

LEADING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: OUR PRINCIPAL PURPOSE

Friday, February 1, 2008

SYMPOSIUM

**Toronto Airport Marriott
901 Dixon Road, Toronto**

Welcome: Nil Parent, ADFO

Nil Parent explained that the Leading Student Achievement project is now midway through its third year. He also presented the following statistics:

- 46 districts are involved in the project;
- 209 Principal Learning Teams have been established;
- 1734 principals and their schools are participating;
- 67 supervisory officers are supporting the project in their districts.

Opening Address: Dr. Avis Glaze, Chief Student Achievement Officer of Ontario & CEO of The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

Introduction: Dr. Glaze began her presentation by congratulating the LNS staff for their continued efforts and introducing Ann Perron, who will be fulfilling the position of Interim CEO of LNS as of February 13, 2008, at which time Dr. Glaze moves into her new role as the Education Commissioner and Senior Advisor to the Minister on equity and character development. She completed her introduction by recognizing principals' sense of mission, moral purpose and support for the work of the Secretariat.

Considering the Future: First, education must be re-missioned to meet the needs of students who possess diverse needs. Second, we must rekindle the interest of our children in the sciences, so that we can prepare them effectively for SPOT (Smart, Personal, Object, Technology), for the semantic web (the new data base that will rival the world wide web), and for nano-technology. Lastly, as we educate the children who have just entered the system for their graduation in 2020, we must ensure that they have developed the following:

- competency in the literacies;
- an ability to problem-solve and think critically;
- creativity;
- the ability to lead or follow depending on what the situation requires;
- the skill to span divides and cross boundaries;
- commitment to ethical behaviour;
- empathy for others.

Leadership Skills Required of Principals Today: In order to be a successful leader today, a principal must demonstrate these important competencies:

- educational leadership;
- the ability to influence others;
- political astuteness;
- community building;
- communication skills;
- social intelligence (the ability to relate to and impact on others in a positive manner);
- understanding of and skill with data.

Furthermore, today's leaders will be judged on three criteria:

- their achievements;
- the way lives have been changed by their actions;
- the level to which they have met the needs of those they serve.

Worth Noting: In Ontario, we are demonstrating that poverty is not destiny and that equity of outcome is the moral imperative that underlies our actions. As a result, we are closing the gap as we raise the bar. In addition, since we recognize that the child is the only substance from which a responsible adult can grow, we realize that character development is a critical component of education. Finally, in acknowledging that continuous improvement is our goal in Ontario, we also acknowledge that professional accountability is integral to our movement forward. This means that we must monitor our own effectiveness through self-assessment and develop self-directed agendas for improvement.

Linking Professional Community and Real School Improvement:

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Note: The symposium package included a handout of the overhead slides used by Dr. Seashore Louis in her presentation. The numbers of these overhead slides that correspond to the material summarized below are indicated with each sub-title.

Core of Resilient Cultures and Leadership: (Slides 4 – 8)

In resilient cultures, people are able to regroup and reaffirm their moral commitment to accountability in the event that something distressing occurs. However, in a number of popular film representations of teachers and schools, the teachers who star are portrayed as heroes who operate alone in their dedication to their students, while their associates appear to be non-performers. These scenarios lack a sense of sustainability, in that, when the teacher departs, so, too, does the impetus. A more desirable alternative is one where

there are joint activities and work that bring groups of teachers together around moral purpose and accountability. It is neither realistic nor wise to rely on a single person solution when the challenges in a system are complex and continuously changing.

Professional Community: (Slides 9 – 14)

School-based professional community is comprised of shared values, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, a focus on student learning and collaboration. The benefits are empowerment, personal dignity and collective responsibility for student learning. Both structural conditions as well as social and human resources support professional community. The positive results show schools having stronger instruction, teachers having stronger classroom practice, and a community having the ability to learn and adapt. An additional benefit is that teachers who are participants in a successful professional community appreciate its value and endeavour to develop a similar community in their classrooms. In order to create the conditions for a strong professional community, a supportive principal is the most critical element; on the other hand, it is the teachers who have the primary responsibility for maintaining the professional culture within the school once it has been established.

Task - Case Analysis: Professional Community: (Slide 11)

Participants read the case study titled, “Agassiz Elementary School” (included in symposium package), and, in small groups, discussed the following:

- indicators of professional community (PC);
- the actions of the principal which helped build and support PC;
- the way in which teachers’ work was affected by their involvement in a PC;
- three lessons learned from the case study.

