t³ TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

ROLE: **Catalyst for change**

PURPOSE: **To create disequilibrium with the current state as an impetus to explore alternatives to current practice.**

BY JOELLEN KILLION AND CYNTHIA HARRISON

Seventh in an eight-part series about roles of the school-based coach

An important role for school coaches is being a catalyst for change. In this demanding role, the coach seeks to influence change for improvement by introducing new ideas, making observations, and questioning current practice. By examining how to be more effective, to move beyond the status quo, and to challenge mental models (Schon, 1987; Senge, 1990), coaches promote learning and continuous improvement throughout schools. Learning organizations are built on the premise that learning in organizations means continuously testing how people think, act, and interact (Senge, 1990; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994). The coach, acting as a catalyst for change, often speaks the unspoken as a way of initiating conversation about alternative ways of thinking and behaving.

As catalysts for change, coaches have two major responsibilities. One is engaging teachers in "evaluation think" (Killion, 2002). Evaluation think is "individuals and teams looking critically and analytically to discover what is working and what is not in order to redefine their work and improve results" (Killion, 2002, p. 1). A second responsibility is introducing alternatives or refinements to current practices. This latter role holds an expec-
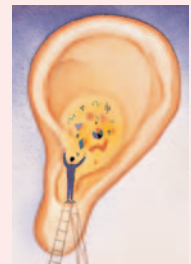
Our goal: All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

SCENARIO:

Catalyst for change at work

It is no secret to Mildred Taylor, instructional specialist at Marlin Middle School, or the administrative team that the number of 7th-grade failures is creeping up. In the last few years, these numbers have been slowly climbing, while student performance on state tests remains relatively stable. In a meeting with 8th-grade teachers last week, Taylor heard complaints that students are not ready for the 8th-grade curriculum.

Taylor is meeting with the 7th-grade team later in the week. She thinks about how she could plant a seed. She does not want to anger teachers, yet she wants to create an awareness that might initiate their desire to act. She also wants teachers to initiate action before the principal requires action because she wants them to "own" the problem. She decides to use "evaluation think" to help teachers understand the issue.

At the meeting, Taylor facilitates a discussion among teachers using the evaluation think questions. When they begin to generate ideas about what's not working, Taylor notices that teachers concentrate on student-centered issues such as lack of motivation, parents' lack of value in education, students' high absenteeism, and poor preparation for middle school. Taylor musters her courage and brings out the grade distribution results for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. "These data prove our point," teachers respond. "Students seem to slack off when they get to 7th grade."

"I wonder why they don't seem to have difficulty in 6th grade," Taylor ponders aloud.

"It's because the 6th-grade teachers baby them," one teacher suggests.

"Yet they seem to bounce back in 8th grade," Taylor responds.

"I wonder why that is?" another asks.

"Are you interested in finding out why that is?" inquires Taylor.

"Sure," say most of the teachers, "but it seems very odd."

Taylor brings out another data chart showing how the numbers of failures in 7th grade compare to those of other grades over the last few years. Teachers study the charts in amazement.

"These students are less prepared than students in previous years," interjects one teacher.

"More challenging students require different instructional techniques to help them learn," counters Taylor.

"I'm curious how your teaching has changed to accommodate the students' changed needs."

The grade-level chair takes up the gauntlet Taylor has thrown. "I think this is something that merits further investigation. Mildred, are you willing to help us figure this out?"

"Sure," responds Taylor. She suggests that the team use a root cause analysis to identify potential reasons for students' failures. She offers to lead them through the process next week when they meet again. They agree.

As Taylor leaves this meeting, she is grateful teachers want to examine the issue of failure rates. She acknowledges that the meeting could have turned out very differently, and is glad that she had the courage to raise the issue. Speaking the truth is not easy, yet Taylor knows that someone has to take the first step.

One of the 7th-grade teachers catches up with Taylor as she walks down the hall. "What you did was gutsy. This problem has been going on for a few years, and we all know about it," he says. "We just haven't had the courage as a group to name it out loud. I am relieved that it is finally out in the public, and that we now have permission to talk about it. It will help us stop talking about students and begin talking about teaching and learning. Thanks, Mildred."

* Fictitious person and school

tation that the coach is comfortable being on the leading edge, current in curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, leadership, and change.

To be successful in the role of catalyst for change, coaches model continuous improvement in their own work. They make their practice public, seek feedback from critical friends within the school and beyond, examine their own practice, refine their own practice, think aloud (metacognition) about their work, and learn continuously from networking with other coaches, reading, and conducting action research.

