Vol. 5, No. 1
September 2009

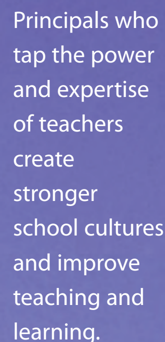
t3 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

DISTRICTS HARNESS POWER AND EXPERTISE OF THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

By Valerie von Frank

In the early part of the decade, Springfield (Mass.) Education Association President Tim Collins was negotiating the teachers' contract in what he described as a challenging environment. Teachers had gone years without a contract or salary increase and politicians were pressuring the district to enact performance-based merit pay, he said. Teachers, he said, were fleeing to surrounding districts.



Principals who tap the power and expertise of teachers create stronger school cultures and improve teaching and learning.

"There was a real brain drain, a talent drain," Collins said.

When the contract was settled in 2006, the atmosphere — and the provisions — were strikingly different. Collaboration began to change the culture. Rather than rewarding individual teachers for students' performance in a single year, a move Collins said fails to recognize the effect of all teachers within the school on a child's academic career, the contract recognized teachers' expertise with a new career ladder. Without having to leave teaching for administration, Springfield teachers now can be designated as teacher leaders or instructional specialists. In these nonevaluative roles, they earn more than in a regular teaching position and lead colleagues in improving instruction.

School leadership isn't just for principals anymore. Research is bearing out that principals who share leadership create stronger school cultures and improve teaching and learning (Copland, 2003; Lord & Miller, 2000). Rather than the principal as the sole person responsible for the increasing number of aspects of work in a school, the principal is becoming leader of an

What's inside

Lessons from a coach
Coaches try to work themselves out of a job, says Marie Parker-McElroy.
Page 5

Focus on NSDC's standards
Skillful leadership is key in the work of improving learning for all.
Page 6

NSDC tool
Measure your team's norms to become more effective.
Page 8

Research brief
Studies discover how teacher teams can be more effective.
Page 10

This newsletter is funded by:

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

NSDC's purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

instructional leadership cadre (Portin, et al., 2003). Kenneth Leithwood, in *How Leadership Influences Learning,* found evidence from multiple studies that successful school leaders share responsibility and create opportunities for leadership throughout their school. A Wallace Foundation Perspective on principal preparation, *Becoming a Leader: Preparing Principals for Today's Schools,* states that a "successful school leader more closely resembles an orchestra conductor than a virtuoso soloist."

The role of teachers as leaders

The concept of shared leadership is more than giving teachers authority over whether the lunchroom should have soda machines or students should be allowed a Halloween parade. Although some teachers in the past had leadership roles as department heads or specialists, the new paradigm does not involve management. Teachers are sharing in school improvement decisions, along with principals. A forthcoming report by Bradley S. Portin and a team of researchers from the University of Washington finds distributed leadership often involves not only a role with the school leadership team, but decision making roles on other learning teams, focusing on curriculum, instruction, or leading professional learning. In the districts Portin and his co-authors study, teacher leaders are part of schoolwide instructional leadership teams developing strategies for improving teaching and learning; do the bulk of professional development work, spend time with individuals, small groups, and sometimes the whole faculty to boost instructional capacity; are focused on relationships and communicating improvement to teachers; and connect with teachers using data. By remaining nonevaluative, teacher leaders retain greater credibility, according to the study, commissioned by The Wallace Foundation.

The benefits of teachers as leaders also have been made clear. Leadership roles for teachers, according to Joseph Murphy (2005):

- Foster collegiality;
- Lessen attrition;
- Increase capacity by attracting bright newcomers;
- And, most importantly, promote change at the classroom and school levels.

Leadership roles enhance teachers' feelings of professionalism and student academic performance, according to some research. Ladson-Billings (1999) and Dilworth and Imig (1995) find that when teachers design and implement professional development, rather than having learning created for them, teachers feel more valued and are more willing to adopt new pedagogical techniques.

