# Utah Association of Secondary School Principals

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Impact Journal

*Impact Journal* is an open-ended theme journal published by the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP). Impact is published twice each year.

**Volume 18 Issue 2, MMXVII**
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Impact Journal Publication Guidelines

Impact Journal is an open-ended theme journal published by the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals (UASSP). We welcome opinion essays, interviews, program descriptions, research reports, theoretical pieces, school climate pieces, reviews of books, humor, satire, poetry, and cartoons.

Impact is published twice each year to correspond with the UASSP annual winter and summer conferences.

Form

- Impact editors use American Psychological Association (APA) style manual.
- Manuscripts can be sent by e-mail attachment.
- Most of our articles are between 1000 and 3000 words.
- Submit a cover sheet with the manuscript. The cover sheet should include the title, author(s), each author’s present position and school (if applicable), each author’s academic status (if applicable), each author’s mailing address, telephone, and email address.

Submission deadlines are November 15 and April 15 of each year.

Manuscripts will be reviewed as to content and acceptability. Authors should assume that manuscripts will be edited to conform to length and clarity.

Send manuscripts electronically to the editor.

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Letter from the Editor

Mary Rhodes, EdD
Editor

Letter from the Editor

Summer means a
change of landscape.
Whether we travel to new
terrain, spend more time in
our yards, or reflect more
deeperly, we expose ourselves
to fresh views, underap-
preciated spots, and new
perspectives. Our articles
this edition provide the op-
opportunity for you to do that
from your hammock.

David Boren begins
by telling of his childhood
move from Mesa, Arizona to a rural land-
scape in Sandpoint, Idaho, and he extends
this metaphor aptly to talk about leadership
and change in our own worlds of facul-
ties, schools, and students. Paul McClatchy
begins with a global setting, comparing
soaring Singapore scores to our own schools
impacted by poverty, and his focus on strate-
gies to support our students and families is
sure to offer possibilities for you. Robert
Averett extends this view on poverty from
his own backyard analysis of Granite School
District proficiency and growth scores, em-
phasizing that the landscape of our students
in low socioeconomic environments can be
planted with rich educational experiences that
contribute to more progress than unimpacted
students.

Robert West and David Gatti scrutinize
the imposition of a business landscape in
the school yard and provide
conditions better suited for our
gardens. Mark Davis travels
in a different direction, moving
to the space beyond classroom
walls back into a world of
authentic learning experiences-
beneficial and engaging. Wil-
liam Marzano gives us a book
review that talks about how to
motivate the teachers through
the terrain of marathon careers.
Floyd Stensrud moves us into
interior positions with arrows
and sign posts to guide our
journey toward sharing and convergence with
travelers who began different places.

An abode, with reverence for the ecol-
ogy, with windows to view environment, and
with intense perspective is the beginning of
our journey and Robert King’s cover of our
journal. David Tanner’s fresh and clever
photos capture the scenes of conferences, and
Carl Boyington and Jane Bradbury lay the
groundwork. Brent Sumner, the tour director
of Impact, keeps us all on schedule until the
destination is final.

Utah is our shared landscape, and as sum-
mer approaches and you take your journal on
road trips to our parks and monuments and
backyards and frontal lobes, renewed com-
mitment to our responsibilities to education
and to future generations is inevitable. If we
bump into the political landscape as we do so,
look at your compass and take the step.
When I was eleven years old my parents moved our family from a beautiful suburban home in warm, developed Mesa, Arizona, to a cold, isolated farm in Sandpoint, Idaho. My dad left his successful architectural practice and pursued a new career as a watercolor artist and rookie farmer. Needless to say, this bold move was life-changing for our family and resulted in many lessons that have benefitted me greatly as a school leader.

Shortly before moving, my dad’s friend, Hal, who had grown up on a farm, gave what I now see as some very good advice: “Whatever you do on the farm, do NOT get cows. They’ll teach your kids to swear.” True to form, shortly after moving, my dad bought a Holstein milk cow and a calf. The calf, who we named Hal, grew over time to be an enormous, feisty, fence-breaking steer.

One day Hal busted through the fence and was hanging out on our neighbor’s property. My cousin and I were sent to bring Hal back to our property. Armed with a rope, a stick, and an abundance of naïve adolescent overconfidence, we set forth on this foolish, quixotic quest. When we found Hal, one of us lassoed him and pulled from the front while the other pushed and hit from behind with the stick. We pushed and pulled and hit with all we had. Hal didn’t budge. We tried again. Again, he didn’t budge. After an eternity of pushing, pulling, hitting, and yelling, no progress had been made. We were ready to call the butcher and forget the whole thing.

Just about then my dad wandered out to check on our progress. He almost fell over laughing as we explained our methods for getting Hal to move. My wise father said something like, “No matter how hard you hit, push, or pull, that cow’s not moving unless he wants to move! So, let’s see if we can help him want to move.” He instructed us to stand on either side of Hal to provide a loose boundary, while he stood in front of Hal with a bucket of feed, slowly walking toward our property line. Providing Hal with a meaningful reason to move within some loose boundaries did the trick. The job was soon done and some extremely important lessons learned.

Looking back, it seems laughable that as two young adolescents with a combined weight of maybe 250 pounds, we thought we could muscle this fiery 1,500+ pound steer to move when he didn’t want to move.

As a young new principal I was charged with helping a seasoned, somewhat resistant faculty to make fairly significant changes. Armed with a lot of great ideas from graduate school and my new positional authority, I was naively overconfident that I could easily force this faculty to go where I wanted them to go. Looking back, this seems even more laughable than two teenagers trying to move a huge steer. Early on, I introduced what I saw as an exciting new initiative to my faculty. I immediately began delving into the details...
about how we could rearrange our budgets and schedules in a way to make this initiative possible. A few months later as we were reviewing our progress on this initiative, I was a bit irked when one of my most tenured teachers raised her hand and respectfully asked, “Now why are we doing this?” While I initially thought that she was just being difficult, I soon realized that I had made few key mistakes.

First, I had totally neglected to establish why we were pursuing this change. “If school leadership cannot provide a compelling why, the staff will not care about the what” (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012, p. 21). By neglecting to establish the ‘why’, I had been lulled into erroneously thinking that my faculty was fully committed, when in reality there was only minimal compliance, mixed buy-in, and zero ownership.

Second, while my intentions were certainly good, I had in some ways treated my teachers like the livestock on the farm, objects to be moved and driven at will to support my vision. These were not ducks to put in a row, cows to get into a corral, or furniture to be rearranged. For this particular initiative, I had approached my teachers with what Martin Buber (1970) calls a very self-serving I-It relationship, rather than the more mutually respectful I-Thou relationship.

What might I have done differently in this situation to have worked with my teachers toward positive change? Here are a few ideas:

1. **Provide Inspiration and Urgency.**
   
   Hal the cow’s urgency came from an empty stomach and his inspiration from a grain bucket. For educators engaged in complex and creative tasks, establishing urgency and inspiration will require much more than a simple monetary stipend or extra prep (Pink, 2011). Simon Sinek explains that “those who are able to inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with any external incentive or benefit gained” (2009, p. 6). Like most educators, my teachers were passionate, competent, noble individuals motivated by what was best for kids. If I had helped them discover how this change would really help their students, most would have been willing to give it a go.

