# Utah Association of Secondary School Principals

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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 or on a disk.
• Manuscripts sent by mail should be accompanied by a disk. MS word is preferred.
• 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 either electronically or mail disk to either editor listed below:

Mary Rhodes
Mrhodes55@outlook.com
801-808-3523
250 E 1200 S
Bountiful, UT 84010
When I teach, I choose—with students and educators—themes, and one year my seventh graders, who working on peer editing and displaying student work, chose the theme Dare to Share. New expressions of the themes always emerge, and daring to share also means sharing the credit. This edition of Impact is an astonishing document, and acknowledging the contributions is a pleasure. Carl Boyington deserves thanks for continued and substantive support and the Executive Board of UASSP for their vision. Because of Carl and the Board, you can find editions of Impact on the UASSP webpage. I also thank Jane Bradbury, who is always reliable and responsive. David Tanner’s photography is characterized by cleverness and clarity, and Robert King’s covers are artistic and metaphoric depictions of Utah and us. Brent Sumner’s project management is as precise as his printing. Against these constants, the authors in this edition contribute a range of variables that will engage your interest utterly.

SAGE has become real, and Daron Kenna has a practical, wise, and important article on reading results and exploring implications for leadership and instruction. Aaron Wilson adds to a body of literature and practice on positive behavior initiatives; the evolution of the program in a highly impacted school includes practical strategies for successful implementation. Aaron’s list of acknowledgements contributed to the idea of my opening paragraph.

Mary Kay Kirkland and Deborah Sorensen command the centerpiece of the journal with two articles on the AdvancED accreditation process in Utah. Mary Kay speaks to changes we can expect in this new procedure, and Debbie reports on the remarkable experience of the first system accreditation—Davis County School District— in Utah. An article from Davis follows as Bryon Nielsen reviews the literature on poverty and inspires renewed commitment to equity.

The commitments and responsibilities of leadership are multiple, and David Boren provides refreshing and insightful guidelines for navigating those; further, his solid research helps with prioritizing. In a new and important development, we have contributors from beyond our boundary; Kathleen Schofield and Sylvia Zilcher from Florida explain and demonstrate the power of lesson study. Finally, Rick Anthony’s profound piece on the evolving roles of technology and pedagogy explores strengths and problems with current paradigms.

These articles are an impetus to our continued learning, and on that topic, Price (2014) notes the imperative of sharing and connecting in our learning styles. As my class and I Dared to Share, we realized we could Expect to Connect. I thank Rick for inviting me to connect on Goodreads.com when I mentioned Price’s book, Open. I thank these authors for daring to share and encourage you to connect with them. Share your acknowledgement of their work, your insights, and your questions with them. As we do, we will all continue our thankfully endless learning journey.

Reference

Five Things Every Administrator Should Know about SAGE

Daron Kennett

After the anticipation leading up to last year’s first administration of the SAGE Summative assessments, much of the excitement and apprehension has died down. Students have had a chance to experience the different test question types, teachers have a better understanding of the level of rigor, and parents are coming to appreciate the valuable role that assessment plays in instruction.

Now that reports and other test results have become available and educators gear up for this year’s tests, many administrators may wonder how SAGE informs their role as instructional leaders. This article addresses the questions most often heard from principals and other administrators about SAGE.

1. How to Read SAGE Reports

SAGE reports contain an unprecedented amount of information never before available to educators after summative testing. However, the data is presented in ways that may be new and unfamiliar to some.

Many administrators may wonder how SAGE informs their role as instructional leaders. This article addresses the questions most often heard from principals and other administrators about SAGE.

One of the most important features of the new SAGE reports is the vertical scale for ELA and math. This reporting tool puts all students in all grades on a subject-specific scale. The vertical scale allows stakeholders to measure student growth from year-to-year, teacher-to-teacher, and grade-to-grade. The ELA vertical scale ranges from 100 to 999, and math ranges 150 to 900. The vertical scale is depicted as a thermometer on the SAGE Student Report, with cut scores separating Above Proficient, Proficient, Approaching Proficient, and Below Proficient levels. The overall scaled score is the most reliable indicator of student proficiency and progress on the SAGE report. (Science course tests are not reported on a vertical scale since there is not a clear year-to-year progression as in ELA and math.)

In addition to the overall scaled score, SAGE reports also include scaled scores for each reporting subcategory. These scores show the relative strengths and weaknesses of a given student’s performance on the test. For example, a seventh grader’s ELA overall scaled score may be 456, which falls into the Grade 7 Proficient range. However, if the Writing sub-score is 423, which falls below the Grade 7 Proficiency cut score, this indicates the student’s writing performance was only
Approaching Proficient. This is immediately beneficial information for teachers to use in creating flexible groups for reteaching or enrichment.

To aid educators’ planning, subcategory scaled scores are also accompanied by a plus (+), minus (-), or equals (=) symbol. This signage does not indicate whether or not the student is proficient in each subcategory; rather, it indicates the student’s performance relative to himself or herself.

To aid educators’ planning, subcategory scaled scores are also accompanied by a plus (+), minus (-), or equals (=) symbol. The signage does not indicate whether or not the student is proficient in each subcategory; rather, it indicates the student’s performance relative to himself or herself. For instance, a student who is Proficient or Above Proficient in every area will still receive a minus (-) symbol in his or her area of lowest performance. Conversely, a student who is Approaching Proficient or Below Proficient in every area will still receive a plus (+) symbol in his or her area of highest performance. This information aids teachers in planning instruction that builds on student strengths and addresses gaps in knowledge, no matter the achievement level.

In addition to the Writing scaled score, the SAGE Student Report also includes detailed, rubric-level feedback on each of the essays (Argument and Informative/Explanatory). The language describes how each student performed in each of the rubric domains (Focus & Organization, Evidence & Elaboration, and Editing & Conventions). This is valuable information for teachers to use in planning and evaluating instruction.

A number of tools are available for administrators, teachers, and the public to aid in interpreting SAGE Reports at the following websites:

http://sageportal.org
2. How to use SAGE Data as an Instructional Leader

SAGE’s Online Reporting System (ORS) has exciting new capabilities that have never before been available to Utah educators. SAGE’s ORS makes it possible to drill down, disaggregate, group, and analyze student testing data to drive instruction. School administrators and Local Education Agents (LEAs) should use SAGE data as one resource for making programmatic decisions. Because the data can be configured by grade level, student subgroup (gender, SES, ELL), teacher cohort (veteran, provisional), and a variety of other attributes, administrators can compare the effectiveness and efficiency of instruction in ways never before possible. This gives instructional leaders the capability to deliver the right amount of support to the right teachers just when they need it. It also makes it possible to gauge the effect of that support on student achievement.

Because SAGE data is so accessible and configurable, administrators can use it to set long term goals. Once a multi-year objective has been set, aim lines (the trajectory from current performance to future objectives) can then be calculated, giving schools, groups of teachers, and individual educators a visible (year-to-year or interim-to-summative) measure of progress toward the goal. For example, a PLC whose members’ aggregate student scores lag the aim line can collaborate on strategies to support struggling students. A PLC whose aggregate scores exceed the aim line can share their effective instructional practices with others in the school. This intentional and responsible use of data builds teacher efficacy by showing educators a direct link between their efforts and their students’ success.

