

# THE LEARNING Principal

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

## Springfield program nurtures leadership growth

*Multifaceted approach focuses on principals*

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Principals in Springfield, Mo., have a hard time avoiding professional learning to improve their leadership abilities. A multi-pronged program identifies aspiring principals, mentors beginning principals, continues to develop experienced principals, and finally relies on retired principals to share what they know with younger colleagues.

The district moved to this new approach four years ago, leaving behind a traditional, sit-and-get style of professional development for principals in favor of a plan that is more closely tied to the actual work that principals are expected to do. "We just reached a point where we had more awareness about the impact of leadership on student performance," said Anita Kissinger, director of staff development for Springfield.



Said instructional specialist Mark Gideon who coaches principals, "The face of the principal had changed. No longer were they just managers of personnel, directors of finance, handlers of facilities, managers of discipline. They are also instructional leaders. They need to walk into a classroom and intuitively know what good learning looks like. They have to be able to intentionally verbalize

what they are seeing to teachers.

"If principals can sit down and have an instructional conversation with teachers, that strengthens the instructional culture of that building," Gideon said.

Springfield's program begins with **workshops for aspiring leaders** offered by Missouri State University (formerly Southwest Missouri State University). The university offers a series

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Dennis Sparks (above) discusses how to create and share your own "teachable points of view."

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Dennis Sparks is executive director of the National Staff Development Council

Creating your own TPOV requires a “commitment of head, heart, and guts.”

#### REFERENCE

**Tichy, N. (2002).**

*The cycles of leadership: How great leaders teach their companies to win.* New York: Harper Business.

## Create and share your own ‘teachable points of view’

*“I need to become a well-educated person, as opposed to a well-trained person. This means reflecting upon and deepening my own ideas, and giving greater value to my own thinking. ... We each have our own theories and models about the world and what it means to be human. We need to deepen our understanding of what we believe.”*

—Peter Block

One of the most important tools that principals have at their daily disposal is clarity of thought and the ability to express their views in writing and orally in simple, easy-to-understand declarative sentences. Such clarity, however, is often hard won and requires a disciplined approach to articulating one’s views, soliciting feedback, and revising. To that end, this month I will focus on “Teachable Points of View” (TPOVs) as a means of achieving and expressing such clarity.

To review and provide a context, last month I highlighted Noel Tichy’s recommendation that leaders create “teaching organizations” 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).

Leaders begin Virtuous Teaching Cycles by crafting their Teachable Points of View. A TPOV is “a cohesive set of ideas and concepts that a person is able to articulate clearly to others” (p. 78) and a tool that enables leaders to communicate those ideas and values to others, Tichy says.

“The very act of creating a Teachable Point of View makes people better leaders. ... [L]eaders

come to understand their underlying assumptions about themselves, their organization, and business in general. When implicit knowledge becomes explicit, it can then be questioned, refined, and honed, which benefits both the leaders and the organizations” (p. 97). And Virtuous Teaching Cycles and TPOVs are central to one of a leader’s most important tasks — developing leaders throughout the organization.

But developing a Teachable Point of View is not a simple or easy process, Tichy recognizes. “It requires first doing the intellectual work of figuring out what our point of view is, and then the creative work of putting it into a form that makes it accessible and interesting to others” (p. 100). Tichy strongly recommends “writing as an essential part of the process of developing a TPOV” (p. 103). In addition, he advocates reflecting, getting feedback from others, and revising. “The process of articulating one’s Teachable Point of View is not a one-

time event. It is an ongoing, iterative, and interactive process,” Tichy writes (p. 103). “Coming up with the initial TPOV really is hard work,” Tichy underscores. “It starts with the leader taking a mental inventory of the stuff inside his or her head. It requires a total commitment of head, heart and guts” (p. 101).

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Craft TPOVs** on two or three areas of special significance to you and/or your school (for instance, the role of an instructional leader or the purpose and benefits of a professional learning community).
- **Share your written draft** with a leadership team in your school or with the entire faculty.
- **Engage others in dialogue** regarding your views, and revise and extend your draft as appropriate.

