



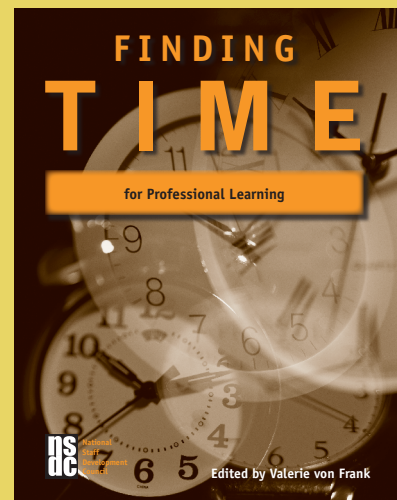
Finding Time for Professional Learning

Edited by Valerie von Frank

A compilation of articles and tools about time published in NSDC's newsletters and *JSD* in the last decade. The most comprehensive collection of articles you will find anywhere. Includes suggestions about how to use the articles to guide the discussion about time in your school and district.

Includes articles by:

Linda Darling-Hammond • Rick DuFour
Tom Guskey • Stephanie Hirsh • Joellen Killion
Kent Peterson • Joan Richardson • Dennis Sparks



Order your copy TODAY!



National Staff
Development Council
5995 Fairfield Road, #4
Oxford, OH 45056
800-727-7288
www.nsd.org

Finding Time for Professional Learning
B379 NSDC, 2007
Member price: \$25.60
Order at store.nsd.org

13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

Lessons from the kitchen table

VISITING WITH FAMILIES IN THEIR HOMES

By Margery B. Ginsberg

With more than 130 million migrants worldwide and nearly 30 million people in the United States who were born in other countries, immigration has, now more than ever, profound implications for schools. In New York City, 48% of students come from immigrant-

headed households speaking more than 100 languages. In California, 1.5 million children are considered to be English language learners. Even in places like Dodge City, Kan., more than 30% of the children enrolled in public schools are the children of immigrants. As one scholar, quoting Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz," notes, "We are not in Kansas anymore" (Suarez-Orosco & Suarez-Orosco, 2001).

Visiting immigrant families in their homes provides a rich way to learn more about the families and their culture and to discover ways to connect them to their new schools. As increasing numbers of schools receive families who are new to the United States, there is a widespread call to include the sources of knowledge that reside in all families in classroom learning (Moll, et al, 1992; Suarez-Orosco & Suarez-Orosco, 2001; Gay, 2000). This approach to teaching has the potential to enhance motivation and achievement

NSDC
TOOL



WHAT'S INSIDE

Voice of a teacher leader

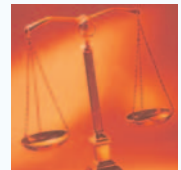
Bill Ferriter is stunned by a mother's question.

PAGE 7

Lessons from a coach

Coach Megan Conklin relies on her learning community.

PAGE 8



Focus on NSDC's standards

Joellen Killion describes the Equity standard.

PAGE 9

Research brief

Researchers rank the best learning strategies.

PAGE 11



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

(Veléz-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000). Just as significant, it can amplify the voices of historically underserved families to inform collective commitments to equity and excellence (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Valdez, 1996).

But visiting the home of an immigrant family requires preparation by the school and by the teachers who will be visiting. In this article, I offer suggestions for preparing teachers to make those important visits.

A six-part tool is printed on pp. 3-6:

1. Start with questions
2. Read about funds of knowledge
3. Identify questions for the conversation
4. Practice asking questions
5. Take notes
6. Learn from interpreters

Applying what you learned in home visits

It is beyond the scope of this article to chronicle the many ways in which teachers can apply what they have learned from visiting families in their homes. In one classroom that comes to mind, for example, a teacher taught literacy through collages of children's travel experiences, photography and poetry about students' neighborhoods, "where I'm from" poems (Christensen, 1997), and math problems that embed in student narratives. These displays remind visitors to classrooms to see children's inclinations and capacities broadly. They also testify to new forms of curricular innovation that engage children's motivation.

