



IMPROVING STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION:

**An Interview With Trudy Schoneman,
Instructional Leadership Initiative Director**

A CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM INVOLVING:

Lower Lake High School (Konocti Unified School District)

Jordan Freshman Academy (Long Beach Unified School District)

Hoop Valley High School (Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified)

Farmersville High School (Farmersville Unified School District)

2009



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE:

COLLABORATING TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Instructional Leadership Initiative Interview

Trudy Schoneman was director of the Instructional Leadership Initiative (ILI) from its inception in 2000 to 2008. Prior to her work with this initiative for the California Academic Partnership Program, she worked at WestEd as an Associate Director of the Western Assessment Collaborative. Schoneman has also been a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent, with a career spanning over 30 years in education.

ILI began with 12 schools. When the first phase of the project ended in 2003, four new low-performing schools participated in the initiative. These schools were Lower Lake High School in the Konocti Unified School District, Jordan Freshman Academy in the Long Beach Unified School District, Hoopa Valley High School in the Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District, and Farmersville High School in the Farmersville Unified School District.

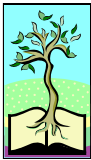
In the following interview conducted by Jan Agee, Schoneman responds to questions on these topics:

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| <i>1. ILI's Primary Goals</i> | <i>6. ILI's Additional Successes</i> |
| <i>2. Activities and Components of ILI</i> | <i>7. ILI's Biggest Challenges</i> |
| <i>3. The ILI Conference</i> | <i>8. Administrative Support</i> |
| <i>4. Unpacking the Standard</i> | <i>9. What to Do Differently</i> |
| <i>5. ILI's Impact on Teaching</i> | <i>10. Next Steps for ILI Schools</i> |

1. What were your primary goals in the Instructional Leadership Initiative?

When the **Instructional Leadership Initiative** began, state policy makers and school administrators assumed that standards-based practice was easy to implement. Few people truly understood what changes teachers needed to make to ensure that *all* students were successful in meeting the state standards. The ILI provided teacher leaders with on-site professional development and support to work with their own community of teachers to develop the instructional units and common assessments required for student success. Specifically, the ILI's goal was to develop the capacity for schoolwide, standards-based instruction by building the skills of teacher leaders to do the following:

- Provide leadership for the collaborative development and implementation of standards-based instructional units and practice in English-language arts and mathematics.
- Help their faculties develop common assessments and establish agreed-upon performance standards for those units.