3. How and Why to Use SAGE Interim

One of the new features of SAGE is the option for interim testing. SAGE Interim tests are full-blueprint assessments that are predictive of performance on the summative test. They are available to be administered up to two times during the school year.

The option to use SAGE Interim tests is left to the discretion of LEAs, many of which have left that decision to school leaders. Given the substantial testing time involved, many administrators have wondered if this is a worthwhile use of instructional time.

For all of the reasons described in the section above, Interims can be invaluable to instructional leaders interested in supporting teachers and students with data-informed decisions. Because Interims are predictive of performance on the year-end Summative tests, they provide insight for both teachers and administrators into whether or not students are on a trajectory (aim line) for success. Once provided with this information, educators can then adjust instruction in time to affect SAGE Summative scores. Administrators can also use this data to target support for specific groups of students or teachers in a way that will impact Summative performance.

However, SAGE Interim tests do have limitations. They are not meant to be used diagnostically. While the subcategory...
scaled scores and rubric feedback are useful in providing awareness of students’ strengths and weaknesses, they are not meant to identify specific skills. Teacher-designed formative assessments and skill-specific diagnostics are a better resource for this level of granularity. Ultimately, the decision to use SAGE Interim tests is dependent upon the plans for the resultant data. Principals or superintendents who have clear, strategic plans to use the data to drive instruction at their schools should absolutely take advantage of this resource. A leader who is simply curious about the scores but has no plan to implement them in a meaningful way should probably not invest the instructional time.

4. Changes to SAGE Writing

Based on feedback from teachers and leaders at the school and LEA level, some important changes have been made to SAGE Writing. Principals should be aware of these updates to the test, as they will affect scheduling and test administration procedures.

Due to wide variability across the state in testing times for the 2014 Writing section of the test, the SAGE TAM (Test Administration Manual) has been updated to include clear limits on time. Test administrators should allow groups no more than 90 minutes to work on each essay, for a total time of 180 minutes. While extensions can be given to students in exceptional circumstances (e.g., EL and SpEd students), it is an ethical violation to extend testing time for all students. Administrators should be aware that the data from the 2014 test show that students who took longer than a combined 180 minutes on their essays did not receive higher scores; in fact, in many cases students whose teachers encouraged or allowed them to exceed 180 minutes of writing received lower essay scores.

To reduce the reading load on this section of the test, the passage set accompanying the Argument essay prompt has been cut by approximately 50%. Additionally, the Informative/Explanatory prompt gives students clearer guidelines as to the expected length (2-3 paragraphs). In order for the human scoring of the 2015 essays to be done in time for summative reporting, the SAGE Writing window is open from February 2nd through the 20th. These changes should lead to more predictable testing times for students and fewer scheduling challenges for administrators.

5. Keeping Things in Perspective

While SAGE is a critical and indispensable part of Utah’s assessment system, it is by no means the most important achievement indicator that instructional leaders should use. In fact, no weighty programmatic, instructional, or employment decision should ever be made based on only one data point. Triangulation is the key to effective decision-making: Leaders should always consider as many different assessments and data sources as possible in making reasoned judgments.

In terms of day-to-day lesson planning, teacher-designed formative assessments are the most important source of data. Formative assessments range from
In terms of day-to-day lesson planning, teacher-designed formative assessments are the most important source of data. Formative assessments range from on-the-fly probes (exit slips, think-pair-share-write, thumbs up/thumbs down) to more systematic examinations of student understanding (quizzes, short answer tests). Formative assessment yields data that is for instruction; that is, formative assessments are given by teachers, during instruction, and in time to inform the way the instruction is delivered.

Many schools use PLCs effectively to create common formative assessments. Depending on the configuration of PLCs, these common formative assessments can yield very specific and useful data. For example, a PLC whose membership cuts across subject areas (e.g. a tenth grade PLC) can gather formative data on abilities that transcend specific content and curricula—for instance, literacy skills. A PLC whose membership is focused on student subgroups can design common formative assessments that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of school-wide instruction—for instance, the extent to which ELs can use academic language in writing.

The most important tests students participate in are self-assessments. These are assessments that prompt a student to evaluate his or her own learning, effort, and progress. Our ultimate goal in public education is the development of self-regulating citizens who can responsibly participate in our civic, economic, and cultural institutions. Students who internalize these self-monitoring and reflecting skills are much more likely to succeed in their post-secondary college and career pursuits.

In conclusion, SAGE has created exciting opportunities and challenges for students, teachers, and administrators. Instructional leaders who use SAGE data effectively will find that it is motivating and empowering for professional educators. SAGE shines a spotlight on areas of success, reveals areas of challenge, and also illuminates a pathway forward for all.

Daron Kennett is ELA Assessment Specialist and WIDA Assessment Specialist at the Utah State Office of Education. He can be reached at daron.kennett@schools.utah.gov.
A Simple Look at PBIS: Reducing Behavioral Referrals and Improving Staff Morale

Aaron R. Wilson

Background
Granite Park Junior High School is located in Granite School District in the heart of South Salt Lake. We are a Title I school with 85% of our students on free or reduced lunch, 70% minority, and roughly 50% English Language Learners.

In the 2012-2013 school year, Granite Park had over 3,300 behavior referrals and 3,800 the year before. In 2013-2014 there were 34% less disruptions in the classroom than the year before, 30% less tardies, 60% fewer out-of-school suspensions. Overall referrals are down 30%.

Teachers, administration and staff attribute the drop in referrals and our improved school culture to a renewed, collective focus on positive behavior intervention support, or PBIS.

Teacher Buy In
Our school leadership team (comprising of team and department leads, counselors and administration) evaluated our school’s current systems of establishing, teaching and reinforcing behavioral expectations. A systematic need was found in each area, resulting in our commitment to launch a school-wide PBIS, and support it throughout the year.

A natural tendency for members of the group, myself being the biggest culprit, was to have a program already in place when the school year began without input or buy-in from all of the staff. We had to remind ourselves that without staff buy-in, this or any new program would not succeed.

Establishing School-Wide Expectations
Our leadership team agreed that an existing school acronym P.R.I.D.E. could be used to establish what preparation, respect, integrity, dedication and excellence look like in common areas throughout the school. By exhibiting these virtues, students show their own Grizzly P.R.I.D.E. Through several staff development meetings, teachers decided which common areas we would publish positive behavioral expectations and what these expectations would be for these areas. The areas identified by teachers where students needed positive behavioral expectations were: classrooms, offices, stairwells, outside, locker rooms, the lunch line, the auditorium, the cafeteria, hallways, bathrooms, gyms, and computer labs. Teachers self-selected for which common area they would establish its set of positively-stated expectations for behavior (see example poster). Each group wrote their rules on a large sticky pad, and the staff engaged in a learning walk in which other groups could provide feedback. At a different meeting, these rules were showcased one final time before these posters were designed, printed, and hung in all of the identified common student areas of the school.

