Educational Change, Baldrige, and Schlechty

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between research on educational change, the Baldrige continuous improvement framework, and Schlechty's (2002) WOW school standards articulated in *Working on the Work*. Each of Schlechty's standards are examined and examples from practicing educators who have been trained in continuous improvement are provided as examples of practical classroom application of these standards.

I truly enjoyed watching the Tour de France and loved seeing a fellow Texan dominate the race for so long. Staying up late at night watching the Outdoor Life Network's broadcasts of the Tour, it was always fascinating to observe the breakout riders who would take great risks to win an individual stage of the race. They knew they had little chance to win the entire race, but in their minds their moment of glory could manifest itself in the possibility of a single stage win. The scenario was predictable. A small group of riders would leave the peloton (the large majority of the riders) behind and exert massive amounts of energy attempting to win the stage. They often led much of the race, leading nearly to the end. However, the peloton would inexorably close in on the breakout group. Sometimes it was painful to watch because I felt sorry for those riders who had tried so hard. As the finish line drew closer, the peloton would absorb the breakout group who desperately tried to hold their lead. Once caught, the breakout riders, utterly defeated, demoralized, and exhausted, often finished well in the back of the peloton. They had given their best effort but failed. Then there would be a

short sprint to the finish where the smartest and most well-trained rider who had implemented a better race strategy would win the stage.

The story of the breakout riders and the peloton is a parable for educational change. In schools, administrators, department chairs, or teachers will have a great idea on how to address an opportunity for improvement. A dedicated group will often breakout and lead the reform effort. Yet, much of the building will remain unconvinced and uncommitted in the educational peloton. As the energy and excitement of the breakout strategy and leaders wane over time, the peloton catches up and absorbs the change leaders and the change initiative. The leaders often become defeated and demoralized. Stung by their failed attempt, they may become skeptical of future reform efforts and become less likely to ever again venture from the educational peloton.

This parable raises the question of: How do educational leaders initiate and sustain educational change? My answer is three-fold. First, to initiate and to sustain educational change efforts one must have a thorough knowledge of educational change research and its processes. The instructional leader must bridge the gap of scholarly research and practical application. He or she must anticipate obstacles and be prepared to apply collaborative, research-based solutions in a practical manner. Second, one must embed the Baldrige continuous improvement strategies into the classroom. This internationally-respected framework is flexible, research based, and nonprescriptive. Third, one must synthesize educational change research and the Baldrige framework with Schlechty's (2002) *Working On The Work* research on authentic student engagement and deploy those strategies systemically into all areas which impact student achievement. For the purpose of addressing the principal's project for the Birdville Independent School District, I will examine the change research literature, the Baldrige framework, and Schlechty's 12 strategies of student engagement.

Educational Change and the Scholar Practitioner

Dewey (1916) early on recognized that change was a significant part of the educational process. He stated, " . . . the educational process is one of continual reorganization, reconstructing, transforming" (p. 50). Yet Dewey could not have envisioned the changes necessary for an effective 21st-century school. Within the last 25 years, technology changes have had a phenomenal impact on educational institutions. Computers have evolved from large, bulky, even rare machines used simply for computation to smaller and smaller devices that saturate our population and are now used for communication, knowledge management, and entertainment. Educators are continually challenged to have something relevant to offer students who live in the instant gratification world of cell phones, computers, iPods, digital cameras and video, Bluetooth-enabled devices, web pages, and blogs (Smith & Cohen, 2005). Dewey's statement was true in his time; it is also relevant in today's global infrastructure.

Fullan (2001) recognizes that change is not a passing trend but is and will remain a fact of life. Schlechty (2005) agrees but believes that schools are now being asked to do things that they were never designed to do. A perfect example of schools responding to a change that they were not designed to address involves the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and the anthrax scares which followed. Educational institutions and educators were thrust into responding to terrorism (Auger, Seymour, & Roberts, 2004). Schools must now be prepared for terroristic attacks locally and must be prepared to deal with possible traumatization of its students as a result of terroristic activities worldwide (Auger et al., 2004). With the brilliant minds of Dewey, Fullan, and Schlechty opining that educational change is a constant, educators who can lead successful 21st-century schools will be those who embrace change and are not threatened or limited by its presence.

Successful Educators Lead Change

Schlechty (2002) espouses that a campus leader's fundamental purpose is to lead her or his staff in new directions, places they have never been before. Most educational leaders would agree that instructional leadership, personnel management, knowledge of budgeting, and staff development are necessary administrative skills. Successful educational leaders must have a working knowledge of these areas. That Schlechty would classify change leadership in the same category as these essential fundamentals indicates his position on the significance of change management.