2. **Examine Evidence and Data Together.**

   Unfortunately, in education we have too often relied “on gut feelings about what’s working and what isn’t” (Bernhardt, 2000, p. 33). In my case, I was the only one looking at the data and evidence-based research, meaning that I was the only one with any sort of ownership for the chosen improvement. “People stop being so arbitrarily demanding when they are part of the process” (Wheatley, 1997, p. 25). Including my teachers in the process of examining data to identify needed improvements would have resulted in much greater ownership.

3. **Leverage Positive Peer Pressure by Building a Guiding Coalition of Opinion Leaders.**

   “No one person, no matter how competent, is capable of single-handedly developing the right vision, communicating it to vast numbers of people, eliminating all of the key obstacles, generating short term wins, leading and managing dozens of change projects and anchoring new approaches deep in an organization’s culture. Putting together the right coalition of people to lead a change initiative is critical to its success” (Kotter, 2017). If we can inspire buy-in and ownership among our school’s opinion leaders, they can then much more effectively promote it among the rest of the faculty. Rick DuFour and colleagues explain: “If you can’t persuade a small group of people of the merits of an idea and enlist their
help, there is little chance you will persuade
the larger group” (2016, p. 27). If I had vetted
my ideas with the school leadership team and
enlisted their help in co-creating a solution,
they could have fostered more buy-in and
ownership among the rest of the faculty.

4. Run a Pilot.
Large corporations would never dream of
rolling out a new product without running at
least one pilot. Pilot programs allow schools
to work out the inevitable bugs of solid
programs, as well as identify weaker pro-
grams that should not be scaled up
schoolwide. Sometimes pilot programs
allow us a safe way
to “get started, then get better” (Eaker &

5. Enlist the Advice of Outside Experts.
Outside experts can be nationally rec-
ognized presenters as well as the teachers in
the school down the street. Both have their
place. I’ll never forget meeting with my
team leaders at the end of a full day with a
national presenter. My team leaders excitedly
said, “David, we need to...” I was thinking,
“I’ve been trying to tell you this for over a
year,” but out loud I said, “What a great idea!
How can we make it work?” Not sure about
how to make it work, we visited some other
schools in our area
that were already
doing it and met
with some of their
best teachers, who
for that initiative,
were indeed outside experts. The very ration-
nale I had been using for a year was much
more palatable coming from others outside of
the school.

6. Learn and Grow Together
It is easy as a leader to feel frustrated
and resentful when our teachers resist due to
an apparent lack of vision or understanding.
Rather than wasting time and energy grumpily
brooding about their incompetence, let’s find
ways to grow together. “Effective leaders real-
ize that if they ask uninformed people to make
decisions, the end result will be uninformed
decisions. Therefore, they are vigilant about
ensuring people have ready access to the most
relevant information and that the group has
collectively studied the information” (DuFour,

As We Learn Together,
Questions to Consider:
• Is this change essential for our school
right now? A Russian proverb states: “If you
chase two rabbits, you won’t catch either
one.” It is easy to spread ourselves too thin
with too many initiatives. “A major failure
of education reform has been its exhaustive
and exhausting call for doing ‘more,’ without
identifying what to do less of” (Wagner &
Dintersmith, 2015, p. 260). Some teachers
may be holding back simply to see if this
change ends up as yet another flash-in-the-
pan, flavor-of-the-month change that will
soon be abandoned for yet another change.
“In education we are always looking for the
next big thing before we’ve gotten good at
the last big thing” (Wiliam, 2017).

• Are we appropriately loose and tight
about this change? Principals “can be ‘loose’
about what means are used to achieve an end,
but they are unshakably ‘tight’ on the end
itself. Principals do not empower others by
disempowering themselves. They cannot send
the message that everything is acceptable:
They must stand for something...Empowered
teachers and strong principals are not mutu-
ally exclusive” (DuFour and Eaker, 1998, pp.
187–188).

• Do our teachers have the time, resour-
ces, and support needed? It is unfair and un-
professional to ask others to change without
giving them the needed support. As school
leaders, we must be able to say, “For every
increment of performance I demand of you,
I have an equal responsibility to provide you
with the capacity to meet that expectation”
(Elmore, 2004, p. 93). Two critical resources
we can provide teachers are adequate time

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Outside experts can be nationally
recognized presenters as well as the teachers in the
school down the street.

———

Two critical resources we can
provide teachers are adequate
time and emotional safety.

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With a knowing and patient grin, she immediately began calling to her sheep, by name. The response was nothing short of miraculous as each sheep came directly to my mom and followed her back to the corral.


My final recommendation for inspiring a faculty comes from another farm experience. At about the same time my dad was buying cows, my mom was buying sheep. My mom loved her sheep. She named each one and enjoyed making daily visits out to the corral to spend time with her “sheepies.” I had no regard for the sheep and spent as little time as possible with them. It didn’t take long for us to realize that, like cows, sheep also have an uncanny knack for pushing boundaries and getting through fences. Whenever this happened, which was frequently, my siblings and I had the job of getting the sheep back into the corral. With limited leadership capacity, our primary approach for gathering the sheep was to run around behind them with long sticks, yelling and herding them back toward the corral. This approach was largely ineffective, and usually resulted in a general scattering of the flock.

One night while trying to gather the sheep, the yell and herd method just wasn’t working. The sheep were running all over the place. The more the sheep scattered the more frustrated we became. Just when we were about ready to leave the sheep to the coyotes, my mom came out to assess the situation. With a knowing and patient grin, she immediately began calling to her sheep, by name. The response was nothing short of miraculous as each sheep came directly to my mom and followed her back to the corral.

Somehow the sheep knew that “if you don’t believe the messenger, you won’t believe the message” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 26). If our teachers sense any ulterior motives or lack of sincerity from us, every new proposal will be met with suspicion. When it comes to influencing others, the quality of our relationships tends to trump everything else. “Effective leaders know that people are not their best asset; they are their only asset, so the need to nurture, develop, and strengthen relationships is at the very core of what good leaders do” (Leithwood et al., 2013, p. 261). We are fooling ourselves if we think we can make long-term, meaningful change without trusting and caring relationships. Abraham Lincoln wisely advised: “If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend” (Thompson, 1894, p. 226).

Conclusion

Each of our schools needs to move and change. If we’re fortunate, we may even know what changes are needed; however, as Michael Fullan has been heard to say, “Being right is not a strategy for change—you need a process.” Do we ever try to force our faculties to go where we want them to go? School change and improvement can sometimes feel like moving a 1,500-pound steer or a gathering a flock of scattered sheep. Rather than pushing, pulling, hitting, herding, yelling, or even swearing, let us find caring and thought-
ful processes for working with our facul-
ties so that we can better move and change
together.

