

Vol. 5, No. 3
November 2009

13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

BUILDING BRIDGES

Data help instructional coach make vital connections with teachers

By Theresa Long

As a secondary instructional coach for assessment and differentiation, I'm all about data. I've recently had a wonderful opportunity to bridge my various professional roles using a new evaluation instrument for coaches. The timing could not have been better — I was

just starting my work as a member of the NSDC Academy, I was new to my role as an instructional coach, and I was invited to join the district committee responsible for developing the new instrument.

My day-to-day work — in four high schools and six middle schools in Rockwood School District (Eureka, Mo.) — allows me to stress the importance of effectively using data for targeting student needs. I facilitate district workshops in differentiation in mixed-ability classrooms and then follow up with coaching through the year. The teachers I work with write action plans with SMART goals. They identify key components of assessment for learning and differentiated instruction strategies they will implement. Together we measure progress in terms of student achievement; we look at student artifacts throughout the year and then we look at how well that teacher has met the goals they set.

Turning my data lens towards myself requires that I assess how effective I am in my new role as a coach. We've all faced decisions where the question arises, "What



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NSDC tool

Use this instrument to formally or informally assess coaches.

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Lessons from a coach

Michael Biondo finds that instructional



coaches receive as much as they give.

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Focus on NSDC's standards

Teacher leaders have key responsibilities regarding data.

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

I came to the NSDC Academy at just the right time

When they join the NSDC Academy, each Academy member poses a problem they hope to solve in their school or district; the inquiry, data collection, reflection, and learning that are part of the Academy experience are all focused on that real-life challenge.

In the period between when I was selected for the Academy and when that work began in earnest, my role in the district changed from that of teacher to that of instructional coach. The problem I posed originally — how to strengthen teacher practice through collaborative structures designed to alleviate teacher isolation — was more relevant than ever.

The Academy gives me the opportunity to analyze data about my problem area and to

explore how to integrate what I am learning into my work responsibilities. With my Academy learning team, we are studying the problem areas we share through reading, conversations, reflection, and coaching one another. In our first session, we were asked to collect data from our stakeholders. In my new role as a district-based instructional coach, I had a wonderful forum for collecting and analyzing data to understand professional learning more deeply before I established my course of action to address the problem I identified.

My work with the Academy will wrap up over the coming year, and I'll graduate next year in Atlanta. One element of finishing our work with the Academy is to develop several teachable points of view. These

For more information about the NSDC Academy, see the last page of this newsletter or www.nsd.org/opportunities/academy.cfm. The deadline to apply to join the class of 2012 is Feb. 15, 2010.

clear statements of our beliefs about our work evolve in the background while we continue to move forward with our work in schools, on the ground, every day.

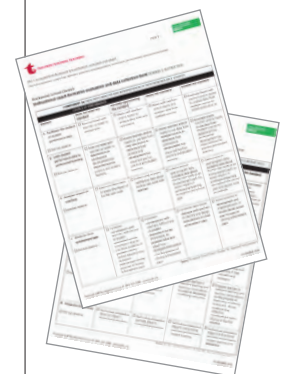
I'm seeing my teachable points of view develop as a result of reflecting deeply, looking at the data about the effectiveness of my role, and studying the impact I'm having in addressing the problem I initially posed when I began this learning experience.

— Theresa Long

will I do if ...” In the past my response had often been, “I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it.” Though we sometimes find ourselves without a bridge, in these situations we work to create structures to support and inform decision making for ongoing improvement. For me, that structure was Rockwood’s board-adopted instructional coaches’ evaluation instrument. I was a member of the committee that worked to develop this clear understanding of a new district role, and I used the instrument as part of my research as a member of NSDC’s Academy. The committee included our director of human resources; the director of professional development; content-area coordinators; the district NEA president; the executive director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and five other instructional specialists.

The instrument we’ve designed identifies levels of performance expectations aligned with NSDC’s standards and Innovation Configurations and was deeply influenced by Killion and Harrison’s book *Taking the Lead* (2006). Similar to building a real bridge where constructing the foundation requires drilling down to bedrock to establish a stable foundation, our evaluation instrument followed a similar course. We designed our evaluation instrument over a period of months, discussing the essential aspects we believed to be most important to the role of a coach. These core ideas have helped our coaches and those who supervise them focus their work together.

In designing this tool, we worked to keep it comprehensive enough to help coaches grow into their roles while simple enough to be useful. We



See pp. 4-5 for portions of the evaluation instrument that Theresa Long used to check up on her own job performance.

built a structure that would support our individual coaches and develop a collective understanding of efficacy among all coaches, regardless of level or content area.

Since I was helping to develop this tool, I asked — why not get feedback from teachers using early forms of the instrument? Not only would that immediate feedback inform my work as a member of this committee, it would also shape my understanding of my performance as a new instructional coach.

To gather feedback, I gave the teachers I served copies of portions of the instrument reflecting topics they could evaluate related to our partnership. These were returned to me anonymously. After tabulating mid-year evaluation results, I created a graph representing the 16 domains of performance. This served as a clear reminder of areas I hoped to improve in as well as those I was doing well with based on teacher perceptions.

For example, the data showed me that I needed to strengthen the work I do in supporting teachers in the use of technology beyond using email. So, I decided to learn how to create and post videos to a server where teachers in our district can watch them. My first video shows me talking about the work I do with teachers and includes interviews of teachers reflecting on the impact of our collaboration. I envision expanding this work with teachers using flip cameras to increase their opportunities to examine their own practice.

The data also showed me I needed to work harder on pushing the door to classrooms open so teachers would invite me into their classrooms to observe them or model best practices. This is new for us in the district and a change in our culture. I set a goal that the number of teachers asking me to join them while they teach would



Theresa Long, left, reviews student work with high school language arts teacher Elizabeth Mintie.

Photo by
SUSAN WITKOWSKI

increase, and it has. I worked on relationship building, listening deeply to their needs, and offering timely feedback. I wanted to make sure they understood that I have great passion for our work with students, just as they do.

Near the end of the school year, I asked teachers to evaluate me a second time using the same protocol. By this time in our partnership, I could easily see patterns of success and areas in need of improvement. Reflecting on the data gave me a clearer sense of direction and motivation. Referencing the domains of the evaluation instrument helped me — and the teachers I work with — understand the expectations of my role and helped us identify collective goals for our students.

From here forward, I'll think beyond the idea of crossing bridges; rather, I'll look for the opportunity to build bridges, strengthen partnerships, and welcome the contributions of others to guide my practice.

Reference

Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2006). *Taking the lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches.* Oxford, OH: NSDC. ♦

NSDC'S BELIEF

Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

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