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An alternative to the traditional Principal Appraisal

Focus on Interactions

1. The Concept

Six assumptions lie behind the thinking from which this project is created:

1. Current Principal Appraisal processes have a bias towards compliance and have limited ability to focus on the principal's influence on learning and teaching.
2. Effective schools encourage reflective thinking and critique at every level.
3. We should be looking for correlations between what teachers do and leadership interactions.
4. Teachers should be expected to critique their practice on a regular basis and principals should be guiding this critique.
5. Summaries from these teacher reflective sessions should provide evidence of the school's strategy in action.
6. Pedagogical leadership can be ascertained to be present when principals are able to assemble evidence of their own practice which can be shown to have a positive effect on what happens in classrooms.

This proposal also acknowledges that many educational professionals appreciate a group focus to their work. Furthermore, the initiative for deciding what is important is in the hands of the participants rather than being directed by some central authority. It should be an attractive proposition for schools as it is not something additional to do but rather substituting reflective group activity based on evidence of current practice, for a number of currently mandated but often time intensive procedures which often divert energy from the ongoing teaching and learning focus.

2. Outline of Project

Objective

To trial the concept of emphasising a focus on interactions as an alternative to the more traditional notion of principal appraisal.

Process

The principal will construct a personal portfolio based broadly around the concept map on KnowledgeNet.

Teachers will use the same concept map – through individually pass-worded copies – to prepare and record the data about their interactions which form the base material for the Quality Learning Circle discussions.

Data Recording for Project

Pre-project questionnaire (Supplied)

Student data (Perhaps whole of school aggregated graph as at Term1)

Principal portfolio entries

Volunteer sample web diary entries from a range of staff

Agreed sample summaries from QLC meetings (Template with example supplied)

Description of training, use of resources, problem solving etc

Term 4 student aggregated graph

Post-project questionnaire/interviews (Supplied)

Expectations

The principal will complete an entry on most pages of the concept map but will concentrate predominately on page 2 'Classroom Interactions'.

Similarly teachers will concentrate on page 2 'Classroom Interactions' and all will complete at least one entry prior to each QLC meeting. (6 entries over three terms.)

The project will seek to find correlations between the principal's interactions and classroom teaching and learning.

Confidentiality

The material from this study may be used for publication and for further research but the identity of all persons and school will remain confidential to the researcher. All staff will have access to the final draft of any publication prior to its release.

Report to Board of Trustees

The group (or a named facilitator) will present a written report to the Board describing the process and broad conclusions. This will include some analysis of the Principal's Portfolio and the relationship of this work to the draft principal standards.

Comment

This outline is based on a trial project currently under way in the Wellington region.

3. *Project direction*

Material for staff handouts, questionnaires, templates for summaries etc would all be available for direct download from the web. From time to time, audio-graphic conferences would be scheduled both across the cohort and if necessary for a particular school or regional group.

The Wellington trial has to date involved the writer for one 50 minute staff meeting, two one hour meetings with the principal, and a number of email exchanges. The face-to-face meetings with the principal could have been achieved via an audio-graphic link.

I commend it for your interest

David Stewart

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