Perhaps, however, the most important outcomes cannot be seen. As teachers listen to stories about refugee camps in Kenya, negotiating the health care system in Seattle, and becoming self-sufficient in the United States by working two or three jobs, they share with one another various reminders of the strength and determination of the families they serve. Related to this, they consistently communicate that one of the most significant outcomes of home visits has been eradicating the discourse on "lack of parent involvement" and the concomitant sense of hopelessness that accompanies such conversation. This process engages educators in new ways to

think about and communicate about the extraordinary knowledge that resides within all families. One of the consequences is that teachers are more likely to view households as contexts where rich learning occurs, as opposed to contexts that hinder academic progress.

References

- Adams, M., Bell, L. & Griffin, P. (1997).** Teaching for diversity and social justice: *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 21, pp. 121-127.
- Christensen, L. (1997).** Where I'm from. *Rethinking Schools*, 12(2), pp. 22-23.
- González, N., Moll, L.C., Floyd-Tenery, M., Rivera, A., Rendón, P., Gonzales, R., & Amanti, C. (1994).** *Funds of knowledge: Learning from language minority households.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Gay, G. (2000).** *Culturally responsive teaching.* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ginsberg, M. & Wlodkowski, R. (2000).** *Creating highly motivating classrooms: A school-wide approach to powerful teaching with diverse learners.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994).** *Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992).** Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), pp. 132-141.
- Moll, L.C. & Ruiz, R. (2002).** The schooling of Latino students. In M. Suárez-Orozco & M. Páez (Eds.), *Latinos: Remaking America*, pp. 362-374. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Suarez-Orosco, C. & Suarez-Orosco, M. (2001).** *Children of immigration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Valdez, G. (1996).** *Con respecto: Building the bridges between culturally diverse families and schools.* New York: Teachers College Press
- Vélez-Ibáñez, C. & Greenberg, J. (1992).** Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U.S. Mexican households. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 23(4), pp. 313-335.

Visiting the home of an immigrant family requires preparation by the school and by the teachers who will be visiting.

As teachers listen to stories about refugee camps in Kenya, negotiating the health care system in Seattle, and becoming self-sufficient in the United States by working two or three jobs, they share with one another various reminders of the strength and determination of the families they serve.

Start with questions

Begin the process of visiting with families in their homes by answering several introductory questions about the expectations for the visits.

These four background questions will stimulate an initial discussion about the purposes and possibilities of visiting with families in their homes. I recommend answering the questions in small groups, perhaps grade-level teams. Another alternative would be to do a carousel activity in a larger group, perhaps an entire school staff. In this scenario, post each question on a separate piece of chart paper and move small groups of teachers from question to question, adding the comments of each group to the chart paper.

1. What might home visits teach us that would be difficult to learn in another context?
2. How might we want to know, with greater breadth and depth, about the lives of diverse linguistic communities in teaching practices?
3. As teachers, how can we continuously dismantle deficit thinking?
4. What have we learned about “respect” that we want to keep in mind as we visit families in their homes?

1

Read about funds of knowledge

Funds of knowledge are strengths and talents that reside in all families, whether they are academic, civic, and/or technical. The concept of “funds of knowledge” is based on the simple premise: people are competent. We all have knowledge, often derived from sources outside of school, culled from within social, historical, political, and economic contexts. Providing educators with an approach to visiting homes in order to learn about a family’s funds of knowledge can reveal rich social fabrics, fascinating oral histories, ways of organizing complicated lives, and technical expertise that can be elicited to significantly enrich everyday curriculum.

As you prepare teachers to make home visits, have them read and discuss “Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms” by Moll, et al (1992). This literature is practitioner-friendly and often requires less than 20 minutes to read. (Check your university library for a copy of this article.) This article distinguishes between visiting a family’s home as the bearer of knowledge and visiting a family’s home as a learner. The idea of teachers as learners in this context is an important departure from convention.

