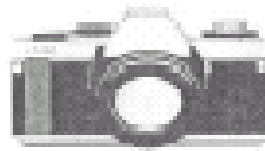


Woonsocket Education Department

Looking at Learning Through a New Lens



Presented To:

The Woonsocket School Committee

October 23, 2002

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“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” - Mahatma Gandhi

A vibrant educational landscape is being created in Woonsocket, where all learners will be empowered to shape and enrich their changing world. To achieve this vision, the diverse learning needs of students will form the roots of our learning community, and all efforts will be grounded in a solid foundation of educationally based research. As we journey towards our destination of becoming an empowering school culture, the driving force must be teaching for understanding. Current research in education supports strategies that create a renewed culture of learning, where students are constantly challenged to think both critically and creatively. A variety of these strategies will be woven tightly into the fabric of the educational practices and experiences in Woonsocket. These powerful approaches, centered around the construction of knowledge, will change and strengthen the texture of the way teachers teach and the way students learn.

The first step in addressing the learning needs of our students is to reframe the traditional notion of intelligence. Intelligence must be viewed through a wider lens. Venturing beyond the belief that human cognition is one-dimensional and measured exclusively by an IQ test, we embrace Howard Gardner’s (1983) concept of multiple intelligence, which expands the parameters of intelligence to include a variety of human abilities. Through his inclusive definition, Gardner has discovered a better way to conceptualize intelligence that captures the range of capacities and potentials that humans possess. To further expand the meaning of intelligence, Goleman’s (1995) theories of emotional intelligence will also be reflected. Goleman believes that by developing higher levels of emotions, such as tolerance, caring, and personal responsibility, intelligence can be increased.

In our renewed school culture, learning will be recognized as a function of both aptitude for particular kinds of learning (talents), and effort, which is how hard a student tries (Resnick, 1995). Students who are held to low expectations do not try to break through that barrier (Resnick, 1999). An effort-oriented belief system, where children are encouraged to meet higher expectations, can actually create intelligence (Resnick and Williams, 2000). Ability is constructed through certain kinds of reciprocal effort on the part of both learners and

educators. If effort is harnessed to create ability, children can become smarter (Resnick, 1999). Recent findings indicate that students learn more and they learn more quickly when they are taught demanding, rigorous content and are expected to explain and find connections to prior learning. As a result, these students develop “habits of mind” (1999) and begin to view themselves as learners. To attain effort-based schools, academic rigor, coupled with a thinking curriculum for every student, will resonate throughout this learning community.

To ensure that all children are provided with equitable educational opportunities, emphasis will be placed on developing more personalized learning environments in our schools. Students’ diverse learning styles will be assessed, acknowledged, and cultivated. Each student’s individual characteristics, abilities, and needs will be aligned with flexible instructional practices that are developed by teachers who are immersed in embedded professional development.

In order to motivate students to work hard and channel their efforts in a particular direction, there must also be clear expectations (1999). Through the use of rubrics that provide authentic assessment of their work, students will know what it is they are striving to learn and they will understand the basis of good performance. With explicit content and performance standards guiding them, students will construct portfolios by selecting work that exemplifies their effort and achievement. Reflecting on their own work, as well as that of others, can motivate students and promote the use of deeper thinking skills (University of Pittsburgh, 2001).

A valuable tool that will enable students to demonstrate evidence of their achievement is the Learning Walk (2001). A variety of people trained to conduct Learning Walks will open the doors to classrooms throughout the city to discover what the children are learning and to determine how performance standards are reflected in students’ work. Utilizing this strategy will stimulate accountable talk by providing students with the opportunity to dialogue about the learning that is taking place.

As these new gates to learning are opened in Woonsocket, students will travel through the emerging educational landscape along the pathway to success. All students will grow to become high quality life performers because they have learned to harness their effort to create the ability they will need to shape and enrich their changing world.