One strategy coaches use frequently as catalysts for change is questioning the status quo. Coaches might ask:

- How did this become our practice?
- Whose needs does it serve?
- What message does this action send to our community about our values as a school (Killion & Harrison, 1997)?

Another set of questions coaches use are the "evaluation think" questions:

- What is working?
- How do we know?
- What isn't working?
- How do we know?
- What are we going to do about it?

Coaches in the role of catalyst for change cultivate continuous learning within their schools by questioning constantly "how their actions affect the results they observe. They regularly test basic assumptions and experiment with new ways of doing things — learning from their successes and failures so they can do better the next time" (Petrides & Nodine, p. v). The coach explores "truths" and assumptions upon which actions are based. The coach, acting as a catalyst for change, "reveals truths and identifies what is often unspoken as a way of initiating dialogue about alternative ways of behaving and thinking" (Killion & Harrison, 1997, p. 43).

Knowledge and skills

Coaches use a wide range of knowledge and skills as catalysts for change. They know and understand change, leadership, reform, context, and adult development. They use scanning and forecasting skills to be aware of national, state, and local trends that may impact education. They use creative and critical problem-solving skills. They engage others in dialogue, surfacing assumptions and identifying mental models that influence behaviors. Communication and relationship skills are essential so that their challenges of the status quo are perceived to be both positive and constructive.

Challenges

As catalysts for change, coaches face the difficulty of maintaining a delicate balance between challenging the status quo and ensuring that people are confident and competent in their work. If the coach is too critical, teachers may become resistant to continuous improvement, yet if the

coach allows teachers to become too comfortable, they may lose the desire for improvement. Another challenge is being ready to act whenever an opportunity arises. The coach maintains a laser-like focus on the vision and seeks every opportunity to move closer to the vision. This constant advocacy may irritate those who are more comfortable with constancy and certainty.

In this role, the coach walks a delicate balance between initiating a necessary change and planting a seed that allows others to perceive the need to change and to initiate the change on their own without the coach leading or owning the change. The coach strives to foster ownership in others so the aspiration to initiate, implement, and sustain the change exists within others. Coaches also seek to maintain a certain level of dissatisfaction, discomfort, or disequilibrium within the school as a way of inducing continuous improvement. A final challenge coaches have in this role is acting alone. This is dangerous because the coach's actions may be perceived as working against the school's plan for improvement or in opposition to the principal's or others' efforts.

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As catalysts for change, coaches face the difficulty of maintaining a delicate balance between challenging the status quo and ensuring that people are confident and competent in their work.

Math coach adds listening skills to her repertoire

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

When she applied to become a math coach, Linda Hostetler admits that she wasn't exactly certain what work she would be doing.

She had been teaching 5th grade for 24 years and was recommended for the job because her principal recognized her exemplary teaching of mathematics. Even from the initial description of the job, she believed being a coach was work that would benefit teachers. "As I began to think about it, I knew I would have enjoyed having a coach when I was teacher," she said.

Hostetler is in her second year as math coach at James M. Brown Elementary School in Walhalla, South Carolina, a largely rural area in the state's Piedmont region. Brown is a Title I school with about 570 students, including 70% who are free- or reduced-price lunch and nearly a quarter who are Hispanic. This year, Brown's rating moved up one level in the South Carolina accountability system "because of substantial improvement in the achievement of students belonging to historically underachieving groups."

She is one of four math coaches in the Oconee County district. Two of the four are supported by the South Carolina Department of Education's Math and Science Coaching Initiative. Each coach works exclusively as a coach in a South Carolina elementary school. The

Linda Hostetler (red vest) facilitates a discussion about math instruction during a monthly meeting with the 2nd grade team.

goal of the coaching is to increase student achievement in mathematics and in science. The coaches work to improve instructional practices of teachers in their schools in the context of the teacher's own classroom.

Having support within her district, especially by having other coaches to work with, has proven to be a very helpful part of her experience, she said. "When you sit in your little office and don't have anybody to reflect with, that's very hard," she said.

Because she is part of the statewide initia-

tive, however, Hostetler has had significant opportunities for professional development to support her work. She began her coaching career by attending an intensive six-day summer institute with her school's principal and also attends one day of training each month for coaches who are part of the statewide initiative.

One of the main objectives of the initial summer institute was to learn how to write a school improvement plan built around student learning goals appropriate for her school. Like many teachers, she'd had no prior experience writing goals or an improvement plan. She learned how to study the data about the performance of students at her school as well as how to share that data with teachers in her school so they could work together to draft a plan to impact student learning.

