

THE LEARNING Principal

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Invest in relationships and students will prosper

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

*When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.
— Ethiopian proverb*

Without knowing it, Gustava Cooper Baker began preparing for leadership at a young age. At age 16, Baker was the oldest child at home when her mother died. She was quickly thrust into being significantly responsible for raising her 10 younger siblings, including a six-month-old baby.

“When you lose your mom at that age, it’s the worst thing in the world that can happen to you. There we were, with my dad, just trying to survive,” said Baker, now principal of Ladd African-Centered Elementary Shule in Kansas City, Mo.

The heartbroken family started having regular meetings with the young Gustava presiding. “We brought everybody together and we started assigning jobs. We decided who would wash the dishes and who would make sure we had clothes that were cleaned and ironed in time for school. We made all the job assign-

ments and posted everything on the refrigerator,” she said.

“Then, if things were not going right, we would come back together and sit down and talk about what we had to do to pull together. Many days, we did not think that we would make it. There was a lot of crying, a lot of hardship but we did make it,” Baker says.

“I learned that, while challenges will face you each and every day, it’s important to pick yourself up and to keep moving,”

she said.

Years later, Baker relied on those early lessons about sharing the load and moving forward as she moved into school leadership, first in a Catholic school in Chicago and later in Kansas City schools.

“I look for shared leadership. You cannot do it all by yourself and you cannot do it all in one day. Principals are successful when they learn how to build relationships. This work is all about

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PROFILE IN LEADERSHIP:
GUSTAVA COOPER BAKER

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Dennis Sparks is executive director of the National Staff Development Council

Principals who lead teaching organizations teach not by telling, persuading, or directing those with whom they work but by engaging them in dialogue about important issues.

REFERENCE

Tichy, N. (2002). *The cycles of leadership: How great leaders teach their companies to win.* New York: HarperBusiness.

See yourself as the leader of a “teaching organization”

“Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership.”

— Michael Fullan

Significant change in teaching and learning begins, I believe, when school leaders change themselves. “Being the change we seek in the world” means that leaders’ own professional learning deepens their understanding about important professional issues, alters their beliefs when current beliefs are a barrier to progress, changes what they speak about and the manner in which they speak, and informs the daily actions that sustain the momentum of change. During this school year, these columns will explore what I consider to be the most important of these changes, the means by which they are most likely to occur, and the impact they are likely to have on teaching, the learning of both students and adults, and relationships within schools.

From my perspective, one of the most important changes many principals can make is to see themselves as leaders of a “teaching organization.” That role does not negate principals’ responsibility to be instructional leaders in their schools or managers of complex organizations, but rather places them within a broader context. “A teaching organization,” Noel Tichy writes in *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win* (HarperBusiness, 2002), “is one in which everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner, and as a result, everyone gets smarter every day.” In such organizations, “Everyone in the organization is expected to be constantly in a teaching and learning mode. ... [T]rue learning takes place only when the leader/teacher invests the time and emotional energy to engage those around him or her in a dialogue that produces mutual understanding” (p. 58).

These organizations, Tichy says, are formed around Virtuous Teaching Cycles in which “. . . a leader commits to teaching, creates the conditions for being taught him or herself, and helps the students have the self confidence to engage and teach as well” (p. 21). These teaching cycles begin with leaders’ clearly-formulated and succinctly expressed points of view on subjects of importance to the school (for instance, the school as a professional learning community) or to his or her work (serving the school as an instructional leader). Tichy calls these expressions “Teachable Points of View” (TPOVs), a subject I will explore more fully next month.

Principals who lead teaching organizations teach not by telling, persuading, or directing those with whom they work but by engaging them in dialogue about important issues based on their TPOVs. Dialogue in this instance means offering one’s ideas, values, observations, and/or assumptions in a spirit of exploration and openness to having one’s views changed by the perspectives of others. This style of interaction will be the subject of my November column.

Consider:

- Whether your predominant style of interaction with teachers is as an “expert” (“Research says ...”), “boss” (“Do what I say”), or interactive “teacher” (“Let’s talk over these important ideas in the spirit of exploration and mutual influence to see if we can achieve a common understanding”).
- Talking with faculty members about your role as a “teacher” of adults rather than a “facilitator” of discussions from which your own views are largely absent.
- Exploring Noel Tichy’s views on “teaching organizations” in an interview I did with him that is available at www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/tichy262.cfm.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

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Easton, L. (Ed.) (2004). *Powerful designs for professional learning.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

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Different needs require different designs

Research in the past 10 years has underscored the importance of schools as the center of change and the principal's crucial role in developing staff members.