An alternative to reading the work of Moll, et al (1992) is to read and discuss the following excerpt from the Center for Applied Linguistics (1994). This article in its entirety can be found online at www.cal.org/resources/Digest/ncrcds01.html. I ask teachers to read the following excerpt and compare what this author is expressing with some of their own reasons for visiting with families in their home.

“Teachers have voiced two underlying transformative potentials in viewing the households as repositories of funds of knowledge. The first challenges traditional notions of culture as only being represented through dances, food, folklore, and the like. As a result of these home visits, teachers begin to view culture as a dynamic process rather than a static end state. Teachers in the Tucson project learned, among other things, how households network in informal market exchanges and how cross-border activities enabled their students to act as mini-ethnographers. They also recognized that students acquire a multi-dimensional depth and breadth from their participation in household life (Moll et al., 1992).

“The second transformative principle of this research debunks the pervasive idea that linguistically and culturally diverse working-class minority households lack worthwhile knowledge and experiences. Teachers who have participated in these visits have been changed as a result of getting to know families that have survived against overwhelming odds or made great sacrifices to gain a better education for their children. Consequently, these teachers now view their students with more respect and understanding, and are better able to tie the academic content to the formerly hidden talents and abilities they have discovered in their minority students” (Gonzalez, et al, 1994).

2

Identify questions for the conversation

The goal in developing these questions is for teachers to learn from families without being intrusive. I often provide the following set of possibilities and ask teachers to underline what they believe are good questions, change whatever might be improved, and draw a line through less important or awkward options. Some of the questions include follow-up probes that can help to clarify. The nuance of language is so important, and sometimes the initial idea behind a question is difficult to communicate. This is one reason why it is ideal to work with interpreters throughout the process. Especially as partners in this initial review of questions, their insights provide a window into experiences that some families may wish to remain private.

3

1. Can you talk a little bit about the experience your child is having in school?
Probe: What does your child talk about when he or she mentions school?
2. What are some of the things about schools in the United States that seem to differ from opportunities to learn when you were a child?
Probe: What is important in your culture or family that you would like educators to know?
3. How did your life in other communities differ from your life here?
4. What are some of the things that you like about this community?
5. Are you currently able to use the skills or talents that you developed in your home country (or in another valued community)?
Probe: Can you tell me a little about some of the skills or talents that you value?
6. What is something you have learned since coming to the United States or moving to this community that you might not have imagined?
7. What are some of the memories from your earlier community (communities) that you enjoy sharing?
8. What are some of your biggest interests now? Can you trace the origin of those interests?
9. In what ways might your child say she or he is similar to you?
10. If your child was to show up in a classroom where you were the teacher, what would you do to help him/her learn? What would you tell him/her?
11. What is a small thing that for some reason means a big deal to you?
12. If you could relive a single day, what day would that be?
13. What gives your family strength?
14. What contributions to the family does your child enjoy making?
Probe: Can you tell me about any daily, weekly, and/or monthly routines that the whole family participates in?
Probe: What are the special gatherings your family enjoys?
15. What stories does your child enjoy?
Probe: What is a favorite story that you share with your children?
16. Has your child talked about any particular experiences at school that were challenging or fun?
17. How does the experience that you had (in school or just growing up) differ from your child's current school/growing-up experiences?
18. What are you most proud of about your son or daughter?
19. Does your child share their success at home?
20. We are developing a unit/learning experience about (to be determined). What do you think might be particularly important or interesting for your child to learn?
21. Are there any ways you would like to participate at school that you may not have had the opportunity to contribute?

Practice asking questions

Once teachers have developed a set of questions, give them time to practice asking the questions. For this, a basic role play is helpful. Organize teachers into pairs for this activity. One teacher will play the role of the teacher; the second teacher will play the role of the interpreter since teachers will eventually work with an interpreter during the visits.

4

The teacher will ask the interpreter three to five questions. Then, they will reverse roles and repeat the activity.

After practicing the questions, invite teachers to suggest other ideas that will ensure that the home visits are comfortable and respectful. For example, teachers often mention the following:

- Ask questions slowly and provide time for people to answer.
- Start with easy questions.
- Ask follow-up questions to encourage families to share more information.
- Photographs and keepsakes can help people share stories.
- Moments of silence are OK.

