

THE LEARNING Principal

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

COLLABORATION *is the key to unlocking potential*

BY RICK DUFOUR

A principal's most significant contribution to developing others is creating an appropriate context for adult learning. It is context — the programs, procedures, beliefs, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm for a given school — that plays the largest role in determining whether professional development will impact that school.

In the right context, even flawed activities — such as the much-maligned single-session workshop — can be a catalyst for growth. Conversely, in the wrong school context, even programs with solid content and powerful training strategies are unlikely to be effective (DuFour, 1998).

When principals recognize how critical school context is to the effectiveness of professional development, important shifts begin. The

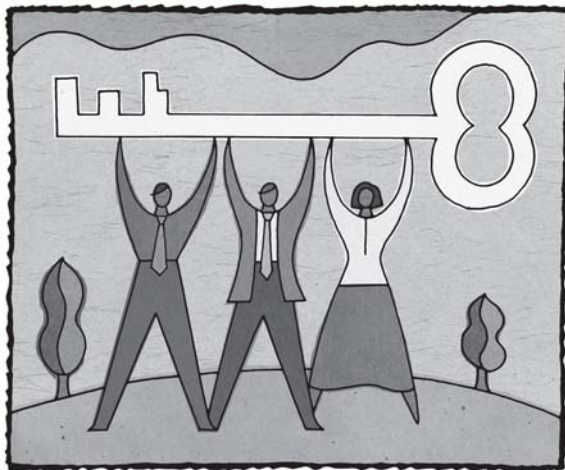
primary arena for professional development moves from workshops to the workplace. Emphasis shifts from finding trainers or speakers to creating opportunities for staff to work together, engage in collective inquiry, and learn

from one another. The artificial distinction between teacher work and teacher learning is eliminated. Opportunities for learning and growth are structured into routine practices.

Principals should strive to create the collaborative culture of a

professional learning community. To create this, they must do more than encourage teachers to work together. The tradition of teacher isolation is too deep to be uprooted simply by offering opportunities for collegial endeavors. Collabora-

Continued on p. 6



WHAT'S INSIDE

School Leadership

Get to know the skills and knowledge teachers possess.

PAGE 2

Focus on NSDC's Standards

Creating an environment that encourages and supports quality teaching.

PAGE 3

NSDC Tool

What a school leader needs to know about the Implementation Dip.

PAGE 4

NSDC Feature

Sometimes the most important lessons come from places completely out of context.

PAGE 5



National Staff
Development
Council
800-727-7288
www.nsdcc.org



Deborah Childs-Bowen is the director of the Institute for Teaching and Student Achievement and assistant professor in the School of Education at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Successful principals will identify potential teacher leaders and nurture their growth.

If you build teacher leadership, they will come

Principals who are confident and secure are more likely to nurture an atmosphere where teacher leadership can take root and thrive. These principals know that sharing leadership with teachers does not diminish their control but instead enables them to increase their impact in their buildings. In order to thrive, these principals know they must empower others.

Successful schools are defined by and through their multiple sources of leadership. Therefore, the work of principals is to discover the gifts, talents, and contributions that each teacher brings to the school and to develop those talents and contributions to the advantage of students and the school community. Principals will know what skills and knowledge each teacher possesses so they can draw on those when the organization needs them.

What is a teacher leader?

Teachers are leaders when they function in and contribute to professional learning communities to impact student learning, contribute to school improvement, inspire excellence in practice, and empower stakeholders to participate in educational improvement.

How do principals identify teacher leaders or know when they are in your midst?

Teachers who can become teacher leaders balance teacher concerns and school needs to support student success. They are positive deviants who:

- Advocate for students;
- Accept responsibility for student performance and for the profession;
- Are open to learning and engaging in regular conversations about teaching and learning;
- Speak out about changes needed and provide plausible suggestions;

- Identify student, teaching, and schoolwide needs;
- Inquire, reflect, innovate; and
- Deal with conflict without compromising goals or ideas.

How can principals develop and support teacher leaders and school success?

Principals telegraph their belief in teacher leadership by investing in their own learning, frequently with teachers.

