

Creating a legacy of relationships

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Consider this scenario: You are a staff developer at an inner ring suburban high school and half of your 300 teachers have taught for four years or less at your school.

That's the challenge faced by Renee DeWald as induction coordinator at Evanston Township High School in suburban Chicago.

ETHS had had a mentoring program for many years but, as the school grew more knowledgeable about the professional learning needs of all teachers, it also became more cognizant of the needs of new teachers. In 2002, DeWald, who had been a staff developer for the science department for several years, became the school's first induction coordinator. She continues to teach four class periods of chemistry each day with the rest of her time devoted to supporting other teachers.

Evanston, which is a single school district, had adopted Charlotte Danielson's components of professional practice as its evaluation tool. So it was logical to build the school's induction program around the five core values in the



Danielson framework: content knowledge and pedagogy; creating a climate of rapport and respect; effectively using classroom time; classroom management; and engaging students in learning.

"We asked 'what do teachers need to know and be able to do to be successful in those five areas?'" DeWald said.

The induction program begins with ETHS 101, a multi-day course for new teachers during the summer before they begin work. "We are essentially getting them ready for the first day and the first week. It's all the stuff you need to know before you hit the door," DeWald said.

Much of the curriculum is about expectations and school culture. Before the course, DeWald said new teachers often had issues because they simply didn't know "the range of how we do it here." Panels of students, teachers, and community members help to bridge that gap.

Once the school year begins, DeWald provides the kind of ongoing support that new teach-

Evanston Township High School chemistry teacher Renee DeWald, right, and Northwestern University professor Emma Tevaarwerk instruct students in a nanoscale science module.

DeWald is the induction coordinator at ETHS and lead teacher for the National Center for Learning and Teaching in Nanoscale Science at Northwestern University.

ers need. Her focus is on planning and classroom management. “If they’re going to struggle, they’re going to struggle in those two areas,” she said.

DeWald also supports the mentor coordinators who oversee the work of the mentors who are assigned to every new teacher. “I need to make sure that mentor coordinators are getting the nuts and bolts information out to their teachers,” she said.

In addition to DeWald, the school also has eight on-site staff developers, one for every academic department. These teachers are released from one class and one duty period each day to work with other teachers. The staff developers provide monthly support on curriculum and instruction issues for teachers in their departments, including but not limited to the novice teachers. In addition, every department has “standards leaders,” teachers who work with the department chair on developing common lessons plans and common assessments.

Every new teacher is observed at least three times during their first year of teaching, either by DeWald or one of the department staff developers. Whoever does the observation, however, the protocol is the same. The observer has a pre-observation discussion with the teacher. The observers use a form of notetaking which they learned from Jon Saphier. (See example on p. 6.) If it’s necessary, they also have a form to collect “interaction data” about student-to-student interaction to help the teacher determine who should and shouldn’t be seated together.

During the second year at Evanston, new teachers attend a course on Skillful Teaching, based on the curriculum from Research for Better Teaching. DeWald teaches this class on each of the high school’s 12 late-start days. “Because we’ve had so many new teachers, this has been really helpful in giving us a shared language so we could talk about instruction,” she said.

DeWald said she has learned a great deal about teaching and leadership during her years as a teacher leader.

She stepped into her first staff development role when she was 30 years old. Her initial staff development work involved a lot of presenting which she was not wholly comfortable doing. For

RENEE DeWALD

Job: Induction coordinator and chemistry teacher

District: Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois

Professional history: Joined ETHS staff in 1977 as a chemistry teacher. Has taught all levels of chemistry since then. Has been induction coordinator, science staff developer, standards leader for science department, North Central Accreditation Association self-study chair, facilitator for Research for Better Teaching, TESA and cooperative learning initiatives. Served on numerous school committees, including technology, staff development, human relations, and gender equity.

Education: Bachelor’s degree in chemistry and secondary education, Knox College, Galesburg, Ill., plus 75 hours of additional study in science and education; master’s degree in administration and supervision, National Louis University, Evanston, Ill.