## Principals model data analysis to make decisions

Standardized achievement scores, until recently, were the predominant source of data about student achievement. Now, school principals and staff have at their disposal a variety of data to help them make decisions about school improvement, professional development, and continuous improvement. The principal has a special role in helping school faculty use data to create meaningful information. In *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (Roy & Hord, 2003), one of the Desired Outcomes for principals regarding the Data-Driven standard is: **The principal analyzes with the faculty disaggregated data to determine school improvement/professional development goals.**

To accomplish this Desired Outcome, the principal **works with the whole faculty to analyze a variety of disaggregated student learning results to determine school improvement goals.** While a leadership committee may have a primary responsibility of examining student

data, the principal should involve the staff in using the data to make school decisions. Staff involvement leads to their ownership and commitment and increases their comfort in using data for instructional and curricular decisions. Staff “buy-in” is not something that can be accomplished once others have made key decisions. According to Holcomb (1999), ownership of improvement goals is something that is “grown, crafted, and invented” throughout the process (p. 10). Holcomb describes a process that engages staff in turning data into useful

information. In her data carousel analysis, groups of staff examine and describe the meaning of student achievement data (p. 61-66).

Disaggregated data is also critical to this analysis. Disaggregated data provides a more detailed inspection of results for sub-groups of students served by the school. This data also allows faculty to answer the question, “Is the school serving **all** students equally well?”

When faculty members are involved in data analysis, they have the needed background to

help set goals and prioritize school improvement and professional development goals. Many strategies can help large groups set goals and identify priorities. Holcomb describes the nominal group process (p. 69) which involves time for faculty to discuss and lobby for specific goals.

The principal also **works with the whole faculty to analyze a variety of disaggregated student learning results to determine student and adult learning needs.** The faculty begins by identifying student needs; student needs then shape adult learning needs. For example,

if mathematics achievement in statistics and probability is weak, the first step may be to examine existing curriculum to ensure it is aligned with the assessment. If the curriculum materials are sufficient, then a more detailed analysis of teacher practices and knowledge needs to be made.

Making data-driven decisions may mean that both the principal **and** faculty need to acquire new skills in analyzing data, using data to make instructional and curricular decisions, and facilitating large group decision making.

### DATA-DRIVEN

Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.



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

### REFERENCES

- Holcomb, E. (1999).** *Getting excited about data: How to combine people, passion, and proof.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003).** *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

**For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see [www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)**

# How I act in conflicts

Proverbs state traditional wisdom. The proverbs listed below can be thought of as descriptions of some of the different strategies for resolving conflicts. Read each proverb carefully. Using the scale given below, indicate how typical each proverb is of your actions in a conflict.

**5=Very typical   4=Frequently typical   3=Sometimes typical   2=Seldom typical   1= Never typical**

## COMMENTS TO THE PRINCIPAL:

This activity will help staff members identify the attitudes they bring to staff discussions. Use this in the early stages of your team development. It should not be used when a team is actively engaged in trying to work through an issue.

**Source:** *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, Sixth Edition by David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson. Copyright 1997, Allyn & Bacon. Reprinted with permission.

	1. It is easier to refrain than to retreat from a quarrel.
	2. If you cannot make a person think as you do, make him or her do as you think.
	3. Soft words win hard hearts.
	4. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.
	5. Come now and let us reason together.
	6. When two quarrel, the person who keeps silent first is the most praiseworthy.
	7. Might overcomes right.
	8. Smooth words make smooth ways.
	9. Better half a loaf than no bread at all.
	10. Truth lies in knowledge, not in majority opinion.
	11. He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day.
	12. He hath conquered well that hath made his enemies flee.
	13. Kill your enemies with kindness.
	14. A fair exchange brings no quarrel.
	15. No person has the final answer but every person has a piece to contribute.
	16. Stay away from people who disagree with you.
	17. Fields are won by those who believe in winning.
	18. Kind words are worth much more and cost little.
	19. Tit for tat is fair play.
	20. Only the person who is willing to give up his or her monopoly on truth can ever profit from the truths that others hold.
	21. Avoid quarrelsome people as they will only make your life miserable.
	22. A person who will not flee will make others flee.
	23. Soft words ensure harmony.
	24. One gift for another makes good friends
	25. Bring your conflicts into the open and face them directly; only then will the best solution be discovered.
	26. The best way of handling conflicts is to avoid them.
	27. Put your foot down where you mean to stand.
	28. Gentleness will triumph over anger.
	29. Getting part of what you want is better than not getting anything at all.
	30. Frankness, honesty, and trust will move mountains.
	31. There is nothing so important you have to fight for it.
	32. There are two kinds of people in the world: the winners and the losers.
	33. When one hits you with a stone, hit him or her with a piece of cotton.
	34. When both people give in halfway, a fair settlement is achieved.
	35. By digging and digging, the truth is discovered.