Principals, therefore, need to acquire a new set of knowledge and skills related to the design of professional development. In *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (Roy & Hord, 2003), one of the Desired Outcomes for principals regarding the Design standard is:

The principal ensures that staff development designs align with expected outcomes.

The principal needs to be clear about both what students and educators will achieve as a result of professional development. Principals and teachers identify these outcomes after examining student information such as achievement, discipline, attendance, and/or graduation data. The best outcomes clearly and specifically state the desired change, the amount of change desired, the timeline for accomplishing the outcome, and the way the change will be measured.

To achieve the Desired Outcome, the principal **advocates for collaborative interaction as a major component of professional development.** Since Little's (1982) first description of conditions that influenced changes in classroom practice, collaboration has been viewed as a critical cultural feature of strong schools. In part because of the noted isolation of many teachers from their peers, collaboration is not just about having good school morale. It is about creating a school where professionals learn from and with each other. This is one

hallmark of a professional learning community.

The principal also **provides training in a variety of collaborative activities that are aligned with expected outcomes.** Collaborative activities among educators require deprivatizing classroom work. In other words, the classroom doors need to be opened, student work examined, and joint planning and common assessments developed. While many educators look forward to these activities, many have not been prepared for the kind of interdependence or

collaborative skills necessary to do these activities well. Many new designs and protocols are available (Easton, 2004) that could be used to help educators learn how to learn from and with each other.

Finally, the principal **aligns a variety of staff development designs with expected adult learning outcomes.** It takes time for adults to learn to use new instructional practices well.

According to Hall and Hord (2001), educators must journey through a sequence of levels and different development activities are necessary to meet the needs at each of those levels. Principals need to learn how to diagnose those levels and determine appropriate activities to assist their staffs.

Designing effective professional development requires effective leadership from principals. Principals do not have to conduct all this work alone but can build the capacity of staff members to accomplish the appropriate design of professional development.

DESIGN

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal.

For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

E-x-p-a-n-d-i-n-g your vision of

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

If the school board in your district suddenly announced that it would no longer fund half-day “inservices” in which teachers sat and listened to “motivational speakers,” what would you do?

Leaping for joy might be one response. Suddenly, you could turn your back on staff development that produces no changes in student learning and focus on strategies that would benefit both teachers and students.

As you try to move your staff out of its inservice rut and into a mode of powerful professional learning, ask teachers to consider these eight ideas for not-a-workshop professional development:

1. Form **action research** teams.

Madison, Wisc. staff developer Cathy Caro-Bruce begins her action research work with teachers by asking them, “What keeps you awake at night? What are you curious about? What question would you like to have answered about your students?” In action research, teachers select questions whose answers matter to them and then collect data to uncover an answer.

2. Enlist teachers to **shadow students** in their school in order to gain perspective on how school looks from the student’s vantage point. Lois Brown Easton editor of *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2004), calls shadowing an eye-opening experience that enables adults to better understand what it is like to be a student in a particular school. “Shadowing students often can result in changed plans ... because the experience injects reality into the proceedings of a committee or a task force,” she says.

3. Do regular **classroom walk-throughs**.

These four- to five-minute regular visits to classrooms provide principals with snapshots of “classroom environments, learning experiences, and student perspectives,” says consultant and author Margery Ginsberg. When several observers do walk-throughs, the principal can quickly gain an overview of what is occurring on a given day. That, in turn, can suggest areas worth celebrating and those that need more attention.

4. Buy journals for each teacher and invite them to **begin keeping a journal** about their daily work. As Joellen Killion puts it, “journaling is the process of thinking in writing. It is a way to construct meaning visibly and to reflect on experiences.” If you have requirements for the length and frequency of journaling, make sure teachers know about them in advance.

5. **Construct a curriculum map.** Ask a team of teachers to create a chart showing how the lessons they teach address each of the curriculum standards and benchmarks for one of their subject areas. Is their instruction logically organized? Are they teaching to the standards identified by your state and your district? Are they teaching lessons that have little to no relationship to the intended goals for that class or course? “Curriculum design helps teachers see the connections, find resources, and make multidisciplinary curricula happen in their own classroom,” says Linda Fitzharris who has worked extensively with curriculum design teams in the Carolinas.

6. Ask teachers to assemble professional **portfolios** of examples of work they and their students have produced. Portfolio consultant Mary Dietz says a portfolio can be a notebook with structured journal responses or any container that includes artifacts, work samples, videotapes of a class and any other items that



Learn more about effective staff development designs. Order NSDC’s book, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, edited by Lois Brown Easton. Available at <http://store.nsd.org>

professional development

illustrate and demonstrate the teacher's learning. She believes discussions that teachers have with their peers about their portfolios help focus and create powerful collegial discussions.

