



The clang of dissonance can signal a paradigm shift

By Valerie von Frank

Q How do you get teachers to reconceptualize established frameworks?

I try to shift teachers from what I think has been the latent function of schools to sort and rank students, where teachers serve as gatekeepers, to embracing enthusiastically all kids learning at high levels.

When we start talking about all kids learning at high levels, some teachers say, "You're crazy. Be realistic about what's achievable in our classrooms on a day-to-day basis." Talking about all kids learning and student engagement is a paradigm shift. Coaches use a two-step process.

First, just ask the question, ask teachers to consciously reflect. Then begin to present some models, some examples of how that can happen.

At Heritage High School we

have chosen to focus on professional collaboration among teachers, as well as collaboration as an instructional model. Educators have to move away from relying excessively on whole group instruction. We've had to be intentionally progressive in learning how to embrace differentiation. Teachers at Heritage are becoming much more conscious of the critical nature of formative assessment so they can meet students where they are in the learning process.

We've also looked at grading. As educators, are we looking at sorting and ranking kids and at compliance, or are we pushing kids to understand at a higher level? Do our grading practices reflect our values? A growing number of our faculty are consciously trying to distinguish between grading a students' ability to apply their knowledge at the understanding level of learning, and grading simple recall at the knowledge level of learning. If we want learning to be enduring, we must demand that our students move beyond recall.

I think learning happens from

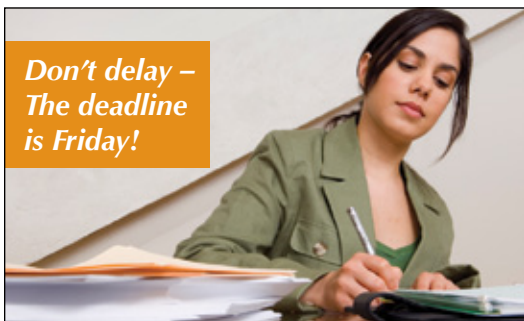
cognitive dissonance, for students and for teachers. When there's a conflict, people think, "I have to work this out." We try to find ways to create that dissonance, whether through reading *Understanding by Design* or bringing in outside leaders or asking teachers questions.

For some, awareness alone creates the paradigm shift. The coach needs to continually present data. Relative to other schools, our school's performance is high. Relative to the standards, there's still room to grow. We look at where the gaps are for individual students.

As a coach, you go where the energy is. One of my jobs is to keep us connected to our passion. I don't think we got into education, most of us, to sort and rank students or to be record keepers for kids' progress to get into the best colleges. We got into education to make a difference.

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