

# The El Paso Collaborative

## February 20, 2004

### Learning about Learning

#### Objectives for the Day

- Explore our under and undeveloped approaches to learning
- Gain broader perspectives about organizations and learning
- Examine organizational strategies that influence student learning and staff productivity
- Discuss leadership roles

# A Writing Activity

- Write your signature on the top of a page
- Now write your signature with your other hand
- Describe in one word/phrase what that activity felt like

There are 5 dogs and 125 sheep in a shepherd's flock. How old is the shepherd?

- Three out of four fourth graders gave a numerical answer to this question.

Reusser, (1986). Problem solving beyond the logic of things as cited in Merseth, (1996). How Old is the Shepherd. Phi Delta Kappan.

# Seemingly simple concepts

- $\frac{1}{2}$  divided by  $\frac{2}{3}$   
= ????

Provide a simple explanation appropriate for a novice learner

- Many leaves change color in the fall

Provide a simple explanation appropriate for a novice learner

# Different Perspectives

- Binocularity
- Counter Clockwise/Clockwise
- Describe Right and Left hand to someone over the telephone
- Ice cream elephant story
- Positional perspective—parent, teacher, administrator, politician, higher education faculty member...

# Learning Challenges

## Two Types

### Technical Learning Challenges

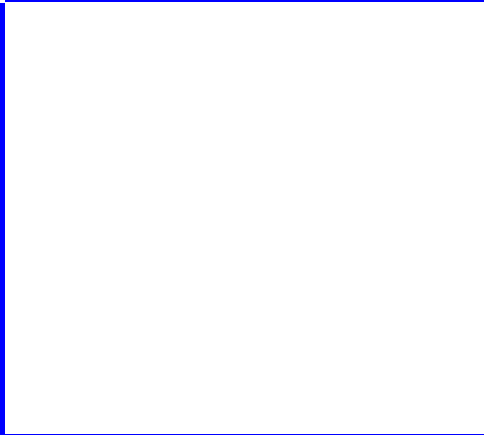
- Technical challenges require skills and knowledge that is ‘technical.’ It is technical because the knowledge has already been digested and put into a set of known organizational procedures.
- It can be specific tools that will accomplish the task. The knowledge and skills are not necessarily simple, easy or insignificant, but they are known.

# Adaptive Learning Challenges

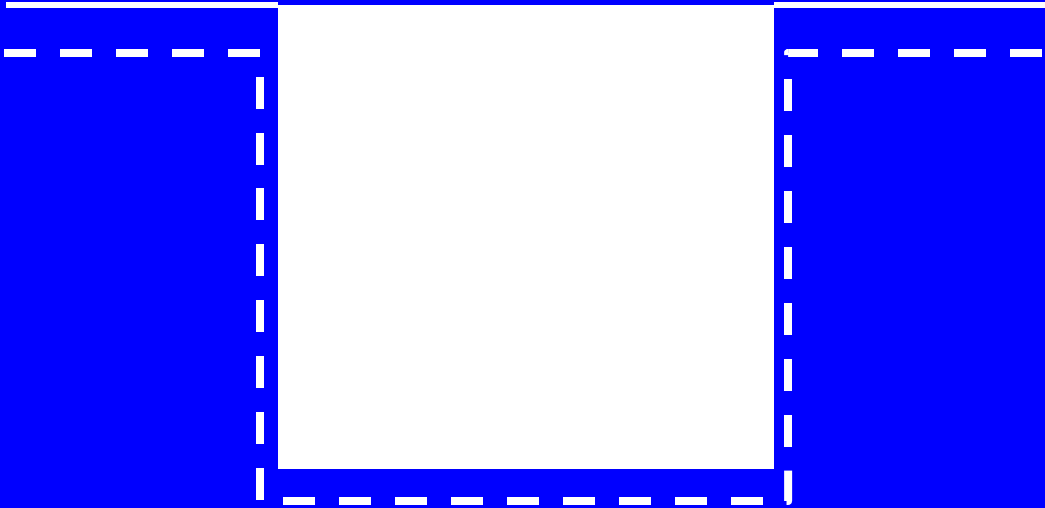
Adaptive Challenges occur when there is a gap between aspirations and reality, when there are challenges for which no adequate response exists. Here the learner has to change as he or she learns. The learner is not static, but changing and so the learning process is also changing.

Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold.

From Ron Heifitz: Leadership without Easy Answers



INformative



TRANSformative



“For a social system to learn, old patterns of relationship-- balances of power, customary operating procedures, distribution of wealth —may be threatened.”

Heifetz, p.30

# Disturbing the Balance

Collective Commitment/ My Commitment	Fearless Inventory that keeps this from happening	Hidden Competing Commitment

To make schools better and to enable kids to learn is both an Adaptive as well as a Technical Learning Challenge for adults who work in the school

# So let's talk about roles for a moment—those of Department Chairs and Staff Developers in your building

- What do you see as the role of the department chairs in your building?
- What do you see as the role of the staff developers in your building?
- Compare your descriptions with someone else's
- How are the roles of staff developer and department chair similar and how are they different?

Remember...

“If you cannot draw a direct line  
between your role and the  
improvement of student learning,  
then you are overhead.”

Richard Elmore, HGSE Professor

# Elmore's Organizing Principles for Professional Learning

## Communities

- It's about instruction and only instruction
- Instructional change is a long, multi-stage process
- Maintain a focus on system-wide improvement
- Set clear expectations, the decentralize
- Shared expertise is the driver of instructional change
- Good ideas come from talented people working together
- Collegiality, caring and respect are essential

# Organizational Structures

- Functional Structure
  - Activities grouped together by common function. Allegiance to functional unit.
  - Best when goals of organization stress functional expertise.
  - Weakness is it can't respond well to environmental changes.

Example: Departments in schools

- Divisional Structure

- Groups diverse functions into divisions

- All necessary functions within one unit

- Identify with division, not function

- Disadvantage is it loses economies of scale

Example: House Systems; Small schools



- Matrix Structure
- Enables organization to meet multiple demands from environment, but accountability and responsibility are problematic

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Department

# Thurgood Marshall High School

- Shared expertise is the driver of instructional change
- Good ideas come from talented people working together
- Collegiality, caring and respect are essential

# Case Analysis Chart

<b>Stakeholders-internal</b>		
<b>Stakeholders-external</b>		
<b>Culture-internal</b>		
<b>Culture-external</b>		
<b>Resources-internal</b>		
<b>Resources-External</b>		
<b>Clarity about Purpose-</b>		

# Changing Culture

- Culture can be counterproductive and an obstacle to educational success; culture can also be oppressive and discriminatory.
- Lasting fundamental change (e.g. changes in teaching practices or the decision making structure) requires understanding and, often, altering the school's culture.
- Cultural change is a slow process.

# Machiavelli on Change

“And one should bear in mind that there is nothing more difficult to execute, nor more dubious of success, nor more dangerous to administer, than to introduce a new order of things; for he who introduces it has all those who profit from the old order and his enemies, and he has only lukewarm allies in all those who might profit from the new.”

Nonetheless...It's ALL about relationships.