Curriculum in Context

Improving Education Through Innovation

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Cover photo credit: iStockPhoto.com/ymgerman 20072108
The theme of this edition of Curriculum in Context is Improving Education through Innovation. A look at the table of contents shows that the articles in this edition are just as varied as the approaches educators are taking to improve student achievement in an era of reform. Variety also suggests complexity, and one of the reasons for this is that innovation means different things to different people. Nevertheless, everyone seems to agree that finding new ways to approach teaching and learning through innovation is critical if students are going to succeed in today's complex world.

At its core, innovation means doing or inventing something new. Innovation can be radical, transcending traditional values and norms, or perhaps even revising them. Alternatively, innovation can involve the application of familiar knowledge and skills in new situations producing novel outcomes. Whether radical or commonplace, effective innovation solves problems. It bridges gaps between present and future, reality and imagined possibilities. Innovation produces new opportunities and providing opportunities is one of the characteristics of effective teaching and learning.

Readers of this edition of Curriculum in Context will find plenty of innovative ideas to inspire, enliven, and motivate as they consider their work, and the work being done by their colleagues around Washington State. The edition begins with Arthur Charity's insightful analysis of differentiation and the challenges teachers face as they work to transcend the traditional model of schooling, and realize the benefits of customizing learning experiences for all students. This is followed by Annetmaire Gaudin's summary of the differences between Finnish and American education systems, a topic which has received significant attention in the media over the last two years.

Robert Eaker and Janel Keating provide several suggestions for overcoming resource gaps in order to do more with less, a theme familiar to most educators following revenue reductions caused by the Great Recession. Matthew Hamilton complements the article by Eaker and Keating through his description of teaching at Southwest Education Center, where doing more with less translates to life changing outcomes for students on the verge of dropping out. Similarly, Suzanne Calvery and Greg Fritzberg discuss their work with university students as public school tutors and the significant gains achieved by matching kids with young adult role models. Calvery and Fritzberg also identify strategies for educational leaders who are interested in establishing university tutor programs in their communities.

Montgomery et al. provide readers with several innovative approaches for improving students' experience in the library, especially for struggling readers. This article is followed by the work of Joshua Schlegel and Charles Salina, which discusses efforts at Harrison Middle School in Sunnyside to align mathematics curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

This note would be incomplete without mentioning the insights provided by Kathy Clayton and Tim Nootenboom. Their messages from one edition of Curriculum in Context to the next are informative and thought provoking. Their commitment to CiC also serves as a reminder of the hard work each individual contributes throughout the year on behalf of the association, and for educators everywhere in Washington.

David W. Denton, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor at Seattle Pacific University. Before joining Seattle Pacific, David taught middle school students, in a variety of disciplines, for ten years. In 2005, David earned National Board Certification in early adolescent mathematics.
A message from the president

by Tim Nootenboom

“Education Leaders are continually instituting innovative practices and implementing systematic reforms in their ongoing commitment to students’ success and school improvement.”

This is the headline from ASCD’s 2013 Legislative Agenda and it raises an important issue. Namely, as our leaders consider reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, it is critical that they preserve and promote the ability of educators everywhere to innovate. The success of children, and not just academic success, but success as it is defined according to characteristics of the whole child, depends on it. However, the gridlock we have all witnessed around national budget issues is translating to indifference toward any effort to revise federal school law. Inattention only serves to facilitate lock-step systems that align more with de-contextualized mandates, and less with the reality of what kids need. Nevertheless, ASCD’s 2013 Legislative Agenda serves as a reminder about critical public education priorities, including

- Use of meaningful accountability systems that embrace multiple measures of growth, and not just standardized test scores
- Integration of comprehensive improvement strategies that are derived from the whole child approach to education
- Support for educators as they engage in ongoing professional development to impact student outcomes

These are progressive priorities and our students deserve nothing less. Nevertheless, considering the array of state-level reforms over the last few years, such as implementation of CCSS and Teacher Principal Evaluation, it is easy to become reactive, rather than proactive. The worst case scenario with reactive responses is to simply manage, and stagnate.

Consistency, accountability and efficiency are important, especially within large and complex organizations such as schools and districts. However, leaders must make a way to deviate from standard operating procedures to meet the needs of those that remain on the margins.

One way to remain systematic, without abandoning the periphery, is to adopt a dual operational mindset. According to Thomas Bellamy from the University of Washington, organizations need to adhere to practices that are derived from the system’s standard operating procedures to ensure reliability across the organization and reduce variability. Simultaneously, the organization initiates “constrained improvisation,” which is essentially the ability to take innovative action.

The events surrounding Flight 1549 best illustrate dual operational mindset. Captain Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger successfully landed an Airbus A320 plane in the Hudson River, preserving the lives of 155 passengers. Sully had been trained and practiced according to the strictest protocols and operating procedures, to manage innumerable problems involving mechanical failure and operational error. However, after thousands of hours of practice and training, and countless simulations covering all kinds of scenarios, he never had to land a plane in a river. Nonetheless, clear standards of operation, institutionalized in pilot training and practice, resulted in a moment of constrained improvisation, producing a superbly successful result.

The same dual operational mindset applies to educators. Standards, aligned curricula, research-based instructional practices, and ongoing formative assessment generally produce reliable gains in student learning. However, some students will occupy the margins and this is where educators need to exercise constrained improvisation.

Operating in a dual mode mindset is complex, but essential. Educators who are exceedingly inflexible are prone to lose students that do not fit predefined systems. Alternatively, educators who are exceedingly hasty tend to be associated with quick-fixes, unsustainable practice, and isolated change. Maintaining balance between consistency and innovation improves reliability, reduces variability, and leads to flourishing of the whole child.

Tim Nootenboom is President of WSASCD, and Executive Director for Learning and Teaching, Central Valley School District, Spokane Valley.
Educators are hungry for sound information and proven, practical strategies to help them make a difference in the lives of their students. Researchers and practitioners across the country, as well as virtually every major educational organization, have endorsed professional learning community concepts and practices. As schools and districts develop high-quality collaborative learning practices into their day-to-day culture, more is learned about the benefits of implementing Response to Intervention models that narrow the focus to each individual child’s learning.

The **RTI-PLC INSTITUTE** is intended to:

1. **PRESENT** information from school and district teams from across Washington State that utilizes concepts and practices relative to Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention. Strands relate to *Assessment, Behavior/Social, Early Childhood/Parent Community, English Language Learners, Instruction, Literacy/Writing, Math/Science, Professional Learning Communities, Response to Intervention, Special Populations/High Needs Programs, and State/Federal Initiatives.*

2. **INSPIRE** institute participants to stay positive as they navigate change by networking with educators from around the state.

3. Provide time to **PLAN** with your team to begin or continue working together toward the implementation of strategies, programs, models and/or policies that increase student learning.

**INSTITUTE SCHEDULE**

**Tuesday Program**
- 7:30-8:00 – Check In & Continental Breakfast
- 8:00-8:45 - Team Time
- 9:00-10:10 - Opening General Session
- 10:20-11:30 - Concurrent Session One
- 11:30-12:30 - Lunch
- 12:30-1:40 - Concurrent Session Two
- 1:50-3:00 - Concurrent Session Three

**Wednesday Program**
- 7:30-8:00 – Check In & Continental Breakfast
- 8:00-8:45 - Team Time
- 9:00-10:10 - Opening General Session
- 10:20-11:50- Concurrent Session Four
- 12:00-1:20 – Lunch and Team Time
- 1:30-3:00 - Concurrent Session Five

Registration information available at [www.wsascd.org](http://www.wsascd.org)
Waiting for Differentiation: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Educational Factory

By Arthur Charity

Moses saw the Promised Land from Mt. Nebo, but it was the Israelites who had to walk there – and that’s the trouble with visionaries. They win us over to their visions before anyone’s really sure how to make them come true. Over the past couple of decades several of the biggest names in educational theory – Lev Vigotsky, Howard Gardner and Carol Ann Tomlinson, among others – have shown us that one-size-fits-all teaching needlessly harms the self-esteem of many students, doesn’t produce the best results in learning and doesn’t even correspond to the structure of the brain (Tomlinson et al., 2003; Kapusnick & Hauslein, 2001). (This was an especially great achievement for Vigotsky, who has been dead for almost eighty years.) They’ve planted a phrase in the lexicon that’s now surely impossible to dislodge: “differentiated instruction.” We will do the best job for our students if we custom-tailor their education to their individual level of readiness for a given block of knowledge, to the personal interests that drive them, and to the environment and manner of instruction in which they learn most efficiently (Tomlinson et al., 2003) – if in our class of 30 students we teach 30 different ways.

Of course the big names are right – to the extent that that’s important. Learners are and always have been unique. We were fooling ourselves when we divided them into the talented and the untalented, the A-students and the D-students, while we taught to a single culture, a single readiness level and a single learning style. That was like putting a microphone and the lyrics to There’s No Business Like Show Business in front of a hundred Nobel laureates and asking them to sing: You could easily persuade yourself most of them had no talent at all. Kolderie and McDonald (2009) point out that, in any event, the factory style of education was never chosen for its pedagogical value but for cost-effectiveness, because in the age of brick schoolhouses, chalk boards and unamplified teachers’ voices, there simply wasn’t a feasible way to tutor thirty separate individuals; you had to herd them together to achieve economies of scale. Now that we are more enlightened, and see a classroom of students as a collection of laureates-to-be, each evolving along his or her own path according to his or her own learning profile, is it any more feasible today? If resources in most American schools were already stretched thin, where can they find the extra time to plan and execute more stuff?

