



**Girls' Prep's Report on
a course offered at the
Harvard Graduate School of Education's
(Leadership: An Evolving Vision)
12 – 20 July 2007**

The Principals' Centre

The Principals' Center runs under the auspices of Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge. The Principals' Center offers courses to Heads in particular, but also to those who play a leadership role in the education environment. The courses are usually offered during the American summer (June, July) when their schools are closed, thus allowing their Heads to attend.

Leadership: An Evolving Vision

This course, or institute, as the Americans refer to it, was attended largely by American Heads. The next country which had a fair representation was Australia. Interestingly, the Australian delegation had representatives from their Government department – superintendents and not just Heads. There were also representatives from India, Colombia, Scotland, United Kingdom, Spain, United Arab Emirates, New Zealand, China, Greece, Romania and Singapore. I was the only South African Head. The course consisted of 14 presentations, most delivered in lecture style, with the exception of two of the speakers. Readings were given beforehand in preparation for the sessions. Each day concluded with small group discussions which were very useful.

The content of the presentations, naturally had an American bias, but there were clear trends that impact on Education universally.

The focus of the course was raising the levels of student achievement. There were various ways of raising student achievement and I have grouped them into 3 sections:

1. The role of the Head as Instructional Leader
2. A belief that all children can achieve
3. The role of the teacher

The Head as Instructional Leader

The responsibility of initiating change lies with the Head. However, Heads have been trained to meet the more technical challenges in a school, but it is those adaptive challenges that require a change in deep beliefs that require more attention and Leadership.

There are various ways of initiating change. The first practical way is by playing the role of Coach. This approach requires 2 days in the classroom (in the playing field) and 3 days in the office. This approach will allow the Heads to examine the practice in their school. In order to do this successfully, leaders need to separate what they observe from their evaluations and judgment. It is therefore, very important for leaders to understand instructional practice.

The Instructional leader must have a good understanding of the role of Emotional Intelligence at work. A strong focus on emotional intelligence will pave the way for fundamental change.

Many schools have a toxic culture, in order to change the culture in an organization, the leader needs to have a clear vision and strategy, as well as needs to equip people with the skills that they are going

to need. This is the area where leaders often fail. They then need to hold staff accountable for the new behaviors they are looking for.

All children can learn

There was a very strong thread throughout the course that all children can learn and that all children must be included. There was emphasis placed on creating a sense of belonging before any learning could take place. The interesting question asked was, "How do you build a sense of belonging without using an allegiance?" Allegiance was defined as when you have a common enemy.

The other, very pertinent question raised was, "Where does belonging get eroded in a school?" It was interesting to note that in countries where children are performing really well, that there was no ability grouping for children until they reached the age of 13 years.

The Role of the Teacher

More than one speaker stressed, that the role of the teacher is very important. It is essential for teachers to be able to raise the level of instruction, otherwise there is a high level content taught at a low level.

Teachers must develop a practice of self reflection. This practice is most successful when done in teams of teachers. Once again the careful and in-depth analysis of student data is vital.

The crisis of teacher shortage, as well as the quality of the teacher, was discussed. It was felt that a way of addressing these 2 issues was by professionalizing teaching. This would involve developing a career ladder for teachers. It was recommended that there should be four teaching positions in schools: Chief Instructor, Professional Teacher, Teacher and Associate Teacher. The Head supervises approximately four Chief Instructors, who in turn supervise a number of teams. These teams consist of professional teachers, fully licensed teachers, associate teachers and teaching interns.

Conclusion

In summary there has to be a values understanding and agreement that all children can learn. In order to achieve this, teachers need to constantly reflect on their practice and rigorously use student data for future strategies and planning. The Head (Instructional Leader) needs to play a coaching role and ensure that the environment is one that allows for change to take place.

Recommendations

This course was well planned with high caliber professionals presenting it. It was an opportunity to be exposed to the latest educational research and how to practically implement this research. I would strongly recommend it and further information is available on their website:

www.gse.harvard.edu/principals.

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