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I recently read an article (Wilde, 2016) about the problems with comparing American students to foreign students test scores. One area of great concern is comparing achievement scores of students from different Socioeconomic Status (SES) populations. The author noted “University of Illinois compared more than 340,000 students using math scores from the 2003 NAEP,” which is the major test standard for international achievement comparisons. “The study found that after adjusting for socioeconomic factors, there is little difference between private and public school scores” (Wilde, 2016, para. 3).

One area of comparison that has received a lot of national press coverage is the difference between USA test scores and scores from other countries worldwide. These comparisons show us far behind other countries. Are such comparisons fair, are we comparing similar students test scores? Let’s look at the top academic countries to see if it is indeed comparable to our student population.

Singapore is ranked number one in many areas worldwide. However, students with mild to severe disabilities are not required to attend school at all there. The types of disabilities involved go beyond intellectually disabled students and Singapore excludes students with attention deficit disorder, visual impairments, or autistic children, while American schools include those students in our test scores. All of those students in the United States who take the same test that are being compared to a dissimilar population in Singapore.

Additionally, Singapore has a test, at basically the end of sixth grade, and that test sorts students into technical, academic, and gifted tracks for secondary education. It is unclear what students we’re being compared against. Are we being compared against the advanced academic students who tested into the academic college bound track? If so, no wonder they’re number one and were much further down, because American students are considered as a whole group with no such distinctions.

Even more suspect, is that many of the high academic students in Singapore attend private tuition schools and have parents who both have advanced college degrees. This is not a low SES population (Wikipedia, 2017).

Many foreign schools come from countries with homogeneous populations and lower poverty rates than found in the United States. See chart below for comparison (Mikkonen, 2013).
Even more suspect, is that many of the high academic students in Singapore attend private tuition schools and have parents who both have advanced college degrees. This is not a low SES population (Wikipedia, 2017).

Further American children raised in high socioeconomic homes compare favorably to foreign peers. The figures are confounded because the US poverty rate is higher than in many other wealthy nations and more firmly entrenched” (Birdsong, 2016). A recent 2016 article lists several effects of poverty on children that put them at a disadvantage educationally (Birdsong, 2016).

**Disadvantaged Even Before Birth**

Cognitive capacity can be impacted by prenatal drug use, environmental toxins, poor nutrition, and exposure to stress and violence all of which are more prevalent in low-income households (Birdsong, 2016).

**Less Verbal Exposure.**

By the age of four, children from poor households hear 32 million fewer spoken words than their better-off peers (Hart and Risley as cited in Birdsong, 2016). Additionally, the quality of conversation varies with parents with higher education and income engaging offspring with higher level questioning. (Sparks a cited in Birdsong, 2016).

My father came from a family best described in today’s terms as the upper 1% and received a fabulous education. At dinner if any subject came up, Dad would send me for the encyclopedia and we’d look it up! Bedtime stories consisted of great works of poetry or literature. I shared much of that tradition and love of learning with my own children, but it was because I was exposed to it.

**Poor Sense of Agency**

Children growing up in poverty often experience life situations over which neither they nor their caregivers have any control resulting in a failure to develop a sense of agency, which affects educational performance negatively (Birdsong, 2016).

While I was coaching girls junior high soccer and basketball teams in low SES schools, even the mention of higher SES schools’ names on our schedule would invoke from most of the girls ‘Oh no, we’re going to lose.’. It was so automatic and took most of the season and a few good wins to change their minds. I’ve seen the same thing with academics. For some of these teens, they are pioneers in education where no one has ever gotten a high school diploma. While all parents care deeply about their children, some lack the background, skills, and vision to see beyond
their current circumstance. I had one parent tell me that a high school diploma wasn’t very important because their child could always get a job at Arctic Circle where their brother worked. That was the parental goal.

**Low Executive Function**

The problems of poverty interfere with executive functions such as emotional regulation by releasing stress hormones that direct energy away from them, interfere with development of neural connections, and result in academic and behavioral problems (Birdsong, 2016).

I’ve worked with many children who are so overwhelmed by traumatic life experiences; such as witnessing domestic violence, death of a loved one, caring for a parent with terminal cancer. For low SES students, these issues are exacerbated due to a lack of financial resources. They are so overwhelmed with the bare basics of survival that academics are crowded out of their thoughts. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD students experience intense intrusions of memories of past events which make it hard to focus. One of my junior high students comes to school so wound up after hearing heavy arguments between caregivers at home that it consumes much of his calming reserves so any tension from teachers or other students sets him off. We worked on lots of calming and grounding to the present moment skills. It gives him space and time to recognize and calm his feelings instead of just reacting.

**More Demanding Environment and Worsening Conditions**

Moving out of poverty is more difficult than in a past context of factory workers and stable families sending students to college. Increased competition and an insufficient minimum wage require more skills to achieve economic independence (Birdsong, 2016), and in a dismal cycle, these are the skills lacking in low-income individuals. Further, such students are four times more likely to drop out and the gap in SAT scores has increased by 42% (Birdsong, 2016). One interesting comparison is that even among college graduates, “only one-third of adults under 35 are forming independent households” (Birdsong, 2016).

I have had so many students from low SES families where both parents are working two jobs. They aren’t home, not because they don’t care about their children, but simply are trying to meet their family’s financial needs. Some work multiple part time jobs because employers save money on benefits costs by keeping them part instead of full time employed. So the families have to cope with parental absence, low income, and no employer insurance benefits. Transportation is difficult too. One of my student’s lives in multiple family dwellings where they all share the use of one vehicle and the gasoline. Another’s family only uses the public bus system which takes forever to get around.

**My Observation of Other Challenges for Low SES Students**

**Lack of Access to the Internet, Home Computer, or Wi-Fi**

Many low SES students have no internet, computer, or wifi at home to do homework. Some students try to do assignments on their phones. It’s much more difficult. Some parent’s phones are the wifi hotspot for the home, so until parents get home from work the students are disconnected. Students in this situation have to utilize the public library system to get access to the internet, computers, and a quiet workplace. These students also face a lack of transportation to go to public library other than the city bus which takes a long period of time.

**Low SES Parental Academic Support Due to Low Parental Achievement**

Parental desire to help is hampered by their own struggles with math and academic subjects. Higher educated parents are in a better situation to assist their children with questions and assignments. Some parents...
resort to using older children to help when available. In addition, as mentioned above, there is a lack of role models for higher educational attainment.

**Immigrant Students May Face Particularly Difficult Challenges**

Many students, having never been educated ever in their lives are suddenly placed in junior high or high school trying to do math and read a foreign language. I’ve had multiple students who have come from war-torn Middle East areas, as well as Africa, who have ended up in refugee camps and had no educational experience whatsoever. Additionally, many of the students have been traumatized by the war they have been involved in and the refugee process as a whole. Such students, sit in a math class trying to do their level of math while other students watch them do the basics of addition and subtraction. How embarrassing for a junior high or high school age student! Language issues also complicate communication with the student’s teachers by the parents.

**Low SES Families Have Financial Demands Just to Survive**

Some high school students are working to help support the family so they can afford food and the basic necessities of life. This takes up their evenings and makes them fatigued for the next day at school. In addition, they may be responsible for care of younger siblings. This situation compounds problems for them because they might have to pick up younger siblings, walk them home from school, and watch them and prepare dinner before their parents get home from work. In some families both parents or single parents are working two jobs each and don’t get home until late. That stops the student from getting the most common academic intervention which is after school tutoring by teachers.

