

MEDICAL  
RESIDENCY  
MODEL

# GOES TO SCHOOL

BY BETH BOATRIGHT AND CHRYSAN GALLUCCI  
WITH JUDY SWANSON, MICHELLE VAN LARE, AND IRENE YOON

**I**magine you have an illness. In selecting a health care professional, you are faced with two choices: a doctor who is two weeks out of med school, or one who attended med school and then spent two years learning on the job with an experienced, qualified physician. The choice is a no-brainer. You want the doctor who worked side-by-side with skilled physicians and real patients, the one who had the benefit of seeing a wide range of

techniques, the one who had the opportunity to make mistakes in a controlled environment. Quite simply, you want the doctor who had numerous occasions to transfer knowledge from formal learning into practice. The long-established residency practice is a major reason why the United States has the strongest medical training system in the world.

Now imagine that you could

choose your child's teacher. Would you prefer the teacher whose practices are rarely questioned, or the teacher who has the benefit of an expert's on-the-job guidance and ongoing collegial critique to continuously improve her practice? While the quality of education doesn't have the apparent immediacy of health care decisions, we know that the quality of instruction in the classroom has a significant impact on children's academic curiosity and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, 1998).



And, if we are committed to improving the quality of public education, focusing on expert-guided, on-the-job professional development for teachers is a good place to start.

### SEEING IS BELIEVING

The Highline School District, located roughly 10 miles south of Seattle, Wash., has begun to implement a residency model for professional learning. Like the medical model, current teachers often traveled from other schools to be “in residency” at a previously selected classroom for six half-day sessions during the 2005-06 school year. Some schools paired up to double their allotted six days into 12. In this arrangement, the host teacher’s classroom served as a studio for her and other teachers’ learning. What made these learning experiences so beneficial was that they involved real students and real problems of practice. Furthermore, the job-embedded nature of these professional learning experiences increased the likelihood that teachers would be able to transfer what they learned into their own classroom practices (Little, 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

But studio residency events are not merely about engaging teachers in critique of their own work. Leaders also play a large role in these half-day learning opportunities. Principals from both residency and studio schools typically observe the professional learning, as do many central office leaders. In 2005-06, Highline’s two directors of elementary education came to more than 50 of the elementary studio residency events. Having school and district leaders present keeps them abreast of what teachers are working on and shows support for

teachers’ professional growth.

External expertise is provided by an instructional consultant — contracted by Highline through the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington — who typically facilitates the studio residency work around a previously agreed-upon aspect of instructional practice. CEL consultants are nationally known expert teachers in a particular subject area, with experience facilitating major instructional reforms (such as those in New York City’s former Community School District #2 and San Diego). The consultant’s job is to expose previously unseen moments where teaching could be better connected to students’ learning needs. In many cases, the consultant helps

teachers, building leaders, and central office staff identify when a student is ready to take increasing responsibility for his or her own learning.

We (researchers from CEL) observed more than 23 days of studio residencies in Highline between 2005 and 2007. One in particular stands out as an example of expert-guided professional development that actively engaged educators at multiple levels of the district. In spring 2006, principals and teachers from three elementary schools, as well as instructional coaches, Highline central office leaders, and a CEL consultant, were thinking about how classroom book clubs might provoke authentic text-based conversations among 5th graders. For two days, these adults in

residency were released from their jobs to focus on a schoolwide problem of practice. Most students had not yet mastered how to read texts and engage in productive, intellectual, text-based conversations with their peers.

### DAY ONE

Opportunities for adults to learn at the studio residency sessions are divided across multiple settings and formats. Some hours are spent in the faculty lounge in a large group discussion, some in silent observation of the studio classroom, and some in side conversations with their peers and the consultant during classroom observations and breaks. Day One of this studio residency included observing Laura Hennessey, the studio teacher,

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as she did a read-aloud of a mystery book with her 5th-grade students. The students sat on the floor as she read the book and periodically paused to ask the group questions about what they heard. Sometimes Hennessey asked the group to turn and talk to a partner about what they were thinking. The main idea of the read-aloud is to guide students through texts that are above their independent reading level and teach them skills they can use to tackle new texts in the future. Hennessey was teaching the characteristics of mysteries as a genre of literature.

Lyn Reggett, the CEL consultant, sat next to Hennessey as she taught the read-aloud. Meanwhile, the adults in residency observed closely. During moments when students were busy conversing in pairs, Reggett and Hennessey conferred about how much longer to let them talk before moving into a larger circle for a whole-group discussion. The whole-

BETH BOATRIGHT is a research associate at the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington (UW). You can contact her at eeb2@u.washington.edu.

CHRYSAN GALLUCCI is a research faculty member and co-director of the Masters in Instructional Leadership Program at UW’s College of Education. You can contact her at chrysan@u.washington.edu.

THE SUPPORTING AUTHORS are doctoral students in UW’s College of Education.

group discussion was intended to gradually release students from the guidance of the teacher and build their independence as thinkers. And yet, the whole-group discussion — as Hennessey and others expected — was somewhat stilted. Students were still new to the idea of building upon each others’ ideas. After class, the adults debriefed what they saw, acknowledging a real assessment challenge for teachers. One teacher pinpointed the problem: “How do you know what your students are capable of if they don’t talk in large groups?”

Reggett responded, “Get them in smaller groups, get alongside them, and *listen in* [her emphasis]. There are multiple ways of judging what kids know and can do. In different situations, kids show different aspects of what they know. Small groups are one way to assess kids. The word ‘assessment’ actually means to sit alongside.

**Highline School District**  
Burien, Wash.

**Number of schools:** 39  
**Enrollment:** 17,266  
**Staff:** 2,529

**Racial/ethnic mix:**

<b>White:</b>	35.2%
<b>Black:</b>	14.5%
<b>Hispanic:</b>	27.0%
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander:</b>	21.2%
<b>Native American:</b>	2.0%

**Free/reduced lunch:** 56.7%  
**Special education:** 12.6%  
**Limited English proficient:** 18.6%  
**Languages spoken:** 70

**Contact:** Beth Boatright, research associate  
**E-mail:** eeb2@u.washington.edu

difficult and not too easy. Some teachers tossed around ideas that they had tried, such as asking students to list 10 favorite books and five people in the class with whom they can have

conversations appeared to be simply a mix of unrelated statements. One student would put an idea on the table, but get no response. Another student in the same book club would put forth a different idea, without building upon the first student’s idea. Groups were literally not on the same page. Students seemed not to know how to get their peers to address their ideas — or they were unaware that they were supposed to do so. Hennessey approached Reggett to chat briefly about this problem. Reggett agreed that this problem was occurring in multiple book clubs and that “it’s about being accountable to your book group.” Hennessey stopped the class to say to her students, “What I’m noticing as I walk around to your groups is that some people have some great ideas and great examples and they’re turning to it in their books, but the rest of the group isn’t. So if you have a great example or a clue or something you want to talk about, you need to find it, and you need to have your whole group find it. Tell them the page, tell them the paragraph, so that everyone knows what you’re talking about.”

Hennessey’s advice seemed to work for some groups, not for others. After class, the adults convened in the conference room to debrief what they saw. People agreed that the students were trying to refer to examples in text to support their ideas, but often could not sustain a discussion because not all students had their texts out and open. Reggett related the adults’ ideas to a greater issue of accountability: “There’s this accountability piece. Are we holding onto that? So if you’re in a community, a partnership, a book group, part of your responsibility is to keep track of your meaning-making, to make sure that everyone knows what part of the book you’re talking about. Everyone else knows it’s their responsibility to be with that person. So that’s accountability. When we say

## Whatever transpired in Hennessey’s classroom would be the basis for future discussions.

It’s the root word. As I sit alongside kids, I can assess what they know and can do.”

The group decided that Day Two would be a good opportunity to observe the same students in the early stages of book clubs. To prepare for Day Two, they agreed to read specifically about building productive book clubs in Lucy Calkins’ *The Art of Teaching Reading*.

### DAY TWO

Day Two began with an hour-long discussion among the adults (roughly 10 of them) about what authentic, text-based conversations might look like at the 5th-grade level. For instance, many teachers wondered how to choose a reading book for students that is just right — not too dif-

academic conversations. Meanwhile, the studio teacher, Hennessey, excused herself to begin her lesson with the students. The large group entered her classroom strategically, at the moment when Hennessey’s students were beginning to meet in their four-person book clubs. There was an air of excitement among the adults because they were “getting to see it in practice from the very beginning,” explained one principal. Whatever transpired in Hennessey’s classroom would be the basis for future discussions. No one expected perfection. The CEL consultant, Reggett, reiterated that they were “just collecting data” on the students’ ability to hold text-based discussions.

As students settled into their book clubs, the observers noted that some

‘accountable talk,’ we are referring to accountability to the community, accountability to the knowledge and the content, and accountability to rigorous thinking.”

In this example, the studio residency model provided a framework for transferring knowledge from formal learning into practice. Hennessey had the opportunity to question herself in a controlled environment; she had the benefit of addressing real problems of practice; and she was able to do all of this with colleagues so that the conversations could continue after the consultant left.

One principal said to Reggett, “I’ve been paying attention to the work you did on questioning ... with letting kids know there isn’t a ‘right’ answer. I’ve been watching how you talk to them.” “In book groups,”

### THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This article stems from our research on the CEL-district partnerships in Highline, Wash., Marysville, Wash., and Norwalk-La Mirada, Calif.

In fall 2004, we initiated a qualitative research study into what, and how, a third-party support provider — the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington — engages districts in a collaborative teaching and learning partnership about instructional improvement. Using a three-year case study design, we collected and analyzed more than 175 interviews and many more informal conversations, field notes from observations of more than 135 district and school events, as well as artifacts from district, school, and classroom sources.

For more information about our research, visit <http://depts.washington.edu/uwcel/resources/research.html>.

new practices. And, although the focus of our study was on teacher learning and not on the model’s impact on student achievement, it is clear that positive trends are emerging

“It’s exciting that — like any profession, be it a doctor or somebody in technology — [our teaching is] getting better. And I think that is a new mind-set for a lot of teachers. They always think of [professional development] in terms of, ‘Here comes another program.’ But I think the whole approach to [studio residencies] is not a program. It’s, ‘How can we refine our craft? How can we get better and add to our knowledge base and be willing to take some risks?’ ”

## These professional learning opportunities prompted even veteran teachers to rethink their practice.

another teacher said, “the goals really come from kids. Their needs really drive the instruction. What I really want is for them to get meaning from their reading. If they don’t get what I want [them to understand], then I need to change — not them.”

### INITIAL OUTCOMES

Seeing such a visible influence of professional development on practice is rare, and these initial outcomes from the studio residency model demonstrate the strength of job-embedded coaching. In situations where educational leaders reserved time and funds for a literacy expert to guide classroom-embedded professional learning opportunities — and also followed up with instructional coaching support between the studio residency events — we observed teachers in Highline starting to try on

in the development of teachers’ content knowledge and their awareness of students’ learning needs.

When skillfully applied in teachers’ work contexts, the expertise of nationally known literacy consultants impressed school and district leaders. An assistant superintendent noted that she was gaining “a deeper knowledge of reading instruction itself.” Another central office leader said that the studio residencies reinforced her belief that “you can’t lead from afar.”

These professional learning opportunities prompted even veteran teachers to rethink their practice. One explained that she had been “lulled into a false sense of progress” with a seemingly high-performing reader. After participating as a studio teacher, she learned how to better identify and address students’ strengths and challenges in reading. She commented,

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