The extent to which teacher leaders are successful depends on the support that principals provide. Principals who want to build a culture of teacher leadership:

- Encourage experimentation;
- Distribute leadership;
- Create opportunities for teachers to lead;
- Involve teachers in goal-setting;
- Provide job-embedded professional learning experiences daily that promote collaboration and group leadership skills (decision making, listening, problem solving, and facilitation processes and skills);
- Honor and celebrate accomplishments and failures that advance learning;
- Provide regular feedback that is specific and growth producing;
- Provide a protective shield from distractions that are counterproductive;
- Nurture, validate, and empower;
- Create opportunities for collective inquiry and collaborative problem solving;
- Create opportunities for teachers to practice listening and to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding teaching and learning; and
- Promote research-based and data-based experimentation.

Highly qualified principals joining in shared leadership with teacher leaders for student success is a winning alliance.



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

Learn more about NSDC's standards, www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

REFERENCES

- Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (March, 2003).** Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40-45.
- Little, J.W. (1981).** *School success and staff development: The role of staff development in urban desegregated schools. Executive summary.* Boulder, CO: Center for Action Research.

Ensuring quality teaching: What can the principal do?

I recently worked with a high school principal who was stymied by the goal of improving instruction in his school. He knew instruction was one of the keys to improving student achievement, yet he wasn't quite sure how to start.

Tucked into the seminal research on collegiality conducted by Judith Warren Little (1981) was research that identified critical principal behaviors that promoted collaboration and changes in classroom instruction. The four leadership practices were:

1) Announcing and describing desired norms and practices: stating expectations for high-quality instruction;

2) Modeling or enacting the desired behaviors: discussing instruction, requesting feedback on the principal's performance, conducting useful observations of classes, and providing time;

3) Sanctioning the desired behaviors: Reinforcing, endorsing, and encouraging expected behaviors with incentives, such as released time or positive evaluations, visible and public praise for collegial or experimental efforts, and "absorbing inevitable failure encountered in experimentation" (Little, 1981, p. 13); and

4) Defending the desired norms and behaviors from "countermovements within the school or from impositions from outside the school" (p. 13): the principal must defend against the descent back to the status quo. This action requires courage and conviction and

involves identifying common ground among competing demands.

So, what can the principal do to support quality teaching? The principal **promotes a culture of innovation that continuously improves teaching.** That goal can be accomplished by *creating an environment of trust, risk taking, and support.* Educators must feel that they can experiment with new practices and be safe from criticism or poor evaluation if those

experiments don't go well. Reanalysis of research in Chicago showed that an environment of trust was one of the most important elements in schools that improved (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

The principal also needs to **encourage, protect, and support staff members who implement innovative strategies.** Curiously, sometimes teachers criticize colleagues who implement new practices. The principal

needs to be ready to protect the risk takers.

Finally, the principal must **assist staff members to learn from implementation mistakes.** Fullan describes that when people try to learn any new behavior there is an inevitable *implementation dip* — things get worse before they get better. The principal must be prepared for missteps as staff experiment with new strategies and help teachers reflect on and learn from those experiences. (See Page 4 for more on the implementation dip.)

The principal plays an important role in creating an environment that encourages and supports quality teaching.

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.

THE IMPLEMENTATION DIP

Michael Fullan defines the “implementation dip” as “the inevitable bumpiness and difficulties encountered as people learn new behaviors and beliefs.”

In *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001), Fullan writes that “the implementation dip is literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings. All innovations worth their salt call upon people to question and in some respects to change their behavior and their beliefs — even in cases where innovations are pursued voluntarily.

“What happens when you find yourself needing new skills and not being proficient when you are used to knowing what you are doing? How do you feel when you are called upon to do something new and are not clear about what to do and do not understand the knowledge and value base of new belief systems?

“People feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious, and — if they have moral purpose — deeply disturbed. Because we are talking about a culture of pell-mell change, there is no shortage of implementation dips or, shall we say, chasms.”

