



Looking at Instruction: Authentic Pedagogy

Schoolwide reform projects often address changing instruction in order to better serve all the students in the school. In this article we examine a model of instruction called *authentic pedagogy* that has been found to promote student learning in schools with a high proportion of students from low income families or students of color.

Based on the work of Fred Newmann and associates at the Center on Organization and Restructuring Schools, authentic pedagogy has been found to support the learning of students at risk and to foster high levels of engagement and interaction (Newman and Wehlage, 1995; Newmann and Associates, 1996). This form of instruction can be learned and implemented effectively in classrooms serving all students. While not a magic bullet for improving student learning, it provides a model for looking at instruction that emphasizes higher order thinking and student learning.

Authentic pedagogy as described in Newmann and Wehlage (1995) has several major components including:

► Construction of Knowledge

Students engage in higher order thinking activities in which they manipulate information and ideas by synthesizing, generalizing, explaining hypothesizing or arriving at conclusions that produce new meanings or understandings. (p. 17.)

For this feature one sees students truly engage ideas and issues with some complex thinking.

This helps them develop for themselves new meanings or deeper understandings.

► Disciplined Inquiry

Students both make use of deep knowledge and engage in substantive conversations. Deep knowledge involves addressing some central ideas of the discipline the students are studying in order to explore connections and relationships that end in complex understandings on the part of students (p. 17). In classes, students also engage in extended dialogues and exchanges with teachers and peers about the subject matter in ways that develop shared understandings about ideas, issues, or the discipline.

For this feature of authentic pedagogy one sees students using some deep knowledge of the issue or topic to explore the disciplinary relationships. This exploration is done through intense back-and-forth dialogue and discussion of the topics, ideas or issues. These are conversations where the teacher assists, but does not control the interactions.

► Value Beyond the School

Students are engaged in subjects so that they make connections between the substantive knowledge they are developing and either public problems or personal experiences. (p.17.)

While some instructional reforms have called for more relevancy, authentic pedagogy requires that students, on their own or through the flow of the

class discussion, understand and make significant connections between what they are discussing and working on and real problems or experiences outside the classroom.

Authentic pedagogy can be found in many classes. Classes with these instructional features often are places with highly engaged students, looking deeply at questions of relevance in the real world outside the classroom, who engage in sustained conversation about complex issues. It is possible for teachers to teach this way naturally. But more often, teachers will find that if they work together to develop and expand on these features in their classrooms through extended professional development and collegial interchange they will bring authentic pedagogy into their classes.

For more information

Newmann, Fred and Wehlage, Gary (1995). *Successful School Restructuring*. Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This concise volume describes the features of authentic pedagogy and other restructuring issues in a clear and useful manner.

Newmann, Fred and Associates (1996). *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass Publishers. This longer volume details the full study of restructuring and authentic pedagogy with attention to the importance of leadership, professional community, and authentic assessment.

This column is prepared by Kent D. Peterson, Ph.D., Senior Training and Research Specialist for this Center and Professor of Educational Administration, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written extensively for both scholarly and practitioner publications and worked with schools and leadership institutes across the country. His current book is The Leadership Paradox coauthored with Terrence Deal.