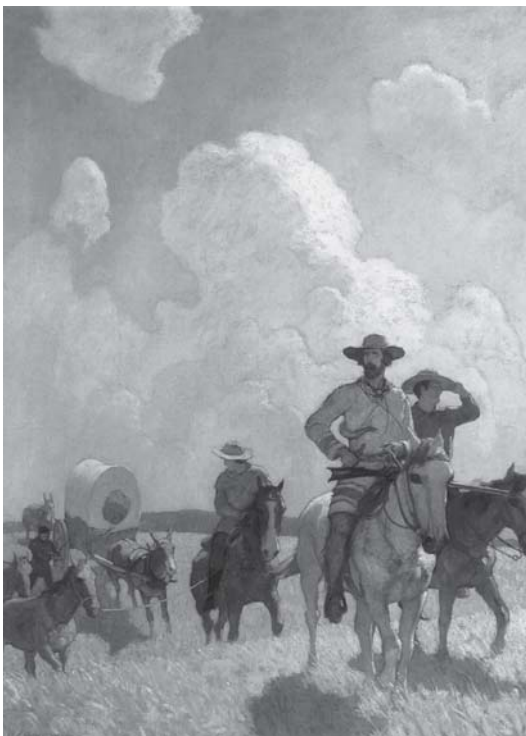# THE LEARNING
System

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

ON THE FRONTIER OF
SCHOOL REFORM

with trailblazers, pioneers, and settlers

BY PHILLIP C. SCHLECHTY

Educators leading change efforts need to recognize the five roles that people play in this process. People assume different roles because they vary in their experiences, their motives, and their expectations. Therefore, it's critical that staff development leaders understand who they are addressing in order to meet their vastly different needs for training, encouragement, and support.

TRAILBLAZERS

Paradigm-breaking journeys are not for the timid, and one should not expect everyone to volunteer for such a journey. Those who take the first steps are trailblazers. They are willing to go without maps to places where no person has gone before them, without the benefit of empirically based models and with little to guide them except a belief in themselves, a desire for novelty, the freedom to try, and a vision that motivates and

Our goal: All teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.

Hayes Mizell
is NSDC's
Distinguished
Senior Fellow

Professional development is not just a remedy for struggling teachers, a booster shot for those who are average, or a reward for successful teachers. NSDC's goal is to have professional learning become part of *every* teacher's daily experience.

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Challenge yourself to embrace the goal

For several years, NSDC has had a provocative and ambitious goal: <u>*All teachers*</u> *in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work.* The goal challenges educators and policy makers at all levels. NSDC lacks the authority to achieve this goal alone; it has no direct control over school systems that must provide leadership in bringing the goal and its benefits to fruition. Because so much depends on whether school boards, superintendents, and central office administrators understand and act on the goal, during the next several months this column will focus on the goal's key components.

The phrase "all teachers" is more complex than it appears. School system officials should interpret "all teachers" broadly rather than narrowly. They should not interpret the phrase as excluding principals and assistant principals. NSDC has long been committed to more effective professional learning for school administrators because they shape the context and provide the support that influences teacher professional learning. The rationale for NSDC's Leadership standard makes this very point: "Principals ... read widely, participate in learning communities, attend workshops and conferences, and model career-long learning by making their learning visible to others" (NSDC, 2001). Unless school system leaders are committed to having school administrators learn as seriously and frequently as teachers, professional learning will not improve to meet the high quality NSDC advocates.

The "all teachers" phrase also tests other assumptions. Most systems regard professional development as a finite resource they can use only a few days each school year, sometimes without all teachers participating. Occasionally, a system may involve all teachers in staff development because a new local initiative, state law, or testing program affects every teacher. Many states require all teachers to participate in a specific number of hours of professional development or earn college credits to maintain certification. There is little information that indicates such activities significantly impact teacher or student performance.

But NSDC has a more profound vision: *Every single teacher* will actively engage in high-quality learning every work day. Some learning will inevitably "inform" teachers, but most of it should be all teachers collaborating, studying, researching, analyzing, problem solving, and sharing for the specific purpose of enhancing student academic performance. Rather than regarding professional development as a remedy for struggling teachers, a booster shot for those who are average, or a reward for successful teachers, NSDC's goal is to have professional learning become part of every teacher's daily experience. Student learning needs will focus teacher learning. All teachers will learn with and from each other, to better meet student needs by drawing on and contributing to their colleagues' diverse levels of ability, knowledge, and experience.

