

MEANINGFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING NEWSLETTER

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BIO

Angela Di Michele Lalor is an educational consultant who has facilitated school-wide professional development initiatives for 25 years in schools across the country. A nationally recognized expert in curriculum design, Angela is the author of two ASCD publications, *Making Curriculum Matter: How to Build SEL, Equity and Other Valued Priorities into Daily Instruction* and *Ensuring High-Quality Curriculum: How to Design, Revise or Adopt Curriculum Aligned to Student Success*. She regularly presents at ASCD National Conferences.

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The Gift of Summer

This summer was a gift of time. It was the first one in quite a few years where I did not have to work on a project that had an external due date. I spent it relaxing with family and friends, enjoying a visit from my daughter Catherine, the traveling nurse, playing with my rescue dog Jerry, and reading, thinking, and writing about my work in schools.

One of the books I read was *Start with Why* by Simon Sinek. Not a new book, but it caused me to reflect and examine the *why* behind the work I do in schools. I have always been driven by two priorities: honor teacher expertise by sharing their work and ensuring students remain at the center of school decision-making. They are the basis of my *why*: *to inspire and empower educators so that all students engage in meaningful and purposeful learning experiences that allow them to become the people they wish to be.*

Aligning School Practices to Valued Outcomes for Student Learning

As school administrators and teachers begin a new year, they too must be clear about their *why* and ensure that their practices align. For example, teachers may engage in a curriculum design project, but are they clear about the *why*; the bigger purpose in which their work sits? The *why* may be to provide students with equitable learning experiences. If that is the case, has this been clearly articulated as the purpose that drives teachers' review of texts and resources to ensure they are diverse and inclusive? Do teachers see how incorporating essential questions that explore self and social awareness helps to build equitable learning experiences? Have teachers explored curriculum-embedded performance assessments to engage students in their learning and how doing so is an important principle of equity? The *why* matters and, when actions are clearly aligned, can lead to more purposeful teaching and learning.

When I facilitate professional development programs, I begin by having educators either revisit their mission and vision statement or make sure that the *why* is clearly articulated at the start of the program. This newsletter shares a process I use to help schools unpack their vision and mission statements so they drive and bring coherence to curriculum design and professional learning.

LET'S TAKE THE FOLLOWING VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT:

“***Our school is committed to preparing, challenging, and inspiring all students to reach their potential by providing them with equitable opportunities for exploration, growth, and success. We will support our students so they may become responsible and respectful individuals and citizens.***”

The first step to unpacking the vision and mission is to identify phrases that capture what educators will do and how it will benefit their students. For example, in the above statement, the school has made a commitment to:

