



Foreword to Special Edition on “Teachers as Researchers”

Dr Linda G. Traylor, Florida USA

Creating the outstanding school starts with educators, administrators and teachers focusing their endeavours on a journey of continual improvement. Continuous improvement is a legitimate core competency that is often missed in organizations. No less so in schools. Unfortunately, continuous improvement also tends to be the first casualty in the day-to-day priorities of the busy school. Conflicts with talent, time, resources – and many other unknowns--- can derail important improvement initiatives. This article introduces a special edition on teachers acting as researchers, as an example of continual teaching improvement, and in doing so highlights key considerations when undertaking such activities.

Creating Outstanding Schools

Creating the outstanding school starts with educators, administrators and teachers, who can push the paradigm and see beyond the obvious, in order to create the best in class performance. This is what this special edition showcases. It highlights that educators must work closely together to implement innovative, systemic change, and strive to achieve breakthrough results. The focus is on continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is a legitimate core competency that is often missed in organizations. Regardless of their status with prior improvement initiatives, true leaders acknowledge that there are always significant challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Unfortunately, continuous improvement also tends to be the first casualty in day-to-day priorities. Conflicts with talent, time, resources – and many other unknowns can take important improvement initiatives off point.

Administrators and teachers must learn to integrate improvement excellence into the curriculum, and keep it there as a sustainable best practice initiative. There is a huge intrinsic value in enabling teachers to sustain strategic improvement and cultural change internally without continued dependence on administrators. Outstanding schools lead, organize, deploy, and execute enhancement initiatives with a return on their investment (ROI), thus achieving real annualized benefits in excess of stated goals and objectives.

Teachers and administrators have to unite forces, for they are the leaders of both the classroom and the school. Outstanding schools are forward thinking and are always looking to develop, to grow, and to become better. They are never satisfied with the status quo or being average. The critical factors of outstanding schools are: (1) teachers and administrators work as a team; (2) the school reacts and responds to student data and incorporates emerging technologies; and



(3) school leadership is consistent and aligned with the mission, value proposition, and strategic initiatives. In outstanding schools, teachers do not work in isolation, and administrators do not work in a vacuum, dictating core competencies from their office. By not being connected and involved as a team in establishing goals, strategic initiatives, curriculum focus, and the direction of the school, quite often the curriculum becomes obsolete and disjointed.

What does it mean to be a contributing member of a team? It means that all voices on the team are heard and appreciated. Sometimes school organizations fail to hear the voices of the new, “beginning” teacher. Too often, a new teacher is looked at as a novice unable to add value to the curriculum because of his lack of experience. In essence, the school is missing out on a great opportunity since new teachers have the latest strategies and techniques to engage students in the learning process. The goal should be to connect the neophyte with open-minded, experienced educators. Both can learn from each other. Never squash ideas until you thoroughly understand the concept in the context of learning. Teachers who have taught for several years, but who have never altered their curriculum or their mindset, are usually an obstacle to progress. Lots of well-intentioned, hard-working teachers spend countless hours compiling best practices, developing content, and performing assessments only to see a distinct lack of real impact on students, the curriculum, and learning.

The second factor which is critical is a student-centered, data-focused curriculum that responds to all the information obtained on students before moving forward. Creative schools analyze test results, where students are on the learning curve, how students are responding in the classroom to change and technology, and what must be done to get them to excel so they become lifelong learners. All of this information must be taken into consideration when enhancing and making changes to the curriculum, selecting text special editions, developing the criteria for staff development, and redefining core competencies and strategies to engage students in the learning curriculum. The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment work hand-in-hand.

The final factor is that leadership must be consistent, shared, and in-step with the school’s strategic goals. Although the final decisions rest with school administrators, input and feedback from teachers and the staff is invaluable.

Papers in this special edition are exemplars of those schools that are leading the way in excellence by preparing students to be lifelong learners. Our core competencies of collaboration and leadership, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving help our students thrive in today’s world. We provide a results-based curriculum with proven teaching methodologies and best practices to maximize student performance and success.

As featured in some of the articles, Al Yasat Private School, for example, serves as a role model to school systems across the country desiring to develop a holistic approach to learning. Al Yasat consists of a team of educators collaborating and using best practices around specific focus competencies to drive value-added results. We achieve this through seven critical core competencies: talented leadership, collaboration, best practices, focus initiatives, creativity and innovation, driven results, and fun.

- *Talented Leadership* - At Al Yasat, we have a clear purpose, a strong strategic vision, and multi-talented leaders. We believe that no one person can possess all the skills necessary



nor fill the various roles required for delivering an innovative curriculum and meaningful learning experiences. We leverage each other's talents, creating a win-win solution for everyone.

- *Collaboration* - We believe that a value-added curriculum emerges from a shared common vision and a team of educators working effectively inside the classroom and across teams.
- *Best Practices* - Implementing methods, tools, approaches, and ideas that have a proven track record of application and achievement is what we do best.
- *Focus Initiatives* - We target areas in the curriculum that are designed to achieve both short and long-term objectives in order to bring about outstanding performance results.
- *Creativity and Innovation* - We foster innovation and encourage an entrepreneurial spirit by employing methods of instruction that integrate thinking, creativity, information, technology, and life skills using real world contexts.
- *Driven Results* - We deliver significantly higher student results and excel in student performance.
- *Fun* - We enjoy and celebrate our successes. We have a humble willingness to learn, adapt, and improve.

This special edition epitomizes these six critical competencies and is a testament to the vision and leadership of the respective school's, their school leaders and the staff teams.