INTRODUCTION

The need for educational reform from policy leaders has been a constant drumbeat for the last 30 years. The cacophony became deafening with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001\(^1\) (NCLB). Since the turn of the millennium, parents, educators, service providers and vendors have been groping for educational solutions that would ensure that all students would be successful in the PreK-12 classroom.

There has been an explosion of reform efforts and vendor-produced solutions that would bring us to the promised land of widespread student achievement. Our district isn’t immune to the outside forces that exert an awful lot of pressure to implement the latest education fad whether it’s influenced by federal policy or vendors within the multi-billion dollar K-12 industry.

The promise of increased student achievement comes at us from all sides at a furious pace. Just the process of evaluating potential educational solutions could be a full-time job. Our district has been steadfast in our response and careful about where we choose to spend our most important commodity, the time of our students and the time of our teachers. Follett’s latest addition to its Follett Destiny\(^\text{®} \) Library Manager™ application comports with that non-negotiable aspect in our district.

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Our district uses an evidence and research-based approach that allows us the ability to withstand those pressures and outside forces. Our work stands on the shoulders of powerhouse educational researchers such as Drs. Anthony Bryk, Alma Harris, John Hattie and Saul Rubenstein. Each of these seminal researchers offers a thread that weaves a powerful case for collaboration as the ultimate driving force behind increased student performance. John Hattie sums it up beautifully in his book, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*:

> Within a school, we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis. Yes, this takes time to work together, but maybe less debate about other structural concerns (lower class size; different tracking methods; professional development sessions not related to these debates) could make way for financing more teacher planning and review time – together.²

Not only does this quote from Hattie convey the hopes and dreams of millions of educators across the globe, but it also allows district leaders to focus on truly what matters and has the biggest impact on student achievement. Bryk, Harris, Hattie and Rubenstein end up in the same place – promoting collaboration between educators on what is and isn’t working is the key to increased student achievement.

As a district leader responsible for curriculum development, professional development and information technology I can only invest time and money into solutions that support collaboration. I was thrilled when our district participated in the Follett Early Adopter Program regarding Collections by Destiny®, an addition to Destiny Library Manager™. Not only did Collections solve a need regarding resource curation, it fit into our efforts around collaboration. In fact, we won’t support any technology tool that doesn’t support our collaboration efforts. We know collaboration is the number-one contributor to increased student performance, and we can’t invest in efforts that pull us from a collaborative framework.

**ONE DISTRICT’S STORY**

West Warwick is a small Rhode Island suburban community of 30,000 residents crammed into 7.9 square miles, located 15 miles south of the capital of Providence.

Our community has a much higher poverty rate than surrounding communities and is saddled with many of the same problems of urban districts. Chronic absenteeism, high mobility rates and a significant number of special education students are some of the same stresses that plague West Warwick and our urban counterparts in the state.

A lower median income level also translates directly into fewer resources available to the school district. Even with the hardships facing a low socioeconomic community, the West Warwick Public Schools (WWPS) continues to invest in its greatest resource, its people.

The district uses a Distributed Leadership model based on the work of Alma Harris.³ One of the outcomes of our Distributed Leadership model is that the district uses an organic curriculum development model.

The WWPS develops its own curricula using a Lab Classroom model. This means a district Standards Implementation Specialist (mathematics, ELA, inclusionary practices or social studies/science) works with a classroom teacher to develop everything needed in a complete unit of study. The units last 45 to 60 days.

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The coach works collaboratively with the classroom teacher, and they share the unit of study with educators across the district. The work is crowd-sourced across the district with input from general educators, special educators, administrators and content specialists. All of these people are adding teacher-created resources, aligned websites, paid subscription resources (digital and/or print), Open Educational Resources, examples of student work, video clips of instructional practice (teachers or the coach engaged in a particularly important part of the lesson) as well as differentiated resources. Hundreds of resources can be gathered within one unit of study.

Collaborative tools such as Google Docs™ excel during the development of the unit but fall short in the curation of all of those resources. The curation of all of these resources creates its own set of challenges. Our solutions, no matter how well intended, were less than elegant.

THE PROBLEM: AT LEAST, PROBLEM NUMBER 1

It takes an awful lot of stuff to teach a unit of study.

Imagine a 45-day unit of study that includes everything teachers needs to be successful with their students. The unit has explicit outlines of day-to-day lesson plans including the warm-up, engagement and assessment activities. There are video clips of what the instruction should look like during each part of the lesson. Specific teacher notes highlight areas of misconception or serve as a guide for teachers with a specific instructional strategy.

Throughout the unit of study, there are examples of student work with annotations and Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs). Colleagues add comments throughout the document or additional resources, and identify issues to consider during the teaching of the lesson. In every way, this work stands on the shoulders of researchers like Anthony Bryk, Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Alma Harris and countless others going all the way back to the seminal work of Lev Vygotsky.

The work is exciting, thrilling and purposeful, and socializes the intelligence of the students and teachers in our school district. Our district’s curricula work takes tired clichés like “curricula should be a living document” and brings those words to life.

I think the work can best be summed up by the words of one of the many educators that visit our district year to year. She said, “I’ve never been to a school district where the students and the educators come to school to learn.”

Our district, like many around the country, has picked up the gauntlet to improve the outcomes of our students. It’s a special place to learn, and my colleagues and I have presented nationally on our curriculum development process. We’re proud to discuss our work and its collaborative nature.

It’s rare to have enough time to get “into the weeds” and discuss some of the problems or challenges surrounding resource curation aspect of our work when we present to others outside the district. Part of the reason is that we felt like we never had a good enough solution to the problem. We try to keep it real with folks, but it felt like it would take hours to go over the issues facing us regarding resource curation.