States and districts recognize teachers' expertise

While many states, districts, and schools continue to have a top-down model, others have given up the hierarchy and are harnessing the expertise of classroom teachers. Teachers are becoming active participants in leadership roles:

- The Ohio Leadership Advisory Council's leadership development framework creates building leadership teams that share leadership among school staff members, allowing for teacher leadership outside the classroom. The state's professional standards for educators also include teacher leadership.
- With support from The Wallace Foundation, Delaware worked with a consortium of states including Alabama, Kansas, Kentucky, and Ohio to develop a model teacher leadership curriculum that allows teachers to add a teacher leader endorsement to their certification. Skills include broadening one's understanding of the school as a whole, working collegially, deepening the instructional capacity of colleagues, and leading school improvement.
- Georgia, Illinois, and Louisiana offer performance-based teacher leader endorsements, but without a requirement for differentiated pay. The endorsements more typically are a path to school leader certification.
- Kentucky added leadership standards for new teachers in 2002. All teachers are required to earn a master's degree.
- Maryland and Massachusetts have partnered with education associations to expand the roles of teacher leaders. Montgomery County, Maryland, expanded teachers' leadership role

For a digital library of publications on education leadership, visit the online Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org

Although some teachers in the past had leadership roles as department heads or specialists, the new paradigm does not involve management. Teachers are sharing in school improvement decisions, along with principals.

NSDC'S BELIEF

Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.

to professional learning and curriculum development.

Springfield's career ladder

In Springfield, Collins said the career ladder is helping to retain talented teachers in the district, as well as helping teachers become recognized for their knowledge as teacher leaders identify their colleagues' areas of expertise to share with others. The job-embedded nature of the work as teachers coach colleagues and model instruction techniques syncs with what is known about best practices for professional learning, according to a Stanford team of researchers led by Linda Darling-Hammond (Wei, et al., 2009).

The contract created two new designations for teachers: teacher leader and instructional leadership specialist. Teachers apply for the positions, submitting a portfolio and interviewing for the select designations. They receive two-year appointments, then must be reappointed.

Only the most experienced teachers are eligible for the elite positions. They must have master's degrees, seven years of experience, and a 97% personal attendance rate. In addition, they must demonstrate that their students achieved more than one year's growth in achievement on the district's value-added model. They must be willing to be placed where the district perceives a need.

The benefits can be considerable. Teacher leaders earn 4% and instructional leadership specialists get an additional 7% beyond their regular salaries. The additional money can put them thousands above what they could earn at the top of the regular teacher scale.

Teacher leaders mentor colleagues, and the instructional leadership specialists work with other teachers, modeling, sharing best practices, working with data, and designing professional learning.

The specialists continue their own learning with one day each month devoted to topics from effective classroom management to content areas to pedagogy. They also hone their skills in working with adult learners, in how to model and mentor colleagues. "We need to give them as much help and support as possible," Collins said. "Schools really rely on them, so they need to be up to speed."

Approximately 100 instructional leaders were hired beginning in 2006-07 after portfolio reviews and interviews. Teacher leaders positions were filled in 2007-08.

Collins warns that the positions can be powerful, but also can shut down communication in a building when those in the roles are asked to become an extension of the administration and take on the perception that they are supervising, evaluating, or even reporting details to the principal.

"People will not share their weaknesses (with a teacher leader or instructional specialist) unless they are confident it is not going to hurt them," he said. "There's a lot that can be learned if someone is lucky enough to be in a school where people share. Working collaboratively increases the chances of growing, becoming an excellent teacher. That's at the heart of this possibility.

"The concept of a career ladder for teachers, if done appropriately and not used as supplementary administrative staff, is exceptional," he continued. "It's about growing our own and growing together.

"Teachers need to be the architects (of reform); top-down reform never works. You have to create an atmosphere where there's honest, open conversation about what's happening, and then a whole culture develops that makes the difference."

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER LEADERS' LEARNING

What teacher leaders need to know — like their role — is still evolving, according to Bradley S. Portin and his co-authors. However, the researchers conclude in a forthcoming report from The Wallace Foundation that teacher leaders need:

- Strong content knowledge, but also to be able to identify areas of need by analyzing data and linking decisions to these data;
- To support colleagues in a nonsupervisory role, helping them to open classroom doors and to understand best practices through demonstrations;
- To learn to navigate a new relationship with colleagues and develop others' trust in their expertise;
- Excellent communication skills to translate district and school reform messages appropriately to teachers.

While many states, districts, and schools continue to have a top-down model, others have given up the hierarchy and are harnessing the expertise of classroom teachers.

References

Copland, M.A. (2003). Distributed leadership for instructional improvement: The principal's role. *The LSS Review, 2*(4): 22-23.