It’s good to stand back for a moment and grasp the scope of the planning required. Fortunately Tomlinson and her colleagues put together a pretty thorough list: A typical American classroom may contain “students with identified learning problems; highly advanced learners; students whose first language is not English; students who underachieve for a complex array of reasons; students from broadly diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, or both; students of both genders; motivated and unmotivated students; students who fit two or three of these categories; students who fall closer to the template of grade-level expectations and norms; and students of widely varying interests and preferred modes of learning” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 119-20). This diversity calls for instruction that varies in everything from content, difficulty and standards of assessment to the pace, format and in which the instruction takes place, and Tomlinson makes it plain that mere tinkering around the edges – throwing in a couple of pictures for visual learners, slowing the pace for students with disabilities – won’t do the trick (Tomlinson et al., 2003). She calls for differentiated instruction that is pre-planned rather than reactive, that creatively sorts and re-sorts classroom working groups, that varies both content material and pacing, and that’s practiced by teachers who have already solved their other challenges as teachers – who possess a “sound knowledge base and clarity of learning priorities” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 133).

It’s quite a challenge, but you only need to take a brief stroll through the recent literature to find a small army of inventive, subtle educators who’ve gamely taken it up. The exercises they’ve developed frequently tackle two or three of the variants in students’ learning needs at once. Scigliano and Hipsky (2010) provide a better than average example. They propose that a teacher sign learning contracts with her students that assign them exercises in accordance with their strengths on Gardner’s scale of multiple...
intelligences (learning styles – check!). Or pre-test students on their prior knowledge of an upcoming topic, then divide them into working groups according to their readiness, giving each group study materials that are tailored to be moderately challenging (readiness – check!). Or have each student take an interest inventory and then use what she’s learned from them to design a menu of final project possibilities, from which the students can choose the one that most interests them (personal interests – check!).

A recent book claiming to draw on the best practices of the best teachers (Breaux & Magee, 2010) lovingly spells out twelve ways to differentiate, from “curriculum compacting” to “team teaching,” but mentions pitifully and only in passing that “the hard work comes in the preparation.” Yes, and the 300-pound gorilla in the room is 300 pounds, and a gorilla.

Only rarely does a DI writer take on the issue of overstretched time directly, and revealingly (for reasons I will explain) it is often one who sees the potentialities of new software for both differentiation and efficiency (e.g., Stanford, Crowe, & Flice, 2010). Tomlinson herself (2004) suggests recognizing the student’s partial responsibility for seeking out work that meets his or her personal needs, thus holding out the hope of crowdsourcing differentiated instruction, but her own brief stroll through the literature, nine years ago, led her to conclude that even teachers who thought they were differentiating were doing less than was minimally necessary, that most teachers are mystified by flexible, student-centered classrooms, and that we don’t yet know how to move from task to task, letting the scheduling software choose how to make the best use of their time. By organizing in flexible shifts and stations, adjusting hour by hour to the current flow, yet taking advantage of economies of scale wherever possible, “mass customization” can make products that are competitive in cost with mass-produced items (Kolderie & McDonald, 2009).

The Department of Education’s RESPECT initiative – which is exactly the paradigm shift and systemic reorganization of education that Tomlinson and her colleagues called for – sounds in many ways as if it’s ingested the mass customization idea whole (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The discussion document Secretary Arne Duncan released in spring 2012 proposes schools in which fixed classrooms are replaced by flexible workspaces where individuals or small groups can work on differentiated projects; in which teachers move in and out of tasks and assignments to focus now on the needs of one troubled student, now on team-teaching a large class with a novice assisting, now on observing other “master teachers” to deepen their skills; in which the school day and year may vary from individual to individual; and in which the whole complicated system is made manageable through the same dense, continuous stream of data on the needs and condition of each order (in this case, each student) – doled out to workers in the form of continually updated work schedules and to-do lists – that you find in the computerized factory. “High-quality data measuring student learning would be made available and accessible to teachers on an ongoing basis – in real time where appropriate,” says the document (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 4) in language that might, with the alteration of a few words, have come right off the bulletin board of a Toyota assembly plant. “Teachers would be trained on how to use the data to inform and adapt instruction hour-to-hour, day-to-day, and year-to-year.”

Just as the city fathers in 1850s New England looked at their red-brick factories making guns and boots and then at their red-brick schoolhouse and hit on the pregnant notion “that the enterprise in all three buildings was essentially the same” (Nehring, 2007, p. 426), the advocates of differentiated instruction might be smartest to rest their hopes on mimicking the very latest and most modern means of economic production. Our vision of DI may be practical after all, but our schools aren’t enough like a good factory to bring it off yet.

References
Tacoma Public Schools and Washington State ASCD present two Leadership Seminars

An Evening with Jamie Vollmer

The Great Conversation: Building public support for public schools one community at a time...

Thursday, March 28, 2013
5:30-7:30 p.m.
Wilson High School Auditorium
1202 N. Orchard Street
Tacoma, WA 98406

Registration fee for seminar: $20
Clock hours will be available onsite for $5 (cash only)
To register, click here for PDF form.

Jamie Vollmer is an award-winning advocate of public education. He has worked for the past twenty years to help schools and their communities remove the obstacles to student learning, both in and out of school. His goal is to help public schools and the communities they serve create a climate that supports rising student achievement.

Vollmer teaches his audiences how to effectively implement a public engagement strategy called The Great Conversation. This coherent, comprehensive program is designed to produce the prerequisites of student success:

- Community understanding of the challenges facing our children and our schools,
- Community trust in their local schools to accomplish the goal,
- Community permission to make the changes needed to teach all children to high levels, and
- Community support throughout the complex and emotional restructuring process.

Audience members will learn what they can do to improve local conditions for student learning. They will gain a practical understanding of the positive steps they can take to engage all community members – with and without children in school – in the creation of schools that unfold the full potential of every child.

See page 21 for the second Leadership Seminar with Dr. Harvey Alvy

About Jamie Vollmer

Jamie Vollmer is president of Vollmer, Inc., a public education advocacy firm working to increase student success by raising public support for America’s schools. Jamie is the author of the highly acclaimed book, Schools Cannot Do It Alone, one of the “top ten books of the year” according to the American School Board Journal. He received the 2012 Friend of Public Education award from the Ohio Federation of Teachers, and the 2010 Learning and Liberty award presented by the National School Public Relations Association. Both awards were given in recognition of his twenty year effort to strengthen school/community partnerships.

With a background in law and manufacturing, Mr. Vollmer entered the education arena in 1988 as a founding member of the Iowa Business Roundtable. He was, at the time, president of the Great Midwestern Ice Cream Company, proclaimed by People magazine as the “Best Ice Cream in America!” In 1990, he changed careers to become the Business Roundtable’s Executive Director.
Improving Achievement: Structural Change or Superficial Tinkering

By Annemarie L. Gaudin

A significant amount of attention has been given to Finland’s success at educating its youth (Lederman, 2012). Interest only increases when comparisons are made between Finland and the United States, especially when American students consistently show average performance on academic metrics in literacy, math, and science (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelzar, & Shelley, 2010). Students in Finland steadily produce results that rank them as top performers in science, math, and literacy in comparison to other developed countries (Fleischman et al., 2010). Moreover, Finland’s performance is often cited by educational critics and advocates of all types to advance or retreat from whatever reform policies educational leaders contrive. However, close inspection of Finland’s success in producing academic achievement shows that it is the result of long-term structural change, accompanied by elaborate government funded support systems.

According to Grubb (2007), some of the key factors that influence educational outcomes in Finland are small class size, residential stability in teacher and student populations, and responsive remediation for struggling students. In Finland, classes and schools are smaller. The typical class contains about 17 students. The average enrollment in primary school is less than 200; in secondary school it is 300. Smaller enrollments per site enable teachers to understand and manage the academic strengths and weaknesses of each student (Grubb, 2007). Likewise, teachers in Finland remain with the same group of students for two to six years (Grubb, 2007). These practices promote familiarity and stability and encourage development of close teacher-student relationships. Teachers know their students well and have a manageable number of them so that they can provide consistent and immediate support (Grubb, 2007).

Other key factors include use of teaching assistants and additional training for special education teachers. Teaching assistants receive specific preparation to work with struggling students, either through individualized tutoring or small group sessions (Grubb, 2007). Special education teachers receive a year of training to assist students with specific learning disabilities, in addition to the five years required for general licensure (Grubb, 2007).

A common statistic wielded by education critics is that Finland and the U.S. spend similar amounts on education, approximately 5.6% of gross domestic product (GDP; World Factbook, 2012). However, this similarity belies the fact that each country funds social welfare programs at vastly different rates. In Finland, the government allocates 52% of all revenues on public goods and services (World Factbook, 2012). In the U.S., it is 16%. This enables schools to refer students, and their families, to a vast array of social support programs and professionals equipped to handle a variety of issues such as mental health (Grubb, 2007). One result of this is that teachers are relieved of the responsibility of solving problems that are beyond the scope of their training. Formulas and mechanisms for funding education and social welfare programs in Finland are separate (Grubb, 2007). This means money intended for supporting academics is spent on learning, rather than ensuring students are properly fed, clothed, and housed (Grubb, 2007).

An important benefit of these systems is that Finland’s population exhibits more residential stability, meaning that there are fewer students living transient lifestyles due to poverty (Grubb, 2007). One reason for this is provision of government subsidized housing (Grubb, 2007). Unlike the United States where low income families move frequently due to fluctuations in rent, low income families in Finland are free from most of these concerns. As a consequence, the negative effects of transience on educational outcomes are reduced.

Despite these differences in social welfare structures, Waller (2012) has argued that Finland’s educational reforms can be applied to other countries such as the United States and also Canada. According to Waller, Canada already follows some of Finland’s policies. For example, educators in both Finland and Canada use many of Dewey’s principles of progressive education (Waller, 2012). This means deemphasizing standards and testing and focusing attention on each student’s particular needs and talents (Waller, 2012). This is a significant departure from standards-based reform efforts in the U.S., which have fixated over the last decade on instructional objectives and aligned assessments.

