Inquiry-Based Instructional Leadership Final Project

Joel Besancon, Rosey Perry, and Kristin Stambaugh
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Purpose

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The purpose of this project is to evaluate the school on how well all stakeholders understand their role in relation to student learning and experiences. The focus for this project is on the understanding of learning experiences, instructional challenges, and professional development.

Supervisor/Team Members & Responsibilities

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Joel Besancon, Roseanna Perry, and Kristin Stambaugh- Creators and presenters: Shared all sections and roles with the exception of data gathering which fell primarily on Joel seeing as his school was being studied

Christine Miller- Administrator: Provided guidelines for gathering and presenting information

Reflect on the influence of the learning excursions in understanding what it means to improve the instructional leadership within your school/district as well as building bridges among the school, families, and community. Use at least two scholarly references to support claims.

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- ❏ All of the school leaders we visited mentioned two key points that crossed school type and school purpose: being student centered and adapting to what the staff and students need. In *Creating Standards-Based Integrated Curriculum* Susan M. Drake claims that instruction requires continuous adjustment and alignment to standards (Drake, 2012).

- ❏ Each leader argues that this adjustment should be done with both staff and students regularly. Lindahl presents the argument that a need for reformation of culture, empowerment, and climate in schools is required to encourage student centric schooling.

- ❏ Each school again presents this in different manners due to their different approaches to learning in different cultures. By adjusting to the culture you teach you allow for a deeper connection with staff and students (Lindahl, 2011).

Instructional Strengths

- ❏ Curriculum is aligned with Common Core standards and state assessments (Drake, 2012).
- ❏ Professional development activities are designed to boost staff understanding of enriched lessons that cross cultural and economical boundaries (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).
- ❏ Students learning styles are considered in the development of all lesson plans (Downey, Steffy, Poston, Jr., & English, 2009).

Instructional Challenges

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Cross cultural alignment within the elementary school with limited resources for cross cultural experiences in a predominantly caucasian district.

- ❏ This is seen in research presented by Ponferrada and Carrasco. They suggest that school created climate and culture are often the reasoning for violence and opposition to develop between students. If the culture affects students relationships as stated, then we as school staff need to empower staff to create a more positive cross cultural climate in which students' learning is centered on multiple experiences and beliefs (Ponferrada & Carrasco, 2010).
- ❏ The idea of cross cultural, or well rounded, learning is seen in Susan M. Drake's research regarding teaching the "being" to a child. "Being" is described as how we interact with the world around us and how we internalize the ideas taught to us.

How do you understand the relevance of historical and community contexts in creating optimal student learning opportunities.

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- ❏ Historical and community contexts directly impact how a student learns and what prior knowledge they have on specialized topics.
- ❏ This can dictate what teachers are able to teach easily or with difficulty.
- ❏ This can affect what students are willing, excited, and/or resistant to learn thus dictating what can be taught.

How do children understand their learning experiences?

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Children understand their learning experiences according to what the teacher or parents expose them to. They also learn through their own life experiences. Students need to be able to form a personal connection to their learning in order to make the learning meaningful. It is the obligation of the teacher to make sure that an appropriate amount of content is presented to the students in order for them to gain the knowledge needed to master the content and be able to communicate that knowledge appropriately.

How do families understand their child/children's learning experiences?

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Families have limited understanding of their child's learning experiences. Unfortunately, most are only concerned with the grades their child receives which is only administered at the end of the nine weeks. Parents and families do not understand that constant monitoring of student achievement is needed to maximize student success. The school does offer before school help along with family math and reading night(s).

How do teachers understand student learning?

Teachers understand student learning by the individual progress students make throughout the year, demonstrating knowledge on classroom assessments, and achievement on state assessments. Teachers often analyze data when comprehending student learning. Teachers use standard-based formative and summative assessments and progress monitor students using Star assessments for reading and math at three points throughout the year (Fall, Winter, and Spring).

How do school leaders understand student learning?

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School leaders understand student learning by reviewing state achievement test data in addition to diagnostic assessments and growth reports generated by Star. Rarely do school leaders devote the time to monitor teacher lesson plans, curriculum maps, and student daily learning. Responsibility is put on individual teachers within the school district as grades 3-12 are departmentalized and teachers have little opportunity to collaborate horizontally.

How do faculty understand the instructional challenge for this inquiry-based project?

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Faculty demonstrated little understanding of the instructional challenge of this project due to an "old school" style of teaching and their inability to recognize the changing demographics of the school district. The faculty have limited 21st Century skills that are needed to teach students and the knowledge exhibited is basic. They understand that each standard needs to be differentiated and curriculum resources need to be utilized. There is also a slight parent opposition when introducing a new way of thinking and teachers need to be trained to handle such situations.

How do faculty understand the role of professional development in deepening and broadening their ways of knowing how to improve student learning?

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Professional development is often unified for teachers in grades K-12 regardless of the content taught. Recently, the school district has employed EdFocus to provide support in unit planning and questioning across all contents and grade levels. Each teacher is responsible for mapping their curriculum and organizing their curriculum resources into a specific "form" provided by EdFocus. Several more experienced teachers have stated that their curriculum resources are organized differently, yet still included all items required to complete EdFocus' format. They are reluctant to engage in the unit planning.

How do faculty understand the role of mentoring in deepening and broadening their ways of knowing how to improve student learning?

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The faculty has a high mobility rate, which limits their ability to be trained and to understand their role of mentoring new teachers to be able to improve student learning. Those faculty members who have stayed, are not open to mentoring or have the "it's my way or no way" mentality. Many new teachers to the district have worked collaboratively to improve student learning despite the lack of mentoring provided by veteran teachers.