Dilworth, M.E. & Imig, D.G. (1995, Winter). Professional teacher development. *The ERIC Review, 3*(3): 5-11.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diversity: Historical perspectives, current

trends, and future directions. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (eds.), *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning.* New York: Wallace Foundation.

Lord, B. & Miller, B. (2000). T*eacher leadership: An appealing and inescapable force in school reform?* Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

Mitgang, L.D. (June 2008). *Becoming a leader: Preparing principals for today's schools.* A Wallace Foundation Perspective. New York: Wallace Foundation.

Murphy, J. (2005). *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Portin, B.S., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., Gundlach, L. (2003). *Making sense of leading schools: A study of the school principalship.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs. ED481977

Portin, B.S., Knapp, M.S., Feldman, S., Dareff, S., Russell, F., Samuelson, C., Yeh, L. (in press). *Improving leading for learning in urban schools.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs.

Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad.* Oxford, OH: NSDC. ◆

The concept of shared leadership is more than giving teachers authority over whether the lunchroom should have soda machines or students should be allowed a Halloween parade.

Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)™ is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council
504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056

© Copyright, NSDC, 2009. All rights reserved.

MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE
504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdc.org

Editor: Valerie von Frank
Designer: Kitty Black

NSDC STAFF

Executive director
Stephanie Hirsh

Deputy executive director
Joellen Killion

Director of business services
Leslie Miller

Director of learning
Carol François

Associate director of publications
Tracy Crow

Associate director of member experience
Tom Manning

Distinguished senior fellow
Hayes Mizell

Scholar laureate
Shirley Hord

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Charles Mason (2010)
President

Ingrid Carney
President-elect

Mark Diaz (2011)

Karen Dyer (2009)
Past president

Sue Elliott (2011)

Cheryl Love (2010)

James Roussin (2009)

Ed Wittchen (2010)

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.nsdc.org/news/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.nsdc.org/about/index.cfm.

LESSONS FROM A COACH

Marie Parker-McElroy is a cluster-based coach at Graham Road Elementary School in Fairfax County, Va. You can contact her at EMParkerMcE @fcps.edu.

We become a teacher's inner voice

Q How should the coach enhance teachers' ability to become leaders themselves?

Instructional coaches are constantly trying to work themselves out of a job. We build capacity in each teacher so that they don't need us anymore. We are giving them skills to be reflective on their practices so that it becomes automatic for them to reflect on their lessons, data, and the curriculum. They need to be constantly in a cycle of learning to make sure lessons are appropriate for their students. Eventually, the instructional coach doesn't need to be there because our little voices are stuck in their heads as they're planning a lesson: 'What modalities should I teach to? What does the child need to know before I teach this? What are the prerequisites?' Those questions become their inner thoughts.

One way is to accomplish this is to use protocols regularly in every meeting. Another way is to ask the same questions and to keep going to that learning cycle in our team meetings and our conversations when we work with teachers individually and in groups. We use different protocols and are aware of teachers' individual needs. A coach's most important skill is understanding the power of listening and being present in the moment so that other adults feel appreciated and that someone understands where they're coming from. As a facilitator, I make sure everybody is active, that I don't have somebody talking the whole time and somebody who never opens her mouth.

Just as teachers gradually release responsibility to students, as an instructional coach, I gradually release responsibility to teacher leaders. At first they see me modeling, then I release a little bit to them. Then they start taking over the roles, such as analyzing data or unpacking a standard with their team, with safety nets of me supporting them and giving them feedback as part of the team. Later, we might have a reflective conversation to build their capacity as teacher leaders. That, of course, goes back to listening, facilitation skills, and the cycle and protocols to build teacher leaders. That's how we build capacity. ◆

FOCUS ON NSDC'S **STANDARDS**

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

Leaders come from all corners

When the phrase school leader is used, most people think about principals or assistant principals. Yet schools are filled with teacher leaders, as well. These teacher leaders are responsible for guiding instructional improvement to increase student learning. Over the years, researchers have explored what it takes to become a teacher leader and what teacher leaders do, yet most teacher leaders enter their roles as volunteers with little or no preparation. In many cases, they become successful leaders by emulating leaders they have known and appreciated and depend on what they have learned as leaders of their classrooms.