Along with a progressive approach to curriculum and instruction, school systems in Canada have more autonomy in spending federal education funds, which means that money can be used to deal with context-spe-
pecific problems (Waller, 2012). This differs from the U.S., where federal dollars are delivered with specific spending requirements and compliance measures (Waller, 2012).

Although differences between Finish, Canadian, and U.S. education systems are significant, the Canadian model shows that adoption of Finish-like reforms are possible. One corollary of this is that reformers in the U.S. could also adopt similar improvement. Besides tripling social welfare spending to match Finish rates, some of these improvements include

1. strengthening remediation programs for struggling students
2. providing extended training opportunities for educators who work with special populations,
3. investigating models for multiple year looping, and
4. reviving progressive pedagogy techniques to teach critical thinking.

Identifying innovations and reforms to improve education in the United States is easy to do. A good example of this is the four recommendations shown above. Other countries, such as Finland, provide interesting models and plenty of ideas. However, in the absence of conversation about the necessary and sufficient conditions upon which educational reforms are sustained and rendered effective, there is little hope that current changes in U.S. schooling will create the level of success found in Finland. It may be the case that efforts to improve education in the U.S. over the last two decades have attended too much to shallow symptoms, such as low test scores, and not enough to deeply entrenched social obstacles, such as poverty. Likewise, it could be argued that until time, energy, and resources are diverted to structural change that reform efforts will amount to little more than superficial tinkering.

References
Lederman, J (December, 2012). Global study of student scores a mixed bag for US. Seattle Times, Seattle, WA.

Annemarie Gaudin is currently enrolled in the MAT program at Seattle Pacific University. She is pursuing dual endorsements in Language Arts and Theatre. Annemarie earned an undergraduate degree from The University of Texas at Austin in Drama and she has experience with diverse educational systems in the United States and abroad.
With a nod to Winston Churchill, it can be said of today’s educators that “Never have so many, been expected to do so much, with so little.” There is little doubt that American public education is experiencing an ever expanding “expectation-resource gap”-- holding educators increasingly accountable for higher levels of student achievement, while at the same time reducing budgets year after year. Mere common sense would lead one to think that increased expectations would be accompanied by what Richard Elmore (2006) refers to as “reciprocal accountability” - that is, “For every increment of performance we ask of educators, there is an equal responsibility to provide them with the capacity to meet that expectation.” (p. 93). Yet, exactly the opposite is occurring. As politicians demand more from public schools, budgets for public education are being slashed.

In many states, reduced budgets for public education have not been a one-time or occasional occurrence. Many local school districts have experienced state mandated budget reductions for consecutive years. The cumulative effect of these budget reductions has been severe. We should be crystal clear; it is unreasonable to think that the significant reductions in state budget allocations for public education are not taking a toll. School districts simply cannot maintain the same level of service and program offerings, and at the same time continually reduce expenditures.

The Fierce Urgency of Now

The continuing reduction in resources from state legislatures is forcing district leaders to make a difficult choice - succumb to despair, engaging in random acts of desperation, or approach the challenge by looking through a different lens. After all, despite declining resources, students will still show up, and we have a responsibility to ensure they learn. The question we must ask is what would we expect for our own child? Would we accept the proposition that our child will learn less because of state mandated budget cuts? Would we accept putting our child’s education on hold until new revenue sources can be found? We don’t think so! The times we live in must not dictate the values we hold dear. To borrow from Martin Luther King (1963), we must recognize the fierce urgency of now! We cannot choose to wait and hope for improved economic times.

Through New Lenses: The White River Example

The White River School District in Buckley, Washington is typical of districts that have experienced consecutive years of significant budget reductions. The task of implementing these budget reductions has been complex and difficult. After all, students still arrive each morning, and the district has not experienced a decline in expectations from the parents or the state legislature. As in every district in Washington, the challenge has been to continue to improve student learning, and to do so with declining resources.

While the challenge of consecutive budget reductions has created considerable problems, White River has succeeded in continuing to improve student achievement. They have managed to do this through the hard work of a devoted and dedicated staff, a passionate and committed school board, and viewing the problem of declining resources through two very important lenses.

One: Sharpening Our Core Purpose by Focusing on the Right Things

There are many consequences of budget reductions; the most obvious being that budget reductions force us to make choices. Granted, these are difficult choices, but they must be made. Ultimately, budget choices communicate what we care about, what we value, what we stand for, but perhaps more than anything, budget choices reinforce the message of our core purpose; above all else, this is what we’re about! Researchers such as Bardwick (1996), Champy (1995), and Senge, et al. (1994) stress the importance of a clear and focused purpose. Marcus Buckingham (2005) argues that the one critical thing that effective leaders must understand is the importance of clarity; knowing how to clearly articulate and consistently communicate the purpose of the organization, the primary clients it serves, the future it is creating, the indicators of progress it will
track, and the specific actions members can
take immediately to achieve its long-term purpose and goals.

If we choose, reducing expenditures can serve to sharpen our mission, our core purpose. The fundamental mission of public schools is to ensure that all students learn at high levels. The very nature of budget choices gives meaning to the question, “Do we really mean it when we say our fundamental purpose is student learning?” In other words, in the budget reduction process are other things being given a higher priority than the declared mission of ensuring student learning?

District leaders in White River approached the budget reduction process by making a commitment to protect and defend the “learning mission” of the school district above all else. On the one hand, this was easy to articulate. After all, no one wanted to take the position of being against protecting student learning, but as district leaders became engaged in the difficult and challenging work of actually cutting budgets in one place, while protecting (or even increasing) budgets in other areas, protecting the learning mission became much more difficult.

This is where the importance of leadership becomes critical. Budget building in a time of reduced resources must be more than merely agreeing on the least “painful” way to cut the budget. The question leaders must ask is this, “What budget reductions can we make that will have the least detrimental impact on our core purpose, so that we can continually improve student learning levels?” Promoting and protecting the core purpose of the school district often requires courage, even in the best of times. In times of darkness, the need for small acts of courage is magnified!

Sharpening a district’s focus requires putting declining resources on strategies that will make a difference. District leaders in White River made a conscious decision to devote scarce resources to initiatives that were likely to have the greatest positive impact on student learning. It is perplexing to say the least to observe states and school districts, in times of severe budget cuts, allocating significant dollars to initiatives that will have little, if any, impact on student learning levels.

For example, in many states, and certainly in many districts, much emphasis is being placed on “teacher observation and evaluation” as a means for improving student achievement. In Tennessee, one of the first states to receive Race To The Top funding, the teacher observation and evaluation requirements by school administrators has been increased dramatically, and teacher evaluation has been linked, in part, to student achievement scores. Significant dollars are being expended in the state-wide training of principals in the new teacher observation and evaluation processes and procedures.

Could the Race to the Top funds (approximately $500 million) be put to good use in Tennessee’s schools? The obvious answer is a resounding “yes”! After all, Tennessee has not been immune from the effects of the current economic recession. On the other hand, there is little evidence, if any, to support the notion that state-wide initiatives to evaluate teachers by linking teacher evaluation to student achievement scores will result in increased student learning. When the Teaching Commission (2006) examined ways to improve schools through improved teaching, it dismissed teacher evaluation as “arcane and ineffective” (p. 16). Richard DuFour and Robert Marzano concur. They conclude that, “Principal evaluation of teachers is a low-leverage strategy for improving schools, particularly in terms of the time it requires of principals.” (p. 64). Most recently, a study by The National Center for Education and the Economy questioned the efficacy of the current approach of teacher observation and evaluation to significantly improve student achievement, and the National Research Council has issued a report that demonstrates little, if any, correlation between high-stakes testing and student achievement, even when the results of the tests are linked to teacher evaluation.

Do principals in White River observe classrooms? The answer is “yes.” In fact, principals in the White River School District spend so much time in classrooms, meeting with teacher teams, and interacting with faculty and students, it is seen as simply “the way we do things around here,” rather than an “event.” Here’s the difference; in White River the purpose of principals being in classrooms, and equally important - meeting with teams, is to focus on and support efforts to improve student learning, rather than observing teaching and “getting the required number observations and post-conferences completed.”

Rather than viewing teacher observation as the primary means to improve student learning, the White River School District made the decision to use scarce resources to build the collective capacity of teacher teams to improve student learning - student-by-student, skill-by-skill. For example, district leaders realized that by putting resources into level two of their RTI plan, ultimately the costs for educating special education students would decline. In short, by making this fundamental cultural shift from a primary focus on “observing and evaluating teaching” to an intense and passionate focus on the aspects of schooling that are proven to have a strong impact on student learning, the district has continued to make steady gains in student learning levels, in spite of reduced resources.

Second: Utilizing Resources We Don’t See

Capturing the Power of Collaborative Teams

In addition to focusing their scarce resources in areas that are most likely to have a positive impact on student learning, district leaders in White River have also sought to capture the power of resources that often go unseen, or at the least, are not typically viewed as resources. For example, capturing the power of collaborative teams has had a significant positive effect on student learning in White River, at very little increased cost. This should not have been a surprise. This observation by National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2003) is representative of literally dozens of researchers and organizational theorists, both within and outside of professional education. “The key to ensuring that every child has a quality teacher is finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers.” (p. 7)

Even as annual budgets were being severely cut, White River organized every school into collaborative teams, and created a culture in which principals were responsible for enhancing the effectiveness of each team. By viewing collaborative teaming as a resource, the district has witnessed a huge cultural shift, along with significant increases in student achievement. Rather than focusing entirely on formal classroom observations and asking teachers questions such as, “What are you teaching today? What are your goals for today’s lesson? What methods will you be using? What should I be observing in today’s lesson?” principals in White River are asking teachers - and importantly, teams of teachers - questions such as, “Are your students learning? How do you know?
What are the areas in which they are doing well? Where do they seem to be struggling? How are students who are struggling getting additional time and support? As a team, what are some things with which you are struggling?” and, “How can I help?”