If someone is recalling something that makes them uncomfortable, show that you know that something is very sad. Accept emotions as part of the process but if you are in doubt about continuing, ask whether they are comfortable doing so.

Don't let an interview last more than about 45 minutes. It is just too tiring for everyone.

After practicing the questions, invite teachers to suggest other ideas that will ensure that the home visits are comfortable and respectful.

Take notes

Taking notes during the visit will promote accuracy and reflection. To prepare teachers for this, I often begin by asking each teacher to take notes as they observe some aspect of school or the behavior and/or interactions of a group inside the school.

5

This experience enables teachers to recognize the difficulty of capturing detail and nuance and eases the way for working with a partner, whenever possible. Taking notes and listening in teams of two allows one teacher to ask questions while the other takes notes. After a few questions, they can reverse roles. Teachers often worry about bombarding a household with visitors, but most families are happy to host two teachers and an interpreter.

To take notes, use any inexpensive notebook and draw a line down the center of each page. Record concrete, observable/audible data on the left and personal thoughts or wonders on the right side of the line.

Both types of data will be informative but teachers will want to be aware that their notes are filtered through their own cultural lens. What we pay attention to, how we pay attention, and how we make meaning are influenced by how each of us is socialized in our families and communities. At a minimum, it is important to be cautious about confusing perceptions from a single visit with certainty about rich and complicated lives.

To take notes, use any inexpensive notebook and draw a line down the center of each page. Record concrete, observable/audible data on the left and personal thoughts or wonders on the right side of the line.

Learn from interpreters

Interpreters play a pivotal role as mediators of language and culture and in communicating policy. These individuals traverse boundaries every day. They negotiate the nuances of language and, in spite of their own limited status within school districts, they lead the way into new forms of learning. Their capacity to imagine possibilities for the families they serve is indefatigable.

6

To help teachers create visits that are culturally respectful, I encourage them to talk with interpreters before their visits. I suggest using these questions for those conversations:

1. How might we promote a sense of respect and connectedness among all who are participating? (For example, a small gift of fruit and cookies is often appreciated. In addition, teachers will want to remember to look at the person to whom they are speaking, as opposed to the interpreter.)
2. Where are the opportunities to make the learning experience relevant to all who are involved, including ways for families to make choices? (“Relevance” and “choice,” as it applies to home visits, might simply mean sharing all of the questions up front and asking families to always feel comfortable to pass on a question or to suggest an alternate question. Families are also assured that the interview can stop at any time in the process. Finally, they are provided with a time frame that respects their busy lives. Interviews do not exceed 45 minutes.)
3. How can we create an experience that is challenging in positive ways and engaging for everyone?
4. How can we create an experience in which there are authentic and valued ways to identify success? (For example, before leaving, share one or two of the responses that were particularly informative or interesting. If possible, return with an example of something that you applied in your teaching and that is reflected in student work).

Interpreters negotiate the nuances of language and, in spite of their own limited status within school districts, they lead the way into new forms of learning.

Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)TM is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council, 5995 Fairfield Road, #4, Oxford, OH 45056. Copyright, NSDC, 2007. All rights reserved.

MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE
5995 Fairfield Road, #4
Oxford OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638 (fax)
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdcc.org

Editor: Joan Richardson
Designer: Kitty Black

NSDC STAFF

Executive director
Stephanie Hirsh
stephanie.hirsh@nsdc.org

Deputy executive director
Joellen Killion
joellen.killion@nsdc.org

Director of business services
Leslie Miller
leslie.miller@nsdc.org

Director of communications
Joan Richardson
joan.richardson@nsdc.org

Director of learning
Cathy Owens
cathy.owens@nsdc.org

Distinguished senior fellow
Hayes Mizell
hmizell@gmail.com

Emeritus executive director
Dennis Sparks
dennis.sparks@comcast.net

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Sue McAdamis (2008)
President
mcadamissue@rockwood.k12.mo.us