**Strategies that Work**

That being said, what can we do to improve low SES schools for students? Here are some ideas below which I’ve found to be helpful. In reviewing these I’ve interviewed those I know in High School settings and my practice who have had high degrees of success with this population:

**Mentoring**

As noted above, many of these students have no role model who has succeeded educationally and are pioneers in their families. In psychology the saying goes, “The relationship is everything! If you don’t have that, you’ve got nothing!” Teachers, administrators, and coaches can provide a mentoring relationship which is profound and lasts for years. They just need the time. This is one of the problems with poorly funded public education and classroom overcrowding. It’s very difficult to have the time to develop that rapport while dealing with a tsunami of students, so lower class size and more teachers would benefit low SES schools.

One area that came up in speaking with great mentors was the role of similar mentors in their lives. One person related how important it was for him to see black teachers or administrators and get to know how they achieved in their lives. Including minority role model teachers and administrators can yield large dividends in building relationships with students and families.

**During School Hours Tutoring**

As noted above, many low SES students have additional demands on their time from the family which makes before or after school tutoring impossible for them. Dedicated time at school for tutoring such as a class can help.

**Recognizing and Addressing the Needs of Refugee Students**

Refugee students might need the opportunity to learn with specialized math programs in a private setting so that they’re not embarrassed by the level of math their learning because it’s the very bare basics. Additionally, mental health services might be needed to help them cope with past PTSD issues. It would be very easy for such students to give up, be embarrassed, be frustrated, and fall into other things such as gangs or withdraw.
all together. How many of us would do well if we suddenly moved from the United States to a school in China where we knew none of the language, the symbols were different, and we weren’t even sure what to do socially.

**Credit Recovery Classes**

These are so crucial to helping students keep the hope of graduation alive. They have worked very well in all the high schools I’ve worked in. It also allows for mentoring students in that setting as well. Birdsong (2016) recommends instructional strategies that

**Broading Services and Resources to Parents and Families**

Providing education classes in computer basics, English, and math for parents at the school can bring parents into that setting as well as increase their employment potential and ability to assist children at home with homework. Broading services and resources further can be helpful. Mr. Abram Maslow postulated a ‘hierarchy of needs’ which fits nicely with what I’ve seen in my practice. Many of my poor students worry about the basics like food, a place to sleep that’s not on the floor or living room couch because they live in crowded or multiple family dwellings. I had an Elementary Teacher bring in a problem 2nd grade student who she said was always irritable and wouldn’t settle down. On talking to him I asked if he had any breakfast? He replied no, and it turned out they had no food in the house and he hadn’t had a meal since yesterday’s lunch at school. I took him, fed him and he went back to class. His teacher found me later and asked what I said to him because his behavior was so improved. We got him the school breakfast everyday afterward and worked with the parent’s food situation.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, there are many challenges that low SES students face that high SES students don’t and to make comparisons between schools, and education levels between countries or schools even within a school district without taking SES levels into consideration is fundamentally flawed. The effect is just too great to ignore, or worse, fault educators over. Rather, we must accept the moral purpose and practical obligation of using some strategies and resources to serve our students and their families. Additionally, targeted interventions to reduce class size, provide mentoring and tutoring, school food pantries, and increased educational funding would make a real difference in closing the achievement gap for the low SES population.

**References**


Education in Singapore. Retrieved from https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educa-


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Paul McClatchy is a Specialist in Psychology and has a Master’s in Education. He has worked as a school psychologist for 29 years. Additionally, he managed a teen court-ordered psychiatric group home in Florida and supervised the crisis intervention hotline for the Tampa Bay area for four years. He was a board member of the Utah Association of School Psychologists. He is currently a school psychologist for Granite School District and can be reached at pmcclatchy@graniteschools.org or 435 840-0951.
Demographic factors affect student learning, but these factors do not necessarily determine outcomes. Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances face greater challenges than their advantaged peers. At age 24 months children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a 6-month deficit in vocabulary development according to Dr. Anne Fernald of Stanford University’s Center for Infant Studies. Fernald says, “It’s clear that SES is not destiny,” Fernald continues, “The good news is that regardless of economic circumstances, parents who use more and richer language with their infants can help their child to learn more quickly.” (Bergland, 2014) (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013) This paper presents encouraging analysis that students do actually escape limitations associated with disadvantaged backgrounds.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a key demographic factor associated with student academic achievement. Parental income, parental education, and parental occupation are primary indicators of SES. Professor John Hattie’s meta-analysis of the effect of these SES factors on student learning resulted in an effect-size calculation of \( d = 0.57 \) which is in the “high” desired effect-size category. Hattie concludes that, “…parents can have a major effect in terms of the encouragement and expectations that they transmit to their children.” (Hattie, 2009)

Analysis of results of Granite School District students Utah’s SAGE testing yields encouraging signals that students can overcome limitations of SES when learning is measured in terms of growth. A student from a disadvantaged background may start and finish lower than an advantaged peer when measuring proficiency but the disadvantaged peers can and do often outperform when measuring growth.

Methodology
A coefficient of determination was calculated for each school for SAGE average proficiency against poverty. A second coefficient of determination was calculated for Median Growth Percentiles (MGP) derived from SAGE proficiency over several years for students against SES. The coefficient of determination is the proportion of dependence of a dependent variable on the independent variable. In this analysis, SAGE average proficiency and Median Growth Percentiles were the dependent variables against the independent variable of SES.

The coefficient of determination is a product of linear regression calculations of the data sets comprising the independent variable and dependent variables. A second product is a scatterplot which is a graphic representation of the two variables, noting the point at which the two variables meet for each school. The values for the coefficient of determination are in a range from 0 to 1 expressed as \( r^2 \). \( r^2 \) values greater than or equal to 0.75 indicate that 75% of the variance between the independent variable and dependent variable is explained by their relationship and are roughly significant. In addition to the \( r^2 \) value an understanding of the variables is necessary to ensure the results have face validity (make sense on their face).

Findings
The following figure shows the scatterplot created for SAGE Proficiency by SES for the ELA test at elementary level. The
The reader will note that the plots do not have a visually wide distance from the regression line. The r² value calculated for this regression line is 0.776, indicating 77.6% of the variance between SAGE proficiency scores is explained by effects associated with SES. The slope of this line is \( y = 67.72 - 0.63 \times x \).

The next figure shows scatterplot for SAGE ELA Elementary MGP against poverty. The reader will notice that there is less visual closeness to the regression line. The calculated coefficient of determination is 0.175 meaning very little of the variance for growth is determined by SES. This is a positive indicator that schools, principals, and teachers can have positive effect on the growth that students under their tutelage can achieve regardless of background.

The coefficient of determination was calculated SAGE average proficiency for elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools for English Language Arts, mathematics, and science. It was also calculated for median growth percentile for the same school groups and subjects. The results were consistent. Average SAGE proficiency had a high coefficient of determination by SES. Median growth percentile had a low coefficient of determination by SES.