## Scoreboard for “How I act in conflicts”

**Directions:** Write your scores from Page 4 in the correct blanks. Total your scores for each column. Your natural style for dealing with conflict will be the column with the highest score.

WITHDRAWING	FORCING	SMOOTHING	COMPROMISING	PROBLEM SOLVING
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____	5. _____
6. _____	7. _____	8. _____	9. _____	10. _____
11. _____	12. _____	13. _____	14. _____	15. _____
16. _____	17. _____	18. _____	19. _____	20. _____
21. _____	22. _____	23. _____	24. _____	25. _____
26. _____	27. _____	28. _____	29. _____	30. _____
31. _____	32. _____	33. _____	34. _____	35. _____
<b>TOTAL:</b> _____	<b>TOTAL:</b> _____	<b>TOTAL:</b> _____	<b>TOTAL:</b> _____	<b>TOTAL:</b> _____

## Conflict resolution styles

Each individual has his or her own way of responding to conflict. Recognizing your personal style of confronting conflict can help you – and your group – become more effective in resolving disputes.

WITHDRAWING	FORCING	SMOOTHING	COMPROMISING	PROBLEM SOLVING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unassertive and uncooperative.</li> <li>• Retreats from discussion.</li> <li>• Indifferent to the needs of others.</li> <li>• Does not address the conflict or even acknowledge it.</li> <li>• Usually uncomfortable with the issue or uninterested in resolution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertive and uncooperative.</li> <li>• Pursues his or her own goals at the expense of others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unassertive and uncooperative.</li> <li>• Opposite of competing.</li> <li>• Minimizes differences.</li> <li>• Neglects his or her own needs in favor of the needs of others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderately assertive and cooperative.</li> <li>• Negotiates.</li> <li>• Recognizes that all parties are making inflated requests and must give a little to get a little.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both assertive and cooperative.</li> <li>• Confronts issues directly.</li> <li>• Employs creative problem solving.</li> <li>• Recognizes that the conflict is not resolved until all parties are comfortable with solution and their needs satisfied.</li> </ul>

**Source:** *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, Sixth Edition by David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson. Copyright 1997, Allyn & Bacon. Reprinted with permission.

## Springfield program nurtures leaders

*Continued from p. 1*

of sessions at no charge for educators who want to learn more about leadership issues in the Springfield schools. “What they learn in these sessions also gives them some confidence that might help them in an interview situation,” Kissinger said. Just introduced a year ago, 16 educators participated in the first year of the program.

All new leaders — principals, assistant principals, program leaders — are part of Springfield’s two-year **Evolving Leaders Induction Program**. Typically, the district has 30 to 40 leaders, about evenly split between first-year and second-year participants. The program begins with a two-day academy each August which focuses on district goals for the year, learning about the school improvement process and how it aligns from the federal, state, and local level, and how to communicate about these issues with the public. The academy also includes a tour of district offices and introductions to key personnel.

During the first year, all participants have a **mentor** who is a practicing principal or other leader in the district. All of the mentors have ongoing training in how to coach effectively, especially how to use the skills of cognitive coaching. Mentor-mentee pairs are expected to meet face to face once or twice a month and to have contact weekly.

In addition to the support provided by the

practicing principals, novice principals also can work with several “exceptionally talented retired principals.” These retired principals meet with all of the new leaders quarterly and can be contacted individually. Some novice principals develop close relationships with the retirees and contact them weekly; others may call on them only every few months.

“This gives them the opportunity to receive guidance from people with different perspectives and experience. It gives them more of a menu of choices so they can become self-directed decision makers,” Kissinger said.

All instructional leaders also participate in structured ongoing learning sessions that focus on the five strands of the leadership curriculum: leadership skills, school and program improvement, performance results, policy and practices, and human resources.

Because of the coaching skills that the mentoring principals learn, Parkview High School principal Judy Brunner said mentoring in Springfield has taken on a different tone. “I am not supposed to be ready with all the answers. I’m supposed to help people problem solve on their own. I’m not the giver of knowledge, I’m the facilitator of their learning,” she said.

“What I have gotten as a mentor not only serves the mentee, it also helps me work with my teachers,” said Brunner, a 17-year veteran of the principalship.

