



# Matthew's Guide To Curriculum Development

"Hi, I'm Matthew,  
and I'm a Peace First Fellow!"

You've already decided on an issue you're passionate about, and you want to make a difference! But are you unsure how to design an effective curriculum? Don't worry - you're not alone. Designing a curriculum — - workshops, lessons, and activities that help people build skills and understanding — can seem overwhelming, but with this guide, you'll learn how to design a curriculum to address any injustice.



## 1 Story of Success

After my younger brother Josh was bullied at our middle school, I wanted 'somebody' to do something about it. By the time I'd reached eighth grade, even though it felt scary to take a stand, I realized that 'somebody' had to be me. I wanted the kids who were bullying my brother to understand the pain they were causing him. My goal was to create a program - both for students being bullied and those who bully - that would open up lines of communication, build bridges across lines of difference, and repair broken relationships in my brother's grade. But I wasn't sure how to empower students to create a positive and inclusive school culture. I developed The Be ONE Project, a four-hour community-building and anti-bullying program for middle school students. We use team building games, activities, and guided discussions to foster empathy and mutual respect. To date, my program has reached more than 4,900 students across four states with our message of kindness and inclusion.

## 2 Resources to Help You

### Resource #1

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~teachers/download/Inquiryframework.pdf>

This resource from San Francisco State University can be used to plan out your curriculum, step by step.

### Resource #2

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/new-teachers-lesson-curriculum-planning-resources>

Though designed for new teachers, this website has great information for young people interested in creating a curriculum to address an injustice.

### **3 Tips to Keep In Mind**

#### **Tip #1**

##### **Curriculums can (and will) evolve over time!**

We used pre and post-program surveys to determine which activities in our curriculum were effective, and which needed to be changed or replaced.

#### **Tip #2**

##### **Start small!**

It's better to have a curriculum that is a small, high-impact and tested curriculum than a wide-scale curriculum that lacks sound planning. We made sure our curriculum worked in just a few classrooms before using it in multiple schools.

#### **Tip #3**

##### **Collaborate!**

You don't have to create a curriculum alone. There are plenty of existing programs and individuals with whom you can partner to maximize your time and resources.

### **4 Strategies**

#### **Strategy #1**

##### **Define Your Audience and Outcome**

The first step in designing a curriculum is to determine your desired audience and outcome. Who is your target audience and what do you want your participants to get from your curriculum? Are you trying to raise awareness about a local or global issue? Are you trying to teach others concrete skills? Do you want to take specific action? The key to any effective curriculum is defining your audience and desired goal from the onset.

To define your audience, it might be helpful to start by thinking about who is impacted by your chosen injustice. For example, after my brother was bullied, I knew that I wanted to help not only my brother, but other bullied students. I defined my audience as middle schoolers in Arizona. Your audience can change over time, but having a concrete audience will help you tailor your program. After you've selected an audience, think about what you want for your audience to take away from your curriculum. It might be helpful to finish the following phrase: "At the end of my curriculum/program, I want my participants to...(fill it in)!" For example: "At the end of my program, I want my participants to understand how to communicate with others kindly on social media." I'd suggest you write down your answer so that you can keep your goal front of mind when you're designing your curriculum.

#### **Strategy #2**

##### **Gather Information**

Once you've clearly defined your audience and outcome, you're ready to move on to step #2, gathering information. The most effective curriculums specifically address the needs of the target audience. You'll need to understand why the injustice you've decided to tackle persists.



What forces prevent progress and where is there room for new solutions? I find that it's helpful to conduct interviews with various stakeholders to truly understand the issue you're trying to address. There are lots of ways you can gather information - from an online survey to one-on-one interviews to focus groups. The key is that you solicit insights from a variety of sources - people experiencing the problem, people working to solve the problem, and maybe even people who are causing the problem, too! (Peace First has [a great tool](#) to help you figure out how to do this.)

After I decided that I wanted to help my brother and his classmates, I needed more information on why bullying occurs and how to prevent it. I interviewed my peers, teachers, parents, and administrators to understand how and why bullying happens. I also researched other effective models online and read about best practices on bullying prevention from books at my local library. Going beyond my own perspective, and getting ideas from many different people, was really important to building my understanding and developing a good curriculum.

### **Strategy #3**

#### **Rapid-Fire Brainstorm**

Now armed with new insights from your interviews, you're ready to begin to draft your first curriculum. There are many ways to draft a curriculum and no one way is 'better' than another. One of the biggest hurdles in creating a curriculum is generating new ideas. It can be difficult to think of activities or ideas for a program. One strategy that I like to use that helps me when I feel 'stuck' when creating a curriculum is an exercise called "Rapid Fire." To do this activity, you'll need a piece of a paper and a timer. Set the timer for 3-5 minutes, and in that time, I want you to write out (or draw) any idea - no matter how bold, ambitious, or silly - that comes to your mind. Envision what your curriculum will look like and share out whatever surfaces. Sometimes ideas that seem ridiculous on the surface have the most promise. Once you've compiled a list of ideas, go through each one at a time and assess its potential.

### **Strategy #4**

#### **Seek Feedback**

No curriculum is perfect on the first draft, and that's okay! Our curriculum certainly wasn't perfect the first time we piloted it. But don't be afraid to share your ideas with others and ask for help. Once you have a draft of your curriculum, seek feedback from a trusted friend, parent, sibling, or maybe even a teacher. Ask for their thoughts on what works well, what could be changed, and what they think might be missing. When I shared my vision for The Be ONE Project, I was terrified that others would think my idea was either silly or wouldn't work. But I found that others were able to offer invaluable feedback to help me refine my ideas. When seeking feedback, keep in mind that everyone has different thoughts and beliefs. Take feedback with a grain of salt, but keep in mind how important it is to get the perspective of the person experiencing your curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

A strong curriculum is the backbone of any community service project. When your curriculum is rooted in a solid understanding of the issue, has a clear audience and outcome, and takes a creative approach to the problem, you're sure to make a difference!