

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

A Reflection on Reflective Learning

It's amazing how much blather emanates from our mass media, while interactive modes of communication limit us to tweets and posts that are meaningless information bites. Blather and information bites seem to dominate us in the real world, and in education we ask students to fill in bubbles on multiple choice tests or give short answers that are easy to classify as right or wrong. What is considered the most intellectual game on television is Jeopardy, which only tests our ability to quickly recall correct answers.

All of this trivial pursuit activity that masquerades as intellectual engagement is dragging our culture down to the point where discourse is at its best unenlightening, and at its worst inane. This situation has been described accurately by some of our best writers, but they tend to be preaching to a small choir of people who some would classify as being like-minded eggheads.

So why should we be concerned? Technology has become so pervasive that politicians and others with influence can advocate a public school curriculum that concentrates on the meager essentials of math, science and reading. Broad applications in those domains and social studies are rarely mentioned, which is also the case with additional subject areas and combinations of disciplines that require judgment, academic exploration, creativity, interdisciplinary thinking, and academic behaviors not limited to the mastery of reflex behaviors.

Role of the Curriculum Leadership Institute

The Curriculum Leadership Institute's model for school improvement is essentially a decision-making and action-taking framework within which a local district can modify an existing academic program. It can be used to create a better controlled, integrated and articulated curriculum both horizontally and vertically, which results in more effective teaching, learning, and student test results. During the NCLB era, which is slowly coming to a close, the CLI Model has helped many schools and districts meet adequate yearly progress and even excel in achieving other state expectations. We're pleased we could help districts meet those goals, but we are now entering an era in which Common Core Standards and other measures of school performance are becoming more sophisticated and balanced. In other words, the new era opens the door to expand upon the teaching and learning of fundamentals so that those who graduate from schools have the mental wherewithal to actually *think about their learning*... and how it can be applied to improve their own lives and those of others. Such students are encouraged to become reflective learners and doers instead of knee-jerk functionaries and reactors.

International Baccalaureate

It is also well known that CLI, as a decision-making and action-taking framework, greatly respects the contributions of such processes as *Understanding By Design* and the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, because they provide ways to achieve real excellence in academic programs and student learning. Those models are very scholastic in nature, and tend to move curriculum design and implementation in challenging and interdisciplinary ways.

It is also instructive to examine programs coming from overseas because, unlike what has been happening in the United States, some other countries are being driven by a need to become world leaders. They believe the way to make that happen is to stimulate their schools so that teachers and students become dynamic scholars working together in an intellectual community, one that rewards quality work with more opportunities to research, interact academically and produce new perspectives.

One of those programs is called the International Baccalaureate, which is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland (<http://www.ibo.org>). Some American school districts are working to implement IB's program, which is characterized by the following descriptors.

International Baccalaureate is interested in:

- developing citizens of the world in relation to culture, language and learning to live together;
- building and reinforcing students' sense of identity and cultural awareness;
- fostering students' recognition and development of universal human values;
- stimulating curiosity and inquiry in order to foster a spirit of discovery and enjoyment of learning;
- equipping students with the skills to learn and acquire knowledge, individually or collaboratively, and to apply these skills and knowledge accordingly across a broad range of areas;
- providing international content while responding to local requirements and interests;
- encouraging diversity and flexibility in teaching methods; and
- providing appropriate forms of assessment and international benchmarking.

Its criteria for implementation are these:

- require study across a broad range of subjects drawing on content from educational cultures across the world;
- give special emphasis to language acquisition and development;
- encourage learning across disciplines;
- focus on developing the skills of learning;
- include, to a varying extent, the study of individual subjects and of transdisciplinary areas;
- provide students with opportunities for individual and collaborative planning and research; and
- include a community service component requiring action and reflection.

It doesn't take long to determine that IB is very different from NCLB approaches. It also doesn't take much imagination to see that such a program is more likely than what is now being done in the U.S. to create reflective citizens and leaders in business and society.

In the next *E-Hint* will be a discussion of specific ways a district can implement elements of a curriculum that promotes more student reflection on what they learn. In the meantime, a Curriculum Coordinating Council review of a program such as International Baccalaureate would be helpful as a way to better serve students, and even meet the new and emerging Common Core Standards.