**The Power of Common Formative Assessments**

Of course, the question, “Are the students learning and how do you know?” implies that the learning of students is being monitored on a frequent and timely basis. The White River School District has found that collaboratively developed, common formative assessments are a powerful resource that has very little associated costs. Formative assessments are a powerful tool for improving student learning. An effective standards-based, formative assessment program can help to dramatically enhance student achievement throughout the K-12 system (Marzano, 2006). Ainsworth (2007) concurs, asserting that, “Most importantly, common formative assessment results enable educators to diagnose student learning needs accurately in time to make instructional modifications” (pp. 95-96).

The collaborative analysis of the results of common formative assessments has enabled faculty and staff in White River to excel in two major areas. One, faculty and staff in each team identify areas of strength and areas of concern related to specific learning targets, and make decisions regarding appropriate additional time, support and enrichment for individual students. Second, the collaborative analysis of the results from formative assessments enables faculty and staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their instructional strategies and resources. In short, the collaborative analysis of the results from formative assessments enables faculty and staff in White River to engage in deep reflection and dialogue related to the efficacy of their professional practice.

**Increased Specificity and Precision**

Often we can improve the outcomes of our work by simply doing what we do better! While this may seem like an obvious observation, for leaders in White River the word “better” means helping teams focus on individual student learning with increased specificity and precision. The good news is that increasing specificity and precision does not require increased resource allocation. What is meant by “specificity and precision” in our work? In the White River School District this means drilling deeper into the right work of collaborative teams. For example, rather than teams merely collaboratively identifying the essential outcomes (i.e. power standards) in each subject or course, teams are much more specific, focusing on such issues as determining what the standards, if met, would look like in student work, collaboratively developing unit plans and learning targets, as well as common scoring rubrics. Teams go beyond merely using formative assessments to determine strengths and weaknesses in the learning of their students, to monitoring the learning of each student, skill-by-skill. Importantly, schools in White River have moved beyond simply providing additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning, to providing focused practice and feedback that is targeted directly to the specific unlearned skills of each student.

Simply organizing into collaborative teams will have little or no effect on student learning. Instead, it’s the power of collaborative teams that are doing the right work that helps more kids learn more. White River’s experience demonstrates that ensuring that collaborative teams are focusing on the learning of each student with specificity and precision can contribute to major increases in student success.

**Re-framing Time**

It has been said that schools and prisons are the only two institutions in which time is rigidly “fixed.” Of course, time is only “fixed” because of decisions that are made regarding how time is utilized. In the White River School district, leaders realized that “time” is a resource that must be managed and maximized. To this end, district leaders decided to view time through two fresh perspectives. First, administrative meetings and teacher meetings that traditionally focused on “nuts and bolts” issues were re-framed into “learning meetings” - meetings that focused on implementing practices that would likely have the greatest impact on student learning. Second, school schedules became much more flexible, providing for collaborative team time, as well as time for students to receive additional time, support and enrichment within the school day. District leaders realized that as long as time was rigidly fixed, and the same for all students, learning levels of students would vary greatly. By viewing time as a valued resource that should be flexible and aligned to support the district’s core purpose, White River has been able to better use the time resource on enhancing student learning at no additional cost.

**Professional Learning: From Training to Doing**

There are areas within district budgets that should be re-framed regardless of declining resources. Reduced resources simply bring these issues to the forefront more quickly. There is no better example of this than the lens through which districts view professional development. For years, researchers, organizational theorists, and professional organizations have called for “job embedded” staff development, rather than the more traditional “cafeteria” or “sit and get” approaches. This reliance on training - and the associated costs that go with it - as the primary engine to move a district forward must be substituted with a culture that is characterized by learning by doing. As Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) have observed, “The answer to the knowing-doing gap is deceptively simple: embed more of the process of acquiring new knowledge in the actual doing of the task and less in the formal training programs that are frequently ineffective. If you do it, then you will know it.” (p. 27, emphasis added).

Leaders in the White River School District made the conscious decision to follow the advice of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) who summarized that, “The message is consistent and clear. The best professional development occurs in a social and collaborative setting rather than in isolation, is ongoing and sustained rather than infrequent and transitory, is job-embedded rather than external, occurs in the context of the real world of the school and classroom rather than in off-site workshops or courses, focuses on results (that is, evidence of improved student learning) rather than activities or perceptions, and is systematically aligned with school and district goals rather than random. In short, the best professional development takes place in professional learning communities (p. 370).

While there remains some specialized and focused training for the faculty and staff in the White River School District, the prevailing idea is simply this, rather than constantly training to get better results, faculty and staff work together to get results. Formal training in White River is limited to providing training to build shared knowledge of
effective strategies and skills in order to address specific student learning needs that have emerged from a collaborative analysis of student learning data. Not only has this allowed district leaders to reduce resources for training, but also it has been a key factor in moving from a culture in which the district was constantly training and preparing to get better, to one of continually getting better by doing the work.

Limiting Initiatives

The very nature of budget reductions causes district leaders to stop doing some things, and many district leaders lament the associated decline in initiatives, or even use budget reductions as an excuse for the lack of growth in student learning. Actually, in the White River School District, limiting initiatives has not only helped reduce the budget, but has proven to be a positive factor in increasing student achievement! When district leaders decided to implement the concepts and practices associated with functioning as a professional learning community, they made the decision that the professional learning community concept would not be one of many initiatives the district would undertake to improve student learning, it would be the approach that would be implemented persistently and consistently, over time, and all new initiatives to improve learning must be linked directly to the professional learning community framework, and the critical questions associated with student learning.

Who Will Call The Parents?

A decline in resources does not mean the students will not show up for school. Parents still send their kids to school, and of course, parents have dreams for their kids. At the most basic level they want three things; they want their child to be safe, to feel special, and to learn. Rarely, does a parent hug their first or second grader and ask, “What were you taught today?” Rather, more than likely, the question will be, “So, what did you learn today?”

Declining resources do not exempt schools from the responsibility to do the things that will help students learn. After all, who will call the parents and say, “We’re sorry, but due to budget cuts we will no longer be able to clearly articulate what is essential for all students to learn?” And, oh yes, you know how we should monitor the learning of each student on a frequent and timely basis? Well, we’ve decided we have to give that up too. We realize you would like for your child to receive additional time and support when they experience difficulty in their learning, but we’ve been forced to drop that practice.

Does the decline in resources make our job of ensuring that all students learn much more difficult? Absolutely! Should we be strong advocates for additional resources for our schools? Yes! After all, the true measure of any society is how it treats its young. But, should we allow declining resources to dampen our resolve to do the things we know we can do to make sure our students learn? No! We began by referencing Winston Churchill. Perhaps Churchill’s wisdom can be an admonition to America’s educators. Through Britain’s darkest hours during WWII, Churchill passionately and persistently urged, “Never, Never, Never, Never give up!”

References


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Innovating Approaches to Dropout Prevention

Shifts in the economy are reviving concerns about the relatively high dropout rate of students in the United States. If current reports are any indication, the gap between skilled and unskilled workers is growing, and the education system has the potential to widen or narrow this gap. In order to narrow it, educators and community members who are collaborating to assist students in completing high school need to innovate and experiment with ways of reengaging students who are on the verge of dropping out. As a teacher at Southwest Education Center in Seattle (SWEC), I am part of a team of dedicated faculty and staff who have made it one of their primary goals to prepare students to reenter high school so they can earn a diploma. SWEC is a program sponsored by Southwest Youth and Family Services, and through my time at SWEC I have become more familiar with the complexities and challenges faced by students who struggle in traditional educational environments.

Although there is no clear evidence that the dropout rate in the U.S. has increased significantly over the past forty years, several scholars have expressed concern about the high rate because of increasing demand for skilled labor in the current job market. This statistic is best interpreted in light of the high unemployment rate for workers without high school diplomas. Darling-Hammond (2007) reported that, “Today, about 70% of U.S. jobs require specialized skill and training beyond high school, up from only 5% at the turn of the 20th century” (p. 2).

Shifts in the economy pose particular challenges for youth of color who live in urban neighborhoods that have de-industrialized over the past 40 years. Blue-collar jobs in many areas have been automated or replaced with high tech work that requires significant amounts of post-secondary education. As a result, in many urban areas the disparity between workers with advanced training and those who are unemployed is growing: “The increasing economic and social marginality of urban dropouts in today’s high-tech, information-based economy has fueled what some scholars have called a ‘graduation rate crisis’ among urban minorities” (Orfield, 2004, cited in Hirschfield, 2009, p. 4). Evidence in the form of labor statistics supports this claim. According to the Bureau of Labor (2007), about 39 percent of Black high school dropouts were employed at age 19 compared to about 60 percent of White and Latino dropouts (cited in Hirschfield, 2009).

Unemployment trends, generalized according to ethnicity, are particularly alarming after examining correlations between dropout rates and incarceration rates. Between 1980 and 2000, three times as many African American men were added to the prison system as were added to U.S. colleges and universities (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 2). In 2009, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 68% of U.S. prison inmates had dropped out - 62% of white inmates, 69% of black inmates, and 28% of Hispanic inmates (cited in Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Barton and Coley (1996) found that more than half the adult prison population had literacy skills below those required for employment (Darling-Hammond 2007). Furthermore, an influential study by Lochner and Moretti found that education causally affects conviction rates for various crimes (Tyler and Lofstrom, 2009).

At SWEC many of our students are on the verge of dropping into this school-to-prison scenario. Nevertheless, faculty and staff provide students with the community, support, skills, and tools necessary to reverse the process and create a second chance for themselves.