Yet, educational research warns us against simply attempting to replicate another's change idea or process. Wheatley (2005) states, "Nothing is ever the same twice, really" (p. 84). Olson (2002) argues that school culture varies widely and that even within the same building issues impact teachers differently. Those who attempt to demand a change process from the top are destined to fail (Wheatley, 2005). Educators must become as adept with collaboratively managing change as they are adept with managing budgets, personnel, and instruction. People must be free to input and adapt as they progress through the process (Fullan, 2001) and they must be free to personalize and create the process for their environment (Wheatley, 2005) if there is hope for the reform to be effective and sustained.

Definition of Systemic Change

Olson (2002) considers schools to be a system of diverse interests and expectations each representing different parts of a more complex entity. Frechtling (2000) defines the levels of a school system as a hierarchy that impacts the student, the classroom, the school, and the educational system itself. She further argues that for reform to be considered systemic, it must address each of these levels in a manner that is sustainable and scalable. Duffy (2003) posits the notion that systemic school improvement or reform must permeate all levels of a school system. Schlechty (2005) contends that systemic change will dramatically impact rules, roles, relationships, and even

culture. Systemic change also recognizes the individual parts of the system are interdependent on each other. Dewey (2002) argues, "One tendency is the necessary completion of the other" (p. 107). For change to truly be systemic, it must permeate the diverse and complex nature of the educational process.

Resistance to Change

Despite the new assessment programs, new curriculum requirements, and the need for new strategies to meet these requirements, some educators still resist change. Dewey (2002) sees educational change as always involving two sides. One group prefers to maintain the existing system while another group would prefer more radical changes. Studies of human nature suggest that people faced with such challenges will resist change and revert to what has worked for them in previous situations. Wheatley (2005) observes, "Old ways die hard. Amid all of the evidence that our world is radically changing we retreat to what has worked in the past" (p. 64). Successful administrators will face such opinions and resistance with courage and will not allow the school to fail its mission of educating its students.

Change is Possible

There is an old adage that the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over all the while expecting a different result. To get a different result, the action causing that result must change; therefore, change, while difficult, is not only possible but is essential if we need different results. Yet, being a successful leader requires attacking such problems efficiently and effectively, rather than sitting back hoping things will improve without our intervention. Wheatley (2002) argues that administrators who care about their schools are not daunted by despair but are motivated to improve their schools. Dewey (1916) succinctly states that schools have the responsibility to change, " . . . it is the business of the school environment to eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes" (p. 20). Not only do schools have the responsibility to change, they *must* evolve to remain effective. "A key to ongoing effectiveness of any organization is its ability to renew itself—to seek and find better ways of fulfilling its mission and responding to change" (Dufour, 1991, p. 95).

Summary

My philosophy on educational change is simply stated: If the learning objectives change and they have changed dramatically, then the old strategies for teaching the old objective are no longer acceptable—therefore, we must continuously improve all aspects of our product for our students. New teaching strategies and methods are needed to meet the requirements of the new objectives. Fullan (1998) recognizes that reculturing can make a significant positive difference where schools matter most, in teaching and learning. My efforts to reculture schools will cultivate collaborative, research-based environments where teaching and learning are the fundamental beneficiaries of these efforts.

Baldrige Continuous Improvement Framework

Total quality management (TQM) is a form of management strategy that is based on providing high quality products for the stakeholders and customers of an organization. Originally designated as methods of improving business organizations, the goal of the quality movement is to focus on improving the workers' final product to one that represents extremely high quality. Dahlgaard, Kristensen, and Kanji (1995) posit that realizing continuous improvement through the TQM vision requires that organizations focus on four significant areas, "1) identifying failures and problems; 2) finding the causes of failures and problems; 3) prevention, i.e. preventing the causes of failures and problems; 4) review" (pp. 454–455). Winn and Cameron (1998) recognize quality as an important ultimate outcome for an organization. To identify one's final product as being one of quality is, therefore, a worthy goal for which organizations strive to achieve. Educational institutions have the significant responsibility of graduating well-educated students. They are our quality product.

The Malcom Baldrige Award

Malcolm Baldrige served the United States government as Secretary of Commerce from 1981 until his untimely death in a rodeo accident in 1987. The Malcolm Baldrige Award was created and signed into law by Congress on August 20, 1987. In 1995 the Baldrige Education Criteria were adapted from the business model with a goal of improving educational institutions in the categories of leadership, strategic planning, student and stakeholder focus, information and analysis, faculty and staff focus, educational and support process management, and performance results. Implemented in an educational setting, the Baldrige continuous improvement strategy will provide a structured framework for change based on assessment, feedback, and management that will result in continual performance improvement. Arif and Smiley (2003) believe the Baldrige Award criteria assume that the quality of the educational institution's product (the students) can be regulated just like other industries' product quality can be regulated. Schlechty (2005) recognizes that organizations that have adopted and embraced continuous improvement as a change strategy have enhanced their opportunities for success.

