



Leading the Journey

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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Berit von Pohle

Director of Education
Pacific Union Conference



Ed Boyatt

Retired educator with 32
years in administration

Lyle Bennett

Vice-Principal
Rio Lindo Academy

Doug Herrmann

Chief Administrative
Officer
Loma Linda Academy

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Instructional Leadership

Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)

The primary function of a principal is to ensure that students achieve. Research (Gallup) indicates that the fastest way to make a difference in student achievement is to change the principal of the school. Effective principals engage in work that supports teachers in improving their instructional practices. This type of support occurs in classrooms, not the principal's office. Effective principals are instructional leaders because they make a commitment to learning, and they connect the work of improved student learning and teaching by

building strong teams of teachers.

While some aspects of instructional leadership may be delegated, it is the principal who makes the difference in the quality of the teaching and learning process. Instructional leadership includes several components:

- Supervision of instruction
- Professional development
- Teacher evaluation

Each component will be discussed further in future newsletters.

Rio's Road to Improvement

Lyle Bennett

It began with a commitment to improve. During the accreditation process at Rio Lindo Adventist Academy 2009-2010, the staff and administration, headed by our principal, Doug Schmidt, decided to write a plan to improve education at Rio. And it began with an assessment of our standardized testing data.

I remember how we use to deal with test results. Once a year in faculty meeting at Rio Lindo we would discuss the data from the ITED assessment. After a few years it felt like the movie, *Groundhog Day*. I could tell you what the excuses were for not using the data; I could even tell you who would make which excuses.

"We have so many new students, and some are not with us, so who knows what this means?"

"The international students skew the scores down in language arts, and up in math, so who knows what this means?"

"Students didn't really try. Who knows what they could really do?"

"Yes, because I gave the test and some students just made patterns on the answer sheet."

"When I have students who do poorly, I go look at the results. Sure enough they scored low."

"Some of my students can't read well, so what can I do? They don't understand what they read in the textbook."

Consultants called upon

Our commitment to improve began the next school year with insights from Dr. Victoria Bernhardt of Chico State University. We started to take our test results seriously. Not only did we expand the usual collection of demographic data and student learning data, we started processes to regularly collect data on school processes and perceptions of stakeholders. Dr. Vickie's Continuous Improvement Continuums started a staff dialog about what good education at our school would look like.

Our assessment of our data suggested that we needed to improve our students' learning in reading and writing. We knew our education could be better and committed to making it better. Yet we were not sure exactly how. But we committed to working together, and finding and using educational strategies for improved student learning.

During the next school year of 2011-2012, we found ways to disaggregate the ITED data in meaningful ways. Consultant Paul Bloomberg from The Leadership and Learning Center helped teaching staff understand how to use standards to sharpen student learning. He introduced to the staff that formative assessment in the classroom is the frontline of all student learning data. We began to define what it was that teachers teach in the classroom, what were

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Rio's Improvement

students learning and how did the instructor know. We introduced the use of the ACT suite of assessments. We struggled with which standards were useful to us and how to use them. Leadership was introduced to a collaborative process, Critical Friends Group, from connections with The Coalition of Essential Schools.

We challenged teachers in 2012-2013 to use a system of recording student success in the classroom on specific learning proficiencies. Teachers became more aware that learning in the classroom was facilitated by data feedback to students. And that learning needed to be adjusted based on this classroom-student learning data.

Data on professional development (PD) showed that most teachers had over 30 hours of focused school-based PD. Data was collected to show what was covered in collaborative time. The learning was focused around what was happening in the classroom. Two teacher coaches began to visit classrooms and helped teachers assess their own teaching.

This year teachers produce and implement a classroom learning experience that uses a combination of literacy and content standards. These must include formative assessments. Teachers look at each other's work in the collaborative process. Teachers have also been challenged to self-evaluate through a video taping of their class. Teachers are looking for what is being taught, what students are learning and how does the teacher know.

In process is the development of a Student Profile for each student to be accessible to all teachers to ensure that each student is maximizing their learning. As well Rio Lindo is creating a Teachers Resource Workroom which will become the center for teacher collaboration.

Lessons learned about school improvement at Rio

- 1) Leadership comes first. Without a vision for improvement, the process of using data goes nowhere.
- 2) Vision is more important than data. Data by itself is of little value. A commitment to improve will drive the practical use of testing data.
- 3) Data is only important when it is used to guide decisions. Teachers facilitate learning. Data must be accessible to them in a way that is useful and helpful. Leadership must allow teachers to decide how to make improvements that happen within the general vision for the school.
- 4) Teacher collaboration and coaching is vital to school improvement.

Time Management

2.0

Doug Herrmann

Each of us has the same amount of time in a day. Like in the Geiko add, "Everybody knows that." Well, did you know that some get more done than others?

Obviously, the issue is how time is used. There are only two choices. Will you manage time or will you let it happen randomly? Of course, there are emergencies that arise, but much can be planned.

A new principal recently commented that unlike in the classroom where he could get through a list of plans quite regularly, as a principal it is a good day if only a couple of things off the long "to do list" are accomplished. Even so, a careful evaluation of what is to be done reveals a variety of priorities. However, priorities are dependent on a prior decision. What is your purpose? What is your mission statement? What is of most importance?

While many things vie for this position, professionally, as a principal, a top priority is student learning. The path to effective evaluation of student learning leads directly through the classrooms. What kind of a learning environment is being created in those rooms? There is really only one way for you to know -- you must be in those rooms. You cannot "phone this one in." Second hand information, student rumors, and phone calls from parents, while perhaps clues, cannot substitute for your presence. Once you have clarified this priority, you must take action.

Take a break and try this test: If school is in session as you read this, put this article down. If you have time to read this you have time to do this exercise. If it's after school hours, do this during the

next school day you are on campus. Walk into a class in session and stand in the back. What is the reaction of the students and the teacher? Are they surprised you are there? Is your teacher flustered? Does he stop what he is doing and ask what you want? Do the students turn and focus their attention on you with a surprised look, wondering what's wrong? If you answer yes to some or all of these questions, you likely have spent too much time in your office and not enough in the classrooms.

Classroom visits fit within Stephen Covey's Quadrant II. This quadrant includes activities that are highly important but not usually urgent, and bring significant results. You must be intentional about these visits. Make an appointment time in your calendar to be in classrooms.

Consider this: If you had an appointment with a cardiologist who had something very important to talk to you about concerning recent tests, you would allow very few things to get in the way. This is no less important professionally. Set regular times in a given week: perhaps an hour each Monday morning or a half hour every day. You know your schedule and what would work best for you. If you have a secretary, see that she provides support for you. Do not let her schedule other meetings. Avoid phone calls; you can return them later.

These visits need not be long. You might choose to look for one thing each time. You might prefer to just walk through and see what is happening. But the key is, you must make time for this and you must carry through. The teachers will come to appreciate your presence, the students will get used to seeing you come in, and you will be able to respond to rumors with more authority. Most importantly, those visits will affirm teachers and be a key element in improving student learning.