*Continued on p. 7*

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### Springfield’s approach to leadership growth

- Springfield’s program begins with **workshops for aspiring leaders** offered by Missouri State University (formerly Southwest Missouri State University).
- All new leaders — principals, assistant principals, program leaders — are part of Springfield’s two-year **Evolving Leaders Induction Program**.
- During the first year, all participants have a **mentor** who is a practicing principal or other leader in the district.
- Whether in the induction phase or the more experienced part of the spectrum, all principals and assistant principals participate in **monthly 45-minute study groups** that precede their business meeting.



# Springfield program nurtures leaders

Continued from p. 6

Although evolving leaders are required to participate in the program for two years, in the second year, they have options. “If they’re struggling, they automatically get a mentor for the second year,” Kissinger said. Others may elect to continue the mentoring, create a formal shadowing program in which they shadow several experienced principals, form study groups focused on an identified need, or join a statewide leadership academy.

Whether in the induction phase or the more experienced part of the spectrum, all principals and assistant principals participate in **monthly 45-minute study groups** that precede their business meeting. One of the district’s 11 instructional specialists facilitates each study group. The groups use the district’s process for Whole Faculty Study Groups, which includes keeping learning logs and creating action plans. Each group is also expected to meet again at a time and place of their own choosing before the next principals’ meeting.

Although the district sets a standard of expectation, Kissinger said there is also built-in flexibility to encourage these groups of leaders to make many of their own decisions. For example, the district expects principals to meet monthly in study groups but each group determines its own content and focus. “We’re very much about ‘what are your needs and how can we serve you?’” Kissinger said.

The study group of high school principals, for example, spent last school year learning Marzano’s nine strategies for learning. Under Gideon’s guidance, the principals spent one meeting every month focusing on one of the nine strategies.

During the study group, half of the principals assumed various student roles (at-risk student, student with attention needs, accelerated student, etc.), and Gideon demonstrated what one Marzano strategy would look like in a classroom. “They were learning not just what it was but how it felt to experience that strategy as a student,” Gideon said. The other half observed the lesson and the “students” so they could provide that perspective during discussion.

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- How does principals’ professional learning in your district compare with that in Springfield?
- What are the strengths of your current efforts? How might they be improved?
- Describe the link between principals’ learning, improved teaching in all classrooms, and student achievement in your school.

Principals also learned how to do classroom walk-throughs and, with Gideon, prepared a protocol of what to look for in classrooms as they did walk-throughs. Principals were expected to return to the next month’s meeting prepared to discuss what they observed about the use of that strategy in classrooms in their school.

Often, only one principal was able to complete the assignment and share something with the group. “No matter how jolly they are about participating, when they go back to their schools, real life happens,” Gideon said.

Gideon said the biggest change he’s seen is in the confidence of principals in talking about instruction. “They have kind of forgotten what it’s like to be in a classroom. After this, they have the vocabulary, the tools to talk with teachers in a common language,” he said.

Brunner, who was part of Gideon’s study group, agrees. “It’s much easier to converse with teachers. It kept me a little ahead of the curve and on the same page as the teachers in terms of language and terminology. I think it gave me more credibility with my teaching staff,” she said.

The greatest tribute to the PD program comes from Brunner. Referring to herself, she said, “I can tell you that a 17-year veteran principal has learned a whole lot during those few weeks.”

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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  
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# Preparing for a principalship

Principals play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but a shortfall in qualified leaders hinders many American schools from providing effective education for all students.

These are among the first findings of a major research effort funded by the Wallace Foundation to gain a clearer understanding of what is known about principal preparation and development, what works, and how to create models that can bring effective leadership to all America's schools.

"The role of the principal has swelled in recent years to include a staggering array of responsibilities," said Stephen Davis, the author of the *Review of Research* for the project and an associate professor of education at Stanford University. "Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. Traditional methods of preparing administrators are no longer adequate to meet the leadership challenges posed by modern schools. There are programs that have successfully managed this new reality, and our goal is to identify the effective practices in these programs so that they can be replicated."

Download a copy of the *Review of Research*, the initial work of the School Leadership Study, at <http://seli.stanford.edu/research/sls.htm>.

**powerful words**

**"The role of a leader is to help people face reality and to mobilize them to make change." — Ron Heifetz, *Fast Company*, June 2005**

**"Traditional methods of preparing administrators are no longer adequate to meet the leadership challenges posed by modern schools."**

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