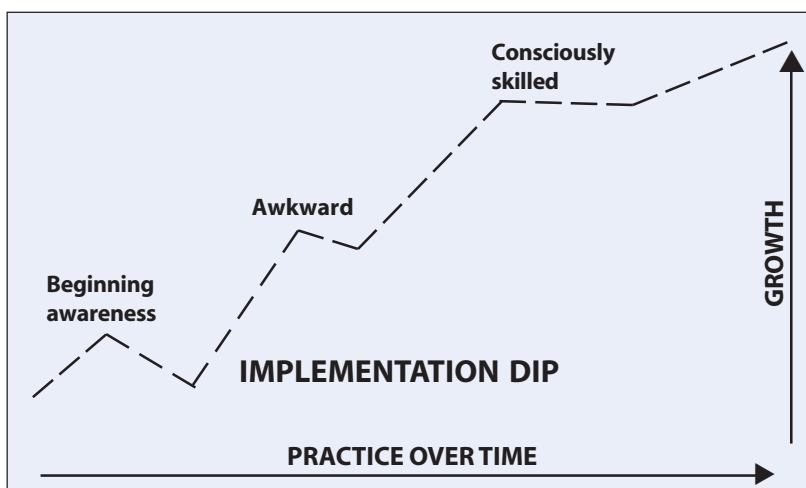
REFERENCE

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



“People feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious, and — if they have moral purpose — deeply disturbed.

Because we are talking about a culture of pell-mell change, there is no shortage of implementation dips or, shall we say, chasms.”



Learning in all the right places

BY HILLARY WOLFE

Sometimes the most important lessons we learn come from places completely out of context. It was quite unexpected when the strategies of my son's preschool teacher infiltrated my own high school classroom.

Last year, I was teaching a Literacy Enhancement class of freshmen and sophomores who were reading at a 4th- and 5th-grade level. The students, who already felt like failures for being so far behind, were frustrated with each new twist and turn in the curriculum. They constantly questioned why they had to study "elementary school" material. Their frustration caused them to act out (of course) and I, in turn, felt completely ineffectual.

I drove home and reflected on ways I could be stricter. Clearly, the problem was that I didn't have enough control. I cringed at the thought of the conflict that awaited me if I imposed even more restrictions on these students. Then, I thought of my son's preschool teacher telling me she loved when the children were in conflict, and I laughed at how silly she was to say that. Who would love conflict?

That question ate at me. I tried harder to remember why she had said that, and suddenly it hit me. A 4-year-old feels frustration when he is on the brink of a breakthrough. When they fall down, scrape their knee, get tangled in the jump rope, or fall off the bike, it means they're only inches away from learning how to do it better.

The next day I went into class with a new outlook.

I went to the board and drew a picture of two steep cliffs separated by a chasm. On the edge of one cliff, I drew a stick figure of a person. My students stared at the picture, and I asked them, how do you think that person feels?

We talked about how the figure was tired from the uphill climb, and exasperated by reaching the top, only to find another distance separating him from the other side. I asked, what should the figure do? Some students suggested

building a bridge to the other side. One student actually said, the figure should go back and get a running start so he could jump.

Now we were ready for a discussion. We talked about how frustrated they must be feeling, having worked hard all their academic life, to still feel separated from their peers. We talked about how this class was the bridge that was going to carry them across. And we talked about how important it was for them to go backwards in order to help make that jump.

I'd love to say that the students were angels from that day forward. They were not. But at least they were more willing to try. Most importantly, I realized how to keep myself from giving up on them.

I understand now that when students act out and misbehave, it may very well be their signal that they've reached their chasm. Instead of cracking down on them, I try to remember that this is the time to build the bridge or take a few steps back. Because whether it's tying a shoe or conjugating a verb, everybody can use a bit of a hand.

SHARE YOUR STORY:
HILLARY WOLFE

Hillary Wolfe is learning specialist at Northview High School in Covina, Calif. She will be receiving a copy of NSDC's best-selling book, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (NSDC, 2005).

To learn more about how to Share Your Story, visit www.nsd.org/shareyourstory.pdf



Hillary Wolfe works with a student searching for a book appropriate for her reading level, using a web site created by another student for this purpose.

In this article, education consultant and former superintendent Rick DuFour responds to his own original article, "The Principal as Staff Developer," which was published in the *Journal of Staff Development* in 1995. This article is excerpted and adapted from "In the right context," which was published in the Winter 2001 issue of *JSD*.

DuFour can be contacted by e-mail at rdufour@district125.k12.il.us. Rick and Becky DuFour will be presenting a preconference on professional learning communities at the NSDC Annual Conference in Nashville in December. Their latest book, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, is available through solution-tree.com.

Collaboration is the key to unlocking potential

Continued from p. 1

tion by invitation never works. Principals who function as staff development leaders embed collaboration in the structure and culture of their schools. Teachers' work is designed to ensure that every staff member is a contributing member of a collaborative team. Creating a structure for teacher collaboration is vitally important, but insufficient. Principals must do more than organize teacher teams and hope for the best. They must provide the focus, parameters, and support to help teams function effectively. More specifically, principals who are staff development leaders must:

1. Provide time for collaboration in the school day and school year. This does not require keeping students at home and/or an infusion of new resources. Principals can identify no-cost strategies that enable teachers to work together while students are on campus.