A second significant piece of work for her was learning how to have reflective conversations with teachers. That involved learning how to ask questions that would elicit thoughtful responses and how to listen deeply to the answers.

"I've found that this is one of the hardest things for me to do. When a teacher asks me a question, my first thought is to jump in and tell them what to do. It's difficult to sit back and learn to listen and not just solve their problems," Hostetler said.

Once on the job, she began in much the way that most coaches begin: by spending a lot of time organizing materials and ordering materials for teachers. "Doing this helped build trust with the teachers. They could see right away that I wasn't there to evaluate them," she said.

"You have to build rapport and trust with teachers before you can even think about making a difference. It's a very slow process," she said.

Now in her second year as a coach, Hostetler spends most of her time observing teachers teaching. "I try to get into two or three classrooms every day and then I try to spend some time reflecting with those teachers. Of course, sometimes that happens by chasing them down the hall!" she said.

She meets for 50 minutes each month with each grade-level to talk only about mathematics. Each meeting begins with teachers describing a

LINDA H. HOSTETLER

Position: Math coach

School: James M. Brown Elementary School, Walhalla, S.C.

District: Oconee County Public Schools

Professional history: Taught 5th grade in Oconee County Public Schools from 1980 to 2004. Became math coach at James M. Brown Elementary School in 2004.

Education: Earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in elementary education from Clemson University.

Honors/accomplishments: Twice recognized as a superior teacher in South Carolina's Teacher Incentive Program. Teacher of the year at her elementary school.

Professional service: Supervised student teachers and served as the math lead teacher and grade-level chair before becoming math coach.

To continue this conversation, e-mail Hostetler at is lhos@oconee.k12.sc.us.

success in their math instruction since the previous meeting. Because of the emphasis on assessment, some time in every meeting is also devoted to testing. She also helps teachers learn how they can add writing to their math instruction since writing across the curriculum is one of the school goals. For example, teachers can ask students to write a brief statement at the end of each week about what they have learned in math that week or what they want to learn during the next week.

Is she having an impact in her school?

"A lot has changed. They'll stop me in the hall and tell me what's going on in their math class and ask 'What do you think about this?' They're not looking for me to give them solutions, they're looking for a conversation about their math classes.

"What's been most effective in facilitating a change in teachers is having them reflect on their lessons, allowing them to bring up questions about what else they should think about. The difference is being able to draw them through a conversation so they can see for themselves how something else might be better. My favorite part is when they say, 'Next year, when I teach this, I'll know not to do that, I'll know how to do it better,' " she said. ◆

THE REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION

It involves **asking** questions that will elicit thoughtful responses and **listening** deeply to the answers.

See **LISTEN FULLY** tool on p. 8.

"When a teacher asks me a question, my first thought is to jump in and tell them what to do. It's difficult to sit back and learn to listen and not just solve their problems."
— *Linda Hostetler*

Joellen Killion is director of special projects for National Staff Development Council.

Teacher meetings do not make a community

If a school doesn't have professional learning communities, it is considered out of touch with current practice. Yet, the variations of professional learning communities are extensive and not all variations fall within acceptable parameters of professional learning communities. NSDC clarifies the critical attributes of learning communities in its Standards for Staff Development.

Learning communities or communities of practice that impact student achievement have several distinct attributes.

First, members work together at least several times a week to learn with and from one another. Their sole purpose is to improve teaching and student learning. They engage in problem solving regarding teaching and learning. They jointly plan instructional units and lessons, common assessments, and student learning resources. Teams of five to eight teachers and sometimes their administrators meet to determine how to reflect on their practices, to improve their practice, and to increase student achievement. These frequent meetings are designed by members, facilitated by members, focused on their joint work, and measured in terms of student academic success. Members of a learning team share students, curriculum responsibility, or common interests related to teaching and learning.

Second, learning communities are guided by shared goals and norms of continuous improvement and experimentation. They work as a team of peers rather than as an expert-driven team. Judith Warren Little stresses the importance of joint work as a characteristic of sophisticated teacher teams. Joint work can be best described as teachers co-developing new products, processes, or strategies to use to address specifically

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.

defined targets or goals. Warren Little distinguishes joint work from shared work. Shared work is more common in teacher teams. Shared work occurs when teachers bring products, lessons, units, assessments, etc., to share with their colleagues. Different from joint work, this process might suggest that the one sharing is more expert than others. Joint work eliminates the subtleties of perceived or assumed expertise within a team by asking all members to bring their expertise, experiences, and knowledge to the table. The table is a blank slate, and all members contribute to the design of something that reflects the entire team rather than some of the team.