Sydnee Dickson (2008)
sydnee.dickson@schools.utah.gov

Karen Dyer (2009)
President-elect
dyerk@leaders.ccl.org

Maria Goodloe-Johnson (2009)
maria.goodloejohnson@seattleschools.org

Charles Mason (2010)
masonc@mtnbrook.k12.al.us

James Roussin (2009)
jim.roussin@gmail.com

Sue Showers (2008)
cinsue@fuse.net

William Sommers (2007)
Past president
wsommers@sedl.org

COPYING/REPRINT POLICY

All content in *Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)* is copyright protected by the National Staff Development Council and may not be copied or reprinted without permission. Please see www.nsdcc.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm for details as well as a form for submitting a request.

CONTACT

Complete contact information for all staff and board members is available on the web site at www.nsdcc.org/connect/about/index.cfm.



Bill Ferriter is a 6th-grade social studies and language arts teacher at Salem Middle School, Apex, N.C.

Her question blew me away

One of the defining moments in my career came when I was teaching a remarkable group of 5th graders — the kind of class that teachers dream of. Discipline was a non-issue because my kids cared about learning and admired me. The connections were undeniable — and resulted in unparalleled learning.

I grew particularly close to a boy named Mark, who had also been my student as a 3rd grader. Mark was an athletic boy — a custom fit for a teacher like me. The personal connection we shared translated into incredible academic success. Towards the end of the year, Mark's mom asked for a conference. "I want to review where he stands so that I can keep him moving forward," she said. "After all, he's not going to have Mr. Ferriter anymore!"

Together, we remembered two years worth of shared experiences and student growth. I spent nearly 40 minutes highlighting Mark's strengths in reading and writing — an area where he had made great strides. I'd seen him learn to add voice to his work and to structure pieces logically. He'd mastered punctuation and was beginning to experiment with compound and complex sentences. When he read, he could make connections and ask questions that reflected a deep understanding of text. Books were never far from the corner of his desk, and stories were never far from his mind.

Near the end of our conversation, Mark's mom blew me away by asking, "That's all great, Mr. Ferriter, but what does the end-of-grade test say?"

I was instantly hurt because her question cheapened the countless hours I had invested into her child. My expertise had been set aside in favor of the results of a single multiple choice exam. Not wanting to ruin a rewarding relationship, I pulled out Mark's scores and reviewed them with her carefully.

She left satisfied, knowing that her child was making extraordinary strides — and I was left to wonder about the role that testing should play in defining student success.

You see, what Mark's mom didn't know was that the standardized test only covered a narrow

slice of the required curriculum. What she also didn't realize was that unpredictable patterns of physiological development often resulted in wild performance swings on standardized tests from year to year.

She probably didn't know that four points represented average growth on an exam whose standard measurement error was three points. She also wouldn't have known that students given the chance to take the test again often saw changes in their scores

of between 6 and 12 points — calling

into question the scores of children tested only once.

But in the end, that score was what mattered to Mark's mom. To her, it was the most reliable indicator of performance.

As a career educator, that left me to wonder how we'd gotten to the point where the judgment of classroom teachers is less valuable than standardized test scores. More importantly, it left me to wonder how we can ever earn professional credibility back again. ♦



Testing cannot be the end-all.

Join the conversation with Bill by visiting www.nsd.org/blog/ and offering your opinion. Bill posts his provocative ideas frequently — be sure to return often.



Megan Conklin is a secondary literacy coach in the North Thurston (Wash.) Public Schools district. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher in adolescence and young adulthood English language arts. You can contact her at mconklin1@nthurston.k12.wa.us.

We created our community

Q How do you advance your own professional learning as a coach?

Our district focus this year is professional learning communities. It only made sense for those of us who are coaching teachers to say, “We need to be part of that, too. We need to be supporting each other and learning together while we learn to do this new work.”