SWEC contracts with Seattle and Highline Public School Districts, providing credit retrieval services for students who have dropped out or fallen behind. Students can earn up to eight credits per year by taking classes at SWEC in the core subject areas of Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Math, Career Choice, and Health. The programs at SWEC assist students as they transition back to a comprehensive high school equipped with the skills and credits necessary to complete their coursework and graduate. Most of the students enrolled at SWEC qualify for free and reduced lunch and they live in working class neighborhoods in Seattle and South King County. The majority are students of color from a wide variety of ethnic, linguistic, and national communities.

Students who enroll at SWEC cite a variety of reasons for why they fell behind in credits, including suspensions due to drug offenses or fights, pregnancy, family struggles, juvenile incarceration, drug or alcohol addiction, lack of support from teachers, and curriculum that they perceive as boring or irrelevant. Although these reasons are complex, faculty and staff at SWEC work with students using the following strategies to overcome these challenges:

1) Because we are a program of South-
west Youth and Family Services, we are able to provide wrap-around services in addition to academic instruction. Students enrolled in the program can access mental health, case management, and family support services in the same building. There is strong collaboration among teachers, social workers, therapists, and counselors at SWEC.

2) Our small class sizes allow teachers to provide differentiated instruction targeted to meet the specific academic needs and interests of each student. Instruction involves a mix of whole-class, small group, and individual learning, and in each case teachers can respond in real-time to student needs and questions. In practice, this means that instructors and program coordinators regularly monitor student progress and make interventions to determine whether students are succeeding. If students are absent, staff follow-up immediately with their family members, counselors, friends, and community members. The only time staff will allow students to use their cellphones is to call their friends to encourage them to come to school. In this kind of environment, students are much less likely to slip through the cracks.

3) Small class sizes also help foster a culture of community, camaraderie, and compassion among students. Instructors de-emphasize competition and foster cooperative learning. The overarching message of the program is that everyone is going through a struggle and everyone deserves a second chance, so we are here to help each other. Instructors explicitly cultivate this culture through scaffolding norms and practices of respectful discussion, debate, and support for intellectual risk-taking. Faculty and staff also build this through social rituals such as community meals.

4) The curriculum is aligned with the Washington State standards because it aims to prepare students for returning to comprehensive high schools. However, we also make curricular choices that promote intellectual, social, and personal motivation. For example, instructors and students read and analyze texts by organic intellectuals, authors from working class communities like the ones students call home. The goal of the program is to create a context where students themselves can grow as organic intellectuals. On the back wall of my classroom there are posters of famous organic intellectuals like Tupac Shakur and Luis Rodriguez. Students add their own pictures to the wall, and when they complete the program, they earn an “organic intellectual” pin in a transition ceremony. These rituals are not simply gestures of good will. Classes provide rigorous lessons in reading, writing, public speaking, discussion, debate, and critical thinking in which students hone their own voices and perspectives as emerging intellectuals. Students who succeed in this process are invited to join our Summer Writers Workshop, where they receive a stipend from the Seattle Youth Employment Program to engage in intensive poetry writing classes culminating in a public reading at the end of the summer, and online publication of their work (http://bootseattle.blogspot.com/).

5) In addition to helping students hone their voices, the curriculum is culturally relevant and promotes values of solidarity and equality. The staff at SWEC come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and have extensive experience working with youth from urban communities of color; this creates a trusting environment where students feel comfortable communicating with staff. All of the instructors in the program have extensive content area knowledge in ethnic studies through formal academic training at UW, Brown, Notre Dame, and WSU. Most of our students express interest in learning about their own communities’ cultures and histories, and we integrate this process holistically into our lesson and unit plans throughout the year. We find that engaging students with non-Eurocentric, culturally relevant curricula increases their motivation.

Although faculty and staff at SWEC experience success with these approaches, challenges persist. Attendance can be inconsistent, especially when students face family crises or when they have to work to support themselves. While a core of students tend to stay for a year in the program, we also have some students who only stay for a short period of time to catch up on a few credits. The flux of students coming in and out of the program can make it difficult to sustain the kind of supportive climate faculty and staff work to build.

Nevertheless, faculty and staff at SWEC believe that these challenges can be overcome, especially through collaborating with other educators who are doing similar work with students in difficult situations. It is easy to see that much more research is needed to solve the myriad of problems facing youth on the verge of dropping out of high school. However, every educator working with a young person can have a significant impact and one key element of this is to develop and deploy best practices. At SWEC, faculty and staff are using a number of best practice strategies, along with developing new ones, in order to lower the drop out rate and narrow the opportunity gap.

References
Since 2008, Matthew Hamilton has taught at Southwest Education Center, a program of Southwest Youth and Family Services. Before that, he taught at Seattle Preparatory School. He holds a B.A. from Brown University and a Master of Theological Studies from Notre Dame, where he studied comparative religious ethics and political theory. He is currently completing a Master of Arts in Teaching from Seattle Pacific University.

Photo credit: iStockPhoto.com/Diane Diederich 102682
Dr. Greg Fritzberg spent years teaching in public alternative school settings, working with students designated as “at-risk” and those who had already seen themselves become unwelcome in the traditional public schools. Few of these students could point to role models in post-secondary education settings who motivated them to move forward with their own education. Many had already given up on themselves. Society didn’t seem to want to invest in much more than public school “babysitting” for them.

Forward several years to the Seattle Public School District and contacts Dr. Fritzberg had made across its ranks of administrators and teachers. The district had been facing increasingly dire warnings under the NCLB laws and was seeking new partners to forge innovative opportunities working alongside their struggling students. Dr. Fritzberg’s previous work, his current role as professor at Seattle Pacific University, and his continued commitment to educational equality led him to devise a model of cooperation between the universities and public schools that would offer additional social and academic supports to the young students. The public school students would receive help and the university students selected to work with them would receive invaluable experience working as educators and mentors to the younger people. Perhaps most uniquely, university tutors were compensated for their classroom assistance, which helped them pay for college while increasing tutor commitment beyond what was possible in more common volunteer programs. The idea was to seek a “win-win” arrangement for both college students and urban kids while promoting relationships that implicitly encouraged K-12 students to aim for college themselves.

Fritzberg, along with Suzannah Calvery, a doctoral colleague at Seattle Pacific University (SPU) who helped him “grow” the program while completing her Ph.D., called their fledgling organization University Tutors, and in partnership with 4 Seattle schools received federal Department of Education (DOE) funding beginning in 2009. As this three year DOE grant ended in 2012, funding support switched to Washington State and City of Seattle levy sources, the latter being the most expansive and holding the most potential for long-term sustainability. Due to City of Seattle guidelines regarding public monies flowing to religious institutions like SPU, Fritzberg needed to create a non-profit entity which could legally accept city funding, and in the 2012-13 school year the organization became University Tutors for Seattle Schools (UTSS) with the approval of SPU’s School of Education and the broader university.

UTSS hires university students and matches them with public school needs to work in classrooms as floating tutors and with students selected for individual or small-group tutoring. What began with only a few schools and a handful of tutors has turned, several years later, into a growing intervention across the district. In 2012-2013, UTSS placed 57 tutors in eleven schools, with a couple outstanding original intent to enter the teaching profession, yet even those who hadn’t often report a sincere desire to continue working in education after they have worked with UTSS.

Those involved in UTSS see it as a bridge between university and lower schools through which young students gain access to role models and academic help and the hired tutor/mentors learn from the youth with whom they work and gain valuable field training from teachers in some of the highest need schools. UTSS expects to serve as academic support, but also learn a tremendous amount about the process of education in urban schools. Many tutors come from similar urban backgrounds and
seek to help lead young people along the path to college that they themselves have found. Teachers in classrooms report that the additional adult help in their classrooms enables more one-on-one work with students as well as generally assisting in classroom management. Administrators report gains in measures of academic success and UTSS has been able to grow each year as more school communities seek to partner with this innovative program.

In addition to the high level of academic prowess UTSS exhibits, they also offer a level of stability that is needed in many under-served populations. Tutors commit to work with the same students every week for the whole school year (when their own college schedules allow it). Teachers and school personnel report that having additional stable adult presences in the lives of their students impacts them positively. Tutors and teachers both note that once trust is established, students are more willing to put forth effort to work for “their” tutor than they may be for less consistent volunteers. This stability is a high priority for UTSS staff and tutors are recruited with the expectation that they will stay with the program as long as possible. UTSS has been fortunate to retain a high number of committed tutors, some of whom serve several years with Seattle students until their own college or graduate program graduation calls them in another direction. In these cases, these university tutors have assisted struggling urban students across the city of Seattle, while simultaneously gaining valuable experience and limiting their student loan debt through the income a UTSS job provides. A true win-win!

Seven tips for other cities, universities, and school districts looking to start similar partnerships, modeled after UTSS, follow:

1. Create an efficient model for matching employees to the assigned schools/partner organizations, including transportation and scheduling needs. Do not underestimate the logistical challenges associated with aligning schools’ identified needs and university students’ availability and transportation resources. Public transportation serves some routes better than others.

2. Provide sufficient training and support systems that can be maintained throughout the year. Such training will obviously include information about productive tutoring interactions, but must also include attention to all the laws relevant to adults working with minors in schools.

3. The most successful school-based tutoring programs have a “champion” of this approach in the school building. Seek out such advocates and partner with them in ways that serve their schools’ unique goals.

4. Recognize that tutors’ productivity is profoundly enhanced or limited by how teachers utilize them in classrooms. Consequently, conduct on-site training for participating teachers whenever and wherever possible.

5. Ensure you have a communication utility that will meet your organization’s needs. Perform online surveys of both teachers and tutors on at least a quarterly basis.

6. Be constantly vigilant about ongoing funding opportunities. The UTSS model pays tutors rather than relying on voluntarism, and thus fund-raising is an essential task. One critical resource to explore is work-study at the universities, both federal and state programs.

7. Be clear about what program evaluation information you seek and who will track it. In many cases, schools will have their own focus students, priority subjects, and growth objectives and take responsibility for monitoring progress themselves.