Flexibility of Continuous Improvement

The appeal of the Baldrige framework for change is its flexibility. It is non-prescriptive. The framework never instructs its users on what one must do. It simply provides a research-based framework educators can utilize to improve. Baldrige does not require a baseline proficiency that one must attain prior to utilizing its concept for change; those interested in adopting and implementing this framework for change may begin utilizing the process at any point. Essentially, they can begin where they are. One simply must have a desire for improvement. Burkhalter (1996) posits the critical importance of a modest beginning in one's

journey to excellence, "It is important to begin the process where you are, to build on existing strengths, identify weaknesses within the system and identify specific ways to correct these weaknesses one by one" (p. 154). The notion of continuous improvement suggests that a school, an organization, or a business will systemically identify its problems and take steps to correct or improve them. Schargel (1996) sums the process of continuous improvement in simple language, "By systematically identifying errors, locating their causes and removing them, we are changing the atmosphere of the school for the better" (p. 215).

Plan-Do-Study-Act

The fundamental tool of continuous improvement is Deming's (1982) plan-do-study-act cycle (PDSA). To effectively use PDSA, one must choose an area that she or he wants to improve and study the process, identify the problem's root cause, and develop an action plan for addressing said cause. Meaningful action plans are critical to the continuous improvement cycle. Simply identifying the problem and developing a solution are ineffective unless the action to correct the problem is accomplished (Dahlgaard et al., 1995). Once the action plan has been accomplished, the final step of continuous improvement is to repeat the process again and again until the originally identified process that needed improvement is no longer a concern, and the improvements are embedded in the process. Burkhalter (1996) suggests, "In effect, every person should be thinking about unique ways to continue to improve his/her job" (p. 158).

Summary

As stated earlier in this project, change in the educational field has been extant since Dewey's time, and change continues to be significant in the future of the educational profession. The challenge of leading change can seem overwhelming, yet the need for change to meet the escalating requirements of newer educational standards is essential. Ownership is critical to the success of any change effort (Wheatley, 1999). Further, the reculturing of educators to be knowledge creators, rather than disseminators of knowledge, is essential to successful change (Fullan, 1998). Burkhalter (1996) recognizes that empowering teachers in the continuous improvement process is critical to its success. The Baldrige continuous improvement framework will cultivate an environment where teachers are knowledge creators and have a real sense of ownership in school problems and solutions.

The purpose of this culminating section of the Principal Project is to offer a school improvement framework that synthesizes educational change research, Baldrige, and the 12 strategies presented in Phillip Schlechty's (2002) book *Working On The Work*. As I near completion of my dissertation, which examines the experiences of six outstanding teachers who have successfully transformed their practice with the Baldrige system, it is relevant and important that where appropriate their voices be present in this project. Although their words are not utilized in every strategy, when they are used, they add a powerful voice to understanding

student engagement issues. Their words will be italicized to aide the reader of this project. For confidentiality, these teachers have been given pseudonyms.

Standard 1: Patterns of Engagement

Nearly all classes are highly engaged, and when they are not, teachers make every possible effort to redesign the pattern of activity in the classroom so that more students are authentically engaged.

Appropriate levels of student engagement are critical to the success of any educational institution, and one of Baldrige's key components is focusing on student engagement. Paula Lester, a 2nd-grade teacher, has successfully implemented the continuous improvement strategies in her classroom, which has resulted in higher levels of student engagement. She feels more effective as a teacher because her students have taken more ownership and because they have a better understanding of what they need to know and why they need to know it:

> *It [Baldrige] has been a really positive impact because it has empowered the kids to know what they need to do and puts it more on them. They really like that because they really know where they are going at all times. "Okay, I have to be here, or I have to be there. By this time, I need to know this many words or whatever we are doing." The empowerment that they get is the biggest plus, and that has really helped me.*
>
> *When I am starting a unit, like science especially, we will do an inquiry. I will let them pick the questions that we are going to answer, and I guide them if necessary. But they really feel they are telling me what they want to learn. We did moon phases this last time, and they told me what they wanted to learn about the moon. Instead of me going, "Okay this is what we are going to learn," they felt like they set up their teaching for that unit.*

Donna Harris, an intermediate school teacher, also reveals her experiences with Baldrige have led her to become a more effective teacher by transferring some of the work and responsibility to the students, which has led to higher levels of student engagement in her class. She speaks of the value she has found as students take ownership of their own learning:

> *Baldrige is very student driven. It has not been more work for me; it has been more ownership for the student, which I love. The kids have become responsible for their learning. They set goals for themselves. We are working as a team. The issues are still there, but the kids are helping me solve it so I don't carry the weight on my shoulders like I did. I still feel very responsible. I still take my job very seriously, but I am letting my kids help me solve these problems and work through these issues.*

Following the Baldrige framework will result in the students taking ownership of what they are learning. They will know what they need to know, how it is being learned, how to set learning goals, and how to use teamwork in problem solving. The result will be increased student engagement.

Standard 2: Student Achievement

Parent's teachers, the principal, and the board of education, as well as others who have a stake in the performance of the schools, are satisfied with the level and type of learning that are occurring.