Third, learning communities are often confused with school committees and other work within a school. School improvement teams, faculty meetings, department or grade-level business meetings, or other such committees or meetings are not learning communities. **Learning communities set goals about student learning and focus exclusively on the day-to-day work of teachers** and address issues such as understanding curriculum standards, assessment for and of learning, instructional strategies, especially to differentiate instruction for students, to support students who are not meeting with academic success, and to assist team members in meeting their goals.

Fourth, learning communities have strategies and structures to guide their work. Members share leadership of the team. They receive training in facilitation skills and have a clearly defined set of norms to guide their work. They understand a wide range of designs for their learning such as examining student work, lesson study, action research, case study, etc., to guide the work of the team. Team members engage in

ongoing evaluation of their work, the achievement of their goals, and their work as a team. They maintain records of their work and report regularly to school administrators and to other teams about their work.

School-based staff developers have several responsibilities to ensure all learning communities have these attributes. They can help team members learn the essential strategies and structures that contribute to their success. They can also assist teams to evaluate their work, model facilitation, and teach teams strategies to use to achieve their goals. School-based staff developers serve teams best when they do not facilitate teams, but rather help teams learn how to facilitate their own proceedings. Their mission is building the capacity of all teachers to be productive and contributing members of a learning community.

Learning communities, when they have these four essential attributes, engage teachers in genuine collaboration that is professionally respectful, relevant to their day-to-day work, and aligned with their professional responsibilities and goals. ◆

LISTEN FULLY

PURPOSE: This exercise helps individuals practice how to slow down and listen. In this exercise, participants will experience what it means to listen fully to another person and to be listened to fully.

TIME: If you're reading an article during this activity, allow at least 45 minutes. Allow each speaker two minutes to speak on each topic. The facilitator may want to limit the experience to one topic or explore several topics and switch speaking and listening partners for each topic.

MATERIALS: Copies of articles to be read by participants, 3x5 cards, marker.

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR THIS EXERCISE
- What I like best about myself as a teacher.
- Why I became a teacher.
- Why I continue to teach.
- Why I chose to teach the subject and grade level that I'm teaching today.
- What my students are capable of learning.
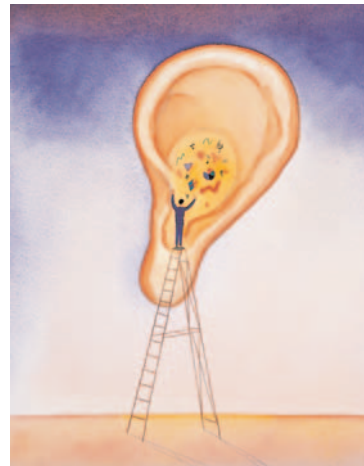
DIRECTIONS

1. Do a jigsaw reading of Chapter 7 of *Falling Awake* or select another article or book chapter that also describes the qualities of listening completely. (See the Dec/Jan. 2002 issue of *Tools for Schools* for directions on a jigsaw reading.) *Time: 20 minutes.*

2. Invite participants to share the attributes of listening fully that they have gleaned from this article or chapter. *Time: 10 minutes.*

3. Identify the topic for this exercise.

4. Ask participants to select a partner. Distribute 3x5 cards labeled "sender" and "receiver" to each pair.

5. The person with the "sender" card speaks first. While the "sender" speaks, the "receiver" listens completely. The "receiver" does not speak or make any noises in response to what s/he is hearing. *Time: 2 minutes.*

6. Next, have the partners trade cards, switch roles, and continue on the same topic. *Time: 2 minutes.*

7. After completing this exercise, the facilitator invites participants to reflect out loud about the experience. *How did they feel while speaking? How did they feel when listening? What did they learn about themselves as speakers and listeners?*

Adapted from **Falling Awake: Creating the Life of Your Dreams,** *by Dave Ellis. Breakthrough Enterprises, 1999. Available through www.fallingawake.com.*

> "Why is being heard so healing?
>
> I don't know the full answer to that question but I do know it has something to do with the fact that listening creates relationship. …
>
> Listening moves us closer, it helps us become more whole, more healthy, more holy.
>
> Not listening causes fragmentation and fragmentation always causes more suffering."
>
> — *Margaret Wheatley,* ***Turning to One Another*** (Berrett-Koehler, 2002)

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School-Based Staff Developers Learning Community

Application Deadline May 1, 2006

Application for Admission

What is the School-Based Staff Developers Learning Community?

Many schools are turning to school-based staff developers as a key strategy to increase student achievement. Whether they are called literacy coaches, math coaches, instructional leaders, or school-based staff developers, these talented teachers have responsibilities for providing professional development and support to teachers. School-based staff developers represent a new "front line" in efforts to strengthen professional development and its effects. One might say that in the schools where they work, these educators are probably the people with day-to-day responsibility for enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills to improve their performance.

The School-Based Staff Developers Learning Community is a one-year program designed to provide support to those serving in schools as coaches, instructional leaders, or staff developers. Based on the design of the highly successful NSDC Academy, this new learning experience will involve learning over time within a community of those in similar roles. The national program will focus on improving student achievement through professional learning. It will include training, ongoing support, and application of learning. The Learning Community will begin in August 2006 and will continue through May 2007.

The program includes two national meetings, August 2–4, 2006, and May 1–3, 2007, with the option of a third session at the NSDC Annual Conference in December 2006.

How Can You Become a Member of the Learning Community?

To be considered for membership, candidates will submit a nomination written by their principal indicating the principal's commitment to support implementation of the learning to improve student achievement, a letter of interest written by the candidate outlining his/her personal goals for participation, and the Learning Community application form.

PARTICIPANT GOALS:
Participants will engage in a series of learning experiences to accomplish the following results:

- Improved teaching and learning within their schools.

- Advancement of their understanding of the connection between professional learning and student achievement through application of NSDC's *Standards for Staff Development* and the Standards Innovation Configurations.

- Establishment of a network of national colleagues to extend collaboration and continuous development beyond engagement in the formal Learning Community.

- Development of a resource bank to support school-based staff development.

- Strengthened relationships with principals and teachers to effect change.

- Awareness of different models of school-based coaching and other powerful intervention models.

Application/Nomination Instructions

What is expected of Learning Community Members?

- Attendance at both national meetings (August and March)
- Final reflection paper regarding their application of learning
- Principal support to apply learning within the school-based professional development program to improve student learning
- Participation in four telecourses throughout the school year
- Letter of interest from candidate
- Nomination form signed by principal
- Letter of nomination from principal
- Participation in a learning group of members

What is encouraged of Learning Community Members?

- Attendance in special sessions at the 2006 Annual Conference

The application packet will include:

- Completed Nomination/Application Form
- Letter of Nomination from applicant's principal, addressing the following:
  - Statement of the commitment to provide financial support for the one-year program including tuition and travel expenses to attend the two national meetings
  - Statement of commitment to provide support to the participant to utilize the skills gained in the Learning Community experience.

  This letter may also include:
  - Description of the school and its commitment to high levels of learning for staff and students.
  - Description of participant's role within the school.
  - Expectations for the candidate's participation in the Learning Community.
- Letter of Application from the candidate including:
  - Description of the candidate's role within the school.
  - Reasons for seeking participation in the Learning Community.
  - Explanation of commitment to be an active participant in the Learning Community, to meet the program expectations including application of the learning to his/her role as instructional leader

Application Deadline May 1, 2006

Applicants will participate in an intake interview and receive notice of admission by June 1, 2006.

School-Based Staff Developers Learning Community – Nomination/Application Form

Nominee _____

Title _____

School/District _____

_____

Preferred Mailing Address _____

_____

Office phone _____ Fax _____

Home phone _____

E-Mail _____

I agree to meet the Learning Community expectations listed above:

_____

(Participant)

Principal _____

Office phone _____

E-Mail _____

Years in position _____

I will support the participation of:

_____

(Nominee)

in the NSDC Learning Community for the one-year commitment.

_____

(Principal Signature)

I will attend the 2006 NSDC Annual Conference in Nashville.　　☐ Yes　☐ No　☐ Uncertain

Application Deadline May 1, 2006
Applicants will participate in an admission interview and receive notice of acceptance by June 1, 2006

Tuition is $1,300.00 for the one-year program and includes tuition, breakfast and lunch each day, materials, four telecourses (90 minute telephone support sessions throughout the year), one-year membership to NSDC, and ongoing support and coaching.

Individuals will be billed upon acceptance and payment is due within 30 days of billing unless other arrangements are made with the Director of Special Projects. Refunds will be made up to 30 days prior to the first session if requested in writing. No refunds will be available after that time, although substitution for the candidate is permissible if the new candidate completes the application process.

After the application deadline, applications will be considered on a space available basis.

Send nomination/application packets to:
Joellen Killion
Director of Special Projects
National Staff Development Council
10931 W. 71st Place • Arvada, CO 80004-1337

For further information, please contact:
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