Honors/accomplishments: NAACP Image Award, 2002. District’s “most inspiring teacher award and district’s excellence in mentoring award, 2002. Illinois State Board of Education’s Those Who Excel Merit Award, 1996.

Professional service: Serves as lead science teacher, National Center for Learning and Teaching in Nanoscale Science and Engineering at Northwestern University. Member, Illinois State Board of Education Prairie State Standards-Setting Committee.

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a long time, that was her only concept about how she could work with teachers.

Several years later, she and a colleague were co-teaching a course for teachers. While her colleague presented, DeWald sat with the participants and joined their conversations. “One day, it just hit me that staff development was really all about relationships. The one-on-one conversations that I could have with other people were much more powerful than anything that would come out of my mouth when I was standing up in front of them,” she said.

Her personal discovery coincided with changes in the field about the most effective

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TOOL
Classroom observation
DIRECTIONS:

- Recreate this chart with the category headings. Use it as you observe classrooms.
- The first three columns should be factual observations. Use the final column to add comments on what has been observed.
- Use these notes to guide your discussion with the teacher. Do not give these notes to the teacher. This frees the observer to make personal notes to him or herself without concern that they will upset or embarrass the teacher.

Time	People involved / if names not known, write gender of student (ask for seating chart)	Activity that is occurring	Comments/questions from observer
Note the time that activity is occurring. Strive for noting something every few minutes.	In this category, write the names of the students involved in the activity. Ask teacher for a seating chart before the observation begins. If you are uncertain about the student's name, note some key characteristics such as gender/race of student.	What action is occurring ... teacher interaction with student, students talking with each other, student demonstrating their understanding of what the teacher has said, etc. Be specific.	Reserve your personal comments for this area.

SOURCE: Renee DeWald, Evanston Township High School

ways to shape teachers' content knowledge and practice. Although having expertise is important, always being the expert is not necessarily the most successful strategy for anyone who is trying to influence changes in teachers, she said.

"When a teacher is in a leadership position, it tends to be all about them. Eventually, you reach a point where it's not about you being in a leadership position, it's about the people you need to help.

"Often, teacher leaders are appointed or anointed because they are outstanding classroom teachers. You like that role because you want to help other teachers be like you because you know you're an outstanding teacher. But that's not the right role. You really need to see where someone else is and help them determine where they want to go in their practice and help them get there. It's not about them becoming like you," she said.

DeWald points with pride to several changes she initiated in the science department at Evanston. As the staff developer for the department, she confronted how isolated teachers were from each other and how uncomfortable they were with seeking support from each other. She saw staff meetings as an opportunity for shifting this culture.

She convinced her science colleagues to

have each staff meeting in a different classroom, with the teacher in that room serving as the host. During the first half of the meeting, the host (or sometimes a hosting group) shared their ideas, perhaps an article they had read, or stories about their work with students.

"One teacher told me that she gained a new sense of respect for her colleagues. We were listening to people talk about what they wanted to talk about, what they valued about their teaching," DeWald said.

Much of her work now is focused on building relationships among teachers. "It doesn't always have to be the staff developer who knows everything," she said.

She drops in on veteran teachers classrooms to get a better idea of each teacher's strengths. "When I see a new teacher struggling in a particular area, I know who I can match them with. And when I see a new teacher doing something exciting that could benefit a veteran teacher, I can make that connection too," she said

"As you approach retirement (she has five more years to teach), you start to think about what your legacy is going to be. I think perhaps the most important legacy is to mentor young teachers," she said. ♦

"It doesn't always have to be the staff developer who knows everything," said DeWald.

The term, mentor, is derived from Greek mythology. Odysseus entrusted his son, Telemachus, to the care of his wise advisor, Mentor. Mentor assumes the role of guiding Telemachus into young adulthood in his father's absence.

SOURCE: "Mentoring," by Pam Robbins, a chapter in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, edited by Lois Brown Easton (Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 2004). Available through the NSDC Online Bookstore, store.nsd.org.