**Conclusions**

Students and teachers can achieve at high levels regardless of their socioeconomic background. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may not achieve as high levels of proficiency as their advantaged peers. Their proficiency scores reflect the totality of their education against core standards at their grade level. A student who struggled with mathematics skills in sixth grade enters seventh grade with those skills. That student can achieve a year or more growth measured against other students entering with the same skills. The key to accelerating growth for students, regardless of socioeconomic background, is checking for understanding and then, based on the results, differentiating instruction for the individual student. Granite District is exploring ways to infuse these practices into the instructional repertoire of new and veteran educators.
r² correlation for SAGE MGP by poverty
r² correlation for proficiency by poverty

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References


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In 2001, Jim Collins published a book about business that was soon to become the most-quoted book of its time within education circles. The book was Good to Great, and it was heralded as containing the secrets of management practice that would apply just as well to schools and education as they did to paper, cosmetics, and personal care products companies, banks and financial institutions, and grocery stores and consumer electronics companies. Soon, everyone turned their attention to the ideals of Level 5 Leadership, First Who…Then What and the rest of the six features of the “framework of concepts” identified by Jim Collins and his team of researchers (Collins, 2001; p. 12-13). The conclusions of Collins’ research of companies that had displayed evidences of sustained “greatness” gave hope to many that schools might achieve “greatness” if only they could be organized and managed around the same framework.

Good is the enemy of great—it’s an engaging concept and one that seems to make so much sense. It implies that greatness is well within the reach of us all, and that if the six features of Collins’ framework of concepts are established, any company, any school, any enterprise can become great. The promise may well be true, if only we knew how to establish and sustain those six features. In fact, one thing that became clear from reading Good to Great, even those companies that achieved greatness probably didn’t do so by systematically attending to those six attributes of greatness. Discovering these features was the result of a reflective process, looking backward to see common elements among companies that had established better-than-expected performance relative to stock market predictions. The interesting study now would be to systematically embed these six attributes into the organization and management practices of a company and observe what happens. But, what measures are there to assess Level 5 Leadership, getting “the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats”, the Hedgehog Concept, A Culture of Discipline, etc.? How would such a process be designed, assessed, guided, and evaluated? Once implemented, what measures might be employed to ensure sustained high-quality practices?

One of the current authors wrote nearly 15 years ago about the status of education in Utah at the time and predicted the future...
course over the next several decades. Given the interest in applying business principles to education, then and now, the following seems to apply:

A business or corporate management model is viewed increasingly as the answer to many of the problems of our education system, since these problems have to do with maximizing outcomes relative to investments (EEC, 2003). Business is concerned with managing its resources to create favorable outcomes, and business thrives only when it attends to the “bottom line”. Businesses must remain profitable (successful, by definition) or they simply disappear.

I suppose that many business principles will find a home in Utah’s education future, and that will be a good thing. However, I think it is unwise to adopt a position that the business or corporate model is well suited for all aspects of such a broad scale social enterprise as education. Attending to the bottom line may challenge our commitment to properly educate all students, especially those who may not respond quickly or willingly to our efforts. Some may say, “Those students cost us too much. We’ll do better to invest our resources in the students who respond more quickly or learn faster”. There will be little motivation to develop new teaching techniques and materials for the relatively small portion of students who don’t respond quickly to the materials we’ve already developed. It may simply be easier to ignore the students who are most difficult to teach, and pass them by.

Furthermore, the process of natural selection that results in successful business ventures over time is gradual and comes at a considerable cost overall. As a result of this process, many businesses fail and only the profitable ones survive. In education, we can’t afford to fail with the future of our children. A child lost or wasted as a result of “unprofitable” educational decisions is not acceptable collateral damage for implementing a risky, or unproven practice. Our responsibility is to all children, not just the ones fortunate enough to enroll in the “profitable” schools. Nevertheless, we are currently failing to provide an appropriate education to many in our schools, and we must adopt policies and practices that reward the use of proven techniques based upon proven principles. We must provide adequate training, research, and support for finding, developing, and using more effective practices. Our curriculum must emphasize the knowledge and skills of life as well as of work.

The business model may be very appropriate for managing the form (i.e., the structure and organizational aspects) of education, but inspired and knowledgeable “content” leadership will be required to oversee the substance of education (the process of instruction, or in other words, teaching and learning). Attending to both form and substance is necessary if we are to achieve success in our children’s education (West, 2003).

The education of our nation’s children is among the most important of our public enterprises. After all, it holds the promise of prosperity, happiness, and economic security. One of this country’s earliest proponents of a public education spoke often about its role in making possible a sound, representative democracy. According to Thomas Jefferson, “An enlightened citizenry is in...
dispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight. It is therefore imperative that the nation see to it that a suitable education be provided for all its citizens [emphasis added].”

Thus, it should come as no surprise that nearly everyone is interested in what our public education is, how it is administered and delivered, and how it is evaluated. The public marketplace of ideas about education is growing louder and more crowded. Each voice is certain of a new approach that will solve what many of us see as a failure to meet the educational needs of all students and families. Two recent Op-Eds in the Salt Lake Tribune, published on consecutive days, are good examples of different viewpoints expressed in this marketplace. The first entitled, “Higher taxes won’t improve our education outcomes” was written by the president of an institute that seeks to “reduce taxes, eliminate regulations, repeal code found to be inimical to individual liberty, and lift regulatory burdens from the market” (Boyack, 2016). The second, published one day later, was written by former education professionals as entitled, “Public schools need more money, and Utahns know it” (Huefner, Bennion, Burningham, Thomas, and McCandless, 2016).

All is not lost, however. Research conducted initially at Utah State University’s Center for the School of the Future and continuing at TetraAnalytix, has revealed that certain upstream variables, under the control of education professionals, can actually overcome the ill effects of many other variables already found in the stream. Adding hope to this discovery is the development of tools to measure these upstream variables, at the time that they are being introduced into the education “stream” so that adjustments can be made, as necessary, to ensure that each student’s steam is wholesome and healthy. These forms of measurement that produce “actionable” data (i.e., data that point to specific actions or interventions) are more likely to achieve desired results that can be sustained over time.

In studies involving more than 3,000 schools in fourteen US states and three foreign countries over the past 15 years, these researchers isolated more than 50 variables of interest within the schools and the neighborhoods in which they are located. A handful of these variables have such strong relationships with academic achievement that they overshadow in importance the remaining variables.

We have compared the data on these variables to standardized measures of academic achievement. Applying rigorous scientific standards in this investigation has revealed relationships among variables stronger than have been found heretofore in educational research. Correlational values approaching .80 are rarely encountered in educational or social science research (Winner & Hetland, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2001), but they are common in our research (Janzen, 2013; Moore, 2007). Our investigation has led us to some very interesting conclusions, some of which confirm what others have said about schools and achievement. For instance,

- Family and neighborhood economic and social conditions matter. Students in schools in affluent neighborhoods and from stable, supportive families tend to achieve better.
- Teacher characteristics matter. Better-trained teachers often have students who score better on standardized tests, although there seem to be other factors that contribute.