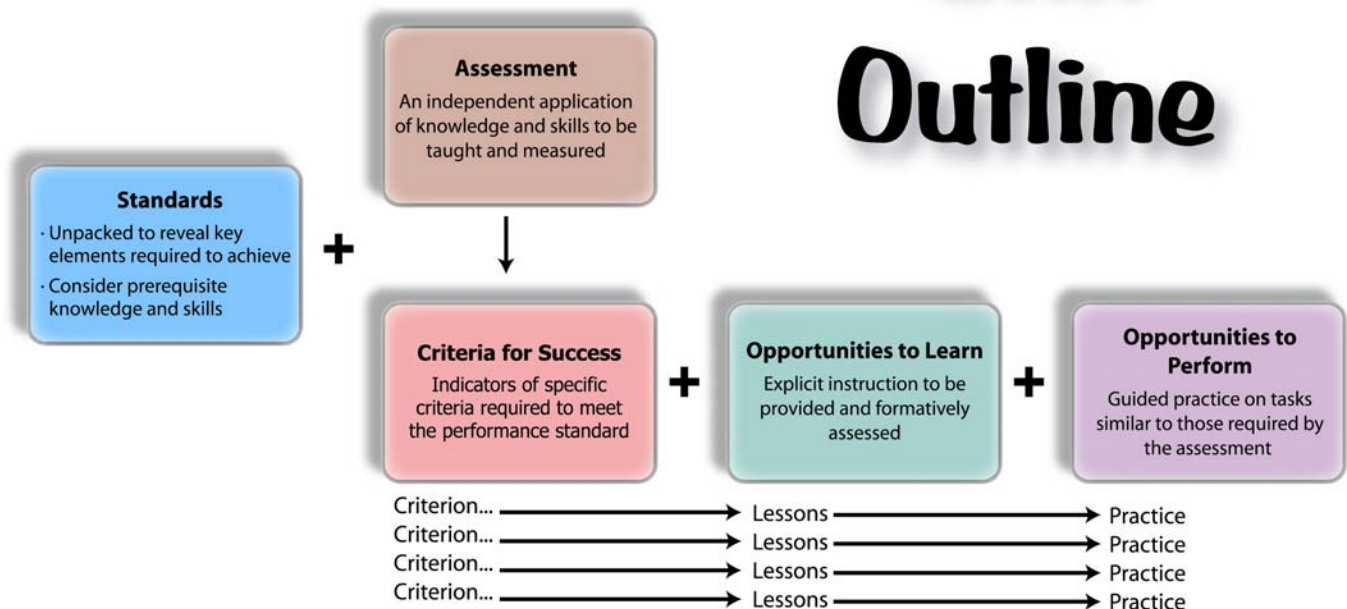


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another. Often deep discussions regarding subject content would ensue before a concept or skill would be agreed upon. The teachers also considered prerequisite knowledge and skills as they thought about what students would need to know before the standard was initially taught. The teachers designed an assessment to determine if the students had these particular skills and knowledge. However, the process could become difficult, for example, when math teachers disagreed on whether open-ended problems or multiple-choice problems would provide teachers with the information they needed without taking too long to score. After the assessment, teachers developed the criteria for success, which provided teachers and students alike with clear expectations about the level of quality needed to achieve the standards.

Unit Outline



The second step was to design opportunities for students to learn; these were basically the lessons in the instructional unit. One benefit of working with a community of teachers, rather than just one or two teachers, is the quality of the instructional planning, because all teachers share their expertise to create opportunities to learn. This schoolwide approach improves the chances of impacting instruction.

Next, the teachers taught the unit, administered the assessment, and collected the student work. Afterwards, we met together and analyzed the assessments.



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Part of the reason we conducted on-site visits and designed the units together was to model, facilitate, and provide structured, hands-on professional development. This approach gave teachers a deeper experience that they had not encountered before around curriculum, instruction, and assessment that could make a real difference in their teaching and in student learning.

3. What was the purpose of the ILI Conference?

During mid-year we conducted the ILI Conference. All the ILI schools and department teams presented their units, assessments, scoring guides and rubrics, and student work to teachers from all over California. In this professional arena, the teachers received feedback and revised their work. Also, the credibility of their performance standards was analyzed. In some cases teachers had low student expectations, but when they saw higher quality work from another school they understood that their expectations were not high enough. They realized that they needed to raise their performance standards higher if students were going to meet the standards at grade level.

We conducted the ILI Conference as one strategy for accountability. We thought that the quality of teachers' work would be enhanced if they knew they were going to share their unit and their students' work with other teachers, and this was the case.

The conference also connected teachers who lived all over California. Many of them were isolated in rural areas, and it was important for them to come together to work and feel part of a team. As a result, they developed a sense of belonging with other teachers who were having similar experiences. It was another professional community they could participate in.

In addition, the conference gave teachers a chance to talk about subject-matter content. In a room with 30 other high school math teachers, they really wanted to discuss mathematics. Through that entire department team dialogue process and even during the breaks, they learned from each other, not just from their own units. Learning how to give and receive feedback, both verbally and in writing, took their skill level deeper and higher. The ILI Conference was an excellent way to integrate everything that they had learned.

4. What exactly does unpacking the standard mean?

After department teams select the content standard they want to focus on, teachers "unpack the standard." Teachers collectively identify the specific skills



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and knowledge that students need to know and be able to do to achieve the standard.

The purposes for “unpacking the standard” are the following:

- **Gain clarity and increased common understanding of what the broad, complex standard actually means.** The process breaks the larger concept into smaller skills that make up the standard. Teachers may have their own interpretation of the standard, but with all of the teachers “unpacking the standard” together, most likely no skill or chunk of knowledge is missed, and they come to agree upon what the standard means.
- **Strengthen teachers’ content knowledge.** During this process the differences in teachers’ content knowledge are evident. Most teachers interpret each standard based on their experience and knowledge. The benefit of working together as a group is that teachers with somewhat limited content knowledge are exposed to a deeper and more thorough way of thinking about the content within the standard. Teachers decide how they actually need to teach the concept. Some teachers may have been leaving out aspects of the process, but because of the collective wisdom of the teachers, gaps are identified. Teachers can see the complexities of a standard that they previously thought was simple to teach.
- **Use the list of what students need to know and be able to do to create an assessment that aligns to the standard.** If these skills are the things that students must know and do to achieve the standard, the assessment must contain these items. “Unpacking the standard” provides a list of items that need to be included in the assessment. Decisions such as how many problems should be included and which items should be weighted more due to the level of difficulty or importance must be discussed and resolved. By creating and administering a standards-based assessment, teachers have the necessary information to decide whether students have met the standard.
- **Create the specifics of what must be taught if each student is going to experience the necessary opportunities to learn and meet the standard.** Teachers can take the list of “unpacked standards” and create instructional lessons.

The actual process of “unpacking the standard” involves charting the standard. A facilitator records what students need to know and be able to do. This process is completed using a computer with the images projected onto a screen or with an easel and paper. Either way, the teachers need to see visually the process as it progresses.

At Hoopa Valley High School the teachers unpack the standard by identifying what the students need to know and be able to do to meet the standard.



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Example from Hoopa Valley High School Unpacking the Standard

English Standard (Grades Eleven and Twelve)

Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Students combine the rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description to produce texts of at least 1,500 words each. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

Unpack the Standard:

The standard is presented below in “a” through “d.” The information in italics explains what students need to know and be able to do to meet the standard – in other words, how the standard is unpacked.

2.2 Write responses to literature:

- a. Demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the significant ideas of literary works.**
 - *State what the author wants us to learn and understand.*
- b. Support important ideas and viewpoints through accurate and detailed references to the text or to other works.**
 - *Cite quote/indirect quote and explain how it connects to the theme.*
 - *Justify how your textual examples help your readers understand the main idea.*
- c. Demonstrate awareness of the author’s use of stylistic devices and an appreciation of the effects created.**
 - *Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in a literary text (e.g., internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, and influences) and explain the way those interactions affect the plot.*
 - *Determine characters’ traits by what the characters say about themselves in narration, dialogue, dramatic monologue, and soliloquy.*
 - *Analyze and trace an author’s development of time and sequence, including the use of complex literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashbacks).*
 - *Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, irony, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.*
 - *Explain how voice, persona, and the choice of a narrator affect characterization and the tone, plot, and credibility of a text.*
 - *Identify and describe the function of dialogue, scene design, soliloquies, asides, and character foils in dramatic literature.*
- d. Identify and assess the impact of perceived ambiguities, nuances, and complexities within the text. (Teachers did not unpack this aspect of the standard because it is addressed in a unit taught later in the school year.)**



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5. What was ILI's impact on teaching?

I think most of the teachers, if not all, would say that their instructional practice changed quite dramatically. For the first time, teachers looked at standards and assessments *before* they looked at what they were going to teach. This accomplishment was huge. We call it backwards mapping; you really look at what you want students to know and be able to do and how you are going to assess it. Then you figure out what kind of lessons you need. Almost everyone said that once they changed their thinking to backwards mapping, there was no way they could go back to the old way of instructional planning.

Also, teachers learned the importance of having an assessment aligned to standards. We are responsible for teaching kids what we want them to know and be able to do; however, many of the teachers previously only assessed what was in the chapter, not what the actual standard required.

Furthermore, the teachers talked about unpacking the standards. The process of identifying what kids need to know and be able to do helped the teachers to think about their subject content and instruction. As a result, the quality of their work improved, in part because teachers did it collaboratively. They talked about how they did not have to do everything alone; they did not just have to rely on their own brains, experience, and knowledge, but they had the advantage of a community of teachers.

This kind of work requires time for teachers to plan and to plan together. Teachers began to negotiate more meeting time from administrators. The teachers also learned that they cannot just teach all of the peripheral skills and things that they love. They have a commitment, as professionals, to teach the standards. This reflects an enormous shift in their attitudes, knowledge, and understanding of what standards-based practice really is.

6. Can you give some examples of ILI's other successes?

In addition to the improvement in teaching and instructional practice, teachers learned the importance and value of content standards instead of seeing them as something that the state was forcing them to teach. They recognized the value of having a common understanding and agreed-upon expectations.