Standard 2 examines satisfaction of the level and type of learning that is occurring in the classroom. A significant source of parent and student satisfaction of learning can be monitored and improved with the use of student data folders. Students track information such as attendance, tardies, and grades, and they keep that information in a personal folder. When a parent comes in for a conference, the teacher can pull the student's folder and have the student examine her or his work with the parent in a student led conference. An ancillary benefit of this activity is that it removes any animosity that may exist in the parent–teacher relationship. They become partners because the achievement data gives the child ownership for her or his learning.

Paula Lester spoke of the significant impact personal data folders have had on her parents' satisfaction with what is occurring in her classroom:

[Parents] like to be able to come into the room and look at the data chart. They can come in and pull their data folder any time and see that they started making 70s on their spelling tests. Well, now with the things we have put in place they are making 90s on their spelling tests or higher. The child is able to explain it to them. That is one of the biggest things. Then the parent knows the child is involved in it, and it is not just a grade that we are arbitrarily giving them. The child knows why they are getting that grade, what they need to do, and where they need to be.

In some situations we will pull out a data folder and say, "Okay explain to me what happened here." And most of them can do that. Most of them can tell that they are going up, and this is why I am going up. "I am reading more. I am studying my words and doing my packet everyday." They will have reasons why they are getting better, or they will know exactly why they did bad. "Well, I had a football game and I did not study that night before that test." So they are really able to look more analytically, and that is just amazing to me. To see and to know that is why and say, "If I had just done this well maybe it would have been a little higher."

It really takes a lot of pressure off of the teacher. The kids remember it; they know why they were doing it or why they didn't do it. That has really

taken a lot off of me for them to be able to do that. The parent will call and say, "Why did she get a 62 on this?" Having them [the student] be able to explain it has been really nice.

Measuring the types of learning that are occurring in the classroom is a key component to stakeholder's efficacy with educational institutions. Paula's voice demonstrates clearly that parents who are shown documented improvement in their child's performance are more satisfied with the school. I have personally witnessed aggressive and angry parents leave a conference extremely impressed and pleased with the teacher and our school after viewing their child's data folder in a student led conference. Implementing data folders is one way a teacher or a department can monitor and document student achievement results.

Standard 3: Content and Substance

Teachers and administrators have a clear, consistent, and shared understanding of what students are expected to know and to be able to do at various grade levels. This understanding is consistent with such official statements of expectations as state standard and standards established by local boards. Teachers and administrators also have a reasonable assessment of student interest in the topics suggested by these expectations.

Standard 3 is very specific. As educators, we must know what it is that our students are expected to learn and be able to do at certain grade levels. The state of Texas has its curriculum designed as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Each district has curriculum experts who determine, along with teachers, what the TEKS look like in their district. Individual campuses and classrooms must ensure that their view of what needs to be taught aligns with the district and state requirements. In continuous improvement terms, this is referred to as aligning your arrows. Marzano (2003) believes that clear learning objectives are critical to a well-managed classroom. We all need to be pointing our curriculum efforts in the same direction. Paula Lester speaks of her experience with outlining specifically what her students need to know.

We have a data wall that goes up, and right now we have for second grade an emphasis on fluency. We have a fluency chart up there. They need to be reading 90 words per minute by the end of the year. So we have a chart up there so they can see how they have changed. The other one up there is the 500 high-frequency words that we expect our kids to know by the end of second grade. We break it up into five six weeks, and the last six weeks is a review or catch up six week period. So they can see that they need to know a 100 every six weeks. We chart who knows a 100 percent by the end of the six weeks so they can see how many kids in the class have done it.

> *We do math minutes tests. We have 30 problems, and they chart those.*
> *They chart their spelling tests. So they can really see their growth, or they*
> *can see when they have slipped down. When the higher kids slip down, they*
> *do not like that. They want to see those bars all the way at the top.*

Our English department is accomplishing this focused instructional approach by assisting our math department in TAKS preparation. The math teachers have given our students a specific list of the math terms that they have researched as highly likely to appear on the TAKS test. These terms have historically given our students trouble. Our English department is tracking achievement data on our students' improvement in learning these terms. Dramatic growth in student understanding of these terms is occurring.

Standard 4: Organization of Knowledge

Teachers and support personnel generally endeavor to ensure that the media, material, books, and visuals used to present information, propositions, ideas, and concepts to students are organized in ways that are most likely to appeal to the personal interests and aesthetic sensibilities of the largest possible number of students and to ensure as well that students have the skills needed to use these materials.

In her seminal book, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World,* Margaret Wheatley (1999) speaks to the importance of relationships in the world. According to her, every time an educator steps into the hallways or the classroom, he or she is impacting those relationships. As principal, when I walk into the school, I am impacting relationships. I find Wheatley's work to be the foundational piece of Standard 4. To know the personal interests of our students, we must build relationships with them. Once those relationships are established, we can know their personal interests and can build assignments to interest our students.

