

Outcome 1

Analysis of a Conversation:

Interviews with Curriculum Senior Strategists and Classroom Teachers

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Abstract

After interviewing a select group of education professionals to obtain their outlook and experience with their districts' curriculum, this comparative study illuminates some of their shared concerns surrounding successful and not-so successful district-specific efficacies and outcomes. The comparing and contrasting of perspectives uncovers the connectivity that all educators have regardless of the district in which they operate.

When speaking to the two senior curriculum leaders and the two teachers, there was really only one thread of sameness. Everyone expressed varying degrees of frustration with the process of creating and successfully implementing the curriculum in their New Jersey school districts while aligning to the beloved and newly sanctioned New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS), formerly the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The following people were interviewed: Superintendent Dr. JoAnn Cardillo of Passaic Valley Regional High School; Paterson Public School, senior English Language Arts Supervisor, Nicole Brown; Paterson Public School, (PS 16) Music teacher, Garrick Vargo; and Bergenfield's Franklin Public Elementary School 4th grade general education teacher, Katherine Villone. This researcher also encountered two educators who lived outside of the Garden State while she was attending a conference at the end of October. At the close of this outcome essay, the additional viewpoints of Doctors' Bolton and Schmidt, both curriculum experts have been presented to add a comparative perspective. This motley crew of interviewees represents a vast span in years of experience and service, thus reflecting each of their outlooks. There were similar frustrations, though the each district's curriculum content varied.

Dr. Cardillo has held a myriad of educational leadership posts on a profusion of different levels in a number of different districts. In her current role, as superintendent of a regional high school, she expressed frustration at the challenge of implementing the Common Core the way it was supposed to be implemented while bringing students together from three different districts. Having worked many years in Paterson and using that as a comparative lens, she remarked, "[At least] Paterson has one philosophy." Each of the districts, which flow into the regional high school utilize the New Jersey Student

Learning Standards (NJSLS), formerly the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), with a slightly altered approach since each of the feeder districts have individual philosophies.

(J. Cardillo, personal communication, October 18, 2016)

Garrick Vargo, a pre-K to 8 music teacher is young, gifted and energized by the newness of his position. He has no complaints about the NJSLS as it pertains to his big job of teaching all 8 grade-levels simultaneously (at this time, the only grade he doesn't teach is kindergarten or it would have been 9 grade-levels). He says it is easy for him to align his lesson plans (the instructional component) with curriculum because he looks for applicability. He says, "The NJSLS impacts me by giving me more goals and end goals." Regarding the district curriculum he says at this time none really exists for his discipline, but if in the future "there was a specific curriculum...that would be great" (G. Vargo, personal communication, October 23, 2016).

A true professional and mother-of-the-year, English language arts (ELA) Supervisor, Nicole Brown juggled the daunting task of rewriting the Paterson Public school ELA curriculum over this past Summer as she prepared for the birth of her fourth...yes 4th child, who was born on September 3rd. As Paterson prepares to relinquish NJ State control, the work Nicole did was absolutely crucial and she admits progress was made (and yet there is a "but"). She highlighted, that in the past, curriculum was located in two different documents that teacher's had to access and now it has been consolidated into one. She cited the interdisciplinary connections and tiered learning as areas for refinement and expressed that she is "not sure how to fix it. It doesn't always work smoothly, especially since all school operate differently depending on the principals'

mandates and teacher's interpretative practice.” She is hopeful, however. (N. Brown, personal communication, October 20, 2016)

Katherine Villone, 4th grade veteran general education teacher in Bergenfield, NJ at the Franklin Elementary School is experiencing a great deal of frustration in her post where she plainly states that the district has no curriculum to speak of and that the school district is often operating on a month-to-month approach to aligning the curriculum to the NJSLS. She speaks of a time when there was no one in the district even assigned with the task of writing curriculum for the district, so it was every teacher for him or herself. She even described the curriculum writers as “secretaries who are asked to cut and paste the curriculum together.” She says, “We’re reinventing [the curriculum] every year, whereas it used to be that I knew what the 3rd grade was doing and I could bridge student learning as they entered 4th grade” (K. Villone, personal communication, October 25, 2016).