Possible solutions were either cumbersome, costly or would cause us to drastically alter district-established processes we used for curriculum development. Quite simply, the solutions didn’t have a way for educators to collaborate, or the tools were too cumbersome to implement.

None of the potential solutions were palatable, and we slogged forward using the structures we already had in place. In the spring of 2017, our district participated in Follett Early Adopter Program for Collections.

Not only did the spring bring us new flowers, it ushered in a new dawn!
COLLECTIONS – A POSSIBLE CURATION SOLUTION

I don’t want to appear overly dramatic, but Collections served as a beacon cutting through the fog, taking what was once a soupy mess and giving it clarity. Collections would prove to be the solution to our curation woes.

Before Collections, our district used Google Drive™ as the curation tool for our units of study. We have completed over 70 K-8 units of study, and one can only imagine the number of teacher-generated resources in each unit.

In addition to the resources created for student use, there are hundreds of video clips and documents to assist teachers during the implementation of the unit. Figure 1 provides a small glimpse into a shared folder with multiple levels of collaboration and access to educators across the district.

There’s a lot to keep track of, and it’s difficult for new teachers in the district or someone that has transferred between grade levels to have access to vital resources to do their job.

From a systems perspective, the collaboration tools in Google Drive work wonderfully during the creation process, but begin to stumble dramatically during the curriculum implementation phase. Follett Collections was a game changer for our district.

As the person responsible for the curriculum development and implementation process in our school district, Google Drive is a nightmare. Google Drive really can best be described as the “Wild West.” Documents were owned by educators and students all across the district with a variety of permissions and rights for each document.

Figure 1: A Share Google Team Drive

Even with the advent of Team Drives, the curation of curriculum resources quickly becomes unmanageable.
I have to be honest, I love the process we use to collaborate and create our units of study, but the chaos of curation keeps me up at night. The innovative practices that we used wouldn't be able to withstand the chaos over the long haul.

Collections helped me sleep a bit easier at night. Just imagine the flexibility of storing any artifact in one central place with easy sharing and accessibility settings.

Collections allows teachers, administrators, librarians and even students to create a curated collection of artifacts to meet any specified need. Our district found, in Collections, the perfect complementary tool to our curriculum development process. Collections enhanced our collaboration efforts during curriculum development and instructional practices with our students.

District-level staff could create shared collections that would automatically be shared with employees once they were added to a specific group. This work is presently part of our existing workflow whenever a new employee is added to the district or moves from one grade level or department to another. New employees no longer need to wait for a colleague to add them to a shared document or folder.

We finally have a systemic solution to a systemic problem.
COLLECTIONS – THE EASIEST WAY TO CROWDSOURCE CURATED RESOURCES

Follett describes their newest addition to the Destiny Discover™ suite of tools, Collections, as “A group of carefully selected resources. Think of a collection like a digital scrapbook with audio, video, slideshows, along with documents and photos.”

Educators and students can now curate their resources regardless of the copyright licenses associated with the resource. Collections allows one to see the resource but only grants access if the person has the rights to the resource. Anyone in a district with a Destiny Discover account can build and share their own curated Collections.

Figure 3 illustrates the anatomy of a collection. We’ve found the easiest way to use Collections is for end users to install the Collections Bookmarklet applet on their Chrome browser.

The details of a collection can be found along the top-left panel of the collection.

Editors can change the name, description, view the activity, sharing rights and create a PDF.

The curated resources within a collection are displayed in the main body of the collection viewing pane.

The title, URL, description and tags of the resource are viewable within the resources details.

Editors can edit any of the details associated with a collection resource.

Users can turn any resource on their computer into a curated resource and add it to a collection simply by clicking the Add to Collections bookmarklet.

The impact in our district was immediate. Within the first few weeks of our inclusion in the Early Adopter Program our Library Media Specialists and Curriculum Specialists were providing curated Collections aligned to our district’s units of study. These Collections were shared with teachers, administrators and support personnel across the district.

In addition to sharing the Collection between the adults, Collections allows us to share curated resources to students via Google Classroom™. Figure 3 illustrates the anatomy of Collections with the details of a Collection located in the left-side pane, and the curated resources located in the main body of the viewing panel. Teacher-created documents, web pages, video clips, Open 6

Educational Resources (OER) and paid content can all be added to a curated collection. Students, educators and parents all can have access to a curated collection through the sharing tools built within Collections.

Follett Collections solved our district’s curation problem. Individuals could continue to work on documents within Google Drive and add them quickly to a collection. District-housed units of study are readily available to every teacher in the district as soon as they become a teacher. All of our substitute teachers also have access to all of our curriculum documents. Instead of worrying about which Google Drive folder a document is in we can simply share a collection.

The beauty is in the simplicity of Collections. It’s all about curating anything and everything educators need in one place to meet the needs of their students. Collections also supports our district’s collaboration efforts. Educators can add resources to a collection, and then we have deep discussions as to how they enhance the instructional opportunities we’re trying to provide our students. It brings transparency and honesty into the farthest corners of our classrooms. In fact, our conversations around student achievement can be discussed at the resource level. We get to have powerful conversations about a specific resource and how it does or doesn’t support engagement with our learners.

Our district finally has a curation tool that’s easy to use, easy to revise and easy to share with anyone who needs access to the resources. Most importantly, it supports our collaborative efforts to improve our students’ educational outcomes. Instead of worrying about providing individual educators access to resources, we can focus our energies on the real work, providing our students with rich, engaging educational experiences.

That’s the work, and that’s where the focus needs to be!

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