Students love to play practical jokes on their teachers, and our world geography department embeds this knowledge in their "spy" project. The students are assigned to groups and given a country to research. The necessary data to ensure a quality project is clearly posted in rubric form in the classrooms. Each group knows what attributes a report must have to ensure that their group presents a passing project. Students research and explore irrigation options, altitude, types of terrain, and other geographical data and put this information into a report.

At this point, this "spy" project appears to be similar to most projects, but the world geography department gives the requirement for turning in the project a novel spin. The students use "spy" strategies to get the work to their teacher, and this is where the fun begins. No group can just turn in its work to the teacher; they must get creative and be stealthy. Students are free to involve other building

personnel for their ruse. One group rolled their project into a plastic tube and baked it into a birthday cake for the teacher. When she cut into the cake, the project was there. Another group utilized a remote control car. They attached the project to the car, and standing in a nearby restroom (out of sight of the teacher) remotely rolled the car against the teacher's foot while she was lecturing her class. She looked down, and the project was there. One very creative group distracted their teacher and took his car keys (with my prior approval). They taped the project to the steering wheel of his car. When he got into his car to go home after school, the project was there.

The week that the spy projects are due is a great week at our school. A very high percentage of our students complete the project because they want to participate in the stealth aspect of the assignment. The students are engaged because they cannot use their creativity to turn in the assignment unless they learn the material. This assignment taps into our students' values and motives (Schlechty, 2005). The entire school is aware of the due date, and kids and teachers discuss the projects and strategize together. This project would not be possible if it were not for great relationships between the teachers and their students. This strategy appeals to students in many ways and has taken a potentially uninteresting assignment and turned it into an assignment that the students enjoy and discuss for many years after they have left our building. Our culminating analysis activity at the end of the year is a plus/delta. This activity simply allows our students to list the activities they enjoyed on the plus side of a column. They also list the activities they did not enjoy on the delta side of a column. At the end of the year, the spy project is overwhelmingly mentioned in the plus column.

That is the beauty of the Baldrige system. It will validate great assignments with positive feedback from the students. Mary Brewer, a teacher in a secondary school, articulates this in her powerful words:

> *I think that is one of the big plusses to Baldrige is that you don't have to change what you teach. It is a great way to allow you to see if it is effective, to fix what is broken. You might discover that it is a really, really good piece that you want to pass on, and it doesn't need any tweak.*

The spy project is an excellent example of Standard 4.

Standard 5: Product Focus

The tasks students are assigned and the activities they are encouraged to undertake are clearly linked in the minds of the teacher and the students to performances, products, and exhibitions about which the students care and on which students place value.

Standard 5 compels us as educators to ensure that the tasks students are being asked to do are linked to activities or instructional strategies on which they place value. One of the most significant conversations I have had as a principal involved a veteran English teacher who was struggling to reach a difficult and challenging class. During the early part of the year, she would often come to me frustrated. She did not feel the students were learning anything. It seemed that no matter what she tried, the students remained disengaged. When I suggested to her that she ask her students, she was very uncomfortable with that suggestion. She did not feel her students (9th graders) would take the assignment seriously. Yet, I challenged her to try.

I suggested that she consider using the continuous improvement tool called the student enthusiasm for learning survey (Conyers & Ewy, 2004). In this survey, the students mark the box where the amount they learned meets how much they enjoyed the assignment. For example, a student who did not like the assignment but learned most of it would place her or his dot in the appropriate box (see example in Figure 1).

The teacher agreed to conduct the survey, and the next day returned with data that totally surprised her. Ninety-two percent of the students felt that they had learned something in that lesson, which contradicted her belief that they were not learning anything. However, 86% of the students did not enjoy the assignment. The data revealed to the teacher that the students were learning but were not enjoying themselves. She went back to that class and conducted a plus/delta on what the students liked (plus) and did not like (delta). She repeated this cycle several times in the fall semester. Each time she tried to utilize what they enjoyed in different ways, and she tried to stop using methodologies that the students did not enjoy. The students loved having the opportunity for feedback and felt they had ownership in the lessons. The class began to function very well. Absenteeism dropped and the students' passing rate climbed. Teacher efficacy improved. For implementing Standard 5, I would recommend utilizing tools such as the student enthusiasm for learning survey and implementing the data gleaned from those results.

Loved it				
Liked it				
Liked some of it				
Did not like it			●	
	Learned nothing	Learned a little	Learned most of it	Learned a lot

Figure 1. Student enthusiasm for learning survey.

Standard 6: Clear and Compelling Product

When projects, performances, or exhibitions are part of the instructional design, students understand the standards by which these projects, performances, or exhibitions will be evaluated. They are committed to these standards and see the real prospect of meeting the stated standards if they work diligently at the tasks assigned and are encouraged.