Although Dr. Bolton is not from New Jersey, she believes that the stakeholders in education should consist of a variety of people and the ground-level people should

definitely have a voice in the discussion. She told me that parents should be a part of the equation as well. (M. Bolton, personal communication, October 25, 2016)

Additionally all agree that stakeholders outside of the field of education should have a seat of the table to discuss the needs of education. The administrators this researcher interviewed felt that the stakeholders should include a myriad of people, but all say that the educators must be consulted. Kathy Villone put it succinctly when responding to the reality that some stakeholders at the education roundtable do not have an education background she said, “It looks good on paper but until you walk into a kindergarten classroom and pull out the standards, you see things through a different lens.”



As this researcher proceeded to gather information for this curriculum and leadership didactic course, an incredible opportunity presented itself. A chance encounter with an education professional at the International Dyslexia Association conference afforded an opportunity to conduct two unlikely interviews. The first was with a curriculum administrator from Missouri, Dr. Mollie Bolton and Dr. Areeyah Michaela Schmidt, who conducted a study in Hawaii, which was curriculum-based. Both shed light on how curriculum impacts communities outside of New Jersey. Though this information was not required for this assignment, it remains interesting and impactful to understanding

some of the global issues facing educators and thereby indicating alternative problem-solving techniques to curriculum challenges.

These two women also expressed a high degree of frustration about the chasm between the idealism of the curriculum tool and the reality of how the chosen tools impact students' instruction. Dr. Schmidt, in her former job as curriculum writer, says she used the philosophical screen in her methodology. Her passion for multisensory instruction was her driving force. She told me that everything she and her team did was designed for curriculum improvement, however her frustration grew out of old-timer roadblocks. Incorporating multisensory learning in a k-8 setting was Dr. Schmidt's vision, but the district wouldn't do it. Today test-based curriculums are the focus in Honolulu, Hawaii as in most districts, but 10 years ago she was espousing a project-based, thematic-based, cultural-based and place-based learning. Grants were written to support her research of multisensory instruction, which enabled her to produce a 45-page proposal that was executed. She had a vision and garnered the funding to back it. In the study, she tried to cover all of her bases to eliminate any holes, like using three levels of teacher effectiveness (low, medium and high). She also designed three test groups- (1) traditional, (2) blended learning, and (3) full-on multisensory incorporating both experimental and controlled groups after establishing a baseline starting point. The district told her she was crazy to execute the experiment, but the results were undeniable. (A. Schmidt, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

After giving all of the students different approaches to instruction and then administering the same test at the end of the instructional cycle, the traditional pencil and paper group had the lowest scores (lower than 70%); the blended learning group which

used half and half plus drill/drill had a passing score (70%); and the full-on immersion group, a product of the multisensory/Montessori curriculum had a 98% passing score. Despite the data, the test-based curriculum, rather than the ones Schmidt proposed, achieved the most support. (A. Schmidt, personal communication, October 26, 2016)

The multisensory initiative has just passed legislatively in Missouri, and Dr. Bolton has just attended her first task force meeting for multisensory curriculum infusion. Already she has discovered that everyone on the high-powered task force in Missouri is not in favor the newly mandated direction for multisensory curriculum development, so her frustration is that a clear path to this evidenced-based solution still needs to be carved out. (M. Bolton, personal communication, October 25, 2016)

Each of the candidates was asked if the stakeholders in education should be educators. All said that people outside of the area of education can have a stake in the curriculum building process, however, those non-educators should not be the final arbiters in the decision making process. Dr. Bolton wanted parents to be a part of the equation, whereas Dr. Cardillo felt strongly that business people and legislators should not be the loudest voices.

Most of the interviewees were hopeful, despite the slow growth, curriculum changes are in the works. Dr. Schmidt was concerned that we have slipped into a test-based curriculum environment that does not benefit all of our students because it doesn't address different learning styles (A. Schmidt, personal communication, October 26, 2016).