Teaching School-Wide Expectations
Many school personnel mistakenly believed that establishing expectations was the same as teaching them to students—that referring to a rule was sufficient cause for students to adhere to it without seeing the correct behavior modeled.

To begin the year, our student multi-media class created short videos that showcased what proper behavior looks like, and doesn’t look like, in these common areas. Once the posters were created, additional posters were made to portray students correcting other students’ behavior throughout the school, using these visible posters as points of reference. While this process of teaching behavioral expectations seems laden with opportunities to be made fun of by students, it was actually...
While this process of teaching behavioral expectations seems laden with opportunities to be made fun of by students, it was actually a major success due to the creativity of these student film-makers and the video’s high production value.

In the case of Granite Park, students surveyed wanted time to party with friends, candy, and a fast pass to the front of the lunch line.

Reinforcing School-Wide Expectations

If students have some degree of input in selecting their rewards, the level of positive reinforcement will be higher than with a teacher-selected system. In the case of Granite Park, students surveyed wanted time to party with friends, candy, and a fast pass to the front of the lunch line. These rewards were put in place as students won a teacher-nominated Student of the Week award. Over our school-wide video, students are announced as weekly winners for showing Grizzly P.R.I.D.E., and their specific positive behaviors for winning are mentioned. Then, when they pick up their prize in the office, students get a certificate stating again why they were chosen, along with a candy bar.

In the case of Granite Park, students surveyed wanted time to party with friends, candy, and a fast pass to the front of the lunch line.

Later in the quarter, the weekly winners are all invited to an all-you-can-eat ice cream party with other winners in the cafeteria.

Students who receive these weekly nominations are not the only ones praised systematically for showing their Grizzly P.R.I.D.E. Each teacher uses a currency to reward positive student behaviors that can be redeemed at a school store manned by our Peer Leadership Team during lunch for prizes.

Granite Park’s PBIS team was able to track which teachers had been handing out this currency to students and who had been nominating for Students of the Week. For these teachers, the PBIS team used positive reinforcing strategies on our teachers themselves, providing them with notes of thank you and treats in their boxes for the efforts they had taken in acknowledging their students. This practice of teacher reinforcement, we believe, had made the school-wide PBIS sustainable throughout the year. In essence, teachers helped their students continue in their positive behaviors by praising them, and this same approach was used with the teachers themselves: as they received praised, they were more motivated to continue in the positive behavior of nominating their students. Other teacher praise systems include teacher peer-nominated Respect Other People’s Efforts (R.O.P.E.) cards read at the beginning of each staff meeting, treats for teachers standing outside their doors at passing times, and positive feedback protocols for teachers observing each other in learning walks.

Correcting Student Misbehaviors

Through faculty meetings, our school PBIS team led professional development in ways that created opportunities for teachers to share ideas of best practice. In one meeting, teachers wrote down best classroom management strategies, posted them on walls surrounding our PD room, and the teachers engaged in a gallery walk, selecting one or two proven strategies that aligned with their own personal goal set to improve classroom management. Subsequent meetings gave teachers opportunities to share success stories on this long-term PBIS goal. In teacher observations and debrief conversations, administration provided emphasis and praise for ways teachers were able to correct students through questions and positive praise when appropriate. Each targeted effort added to an overall more positive feeling within our schools.

Aaron Wilson is Assistant Principal at Granite Park Junior High. He can be reached at awilson@graniteschools.org. He wishes to acknowledge wonderful teachers and staff, the principal Danny Stirland, the previous principal Dr. Taran Chun who set the stage for PBIS, Granite School District instructional coaches Roseanne Markham and Chad Coon for their mentorship in school-wide PBIS, and consultants Cori Groth and Ashley McKinney from the University of Utah’s Department of Educational Leadership and Policy.
Accreditation through AdvancED is moving forward in Utah with some significant changes in both people and process. First and foremost, we bid a bittersweet farewell to Georgia Loutensock, who provided stability and leadership to the accreditation process in Utah for over twelve years. In her quiet but determined way, she led by example and most recently facilitated the transition from the Northwest Accreditation Commission to AdvancED with minimal disruption in the process of continuous improvement for students and schools. We wish her well in her new endeavors and want her to know that we will miss her.

Georgia started the ball rolling on an enormously important milestone in accreditation in Utah, the successful accreditation of our first school system. Davis School District hosted a sixteen member External Review Team from October 5th through the 8th, 2014 to become the first school system in Utah to earn accredited status through AdvancED. All 85+ schools in the district have now achieved accredited status through AdvancED.

Complimentary of the staff, schools and patrons in Davis District. We congratulate Davis District on the accreditation of their School System and thank them for showing us how it can be done.

American Preparatory Academy will become the second School System to be accredited in Utah in February 2015.

Last year Spencer Hansen, the principal at Centerville Junior High School, wrote an extremely eloquent and informative article for this journal describing the changing face of accreditation based on the merger of AdvancED with the Northwest Accreditation Commission. Now, after two years of implementing the new AdvancED process, we have become more skilled in using the AdvancED tools and protocols, and, in addition, AdvancED has made some major improvements to the procedures and policies that drive continuous improvement in our schools.

Many of the changes coming from AdvancED relate to the way the External Review team operates and won’t affect the preparation process for a school or system accreditation visit, but the information a school or system receives back from the External Review has changed dramatically and will be much more helpful in driving school improvement efforts in the future.

Changes in the External Review Process and Reporting

1. While a school or system going through the accreditation process continues to focus their reflection and self-assessment efforts on rating their performance in the five standard areas using a four point rubric for each indicator, the findings of the External Review Team will now be reported out based on three domains. All of the team’s ratings for each indicator will still be included in the report, they will just be addressed through these three domains:

   a. Teaching and Learning Impact
   This domain will incorporate the External Review Team’s ratings and findings from Standard Three, Teaching and Assessing for Learning; Standard Five, Continuous Improvement, and the four evaluative criteria questions from the Student Performance Diagnostic.

   b. Leadership Capacity
   This domain will include the External Review Team’s ratings and findings from
Standard One, Purpose; Standard Two, Governance, and the two evaluative criteria questions from the Stakeholder Feedback Diagnostic.

c. Resource Utilization
This domain provides feedback from the External Review Team on the indicators from Standard Four, Resource Utilization.

2. In a move away from compliance language and toward a focus on continuous improvement, the External Review Team will now identify Improvement Priorities for the school or system instead of Required Actions. Schools and systems will still receive recognition for their Powerful Practices and suggested Opportunities for Improvement but the accountability for their improvement efforts will be focused on their progress in addressing the Improvement Priorities provided by the External Review Team.

3. In the External Review Report, schools or systems will still be provided with ratings on each individual indicator from the five standards, but now the ratings will be displayed as decimals rather than whole numbers. When the AdvancED process was first implemented, External Review Team members were asked to come to consensus on the ratings for each individual indicator and the school or system received a whole number score for each indicator based on the consensus of the group. As a result in the final report, a school or system could possibly get ratings of “2” on multiple indicators. These ratings left the school or system wondering about the context of each rating. Were all of the “2” ratings of equal importance? Which “2” rating should they focus their improvement efforts on first? Was it a “high 2” or a “low 2”?

