

Relevance – Along with Rigor

Real-world relevant instruction and higher standards among the keys to needed improvements

KEN SYKE

Because our schools are based upon a mid-20th century model, we have a serious educational problem.”

With that statement, Bill Daggett let it be known that the attendees in his special workshop “Rigor and Relevance for ALL students” would learn about fundamental educational change.

Likening the current state of public education to a lawn mower just moments before it runs out of gas, Daggett said what’s taking place is “a burst of energy before the end of public education as we now know it.”

“Our schools have become museums of teaching and learning, and we are the curators,” he said.

Daggett is CEO of the International Center for Leadership in Education, which assists schools and districts to implement organizational changes that translate into improved curriculum, instruction, and assessment systems.

Daggett emphasized that American schools are getting better – there’s documentation to back it up – but that the world is changing four to five times faster than schools are getting better.

“The gap between where schools are and where they need to be has never been greater,” Daggett said.

Wisconsin Needs to Change

Daggett’s organization bases much of its work on research and data, and he had a specific message for Wisconsin educators. Noting that the Badger State has a history of good schools, his organization “is hard pressed to find other states where schools have changed less.”

“In Wisconsin, ‘good’ is the

enemy of ‘great’. There’s been no urgency to change.”

He used Grade 4 Reading Proficiency minimums to make the point that Wisconsin sets low standards.

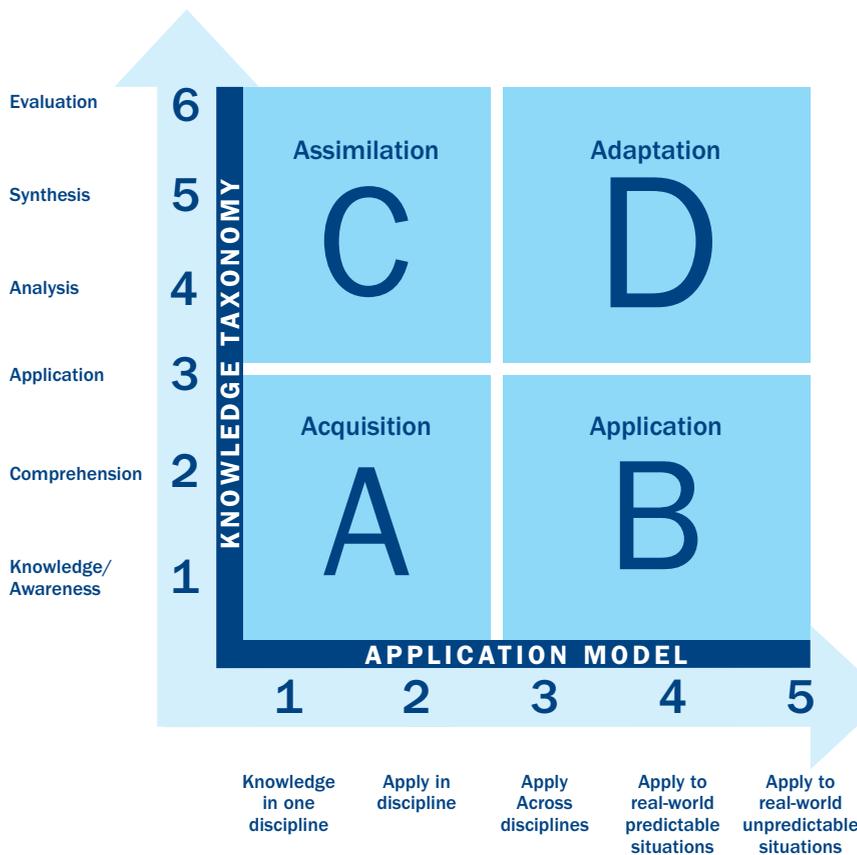
While Wisconsin students rank among the top states in percentage at proficient or better (82 percent in 2009), it’s made possible by the state-defined NAEP score requirement for proficiency; it’s the third lowest

among the 50 states – only 189.

This example, says Daggett, reveals a stark fact: “Wisconsin has some of the lowest cut points for proficiency in the country.”

Noting that state curriculum standards are regularly added but seldom taken away, he told the attendees that school curricula here are lacking in that they have breadth, but not the needed depth.

Rigor/Relevance Framework



Session Details

TITLE *Rigor and Relevance for ALL Students*

PRESENTER **Bill Daggett**, CEO, International Center for Leadership in Education

The Case for Relevance

Through a meta-analysis of research on school effectiveness, five indicators (out of 132) are characteristic of the fundamentally most effective and rapidly improving elementary, middle and high schools in the nation:

Top 5 indicators of the 75 most effective schools

- culture of high expectations
- relevance of instruction
- strong relationships
- system-wide focus on literacy
- focused and sustained professional development

Daggett focused on the second of these indicators – relevance of instruction, because “relevance makes rigor possible.”

The International Center has developed the Rigor/Relevance Framework (see graph). The Framework’s vertical scale represents knowledge (rigor) and the horizontal scale is application (relevance). The targeted quadrant has to be “D” – Adaptation, where in-depth knowledge is significantly applied to the real world.

“When students learn how to apply knowledge, they retain it,” said Daggett.

The D Quadrant’s adaptive skills – such as innovation, creativity and decision-making, among others – are what’s demanded in the workplace and will lead to economic success.

“It doesn’t matter what you took in schools; what matters is what you can do with what you took.” ■

Syke is a Communication strategist, crisis management, professional communication support at Syke Communications.



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