2. Identify critical questions to guide the work of collaborative teams. The impact of providing time for teachers to engage in collective inquiry will be determined to a great extent by the questions teachers are considering. Principals must help teams frame questions that focus on teaching and learning.

3. Ask teams to create products as a result of their collaboration. Examples might include statements of student outcomes by units of instruction, new units to address gaps between state standards and local curriculum, common assessments and rubrics, or improvement plans based on analysis of student achievement data.

4. Insist that teams identify and pursue specific student achievement goals. Improved results must drive the effort to create a collaborative culture. Principals foster improved results when they ask teams to identify and pursue specific, measurable student achievement goals.

5. Provide teams with relevant data and information. When every teacher has access to information on student performance in meeting agreed-upon standards, on valid assessments, in comparison to other students trying to achieve the same standards, individual teachers and teams improve their effectiveness.

Simply put, when teachers operate within a

learning community, they are more likely to develop professional competence. Principals play the critical role in forging conditions that give rise to the growth of professional communities in schools (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996).

RESULTS-DRIVEN LEARNING

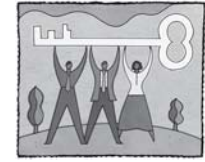
Some principals cling to the notion that they are staff development leaders when they offer a potpourri of professional development opportunities. These peripatetic principals strive to expose staff to every educational fad. This eagerness to pursue change and embrace every "new thing" results in the "Christmas tree" school. Programs, training, and initiatives are simply hung on the existing structure and culture of the school like ornaments on a Christmas tree. Like ornaments, they never become truly organic or part of the tree. They dangle fragily without ever being absorbed into the school culture.

Principals who are staff development leaders recognize that professional development is a means to an end — improved student achievement. They work with faculty to identify competencies that are critical in helping staff achieve that end; they design purposeful, goal-oriented strategies and programs to develop those competencies; and they sustain commitment to those strategies and programs until staff acquire and use the intended knowledge and skills. They assess the impact of professional development not by the number of offerings or enthusiasm for the offerings, but by results.

The emphasis on results also means that building the collective capacity to achieve school goals must be a higher priority than developing individual knowledge and skills. Traditionally, staff members have had incentives to take university courses or attend conferences and workshops based on personal interests. It is time for a profession that has been fiercely protective of individual autonomy to acknowledge that individual development does not ensure organizational development. The random learnings of staff members may contribute little to a school's ability to solve its problems.

A famous symphony conductor once

Continued on p. 7



Collaboration by invitation never works. Principals who function as staff development leaders embed collaboration in the structure and culture of their schools.

REFERENCES

- DuFour, R. (1998).** Why look elsewhere: Improving schools from within. *The School Administrator*, 2(55), 24-28.
- Greenleaf, R. (1990).** *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis, IN: Robert Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Louis, K., Kruse, S., & Raywid, M.A. (1996).** Putting teachers at the center of reform. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(580), 9-21.

Collaboration is the key to unlocking potential

Continued from p. 6

commented that while he wanted each violinist to improve, developing individual skills did not result in a great orchestra. He also had to help each section of the orchestra develop its ability to work together as a section. Finally, he had to ensure that each member and each section heard the music the same way and that they had a common sense of what they were trying to accomplish. Principals who are staff development leaders function in much the same way. They want each 3rd-grade teacher to become a better teacher, but they realize that a focus on individual development will not create a great school. They must also help the 3rd-grade team function in ways that strengthen the entire 3rd grade. Most importantly, they must keep everyone in the school committed to a shared vision of improved learning for all.

MODELING

Principals who hope to encourage others to grow professionally must remember the words of Albert Schweitzer: "Example isn't the best way to influence others — it's the only way." When principals are committed to their own professional development, when they are open to new experiences and ideas, when they are willing to pose questions and engage in action research, they increase the likelihood that staff will make a similar commitment.

