

Consultant Spotlight
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Angela Lalor



LCI
learner-centered
initiatives

Angela Lalor is a senior consultant at LCI specializing in making connections between curriculum, instruction and assessment. She is also a published author, with her latest, a curriculum-focused book, arriving in Spring 2016. Prior to joining LCI, Angela worked as a 7th grade social studies teacher.

Outside of her work, Angela is a dedicated runner who recently completed her second New York City Marathon. Learn more about Angela, below.

Much of Angela's work at LCI focuses on curriculum design. She approaches design from a broad perspective, believing that creating and teaching stand-alone, individual units of studies is not in the best interest of student learning. As a proponent of **coherent curricula**, Angela encourages her teachers to look at the continuum of their academic programs through the course of the year, to see and connect the dots wherever they can, to create engaging, relevant courses of study.

Coherent curricula are...

1. *Well organized and purposefully designed*
2. *Free of both gaps and unnecessary repetitions*
3. *Aligned across lessons, courses, subjects & grades*

Source: The Glossary of Education Reform

*The **formal curriculum** uses standards, outcomes, objectives and learning targets to describe what students need to know and be able to do. The **operational curriculum** brings in specific content and identifies instructional practices and assessments. The **taught curriculum** is how the **formal** and **operational curriculum** manifest themselves in the classroom.*

Educators often speak of alignment solely in terms of state standards. While this is important, limiting alignment to the standards misses larger opportunities to keep learning and teaching focused and on target, and allow teachers to draw valid conclusions about students' learning. Angela believes that meaningfully designed curriculum includes strong alignment between the curriculum, its embedded assessments, and the outcomes desired by the teacher. By focusing on what students need to know and be able to do - which is communicated through the **formal curriculum** - and by aligning curriculum, assessments and instruction to those standards, teachers can better determine what students do well and what their needs are to move student learning forward.

Resource links:

Deepen your understanding of alignment. [Download activity.](#)



[Explore](#) our trifold resource, *A Practical Guide to Developing Quality Curriculum Units of Study*.

Taking it one step further, Angela speaks of how true alignment should incorporate school values and culture. Districts might invest effort in crafting beautifully thought-out mission statements and goals, but nothing can come of these goals if they are disconnected to the curricula being taught in their schools. As an example, a district may claim to value mindfulness, but specific work needs to be done to make that a reality, including defining mindfulness, understanding what it looks like in the classroom, and taking those definitions into account when designing curriculum.

In addition to her curriculum work, Angela is excited about recent programs related to quality discourse, which build skills to help students take charge of their learning. Teachers in these programs first examine what needs to be established in order to promote quality discourse: an essential question, a protocol for discussion, and safe and encouraging classroom environment. Next, they review components of quality discourse: dialogue, participation and engagement, and discuss strategies for students to understand these components so they can make the most of discourse as a learning opportunity. Teachers learn how to observe small group student interactions and help students build skills to effectively participate in the discussions by providing them with quality feedback. Quality feedback, in this case, relates to both the content of student comments, along with reflective prompts about the process (“how does sharing these steps help you to learn on your own”), with the end goal of helping students to understand how observation, feedback and reflection can help with their own learning.

Angela believes that making sense of the disconnect between what is taught and what is understood, and focusing on the process of learning, is critical, and that as educators, we need to spend more energy there. Techniques such as [formative assessments](#), which Angela sees as akin to conversations between teachers and students, address this need. Formative assessments enable teachers to understand what students know and are struggling with, and provide students with the opportunity to say “I’m not getting this,” leading to new learning opportunities.

Formative assessments are embedded within a unit to help monitor learning and inform planning, student and teacher reflections.

Learn more about these and other learner-centered assessments in our [webinar series](#).

The challenge with teaching to the process is that many teachers are constrained by the current system, which is typically and traditionally focused on outcomes. Outcomes are what parents see and ask about, and they are also what schools and districts are held accountable for.

Angela sees an opportunity that exists within this challenge. In her experience, in places where people are having conversations about formative assessments, there is a big sense of relief that they have permission to focus on the process of learning, not just the outcomes. Educators have the chance to make meaning out of mandates that focus on outcomes, by focusing on leveraging those mandates to improve their practice and student learning. It is gratifying to her to be able to help educators learn to invest their time and energy most effectively, by introducing them to new tools and techniques that can help them to impact their practice in specific and positive ways that help students learn. 

More About Angela:

Select Publications

- **Considering Curriculum: A Guide to Ensuring Quality in Your Curriculum**
(coming in Spring 2016 from ASCD)

Curriculum is thought of as the “what” in teaching; what students learn in school. It sounds simple enough but what students learn is multi-layered and may include content, skills, strategies, dispositions and habits of mind. This book provides a foundation for schools and district leaders to use in creating a cohesive whole from these parts. Included tools and activities help readers to better understand attributes of quality curriculum, to evaluate and plan their own curriculum, and to decide what areas warrant further investigation. [Contact us](#) to be notified upon publication.

- *Thoughtful Selection of Informational Text*, ASCD Express. [Article link.](#)
- *Keeping the Destination in Mind*, Educational Leadership. [Article link.](#)

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About us

Learner-Centered Initiatives works to improve education by focusing on teaching, learning and leadership practices. We use a systems approach, recognizing that changes made in one area will naturally interact with, and affect, other components and participants in the system.

At LCI, we practice the priority that our name establishes, integrating learner-centered practices into our work, engaging participants' perspectives, energy and expertise and tapping their passion for education. Our programs, products and services are customized to each clients' needs and interests. They integrate relevant neuroscience approaches, as well as educational practices grounded in research and refined through practical field-application.

We are a certified MWBE in NYS and NYC, and have been successfully helping clients since 1995.

- [Learn more](#) about our professional development programs in curriculum
- Read about our [approach](#) to PD



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