

“I have to develop the trust or I can’t do any of the other work.”

Math facilitator adds trust and multiplies effectiveness

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Building trust was the dominant concern for Tina Scholtes’ first year as a K-6 math facilitator/coach for the Starkville Public Schools.

Building trust with teachers so they would invite her into their classrooms to observe and demonstrate. Building trust with principals so they would support her recommendations for improvements. Building trust with parents who wonder why money is being spent to create this new job instead of hiring another classroom teacher.

“What I’ve learned is that I’m having to take this job in little, tiny, teeny steps. I have to develop the trust or I can’t do any of the other work,” she said.

Building trust, she said, is delicate work. “We’re trying to crack the shell of the egg without getting the egg all over us,” Scholtes said.

Starkville created two elementary math coaching positions during the 2004-05 school year because of a belief that supporting teachers with coaching would result in higher student learning in mathematics. “We had seen that math scores were declining as students progressed through school,” Scholtes said. Only 11% of 2nd graders scored in the lowest categories of Mississippi’s statewide math assessment. But by 8th grade, those numbers jumped to 65%.

For Scholtes, making the switch from being a 1st grade math teacher to a K-6 math specialist seemed like a natural move. She had been a classroom teacher in Starkville for 22 years. By

anyone’s standards, Scholtes is a master teacher: She is a National Board Certified Teacher in the early childhood generalist category, the 1998-99



Photo by Gracie Sistrunk a photography student at Starkville High School.

Mississippi Teacher of the Year, a clinical instructor at Mississippi State University, and one of the creators of her district’s highly regarded Teacher Leadership Conference. In addition, Scholtes had been involved in selecting items for the statewide math assessment for elementary students and was intimately familiar with both state and national math standards and teaching strategies.

But, she quickly learned that, no matter what your credentials as a teacher, you begin over again when you switch roles and become a coach. Although she was well known for her

Tina Scholtes, right, meets at Starkville Public Schools Professional Development Center with, from left, Shya Su, Cathy Rodriguez, and Brenda O'Bannon.

teaching expertise among early elementary teachers, she was not so well known by teachers in upper elementary grades. They were, she said, skeptical that she knew enough about teaching math at higher grades to help them.

Developing trust meant finding ways to serve teachers. In the beginning, that meant doing a lot of work to locate resources for teachers. “I’ve been a classroom teacher. I know how hard it is for them to do the research, to find the materials so they can do the lessons,” she said. Each offer of resources helped build a relationship with a teacher and, eventually, led to invitations to do a demonstration lesson or to observe a teacher.

Scholtes and the other math coach decided to survey teachers to determine their familiarity with the statewide math standards. They learned that teachers had not fully implemented the state standards or were not fully comfortable with the state’s recommended instructional strategies. So, one of their first self-assigned tasks was to write grade-level guides for elementary teachers that showed the alignment between benchmarks for the state’s math curriculum standards, testing expectations, and the state’s recommended instructional strategies.

Once the guides were complete, the two math coaches introduced teachers to the new documents during staff meetings at individual schools. Later as they worked closely with teachers to develop units and write lesson plans, the coaches reminded teachers to check their grade-level document to determine which strategies were recommended.

“They were calling and thanking us. They were very excited to have it,” she said.

As she shared the new math documents, Scholtes knew she was “starting conversations in buildings that had never before had these conversations.” Initiating that discussion could be threatening to some principals who have long played the leading role in ensuring that the curriculum was presented as intended, she said. To transfer some of that responsibility to another person can be intimidating to the principal.

But Scholtes said she must have buy-in from a building principal or her work will not be reinforced when she leaves the building.

TINA SCHOLTES

Position: K-6 math coach/facilitator

School district: Starkville Public Schools, Starkville, Mississippi

Professional history: Taught 1st grade in the Starkville school district for 22 years before becoming a coach.

Education: Earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in elementary education, and a specialist certificate in educational leadership from Mississippi State University. Currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Mississippi State University.

Honors/accomplishments: Selected for NSDC Academy XVII. Received National Board Certified Teacher/early childhood generalist, 1997; Mississippi Teacher of the Year, 1998-99; Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching Elementary Mathematics, 2001.

Professional service: Serves on the Mississippi Mathematics Framework Revision Committee, Mississippi Teacher Center Steering Committee, SERVE Teacher Advisory Council, and Mississippi State University College of Education’s Teacher Advisory Board. Previously, SERVE board of directors, 2001-2004; World Class Teaching Project Advisor for National Board Certification. Has supervised about 20 student teachers in the last five years.

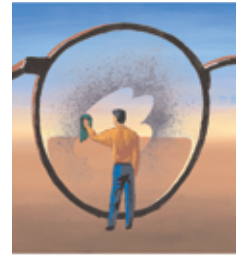
To continue this conversation, e-mail Scholtes at tscholtes@starkville.k12.mi.us.



“When I’m not there, if there are questions, teachers are going to go to the principal. So the principal and I have to be on the same team. They’re the ones who are in the building every day.”

“Sometimes, the answer I am giving teachers is not the same as the answer they are getting from principals. When I’m not there, if there are questions, teachers are going to go to the principal. So the principal and I have to be on the same team. They’re the ones who are in the building every day,” she said.

Scholtes said the coach’s job might be easier if she had an office in a school rather than in the district’s main office building. “The location makes sense for when you work with teachers in five buildings. But I can’t just walk down the hall



ORIGIN OF THE DEMONSTRATION LESSON OBSERVATION SHEET

See tool at left.

After one teacher sat in the back of the classroom and graded papers during a demonstration lesson, Tina Scholtes decided she needed a tool that would help teachers focus on the lesson.

Scholtes gives the form to the teacher before she begins a demo lesson and uses it after the lesson as a way to debrief the lesson with the teacher.

Demonstration lesson observation sheet

LESSON BEING OBSERVED

OBSERVER

DATE

INSTRUCTION:

The assignment/work is on grade level.	Yes	No
The instruction is linked to state/local standards.	Yes	No
The assignment is connected to students' prior knowledge.	Yes	No
The assignment is differentiated.	Yes	No
The teacher uses various resources/materials.	Yes	No
The teacher uses various instructional strategies.	Yes	No
Transitions are smooth. There is little or no disruption to the learning process.	Yes	No
Students work alone, in small groups, and in large groups.	Yes	No
The teacher gives clear, precise directions.	Yes	No
The teacher frequently checks for understanding.	Yes	No
The teacher incorporates guided practices into the lesson.	Yes	No
The teacher includes ongoing assessment with feedback.	Yes	No
The teacher shows flexibility and adapts the lesson to student needs.	Yes	No
The teacher uses essential questions to guide student learning.	Yes	No
The teacher facilitates students to:		
Engage in learning.	Yes	No
Think deeply (how and why).	Yes	No
Construct their own understanding.	Yes	No
Apply new knowledge and concepts.	Yes	No
Show understanding in various ways.	Yes	No
Reflect on their learning.	Yes	No

On the back, describe one strategy that you will use when you teach this unit.

Please include any additional comments about the demonstration lesson.

Thank you for allowing me to present this demonstration lesson!

into someone's classroom," she said.

"We have not been in classrooms as much as we wanted to be. But we know that takes time. We know we have to build the trust first," Scholtes said.

As she works to balance her new workload, Scholtes said she's always conscious that her job is to assist in improving the quality of other peo-

ple's teaching and not to jump in and do the work herself.

"They want someone to tell them what to do. I can't do that. My role is to be a leader of teachers. I'm so conscious that part of my job is developing them as leaders, making them aware of information so they can take on that leadership role for themselves," she said. ♦