With the new process, while team members still spend a significant amount of time discussing the evidence provided by the school or system for each indicator, every team member rates each indicator individually based on his/her own perception of and experience with the evidence provided including the observations and interviews. The result of those individual team ratings is a decimal score on each indicator. This provides the school or system with much more context and information around which they can focus their improvement efforts. If a school or system receives a rating of “2.80” on one indicator and “2.18” on another indicator, it becomes much more obvious which indicator deserves the focus as the school or system prioritizes their improvement efforts.

4. Last year AdvancED introduced the Index of Education Quality™ (IEQ™), a formative measure for placing a school on a continuum of performance, pinpointing areas of success as well as areas in need of improvement. The IEQ is based on the three domains listed in #1 above. The Index of Education Quality provides a holistic measure of overall performance. By basing the IEQ score on data aggregated from each AdvancED indicator as well as the diagnostic results from student, parent and staff/teacher surveys, and the Student Performance data, the IEQ provides a benchmark to assess and guide future improvement decisions. Institutions that host a successful External Review receive an IEQ score when they are accredited. The IEQ data from each of the three domains as well as the overall IEQ are displayed on a dashboard created for each school or system on the AdvancED ASSIST website. This dashboard includes drill down capabilities for each domain.

Additionally, in the fall of 2014, AdvancED began providing benchmark data for the indicators in each standard. These benchmark data represent the overall averages across the entire AdvancED Network. The AdvancED Network averages provide an extraordinary opportunity for institutions to understand the context of their ratings on a global scale rather than simply compared to a state, region or country. Benchmark data, when wisely employed, have a unique capacity to help institutions identify and leverage their strengths and areas of improvement to significantly impact student learning.

Davis School District hosted a sixteen member External Review Team from October 5th through the 8th, 2014 to become the first school system in Utah to earn accredited status through AdvancED.
Together, the IEQ and the AdvancED Network benchmark data provide a powerful framework that recognizes and supports the journey of continuous improvement for each school or system.

5. The classroom observation tool used by all AdvancED External Review Teams is called, eleot™. As opposed to a Teacher Evaluation tool, eleot is a Learning Environment observation tool. This observation tool focuses on the most important educational stakeholder: the student. The tool is comprised of thirty items organized in seven environments aligned with the AdvancED Standards and Indicators and based on a review of widely used observation instruments and the most current research on effective learning. Items focus on learner-centric tasks, attitudes, and dispositions that have been found to be conducive to optimal learning.

What is new about eleot is how the ratings can be used by a school or system to provide focus to their school improvement efforts. An AdvancED network score will now be provided for each of the seven learning environment ratings. Much like the IEQ network scores, the eleot network scores provide context and clarity to the learning environment scores provided to the school or system in the External Review Report. Schools and/or systems will now be able to evaluate their performance in each environment based on a comparison to other schools/systems in the AdvancED network. AdvancED has created a structure to keep schools and systems engaged in the process of continuous improvement. Two years after the External Review, the school or system is required to report on the progress they have made on the Improvement Priorities identified by the Review Team. The Accreditation Progress Report, or APR, is an online report that is accessed through the school or system’s dashboard on ASSIST. In completing the APR, the school or system is asked to address the progress they have made on each of the Improvement Priorities. There is a place for a narrative description of the progress and process as well as the capacity to upload documents that provide evidence of the progress. The APR reports will be reviewed by members of the AdvancED State Council to determine if enough progress has been made to re-score indicators. As indicators are re-scored, the IEQ for the institution will change providing an ongoing and dynamic process to measure continuous improvement. AdvancED will notify each school or system when their APR is due, and the Utah Managing Office will provide ongoing support for the process.

Many Thanks
As I have filled the position of Director of the Utah AdvancED Managing Office for the past four months, the thing that has become most evident to me is how dependent I am on quality educators in the state to fulfill the requirements of my job. We have thirty-three highly trained and exceptionally competent lead evaluators who take time out of their high pressure day jobs to provide feedback and consultative support to other schools in the state. They get paid very little for their efforts but their impact for good in schools and districts is tremendous. We also have many volunteer team members in the state who leave busy assignments to participate on review teams as critical friends who provide support and ideas that help schools improve. All of these educators are invaluable to the accreditation process.

We always in need of lead evaluators and
team members. We have 76 schools scheduled for an External Review during the 2014-15 school year. That doesn’t include the seven new schools that we will need to visit twice during the year. It will take between three and four hundred educators to fill all of those teams. If you are interested in becoming a team member, you can email my Administrative Assistant, Bonnie Mortensen, at bmortensen@advanc-ed.org. There are two online training sessions you will need to complete to serve on a team, but they can be done at your leisure at home in your pajamas.

If you have questions about accreditation or the AdvancED process, please let me know. I would love to get to know you and serve you. Thank you for your support and your willingness to be part of this continuous improvement journey in support of improved learning for all of our children in Utah’s schools.

Reference

Mary Kay Kirkland is Director, AdvancED Utah Managing Office. She can be contacted at mkirkland@advanc-ed.org
Accreditation the “Davis Way”

Deborah Sorensen

It appeared to be a herculean task: accreditation of the entire Davis School District with 88 schools, 69,185 students, 3,553 teachers, 4,205 support staff, 211 administrators, and an annual budget of 558 million dollars. No district in Utah had attempted such a complex and monumental evaluation before. Davis, the second largest district in the state, was breaking new ground. Although it was an exciting prospect, as a member of the AdvancED review team, I wasn’t sure how we could accomplish such a huge mission in a short amount of time.

Organization

I discovered, however, while district accreditation is new to Utah, many districts across the nation have done similar systems reviews. AdvancED has excellent tools in place and highly trained personnel to guide the accreditation process for large organizations. Our lead evaluator, Michael Klopfenstein, worked closely with Davis District administrators for months before the external review, organizing all of the logistics and managing information. In collaboration with Mary Kay Kirkland, Director of Utah State Accreditation, he brought together a team of 16 in-state and out-of-state school administrators trained by AdvancED. Several weeks before the visit, Michael contacted each of us personally and provided electronic reports from the district for us to read and study.

Standards

To become accredited, AdvancED required the district (including the central office, elementary, junior high and high schools) to complete an analysis using AdvancED’s five Standards of Quality:

- Purpose and Direction
- Governance and Leadership
- Teaching and Assessing Learning
- Resources and Support for Learning
- Using Results for Continuous Improvement.

The self-assessment process collaboratively engaged all staff members and stakeholders in a study of performance data, instructional practices, and operations of the district. Using AdvancED rubrics, the district assigned a self-rating and provided artifacts and evidence to support their ratings. The reports were voluminous containing several hundred pages of narrative descriptions, graphs, survey results, and statistics from the central office and all 88 schools in the district.

The External Team members were charged to read the reports and begin to assess how the district was performing with respect to AdvancED standards. While that was a challenge for us, we were impressed by the self-study done by the district. It had been done “The Davis Way”, candid, rigorous, and thorough. Their reports allowed us to grasp many of the district’s strengths and areas for improvement before the visit began.