Skillful teacher leaders who influence change within their schools and their colleagues lead with attitude, focus, and commitment. Teacher leaders emerge from many corners of the school. The school media specialist who organizes a schoolwide research initiative to explore the impact of global warming on Earth's climate is a teacher leader. So, too, is the ESL teacher who hosts her students' parents for a family introduction to school and the school's curriculum and helps parents learn about resources available for families in the community. Teachers who serve as grade-level, department, or team chairs are leaders — responsible for engaging teachers in curriculum alignment, examining student work, and screening curriculum resources to ensure they complement adopted curriculum standards.

Some district leaders and principals understand the significant contribution teacher leaders make to improving school culture, teaching, and student learning. In those schools, teacher leaders have opportunities to develop leadership competencies, some of which they developed over their career, such as those associated with curriculum, assessment, and instruction. However, some competencies teacher leaders need are not common to classroom instruction. Teacher leaders develop those areas of expertise through practice or through professional learning that focuses on teacher leadership.

In their analysis of leadership for transforming high schools, Michael Copland and Elizabeth Boatright (2006, p. 11) identified five areas of focus for school leaders that align with other research studies on leadership. Those areas include:

1. **Focus on learning.** Leaders' ability to promote a clear and consistent focus on learning for all high school students and professionals is a central part of their work.
2. **Use of data and evidence.** Leaders continuously use data and evidence in service of instructional improvement and as a basic element of decision making related to instructional improvement in the high school.

NSDC STANDARD

Leadership: Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

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

3. **Aligning resources with learning improvement goals.** Leaders reallocate resources and create incentives that serve the specific instructional improvement goals that each high school sets out for itself, across differing school district contexts.
4. **Construction of roles that enable leaders to focus on learning improvement.** The redefinition of leadership roles and authority relationships enable leaders (construed broadly) to impact teaching and learning in high schools.
5. **Engagement with the community.** Leaders emphasize engaging community constituents, parents, and support providers in ways that promote the learning agenda.

These areas of focus require those in leadership roles, including teachers, to hone a set of skills based on a body of knowledge and embedded in healthy attitudes about productive leadership. Some district leaders realize the importance of providing opportunities for developing teacher leaders who will influence school improvement and have designed appropriate programs. Some principals work closely with teacher leaders, coaching them. Others teacher leaders learn on the job through trial-and-error. Knowledge and skill areas such as adult development, individual and organizational change, facilitation, and communication are often included as core content in teacher leadership programs. What is frequently missing is attention to the attitudes or dispositions for successful leadership. Three, in particular, are important to consider.

Efficacy: Teacher leaders have a strong belief in their own efficacy. They know they make a difference; seek the learning that will help them improve continuously; feel confident in their actions; have a strong sense of empowerment to take action; and believe others share their sense of self-efficacy. Strong efficacy prevents blaming and fault finding, encourages action even in the face of adversity, and ensures commitment to overcoming barriers.

Collective responsibility: Closely related to efficacy is a strong sense of collective responsibility. Teacher leaders recognize that no one person is capable of transforming schools. They believe every adult within a school has a role and responsibility to ensure student success. They work collaboratively with their peers to set short- and long-terms goals, define specific actions to accomplish those goals, engage in learning to expand and refine their practice, and evaluate the impact of their work on student learning.

Equity: Teacher leaders are committed to success for all students and adults. They recognize that success depends on the success of each learner within a school and work to identify and overcome practices that include inherent bias, preferential treatment, unfair practices, and inadequate opportunities for the learning. Teacher leaders actively pursue ways to develop and support classroom, school, and community interventions that address underserved students, and they hold a deep belief that the nation's future depends on a well-educated citizenry.

Attitudes, what people believe, are more challenging to develop in leaders than knowledge and skills. Successful leaders demonstrate strong alignment between what they say and do. This alignment is based on a mental model in which one has integrity and clarity about his or her dispositions. In order to understand one's beliefs and to refine them, it is important to examine practice, receive feedback, reflect on the alignment between one's actions and espoused beliefs, and engage in dialogue. Teacher leaders, as other leaders, often have limited opportunities for this form of learning and engagement with others, yet teacher leaders can influence the content of conversations to focus on beliefs associated with actions.