Another success was the fact that teachers began to *enjoy* working together. They saw the value that together they are stronger and better teachers than they are alone. Departments changed how they worked together. I observed teachers who initially were not getting along. They had differing philosophies and were used to doing their own teaching, but they came together and started



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to understand the advantage of having common assessments. I watched some really hard-headed teachers take a stand and dig their feet in, but then these resistant teachers softened and began to participate in a meaningful way.

Most of the time this transformation happened when we analyzed student work together. For example, we asked, “In this unit on this particular standard, what are all the students at the school doing well? What are the patterns of weakness, error, or misunderstanding that would inform teachers regarding what they needed to teach better?”

In one school the English department was basically dysfunctional. It was really difficult; the teachers had very different philosophies. It actually took three or four years before they all finally came together by agreeing to a common philosophy and working out personal differences. This last year was so exciting because we worked together. Everyone got on board, and they understood the importance of standards-based practice.

Watching department chairs and teacher leaders develop their capacity to lead standards-based practice was one of the most amazing successes of ILI. In the beginning most of the department chairs were soft spoken, though hard workers, but they were unwilling to speak up and take the lead by engaging teachers in the positive aspects of standards-based practice and holding teachers accountable. By the end of ILI, these teachers had a new, powerful energy and were no longer afraid to advocate for the needs of students. They became strong, capable leaders who organized and facilitated the meetings, as well as conducted all of the follow-up responsibilities. This transformation was extraordinary.

At another school, when we initially got together, each teacher scored the identical assessment differently. While a student would get an “A” in one class with a certain number correct, another student in a different class would have the same number correct and receive a “C.” Then we scored the algebra assessment together, giving point values for all sections of a problem. The teachers loved the conversation about what part of the algebraic response had the most value, and we made a common answer key before the teachers administered the assessment again. Teachers acknowledged the unfairness to students of implementing inconsistent grading practices.

Standards-based practice helped teachers clarify what they needed to teach, and they worked collaboratively to design lessons. There is no more successful place doing this than Jordan Freshman Academy. The teachers designed PowerPoint lessons for each unit. The lessons were incredible, with visuals, diagrams, warm-up problems, examples, guided practice, sound effects, and questions, and the teachers continued to revise the information. They taught



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the lessons and administered the assessment. They recognized when kids did not understand a certain part, and the teachers went back and improved the lessons. Currently, they are trying to get the lessons published, and I think they will be successful.

7. What were your biggest challenges? Can you give some examples of things that did not work?

There were a range of challenges. In the beginning some schools had no infrastructure to support professional development. They did not even have a contact person. Trying to find a person, teacher, department chair, or someone who was my contact to actually set up the meetings at the school, get the substitutes, and do all of the groundwork on site was a daunting task. I would send a list of things to consider, but some schools ignored most items. And when I did arrive, the substitutes and the teachers were not there on time, there were no refreshments, and nothing was done to support a successful meeting. Sometimes, a room was not even available, and if we did have a room, it was not set up for a meeting. In contrast, at Jordan the school designated a math coach to be in charge of ILI, and she took care of every detail. You could get a sense of the schools, just in terms of their infrastructure.

The resistant teachers were the second challenge. Half of the schools' teachers were excited, and the others were upset. Because the administration had not initially developed the necessary teacher buy-in before the ILI project began, teachers did not understand the initiative's importance, and they did not want to participate. Others did not want to be out of their classrooms, which was understandable. Most of this opposition turned around when they understood standards-based practice, what the project was, and how it would be useful to them. Again, most departments shifted their views when we looked at their own student work, and they could see the value of working together. It was authentic work; it was not something extra on top of their daily routine. They were going to develop and receive assessments and scoring guides and, in some cases, lessons. This information was seen as helpful.

Another challenge was the constant turnover. The first year we had resistant teachers. But then we would get them on board. They would attend the ILI Conference and be inspired by what they learned and what was going on across California. Then some teachers would leave or be let go, and we would have to start all over at the beginning of the next school year with new teachers.

In addition, many teachers did not know how to work together. For years they had worked alone. So, I would set norms for working together at the beginning of every meeting. I would have to enforce those norms when someone was not



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being respectful or engaging in unduly negative talk. I would bring them back to what we were working on. I had to do whatever it took to move the group forward. Some teachers just needed an opportunity to learn how to work together at a professional level.

