JUST IN TIME LEARNING FOR SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Although the role of the superintendent is commonly cited as a keystone in school improvement, it is not the traditional role of times past. This presentation puts forth a more encompassing and collaborative perspective on leadership, suggested by Peter Senge (1999), that it is the ability of a group (not an individual) to sustain the purpose it has begun. This session presents the World Wide Web as a conduit through which superintendents can deliver more timely, more extensive, and more contextually appropriate resources to their administrative teams and teaching staffs.

The superintendent is not only the organization’s chief executive officer for the learning experiences of children and youth, but the motivating agent and facilitator of adult learning for the administrative team, teaching staff, and community. These multi-dimensional tasks demand attention to the informing role that superintendents play for their varied constituencies. Informating, a term coined by Shoshana Zuboff (1988), is a useful concept for professionals who play such connective roles in the learning success of others. In contrast to the automating technologies that make our work more efficient, informing efforts stretch people to think differently about the work they do and then to use technology in improving that work. How then can the educational CEO keep his or her team connected with each other, and with resources that support the district’s mission and that reflect “world class” standards?

The presentation uses a conceptual framework based on Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s findings about “world class” organizations. Kanter points to three primary factors accounting for this level of successful group effort. They are: 1) improved thinking and problem-solving, 2) improved performance reflected by results, and 3) improved networking of individuals within the organization. She claims that world class organizations whether they are corporate, medical, or educational all support such an amalgamation of thinkers, makers and traders.

This presentation takes these three categories as organizing units from which to explore available electronic resources through which superintendents can connect the administrative and teaching staffs with information to stretch their thinking, improve their performance, and expand their connections to gurus in their field and to each other.

Integrating the web into a superintendents assistive approach to the learning of others exemplifies to a community a “marketing” as opposed to “sales” approach (Schlechty, 1997) to education. The traditional mindset for most organizations is looking at what exists in our warehouses and designing our offerings to reflect an existing product. Like many products, the shelf life of information in education too exceeds its limits. A major dilemma for veteran educators today is that those practices which accounted for their own professional success and the success of their former students grow increasingly obsolete. In both its informative and communicative capacities, the Web enables superintendents to foster a marketing approach linked to best practices and attention to the development of thinkers, makers, and traders, in any organization.

It creates a leadership arena less shaped by policy and bureaucracy and more connected with others on whose success the ability to sustain positive initiatives depends.