But, our most important finding to date is that what teachers do every day in the classroom, in response to specific student needs...
These forms of measurement that produce “actionable” data (i.e., data that point to specific actions or interventions) are more likely to achieve desired results that can be sustained over time.

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and requirements, matters most, and often can overcome the effects of variables that schools and teachers have no control over, such as social and economic factors. In fact, if teachers create four “conditions for learning” in their classrooms, conditions recognized and acknowledged by their students, the students will learn in spite of many other competing variables and obstacles.

Taken together, these four variables account for 67% of the variance of academic achievement; four times more than community risk variables (socioeconomics), five times more than parent support, 15 times more than teacher qualifications, 37 times more than school leadership, and 60 times more than school fiscal and programmatic resources (Janzen, 2013; Smith, Taylor, & West, 2004; Taylor, West, Charlton, & Smith, 2015; West, Smith, & Taylor, 2004). In a study of 100 Utah schools, these student reports of the presence of these four conditions were found to predict end-of-year scores on a standardized language arts test better than the DIBELS test predicted these scores, and the predictive relationship was even stronger when the contribution of socioeconomic variables was removed (Janzen, 2013). Thus, these conditions, completely under the control of teachers and schools are far more important in predicting academic success than are poverty, and various family and neighborhood variables thought previously to be impossible to overcome. Frankly, if you create the “conditions for learning” for every student every day, students are guaranteed to learn (West, Charlton, & Taylor, 2016).

REAL Schools

When as many as 80% of the students in a school report experiencing these conditions in their schools, we refer to the schools as REAL Schools, a title that reflects the four conditions for learning: Relationships of trust with significant adults; Expectations that are clear and challenging; Affirmations of actions and behavior related to success; and Learning of important and fundamental knowledge and skills. In REAL Schools, students enjoy and acknowledge the presence of these critical conditions that teachers create in each classroom. Teachers enjoy the support and encouragement of colleagues and administrators as they work to create these conditions, and students’ parents experience these conditions in their important role that includes both guiding and supporting the efforts of teachers and administrators at school. We have provided a more complete explanation of the conditions for learning, teaching, and community support in other articles (West, Charlton, & Taylor, 2016), but we also offer here a brief description of these conditions.

Relationships of Trust

Establishing and maintaining adult (teacher)/child (student) relationships based upon mutual respect and positive regard heightens a student’s motivation to excel and provides a firm foundation for teaching, especially the teaching of difficult skills and complicated concepts. These relationships provide a context for support to the student who may feel overwhelmed when recognizing the size of the gulf between current and expected performance.

Expectations

Clearly communicating expectations for performance, and turning those expectations into common language, is the first step in effective teaching. It explains the reward contingencies for acceptable behavior and clearly describes the steps to the reward. Using common language throughout the school and all learning environments results in a common understanding of expectations, which leads to common success, a condition that in today’s world and society is not common at all.

Affirmations

Appropriate behavior and individual efforts to improve should be recognized and affirmed whenever and wherever those actions...
occur throughout the school and the student’s other learning environments (e.g., home and family, work, community/neighborhood). Truly effective recognitions will be timely and descriptive, will include a specific rationale or explanation of why the behavior is useful or valuable, and will have an enduring quality that will serve as the context for future performance (such as a praise note that can be posted and used as evidence of expectations for future performance).

Learning. An emphasis upon building and strengthening new behavior results in substantial reductions in problem behavior and makes more coercive practices largely unnecessary. Providing ample opportunities to respond appropriately is the most effective approach in building skills. Capable and successful students rarely engage in disruptive behavior. Students who actively participate in school and classroom activities where they have the opportunity to acquire and practice essential knowledge and skills have significantly fewer opportunities for errors and misbehaviors. Careful attention should be given to strategies that provide many response opportunities in the teaching of academic skills, as well as cooperation and play skills, social skills, and self-management skills.

Conclusion

The magnitude of improvement of groups implementing metrics on based on REAL schools have resulted in metrics would be not only acceptable, but desirable for any school looking to improve. In our opinion, schools that focus on the four conditions of learning are spending time on an endeavor that will be worth the precious time and effort required to improve schools. We hope that those who seek to make REAL improvement in their school will strongly consider developing their change strategy through this lens that we have found can deliver their desired results. We would be happy to help any who need more information, or help, with creating the strategy for their school improvement. Good luck with your pursuits of this noble cause.

References


Smith, T. G., Taylor, M. J., & West, R. P. (2004). Until students notice a difference, nothing has really changed. The
Richard P. West, PhD, is Professor Emeritus at Utah State University and CEO of Tetra Analytix. Rich was a teacher and a school administrator prior to his 35 years as professor at Utah State University. He was director of the University’s Center for the School of the Future for 14 years. He can be contacted at rpwest@tetraanalytix.com.

David P. Gatti, EdD is the assistant Principal at Taylorsville High school in Granite School District and faculty member at University of Phoenix. He can be reached at dgatti@graniteschools.org.
We live and work in an era where standardized and other high stakes testing plays a large role in the educational process. Due to this reality we, as teachers, spend a lot of time and focus on preparing students for these tests and then on administering them. Regardless of how one may feel about this type of testing and its role in education, most would agree that the ultimate purpose of teaching should not be to prepare students for a test, but for life. With that as a goal then, we serve our students best when we help them develop the skills that will help them excel in life; and few things will serve our students better than helping them to develop leadership skills.

Administrators that support staff efforts and provide resources for teachers to develop student leadership are promoting success on many levels. Leadership skills will benefit all students studying, and later working, in all fields and therefore can have universal application. Leadership opportunities teach a variety of real world skills: critical thinking, decision making, organization, communication and accountability. Students leaving school to enter higher education or the workplace who possess these abilities will be better employees, students, and citizens (not to mention be better at critical thinking and problem solving and thus score higher on standardized tests as well). So how do we give students the opportunities to learn and practice these skills while they are in our classrooms? Whenever possible we should design our curriculum to not only teach the required content but to make the students use that knowledge in real world situations where they have to think, hypothesize, write, problem solve, and work together with others.

I understand that concepts like project-based learning and learning groups are not new ideas. However, far too often we as teachers and administrators let concerns such as testing, time, or other restraints keep us from doing the type of teaching that will benefit our students most. Another obstacle that keeps us from doing the kinds of activities and lessons that help to develop leadership skills is simply a lack of resources or doubt over our own abilities to be creative and design these kinds of lessons. It is this issue that I would like to address.

Of course, the most obvious way to find activities and lessons is to take advantage of the internet and the many websites and blogs that are dedicated to just such a purpose. I have taken advantage of this resource as have many of my colleagues. However, I have found that lessons and activities that I have personally created or reshaped to fit the specific needs of my own classroom are usually far more powerful in teaching both the content and the leadership skills I want my students to gain. As a social studies teacher, my own curriculum lends itself to this kind of teaching, but it can be done in any subject.
with a little effort, planning and creativity.