We started like you would any professional learning community. We established norms and we talked about confidentiality. We shared triumphs — things that worked well — and issues with which we struggle. Additionally, we all are attending our own individual professional development opportunities. We bring all that information back to the table and see what pieces we want to integrate into our own models.

Because this is my first year, I think I’m a little heavy on personal professional development. I’ve gone to many coaching seminars and conferences. I know I’m erring on the side of my

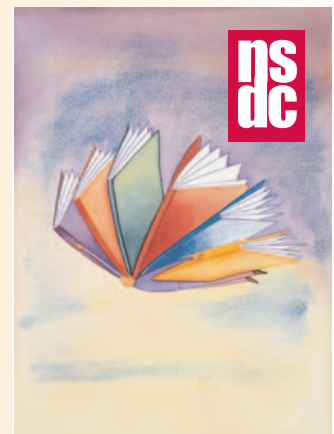
own professional growth just because I have so much to learn right now about this role and about my content — secondary reading.

Our literacy cadre is where I first saw the power of professional learning communities come to life. The group began meeting four years ago before we knew the words “critical friends group” or “professional learning community.” It began with all the high school reading teachers coming together. We talked about what we were doing, aligned our curriculum, and did troubleshooting. This literacy cadre has been the single most powerful factor affecting student learning in our district — especially for struggling readers.

It’s that time to discuss as professionals what’s working and what’s not — to have people around to help us solve the problems and celebrate the successes — that makes a difference. These are opportunities to meet and ask pivotal questions. Because the district either pays us or provides released time, we feel that our time is being honored. This time together renews us. ♦

ARE YOU ENJOYING ALL OF THE BENEFITS OF YOUR NSDC MEMBERSHIP?

- Eight issues of *Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)* emailed directly to you
- 20% discount on all NSDC bookstore products — store.nsd.org
- Access to the members-only area of the NSDC web site, including an online community for your specific job role or responsibility
- Ability to register for both NSDC conferences and institutes at member rates
- 12 issues of *Connect with NSDC* e-newsletter to help you stay up to date on new publications and resources
- If you have the full Teacher Leadership membership, you also receive four issues of *JSD* each year and four issues of *Tools for Schools* each year.





Joellen Killion is deputy executive director of National Staff Development Council.

VARIETY MUST LEAD TO EQUITY

Meeting the needs of *all* learners in classrooms provides teachers both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to maximize a teacher's professional expertise to adapt instruction and curriculum to meet the unique needs of their students, much as a doctor treats individual patients. The challenge rests in having a breadth of knowledge, skills, and resources to accommodate the differences in students' learning preferences and needs. However, for teachers to create safe, positive, productive learning environments in their classrooms built on respect for students requires extensive teacher expertise. Those in leadership roles have the responsibility to muster and share the expertise that rests across the school so that no teacher lacks resources or the pedagogical practices necessary to ensure that all students succeed.

NSDC's Equity standard acknowledges that each student brings into school variations and differences in their backgrounds, educational experiences, academic ability, and family situation. When students enter the doors of some schools and classrooms, teachers recognize and tap into these difference as a potential source for connecting the student to the school. When students are connected, feel valued, and are a part of a classroom community, they are more likely to be academically successful, attend school, and stay in school.

Coaches and teacher leaders help their peers appreciate each student, create safe, learning-focused classroom environments, and hold high expectations for every student.

They do this is a variety of ways.

1. Disaggregate data.

Coaches can help teachers disaggregate school, grade/department, and classroom data to

look at how various groups of students perform on a variety of measures of student achievement. When teachers use data to understand how different student groups perform, they can adjust their instruction. For example, when teachers look at common assessment data, they can discover if students with similar characteristics are performing better than others. With this information, teachers adjust instruction, curriculum, classroom resources, and interventions to address student learning needs.

2. Help teachers understand how their own background, family experiences, culture, race, gender, and learning experiences influence their instructional practices.

Parker Palmer reminds us that teachers teach who they are rather than what they know. Coaches can create opportunities for teachers to engage in dialogue in which they examine their individual and collective beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers who understand their own beliefs and those of their colleagues develop a deeper understanding of how differences enrich a community.

