

Times call for Mario's powers

Time and money — these are treasures sought by every educator. Educators seek more of each particularly to improve professional learning. In difficult economic times,

however, requests for more resources for professional learning are answered with cutbacks instead. Rather than seeking additional resources, coaches and teacher leaders need to dig deeply to uncover hidden powers that can make them more resourceful.

While school systems cut expenses, particularly in the areas of professional learning, by restricting travel, eliminating released days, denying conference registrations, sometimes even eliminating instructional coaches, coaches and teacher leaders can take some lessons from Mario, Nintendo's mascot and star of numerous video games, created by Shigeru Miyamoto. Within the famous video games, Mario finds hidden treasures that give him special powers to face his foes and accomplish feats.

Mario has a number of "power ups" that allow him to exponentially increase his abilities, along with other special powers he can access. When he finds a cape, in *Super Mario World*, he has the ability to fly and glide.

When coaches gain their capes, they gain a new perspective — to see the broader view and to see beyond the present into the future. These abilities allow coaches to move teachers from the mire of current challenges to the possibilities that lie beyond.

In several games, Mario gains the ability to jump, spin, roll, and move in new ways. When coaches gain the flexibility to flip, spin, and jump, they have more opportunities to reach teachers who might be unreachable or to

leverage their work so that it more closely fits with teachers' needs.

With each special power Mario gains, he increases his capacity to accomplish his goals. He gains powers through crafty moves, solving problems, and searching for them in places they aren't logically found. Some powers, once earned, are his for the entire game. Others disappear over time.

Like Mario, coaches must power up for difficult times. To navigate through challenges, to reach further than they might normally, to support teachers who may feel particularly stressed about the reduction in resources within the school or district, coaches can power up their support.

Coaches can become the primary source of professional learning for teachers. They might model instructional practices for

teams of teachers rather than one teacher and facilitate a debriefing following the demonstration lesson.

Coaches can share articles, books, classroom strategies, or tips. For less than the price of sending one teacher to a workshop, coaches can conduct a book study with a whole grade level or part of a department. Coaches can invite teachers to "lunch and learns," during which they explore a new web-based teaching resource. Coaches might share the rich resources available on the



NSDC STANDARD

Resources: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

Image courtesy of NINTENDO



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

web sites of many museums, local community agencies, or federal agencies or departments such as NASA or the Library of Congress.

Coaches who are NSDC members can search the NSDC web site and use articles in *JSD*, *The Learning Principal*, *The Learning System*, *Tools for Schools*, and past issues of *Teachers Teaching Teachers*. Coaches may be members of professional associations, such as content associations, and might tap into the rich resources available through those associations that will help them with specific school goals.

Coaches can encourage teachers to share their most successful assignments, assessments, lesson plans, or unit plans with one another as a way of extending teachers' resource banks. Coaches can ask teachers to come together during faculty meetings to focus on instructional strategies that work for special student populations such as English language learners, special education students, gifted students, or students significantly below level.

Beyond the classroom and school, coaches can work with principals and other district leaders to broker available resources. They might tap special resource personnel in the district to address specific goals. For example, coaches might ask district special education directors for current publications with articles or resources to address needs within the school. They might ask the district's math or curriculum coordinator for videotapes of effective teaching, research on mathematics instruction, or other content-specific resources to share with teachers. Coaches can work with their principals to search leadership publications or other resources for relevant

resources to share.

Within their school communities, coaches might find other professionals who work in business and industry who have expertise in particular content areas to share with teachers. Within every community are those who know what others want to know, who have resources others would like, and who are willing to engage in inquiry and problem solving to explore others' issues and challenges. Coaches can use their knowledge of teachers' expertise to invite those who might be able to help one another come together in informal settings. Coaches may help those with special resources share because these people often are unaware that they have knowledge, skills, or materials others want.

Most importantly coaches can help their colleagues navigate diminishing resources with their attitudes. How coaches talk and think about declining resources makes a difference in the attitudes of others. For example, if the coach speaks negatively about the loss of professional development resources, others will believe that is an appropriate behavior. Instead, the coach can describe alternatives available for professional learning or engage teachers in brainstorming possibilities.

Coaches can "power up" to become resourceful when resources are scarce. From this perspective, they can help their colleagues face the challenges of reduced resources. Difficult times are often the best times in which to build a strong collaborative culture so that everyone's talents are recognized and contribute to the well being of the entire community. ♦

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OUR WINNERS

Congratulations to these winners drawn from those who responded to our December survey.



- **Wesley Oginski**, director of professional learning for the Rocky View Schools in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada. Winner of *Finding Time for Professional Learning*, the first book in NSDC's Topics in Professional Learning Series.
- **Susan Gold**, teacher at Presidio Middle School in the San Francisco (Calif.) Unified School District. Winner of a one-year NSDC comprehensive membership.
- **P. Colen**. Winner of *Team to Teach*, by Anne Jolly (NSDC, 2008).