7. Examine student work using a tuning protocol. Teachers voluntarily present products that students have created as the result of assignments and ask their colleagues to follow a structured plan for critiquing the student work as a way of understanding how to improve instruction.

8. Explore the Japanese concept of lesson study in which teachers design, observe, and revise "research lessons." In lesson study, teachers work together to form goals for student

learning, collaboratively plan a lesson, teach and observe the lesson, discuss evidence collected during the observation and then revise the lesson as needed to make it more effective. Lesson study advocate Catherine Lewis believes lesson study is a way to "slow down the act of teaching in order to learn more about students, subject matter and their own teaching."

Every one of these strategies could be introduced into any school. Each of them has the power to shift a school's culture so teachers are more involved in their own learning and so their professional learning will benefit student achievement.

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IF NOT A WORKSHOP, THEN WHAT?

- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Conducting action research projects | 12. Participating in a study or support group | 22. Using a tuning protocol to examine student work | 31. Analyzing the expectations of your statewide assessments | 39. Visiting model schools/programs |
| 2. Analyzing teaching cases | 13. Doing a classroom walk-through | 23. Attending an in-depth institute in a content area | 32. Enrolling in a university course | 40. Developing curriculum |
| 3. Attending awareness-level seminars | 14. Giving presentations at conferences | 24. Writing an article about your work | 33. Viewing educational videos | 41. Doing school improvement planning |
| 4. Joining a cadre of in-house trainers | 15. Researching on the Internet | 25. Observing model lessons | 34. Maintaining a professional portfolio | 42. Examining new technological resources to supplement lessons |
| 5. Planning lessons with a teaching colleague | 16. Leading a schoolwide committee or project | 26. Reading journals, educational magazines, books | 35. Studying content standards for your state | 43. Being observed and receiving feedback from another teacher or principal |
| 6. Consulting an expert | 17. Developing displays, bulletin boards | 27. Participating in a critical friends group | 36. Observing other teachers teach | 44. Engaging in lesson study |
| 7. Examining student data | 18. Shadowing students | 28. Doing a self-assessment | 37. Listening to video/audio recordings | 45. Working on a strategic planning team |
| 8. Being coached by a peer or an expert | 19. Coaching a colleague | 29. Shadowing another teacher or professional in the field | 38. Participating in a videoconference or conference calls with experts | |
| 9. Leading a book study | 20. Being a mentor — being mentored | 30. Keeping a reflective log or journal | | |
| 10. Making a field trip to another school or district | 21. Joining a professional network | | | |
| 11. Writing assessments with a colleague | | | | |

Profile in leadership: Gustava Cooper Baker

Continued from p. 1

building relationships. You do that piece by piece, block by block. When we all work at it together, then we can say that we did it together,” she said.

When Baker arrived at Ladd as assistant principal in 1999, the school was ranked at the bottom academically and had no plan for improvement. Leadership had been unstable. Many teachers were not certified and some students had substitute teachers for several consecutive years. Angry parents frequently cursed at teachers and other staff inside the school building. Discipline referrals were high and attendance was poor.

Since then, Ladd has made steady progress. Last year, 16% of 3rd graders were reading at a proficient or advanced level on the statewide assessment, up from 3% five years ago. During the same period, 4th-grade math achievement moved from 2% to 32%. Ladd exceeds the district average but still lags behind the state average. But student and teacher attendance are nearly perfect and parent satisfaction is at the highest level.

To build a supportive community, Baker focused first on building support among teachers. If the teachers can’t work together, it’s unlikely teachers will be able to enlist parents and students to work for improvement.

With a small gesture, Baker began to build the trust that would blossom into the relationships that would help Ladd bloom. During her first year, Baker asked teachers to submit a wish list of what they wanted for their rooms — an offer they had never received before. Only three turned in a request. “I gave them everything they asked for. The next time I asked, I received lists from most of the teachers,” she said.

At the end of her first year, Baker sent the Ladd staff on retreat with the staff of Chick Elementary School, a successful African-centered school in the city where Baker had worked previously. Away from the challenges of the city, the teachers collaborated on planning for the coming school year. Before they returned home, they proposed doing common grade-level meetings each month to continue their work.

Without being told explicitly to do so, the Ladd teachers began modeling themselves after the more successful school.

Once they had a taste of sharing the work, Ladd teachers wanted more. Baker restructured the school day to enable teachers to have weekly grade-level meetings. Teachers voluntarily created their own weekly book study groups and Saturday teacher work sessions. They created a framework for examining student achievement and doing year-ahead planning according to student needs. Teachers created individual professional development plans which require Baker’s endorsement each year. A site-based professional development committee oversees all aspects of teacher learning.