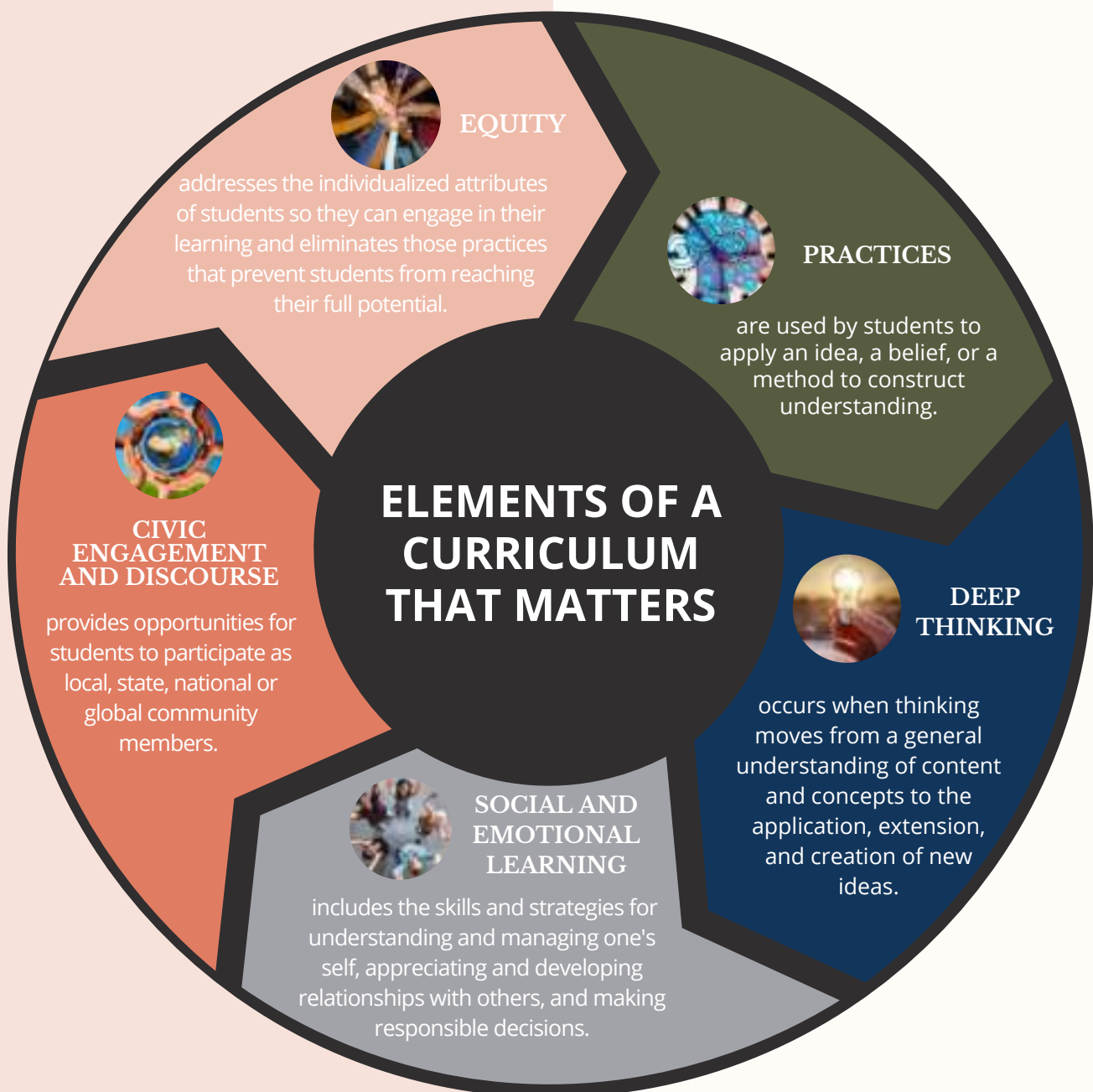
- ***Prepare students***
- ***Challenge students***
- ***Inspire students***
- ***Provide equitable opportunities***

These actions are taken so students can achieve the desired goals identified in these statements. In this example, the school will provide equitable learning opportunities that challenge and inspire students, so that students:

- ***Explore, grow and succeed***
- ***Reach their potential***
- ***Become responsible and respectful individuals***
- ***Become responsible and respectful citizens***

Another step that can help administrators and teachers gain further clarity on their *why* is to examine their vision and mission statements through the **Elements of the Curriculum That Matters Framework**, that I explain in my most recent book, *Making Curriculum Matter: How to Integrate SEL, Equity and Other Priorities into Daily Instruction*.

I identified the elements of the framework by examining the vision and mission of schools and the different priorities that emerged in professional development program requests that I received. What I learned was that even though the language was different, schools sought similar outcomes for their students. Using the elements as overarching categories helps schools focus on the goals they have for their students.



Continuing with the same example from above, you can see the relationship between the elements and the phrases that resulted from unpacking the vision and mission.