Students sometimes see little importance in developing a speech for their English class. Yet our English department has developed a method which authentically engages our students. Our students study the persistence of Martin Luther King, Jr. They discuss the critical attributes of his persistence, and they are asked to write a speech on a situation where they were persistent. They provide personal examples and critically analyze areas where they were successful in being persistent or areas where they might have been able to have done something a little differently for a better outcome.

Our English department is working to expand this activity because it is so highly thought of by our students. Utilizing Marzano's (2003) guidelines for working within groups, we are attempting to have our students synthesize their speeches, taking the best from each group member. The group will collectively write a speech that takes the best each individual speech had to offer and combine them into one speech. The students will develop a rubric for grading the new speeches and will grade each others' work. They will study the results and determine how to recalibrate the rubric to deepen the impact of the speeches. For example, they may determine time limits, characteristics of a better introduction, use of humor, etc. The groups will then rewrite their speeches to meet the requirements of the recalibrated rubric.

We are also taking this assignment one step further by asking our students to predict how the qualities of persistence will help them in college or in a future job situation. The teacher's role changed dramatically in this assignment. Rather than grading all of the speeches and assigning a grade, the teacher will facilitate a deepening of the assignment through the use of rubrics and rewrites. The students will continue to revise and resubmit their assignment until they have met the assignment's standards for quality work.

Standard 7: A Safe Environment

Students and parents feel that the school as well as each classroom is a physically and psychologically safe place: Success is expected and failure is understood as a necessary part of learning, there is mutual respect between and among faculty and students, and the fear of harm or harassment from fellow students and demeaning comments from teachers is negligible.

A safe environment is critical to the educational process. Students and teachers must feel physically and mentally safe. A safe environment can be monitored and cultivated by tracking data through student and faculty surveys. An excellent method for approaching this standard is to establish a committee that includes teachers, the administrator who oversees security, the School Resource Officer (SRO), parents, the crisis counselor, and anyone else who deals with building and student safety. Establishing an environment of continuous improvement is also essential for this standard. Using tools such as the plus/delta with teachers and students after a fire drill can help improve student safety.

Campuses that have fights and threats of physical violence can use the affinity diagram to identify reasons for the violence. To use an affinity diagram, we have the participants list all of the reasons why violence may exist on the campus. Then they place these reasons in columns that are similar reasons. Each column is labeled and these labels can be placed in a relations diagram to determine the root cause of the violence. Mini lessons can be utilized to model a better way. For example, at our campus this year, we had several fights during a 1-week period. Using continuous improvement tools, we worked with our students to determine the root cause of the fighting, which was the students did not know of a better way to respond. We had our teen leadership class develop mini lessons that modeled students responding to potentially violent situations in non-violent ways. These mini-lessons were done by the teen leadership classes campus wide, and violent referrals dropped dramatically.

Another outstanding resource to use for campus-wide book studies is Marzano's (2003) *Classroom Management That Works.* He provides research-based interventions that respect the student and the teacher and their relationship. One specific suggestion by Marzano deals with students' feelings. Students often respond in surveys that their biggest concern is being embarrassed by their teacher. Denise Denis speaks to the importance of students feeling safe in her classroom:

> *With our students and the demographics of our kids, they are easily frustrated. Usually when I come across disciplinary issues, it is because they're being required to think beyond the problem. They are quick to shut down because they're unsure of their math ability, and they don't want to be unsuccessful at something. They have already hurt enough. And so I try to make my classroom a safe place so that my kids can open up and at least put an idea down.*

Marzano's book dedicates several sections providing teachers effective, research-based strategies for responding appropriately to an incorrect answer. Following these strategies will improve student–teacher relationships and result in a safer, educationally-sound environment.

We also use student focus groups to gather data which deals with student safety. The information about student effort and student safety was gleaned from

the results of a survey given to such a focus group. The committee analyzed the results and all recommendations were taken to our CIT or department chairs and were implemented throughout our building. We will monitor this data and survey our students at the end of the year to determine whether or not our efforts have paid dividends, and we will continuously improve in this area.

Standard 8: Affirmation of Performances

Persons who are significant in the lives of the student, including parents, siblings, peers, public audiences, and younger students are positioned to observe, participate in, and benefit from the student performances, as well as the products of those performances, and to affirm the significance and importance of the activity to be undertaken.

Standard 8 is very important to the success of our students. Schlechty's (2002) key words here are "persons who are significant in the lives of the student." As an educational leader, I have the responsibility to ensure that each student has at least one adult advocate to whom they feel a connection. The key question that we must ask is, "How do we know if we have connected with our students?" We developed a process to measure and document our relationship levels with our students.

We printed our entire student roster on poster-sized paper. During a faculty meeting, we gave each of our staff members sticky dots and asked them to place the dots by the names of every student with whom they had "connected." Connected was operationally defined as a relationship where the staff member knew he or she had influence on the student and had some knowledge of her or his personal interests. We agreed that simply having the student in class did not constitute "connected."

