

Best Practices/Tom W. Many, Ed.D.

The Real Deal: Creating an Authentic Results Orientation

“When leadership is focused on results, on urging a formal, frequent review of instruction, teaching improves.” Mike Schmoker, (2006), p126

Collecting and compiling data from common, formative assessment is one way to respond to Schmoker’s call for a focus on results but in truth, the only time collecting data at the building and classroom level can be justified is when it is directly linked to, and an integral part of, efforts to improve teaching and learning. When using data in a PLC, the singular focus of the process is on helping students learn.

The Role of Data in a Results Orientation

Data from a common formative assessment plays an important role in fostering a Results Orientation but only if the data are easily accessible and used to change practice. Donella Meadows illustrates the importance of this concept in a story about the impact that easy access to timely and accurate information had on energy consumption in a suburban community. She describes a subdivision of nearly identical houses where the electric meter was installed in the basement of some of the homes, while in others, it was installed in the front hall where the homeowner could see the dial constantly

going round faster or slower as the homeowners used more or less electricity.

With no other differences,

Conduct quarterly reviews of instruction at the classroom level.

Change the focus of the traditional teacher evaluation process.

Celebrate the results you want repeated.

Authentic Results Orientation

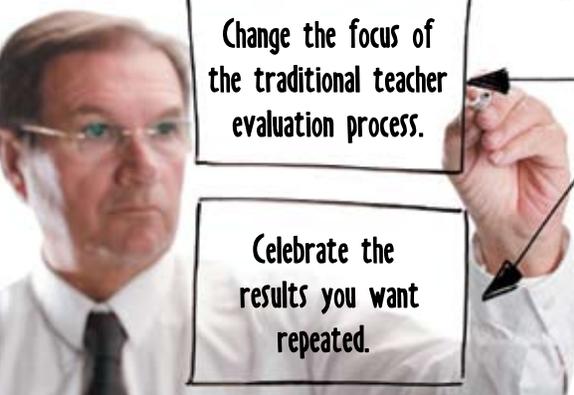
electricity consumption was 30 percent lower in the houses where the meter was installed in the front hall. A similar information strategy is used to promote weight loss. When clinical subjects log their caloric intake on a daily basis, they tend to lose weight. Simply being aware and having easy access to information on a timely basis promotes progress towards the goal.

The point of the story—how easy access to data from the electric meters helped homeowners save energy - should not be lost on those striving to improve teaching and learning. The critical insight for leaders is that the data was easily accessible and used to change behavior. The same is true for teachers and principals in schools with a Results Orientation; the data from common, formative assessments need to be easily accessible and used to change practice.

Towards a More Authentic Results Orientation

When Schmoker describes the components of a Results Orientation he includes data from formative assessments but an *authentic* Results Orientation goes far beyond looking at the numbers. Schmoker suggests that principals should also look at grade books, team lesson logs and samples of student work. He encourages principals to get out of the office, onto the teaching floor, and focus on products of the teaching and learning process—samples of student work—in order to foster a real Results Orientation in their schools.

Likewise, Dennis Sparks encourages principals to watch student’s reactions and pay special attention to their level of engagement during the traditional teacher observation process. He suggests principals require teachers to bring samples of student work from the lesson that was observed to the post observation conference in order to assess the effectiveness of the lesson based on *results*. His argument



is that this simple shift in the focus of the principal's time and attention during the teacher evaluation cycle creates a much stronger focus on results.

In schools with an authentic Results Orientation, data represent a means to an end, not the end itself. Indeed, data from common assessments play an important part in creating a Results Orientation but data are only one part and a school cannot boast of its Results Orientation if their focus is limited to a review of the data generated by common formative assessments. Here are three other strategies principals can implement right now to develop a stronger and more authentic Results Orientation in their schools.

1. Conduct quarterly reviews of instruction at the classroom level. Quarterly reviews at the classroom level include the results of common, formative assessments but they also include a review of the standards teachers taught during the previous quarter. Along with common assessment results, teachers should also provide evidence that 1) they have taught the standards, 2) that students have been given the opportunity to learn what the team agrees was important for all kids to know and be able to do, and 3) that those who have not learned it *yet* were given more opportunities to learn.

If principals want to foster a more authentic Results Orientation in their schools, the regular review of results must be more than a posting of test scores; principals must also seek evidence that the agreed-upon curriculum is being taught.

2. Change the focus of the traditional teacher evaluation process. When observing teachers during the evaluation cycle, principals should focus less on what the teacher is doing and more on what the students are doing. More specifically, principals should watch how students are responding to the teacher's instruction, level of engagement, and what kinds of products students are generating. Teachers should bring samples of student work to the post conference where conversations between teachers and principals revolve around the work students produced as a result of the lesson. Principals foster a more authentic Results Orientation when they make it clear the goal of teacher evaluation process is to explore outcomes and the post observation conference is focused on the products, not process of the lesson.

3. Celebrate the results principals want repeated. Principals should celebrate the results they would like to see repeated in their schools. As Evans said, "The single best, low cost, high leverage way to improve performance, morale, and

the climate for change is to dramatically increase the levels of meaningful recognition for-and among-educators." Evans (1996, p. 254). In establishing a results-oriented culture at Stevenson High School, "DuFour did one thing with passion and strict regularity: he made occasions to reward, recognize, and celebrate accomplishments at every single faculty meeting and more formally at the end of each semester." Schmoker (2006, p. 146).

By celebrating the results they want to see repeated, principals increase the likelihood that the behaviors that promote a Results Orientation in the short term will become part of the school's culture over the long term.

A Cautionary Note About A Results Orientation

As we have said, schools with a Results Orientation are focused on improving teaching and learning but principals must be careful not to put too much emphasis on the numbers alone. An *authentic* Results Orientation is more, much more. Principals in effective schools realize that promoting the development of an *authentic* Results Orientation involves helping teachers focus on the right work.

Too often the focus is too narrow and data collected at the building and classroom level is funneled to dashboards and scorecards that support thick and detailed school improvement plans that grew from elaborate strategic planning processes; all of which has little or no support as ways to improve teaching and learning. Scrutinizing more numbers doesn't make for a better Results Orientation, it just makes for a more time consuming and complicated one.

The bottom line is that every minute a principal spends in their office gathering data for a dashboard or scorecard is one less minute they are on the teaching floor engaged in the collective and collaborative effort to improve student learning. ■

During the course of a career spanning more than 30 years, Dr. Tom W. Many has served as a classroom teacher, principal and superintendent—all at the elementary level.

Resources

Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements In Teaching And Learning*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Alexandria: VA.