

**On the Same Page:
Using Google Documents to Record and Share
Curriculum**

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Introduction

As St. Paul's increases enrollment, hires new faculty, and improves its physical structures to support curricular programs, so must its faculty continue to reflect on, develop and augment curriculum to best accommodate the diverse academic and social needs of our current and future students. Just as the faculty strive to draw out students' flexibility, curiosity and collaboration skills in academic pursuits, they may also apply these goals to their own work in curriculum development. New teachers bring new talents and curiosities. Thematic units change with the times. What does not change, however, is the need for each grade level to have a current, flexible, working curriculum map that incorporates the projects, skills and concepts a child will study and practice at St. Paul's, as well as reflects the dynamism and talents of the teachers. My goal for the research project was to find a technological tool that would allow faculty to create, share and update a curriculum map with ease and utility.

The current Filemaker curriculum documents are out of date. While they may be augmented to incorporate current curriculum, the format of the documents does not support the dynamic, thematic, interdisciplinary nature of our curriculum. An updated, thorough, "working" curriculum map would bolster our accountability to the academic program, assist with the identification of strong and weak points in the scope and sequence of the program, and enable new teachers to organize and plan instruction more easily.

Problem Statement

St. Paul's welcomed a new fourth grade teacher into the lower School, and as the existing fourth grade teacher, I knew I had to provide my new colleague with a map of the curriculum I had been using for the last two years. The Filemaker curriculum database was out-of-date, and I knew that photocopies of my plan books from the past two years would not suffice as planning documents for a teacher who was new to the School and the curriculum.

I am always interested in discovering new ways to enhance teaching and learning with technology, so I turned to Google, a company who is always innovative and looking to enhance the quality of life (efficiency, ease, productivity) with their technologies. Until October 2007 the School had not obtained a license to put Filemaker on the faculty's computers and had not trained faculty to use the software. The existing Filemaker documents were out-of-date and I did not know how to edit them to make them more current. Finally, the Filemaker documents were arranged into discrete curriculum areas and did not reflect our interdisciplinary, project-based teaching and learning styles, so I wanted to find a new curriculum mapping solution. As I set out to collaborate with my new fourth grade teaching colleague in revisiting, reflecting on and recreating the fourth grade curriculum, I needed to find a technological solution that would be flexible enough to allow for continual, easy access to the information, so that curriculum could be recorded, changed, and shared between us and our division head.

Guiding Questions/Purpose

- What technological tools exist for document creation and sharing that we could use for a curriculum map?
- What is the best online document tool for our curriculum planning needs?
- In addition to curriculum planning documents, can the online document tool be used for other kinds of school-related documents that are shared?
- How would such an online document facilitate faculty collaboration and curriculum development, better than the current Filemaker documents?

Data Collection Methodology

First, I accessed and reviewed the current curriculum documents that were created using Filemaker. I studied the fourth grade documents using Filemaker. I looked at the document on the computer to see how easily I could update the curriculum myself. Without Filemaker training, I do not have the ability to modify the documents, and since they needed significant updating, I turned to searching Google for curriculum mapping software.

In a previous teaching position at another independent school, I worked on a team to write curriculum for *Atlas*, a popular curriculum mapping software. Costly and logistically cumbersome—two traits I was not looking for in a technological solution to my “problem”—*Atlas* was not a suitable option. However, I did scour the Internet in search of curriculum mapping software similar to *Atlas*, and discovered only similarly expensive programs that would require a significant expenditure by the school and buy-in from the entire faculty and administration. I was looking for a smaller-scale, very inexpensive (if not free) technological solution.

Calling on previous teacher research conducted by Jared Fortunato, I turned to Google and Yahoo, two leading software companies that offer various technological solutions to individuals, such as teachers, who are looking to streamline their communications and organizational operations. I studied Yahoo, then Google.

Yahoo is well known for their Yahoo Groups product, and I looked to see if there was any document-sharing component. Then I examined the Google Documents pages and studied their capabilities for document creation and sharing. Google Documents seemed to have the capabilities I was looking for, so I created some prototype curriculum documents using their tools. Then, over the summer, I collaborated with Kathryn Robertson, the new fourth grade teacher, to record our fourth curriculum using Google Documents.

First we created a master curriculum map that incorporates all of the subject areas. The document creation tool allows for both Word- and Excel-type document formats, so we were able to create an Excel-like spreadsheet and format it so that cross-curricular and thematic qualities of the curriculum could be easily shown. Additionally, we explored and used the various editing tools, such as the highlighter, to call out important interdisciplinary connections.

Data Analysis/Findings

1. **Finding:** Google Documents is an inexpensive, stable, useful, user-friendly tool to help teachers create curriculum maps.

- **Substantiating Data:** Ms. Robertson and I agree that Google Documents provides a user-friendly, intuitive interface for teachers to create a curriculum document. In our experience of using the site over the past few months, we have not had login issues or lost data. Yahoo did not offer a hosted documents option in its portfolio of products. Other curriculum mapping software was prohibitively expensive, and would require extensive training and development. Google Documents' interface is easy-to-use and would require little training.

2. **Finding:** Google Documents may be used to reformat existing Excel and Word documents.

- **Substantiating Data:** Ms. Robertson had created a curriculum map using Excel, before I began using Google Documents. I was able to upload her Excel document into Google Documents, which then converted the Excel spreadsheet into an editable, online document that we could share. Teachers who already have Word or Excel documents could easily transform them into Google documents.

3. **Finding:** Google Documents helps prevent outdated or multiple copies/attachments from clogging a hard drive or inbox.

- **Substantiating Data:** Because Google Documents files are hosted by Google, there is no need to email attachments back and forth and run the risk of reading/working from an old version of a document. Google Documents hosts the latest copy for users to edit and share.

4. **Finding:** Google Documents promotes collaboration among faculty and administrators.

- **Substantiating Data:** We found that we could not only easily create new curriculum documents and edit them collaboratively, but we could also invite others to be collaborators or viewers. Multiple people could simultaneously access the document, and either edit or simply view it, depending on the permissions set by the administrator. Administrators and intern teachers can be invited as viewers of a document.

5. **Finding:** Google Documents may be used for other faculty and administrator produced documents that allow for greater efficiency and collaboration.

- **Substantiating Data:** The fourth grade teachers have used Google Documents to create online documents for:
 - family contact information
 - curriculum calendars by subject area
 - lists of curriculum resources
 - book lists

Recommendations

Google Documents is a user-friendly, useful technological option for teachers to plan, record, and share their curriculum with colleagues and administrators.

Google Documents may also be used to create resource documents for the School, including:

- an up-to-date, online version of the roster
- Summer reading lists by grade
- calendars of important dates
- signups for conferences by class
- field trip sign-ups
- lower School weekly classroom schedule

The significant, though not insurmountable caveat is that to create or access Google Documents, one must sign up for a free Google account.