Team Work

The External Team met the evening prior to the visit to share our thoughts and to plan our duties for the next three days. Everyone on the team had studied the accreditation reports and came prepared with reactions and questions for further investigation. Our lead evaluator set a positive tone for the team as we agreed to work collaboratively and respectfully with one other. Our aim was to validate the good work of the district and give them feedback on how they might improve.

The official review began in earnest the next
The team received an introductory presentation from Superintendent Bowles and other district leaders. The majority of the day we spent interviewing the Superintendent, School Board Members, Standards Teams, District Support Staff, Principals, and Parents and Community Partners. Each group explained their role in the accreditation process and answered questions from the team. They shared their commitment to the district’s mission, “Learning First” and openly voiced what they felt were the strengths of the district as well as areas in need of improvement.

Evidence and Observations

The second day the External Team divided into pairs to visit 16 schools representing a range of socio-economic status and performance levels. The teams met with school administrators to discuss their individual school mission, achievement levels, professional development activities, resource allocations, and plans for continuous improvement. Using the eleot™ tool (Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool), team members visited random classrooms to observe instructional methods and student engagement.

The highlight of the day was visiting with students and parents to listen to their opinions of the school and district. Students spoke about their great teachers and their principals who cared about them. They told us why they liked their school and the fun activities they had with friends. Parents spoke about the quality of teaching their students were receiving and the resources available to support their child’s learning. Both groups shared what they viewed as the greatest strengths of their school and also areas in need of improvement.

Collaboration and Camaraderie

Because the team had been separated into subgroups during the day, each evening we returned to our meeting room to collaborate with the entire group. We discussed our findings and shared the insights we had gained from the day’s interactions. We looked for patterns and trends throughout the district that emerged from the data as well as from interviews. We analyzed each standard and indicator at length, seeking evidence to support our assumptions.

Our discussions were focused and intense, yet professional, even friendly. We worked through dinner each night until 10:00 P.M. and a surprising camaraderie developed among us. The group of men and women assembled as strangers a few days prior became united by a common purpose and mutual respect. We gelled into a collegial entity that could listen to divergent points of view, reason together, and come to a consensus that everyone could support. While we evaluated an existing learning organization, we became a learning unit ourselves.

Outcomes

District-wide accreditation is clearly a large undertaking. While it seemed daunting at the outset, the External Team accomplished the task by focusing our efforts and strategically planning our time. We analyzed data, observed classrooms, and formally interviewed 8 board members, 27 district administrators, 109 principals, 161 teachers, 96 support staff, 147 parents, 12 community members, and 250 students--a total of 802 people with whom we spoke face to face. After three long days of observation, reflection, and analysis, the External Team generated an accreditation report which rated the district on all AdvancED standards and indicators. At the conclusion of the visit, Davis District received a verbal report from the AdvancED Team. A comprehensive, written report will be sent at a future date including more specific detail and identifying powerful practices and areas for continuous improvement.

Davis School District is a great organization because they are committed to “Learning First”. They will use the feedback and recommendations from AdvancED continue to grow and get stronger. That’s the “Davis Way”.

Deborah Sorensen is recently retired from Murray High School and is currently a lead evaluator for AdvancED for the state of Utah. She can be reached at deborah.sorensen@hotmail.com
Helping All Students Achieve Their Potential

Bryon S. Nielsen

Introduction

Recently, I had a conversation with a frustrated teacher who complained that he and the grade-level team he is a part of implemented a number of interventions, during second term, designed to ensure their most challenging students would improve their test scores. Unfortunately, comparing second term to first term, there wasn’t any improvement. In frustration he echoed the all too common refrain, “Why are we spending so much time and effort with students who don’t care, who aren’t motivated, and for whom our time seems to be wasted?” He and his team were ready to abandon their interventions because results were not immediate or dramatic.

I’ve had the opportunity to be the principal of three junior high schools, and in each there has been great progress made in terms of getting students to learn more and in getting more students to learn as we’ve worked together to recognize and overcome opportunity gaps. There have also been setbacks and discouragement. Helping students who don’t seem to want help and whose parents are either unable or unwilling to support is disheartening. The resources and programs teachers are provided with are often times less than optimal in terms of meeting the needs of the diverse populations in our classrooms, so teachers must make up for those deficiencies through their own efforts.

My personal experience is not different from what goes on in public schools all over the U. S. where traditions and practices have practically assured that all students would not learn. The culture of schools, the way teachers were taught when they were in school, political forces, and economics, all effect and work to perpetuate opportunity gaps. I’ve found that closing those gaps is less a matter of theory and more a matter of persistence, courage, and hard work. In my opinion, the biggest question educators face is, how do we as school practitioners, help students overcome the effects of opportunity gaps and achieve their potential.

Opportunity Gaps

Some have described the opportunity gap in terms of what they refer to as “The Matthew Effect” (Pete & Fogarty, 2005), which is based on St. Matthew’s report in the New Testament of a principle Jesus taught called the parable of the talents. At the conclusion of the parable, Jesus states, “For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (Matthew 25: 29, King James Version).

Examples are prevalent in the world of sports, in the arts, and in education. A child who has natural athletic ability is quickly noticed by coaches who give him more playing time, more attention during practices, and place him on more competitive teams with other more talented players. While your average athlete may compete on one team, more talented players may be on as many as three at a time, tripling their practice and playing time.

In schools, teachers quickly notice those who appear to have the most aptitude and who are the most ready for school. They are more inclined to invest their time and energy in students who hold the most promise. Those students are called on more often to read, to answer questions, and to help other students.

The Matthew effect creates funding gaps between neighborhoods, school districts, and even states. For example, in the U. S., because our schools are funded by local property taxes, we spend less on our highest-poverty and highest-minority. These funding gaps serve to perpetuate
The biggest question educators face is, how do we as school practitioners, help students overcome the effects of opportunity gaps and achieve their potential.

In schools, teachers quickly notice those who appear to have the most aptitude and who are the most ready for school. They are more inclined to invest their time and energy in students who hold the most promise.

Children from poverty-stricken homes have less interaction with their parents and have access to fewer books and educational toys, which leads to hindered development of basic skills like counting, letter identification, and sorting, and other cognitive abilities that are the foundation for successful learning experiences in the future. There is a big difference in vocabulary attainment between children of poverty and children from professional families. For example, the average child on welfare hears about 616 words per hour, which is about one-third that of a child from a household with professional parents (about 2,153 words per hour). A five-year old child from a middle class home will know four times as many words as a five-year old from a low-income family (Hart & Risley, 2003).

The factors that are absent in the low-income environment--books, hearing a rich vocabulary, modeling of learning skills, and encouragement-are those that nurture both effective learning and academic achievement. In professional homes, children hear encouragement six times as often as discouragement; in low socioeconomic status (SES) families, the ratio is two to one. Children from low SES homes score lower on vocabulary and communication skills measures, number knowledge, use of symbols, cooperative play, and concentration tasks than children from homes with higher incomes. As a result, children from poverty-stricken homes may be as much as two years behind in their learning compared to their peers of the same age who come from average or higher income households (McKinsey and Company, 2009; Pellino, 2007).