Because the fundamental purpose of school is learning, principals must become students of the teaching-learning process. Because learning communities require shared vision and collective commitments, principals must become skilled in building consensus and resolving conflict. Because clarity of communication helps signal priorities and focus improvement efforts, principals must develop powerful strategies for communicating effectively. Because learning communities are results-oriented and committed to continuous improvement, principals must become proficient in gathering and reporting data in ways that are meaningful to teachers. Because the transformation of traditional school cultures into professional learning communities is replete with obstacles, frustrations, and setbacks, principals must learn how to encourage the hearts of those with whom

they work. This is by no means an exhaustive list. It is, however, representative of the kind of professional development principals could pursue to help those within a school accomplish their collective goals.

How can principals develop these skills? Read voraciously, secure a mentor, participate in a principal network, create a guiding coalition within the school to help generate, assess, and refine improvement strategies. Most importantly, look continuously for experiences that offer an opportunity for professional growth.

There are those who contend that school improvement initiatives have suffered because schools are too dependent upon principals, that a principal's influence must be lessened in order for schools to function as learning communities. I do not subscribe to that theory. Schools need strong, effective leadership from principals more than ever. But that leadership is not the autocratic "my-way-or-the-highway" model. Principals who embrace their role as staff development leaders heed the tenets of servant-leadership. As Robert Greenleaf (1990) described this model of leadership:

The servant-leader is servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.... The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 7).

When principals focus on creating an environment in which people are working toward a shared vision and honoring collective commitments, an environment in which the structures and supports foster collaborative efforts and continuous professional growth, an environment in which each teacher has someone to turn to and talk to when confronted with challenges, they address one of the deepest yearnings in the hearts of most teachers: To make a positive difference in the lives of their students. In helping teachers address that fundamental need, principals increase the likelihood that teachers will themselves become servant-leaders to their students. And that is what the principal as staff development leader is all about. ■

ISSN 0276-928X

The Learning Principal is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council, 5995 Fairfield Road, #4, Oxford, OH 45056, for \$49 of each membership. Periodicals postage paid at Wheelersburg, OH 45694.

© Copyright, National Staff Development Council, 2006. All rights reserved.

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

Director of business services

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.nsdco.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

William Sommers,
president (2007)
Deborah Childs-Bowen,
past president (2006)
Sydnee Dickson (2008)
Karen Dyer (2007)
Sharon Jackson (2006)
Charles Mason (2007)
Sue McAdamis,
president-elect (2008)
Sue Showers (2008)

COPYING/REPRINT POLICY

Please see www.nsdco.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm for details and a form to submit a request.

BACK COPIES

Back copies of *The Learning Principal* are available for \$3 per copy. Member and bulk discounts apply. To order, contact NSDC's main business office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the National Staff Development Council, 5995 Fairfield Road, #4, Oxford, OH 45056.

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Member Services

5995 Fairfield Road, #4

Oxford, OH 45056

Membership info: 800-727-7288

NEW NSDC BOOKS ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

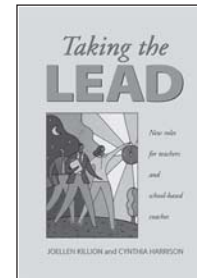
AVAILABLE IN DECEMBER – RESERVE YOUR COPY NOW!

TAKING THE LEAD: NEW ROLES FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL-BASED COACHES

By Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison

This guide to school-based coaching is written by two educators who have developed coaching models and worked closely with dozens of coaches. They explore the complex, multi-faceted roles played by teacher leaders and school-based coaches as well as examining district and school expectations, hiring practices, and deployment of these educators.

A companion CD-ROM includes dozens of tools that teacher leaders and school-based coaches can use in their work. One of those tools is a new set of Innovation Configurations for school-based coaches. (NSDC, 2006.) **Item B352. Price: \$36, members; \$45, nonmembers**



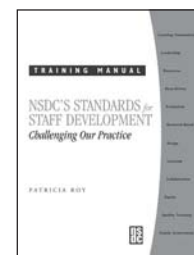
AVAILABLE NOW

TRAINING MANUAL: NSDC'S STANDARDS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

By Pat Roy

This 60-page guidebook presents a plan for a one-day workshop to introduce NSDC's standards to educators. The sessions are designed to encourage participant involvement to develop greater understanding of the standards. The slide presentation plus materials needed to conduct activities are included as PDF files on a companion CD-ROM.

This guidebook may be purchased separately or as part of the NSDC's Standards for Staff Development Trainer's Kit. (NSDC, 2006.) **Item B340. Price: \$32, members; \$40, nonmembers**



Periodicals
Postage
PAID
at
Wheelersburg, OH
45694