

*Consultant Spotlight*  
December, 2013

Diane Cunningham

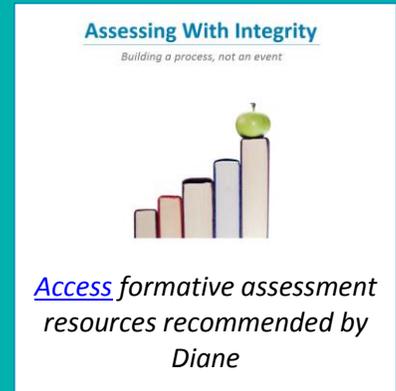


**LCI**  
learner-centered  
initiatives

*Diane Cunningham is a Senior Consultant with Learner-Centered Initiatives. In this role, she facilitates long-term staff development programs, primarily in the areas of action research, curriculum and assessment design and blended learning.*

*Diane is an advocate for authentic assessment. She has written on the subject, and helped to design LCI's recent **Assessing With Integrity** conference, which addressed the challenges in recognizing, building and supporting quality assessment in the face of external pressures. During the conference, Diane helped participants learn to use formative assessment to produce student learning.*

*Get to know Diane and her work, below.*



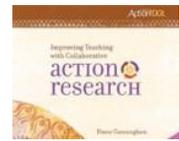
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## Action Research

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Action research – a job-embedded, systematic study of practice - is one of Diane's biggest passions. She believes it is the most teacher-centered of the professional development disciplines, because it calls upon the educator to research his or her own processes.

In her action research work, it is Diane's role to help educators through their exploration processes. She enjoys the fact that there is no lock-step "program" for this work; rather, it's informed by and designed around personal questions and goals that teachers want to explore to ultimately impact their students' learning by improving their skills.



[Explore](#) Diane's detailed, authentic Action Research tool, published by ASCD.

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[Read about](#) the first year of Byram Hills' Action Research program.

Recently, Diane worked with the Byram Hills School District on a multi-year project to incorporate action research into their professional development. She took the initiative

from the introductory phase – providing an overview to the administrative team – through “learning in action” – training and guiding facilitators – to the point where action research became embedded within Byram Hills’ processes, and the district gained the skills to continue the work themselves.

Tim Kaltenecker, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in Byram Hills, spoke about Diane’s work with the district: “Diane is very good at having her pulse on where the teachers are, and uses evidence of teacher practice to customize her work to the appropriate level. She works with everyone to make sure she meets their needs.”

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## Blended Learning

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Another of Diane’s projects involves in OC21, a cutting-edge blended learning model created by a consortium of 13 New York school districts, Putnam-Northern Westchester BOCES, Lower Hudson Regional Information Center, and LCI. OC21 is a virtual high school that offers students a way to take classes that may not be offered in their home district, using a medium that leverages their technology skills. The classes are designed to reflect the realities of how we live and work outside of school.

Teaching – and learning – in an online setting brings its own challenges. This new environment requires instructors to move beyond the tried-and-true techniques that work in traditional classroom settings, and many universities are not yet teaching these types of skills to new teachers. Diane’s role is to help OC21 teachers to create the curricula for their online courses. She enjoys the challenges of adapting all that we know about effective curriculum design to an online medium, and integrating the use of technology into an authentic curriculum.

Diane sees blended learning as the beginning of a “disruptive” movement in education. Educators are starting to use the medium to augment their teaching, and Diane believes



Get a first-hand account of Diane’s work with OC21, in this [view from the field](#)



Read more about OC21 in this [article](#) from BOCES

this is part of a trend towards adapting learning to reflect how technology has become engrained within our lives. The OC21 high school represents a sophisticated blended learning model which enables students to do most of their learning online, but still have face-to-face interactions with their teachers and fellow students.

In addition to her work at LCI, Diane is currently pursuing her doctorate in Teaching and Learning, focusing on curriculum and instruction. She is currently considering two topics for her dissertation: how action research changes teacher practice and how to support critical and creative thinking in a blended learning environment. The common link between the two is “questioning”, which addresses Diane’s passion to help teachers question their practice and therefore improve student learning. 

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