Socioeconomic status impacts children’s educational achievement from elementary through high school, and even into post-secondary schooling. Low SES students are at higher risk of failure and dropping out of school (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 2007). Children who grow up in middle to upper middle class homes have a 50% chance of earning a bachelor’s degree by the time they are 24, whereas children raised in low income families have only a 6% chance (Brooks, 2005).
the field they were trained in, are inexperienced, or who do not meet their state’s certification standards (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2008).

Personal Experience

As an administrator, I’ve made it a goal to ensure all students have equal access to the best teachers and to programs and opportunities for additional help and services. In the process I’ve made both lifelong friends and enemies. The very culture of schools often works against those who fit in the oppressed category. A common theme among teachers is that the best they can do is help those who want help. They seem to ignore the fact that many low-income students come to school deficient in social capital and from situations foreign to the expectations of the school community. Furthermore, instead of using the cultural experience and knowledge kids come with for their benefit, it is used against them.

Three years ago, I was reassigned to a school with a large upper-class population and a mid-range population of low-income students. After-school tutoring for math and English were poorly attended, even though many low-income students were failing those classes; it seemed the only students who sought tutoring were those in honors classes. Several teachers earned extra income tutoring after school, so when I suggested we find a way to provide tutoring programs during the school day, I was met with stiff resistance. I was told that if those kids wanted to learn, they would find a way to participate after school. After much discussion and deliberation, we finally made the decision that we would require students who are failing to meet with their teachers for extra help during the regular school day. This required deviating from the traditional schedule by shortening each period by five minutes to create another period of thirty-five minutes for tutoring to happen. While there are still teachers who haven’t caught the vision, only one has actually left the school because of that decision. Many others seem to be buying into the new paradigm of equal access and high expectations for all students.

Beliefs and Attitudes

Although there may be a few exceptions, based on my experience in education, it is fair to say most teachers care deeply about ensuring their students learn. Most take it personally when their students fail; they work very hard to avoid giving a student a failing grade. But their ability to make a difference with every student begins with their own attitudes and beliefs about their own capacity.

If we want all students to achieve at high levels, teachers must believe in their own ability to raise the level of learning for each individual student. Beliefs and customs that are not focused on learning must give way to attitudes that reflect a strong belief that all students can learn at high levels, and teachers must hold high expectations for all students, not only those few deemed capable. Collectively, the entire faculty needs to have an equally strong group belief in their capacity to reach all students. A culture of beliefs, attitudes, and values in which teachers recognize that the central purpose of school is learning for all and they take responsibility for and focus on student learning, will lead the school to effective practice (DuFour, 1998). That effective practice will include providing quality teaching and a strong curriculum for all students, extra time and support during the regular school day for students who need it, connecting what students are learning to what they already know or have experienced, using instructional strategies that apply to students’ interests and abilities, engaging their parents, and providing frequent, ongoing assessment aligned with curriculum and instruction.

Ameliorating the negative effects of opportunity gaps in our schools is not impossible, but it requires first a change in culture, attitudes, and beliefs, followed by a lot of hard work implementing effective practices.
References


Bryon Nielsen is principal of Fairfield Junior High in Davis County School District. He can be contacted at bnielsen@dsdmail.net.
The Greatest Impact?
Keeping It Simple!

Dr. David McKay Boren

Rather than doing a mediocre job implementing numerous programs and initiatives or jumping on every passing bandwagon, leaders would be wise to find those few behaviors that will have the greatest impact.

When In-N-Out Burger first opened in Northern Utah, it was not uncommon for the drive-through line to extend further than a football field. While some were incredulous that a restaurant with only a few menu items could survive, it was precisely because of the simple menu that many diners chose In-N-Out. Psychologist Barry Schwartz describes this phenomenon in his 2004 book, The Paradox of Choice. He explains that while we often assume that more choice is better, too many options can actually be exhausting to the psyche before, during, and after making a choice. Faced with too many good options, we not only struggle to choose, but then we often second guess the wisdom of our choice. When choice is limited, we can appropriately focus our time, energy, and other resources on those few choices.

Through his analysis, Hattie was able to rank-order factors by their level of influence on student learning. He conducted a thorough meta-analysis that considered over 50,000 educational studies and was able to identify the approximate impact of 150 factors on student learning. Through his analysis, Hattie was able to rank-order factors by their level of influence on student learning. He found that 0.40 was the average effect size of the factors studied, and thus designated 0.40 as the hinge point for designating a factor as more or less influential.

It is interesting to note that many of the things we spend a lot of energy trying to implement or debate aren’t even close to the top of Hattie’s list, nor are they even above the average effect size of 0.40. In fact, “many of the most debated issues are the ones with the least effects. It is a powerful question to ask why such issues as class size, tracking, retention…, school choice, summer schools, and school uniforms command such heated discussion and strong claims. Such cosmetic or ‘coat of paint’ reforms are too common” (Hattie, 2009, p. 33). Table 1 lists the influence of a few of these hot-topic items that have very little influence on student learning.
Let’s examine Hattie’s top ten influences to find out (see Table 1). Drum roll please…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Computer-Assisted Instruction</td>
<td>.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Standardized Test Preparation</td>
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<td>106</td>
<td>Summer School</td>
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<td>113</td>
<td>Class Size</td>
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<td>116</td>
<td>Extra-Curricular Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Out-of-School Curricular Experiences</td>
<td>.09</td>
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I am not suggesting that these factors are unimportant or that they should not be part of our schools. While their effect size is below average, the effect is still in a positive direction, meaning they can each contribute to overall student learning to some degree. What I am suggesting is that we would do well to spend the bulk of our time, energy, and resources on those few vital behaviors that have the greatest impact on student learning.

W. Edwards Deming wisely observed: “It is not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, and THEN do your best (as cited in Patterson et. al, 2008, p. 23). So what are the factors that have the greatest impact on student learning? Let’s examine Hattie’s top ten influences to find out (see Table 2). Drum roll please…”

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-Reported Grades/Student Expectations</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Piagetian Programs</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formative Evaluation</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher Credibility</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Commonly debated educational factors of minimal influence (see Hattie, 2012)

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That’s it? Where’s the glitz, the flash, the magic? Admittedly, this is a very simple list. As I review this list, a few vital behaviors emerge:

• Clarify Objectives – Students, teachers, and teams need to have a crystal clear understanding about the desired learning objectives and how those objectives will best be met.

• Provide Feedback – Students, teachers, and teams all need timely and specific feedback about their progress toward meeting the learning objectives.

• Intervene – Students, teachers, and teams all need timely and targeted support when objectives have not been met or have already been met.

