Forum 3

There are many variables that affect what a school culture is for all people involved. Everyone plays a part that could build a positive school culture or bring people down. According to our text, a positive school culture happens when “Everyone in the organization is treated with dignity and respect; their contributions are valued and important; and their accomplishments are recognized and celebrated” (Hackman, Schmidt-Oliver, Tracy).

One strategy that has worked in my district is establishing what the stakeholders want to see happening in our schools. Once this is established there has to be a building of a shared knowledge of the mission and vision. Last Thursday, I had the opportunity to attend a professional development session listening to Jimmy Casas. His message was about establishing if every student matters, every day. This has to be the leadership in the school buildings living their excellence each and every day. This does not mean being perfect but doing your best to live that every student matters, every day!

A great way to model a positive school culture starts with positive teaching happening in each and every classroom. There is a plethora of research that says “Successful teaching begins with the analysis of lesson structure, information about learning styles, brain research, multiple intelligences, authentic assessment, and constructivist classrooms to shape instructional decision-making about the content and the process of learning” (Caine & Caine, 1991; Danielson, 1996; Gardner, 1991; Hunter, 1982; Jacobs, 1997; Jensen, 1998; Newmann, Secada, & Wehlage, 1995).

A strategy that would ensure all teachers are working to achieve teaching that is meaningful for the students is to provide opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers either in building or outside our buildings. When teachers are able to observe and reflect in their practices, good teaching has a better chance of happening.

A third indicator of a positive school culture is what is being asked of our students. Tomlinson (1999) notes, “Thus, in a healthy classroom, what is taught and learned is relevant to students; it seems personal, familiar, connected to the world they know” (p. 30).

The learning has to matter to the students to promote a positive school culture that is not just talked about but is lived out daily. Fake culture or hoping a positive culture will take shape will only work for a short time. The students have a very large voice in the culture of our schools and if the learning is real and not fake or meaningless, the culture will have an authentic chance to develop.

One strategy to promote authentic learning is to inspire teachers and administrators to dive into project-based learning or also known as authentic learning experiences. I have thoroughly enjoyed this year far more than my previous years of teaching because the relevance for the students is happening each day. With this strategy students are pushed to use the soft twenty-first century skills of problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration to solve real world questions. Th students are then connected to an authentic audience to present their research and product to which provides the build in rigor needed to create a culture of high expectations for the students to achieve and pass.