Practices	Deep Thinking	Social and Emotional Learning	Citizenship	Equity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire students • Explore, grow and succeed • Become responsible and respectful individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become responsible and respectful citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide equitable opportunities to reach their potential

Each element serves as a lens for viewing curriculum and ensuring it aligns to the *why* of the vision and mission. For example, social and emotional learning is addressed in the vision and mission statements of this school. According to this school’s vision and mission, indicators of social and emotional learning include inspiring students; student exploration, growth, and success; students becoming responsible and respectful individuals. Looking at the curriculum through a social and emotional lens raises the questions:

How does the curriculum:

- *engage students in experiences that inspire them?*
- *provide opportunities for students to explore new and different content, ideas and experiences?*
- *help students recognize their growth and success as learners?*
- *provide strategies for students to become responsible individuals?*
- *include opportunities for students to demonstrate respect for each other?*

The element of social and emotional learning connects the vision and mission, the *why* and the curriculum. The individual phrases from the vision and mission can be used as part of the curriculum design process. For example, *explore*, *grow*, and *succeed*, can become the student learning outcomes:

- Students will *explore* new information and ideas and engage in new experiences.
- Students will *grow* as learners.
- Students will experience *success* in different ways as they learn.

These outcomes can be listed, along with standards, as desired results for student learning. Explicitly including outcomes can lead to more intentional alignment of classroom practices, a process I describe in detail in *Ensuring High-Quality Curriculum*.

The Elements of the Curriculum That Matters Framework were intended to help schools evaluate or create a curriculum so the tool teachers use to make instructional decisions would align with their vision and mission. However, the elements can be extended beyond the curriculum to serve as a bridge between different systems within a district or school to create more coherent experiences for teachers and students. For example, the Curriculum That Matters Framework can also be used to determine school priorities and plan professional development programs.

As you can see in the following examples, using the elements clearly communicates the *why* of the program, and how it will impact student learning. This sets the context for the work of the teachers.

Example #1: *In order to ensure equitable learning experiences*, students engage in learning activities that explore identity. Teachers design units of study in which students apply their learning to issues that matter to themselves and their community; use a “mirror, window, or sliding glass door” (Sims Bishop, 1990) lens when reading books and viewing resources; and participate in authentic tasks in which they can explore different possibilities for their future selves.

Example #2: *In order to engage as active citizens*, students participate in curriculum-embedded performance assessments in which they identify a need in their community, and develop and carry out a plan to address that need. Teachers design curriculum-embedded performance assessments that strongly align to standards and practices but allow for enough flexibility for students to make decisions about what they are learning, how they are learning it, and the way they will share their learning.

Example #3: *To develop the SEL competency of responsible decision making*, students work in groups to create an action plan for their projects. Teachers include action plans as one of the formative assessment moments in project-based learning experiences.

Beginning with your vision and mission statement is the first step in aligning students' experiences in school with valued outcomes for learning. Clarity will help ensure that the curriculum is one way for students to work towards these desired results. It will also guide decisions on professional learning, so that teachers' valuable time is spent working towards these goals.

REFERENCES

Sims Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 1(3), ix–xi



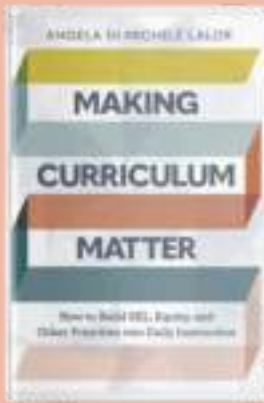
UPCOMING WEBINARS

Attend one of the following webinar series hosted by **NYSASCD**:

- Integrating SEL in the Classroom, October 13 and 20, 2022, 4 – 5:30 pm
- Attending to Equity Through Curriculum, January 26 and February 2, 2023



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LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO ALIGN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION TO VALUED OUTCOMES FOR LEARNING IN MY NEWEST PUBLICATIONS:

- [5 Elements of a Relevant Curriculum](#), ASCD Express (July 27, 2022)
- [Building Equitable Learning Experience Through the Formative Assessment and Feedback Process](#), NYSASCD Impact Magazine, Summer 2022
- [Feedback that Empowers Students](#), Edutopia (June 24, 2022)
- [Creating a Culture of Learning](#) Edutopia (October 5, 2021)

You can also listen to my conversation with Cassie Tabrizi as we discuss how curriculum design can empower teachers and greatly improve student experiences in the classroom.



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