Over the years, I have been able to choose some of the key themes and concepts used in my curriculum and design my own simulations, games, and activities that teach the needed concepts while also allowing students to plan, think, work together, and make decisions that have real consequences. Let me give a few examples of simulations I have developed.

When I teach the colonization period in either American History or World Civilization I use a colony simulation I developed where students are broken into groups and are sent to establish a colony on a new, imaginary continent. As part of this process they have to write a charter stating their reasons for beginning a colony and how it benefits their home country. They then have to study a landform map (of this imaginary continent) to make decisions about what kinds of work the people in their specific colony should do to make money for themselves and their home nation. Then through a process of educated hypothesizing and trial and error, the students discover which occupations are the best to make money in their specific colony. As part of the process students also have to pay taxes and deal with random events, as determined by rolling the dice, that can help or hurt them, all of which requires students to deal with changing situations and adjust their plan. Students also must keep a journal of their experiences as they go through the process, and the journal which serves as a formal assessment at the end.

This colony simulation requires students to gain information and work as a team to make decisions that will benefit or damage their colony. Furthermore, the activity not only gives them a very hands on, real work scenario about the difficulty of establishing colonies and all of the factors that helped or hurt in that process but it also requires critical thinking and map reading skills, as well as being a cross-curricular activity that also uses language arts and math. Of course, the best part is that the students are highly invested and learn the material in a lasting and meaningful way. Leadership and character-building through decisions that impact levels beyond the individual are powerful.

I have other activities I have developed for other key topics in my courses including a lesson where we examine the differences between political parties and then take an issues survey that helps students learn where they fall on the political spectrum and a language development activity where we discuss the corruption of Latin into the Romance languages following the collapse of the Roman Empire. After we study the reasons and the process that caused this to occur, we then run a simulation where we take modern English and show how it could evolve over many years into different languages, thus recreating what happened to Latin and involving the students in a hands on exploration of the topic. Using real world situations to encourage critical thinking and leadership can be done in any subject area if we will invest our time and talents into looking for ideas or creating our own. I have a science teacher colleague who does an amazing simulation activity about ocean ecology and the effects of over fishing. In this activity students quickly discover they must balance ecological and commercial needs or both will suffer. Another science teacher colleague is having students grow flowers and hatch chicks and quails in a unit on comparative anatomy and organs and systems where student discover the differences and similarities between plant and animal species.

Still another colleague has developed an entire teaching model for personal finance classes that focuses on real-world choices where students make decisions daily about spending, saving, credit, interest and other situations and adjust their plan. Students also must keep a journal of their experiences as they go through the process, and the journal which serves as a formal assessment at the end.

Whenever possible we should design our curriculum to not only teach the required content but to make the students use that knowledge in real world situations where they have to think, hypothesize, write, problem solve, and work together with others.
key financial points. Then, instead of being awarded a grade through traditional measures, students use the funds they have managed to buy lab-grades on a regular basis. A math teacher did an assignment where her students did a model UN refugee camp and had to solve a series of math problems around based around real world logistics such as how much food was needed, weight limits on roads, bridges and aircraft to get it there, costs to buy and transport the food, operational costs, and other such factors. Students used math to solve these problems to help as many refugees as possible, while also facing real world obstacles and having to make difficult ethical decisions such as whether or not to send in aid workers with the needed amounts of food if there was an active military crisis or whether to include bribery of third world officials into the budget. This let students practice their math, critical thinking, and leadership skills.

Other subject areas lend themselves to very direct discussions of the principles of leadership, and this can be an effective way to teach these concepts as well. Having students serve as leaders of actual project-based teams where they practice these skills and manage a group to create a final product can be done in many other areas as well. Subjects like physical education, foods and sewing courses, music classes, drama, technology and vocational classes all can use these leadership principles in real world ways. In any of these courses basic principles can be taught by the teacher and then student teams can be organized with assigned leaders to create a real result. Cook offs, design and invention competitions, student-led mini productions in drama and music, and sporting competitions allow students to learn and practice these leadership skills and provide high student investment. This can be especially powerful when specific leadership principles are taught and then assessed as part of the learning process. In recent years education has become wary of using competition as a teaching motivation, and basing student grades on success in a competition may or may not be acceptable, but using competition as a natural way to get students to have investment in their learning and to practice these skills need not be avoided; after all most of the real world we are preparing them for is also competitive in nature.

Another way to teach leadership skills is show these principles as they occur in other areas we are already teaching as part of our regular subject matter. When reading novels in language arts classes instructors can teach books that discuss decision making and give students the chance to discuss these ideas while also examining the decisions the characters make and their motivations for making them. One example would be a novel like Orson Scott Card’s Ender’s Game which allows students to examine different leadership styles, think about the principles of leadership and the effects of the decision-making process, and the burden of leadership, and living with the consequences of accepting the responsibility that comes with authority. Of course, Ender’s Game is just one of many books that could be used to examine some of these issues. Another way I have seen this done in a language arts class is by reading Choose-Your-Own-Adventure novels and having discussion about possible consequences and effects before having students make the choices in the book. In social studies, I will often use “Choose-Your-Own-Adventure” history in my lectures where I stop my direct instruction at key decision points in history and ask students to make the decision and explain reasons and motivations. Only then will I move on and discuss what actu-

Students also must keep a journal of their experiences as they go through the process, and the journal serves as a formal assessment at the end.

Using real world situations to encourage critical thinking and leadership can be done in any subject area if we will invest our time and talents into looking for ideas or creating our own.
Having students serve as leaders of actual project-based teams where they practice these skills and manage a group to create a final product can be done in many other areas as well.

However, in a world that increasingly deals with complex problems, where information and technology require mental flexibility and the ability to reshape how we think, and where technology makes the access to information easier than ever, it should be a key part of the educational process to teach students to think, make good decisions, work with others, compromise, adjust from mistakes and move forward. Again, these are the principles of leadership and they should be an integral part of our teaching if we want to prepare students for the future they will face. This can be done by finding or creating lessons and activities that allow students to use these skills and principles while also learning the basic content of our subjects. Doing this makes education more real and more engaging for our students. We, as teachers and administrators and as leaders, must develop ways to do this.

Mark Davis is a social studies teacher at Payson Junior High. He has 17 years of classroom experience at the secondary level and 15 years teaching at the university level. He also has co-authored a world civilization textbook and published several papers in historical and educational journals. He can be reached at mark.davis@nebo.edu.
Book Review: **Recognition Vs. Merit Pay for Our Best Teachers**

*William A. Marzano, Ed.D*

For more than three decades, Dr. Hans A. Andrews has been a leading researcher and author in the field of faculty evaluation and recognition. In this book, he highlights the distinction between simple merit pay systems and robust recognition programs. The former provide a financial bonus for teachers who receive high performance ratings and/or whose students demonstrate test scores gains. In contrast, recognition programs provide public recognition for outstanding teachers and may additionally provide a one-time small financial award to be used for classroom equipment, travel, and professional conference support.

