

BUILDING A CULTURE OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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An Instructional Culture

- “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”
Stephen R. Covey
- The main thing is student learning and instructional leaders at all levels keep that as the focus.
- It feels different
- Everyone--staff, teachers, administrators--are focused on instruction
- Different job roles have different responsibilities

Instructional Leader is...

An instructional leader is one who creates

- A climate that puts learning first for students and adults
- Contagious enthusiasm and excitement about learning
- A climate free of distracters,
- Clear priorities, and
- High expectations for students and teachers.
 - John Hattie in *Visible Learning* p. 83

Role Responsibilities

- Superintendents
 - Creates climate where in all departments—decisions made as to how they affect student learning—business, transportation, food service.
 - Cabinet meetings spend the most time on learning issues
 - Know what issues are current in curriculum area re: standards, assessment, Common Core Standards, etc.
 - Leadership team meetings are professional development around learning
 - Attend professional development—and stay the whole time —, not just attend athletic/activities

- Focus of strategic plan--about learning
- Budget discussions revolve around how \$\$ affect students' learning, not adult comfort
- Transportation—how busing facilitates more time in the classroom, not convenience of adults
- Facilities planning—what's best for kids, not what's best for adults
- Inquire often and deeply about what learning is occurring

- Principals

- Are intellectually curious
- Lead the way in providing ideas and materials about instruction and curriculum
- Are part of the training for new curricular adoptions
- Are conversant in understanding and interpreting data
- Are intellectual partners with staff, not just passive attendees at meetings
- Teacher observations center around best practice lesson design, assessment practices, and use of data

- Curriculum leaders
 - Knowledgeable and current about what is happening in buildings and with researchers
 - Use common sense (albeit it is rare, not common) to take what you learn and infuse it into the system—not import wholesale
 - Avoid bandwagons
 - Curriculum documents are written from the perspective of what students must know and do, NOT what the teacher must do
 - Take what works and adapt it; don't throw out wholesale

- Teachers
 - Responsible to know and use best practice instructional strategies
 - Feel responsible to ensure that ALL students learn
 - Know that textbooks are NOT the curriculum;
 - Curriculum is based on the MN academic standards
 - Know your students and create learning targets
 - Then design assessments. How will you know if students know ?
 - Then choose materials to make it happen
 - Understand power of formative assessment
 - Develop toolbox of different strategies to teach and reteach
 - Love learning and model enthusiasm

Scholars not Clients

- Dr. Michael Hartoonian, U of M
- Students are scholars, not clients
- Scholars and teachers have reciprocal, not dependent, relationship

like a teacher [instructional leader] who gives you something to take home to think about besides homework. ~Lily Tomlin as "Edith Ann

How is your district focused on instruction?

Ask yourself--

- Where do I see evidence of this vision?
- How do I promote this vision?

How do you know if you are an instructional leader?

- Are your conversations focused on how the topic can improve student learning?
- Do you guide discussions back to this primary focus?
- Do you say no to distracters?
- Do you see evidence on the walls, in the newspaper, in classrooms that students are first?
- Do you stay current in best practice?

STOP...

- Admiring the problem. Have same amount of time and money is always an issue.
 - Don't allow conversations to get sidetracked.
- Being stuck. If you don't like it , change it.
- Doing something because it's been done before. If you've done something once, it is not a tradition.
- Using schedules as a weapon; they are a tool

- Complaining about the lack of time. Same amount of time. Choose to spend your time on things that matter and not spend it on distractions.
- “Covering”. It’s about learning, not coverage. If teachers are speaking and students are not learning, then teachers are merely presenting.
- Turning students off to learning. All students want to learn. Somewhere, sometime, somehow we have taken that away from some. **PUT IT BACK!**

- We have one of the most important jobs in the world. Treat it as such. It is an honor to do something that makes such a difference.
- *Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in awhile, or the light won't come in. ~Alan Alda*

START...

- The Grand Canyon started with one drop of water.
- Build on strengths:
 - Professional development to promote what is already occurring