Out of all of their efforts, teachers have formed strong bonds with each other, creating the kind of relationships that Baker believes enables them to do the hard work that’s necessary at Ladd. The warmth of these relationships is clear to visitors and reinforced by the stories that teachers share about their work.

Other enduring lessons from Baker’s childhood and education at a segregated, all-black school in rural Arkansas also shape her leadership style at Ladd.

Baker said her teachers always had high expectations for their students and assumed students would have a bright future. “One teacher introduced us to French in 5th grade knowing that one day we would go to Paris and would need to know the language. That really stuck with me as a child,” she said.

The schools of her childhood also were tightly wound into the fabric of the community around them, she said. Teachers lived in the same neighborhood as their students. Children saw their teachers out shopping on Saturday and at church on Sunday. “We saw how they lived, how they managed their lives,” she said.

Because Kansas City is not a rural community, Baker and her teachers have to consciously create connections with the adults in the lives of their students. “Many of our children are reared by their grandparents. I walked to one student’s home and spent time with the grandmother. She

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“I look for shared leadership. You cannot do it all by yourself and you cannot do it all in one day. Principals are successful when they learn how to build relationships. This work is all about building relationships. You do that piece by piece, block by block. When we all work at it together, then we can say that we did it together.”

GUSTAVA COOPER BAKER

Position: Principal, Ladd African-Centered Elementary Shule

District: Kansas City (Missouri) School District

Education: Bachelor’s degree in elementary education, University of Arkansas; master’s of education/K-12 reading specialist, University of Arkansas; educational specialist in administration/elementary school, Central Missouri State University; candidate for doctorate in educational leadership, University of Missouri-Columbia.

Professional history: Taught elementary school in Kansas City, Keokuk, Iowa and at a Catholic elementary school in Chicago. Became assistant principal at the Chicago school and returned to Kansas City as a 5th-grade teacher. Later became an instructional assistant and assistant principal in Kansas City before becoming principal at Ladd in 2000.

Most recent book read: *Cotton Field of Dreams*, by Janis Kearney (Writing Our World Press, 2005).



Favorite book: *Outlearning the Wolves: Surviving and Thriving in a Learning Organization*, by David Hutchens (Pegasus, 2000).

To continue this conversation, e-mail Baker at gustavabaker@sbcglobal.net.

Visitors at Ladd would see evidence today of Baker’s mother’s influence. Teachers stop students who misbehave and routinely ask them, “Why did you make that decision? Who’s responsible for that?”

Continued from p. 6
was elated that the principal would sit down with her in her home and talk with her about what she could do at home to help her grandson’s education. She really appreciated that I walked through the same neighborhood that her grandchild passes through each day going to and from school,” she said.

Again, it’s all part of building a web of support to nurture children.

But nurturing children does not mean neglecting the important lessons of responsibility and respect, she said. In particular, she has carried into her school one of her mother’s practices of questioning her children about their choices and their actions. “She would always talk to us about why we had made certain decisions. She was always asking ‘why did you make this choice, why didn’t you make that choice?’ That caused us to think about all of our

actions,” she said.

Visitors at Ladd would see evidence today of Baker’s mother’s influence. Teachers stop students who misbehave and routinely ask them, “Why did you make that decision? Who’s responsible for that?”

The question, Baker said, invests in students a sense of responsibility for their own behavior. “That’s putting it back on them,” she said. “In the real world, they’ll have to be responsible for what they do. They need to learn that here.”

By weaving those relationships tightly around teachers and around students and by persevering through difficult times, Baker believes schools will prosper. “If we treat each child as if that is your child, that child will be able to learn. When they leave Ladd, I want them to remember that the teachers here cared about them and taught them and that they learned.”

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NSDC STAFF

Executive director

Dennis Sparks
dennis.sparks@nsdc.org

Deputy executive director

Stephanie Hirsh
stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org

Director of publications

Joan Richardson
joan.richardson@nsdc.org

Director of special projects

Joellen Killion
joellen.killion@nsdc.org

Web editor

Tracy Crow
tracy.crow@nsdc.org

Distinguished senior fellow

Hayes Mizell
hayes.mizell@nsdc.org

Business manager

Leslie Miller
leslie.miller@nsdc.org

Editor: Joan Richardson

Designer: Sue Chevalier

MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE

5995 Fairfield Road, #4
Oxford OH 45056

(513) 523-6029

(800) 727-7288

(513) 523-0638 (fax)

E-mail: nsdcoffice@nsdc.org

Web site: www.nsdcoffice.org

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