What Copland and Boatright assert in their discussion of high school leadership makes it clear that the effects of leadership are measured on one criterion. Their comment (p. 11) applies to all schools: "The outcomes of leaders' efforts to improve high schools," they state, "must be judged on the basis of tangible evidence of learning — learning by students and professionals and for the school as an organization. Absent this, not much else matters."

Successful leaders demonstrate strong alignment between what they say and do. This alignment is based on a mental model in which one has integrity and clarity about his or her dispositions.

Reference

Copland, M. & Boatright, E. (2006, December). *Leadership for transforming high schools.* Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org/wallace/6LeadershipforTransformingHighSchools.pdf. ◆

MEASURING **collaborative norms**

Purpose: To surface staff or team members' awareness of the group's use of collaborative norms and to assist staff and team to identify areas in which the staff or team wants to focus.

Time: 20 minutes to take the inventory; 30 minutes to discuss findings.

Directions:

1. Make enough copies of the inventory (pp. 8 and 9) to allow each member to have his or her own copy.
2. Organize a large group into smaller groups of three persons each. Ask each group of three to rate the larger group's adherence to each norm from low to high. *Time: 20 minutes.*
3. At the conclusion, reassemble the larger group and invite one person from each small group to report out the responses. *Time: 30 minutes.*
4. Using the same scale, mark each group's response on a poster-size piece of paper.
5. Identify norms where the groups scored the lowest.
6. Invite the group to develop a plan to improve its abilities in those areas.

1. Pausing

THE NORM: Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision making.

- Listens attentively to others' ideas with mind and body.
- Allows time for thought after asking question or making a response.
- Rewords in own mind what others are saying to further understand their communication.
- Waits until others have finished before entering the conversation.

2. Paraphrasing

THE NORM: Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you such as "So … ." Or "As you are …" or "You're thinking …" and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of a group to hear and understand each other as they formulate decisions.

- Uses paraphrases that acknowledge and clarify content and emotions.
- Uses paraphrases that summarize and organize.
- Uses paraphrases that shift a conversation to different levels of abstraction.
- Uses nonverbal communication in paraphrasing.

3. Probing

← LOW				HIGH →

THE NORM: Using gentle open-ended probes or inquiries such as "Please say more ..." or "I'm curious about ... ." or "I'd like to hear more about ... ." or "Then you are saying ..." increases the clarity and precision of the group's thinking.

- Seeks agreement on what words mean.
- Asks questions to clarify facts, ideas, stories.
- Asks questions to clarify explanations, implications, consequences.
- Asks questions to surface assumptions, points of view, beliefs, values.

4. Putting ideas on the table

← LOW				HIGH →

THE NORM: Ideas are the heart of a meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, "Here is one idea ..." or "One thought I have is ..." or "Here is a possible approach."

- States intention of communication.
- Reveals all relevant information.
- Considers intended communication for relevance and appropriateness before speaking.
- Provides facts, inferences, ideas, opinions, suggestions.
- Explains reasons behind statements, questions, and actions.
- Removes or announces the modification of own ideas, opinions, points of view.

5. Paying attention to self and others

← LOW				HIGH →

THE NORM: Meaningful dialogue is facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others and is aware of not only what s/he is saying but also how it is said and how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning style when planning for, facilitating, and participating in group meetings. Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

- Maintains awareness of own thoughts and feelings while having them.
- Maintains awareness of others' voice patterns, nonverbal communications, and use of physical space.
- Maintains awareness of group's task, mood, and relevance of own and others' contributions.

6. Presuming positive presuppositions

← LOW				HIGH →

THE NORM: Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional put-downs. Using positive presuppositions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

- Acts as if others mean well.
- Restrains impulsivity triggered by own emotional responses.
- Uses positive presuppositions when responding to and inquiring of others.

7. Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry

← LOW				HIGH →

THE NORM: Pursuing and maintaining a balance between advocating a position and inquiring about one's own and others' positions assists the group to become a learning organization.

- Advocates for own ideas and inquires into the ideas of others.
- Acts to provide equitable opportunities for participation.
- Presents rationale for positions, including assumptions, facts, and feelings.
- Disagrees respectfully and openly with ideas and offers rationale for disagreement.
- Inquires of others about their reasons for reaching and occupying a position.

The group is invited to develop a plan to improve its abilities in the areas with low scores.

Source: *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups,* by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman. Christopher-Gordon, 1999.