The final challenge was that some teachers had very low expectations for student achievement. Maybe they had been working with low-performing kids for so long that they forgot what high-quality, grade-level work looked like. The ILI Conference provided an opportunity for teachers to see different quality student work and hear teachers talk about their expectations, which proved to be insightful.

8. How did the various schools differ in terms of administrative support?

The administrative support varied tremendously. We had some principals who did not believe in the work and were getting in the way.

On the other hand, for example, Jordan Academy had a very strong principal and a math coach who was in charge of ILI, so I had a contact person who organized our meetings. The principal of this 4000-student high school came to all of our sessions. While he didn't stay for the whole time, he made a point to come by, speak to his teachers, encourage them, and support them. As a result, Jordan Academy is phenomenal. It gets support, encouragement, and professional development beyond what ILI provided. The staff meet together, and have an early release day – one day a week to do the work.

9. What would you do differently next time?

Toward the end of the project, after teachers understood standards-based practice, they told me that they really wanted to focus on instruction. I think that when not all of their students met the standards, the teachers wanted to find more effective ways of instruction to get better results. Now I see that because these were really low-performing schools, teachers might have benefited from having the most powerful, researched-based strategies modeled for their subject areas. Some strategies for differentiated instruction would help their low-performing kids in math and English. The fact that teachers had a strong desire to improve their instruction by the end of the ILI project helps me to know that ILI was a true success. Teachers now firmly believe that good teaching improves student achievement.



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10. What would the next steps be for the schools that participated in ILI?

Many of the schools are in similar situations. For example, most have all of their Algebra I units developed. They need to put them online so that the assessments, prompts, rubrics, and answer keys are available to every teacher in the school's math department. New teachers won't have to ask for every assessment and its details, because everything is online. If the documents change, everyone has access to the most current document. For example, perhaps the teachers discover that one question needs to be revised after the assessment is administered. It is easy to go back and change it immediately while it is still fresh in their minds. Or maybe the English teachers did not get the result they desired because a prompt lacked clarity. The teachers can enhance the directions before administering it again. Online access prevents teachers from having different versions floating around, which loses the purpose of having a common assessment.

Departments and schools also need a plan for new teachers. How are the schools going to provide the professional development and experiences so the teachers know how to use these instructional units and assessments? The new teachers need to understand the department's focus and belief in standards-based practice, what kind of work they are doing together as a department, and how they collaborate. That interaction has to be in place as part of the infrastructure.

Some of these schools will be getting new administrators. The teachers have to talk to their new principals and explain their standards-based practice and their work, how valuable it is, how it enhances student achievement, and how they need time to meet together. Maybe the schools that are not already providing release time could work towards having it weekly; for example, teachers can meet one morning to continue the ILI work, and the students can arrive later in the day.

Finally, the department chair has to step up and be the instructional leader who owns, supports, and leads ILI work. The ILI has built individuals' capacity to function as instructional leaders. Then because they are more powerful together, all of the teachers must join in to ensure that their standards-based practice leads to all students achieving high standards.

ILI Evaluation Findings

CAPP has funded two evaluation reports involving ILI. The first entitled, “Instructional Leadership Initiative Conference, January 2006 – Evaluation Summary” is a descriptive report.

The second report, “WestEd’s Final Evaluation of CAPP’s California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Initiative from School Years 2000-01 through 2007-08” assesses change and student improvement in 10 high schools including the four discussed in this interview.

Findings showed that the CAPP CAHSEE initiative clearly helped to support the schools develop as professional learning communities. The schools developed effective approaches to supporting students academically, both by improving the quality of curriculum and instruction, and by providing targeted support to students needing additional support. Teachers collaborated with their colleagues around developing curriculum and assessments, as well as on assessing student work. In addition, faculty and staff collaborated across schools, sharing effective strategies for supporting students academically. Given that many of these practices have become institutionalized, it is likely that students will have increasing success in passing the CAHSEE and developing a solid academic foundation based on the mastery of content standards, which in turn should lead to improved academic achievement, increased persistence in high school, and higher levels of college preparation and enrollment.

View or download the above reports from the CAPP website:

<http://www.calstate.edu/CAPP/>



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