



Project Success

Close the Gap Consortium: Leadership News

December 2004

Leaders as Change Agents—Bob Henley

“Change Agent:

- Consciously challenges the status quo
- Comfortable with leading change initiative with uncertain outcomes
- Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things”

The Hickman Mills situation

The district decides to implement a program offered by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This innovative program involves substantial work for teachers and principals. The annual professional improvement program has already been implemented, so additional time must be found for “Closing the Gap.”

The Leadership Problem

How to implement the “Close the Gap” project without risking resistance from

teachers and administrators.

A resource to review: Ronald Heifetz’s *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 1994.

Heifetz has a helpful discussion (Ch. 6) on what he calls “adapter change.” He offers five strategic principles of change leadership.

1. Identify the adaptive challenge
2. Keep the level of distress within a tolerable range for doing adaptive work
3. Focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions
4. Give the work back to people, but at a rate they can stand
5. Protect voices of leadership without authority

Heifetz offers practical examples of these ideas in a very readable format. You will find his “pressure cooker” analogy very appropriate. Hickman Mills has done a very good job at keeping the pressure on to implement “Close the Gap,” but not so much pressure as to create a negative reaction. Hickman Mills has done a good job of giving the work to the “people.” Obviously, this is a program that must be done. Including teachers in the leadership is critical.

Heifetz’s book will be available on loan from your school’s mentor and, hopefully, from your school’s professional library.

Heifetz’s description of change is very similar to McRel’s “2nd order change.” More will be written about this concept in future issues of the newsletter.

Hickman Mills Mentors

- **Bob Henley is mentor to Ervin and Smith-Hale Middle Schools**
- **Russ Pieken is mentor to Hickman Mills High School**
- **Harold Frye is mentor to Ruskin High School**

Input and Leadership—Harold Frye

The direction of this newsletter in briefly examining McRel’s *Balanced Leadership Framework: School Leadership that Works* is to take a closer and more practical look at how 21 different aspects of leadership can affect the achievement of students. That’s a tall order, especially considering that there are so many factors in the first place. How does a leader manage them all? It’s probably not surprising that INPUT has one of the high-

est impacts on leadership. We live in a time when input is almost commonplace. Instant messaging, email, voicemail, and weblogs, are only a few of the methods available to those who want to have their say in matters at hand. The airwaves are filled with call-in shows, Monday morning quarterbacking, and editorializing. The wise leader takes it all in, considers it, and then makes decisions. In her book, *In the Age of the*

Smart Machine, Shoshana Zuboff wrote about work in earlier times when the boss held all the plans and details in his head. Input from workers was so lacking that work stopped when the boss was gone. Today, leaders involve a diverse cross-section of the organization to gain information, opinions, and resources needed to make effective decisions. Dennis Sparks, Executive Director of the National (continued on back)

Input (continued)

Staff Development Council, writes that “successful principals develop the leadership talents of teachers by delegating increasingly more complex responsibilities to them and nurturing the knowledge and skills to successfully fulfill those responsibilities.” That engagement begins with gaining input. And, it doesn’t stop there, for the process of gaining input throughout the process is critical to success.

As we look at the concept of leadership through the writings of Ronald Heifetz,

we can see that effective leaders are those who possess certain values about leadership. He notes that leaders must address the needs of followers, but must elevate followers to a higher moral level. Without input, it is not likely that either will occur.

McRel’s *Leadership Framework* identifies input as “the extent to which the principal:

- Provides opportunity for input on all important decisions

- Provides opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies, and
- Uses a leadership team in decision making

As the Hickman Mills secondary schools move forward in “Close the Gap,” it will be vitally important that these essential elements prevail, not only for those who serve formally on each school’s leadership team, but for all. To do less will stagnate or stymie growth in the achievement for each student.

Spotlight on Content Vocabulary— Dick Plymell

Lee Crow, a Hickman Mills High School science teacher, was discussing “acquired characteristics” with her class. When she noticed that her students were reacting to the questions with little idea of what was intended, Crow stopped her lesson, pulled the overhead projector in

place, and drew the Frayer Model for the students to see. She then proceeded to use the content vocabulary strategies she learned at the faculty’s previous professional development session. Crow was delighted that the students had a great time with the Frayer Model. She

reports that she has now started a word wall and the students actually look forward with enthusiasm to this activity. She definitely thinks this is a great tool to be used when starting new lessons.

“Leaders accept responsibility for achieving results and create the necessary environments that contribute to individual and organizational success.”

McRel

Content Vocabulary

Content vocabulary? Frayer Model? What’s that all about? The “Close the Gap” Consortium is an initiative by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools to involve secondary schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis areas and in the Missouri “boot heel” struggling with achievement levels that are lower for students of color or in poverty and those who are white and or generally

more affluent. The Consortium rests squarely on the research work of Mid-Continent Research and Learning (McRel). The Consortium is intended to be a three-year project and has started with attacking deficiencies in vocabulary found among lower achieving students. As many teachers recognize, author Ruby Payne notes that these students become stuck in lower registers of language and are

less able to function academically at the formal register used in schools. The Hickman Mills secondary schools, Ervin and Smith-Hale Middle Schools and Hickman Mills and Ruskin High Schools, are collaborating within their faculties to develop lists of content vocabulary upon which to focus and are learning the strategies needed to assist students with learning the vocabulary.