Dr. Andrews critically evaluates a variety of both merit and recognition programs and posits a cogent argument for the superiority of recognition systems. The backdrop for his argument are the classic motivation theories of Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg. Monetary awards or bonuses tend to have an ephemeral effect on performance, i.e., the they can incent a “sprint.” In contrast, properly structured recognition programs appeal to an individual’s esteem needs and impact a teacher’s long-term performance. Most faculty careers span decades, so it is important to have a system that is designed for a “marathon.” Teachers will be motivated to achieve the special affirmation of their efforts provided by a recognition award. Furthermore, they will be inspired to sustain and even improve their performance in order to “live up to” the high expectations they have internalized and to which others hold them.

Dr. Andrews’ scholarship points not only to choosing a teacher recognition system but also how to construct an effective model. The book contains numerous case studies, practical suggestions, and invaluable lessons from extensive research. By reading this book, an educator will be given a blueprint for educational success. Student learning is the paramount goal of education. A faculty recognition system which incents and inspires faculty to strive for excellence in teaching and learning contributes mightily to achieving that goal.

In contrast, properly structured recognition programs appeal to an individual’s esteem needs and impact a teacher’s long-term performance.

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While in the process of conversing with a parent about a teacher on one of many occasions, I recall the flow of the conversation in this way: “I feel this way about this teacher and you obviously feel differently than I do, but this is the way I feel about her and, by the way, I’m not budging!” Sound familiar? Any conversation or discussion ranging from the child to the adult will build upon these characteristics with little regard for coming together to formulate a viable dialogue let alone knowing how to actually accomplish that task. If we look at last year’s election cycle and this year’s two-party struggles in Congress, it is easy to see that opinions are as disparate as Mars and Venus with no clarion call to come together.

Engaging in an argument of opinions where positions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011) are the only foreseeable destination with little to nothing accomplished in the interim brings to mind many of the conversations I have had with students, parents, and even colleagues where no wiggle room is allowed for dialogue. Why is it that we get so caught up in the “position” game and find it hard to see the light when, in fact, coming together to resolve an issue or conflict would certainly better satisfy the needs of both parties?

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This is a bit counter intuitive because we are assuming that we will be able to persuade them to our way of thinking. This is where the accommodation comes in to play. This is also where the conversation should turn to the merits of their argument. It all starts and ends in the brain. It is literally a cognitive and emotional (Shapiro, 2016) process we go through as we strive to work with others to come to some agreement about how best to serve the other’s interests.

One key to making sure that we are doing this is to realize that we must strive to accommodate the other party’s position (Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 2011). Do not expect them to accommodate your position or for them to have the same interests or concerns. This is a bit counter intuitive because we are assuming that we will be able to persuade them to our way of thinking. This is where the accommodation comes in to play. This is also where the conversation should turn to the merits of their argument. So, how do we shift that gear?

**Positions Versus Concerns**

Rather than using the argument that “this is my position, and I am sticking to it,” how about allowing the other party to first share their position, and then see what can be done to meet the demands and reason through the
demands as interests and concerns? Positions, first of all, are hard and fast. “You and your staff have treated my daughter unfairly, and I am going to the superintendent to offer an official complaint!” Positions tend to back us into a corner of our own making, and they come off rather evaluative and judgmental. This is how many conversations start, but it does not necessarily need to be that way, and it definitely does not need to end on a position bargaining note either (Moffitt and Bordone, 2005).

Frame Reflection

Positions that are needs and interests based are generally grounded in concerns first. Working through the concern, and framing it correctly, is really at the heart of getting to a place where you can collaboratively problem solve. And in order to do so effectively, you must first dispel the position. Try to peer behind the position (Ury, 2007). For example, you as the administrator might say to the parent, “I realize that this is the position you are taking. Let’s take a look at what is behind the position to see what the real issue is.” Now, if we examine this interaction more closely, a problem you may confront with this approach is that you did not ask the person’s permission to peer behind the position. You just took it upon yourself to forge ahead, which can come across as impatient or directing (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

Another approach might be to ask, “Do you mind if we look behind the position to better understand what your particular needs or interests are?” The answer to this question may be, “Yes, I do mind!” The person is still obviously upset, and you may have offered them the perfect reason to continue to appear confrontational even though you asked permission, but you did ask permission, and that is a powerful tool to getting where you need to be in this dialogue.

This is where “frame reflection” (Schön, 1987, p. 218) comes into play. Consider asking, “Now that I understand better where you are coming from, might you consider the two of us looking at the issue to determine what your real concerns are? I feel that this will give me a better perspective to see how I can help you. Are you okay with this approach?” You haven’t mentioned or referred to the other person’s position, and you have asked permission with a rationale in mind to help. Now, wait for the response. Let’s say they are really tough. The parent may respond with, “I don’t know. I am not sure.” You may say, “I understand, please take your time.” And then wait again. There is value in striving for patience and talking less. Let them drive the direction of this conversation. It is, after all, their concern that you are attempting to work through with them and not for them. And, finally, reflecting on the question you are about to ask is a good way to frame the response you may be looking for.

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Convergence of Meaning

Now that we have come this far, it would be wonderful if we could come together in a way that benefits both parties. “Frame reflection” (p. 218) can also assist us as we consider the analogy of two arrows pointing away from each other and then coming together. If two arrows are pointing away from each other because the thought processes of two individuals are different, Shapiro (2016) would see the gap between the arrows as a place where assumptions about the other person’s thinking are made that cause differences in our opinions about the issue. Schön (1987), on the other hand, would lead us to believe that the gap between the two arrows is where “frame reflection” (p. 218) can occur causing the two divergent opinions or frames to come together by finding common ground. Both
In contrast, properly structured recognition programs appeal to an individual’s esteem needs and impact a teacher’s long-term performance.

Frame Reflection

The middle ground of the two opposing arrows is where a problem can be set or formulated and the issue that will be focused on is decided. This is the problem formulation or “problem setting” as Schön refers to it (1987, p. 4). This can also be the place where positions become strongest because opposing views are not reconciled. This could potentially mean now that two positions have actually emerged—their position and your position.

As we “reflect-in-action” (Schon, 1987, p. 26)—this is reflection that occurs while we are in the act of looking at each other’s opposing views—our assumptions and divergent notions or thoughts percolate, and discussion can be initiated. Once the positions we have taken begin to diminish through looking at each other’s opinions empathically, then the position begins to turn to interests and concerns where problem solutions can then be sought. This is when the collaborative mode of problem solving kicks in. Working together, which begins to bring the arrows into a more circular pattern of cooperation, the conversational tone and meaning of the two parties begin to converge (1987) where options to the problem can be initiated and reviewed (Schön, 1987; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011). Now our thought processes and meanings have Stone, Patton, and Heen (2010) converged into a collaborative problem-solving pattern that allows for positive negotiated outcomes. The reason I say “negotiated” is because you are now in a far better position with the other party to create options for successful outcomes. Your ability to help this person with concerns is now amplified. You are no longer struggling through the position phase because it has been eliminated, and the prognosis for a reasonable conclusion is viable.

Conclusion

You will have to reflect while you are in the act of conversation.

If we are willing to put forth the effort to ask evocative questions that promote thoughtfulness and ask permission to engage before doing so, this can bring us squarely together as cooperative and collaborative partners working to resolve difficult circumstances.

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References


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