Dr. Greg Fritzberg is a professor in the School of Education at Seattle Pacific University. Before joining the University, Dr. Fritzberg taught at an alternative high school in the Skyway neighborhood of South Seattle. His scholarly interests include school policy, and promoting educational opportunities for disadvantaged students.

Suzannah V. Calvery, PhD., is a Research Associate for the BERC Group, an education research organization in Washington state. She has taught at the high school and college levels and has particular experience working with under-served and at-risk youth.
Another visit to the library has arrived. You’ve been looking forward to it since it means you can exchange books, replacing the one you lost interest in a while ago. The teacher gently reminds you that you have 20 minutes to choose—probably not enough time to make a thorough search, but you’re familiar with quick decision-making. You wander through the maze of shelves looking for something, anything, to read. All of the thin books are too easy, and the thick ones look boring. Ugh! The teacher just signaled, “ten minutes!” You glance at the shelf where you found last month’s book, the one with the dull stories about quilt makers. Better get as far away from that section as possible. There is no librarian on Fridays anymore and all of the computers are taken by other kids playing games. You see a few friends grab something from a shelf in the corner. Two minutes—time to abandon discretion and be impulsive! You run to the shelf and choose the book with the most interesting cover. There’s an old guy on top of a mountain in a lightning storm. You are not sure what a tempest is…but it doesn’t look like it has anything to do with quilts, so at least there’s that.

Does the scenario sound familiar? It could be argued that most educators, at least any that have spent time around a library with kids, have experience with book choice issues. It may seem trivial, but book choice deserves renewed attention since selection of reading material is an important factor in motivating students to read (Hurst, Scales, Frecks, & Lewis, 2011). With choice, however, comes responsibility for both teachers and students. Teachers must model how to choose books independently based on explicit strategies for selecting “just right” texts. Once students know how to apply strategies for book selection, students must read independently to participate as literate, informed citizens, but the key is motivation.

Nevertheless, according to Brozo (2002), choice and control are two ingredients often missing when it comes to instructing students not reading at grade level. One issue associated with choice is whether students can navigate through the library. Budget cuts resulting in unemployed librarians has a deleterious effect, especially for students unfamiliar with how a library works, or at-risk students with little or no experience with libraries or reading. Indeed, the classroom teacher may be the only available model for demonstrating why reading is important and how enjoyable reading can be. Certainly, classroom teachers can find what excites individual students in order to motivate reluctant readers and can help those students find books that are personally engaging while making connections to their lives. Although involving other adults in efforts to increase literacy, especially librarians, is critical to long-term success.

When students gain self-knowledge and choose a book that interests them, their confidence increases. Increases in confidence lead to a variety of positive affective outcomes, including increases in student perceptions of self-worth and pro-social behavior. Likewise, cognitive advances in reading and math achievement also result (Rimm-Kaufman, & Chui, 2007).

Success depends on multiple factors, and choosing the right book is one of these. When students have frameworks that enable confident choices, motivation results. Some general strategies for assisting students with book choice include explicit instruction of text selection based on current reading level, followed by opportunity to apply newly learned skills independently. Other experts organize additional strategies into two broad areas, including library use and student support (Wurtz & Wedwick, 2005). However, one widely agreed upon approach is to inventory the interests of students.

Tip 1: Start with Student Interest

Interest inventories for students are an effective way to inform educators to the personal preferences of students, along with raising awareness overall about cognitive styles and personal preferences. Specialized inventories can target reading likes and dislikes, learning styles, or world knowledge, among many other topics. As students become more aware of their preferences, they show increased independence and self-direction when selecting books. Reading inventories often contain questions that require self-reflection and meta-cognitive
habits, which further empower students to make focused choices.

Variations on reading inventories include activity ratings and assessment of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993; Heacox, 2002). Adding these into an inventory enables students to make personal connections to their reading selection and provides insights to nearby adults to assist. The following list shows some sample items for writing student interest inventories.

Sample Inventory Items

Reading Preference Questions
What do you like to read for pleasure?
Do you ever share reading with an adult? How often?

Interest Inventory Questions
If you could learn about anything you wanted to, what would it be?
What items have you collected in the past?

Learning Style/Multiple Intelligences Questions
Think of a great teacher you had. Describe what made the teacher so terrific.

What makes learning more difficult for you?

Tip 2: Useful Websites to Help Promote Student Interest

Websites can help provide a short list of titles a student might consider for independent reading, avoiding that “lost in the library feeling.” When students arrive at the library with a list of possible books, precious library time is focused on locating a specific title rather than feeling overwhelmed by overloaded shelves. Using the internet, parents and book buddies can help students with book quests locating book titles and/or authors. The following list shows resources for supporting focused book searches:

http://bookwizard.scholastic.com
http://www.childrenslibrary.org
http://www.dawcl.com/search.asp
http://www.wegivebooks.org
http://books.google.com/

Tip 3: Enliven the Library Experience

The trip to the library has the potential to be the highlight of the day. Even in the absence of a librarian, teachers can make the library experience engaging and motivating. It’s more than just books! For example, begin by having students complete a scavenger hunt or a library mapping activity to become more familiar with the layout, features, and secrets of the space. End the school year by having your class design the activity for next year’s group. Another engaging activity is to have students make “movie posters” of the books they’ve read to put on display. Constructing a “spine poem” is a kinesthetic project, which involves finding a book from every section and stacking them so that their spines read as lines of poem is also engaging for students.

Example Spine Poem

Share the reading! Libraries are built around sharing, so why not have students share their opinions about books as well? Students can write brief recommendations for the book they have just finished on an index card. When they check the book back into the library, their recommendation can be tucked inside the cover for the next reader as a bookmark. The library staff can display well-written recommendations on the shelf. This gives students a chance to read and write a book report with a purpose and to publish their opinions for their peers.

Get competitive! Grade level teachers can make a poster displaying tallies (or some other graphic representation) of how many books each class has read. Posters displayed in the library are present and updated for all students to view as they visit. This adds a little competitive flavor to the library experience and ultimately, makes reading a group celebration.

Tip 4: Explicitly Teach Students How to Select “Just Right” Texts

There are several methods students can choose when selecting “just right text.” Using the Goldilocks methods, teachers model what a reader will look like while reading a book that is too easy, too hard, and “just right.”

For example, when a book is too easy, students might answer in the affirmative to the following question: “Is this book easy to understand (comprehension)?” Alternatively, when selecting a book that is too hard, a student might respond, “Do I understand what is happening in the story (comprehension)?” Finally, just right text selection means the student can read most of the words and comprehend the story.

Tip 5: Integrate Independent Reading into Larger Classroom Conversations

One way to allow students to include what they are reading independently into shared conversations about text is by using reading strategies as a means of grouping students. By organizing small groups around reading strategies, such as chunking or looking for key words, students can reach rich levels of discussion while focusing on certain skills. Therefore, teachers show students that independent reading can lead to both pleasure and help develop reading skills.

Conclusion

Successful text selection is not a given for struggling readers. Teachers at all levels must strive to teach students how to read independently so they are motivated to read throughout their lives. As Nagy (2007) observes in response to the National Reading Panel summary, it is not that independent reading is ineffective, rather that it has not yet been documented to be effective. He notes, “Given the strong correlational findings linking volumes of reading to vocabulary growth and numerous other benefits, it is reasonable for teachers to do what they can to increase the amount of time students spend reading, to the extent that this can be done without cutting into time devoted to effective instruction. Teachers can increase the effectiveness of time spent reading by supporting students in finding and choosing books of interest to them – and at an appropriate reading level” (p.13). Through these thoughtful techniques, educators can increase the effectiveness of independent reading classrooms and launch children into a world of insatiable readers and learners.
References


President Lincoln’s influence endures and resonates with 21st century leaders because of the power and passion of his personal story and the journey our nation has taken toward a more perfect union. By examining Lincoln’s heroic life story—his words and deeds—we can gain inspiration and learn practical leadership strategies to improve our performance as school and community leaders in order to make a difference in the lives of others.

These strategies include pursuing a mission and vision, communicating with clarity, displaying courage, humility, and persistence, facilitating change, and lifetime learning. Based on the presenter’s co-authored book, Learning From Lincoln: Leadership Strategies for School Success, we will examine these strategies while honoring the individual capacity that each of us bring to our leadership work. Thus, an important presentation goal includes affirming and refreshing one’s own voice and calling to leadership.

About Dr. Harvey Alvy
During the past several years Harvey Alvy has been conducting presentations, both nationally and internationally, on the leadership of Abraham Lincoln for community groups, school leaders, and business organizations interested in how to apply Lincoln’s life to the realities of our 21st century leadership challenges. The presentations are based on his book, Learning From Lincoln: Leadership Practices for School Success (ASCD, 2012) co-authored with Dr. Pam Robbins in 2010. Harvey’s interest in Lincoln and leadership began with his work as a history teacher, international school leader, and principal at the American International School in Israel, the American Embassy School in New Delhi, and the Singapore American School. As an international educator, Harvey was selected as a National Distinguished Principal for American Overseas Schools and is a founding member of the Principals’ Training Center for International Schools. As a university professor, Harvey received the Eastern Washington University (EWU) CenturyTel Faculty Achievement Award for Teaching Excellence and held the William C. Shreeve Endowed Professorship in Educational leadership until 2012. Other books co-authored with Dr. Robbins include The New Principal’s Fieldbook: Strategies for Success (ASCD), The Principal’s Companion, and If I Only Knew: Success Strategies for Navigating the Principalship. With Dr. Jane Liu, Harvey co-authored a Mandarin only book for Chinese school leaders, The Principal Management Handbook: The American Principal’s Approach to Successful Administration. Presently, Harvey is a Professor of Education, Emeritus, at EWU.