Creating a culture

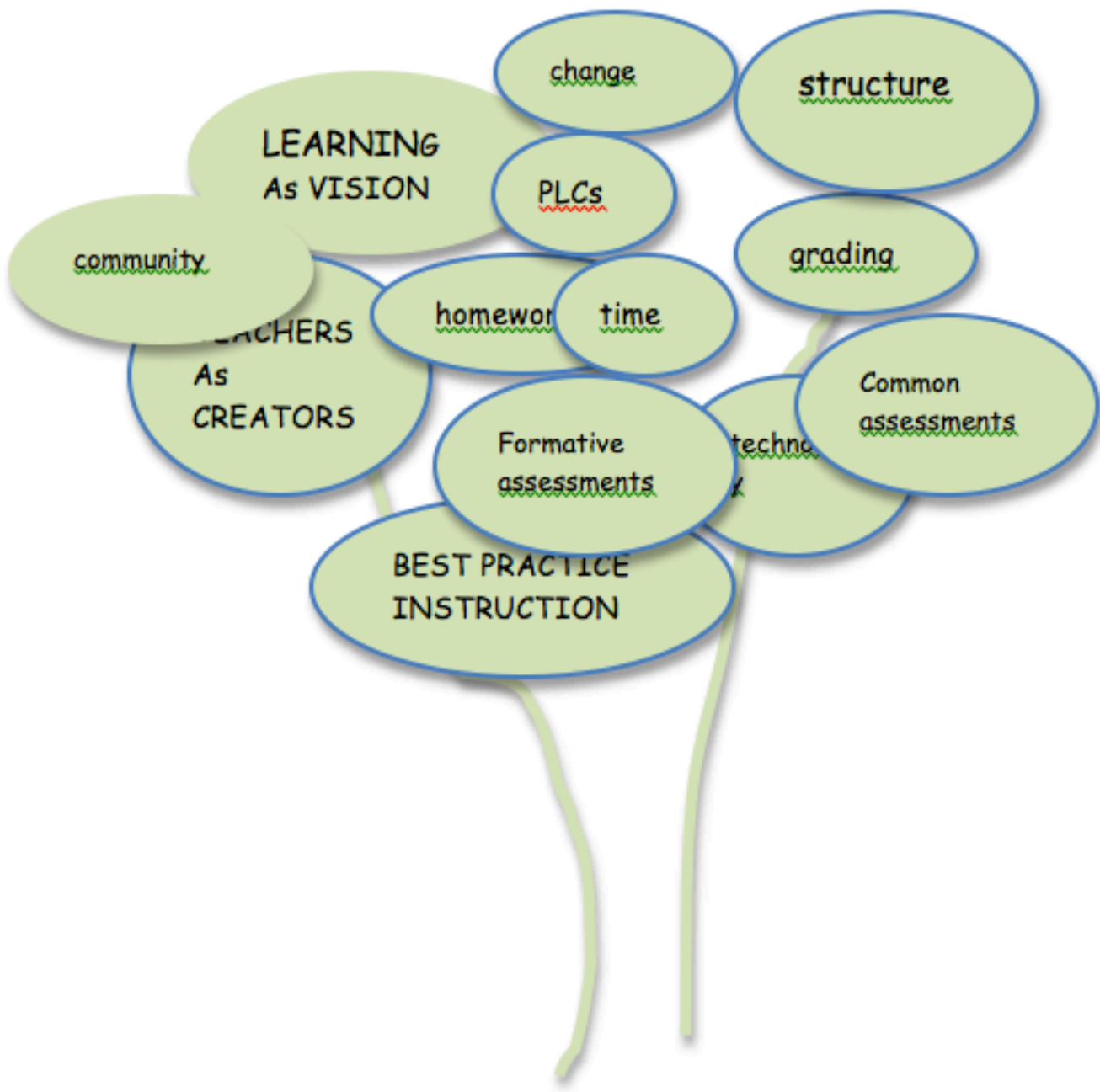
- It's an attitude, a belief that our prime focus == student learning
- Leaders from all different job descriptions have a role to play
- Curriculum leaders can start by providing professional development around the best practice that we know works:
 - Lesson design
 - Authentic literacy
 - Direct instruction
 - Interactive lecture
 - Well designed and aligned assessments

- Communication—develop teams in crucial areas to converse about the work
 - E.g. leadership teams about student work
 - Curriculum teams to create 21st century instruction
 - Devote time at each Board meeting to instruction and learning
 - Say what you are going to do, do it, and then tell everyone what you did.

- Become informed
- Read
- Attend STRONG professional development—national experts such as Marzano, Hattie, Wiliam etc. Forget 3 day wonders
- Develop local networks to build on each other's strengths “No man [or woman] is an island.”

- Process versus recipe
- No recipe but an attitude
- It's complex change- a fractal

- Personal responsibility to be engaged and informed
- Understanding that change occurs slowly.
- Start with ONE thing.



Additional Reading

- Professional Capital Michael Full
- Visible Learning John Hattie
- Visible Learning for Teachers John Hattie

Ask Yourself

- Am I an instructional leader?
- Is student learning purpose of all discussions?
- Do we give priority to student learning at Board meetings, Cabinet, etc.
- Do I know what is current best practice?
- Do I know current educational issues?
- Am I supporting those who excel in making learning happen?
- Does everyone know that learning is our prime focus?

Thanks!

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