How do school leaders understand the instructional challenge for this inquiry-based project?

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There was not much understanding of the instructional challenge or a need to adjust instruction to meet the challenge. There was some hesitation due to school leaders not being familiar with what is required to remedy the situation. On a positive note, school leaders are sensitive and aware that inquiry based-projects are needed to improve student learning, however, it is not a high priority due to funding and time necessary to implement solutions.

How do school leaders understand their role in creating and implementing professional development to deepen and broaden ways of knowing to improve student learning.

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School leaders understand the importance of professional development and that it needs to be differentiated to meet the needs of all staff members in the district. However, due to budgets, it is difficult for them to be able to differentiate professional development, yet intimidating at the same time because some staff are reluctant to change. If PD is differentiated, then school leaders need to be able to monitor the progress of teachers, especially those who are resisting change.

What are strategies school leaders implemented to address the instructional challenge chosen for this project? What works? How do we know this? What has not worked? How do we know this?

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School leaders are going to provide professional development time during 2 hour early releases and staff meetings to promote culturally responsive teaching practices. These short professional development sessions will hopefully spark conversation among grade level and content area teams. Additional time may be devoted to the revision of curriculum maps and lesson planning to include culturally diverse resources into the curriculum.

School leaders will monitor staff engagement during these sessions and will adjust the focus as needed.

Reflect on how you understand the instructional challenge for this inquiry-based project after engaging in dialogue/collecting data from school community members.

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School community members don't feel it's an issue and therefore won't support it. Most teachers are solely focused on student achievement and grades. It will require a larger shift in our student population and curriculum for teachers to accept the need to infuse cultural differences into their curriculum resources and instruction.

To what extent is the school/district's vision and mission aligned with improving student learning?

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Vision: Preparing students for life through excellence in education.

Mission: Educate everyone, everyday.

In order to align the vision and mission with improving student learning, stakeholders must believe that all students can learn and that resources used to educate students must be used responsibly. They must also collaborate to define what excellence in education looks like when implementing instructional practices to give all students the opportunity to learn every day.

To what extent is the school/district's policies and practices aligned with improving student learning in comparison to the instructional leaders you met in the field?

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Policies and practices are being distributed to staff as they are being revised and clarified. Teachers are not given the opportunity to be involved in this process as it is primarily Board and Superintendent driven.

The instructional leaders we met in the field tend to promote a way for staff to communicate. The leaders could then use that information to dictate common practices that aligned with the policies of the district.

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- ❏ Solution #1:
    - ❏ Create opportunities to engage in culturally diverse activities with nearby school districts. This will create an experience in which staff can have open dialog on improving their cross cultural lessons in an attempt to address student differences and create a more equitable and positive school climate (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009).
    - ❏ This is supported by Margaret Grogan in her book *Educational Leadership* in which she claims leaders must own what they do in order for students to grow in rigorous settings (Grogan, 2013).
    - ❏ It is also supported by Ruby K. Payne in her book *Under Resourced Learners* in which she discusses learning as a competitive, social activity for teachers and students(Payne, 2008).

Two research-based solutions with two scholarly references for each solution for the instructional challenge chosen for this project.

❏ Solution #2:
- ❏ Engage staff in professional development and/or open dialog on challenges, strengths, and methods of addressing cross cultural curriculum and assessment. This will focus on the questions regarding why it is important to teach and how it can be taught. It will be done in a professional learning community. All activities will be archived to create a bank of activities from which teachers can plan lessons.
- ❏ This is supported with the research done in Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's book *Driven By Data* in which he suggests an inclusive PD strategy that fits under an umbrella of understanding (Bambrick-Santoyo,2010).
- ❏ This view is supported by Susan M. Drake in her book *Creating Standards-Based Integrated Curriculum* where she claims every level of assessment is important and needs evaluation to assure standard alignment and student centered learning (Drake, 2012).

One-year action plan for the implementation for each solution and professional development opportunities.

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Step 1: Network with other districts in the area that are willing to partner for professional development training in curriculum development for culturally diverse student populations

Step 2: Have staff complete individual curriculum audits to find strengths and weakness in their lessons.

Step 3: Plan a week of immersive training at partnering schools during which staff will be exposed to best and past practices.

Step 4: Plan a final day of open discussion activities in which staff are able to plan for changes in their lessons and request revisions to the curriculum.

One-year action plan for the implementation for each solution and professional development opportunities.

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Step 5: Create a shared form teachers can print out and use to reflect on daily and/or weekly lessons and student progress.

Step 6: Collect evidence of student progress weekly in the form of data sheets on which student scores and teacher observations are recorded.

Step 7: Add weekly and monthly discussions to TBT and BLT meetings in which all staff will evaluate success of revisions made to the curriculum.

Step 8: Continue to evaluate curriculum annually using the audit process in order to revise based on student and staff need.

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Rosey: Instruction must be culturally sensitive, diverse, and conscious (Drake, 2012). It needs to consider the whole child and align to standards. However, the goal of instruction should not be to simply increase a test score. We as leaders need to encourage teachers to challenge norms and revise their past practices to best practices (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).

Kristin: Culture is the heart of all we do in education, no matter what form (curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment) (Gay, 2010). As an instructional leader, I need to remember this and let this idea influenced my leadership. I need to always keep the students first and at the center of my reasonings. Being authentic is key especially when communicating (Freire, 2000).

Joel: As an instructional leader, it is my goal to provide a meaningful learning experience for my students. In order to provide such an experience it must be motivating, challenging, and inspiring (Knight, 2007). Students need to learn knowledge and skills that they can apply in life and meet high standards that have been set for them (Gay, 2010).

References

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