One thing I find uncanny about these three vital behaviors is their striking similarity to the four-essential questions of professional learning communities promoted by DuFour and colleagues (2008). It is fascinating that though these researchers worked very independently of each other over many years, they identified the same basic behaviors as the most impactful on student
learning. If research has shown over and over again that these few vital behaviors have the greatest impact on student learning, should they not feature as the main courses on our school’s menu? Do they? Are we consistently focusing on these few vital behaviors or do we allow distractors to veer us off course? How do we use professional development days, team collaboration time, and informal conversations throughout the school day? We must follow the counsel given by Stephen Covey: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing” (1994, p. 13).

During my second year as principal I began to feel somewhat frustrated that we didn’t seem to be making progress on any of the many programs we had going. I began to feel a little resentful towards my teachers’ apparent lack of enthusiasm for these amazing programs that were designed to help them. I realized that we had too many items on our school’s menu. I was exhausting my teachers with too much choice (Schwartz, 2004). They were working hard to meet the minimum standard of the many things I was asking of them, but they didn’t have the time, energy, or resources to really focus on and excel at the most important things. In hope of a quick fix, I had chosen some things that were attractive up front, but that would have very little long-term impact (see Fullan, 2014).

From that point forward we cut out most of the fluff, and put Hattie’s vital behaviors and the principles of PLCs as the main focus of everything we did as a school. In essence, we simplified our very complex menu to a more simplified “In-N-Out Burger style” menu. It provided continuity to our professional development days, team meetings, and daily actions. With only a few items on our menu, my teachers and I never had to wonder what the focus would be for the next professional day or faculty meeting. We sought to keep the main thing the main thing and we finally started to see some progress. Keeping it simple had the greatest impact on our school.

References

David McKay Boren, PhD, is Director of School Leadership Program at Brigham Young University. He can be reached at david_boren@byu.edu. He has been a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in the Alpine School District.
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one of the top initiatives educators are working to implement across the country. The work of the PLC can be multifaceted, and there are broad interpretations of the work approached through the process. According to Louis (2006) Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) shift the focus of school reform from restructuring to reculturing. Tied to school improvement, a PLC is designed to be an ongoing cycle that works to foster teacher leadership and improved student achievement through sustained growth. There is no one universal definition of a PLC, but there is consensus amongst leaders about the overarching goals. The goals are described by ASCD (2014) as follows: 1) ensuring students learn, 2) building a culture of collaboration, and 3) placing a focus on results. While the goals are similar across all districts, the paths that PLC’s take on the way to the end result are varied.

Many places around the country are taking the work of the PLC a step further through the practice of lesson study. Lesson study truly has the potential to transform the culture of a school. Lesson study is a form of long-term professional development brought to the United States from Japan. It is a natural extension of the work of the PLC. It is a form of collaborative planning and teaching that is driven by research and student data. Lesson study truly has the potential to transform the culture of a school.

Many districts have experienced the power of lesson study. In the United States, a modified version of lesson study is practiced, in which the focus moved from the teacher’s delivery to the student response. Teachers work as collaborative groups to plan a lesson. They then identify a teacher on the team to present the lesson to a class. While the lesson is being taught, the remaining teachers on the team observe. The difference between US and Japanese lesson study is that the observers (the research team) are not watching the teacher, as would be the case in a model lesson, but instead are observing the students, carefully noting their interaction and level of engagement. After the research lesson, the group comes together to analyze the data collected, and modify the lesson and strategies implemented based on the student reaction to those strategies. This process is very powerful because it allows teachers to do so much more than possible by bringing student work samples back to the PLC. The teachers are able to observe students and
their work as it is being created, as silent as a fly on the wall, listening to the collaboration and communication between students as the work is being created. Following the data collection in the research lesson, the team debriefs from the experience. The discussion that ensues is relevant and enlightening. Teachers are able to see and analyze the productive struggle that students undergo at each level of engagement in the lesson. This allows for deep reflection of the deliberate strategies that were carefully designed into the lesson. Teachers are able to understand the impact of their questioning and modeling and see the power of deliberate practice.

But the work of lesson study has extended far beyond observing how students interact with a lesson. Districts around the country are utilizing the process to unpack initiatives and translate them into what really matters: How does this increase student achievement?

The Ethel McKnight Elementary School is a diverse school community in East Windsor, New Jersey. Its principal, Sylvia Zircher was eager to enhance and improve the quality of professional development through the incorporation of teacher-directed PLCs. A new state mandated system for teacher evaluation had teachers feeling anxious and doubting their own abilities and skills. Ms. Zircher turned to lesson study for an approach that is founded in research and targets specific instructional practices, but in a comfortable and non-evaluative way. She began by recruiting a successful and effective team, knowing that they would be eager to take this new journey together.

Soon one team’s success led to two others and then an additional team each consecutive year since. The teams researched topics related to student engagement, teacher talk verses student talk, effective partner shares, and levels of questioning. Every time a team was developed and a research topic was explored, PLCs became more successful. Most importantly, the concept of co-planning lessons, visiting each other’s classrooms, and electing research topics to study together, became the norm. Lesson study is now used as the basis of their teacher professional development plan.

One such area is the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems that are often based around an instructional framework. In one Florida district, teachers were extremely resistant to the introduction of the Danielson framework as a toll to be used in observations and walk-throughs. The pushback was strong from both teachers and administrators who were tasked with the bringing the instrument to life in their schools. Through the work of the PLC, lessons were viewed through the scope of the framework, with connections being made to the points of observation. Slowly, teachers saw that the framework was not a punitive tool, but rather, an expose of excellence! They found that by taking a deep look at the framework, point by point, and deliberately aligning instruction, they were able to embrace the framework, and improve student achievement. Through the process of lesson study, a safe environment was created where teachers could experiment with aspects of the framework, and see what it looks like in the classroom. With the implementation of various frameworks, there has been a natural shift toward a focus on content.

The adoption of new standards is demanding shifts in content and pedagogy. As schools embrace new standards and the accompanying instructional shifts, lesson study has proven invaluable in allowing teachers to see the process in action and the depth that the shifts in pedagogy require. In the area of mathematics, several California districts are unpacking the process standards through the lens of the content standards. Leaders realized that initial implementation of the process standards was somewhat shallow and that teacher content knowledge was not deep enough to allow for a true transformation to a problem-solving environment. In some cases, the lack of depth in content knowledge was allowing for student misconceptions in mathematical concepts to go unchallenged. There were even cases where correct student thinking was dismissed as wrong because the teacher did not recognize the strategy a student was employing as valid. When research lessons were conducted, the teacher-teams observing the lesson were able to hear and capture the discussion and critical thinking students
Most importantly, the concept of electing research topics to study together, co-planning lessons, and visiting each other’s classrooms became the norm.

When research lessons were conducted, the teacher-teams observing the lesson were able to hear and capture the discussion and critical thinking students employed as they worked through solving difficult problems.

shifts required.

One Wisconsin district has taken this approach to disciplinary literacy in content classes that are challenging for implementing a balanced approach to literacy. In Career and Technical Education programs, PLC’s are taking a step back and meticulously uncovering and redesigning their understanding of text. The research team, as well as the literacy coaches leading the lesson study came to the realization that the blueprint needed to be respected as an opportunity for students to interact with meaningful, complex text that is connected to career applications.

