

*Discussions In The School With...
... Teachers*

Commitment

A policy maker once said that he'd discovered over the years that policy can be made without teachers but policy can't be made to work without teachers. If literacy and the improvement of reading and writing skills are to develop in schools, all teachers will need to be committed to it. Teachers are intelligent and educated people who work in relatively private environments. They cannot do a great job unless they understand 'why', as well as 'what'. They need to see the relevance of what they've been asked to do for themselves, as well as their students, and feel that the practical implications are within their grasp, even though they may have to stretch to reach them. Issuing orders may give the impression that everything is being attended to, but behind the closed classroom door something different may be happening, and the School Administrator cannot check and monitor everybody all the time.

Necessary Rationale

To create the necessary rationale which teachers both need and deserve, if a change in classroom practice is expected, it's appropriate to start the conversation with "What's in it for you, the teachers, to improve the literacy standards of our students, and to help all of them achieve success in the Grade 10 test?" or "What are the potential advantages and disadvantages, the cost/benefit analysis, of working together to manage this change as effectively as possible?"

Right to Their Views

In this case, the starting point of the conversation is not neutral. There are powerful feelings already in play around the issues of high stakes testing, and these feelings need to be respected, not merely ignored or contradicted. For some teachers, a positive and energetic response to government policy changes does feel like 'collusion', when the personal instinct is to oppose. Teachers have every right to their views. The issue is how and where these views are expressed and acted upon.



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Maximise Opportunities

Test success, as a condition of secondary school graduation in Ontario has arrived, with or without the support of teachers, and will be around for awhile. In other parts of North America, these types of tests have already been in place for several years. Teacher federations and professional organizations may campaign against this development, but in the school environment, these desires must give way to the needs of the students and the families. If this is forgotten, the core purpose of a school, to maximise the opportunities for all its students to achieve their goals, is lost. Literacy skills including oral, visual, reading and writing are crucial to these opportunities, whether the test is a graduation issue or not.