An Evening with Dr. Harvey Alvy
Learning From Lincoln: Leadership Qualities that Make a Difference
Tuesday, April 23, 2013 • 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Lincoln High School Auditorium
701 S. 37th Street, Tacoma, WA 98406

Registration fee for seminar: $20
Clock hours will be available onsite for $5 (cash only)
To register, click here for PDF form
Impact of Deep Instructional Alignment on Student Achievement

By Joshua E. Schlegel and Charles Salina

Background

In 2008, math teachers at Harrison Middle School in Sunnyside, Washington, struggled with the reality that, despite their best efforts, only about one-fourth of their students were meeting standard on the state mathematics exam. Two years later, three times as many students passed. The innovation of creating deep alignment between state standards and content taught made the difference.

Deep alignment is our phrase for a specific and intentional correlation between instructional content and state standards. The need for deep alignment at Harrison became apparent in 2008, when frustration among teachers was elevated due to the high percentage of students who were not meeting standard on high-stakes state tests. Although teachers were working hard and cared about their students, they faced significant challenges, including a high proportion of ELL students and students with challenging socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2009, only 25% of sixth-grade students and 21% of seventh-grade students met standard. Faced with these challenges, the math teachers decided to innovate and address the what rather than the how of instruction by embracing deep alignment.

Methods and Results

Teachers asked themselves, “How closely does the content in our curriculum really match the content in the Washington State Math Standards?” The curriculum they were using, ostensibly in alignment with state standards, proved upon close examination to be aligned only superficially, without meaningful correlation with grade levels and state standards. Teachers responded to this by raising the level of alignment between instructional materials and the Washington State Mathematics Learning Standards and Test Item Specifications. They also raised their expectations of students and honed the focus of their professional development.

After these changes were implemented, a sharp improvement in student performance at Harrison took place between 2008 and 2010. According to the Washington State Board of Education’s 2011 Achievement Index, in 2 years, Harrison went from being outperformed in mathematics by 86% of schools to being outperformed in mathematics by only 3.6% of schools. In other words, Harrison moved from performing in the bottom 15% of schools to performing in the top 4%.

The improvement at Harrison was singular and extraordinary. Yet little change was made during this time in personnel, collaboration within the mathematics department, frequency of monitoring of learning, and family and community involvement. Individual teacher results, as indicated by student test performance, were also within 5 percentage points of one another, even though instructional practices varied significantly.

What changed was that teachers became more informed about Washington State Mathematics Learning Standards and Test Item Specifications, and collaboratively designed and implemented curricular materials accordingly. As a result, teachers became empowered to help students succeed on state measures.

Low Level of Alignment

Fulmer (2010) found that the level of instructional alignment among teachers is consistently high across classrooms, districts, and even states. This suggests that regardless of a school’s location and demographics, educators are teaching lessons on similar content while using similar materials and instructional methods. In contrast, however, the alignment between the content teachers deliver and the state standards is low. Seemingly, the content being taught in classrooms has not been significantly affected by the introduction of state standards. Fulmer’s data suggests that the level of alignment among teachers’ instructional practices is greater than the level of alignment between content delivered and the state test, indicating that the focus on the how of teaching is eclipsing an important focus on the what.

Price-Baugh (1997) have shown that another problem is that many teachers do not know what the level of alignment is between the textbooks being used and the state standards; neither are they thoroughly conversant with the state standards or the state assessment. Insufficient knowledge regarding the standards combined with textbook dependency creates a situation in which instructional alignment can be only as deep as that of the text. Unfortunately, according to Price-Bough, alignment between textbooks and standardized tests has historically been unacceptably low. But if teachers are to deviate from texts upon which they rely, they...
must first feel confident that alignment is likely to result in increased student achievement, and know what schools need to do to implement the practice successfully.

**Impact of Instructional Alignment**

Research shows that varying levels of instructional alignment produce varying results (Zellmer, 1997). When alignment is implemented in a thorough manner, however, student performance improves dramatically. These improvements have been shown to remain consistent across socioeconomic level, race, gender, and school size (Moss-Mitchell, 1998). Furthermore, desirable gains may be made in spite of the presence of predictors of poor achievement (Moss-Mitchell, 1998).

However, alignment must be deep if its benefits are to be maximized (Koczor, 1984). Even slight differences between instruction and assessment can produce drastic disparity in student achievement, even among students who are typically high achievers (Koczor, 1984).

In 1986, Fahey found that low-aptitude students benefited from alignment even more than high-performing students. When students were given tasks that were considered easy, instructional alignment did not seem to have an effect. However, when students were given a misaligned assessment containing more difficult tasks, those classified as having lower aptitude scored lower than those classified as having higher aptitude. When students were presented with an assessment deeply aligned with the content of the lessons and still including more difficult tasks, alignment was shown to increase the performance of lower aptitude students to the point that their performance exceeded that of higher aptitude students operating under misaligned conditions (Fahey, 1986). The study suggests that when deep alignment is present, students at all ability levels can be successful.

**Development of Instructional Alignment**

To achieve deep alignment, certain conditions must be met. First, instructional materials must have focus, direction, and accountability (Clarke, Stow, & Kayona, 2006). Focus and direction may be derived from the state standards as well as from test item specifications, and accountability may be heightened through the use of district and state assessment systems. Second, expectations of students must be aligned with state standards (Clarke et al., 2006).

Third, instructional leaders must monitor the development and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure these elements are matching (Clarke et al., 2006). This role is most appropriately filled by a person with extensive knowledge of the subject matter, as well as of state standards and test item specifications. If one of these conditions is missing, alignment is not likely to be deep enough to produce the desired results.

Key attributes of successful instructional alignment include the following:

- A match between curricular materials and state standards is ensured;
- Specific employees are charged with teaching and supervising the deep alignment model;
- Professional development is offered to support staff as they use the model;
- Notebooks containing alignment information are developed and made available to the public;
- School principals are involved in the process (English & Steffy, 2001); and
- Once alignment has been established, a formal system for revising instructional materials and for communicating results with all stakeholders is developed (Clarke et al., 2006).

If all of these conditions are met, student achievement is likely to result.

This focus on instructional alignment brings up some important questions: Should content be valued above method? Do reform efforts that emphasize instruction in comparison to subject matter miss the mark? If the answer to this last question is yes, then it is critical that alignment between content and assessments be used to inform instructional practices.

**Recommendations**

Washington State is currently transitioning from State authored numeracy standards to the Common Core Mathematics Standards. With this transition, the importance of achieving deep alignment cannot be understated. Schools that implement deep alignment are likely to see significant improvement in student achievement that defies traditional barriers to success. In addition, school leaders can orchestrate the implementation of deep alignment by enlisting the support of teachers and administrators, developing a thorough knowledge of the standards and assessing current texts, writing or modifying curriculum, and working with teachers to plan the delivery of the common content assessed by the standards.

Buy-in from is achieved by asking questions that allow teachers to realize that deep alignment is both necessary and lacking, and by getting feedback from teachers about how to address the problem. Further buy-in will take place when teachers see the success achieved in one grade or school and want to replicate that success.

Administrators are likely to support the project when they realize that the resources they need are already in the building, eliminating the need for costly new textbooks and outside consultants. Buy-in from the administration is also based on measures of student achievement. Nevertheless, this challenging work is led most effectively by leaders with the following characteristics:

- Strong relational trust with teachers, since the process may expose content knowledge deficiencies;
- A deep knowledge of mathematics learning standards;
- The capacity to develop curricular materials that are aligned with standards;
- The ability to lead teachers in the implementation of new materials; and
- The capacity to work closely with administrators, who must be willing to support the project through designated time and funding.

The individual leading the alignment process should also be capable of teaching the standards to other educators. Simultaneously, teachers must also adhere to the following activities and norms:

- Spend plenty of time immersed in the standards to develop a deep understanding;
- Examine each standard at least twice initially;
- Continually revisit standards, to make sure departmental knowledge is aligned; and
- Write assessment items for individual standards.

As a result of working through this process, teachers will know with exactitude what the standard is and will therefore be empowered to prepare students to succeed by those standards.
The next step in moving toward deep alignment is to examine the current curriculum to assess whether it is aligned with the standards. If previous research is any indication, most analyses of this sort show some level of misalignment between curriculum, standards, and assessments. After assessing curricula, the math coach (or other designated individual) can work with teachers to develop a plan to address misalignment. Allowing teachers to do the work themselves builds their capacity and shows confidence in them, allowing them to connect with the material and the project. Assessments can be written first, and then the curriculum that matches that assessment can be created. Questions must be explicit and specifically designed to meet both the content and the rigor of the standards exactly.

Once new materials have been written (no small undertaking), the math coach can work with the teachers on how to teach the new lessons, emphasizing the precise content to be delivered. The coach and the teachers must have common planning time, during which the team can clarify critical elements of instruction, such as:

- The intent of the lesson;
- How it addresses the standard;
- Where it fits into the progression; and
- The key points that must be addressed when teaching it.

Thus, what used to be the hard-copy teacher’s guide turns into collaborative discussion about what the lesson is and why it is important. Administrators must provide appropriate support and information to the teachers, and the teachers’ feedback must be welcomed throughout the process in order to maintain sincere participation.

Conclusion

The once-frustrated teachers at Harrison now experience a strong sense of accomplishment as a result of increased student achievement. Teachers report that they discuss instruction frequently, and find it easier to do so because they are all teaching common content. Furthermore, they report that students are more likely to help each other because they have a greater sense of mastery over the content. Students also appear to be more comfortable asking questions. Teachers report that they are happier at test time because they are sending the students in prepared; students are likewise more eager to take the test, relishing the opportunity to “show off” their knowledge. “For our kids,” one teacher stated, “it’s revolutionary. It has changed the mind-set of the students.”

If implementing deep alignment at Harrison, a school with challenging circumstances, has resulted in a stunning level of improvement, it is likely that the same practice will produce constructive results in other schools with similar challenges, as well as perhaps slightly less impressive but still valuable gains in other schools with greater advantages. Deep alignment is one method that educational leaders can use to ensure that teachers and students are moving toward increased achievement.