3. Bring students' life experiences into the classroom.

Erin Gruwell and her students provide one example of how bringing students' life experiences into school can improve their academic success. In their book and eventually a movie, "Freedom Writers," Gruwell and her students describe how they used the complexities of their students' lives as the grist for their writing. Eventually, these students whose differences



EQUITY

Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.

For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

often led to conflict became passionate writers, an active community of peers who learned to appreciate their similarities and value and understand their differences, and who stayed in school. Today, several of them carry on the tradition Gruwell began in their own classrooms.

4. Provide opportunities for increasing teachers' understanding of practices that increase opportunities for students to learn and to receive feedback on instructional practice.

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (<http://streamer3.lacoe.edu/tesa/>) is a professional development program using peer observations that focus on helping teachers learn how to strengthen their instructional practices to increase teachers' expectations in learning. For example, teachers gather data in one another's classrooms about the presence of specific and sometimes subtle instructional behaviors. Data provide the evidence teachers use to know if they are including more of the desired practices.

5. Facilitate professional collaboration about teaching and learning.

Teachers want a safe, risk-free forum for seeking support from their peers on differentiating instruction and curriculum for students in their classrooms. Coaches can facilitate opportunities for teachers to examine student work; conduct child study or review; design lessons, common assessments, or student work together; engage in problem solving around particular challenges of practice; increasing student engagement; and creating safe classrooms.

6. Support teachers' understanding of instructional practices that decrease disparity in the classroom.

Generating Expectations and Student Achievement (GESA) provides teachers an opportunity to understand what contributes to disparity in their classrooms. GESA identifies five areas teachers can examine including: instructional contact; grouping and classroom organization; classroom management; enhancing self-esteem; and evaluation of student performance. When teachers learn specific classroom behaviors that reduce disparity, students engage

more actively in their learning experiences.

7. Engaging students in authentic, rigorous learning experiences.

Increasing the relevance, rigor, and authenticity of students' classroom work has a parallel impact on student learning. Phillip Schlechty at the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform (www.schlechtycenter.org) identified 10 design qualities that increase the relevance and rigor of student assignments and foster student engagement in and responsibility for learning: content and substance; organization of knowledge, product focus; clear and compelling product standards; safe environment; affirmation of performance; affiliation; novelty and variety; choice; and authenticity.

8. Spend one-on-one time with each student.

Disenfranchisement contributes to negative attitudes about school, high drop-out rates, and even poor academic performance. Developing caring relationships with students helps teachers gain a deeper understanding of students' individual learning preferences, their background, their culture, their needs, and their unique attributes. When students feel that they have a strong advocate, a trusting adult who cares about them, they are less vulnerable academically. Teachers can promote increased motivation, self-esteem, competence, and emotional intelligence when they build an interpersonal connection with their students.

In classrooms where equity exists, teachers respect students as individuals and their ideas as important, acknowledge and tap the background experiences students bring with them, develop a deep understanding of students' culture, and build on what students already know. Students share ownership for their learning and take responsibility for their own academic success. Coaches and teacher leaders support colleagues in developing learner-centered classrooms and schools through facilitating courageous conversations about race, poverty, and beliefs (Singleton & Linton, 2006), facilitating learning experiences, modeling, co-planning differentiated instruction, and offering feedback about classroom practices. When teachers create learning-centered classrooms, students benefit academically, socially, and emotionally. ◆

Reference

Singleton, G. & Linton, C. (2005).

Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Learning methods are ranked

QUESTIONS AND QUIZZES TOP THE LIST IN NEW PRACTICE GUIDE FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By **Carla Thomas McClure**

What can research tell teachers about improving the odds that students will learn, remember, and apply academic skills and concepts?

The U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) asked a panel of experts to answer this question. After months of evaluating and summarizing the best available evidence, the panel has concluded that research offers some support for seven concrete strategies. The strategies with the strongest research evidence involve asking deep explanatory questions and using quizzes to re-expose students to key content. A discussion of all seven strategies and the research behind them is included in *Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning: A Practice Guide*.