Graphic Organizer/Chart

Questions ↓	Nicole Brown, M.A. Paterson Public School district, ELA Supervisor NEW JERSEY	JoAnn Cardillo, Ph.D Passaic Regional High School, Superintendent NEW JERSEY	Garrett Vargo Paterson Public School district, Music teacher (1 st year) NEW JERSEY	Katherine Villone, M.A. Bergenfield Public School district, 4 th grade General Education teacher NEW JERSEY
1. What parts of the curriculum do you feel are working and what parts do you feel require reorganization?	The Standards have now been unpacked in detail. Prior to recent reorganization, teachers had to reference two documents. Now streamlined in one place. Plus there is now more interdisciplinary connectiveness and tiered learning, but it is also an area in need of refinement. Not sure how to fix it. District has compartmentalization. All principals wield power making schools operate differently.	“Anything that comes up as an ill in society becomes a mandate in education to fix it.”	N/A	“I don’t feel it’s aligned to their cognitive development level. I feel it is alof for them to handle. It’s too high! Whoever’s writing it has too high expectations. I don’t think that the skills are carrying through from year to year – especially in Math. It’s not cohesive. We’re reinventing every year whereas it used to be as a 4 th grade teacher , I knew what the 3 rd grade was doing.
2. Is the present curriculum addressing the needs in our students’ lives?	N/A	HS needs to be more rigorous to bridge gap into college. There should be more AP courses.	He is watering down the curriculum for the younger grades. Uses 9 th grade vocal and theoretical music curriculum. It is easy for him to align LP’s with curriculum. He looks for applicable connections. The NJTCS for Music is what he uses.	N/A
3. Do you believe people outside of the field of education should be stakeholders and have a voice in the education process? Why or Why not?	Yes, they should have a say, but just should not be driving the bus. People have a different take on what the kids need out in the real world. They should not have the final say.	Yes, but she does not believe they should proclaim themselves as experts. They should be concerned not think of themselves as experts. Legislators think they know how to make mandate for how teachers spend their time .	He received a great deal of support from benefactors through donor’s choose. He received a clarinet, saxophone and flute along with some music notebooks, workbooks, guitar and violin – all almost fully funded from outside support.	Yes they should be part of a collaborating team, but they should rely on educators expertise. “It looks good on paper (some of their ideas) but when you walk into a kindergarten classroom and you pull out the standards you have a different lens.”
4. Do you believe students should have	“We’ve made efforts using a tiered	N/A	N/A	It depends. Yes because if they don’t

<p>a curriculum which allows them to work and learn to mastery given the many differentiated instructional needs of most learning communities? Why or why not?</p>	<p>curriculum to close that gap. All students, ideally, should be at the top level of the tier by the end of the year.” She is fully supportive of students learning to mastery.</p>			<p>master their facts in the 4th grade they cannot build on them in the 5th grade. It is important to build on their skills from one year to the next.</p>
<p>5. What parts of the curriculum do you feel are working and what parts do you feel require reorganization?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>“No specific curriculum now so if there was a specific curriculum that would be great.” In middle school you are prepping them for professional choirs and orchestras. Would like to see a focus on professionalism in the music ensemble. This is not specified in the curriculum but needs to be a part. In an ideal world would like each class to have all musical software, all recording software installed onto their computers, plus a SMART board interface.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>6. How does Common Core impact the high school curriculum?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p><i>(As my only High School resource she was the only one who could answer this.)</i> Adjustments had to be made to the HS curriculum. At the HS level the time frame is 45 minutes- bell to bell. There are no blocks. Also CC was not implemented in the way it was supposed to because 3 towns, who do things their own way feed into the regional HS. Kids are coming from Totowa, Little Falls & Woodland Falls. Prediction: HS will be 3 yr program and 1 yr in-service then onto community college due to changing demographic. She is PRO- Common Core!</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Graphic Organizer/Chart
Out-of-State Perspective

<p style="text-align: center;">Questions ↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mollie Bolton, Ph.D Missouri School district, Task Force on Dyslexia Instruction Awareness MISSOURI</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Areeyah Michaela Schmidt, Ph.D School Administrator/School Owner HAWAII</p>
<p>1. What parts of the curriculum do you feel are working and what parts do you feel require reorganization?</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Wanted to incorporate multisensory learning k-8 but district wouldn't let her</p>
<p>2. Is the present curriculum addressing the needs in our students' lives?</p>	<p>Not really especially with so many students dealing with dyslexia, many of whom do not realize that is the problem.</p>	
<p>3. Do you believe people outside of the field of education should be stakeholders and have a voice in the education process? Why or Why not?</p>		