Once the entire staff had completed placing dots, we examined the roster for students who had one or zero dots by their names. Each staff member wrote the names of these students who were in their classes or who they knew they would see during the day, and made the commitment to build a better relationship with those students. The strategies were simple in gesture but were powerful in result. One science teacher invited two of the students with zero dots by their names to become members of the Rocket Club. They joined and are active members. One coach encouraged another student to keep getting stronger when she saw him in the weight room. Other teachers wrote simple notes of encouragement on homework papers that were handed back to students needing a connection. A special education teacher collected donations from staff members to ensure that another one of these students had enough money to attend a field trip. Our teachers have adopted these students and are doing the little things to ensure the students feel connected. These examples of educational grace have made a difference in the lives of these students. We are very proud to say that all of our students now have at least one dot by their names and have an adult advocate in our building.

Standard 9: Affiliation

Students are provided opportunities to work with others (peers, parents, other adults, teachers, students from other schools or classrooms) on products, group performances, and exhibition that judge to be of significance.

Most schools have a student council or a student government group. Unfortunately, my experience with these organizations has been that their elections become popularity contests. Most students involved in these organizations are already engaged in many school activities. Further, their leadership activities are often superficial in that they do not deeply touch the entire student body.

I suggest an alternative organization that is novel and moves its students and their peer groups to a higher level of school engagement. Most schools have diverse, varied student peer groups. Their members often label themselves as Gothic, Cowboys, Athletes, Skaters, or even the Geek Squad. Schools also have varied ethnic groups and students who do not fit, the loners. All of these groups have one thing in common, a leader. If you see the Gothic students together, they are usually following one or two key people who lead that group. Unfortunately, the leaders of these groups do not always lead in positive ways, but they are leaders nonetheless.

We observe our student body for approximately 6 weeks and identify the peer groups and who they follow. We invite those leaders (approximately 30 students) to become part of our Unity Council. Many of these students have never been asked to be a part of anything in their school years. We assign a teacher and administrator to work with these students on positive leadership skills, and we involve them heavily in the organization and processes of the school. One UC member serves on our site-based committee. Our UC has participated in a ropes course for team building. They have conducted taste tests in our continuous improvement efforts for our food service department. We teach them to stop gossip. (For example, when they hear someone in their group gossiping about another person, they can ask a future-oriented question such as: "What movie are we going to see tonight?" That immediately stops the negative gossip without revealing the UC member's real purpose). The last 2 years our UC members have taught a Master's level counseling class session at Texas Christian University. The Optimist Club has recognized them for their contributions to our school. They meet with our superintendent. We are also planning to take our members to Austin to speak with our legislators when the Special Session opens later in April.

To effectively communicate the significance of this organization, I would like to tell one student's story. Maria spent her 8th-grade year in a lot of trouble. She was constantly getting disciplinary referrals and was eventually sent to our DAEP for threatening to kill another student. When she came to us at the beginning of the year, it was obvious she was a leader of the Hispanic population on our campus. Wherever Maria was, you would find a large group of Hispanic students. She joined our UC and is very active. Her disciplinary referrals have

dropped dramatically from the previous year. She loved the TCU experience, and we have had several conversations about how she can go to college. She is looking forward to the trip to Austin for the legislature's special session. She has become an engaged student and has positively impacted her peer group.

Standard 10: Novelty and Variety

The range of tasks, products, and exhibitions is wide and varied, and the technologies that students are encouraged to employ are varied as well, moving from the simplest and well understood to the most complex.

Although I see tremendous value in repetition, I do recognize that novelty and variety play an important role in students' learning. Our special education math teacher is a master at bringing new and compelling ideas into her classroom. The activities she uses to engage the students are limited only by her tremendous imagination and the imagination of her students. When covering measurements for students who need functional academic skills, she often has them cook a meal for themselves. They measure ingredients, use timing and temperature, and they get to eat their project.

It is not unusual to see her and her students in the parking lots measuring the width of parking spaces and cars to determine if space was wasted when our parking lot was designed. Her students measure locker size versus the size of the text books they were given to store in those lockers. When studying volume, it is not unusual to see her with grocery sacks and items to place in those sacks. Another innovative approach she uses involves the study of temperature. She has purchased a laser temperature gun and the students tour the building measuring temperatures of various surfaces (including me). They work in groups and students divide the roles so that each gets to participate in every activity. Her students are thoroughly engaged, enjoy her class, and are learning relevant skills.

Standard 11: Choice

What students are to learn is usually not subject to negotiation, but that have considerable choice and numerous options in what they will do and how they will go about doing those things in order to learn.