Principal “Leadership for Learning”: (Slides 15 - 19)

Principals have a strong impact on what happens in the classroom when they behave as instructional leaders, share leadership activities with their teachers and engender trust. In instances where principals are successful in these three areas, teachers are more likely to be involved in professional communities, and, in turn, develop strong, focused instructional practice which then results in higher achievement for students. It does appear to be the case that there is a larger degree of instructional leadership and shared leadership in elementary schools, which also means that stronger cultures of professional community are apparent within elementary school communities.

Instructional Leadership and Shared Leadership: (Slides 20 – 23)

Both instructional leadership and shared leadership are concepts that elude exact definition. However, two perspectives on instructional leadership have evolved: one proposes that it involves instructional expertise while the other claims it involves instructional support. The latter claim is one that is demonstrated by the school leader understanding new programs, encouraging discussion and promoting professional norms,

while the former shows leaders having content knowledge, knowing how to coach and providing direct classroom support. Because of his/her extensive workload, it is next to impossible for a principal to provide both types of instructional leadership. The solution is to share instructional leadership with teachers, a move which requires changing the school's culture to one where teachers view themselves as intellectual and instructional leaders within the school community. This community includes the classroom, grade/division teams, the whole school, and the district. Teachers are comfortable and have confidence regarding their expertise as they work in their classrooms and teacher teams, but they are not as confident taking on a schoolwide or district role. The challenge for the principal lies in creating an environment of trust so that teachers will risk taking on new roles; the second challenge is then maintaining consistency in reinforcing these new professional norms.

Reverting to Default Cultures: (Slides 24 – 29)

When there is a lack of trust between teachers and the school leader, the workload of the teachers becomes overly stressful, and the principal makes a mistake or fails to provide consistency in promoting new norms, teachers will likely revert to one of the following default cultures:

1. teaching in isolation;
2. refusing to do something exceptional or different for fear of losing collegiality with other staff;
3. embracing a “doing culture” that advocates activity and work in the classroom over reflective dialogue;
4. abandoning shared leadership for hierarchical structure and responsibilities.

Schools as Giant Hairballs: (Slide 30)

Within a school community, the “hairball” consists of accumulated practices which have been successful and have provided a sense of comfort for staff. This collection of conditions gets entangled and makes change difficult or impossible because people are attached to these processes that have worked for them in the past. It is important to examine these and determine whether or not they are hindering progress. If such is the case, the practices must be changed before improvement can take place.

Task – Professional Community and Shared Leadership Worksheet: (Slide 31)

(A worksheet and article titled, “Orbiting the Giant Hairball”, were included in the symposium package.)

In groups, participants discussed those aspects of the “traditional teacher culture” and the “hairballs” that challenge the creation of professional community and shared leadership in their schools.

How to Continue Your Work: (Slides 32 – 44)

It is important to link organizational learning (OL) and professional community (PC) through the practice of reflective dialogue, a process that takes time but is essential. The following actions will contribute to success:

When something new comes along, engage in reflective dialogue that addresses these four questions:

1. How do we experience it? (emotions)
2. How would we interpret it given our sense of who we are? (identity)
3. Have we seen anything like it before? How did we react and with what consequences? (memory)
4. What should we do? (intellectual processing)

Address the “default cultures” by lessening constraining factors such as:

- lack of clarity about the process of decision-making and channels of authority;
- teacher isolation;
- inadequate resources or technical support;
- a shortage of time for collaboration, learning and leading;
- lack of incentives or rewards.

Conduct conversations on shared leadership that focus on the goals for students, the involvement of teachers in the learning they require to ensure they meet these goals, and the ways teacher leaders will advance this work.

Provide staff development that changes teacher practices and leads to improved student achievement. This will lead to a change in teacher beliefs.

Avoid implementing superficial, eye-catching changes because they are neither valuable nor sustainable.

Align energy and resources for teaching and learning.

Form strong relationships, because the strongest facilitator of professional community is social trust among faculty members. Real power and energy will be generated through these relationships, and the end result will be increased student achievement.

Three Principles for Instructional Leadership: (Slide 45)

There are three responsibilities of instructional leadership (Marzano, 2005):

1. knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment;
2. involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment;
3. establishment of a monitoring (feedback)/evaluation process.

Principles for Maximizing Shared Leadership for Student Learning: (Slide 4)

1. Teacher leaders are respected, are learning-oriented, and have leadership capacity.
2. Leadership work is valued, visible, negotiated, and shared.
3. Conditions include a supportive culture, a supportive principal, time, resources and development opportunities.

Principals' Association Meetings: ADFO, CPCO and OPC

Principals met in their association groupings to review the objectives and five conditions established as the focus for Year 3 of the LSA project. They discussed progress to date, as well as challenges encountered. Dr. Karen Seashore Louis spent time at each of these association meetings in order to answer questions of clarification and provide additional insight into the material she presented during the morning.

The next Leading Student Achievement symposium will be held on May 9, 2008.