This is not how most school systems think about professional development. That is exactly the point of NSDC's goal. NSDC wants to stimulate the reexamination of policies and practices and encourage discussions that lead to the conception and implementation of new models. Begin by reviewing professional practices through the "all teachers" lens. To what extent do all teachers (including administrators!) engage in high-quality professional learning? What prevents their participation? How can a system dismantle barriers and facilitate more frequent access for all teachers? School systems that understand the link between educator learning and student learning will want to wrestle with these questions, whether or not they embrace NSDC's goal.

Central office can't circumvent the influence of the principal

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

An assistant superintendent I knew always tried to design staff development that could overcome school principals' lack of skills in instructional leadership. She created rigorous and engaging courses, developed instructional coaches, and monitored teacher needs for resources and materials to support quality instruction. Yet, when she did a districtwide evaluation of the professional development program, she found that the principals' behaviors still determined the results at different schools. While she tried to supercede the principals' influence, she was left with the understanding that their influence could not be circumvented.

The same reality is true for central office staff when they attack the Quality Teaching standard. One of the major roles of central office staff in developing quality teaching is **to develop the skills of school administrators to promote quality teaching.**

What actions can central office staff take to improve the instructional leadership of principals? First, central office staff must ensure that principals can conduct useful and powerful classroom observations of instruction. They can accomplish this task by **assisting the principal in analyzing classroom observation data.** This goal could be accomplished through coaching — conducting joint observations and analysis until the new analysis skills are established.

A second action would be to **support principals in conducting formal walk-through observations by providing clear descriptions of expected classroom practices**. Central office leaders can do this in reflective conversations with principals that precede and follow walk-throughs. When new instructional or curricular programs are implemented, the principal's role is often disregarded. Principals not only need to recognize the use of new instructional strategies they also need to recognize when *high-fidelity* implementation occurs. Central office staff can develop an innovation configuration map for new major programs which describes implementation on a continuum and help principals use this tool for their walk-through observations.

Central office staff can also provide information and skill development of other strategies that principals can use to encourage quality teaching. These strategies might include how to conduct informal observations and how to write effective feedback notes to teachers and how to change staff meetings into professional development events.

Central office staff can also **structure collegial sharing among principals about strategies that support quality teaching.** Sharing strategies and learning new approaches from colleagues is as important to administrators as it is to teachers. Many principals feel that their colleagues have a better understanding of the stresses and strains of the job and provide more realistic and practical strategies.

When central office staff increase the capacity of principals to serve as instructional leaders, they will be more likely to attain the goal of quality teaching in every classroom.

> **Quality Teaching**
> Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

Read more about NSDC's standards at www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm.

ADDRESSING INDIVIDUAL CONCERNS

"The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the **emotional context** in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech."
— Edwin H. Friedman

Source: *Taking Charge of Change,* by Shirley Hord, William Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene Hall, ASCD, 1987.

To help bring about change, you first must know an individual's concerns. While there are no set formulas, here are some suggestions for addressing the stages of concern.

Stage 0: Awareness concerns
- If possible, involve teachers in discussions and decisions about the innovation and its implementation.
- Share enough information to arouse interest, but not so much it overwhelms.
- Acknowledge that a lack of awareness is expected and reasonable and that there are no foolish questions.

Stage 1: Informational concerns
- Provide clear and accurate information about the innovation.
- Use several ways to share information — verbally, in writing, and through available media.
- Communicate with large and small groups and individuals.
- Help teachers see how the innovation relates to their current practices — the similarities and the differences.

Stage 2: Personal concerns
- Legitimize the existence and expression of personal concerns.
- Use personal notes and conversations to provide encouragement and reinforce personal adequacy.
- Connect these teachers with others whose personal concerns have diminished and who will be supportive.

Stage 3: Management concerns
- Clarify the steps and components of the innovation.
- Provide answers that address the small specific "how-to" issues.
- Demonstrate exact and practical solutions to the logistical problems that contribute to these concerns.

Stage 4: Consequence concerns
- Provide individuals with opportunities to visit other settings where the innovation is in use and to attend conferences on the topic.
- Make sure these teachers are not overlooked. Give positive feedback and needed support.
- Find opportunities for these teachers to share their skills with others.

Stage 5: Collaboration concerns
- Provide opportunities to develop skills for working collaboratively.
- Bring together, from inside and outside the school, those who are interested in working collaboratively.
- Use these teachers to assist others.

Stage 6: Refocusing concerns
- Respect and encourage the interest these individuals have for finding a better way.
- Help these teachers channel their ideas and energies productively.
- Help these teachers access the resources they need to refine their ideas and put them into practice.