References


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Joshua Schlegel began his career as a mathematics teacher at Harrison Middle School in Sunnyside. Josh specializes in developing teacher content knowledge and learning progressions in mathematics. Josh also serves as a mathematics instructor at Heritage University and Yakima Valley Community College. Joshua can be contacted at josh.schlegel@sunnyside.wednet.edu.
A Systematic Approach to Implementing Innovations

As a teacher, dozens of questions used to run through my mind when a leader returned from a conference with the latest ideas on how to transform our school and turn my world upside down. "How will this affect my planning? Do we even know if this innovation will make a difference for kids?! What about my lesson plans from last year? What professional development will I have to attend?"

Today, as a leader, I have learned to systemically approach the implementation of innovations. I have learned that it takes time to bring people up to speed with new thinking and that taking the time to attend to the needs of the people who carry out the work in classrooms is time well spent. You don’t have to invent implementation strategies to think systematically! I’ve learned to utilize multiple change theories to inform my actions throughout implementation and to be constantly aware of the impact change has on educators.

The table [next page] is representative of the theories on which I often rely. As an innovation is introduced into a system, an organization begins progressing through the Stages of Change. As a leader, I collaboratively focus on specific activities, while being aware of the evolving concerns of all faculty and staff in my sphere of influence.

Utilizing the Activities of Leaders and being conscious of the Stages of Concern for Teachers throughout the change process provides the opportunity for a systemic approach to implementing innovations. As you read the table, examine the Stages of Change on the left and the elements associated with each stage to the right.

References

Hannah Gbenro is an elementary school vice principal in Federal Way Public Schools. Over the last decade, Hannah served as a district instructional technology specialist, high school teacher, and elementary school para professional. Hannah is earning her Doctorate in Educational Leadership with dual specializations in Educational Administration and Business from Seattle University.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of change</th>
<th>Activities of Leaders</th>
<th>Stages of Concern for Teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before the change is implemented</td>
<td>• Talk about the shift</td>
<td>0 Awareness: At the awareness stage, teachers often see</td>
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<td>• Provide training to the management team</td>
<td>the innovation as unrelated to their work and they have</td>
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<td>• Identify what people will lose due to change</td>
<td>little concern for the innovation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Plan communication process</td>
<td>Impact</td>
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<td>• Design successes</td>
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<td>Ending: Each implementation of an innovation begins with a loss when things change. To accept and eventually celebrate a beginning, an ending must be grieved.</td>
<td>Communicate the 4 P’s (Purpose, Picture, Plan, and Part)</td>
<td>1 Informational: Teachers are generally aware of the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create temporary supports to regulate the neutral zone</td>
<td>innovation and would like to learn more information. For</td>
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<td>(roles, systems, policies, and processes)</td>
<td>the most part, teachers are not worried about how the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Set realistic measurements of success and expect flexibility</td>
<td>innovation will impact them; instead, teachers are</td>
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<td></td>
<td>with the timeline</td>
<td>primarily interested in the general ideas and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provide professional learning experiences</td>
<td>characteristics of the innovation.</td>
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<td>• Encourage experimentation and collaboration</td>
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<td>Neutral Zone: After grieving, people enter a neutral zone in which they are often worn down and become somewhat confused. While some people quickly adopt innovations, other people have a challenging time adapting and remain in a state of neutral uncertainty.</td>
<td>• Over-communicate the 4 P’s (Purpose, Picture, Plan, and Part)</td>
<td>2 Personal: Teachers question their ability to meet the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Simplify and explain what is not ending</td>
<td>demands as they analyze their role in relation to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify the end</td>
<td>the innovation. Teachers are concerned about being</td>
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<td>• Openly recognize losses</td>
<td>inadequate in their roles. Teachers consider</td>
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<td>New Beginning: The dawn of a new beginning rises and people start identifying with, and accepting, the new reality. During the phase of new beginnings, people refocus themselves around their central purpose and goals with restored energy and clarity.</td>
<td>• Communicate 4 P’s (Purpose, Picture, Plan, and Part)</td>
<td>3 Management: Teachers focus their energy on managing</td>
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<td>• Be open about stumbling blocks and invite others to</td>
<td>the processes and actualization of tasks associated</td>
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<td>support solutions</td>
<td>with the innovation. Issues associated with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Celebrate successes</td>
<td>efficiency, organizing, managing, scheduling, and</td>
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<td>• Encourage experimentation</td>
<td>time demands often rise to the surface.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Revisit temporary policies</td>
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<td>• Reflect on the journey</td>
<td>4 Consequence: Teachers focus on the impact the</td>
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<td>innovation has on student</td>
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<td>5 Collaboration: Teachers concentrate on teaming with</td>
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<td>one another to support</td>
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<td>each other in using the innovation.</td>
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<td>6 Refocusing: Teachers explore collective and widespread</td>
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<td>benefits resulting from the innovation, including</td>
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<td>the possibility of significant adjustments to the</td>
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<td>innovation. Teachers have explicit ideas about</td>
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<td>alternative options to the current innovation.</td>
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(Bridges, 2009; Hall and Hord, 1984; Haneburg, 2005)
Executive Directions

“The future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create.”

---President Barack Obama

Innovation is crucial to competition, and creativity is integral to innovation. In today’s global economy, there is renewed emphasis on creativity, ingenuity and innovation, as employers seek a work force that exhibit these qualities. So what does that mean for education? While education leaders have instituted innovative practices and implemented systemic reforms in their ongoing commitment to support students’ success and school improvement, federal education policies have not kept pace, hindering innovation and progress.

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is vital for our schools to be successful in the future because it provides regulatory and fiscal certainty so that districts can develop and implement proposals and policies that will drive improvements. At ASCD’s recent Leadership Institute for Legislative Advocacy (LILA), their 2013 Legislative Agenda was unveiled. The agenda outlines policy recommendations for Congress that will help achieve the goal of educating students who are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged and who graduate ready for the demands of college, career, and citizenship. Following are ASCD’s recommendations for Congress:

- **Support meaningful accountability systems** – Any comprehensive determination of student proficiency, school quality, or educator effectiveness must take into account student growth, use multiple measures of evaluation beyond standardized test scores, and differentiate among levels of performance.

- **Promote comprehensive improvement strategies** - Methods to improve student achievement, educator effectiveness, or school quality must be evidence-based; engage all stakeholders, including families and communities; and be grounded in a whole child approach to education. Interventions for those not meeting expectations need to be commensurate with their level of underperformance and existing and needed support structures.

- **Help educators support students** – The foremost strategy and funding priority must be adequate and effective preparation and ongoing professional development for educators to improve student outcomes.

Inherent in these recommendations are the following guiding principles for success, intended to help policymakers address the recommendations of the legislative agenda.

- **Whole Child Education** - The demands of today’s global society require a new approach to education to fully prepare our nation’s youth for college, careers, and citizenship. A whole child approach to education enhances learning by addressing each student’s social, emotional, physical, and academic needs. Educators, families, policymakers, and communities have a collective responsibility to work together to provide engaging learning opportunities that meet the needs of each student in a safe and supportive environment. A comprehensive approach to learning recognizes that successful young people are knowledgeable, healthy, motivated, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond their own borders.

- **Multiple Measures** - The true measure of students’ proficiency, educator effectiveness, and school quality must be based on more than just students’ test scores on a few standardized tests. A comprehensive picture of student achievement should track individual growth over time, and could include portfolios, presentations, and summative assessments. Similarly, evaluations of educator effectiveness should be based on a combination of elements and could include students’ performance, classroom observations, and staff feedback. Measures of school quality should also incorporate additional elements, such as school climate, availability of advanced courses, and graduation rates.

- **Capacity for Success** - All school improvement strategies - particularly interventions focused on the lowest-performing schools - must inform and engage all stakeholders; support enriched curriculum; enhance the school culture; provide high-quality teaching with ongoing professional learning to improve the quality of instruction; be commensurate with the need; and offer engaging learning op-
opportunities that involve all students, families, and staff. Policymakers must provide sufficient time and resources for successful implementation of any capacity-building strategy, and such assistance must be mindful of and appropriate for local circumstances. In addition, districts and schools that consistently perform well, close achievement gaps, succeed in cohort comparisons, or improve educator effectiveness should receive rewards and incentives, including flexibility in the use of federal funds.

• Improving Student Outcomes - Like members of any highly skilled occupation, educators welcome professional standards, workplace accountability, ongoing training, and leadership opportunities. Evaluations of teachers and administrators must use multiple measures and lead to professional development opportunities that build the capacity of districts and schools to improve student outcomes. At a minimum, professional development for educators requires dedicated school time and adequate resources and must include the knowledge and skills for planning and preparation, classroom management, instruction, and subject-area content consistent with standards that prepare students for college and career.

These recommendations and principles can also be utilized by school district policy makers and stakeholders in Washington State as we advocate for ensuring success for their own students, educators, and education systems.

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Engagement in Education

Engaging students is at the heart of effective teaching. Without engagement, interest withers, time wastes, and plans fail. Although it is at the core of meaningful classroom activity, it is difficult to define and perhaps impossible to prescribe. Engagement depends on careful proportioning of passion, knowledge, and skill. Nevertheless, educators across the State of Washington engage their students every day. The next theme of Curriculum in Context is Engagement in Education. How do you engage students? What kind of methods do you and your colleagues use to engage kids with special needs? What is your district doing to ensure students are continuously engaged to raise achievement?

These are some of the questions under consideration in the next issue of Curriculum in Context.

The editorial staff invites you to submit a manuscript on this topic by September 9th to David Denton (dentod@spu.edu). Final manuscripts are between 850-2500 words and citations are written in APA format.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
September 9, 2013