Teachers often have little choice in the curriculum that the students must learn, but there is a myriad of choices related to how the material is taught and how mastery is demonstrated or measured. Utilizing the plus/delta and the fast feedback forms (see Figure 2 later) helps teachers get feedback from their students. The feedback is often very powerful and allows the teacher to improve the instruction for the students. Mary Brewer's words about the importance of the plus/delta are a powerful example of what student feedback can do to improve a difficult and potentially boring lesson:

> *The kids are always challenged to come up with good stuff and bad stuff. With a plus/delta, it is always not what is bad but what can we do to make it better. That shifts it a little bit from negative to a level of okay this is what will work a little better next time and I like that positivity. I am much more in tune to adjustments that I need to make in terms of instruction to make it more valid, to make it more viable for them, and to make it more interesting. There are some things we must teach that are dry as dust. We covered the literary elements on the TAKS today, and it is desperately boring for them. But you try as much as possible to make it valid, and their input and response especially in a Baldrige format allow me to adjust and make changes that will be beneficial in the next round.*
>
> *Specifically, in terms of some of the vocabulary strategies that we were using last fall, after going through the issue bin, doing some consensograms and plus/deltas, I just got the message that maybe we needed to look at another way to provide that vocabulary and give them instruction in a way that was more effective and allow them to come up with some ideas to do that. Specifically, the feedback from them was to change instruction on vocabulary.*

This student feedback led to improved classroom instruction and more student engagement.

The fast feedback is another form (see Figure 2) that can assist teachers and administrators in gleaning helpful suggestions for improving lessons. The

Circle the number that best represents your thoughts on today's lesson:

I understood today's learning objectives or concepts:

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please circle the phrase that best describes your level of engagement during today's lesson*:

Rebellion	Retreatism	Passive Compliance	Ritual Engagement	Authentic Engagement

*Schlechty, P. C. (2002) Working on the Work. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

The following topics or concepts are still "muddy" to me:_____
_____

The pace of today's class was (circle one):

Way Too Slow	Slow	Just Right	Fast	Way Too Fast

One thing that would make the next lesson better is: _____
_____

Figure 2. Fast feedback form.

fast feedback form is powerful because it can give its user data on the percentage of students who learned the material, on whether or not the lesson pace was appropriate, on concepts that are still "muddy" to the students, on their levels of engagement, and finally on suggestions for future lessons. The example provided on the next page is adapted into format where a teacher might ask the students for information about the day's lesson. There would need to be instruction on student engagement so that the student could accurately identify their engagement. I also use this form, in a slightly adapted format, to get data on our in-service days prior to school starting. We utilize this information in a continuous improvement format to plan the next years' professional development.

Standard 12: Authenticity

The tasks students are assigned and the work they are encouraged to undertake have meaning and significance in their lives now and are related to consequences to which they attach importance.

Standard 12 relates with the meaning and significance attached to the tasks students are asked to accomplish and are related to consequences they deem important. Mary Brewer's alternative class needed data to graph in a math lesson, and rather than use fictional data, she felt that the students would find relevance in tracking their own attendance data. Her words reveal this idea's powerful impact on one student who was motivated to graduate.

> *The students tracked attendance. I have one student who wrote a plan on how they were going to improve their attendance, what they were going to do and then went back to evaluate if they had met those goals and what else we could change to make it more successful. And just being focused on the fact that they had an attendance problem and that we were looking at ways to address it improved the attendance. So sometimes it is just a matter of having them aware that there is an issue and that it is a concern that we're working together to find solutions and going back and making sure that they are following through improves performance. I mean it just works. That is how it works.*

Students on our 9th-grade campus must earn 6 credits to be promoted to the high school. We track that data with our students using the promotion status graph. We simply have the students write their grades in the appropriate box. Where grades of 70 or higher have been recorded, they use map colors to shade in the boxes. Each colored box represents credits they have earned. At the beginning of the spring semester and each 6-week grading period after that, our students perform this task. They know exactly how many credits they have and what they need in order to have enough credits to be promoted.

Closing Summary

Our district had a legendary payroll clerk who was just one of those people who everyone enjoyed seeing and not because she was bringing us our paychecks. She had a wonderful personality and loved people. When our district began the Baldrige system, our Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations asked her an interesting question, "Mary, are you a great payroll clerk?" When she answered that she was, he asked her another powerful question, "How do you know?" She could not answer that question. That day she developed a mission statement and a goal for her job. Her mission was to ensure that all employees were paid on time each month and that there would be no errors on those paychecks. She began to track that data and worked to maintain a very high proficiency of correct pay checks. Now when asked "How do you know that you are a good payroll clerk?" she can respond by saying that 99.95% of our payroll checks go out each month with no errors. She now has documentation that she is good at her job.

I submit that if most educators were asked if they are good teachers or administrators, they would respond that indeed they are. However, if they were asked "How do you know?" I am not sure many would be able to provide documentation to answer that question. Monitoring and improving authentic student engagement in our classrooms and schools might give us the best answer to that question. To be able to say with full confidence, "I am a great teacher because 100% of my students are authentically engaged everyday" would be a powerful testimonial and would provide documentation that one is good at her or his job of teaching our students.

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