What is a practice guide?

Practice guides are systematically developed documents that combine research and professional judgment. They present practitioners with recommendations that constitute a “coherent and comprehensive approach to a multifaceted problem.” Practice guides are common in the health care profession. IES released its first practice guide in July 2007.

How does IES develop its practice guides?

After selecting a topic of high interest to practitioners, IES convenes a panel of experts. The panel spends 6 to 9 months evaluating relevant research and drafting the practice guide. For



To increase learning and memory

- Ask deep explanatory questions.
- Use quizzes to promote learning.
- Space learning over time.
- Alternate between worked example solutions and problem-solving exercises.
- Combine graphics with verbal descriptions
- Connect and integrate abstract and concrete representations of concepts.
- Help students allocate study time efficiently

each recommendation, the panel indicates the rigor of the evidence supporting it (e.g. strong, moderate, or low). Before publication, the guide

Practice guides are systematically developed documents that combine research and professional judgment. They present practitioners with recommendations that constitute a “coherent and comprehensive approach to a multifaceted problem.”

EDVANTIA™

Carla Thomas McClure is a staff writer at Edvantia (www.edvantia.org), a nonprofit research and development organization that works with federal, state, and local education agencies to improve student achievement.

undergoes independent peer review and is revised as necessary.

What research was examined in producing this guide?

The panel examined research in cognitive science, experimental psychology, education, and educational technology. The focus was on instructional procedures and timing for increasing learning and memory. Much of this research was conducted within the past five years. The panel identified seven instructional strategies for increasing learning and memory, then applied IES guidelines to characterize the evidence for each strategy as having strong, moderate, or low rigor. Generally, evidence was considered “strong” if derived from randomized control trials, “moderate” if based on well-designed studies involving no randomization, and “low” if based on expert opinion supported by evidence not meeting the standards for the moderate or strong levels of rigor.

Which strategies show strong evidence of increasing learning and memory?

Two strategies are supported by strong research evidence: (1) Prompt students to pose and answer deep-level questions that require students to explain their answers and the thinking behind them. (2) Give short-answer and fill-in-the-blank quizzes at spaced intervals to re-expose students to key content and give them practice in retrieving information. (Note: Using pre-questions to introduce a new topic may also be a good strategy, but the research supporting that dimension of questioning was low.)

Which strategies are supported by moderate research evidence?

Four strategies are supported by moderate evidence: (1) Space learning over time by arranging homework, quizzes, and exams so that key content is reviewed several weeks or months after it is introduced. (2) Alternate between having students look at examples of solved problems and having students try to solve problems themselves. (3) Use graphics to illustrate key points in verbal descriptions. When possible, however, avoid having students view a graphic and written

text at the same time. This can overload visual processing capacity. Presentations that combine audio and visual components work better. (4) Connect and integrate abstract and concrete representations of concepts. For example, point out which variables in a mathematical function are related to which aspects of a word problem.

Were any other strategies recommended?

The expert panel suggests that teachers should teach students to assess their own degree of learning and to allocate their study time accordingly. The rigor of the evidence base available to support this recommendation is, however, low.

How should teachers apply the panel’s recommendations?

IES advises teachers to use the practice guide as a decision-making tool rather than a “cookbook.” The panel writes that its recommendations most directly apply to grades 3 through 12 and are especially suitable for use with subjects that demand a great deal of content learning, such as science and social studies. Included in the guide are practical suggestions for overcoming potential roadblocks to putting recommendations into action.

Reference

Pashler, H., Bain, P.M., Bottge, B.A., Graesser, A., Koedinger, K., McDaniel, M., & Metcalf, J. (2007). *Organizing instruction and study to improve student learning* (NCER 2007-2004). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Research. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/20072004.pdf>. ◆

Bookmark this

The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences has released two additional practice guides so far:

- *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades*
- *Encouraging Girls in Math and Science*

These and future releases may be accessed online at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguides>