

# THE LEARNING Principal®

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

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## TALKING *the* WALK RENEWS SCHOOLS

*The transformational leader links values to actions*

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

*"We encounter each other in words..."*

— Elizabeth Alexander, poet

Principal Ted Little is fond of talking about doing "what's right." And the way Little defines right is actions that are "best for kids."

So Little took action with one teacher who didn't vary the curriculum from 2nd through 5th grade, spending weeks on the same project; he put another on probation, despite her standing in the community; and he reprimanded a teacher for saying, in front of students, that being at school on a snowy day was "stupid" and "a dumb idea."

What set Little, then principal of Evans Elementary School in O'Fallon, Ill., apart from other principals in a study (Searby, 1999) was his ability to broadcast his values. He did so not only through his actions, but by his explanations of those actions that often concluded with a value statement. Little, in other words, walked the talk, but he also *talked the walk*. Searby found that Little created what she termed a "moving"



school, one that was achieving, through his clarity of leadership. "He set himself apart from other principals by sharing his reflections out loud with his staff," Searby said.

Clarifying one's values and being able to clearly and regularly express them, linking values to actions and the school's priorities, are hallmarks of the kind of leadership that creates school renewal. Values are the beliefs or feelings that drive decisions about the way we behave. The transformational leader, researchers say, is clear not only about which actions are impor-

*Continued on p. 6*



**JO ANNE ROGERS**  
Principal, Lincoln  
Elementary School  
Riviera Beach, Fla.

**District:** Palm Beach  
County Schools  
**Grades:** Pre-K-5  
**Enrollment:** 527  
students  
**Staff:** 35 teachers

Riviera Beach is a largely African-American city of about 30,000, noted for its high rates of crime and poverty, with a median family income of under \$27,000. It is home to a U.S. Coast Guard station. The majority of Lincoln Elementary's students come from four low-income housing projects. The school was in restructuring status because it had been a D or F school (on the state report card) for six consecutive years. In one year, the school moved from an F on the state report card to an A, in 2008.

## Q&A Teacher learning turns school from F to A in one year

BY VALERIE VON FRANK

### Q. What did you do to turn Lincoln from an F to an A school in one year?

It didn't take very long to turn it around. I found good teachers in this school. All it required on my part was coordinating the instructional effort. What had to be addressed was building capacity and maintaining the integrity of the instructional day; administrative monitoring; reteaching; and intensive corrective instruction.

Teachers attended weekly, 90-minute grade-level learning team meetings to look at test data itemization. If the data showed main idea was an area of weakness, for example, then grade-level teams of teachers used that time to develop lessons focused on that area. They presented those lessons to their peers and the administration for feedback. Grade levels presented, rather than one teacher by herself, so their comfort level and security was present. All instructional staff had to be experts, and we all had to understand the standards so that in every single classroom all children were exposed to quality instruction.

For students, we have an 85% or better rule. If a child doesn't achieve 85% on a test or task, as we see in monitoring their portfolios, we're going to find supplementary materials and bring that child to small group instruction, intense intervention, to ensure that child becomes successful. Sometimes people taught on their planning period, sometimes they tutored before school even started, at 7:30 in the morning, or even on weekends. We didn't leave any child behind.

Every Monday the administration met with every teacher on every grade level to personally review each student's progress. We did that all year long. The expectation that someone was measuring students' proficiency on a weekly basis made a huge impact.

### Q. How did you accomplish those reviews in six hours?

I coordinated all available assistance: my assistant principal, a special teacher on assignment, district staff, the learning team facilitator. I enlisted the help of district administration. I would just pick up the phone.

### Q. What kind of professional learning did you need?

The professional development component at Lincoln was huge. We developed specific lessons every time we had a chance to get together for professional development — and we used every opportunity. The entire month of July and a full week prior to school's opening, we used Title I funds to pay teachers if they wanted to attend sessions. Every faculty meeting focused within a content area on a strategy. We also required six, full-day Saturdays for which teachers were paid 20% of their salaries by the district. We also used five district half-days for professional development where students are dismissed at 11:30 a.m.

As a staff, we constantly read books and articles. But the bulk of learning dealt with the instructional process. We focused on standards and content areas, identifying effective materials and instructional strategies, and instruction for students performing in the lowest 30%. That's how we built capacity.

### Q. Did you find any resistance to what you wanted to do?

Teachers *want to know* how to fix the problem. Our teachers were *hungry*. They absorbed every opportunity to learn new strategies because they knew when I came to their classrooms I expected effective instruction that reflected the strategies they were learning.

I'm not going to say it was a Utopia where everybody was happy about it. It was very tedious. But our teachers were committed to seeing a change at Lincoln. Who wants to be part of an F school?



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

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## Don't wait to find time — create it

The recent NSDC study by Linda Darling-Hammond and the Stanford University team, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad*, found that countries whose students outperform the United States provide teachers significantly more time to work together, as much as half their work week in some places. Teachers have time to collaborate on curriculum and honing lessons. In the U.S., as much as 80% of a teacher's work week is spent instructing students.

NSDC had suggested a meager-by-comparison 25% of work time be dedicated to learning and collaborating with colleagues. Yet still many educators are unable to meet even this goal. System and school leaders are searching for ways to reschedule time for professional learning and structures to provide teachers the time they need.

The learning principal **allocates resources to support job-embedded professional development in the school** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 70). Job-embedded professional development includes **both informal and formal interactions** among teachers who develop lessons, share instructional strategies, examine student work, analyze achievement data, and observe each other and give feedback. Job-embedded work focuses on the core of instruction — the classroom — with the intention of improving educators' knowledge and skills so that students benefit. In her work concerning job-embedded designs for professional learning, Lois Easton (2008) has said that powerful professional development strategies:

- Connect to and return benefits to the real world of teaching and learning;

- Focus on what is happening with both student and adult learners;
- Are collaborative;
- Establish a culture of quality among staff; and
- Allow time for inquiry and reflection that promotes learning and application.

More and more job-embedded strategies are being developed, studied, and shared every day. In her book, *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning, 2nd ed.*, Easton identified 23 job-embedded professional development strategies, including action research, case studies, journaling, portfolios, shadowing, study groups, and protocols.

These strategies structure teacher interactions and create opportunities for substantial conversations about the classroom and instruction.

Crafting a schedule that allows time for colleagues to learn from and with each other is not easy. But, many schools and systems have found ways to create space in their day for teacher learning. The Spring 2007 *JSD* is devoted to this topic, and NSDC has published *Finding Time for Professional Learning* (2008), a compilation of articles that can provide information on what other districts and schools have done to create time for job-embedded professional development.

Time is one of the precious resources that schools have; the way we use time demonstrates the importance of various aspects of education. School leaders need to focus that resource on improving teaching and learning.

**NSDC STANDARD**

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

**Learn more about NSDC's standards:**  
[www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm)



# VERBALIZING VALUES

**Directions:** Using the example provided and the core values you identified in the reflection tool on p. 4, map a plan for how you might communicate your values. Be specific about when and where you might speak and what your statements might be. Refer to your outline periodically to determine whether you are following your plan.

## EXAMPLE PLAN

### CORE VALUE

I value empowering teachers as leaders in their own professional learning because they have incredible expertise to share.

### WHEN, HOW, AND WHERE I NEED TO COMMUNICATE THIS VALUE

**When:** At the beginning of each school year, state the expectation that I want teachers to share their most successful teaching strategies; reiterate monthly in professional learning community meetings.

**How:** In September, engage in personal communication. For example, ask two teachers implementing a new geography project to go first by sharing their work in October.

**Where:** In weekly teacher newsletter, build up the upcoming teacher presentation using my “core value” language. After PLC October presentation, praise Caldwell and Spencer both privately and publicly. Forecast that I will be asking others for November and December.

### STATEMENT IDEAS

“Because I believe that we have teachers with incredible instructional expertise here at Central School, I want you to be sharing your great teaching strategies with one another. You, as the experts, should be leading each other. I am going to facilitate that this year, asking two teachers each month to share their knowledge at our PLC meetings.”

**MY PLAN**

**CORE VALUE**

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**WHEN, HOW, AND WHERE I NEED TO COMMUNICATE THIS VALUE**

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**STATEMENT IDEAS**

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**Source:** Linda Searby, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

# Talking the walk renews schools

*Continued from p. 1*

tant, but *why*. The language of values can affect staff behavior and lead to greater commitment (Kohles, 2000).

Kent Peterson, leading education researcher on school culture, sums it up this way:

“I’ve visited schools that have become factories for learning, where teachers feel they’re building widgets as opposed to a nation of learners,” Peterson said. “A lot of leaders abdicate responsibility for thinking about what’s really important in schools. . . . If leaders communicate what they consider important, that starts to shape what people think the school is, and they get motivated about what is possible.”

## LANGUAGE BUILDS CULTURE

In *Outliers* (Little, Brown and Company, 2008), Malcolm Gladwell tells of several airplane crashes in which significant numbers of people were killed. He relates the conversations of the pilots and co-pilots of some of the planes. And then he tells how airlines have improved their safety records — by implementing “crew resource management” training, teaching co-pilots to be very specific in their language when talking with the captain.

While it seems obvious that a leader is able to articulate the school’s vision and his or her own values, cultivating the practice of being explicit may be as necessary in education as it was in the airline industry. In Searby’s study, Little was the only principal to routinely state his values and link them to his actions.

“People can be good communicators without communicating the right things,” Searby said in a recent interview. “Members of an organization want to know what the leader believes in and stands for. Many leaders assume people will know. They don’t understand the importance of hearing the leader say, ‘This is what I believe.’”

“The *process* of articulating and sharing our values and beliefs is critically important,” according to Julia Atkins, an education and learning consultant in Australia. “The processes of imagining, (trying), and evaluating new or different practices

are essential to true growth and learning. . . . It is *experiencing visioning and engaging in the process of evaluating your practices* against what you value and believe that are critical to the power of a values and vision-driven approach.”

## WHY VALUES MATTER

As Atkins points out, the act of reflecting on and refining one’s values is important for leaders’ own practices. Lippitt (1997) says employees may see a vision as a vague statement and need greater detail to understand the implications and benefits to their work.

Another study found that developing common purpose by stating values leads to teacher engagement and school renewal (Cavanaugh, et al., 2004). Cavanaugh found that school renewal depends on the principal and teachers sharing a common purpose for the school and an under-

standing of how the vision will be realized. Principals developed a common purpose by sharing their values, articulating the vision, and emphasizing mission. Teacher engagement alone did not lead to renewal, Cavanaugh found, nor did shared curriculum decision making or expectations of teacher instruction. The essential piece in cre-

ating school renewal, according to the study, was that sense of common purpose, created by shared and articulated values.

## THE LANGUAGE OF VALUES

Searby suggests that principals be deliberate in considering their values. “They must be able to examine learned beliefs and ingrained assumptions which preserve the inadequacies of the status quo and prevent change,” she said.

She suggests leaders schedule time daily for professional reading and reflection. She says leaders also should consider whether they are being explicit in their communication by auditing newsletters to look for values statements, examining notes from faculty meetings, or interviewing colleagues.

Atkins suggests that leaders “make explicit what we stand for and what gives direction to

*Continued on p. 7*

## WHAT DO YOU DO TO IMPROVE?

How should you improve your practice to become values-driven? Do you need to:

- Clarify your values and beliefs?
- Work toward congruence between your values/beliefs and practice?
- Revisit your values/beliefs to refine and verify their validity?
- Reconsider the “why” behind a specific practice?
- Ensure evaluation of how your practice is helping you achieve what you value and believe?

**Source:** Julia Atkins, 1996

## NSDC’S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

Continued from p. 6

our actions” by asking:

- How well does our current situation match our vision of what is possible?
- How does this practice help us achieve what we say we value and how does it aid learning based on what we know about how children learn?

Repeating the latest fashionable aphorism about learning — such as “I believe all children can learn” — is not adequate for expressing one’s personal values, according to Peterson. Time for reflection on what is important, for reading, and to consider ideas is essential, he said, if leaders are to create schools with the kind of cultures that lead to student achievement.

“The majority of the focus has been on becoming more bureaucratic, establishing rules and accountability systems,” Peterson said. “The bottom line is that schools are human places. Leaders should be generating excitement about what’s important.”

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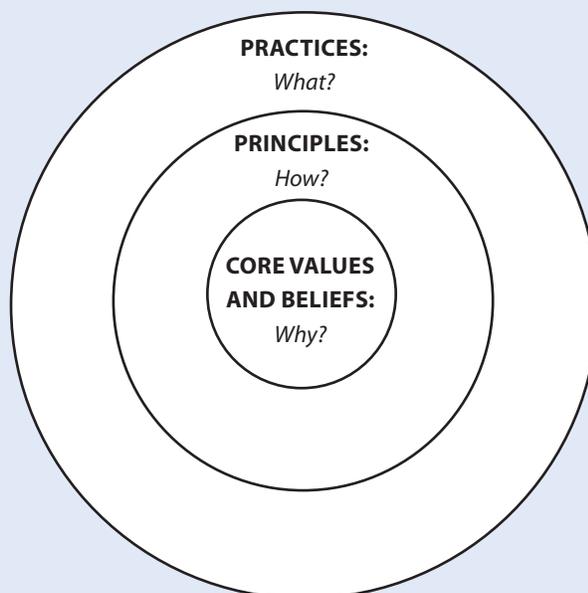
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## Exercise for developing congruence between beliefs and actions



### WORKING WITH A PARTNER:

1. Identify one of your strongly held values or beliefs about learning.  
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2. If you believe this, *how in principle* do you respond? How *in principle* do you work toward this belief?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
3. Give three examples of different practices which are congruent with this principle and its underlying belief.  
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4. Identify barriers or potential barriers to this belief being lived out in practice.  
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5. Identify a practice which is not congruent with your belief.  
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Source: Julia Atkins

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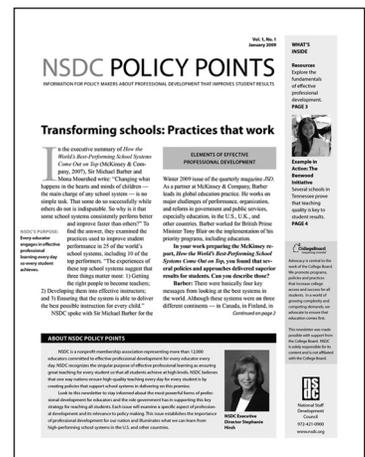
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# Strategic work aims at education federal policy makers

**N**SDC's strategic goal of affecting policy about the most powerful forms of professional learning has taken a giant leap with the launch of a new newsletter. Funded by College Board, *NSDC Policy Points* will be sent to members of Congress and their education staffs to help them develop greater understanding of federal government's role in supporting educator learning that directly affects student achievement. Each issue will examine a specific aspect of professional learning and its relevance to policy making.

The quarterly newsletter will be publicly accessible online at [www.nsd.org/policypoints/](http://www.nsd.org/policypoints/) for members to read and download. NSDC invites members to share these newsletters with state-level policy makers and other key decision makers within their own spheres of influence.

The first issue, published in January, establishes the importance of professional learning for our nation's educators and illuminates



what we can learn from high-performing school systems in the U.S. and other countries.

NSDC believes every educator can make a difference in how teachers learn by having our voices heard about the definition of quality professional learning and its link to student achievement. To read NSDC's definition of professional learning and stay up-to-date on the organization's advocacy work, visit [www.nsd.org/connect/legislative-update.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/connect/legislative-update.cfm).