Districts have turned to lesson study when faced with deep challenges in student achievement. One Illinois school district outside of Chicago reached this position when, based on high-stakes test scores, 10 of the district’s 40 elementary schools fell into the category of federal restructuring. Once placed into Federal Restructuring status, the school district was faced with the choice of reopening the schools as public charter schools, replacing all or most of the staff at each school, including the principal, contracting with an outside organization to run the schools, or implementing the program that was recommended by the assistant superintendent. They knew that in effective schools, teachers have dedicated time to work with each other, to look at data, look at their students’ work samples, reflect with each other on their practice, and give each other feedback. The body of research on effective schools, and the need to make a drastic change, well beyond the impact that would come from trying a new intervention, or a supplemental program. The change needed had to impact directly at the teacher level. It also needed to impact every teacher at every school, as well as meet the intent of the federal restructuring requirements. The district did not want to let the teachers and administrators go at these ten schools, and they knew that there were a lot of good and powerful things going on. The overarching goal was to have the greatest impact on teacher growth and student achievement, while having the least detrimental effect on staff. Common planning for professional learning communities to meet was put in place, and instructional coaches were trained in lesson study facilitation. The newly trained facilitators were dispatched to the schools to work with the grade level teams. The district went full scale to implement the program, which impacted every grade level at each of the ten schools. Every teacher was involved. The results were extremely positive, with many of the schools making well over a year’s gains.

While academics are critical, it is important to address the needs of the whole child. As trends in violent student behaviors increase, districts around the nation understand the importance of social/emotional learning and are using the process of lesson study to look at the student culture that is present in the school. While using lesson study to uncover and teach positive student interactions, every lesson implemented had a social focus that was deliberately set. When data was analyzed, the teachers realized that the lack of the basic structure for collaboration and behavioral expectations were a detriment to the process of instruction. Without a solid classroom culture, the content did not matter. In the collaborative
classroom, with a focus on SEL, on the other hand, student outcomes were higher, and incidents of behavior referrals were reduced.

Further, in the arena of the individual student, one district has utilized the lesson study process to gather observational data based for the purpose of Response to Intervention (RtI), as well as determining the most appropriate placement for students with exceptionalities. By using this process, multiple adults in the room taking anecdotal data from multiple student groups the team is able to determine and recommend the most suitable placement. Lesson study tools can also be used to observe individual students.

Lesson study—when framed and executed in the context of the professional learning community, the planning that teachers do, and the work they explore—comes to life through they eyes of the students. Professional learning becomes directly connected to the classroom, and student engagement is understood. Teachers see, first hand, how scaffolds play out, when they have set the bar too low or too high. The take-aways have been concrete, and classroom practices are shifting as a result of the strategies researched.

References

Kathleen Schofield is Curriculum Specialist in Clay County School District in Florida. She is also a consultant with Developmental Studies Center, San Francisco, Ca. Her work focuses around lesson study, and she is currently developing a series on lesson study. She can be reached at kmschofield@oneclay.net.

Sylvia Zircher is Principal at Ethel McKnight Elementary School. She can be contacted at szircher@ewrsd.k12.nj.us

Districts around the nation understand the importance of social/emotional learning and are using the process of lesson study to look at the student culture that is present in the school.
Open Entry Open Exit Online Courses: The Positives, the Problems, and the Pedagogy

By Rick Anthony

For the most part, OEOE options have been leveraged for remediation purposes. However, with technology advancing and the ease of delivery through the internet, online OEOE options are becoming more and more accessible.

For purposes of clarity, it is important to note that “online learning” can be many things, running the gamut from open entry/open exit to blending of online and face to face to even flipping the direct instruction so that it is done outside of class-time. In this article, I am specifically addressing open entry/open exit or asynchronous online learning.

Additionally, I understand there are many theories of learning and many different teaching methodologies. I am most familiar with the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) instructional method. My perspective and familiarity with GRR is the lens I am looking through in this article. It is relevant because GRR is a model that is effective, widely used, and accepted.

Open entry open exit (OEOE) options for learning are not new. They have always been around for years in programs like Independent Study, Homebound and Hospital, Youth in Custody, Alternative Education, and Adult Education. They are used because students are unable meet at a traditional time or place. They are not able to work through material with a group as a cohort. Where we have seen these options come closest to mainstream secondary school is through credit recovery. For the most part, OEOE options have been leveraged for remediation purposes. However, with technology advancing and the ease of delivery through the internet, online OEOE options are becoming more and more accessible. We are now seeing online OEOE being used for enrichment purposes more than ever before. The access, visibility, and hype of online delivery has now made OEOE more of an option and choice for all students. This has resulted in a growing use of OEOE online to get ahead. New roads are being traveled using OEOE online in place of or in addition to traditional face to face classroom learning.

I believe OEOE learning has always had its flaws. Online OEOE with the use of technology has made it better than ever before, but inherently in being OEOE it has limitations. I use the merits of the GRR method to illustrate later in the article. OEOE has been used in non-mainstream programs for years but due to the nature of these programs (very limited options), its limitations are accepted. When OEOE is added as a choice or as another option to students in place of or in addition to face to face cohort instruction, the limitations must be acknowledged.

We know there are limitations to OEOE learning. It wasn’t something I could articulate until I looked at it through the lens of the GRR model. Simply put, the GRR model is a framework with three components: Direct instruction (teacher does), guided practice (we do collaboratively) and independent practice (student does independently). Guided practice where students work together and/or with the teacher collaboratively is arguably the most powerful part
of learning. Without a group meeting to work together (guided practice), it only leaves direct instruction and independent practice. In OEOE online courses, technology has made the direct instruction more than just reading a document. Using technology we can now watch, listen, etc. Also, technology has made independent practice more engaging than filling out a worksheet. Gamification alone has made independent practice online much more engaging. Still, the technology isn’t far enough to take asynchronous time of participation and make it synchronous, which means opportunities for guided practice suffer, at least currently.

We often hear “online learning isn’t for everyone”. What does that mean?!!! When I think of guided practice it clarifies what that means. OEOE isn’t for everyone. Using online to always mean OEOE is unfair. In its nature, OEOE doesn’t allow for collaborative guided practice. What should be said is open entry open exit learning isn’t for everyone. The non-mainstream programs mentioned above have known that for years. In many ways it is particularly acute because the students they are working with in these programs arguably need guided practice more than anyone.

OEOE (online or not) really is for students who learn best from direct instruction or independent practice. Over the last couple of years, we are seeing more and more discussion around blended learning and all its forms. To me, blended learning has the most potential to provide more options and choice for student learning whether it is for remediation or enrichment. As I watch the latest educational technology buzz, I watch for technologies that allow for new and engaging ways to enhance the “we do collaboratively” part of learning.

Blended learning is not as easy, convenient, and in all fairness, not as developed as the current OEOE options, and due to these things, it is not as popular. However, I have to think we are on the right track and as advancements allow technology to enhance guided practice we will see more and more merit to online learning.

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Rick Anthony is Principal Granite Connection High school and Director of Granite Peaks Lifelong Learning in Granite School District. He can be reached at rranthony@graniteschools.org.
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