How to improve teacher teams

By Carla Thomas McClure

The notion of distributed leadership has gained increasing attention from education researchers in recent years. Researchers have been interested in how leadership emerges from interactions among teachers and other school staff members who collaborate to make educational decisions. Findings from a recent case study on distributed leadership have practical implications for improving teacher teams.

Listening to teacher talk

To examine the dynamics of distributed leadership in teacher teams, researchers observed two teams during one semester in a large Midwestern high school. Team 1, comprising seven veteran teachers, had a problem-finding purpose. This team was charged with suggesting policies and interventions to bolster the academic success of students in danger of failure in more than one subject area. To help these students succeed, they needed to figure out why some were persistently failing multiple classes. The team's 10 meetings during the semester averaged 35 minutes each.

Team 2 included six core members, joined periodically by other teachers. This team had a problem-solving purpose: creating interdisciplinary instructional and assessment materials for team-taught English and social studies within a block schedule format. The team met eight times, and meetings lasted an average of 43 minutes.

During each team meeting, an observer took notes and digitally recorded the meeting. The researchers then used a technique called discourse analysis to identify interactional routines—repeating patterns of conversational processes within each team's interactions. Previous research has established that participants who share a culture know how to "play the conversational game" at work in each routine. As the researchers analyzed the notes and recordings, they looked for internal and external factors influencing the relative success and collaborative disposition of each team.

Learning from teacher talk

The study revealed that conversational dynamics within the problem-finding team differed from those within the problem-solving team — and that each type of team was prone to interactions that either helped or hindered collaborative work. For instance, the *problem-finding* academic intervention team had an opportunity to brainstorm and discuss possible causes for students' difficulties and to suggest innovative solutions. However, the open-ended nature of their task at times seemed to overwhelm the team. When discussions didn't lead to creative solutions, members seemed stuck and ended up arguing about ground rules.

Meanwhile the *problem-solving* interdisciplinary team started with a well-defined problem (the need for assessment and instructional materials), so there was less uncertainty. However, there was also less innovation. When a team member ventured outside the box to consider the task within a broader context, her comments were ignored. Why? Because team members were focused on finalizing their product.

The researchers concluded that facilitators can help teacher teams be innovative and productive by increasing teachers' awareness of conversational dynamics that can either help or hinder the team's effectiveness. They also say that principals need to be aware of the important role they play in establishing clarity of purpose and appropriate levels of autonomy so that teams can be both innovative and effective. ◆

Carla Thomas McClure is an education writer whose research summaries are featured regularly in *Teachers Teaching Teachers.*

Reference

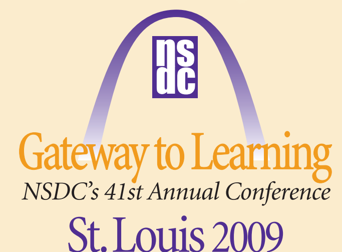
Scribner, J.P., Sawyer, R.K., Watson, S.T., & Myers, V.L. (2007). Teacher teams and distributed leadership: A study of group discourse and collaboration. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(1), 67-100.

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Register Today for THE Learning Conference

December 5-9, 2009
America's Center®
Convention Complex /
Renaissance Grand Hotel
St. Louis, MO

- General Session keynote speakers include Michael Fullan, Tony Wagner, Mary Cullinane, Geoffrey Canada, and a panel discussion with the producers and directors of THE PRINCIPAL STORY, a film funded by The Wallace Foundation.
- Preconference and concurrent session presenters include Ian Jukes, Marcia Tate, Tom Guskey, Vera Blake, Jamie Almazan, Leslie Conery, Barrie Bennett, Rick and Becky DuFour, Yvette Jackson, Charlotte Danielson, Stanley Pogrow—and more!
- 400 concurrent and roundtable sessions in seven strands such as leadership; race, class, and culture; documenting the impact; fundamentals of professional learning; teaching quality; technology; and policy and advocacy.
- More than 100 exhibitors offering valuable products and resources specific to professional learning.



The Gateway to Learning Opens December 5–9

For **conference information**, go to www.nsdc.org/conference09
For **exhibit and sponsorship opportunities**, contact Renee Taylor at renee.taylor@nsdc.org or 800-727-7288, ext. 222

Save $50 when you register by October 13, 2009 on a 3- or 5-day registration fee.
For more information, visit www.nsdc.org/conference09