Using standardized test data to improve instruction

BY CARLA THOMAS McCLURE

A descriptive study from the University of Northern Iowa demonstrates that various approaches to analyzing standardized test data yield insights that can lead to improved learning. To maximize the potential benefits of such analysis, however, teachers may need help gaining basic hands-on data analysis skills not commonly taught in university-based research courses.

Why examine the use of standardized achievement data to improve instruction? Researcher John E. Henning points out that 50 years ago "standardized achievement test scores were primarily used for (a) informing teachers and parents about students' achievement relative to their peers, (b) helping place students in appropriate programs, and (c) justifying the allocation of supplemental resources." The developers of standardized tests did not originally intend that test results would be analyzed for the purpose of informing curriculum and instruction. In fact, James Popham, a former president of the American Educational Research Association, argues that "classroom assessments are the best source of data for informing instruction."

In practice, however, analysis of standardized test data has increased in recent years as schools have come under increasing pressure to improve student achievement. Upon reviewing the literature, Henning identified three school-based approaches to data analysis: (1) analysis of trends to see how an intervention has influenced achievement over time; (2) disaggregation of data to separate and compare student data by ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or performance; and (3) examination of the relationship between test scores and other indicators of student performance, such as grades or attendance. Henning's study documented the efforts of 24 educators to use standardized test data to improve learning.

How was the University of Northern Iowa study done? Henning examined data analysis reports written by 24 veteran elementary and middle school teachers participating in a graduate program for teacher leaders. The teacher leaders had worked in teams, by building, to analyze Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores. The teams examined building-wide scores, compared student subgroups, and analyzed a particular subject area. For each analysis, the team wrote a brief report that described the data source, purpose for analyzing the data, procedures used, recommendations, and questions for further research. Each team was also required to include visual displays of their data. Henning examined the 24 reports and categorized them by type.

What were the findings of the study? Henning observed that six of the 24 reports included data from a single school year; the others used two to four years of data. "The limited number of years in these trend lines may indicate that student achievement data is not yet accessible enough for teachers, an explanation informally confirmed by the teacher leaders," he writes.

Henning also found that "the insights provided by school achievement data are often revealed through visual display of data" and noted that a basic understanding of statistical concepts was essential to teachers' drawing conclusions consistent with the data.

His findings indicate that "school data can be analyzed in a wide variety of ways," although he notes that several possible approaches were not seen in his study.

What are the implications for district leaders? Schools that are attempting to use standardized test data to improve learning can improve the likelihood of making principled data-based decisions by (1) improving the storage and organization of school data, (2) providing professional development in the application of statistical concepts and the use of visual displays to understand data, and (3) enriching the culture for school data analysis through the sharing of professional literature.

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EDVANTIA

"The limited number of years in these trend lines may indicate that student achievement data is not yet accessible enough for teachers, an explanation informally confirmed by the teacher leaders," Henning writes.

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On the frontier of school reform

guides them.

The most important requirement for a trailblazer is a clear vision. Trailblazers want to know that there is someplace to go that is different; they are motivated by novelty and excited by risks. Once they have a vision in which they believe, all they want and need is encouragement and support for that pursuit. Most of all, they want to be recognized and celebrated for their unique brand of courage.

Trailblazers are not egomaniacs, but they are often monomaniacs with a mission. They know where they are going even if they are not quite sure how they are going to get there or what obstacles they will confront on the way.

Staff developers and school leaders need to constantly assure trailblazers that the vision is worth the quest and that others, especially powerful others, believe that what they are about is important. But trailblazers need to be reminded that it is a community quest, not a private venture.

Trailblazers need the opportunity to read about and visit with other trailblazers. They need time to discuss and assimilate what they learn from these encounters. They need opportunities to network with others like them. Networking turns lonely ordeals into shared ordeals. Lonely ordeals debilitate; shared ordeals inspire and motivate.

PIONEERS

Closely following the trailblazers are the pioneers. Pioneers sometimes begin their journey because of intolerable conditions, but they will stay the course only if they become convinced that the new world is really better.

Like the trailblazers, pioneers are an adventurous and hardy lot and willing to take considerable risks. Like trailblazers, pioneers must learn how to link a personal quest to a larger agenda and they need assurance that the trip upon which they are embarking is worthwhile. They do not need skill development, and staff developers would be ill-advised to try to provide that.

More than trailblazers, pioneers need demonstrations that the journey can be made. Pioneers, however, understand that few people can teach them "how to do it" because only the trailblazers have gone before them.

When staff development leaders are trying to recruit pioneers, their best allies are those who write about trailblazers. They need anecdotes, reports, and stories to inspire them for the journey. These stories should contain possible lessons regarding what one must know and be able to do to survive the rigors of the journey.

Pioneers are those who develop teams and build communities. This requires a different style than does the early exploration of a frontier. Trailblazers can help motivate pioneers, especially if they are colorful and good storytellers. But monomaniacs with a mission can quickly come to appear to others to be egomaniacs whose only mission is to advance themselves. Trailblazers are needed, but they are not easy to live with in the more sedate environments of committee meetings and seminar rooms. Pioneers are more suited to that work.

SETTLERS

After the trailblazers and pioneers come the settlers. Settlers need to know that the world they are being asked to move to is better than the one they are leaving and that the way to get there is known. Most of all, they need to know that they are not traveling alone.

They want to know what is expected of them. They need detail and more carefully drawn maps than those who have gone before them.

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5 ROLES PEOPLE PLAY IN THE CHANGE PROCESS

Trailblazers: Trailblazers are motivated by novelty and excited by risks.

Pioneers: Pioneers develop teams and build communities.

Settlers: Settlers need to know that the world they are being asked to move to is better than the one they are leaving.

Stay-at-homes: It is probably not wise to spend too much energy trying to convince the stay-at-homes that they too need to move to the frontier.

Saboteurs: Saboteurs are actively committed to stopping change.

On the frontier of school reform

Settlers are bold, but they are not adventurers. Staff development leaders must help settlers understand why the change is needed.

Settlers want assurance that the task can be accomplished and that they are not on a fool's mission. They need site visits where pioneering work is already under way, conversations with pioneers and trailblazers, testimonials from those who have tried, books and articles that provide rich descriptions of what can be expected and so on.

Settlers want skill development. They want to be sure they know how to do what will be required of them. Many potential settlers will not move until they are assured that the requisite knowledge and support are available for them.

Staff development leaders can support them with coaching, opportunities for feedback and critique, and, above all, protection from negative consequences for failed efforts.

Finally, settlers need strong, constant, and reassuring leadership that inspires them to keep going when they are tempted to turn back. Change is likely to create uncertainty, doubt, and confusion. The new practices are likely to be frightening and demanding and, at least in the short run, the results may be no better than doing things "the old way."

Staff development leaders must understand the terrain well enough to point out progress when settlers become discouraged. As they do that, they will show settlers how to identify evidence to demonstrate their progress.

STAY-AT-HOMES

Stay-at-homes are not bad people. Indeed, in the long view of history, they are inconsequential people for no one remembers the stay-at-homes after the change has occurred. At the time a change is being contemplated, however, stay-at-homes receive a great deal of attention because most leaders need approval from those they want to lead. Those who do not respond enthusiastically — or at least compliantly — with the desires of change leaders are often viewed as problems.

Effective leaders seem to understand that it is probably not wise to spend too much energy trying to convince the stay-at-homes that they too need to move to the frontier. These leaders accept that some will never come along and those who do change will do so only after the pioneers and settlers have done their work very well. Of course, some will only come to the new land for a visit.

I have found that the best strategy with stay-at-homes is benign neglect, coupled with as much generosity of spirit as possible.

SABOTEURS

Saboteurs are actively committed to stopping change. Not only do they refuse to take the trip, they do not want others to go either.

Saboteurs are often lone rangers. They are not afraid of taking risks. Loneliness does not have the same meaning to them as it has for the settlers, and isolation often inspires the saboteurs to even greater effort. To be persecuted, it seems, is to be appreciated, and, in a perverse way, to be isolated or excluded is to be honored.

Saboteurs can cause trouble no matter where they are. But I have found that the best place to have them is on the inside where they can be watched rather than on the outside where they can cause trouble without it being detected until their effects are felt.

If change leaders continue to reach out to saboteurs and critics and try hard to hear what they are saying, sometimes there is much to be learned. It might be learned that some saboteurs were once trailblazers and pioneers who had the misfortune to follow leaders who did not give them the support they needed and abandoned them at the first sign of trouble.

CONCLUSION

Creating commitment to change is not the same as overcoming resistance to change. To create commitment, one must understand motives. Without leaders who understand what draws men and women to the frontier and what these people need to keep going, our efforts to reform schools will fail. ■

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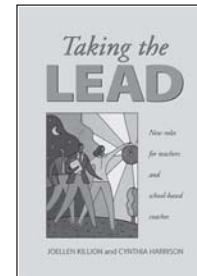
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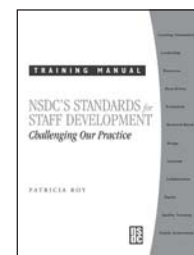
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