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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

What's inside

NSDC tool

Use this instrument to formally or informally assess coaches.

Page 4

Lessons from a coach

Michael Biondo finds that instructional



coaches receive as much as they give.

Page 6

Focus on NSDC's standards

Teacher leaders have key responsibilities regarding data.

Page 7



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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.

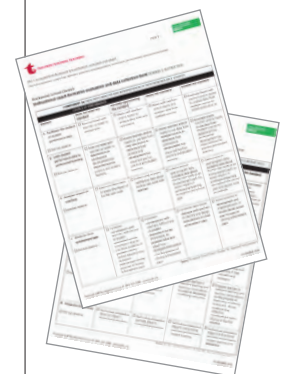
I'm seeing my teachable points of view develop as a result of reflecting deeply, looking at the data about the effectiveness of my role, and studying the impact I'm having in addressing the problem I initially posed when I began this learning experience.

— 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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This is excerpted from Rockwood School District’s evaluation instrument.
The full instrument covers four domains: planning and preparation, instruction, environment, and professionalism.

Rockwood School District
Instructional coach formative evaluation and data collection form DOMAIN 2: INSTRUCTION

COMPONENT 2a: FACILITATES ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES.				
LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE				
Element	Does not meet the standard	Partially meets/ approaching the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
1. Facilitates the analysis of student performance data <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not meet with teachers or teams to analyze data.	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets with teachers and/or teams to analyze data from only one source.	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets with teachers and/or teams and analyzes data from multiple sources.	<input type="checkbox"/> Routinely meets with teachers and/or teams to analyze data from multiple sources to inform instruction.
2. Links student performance data to professional learning <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not meet with teachers or teams to determine how professional development has impacted teacher practice and student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assists teachers and/or teams to use data from only one source to determine how professional development has impacted teacher practice and student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assists teachers and/or teams to use data from multiple sources to determine how professional development has impacted teacher practice and student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Routinely assists teachers and/or teams to use data from multiple sources to determine how professional development has impacted teacher practice and student learning.
3. Analyzes impact of coaching <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not collect data to assess the impact of his/her own work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Collects end-of-event satisfaction data about his/her own work with teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Collects end-of-year/program data, including data about his/her own work as an instructional coach, to assess impact of professional learning throughout the school year.	<input type="checkbox"/> Collects end-of-year/program data, including data about his/her own work as an instructional coach, to assess impact of professional learning throughout the school year and adjusts work accordingly.
4. Works to close achievement gap <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitates conversations with teachers, without use of student assessment/survey information that do not show evidence of problem solving and/or adapting new strategies/interventions for the purpose of closing achievement gaps.	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitates conversations with teachers, without use of student assessment/survey information, to problem solve and adapt new strategies/interventions for the purpose of closing achievement gaps.	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitates data-based dialogue with teachers to identify and design interventions to close achievement gaps.	<input type="checkbox"/> Assists teachers in development and implementation of results-driven action plan focused on closing achievement gaps.

Source: Rockwood School District, Eureka, Mo. Reprinted with permission.

Rockwood School District

Instructional coach formative evaluation and data collection form DOMAIN 2: INSTRUCTION

COMPONENT 2b: PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW AND/OR REFINED INSTRUCTIONAL AND CURRICULAR PRACTICES.				
LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE				
Element	Does not meet the standard	Partially meets/ approaching the standard	Meets the standard	Exceeds the standard
5. Provides personalized teacher support <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Provides a one-size-fits-all level of classroom support.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provides classroom-based support that aligns with instructional coach's level of comfort and expertise.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provides classroom-based support that aligns with teachers' levels of comfort and expertise (e.g., years of experience, current knowledge and skills, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/> Conducts assessment then provides classroom-based support that aligns with teachers' levels of comfort and expertise (e.g., years of experience, current knowledge and skills, etc.).
6. Supports implementation <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Leads discussions on how new practices may be implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/> Visits classrooms to observe implementation of new and/or refined practices. Gives feedback to teachers about their implementation of new and/or refined instructional practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provides demonstration, co-teaching, observation, and/or feedback to support implementation of new and refined instructional practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provides demonstration, co-teaching, observation, and/or feedback to support implementation of new and refined instructional practices. Designs and supports multiple experiences that deepen understanding and meaning of new concepts and strategies.
7. Engages reflective conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not engage teachers in reflective learning conversations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages teachers in reflective learning conversations with some focus on improvement of instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages teachers in reflective teaching and learning conversations focused on improving or refining instruction.	<input type="checkbox"/> Engages teachers in reflective teaching and learning conversations for the purpose of improving or refining instruction. Shows evidence that reflective conversations led to change in teacher practice.
8. Integrates technology <input type="checkbox"/> Did not observe	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology integration does not impact instructional practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology integration partially impacts instructional practices.	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology integration impacts instructional practices and increases student learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology integration impacts instructional practices and increases student learning and interaction.

Source: Rockwood School District, Eureka, Mo. Reprinted with permission.



Michael Biondo is a districtwide instructional coach for District 207 and a social science teacher at Maine South High School in Park Ridge, Ill. You can contact him at mbiondo@maine207.org.

Give-and-take changes the climate

Q How is coaching changing your school?

We're working to change the climate. We have such a successful high school and academic program, successful teachers and students, but we're trying to encourage large-scale peer coaching, having teachers work with instructional coaches, but also having teachers work together.

I teach three periods rather than five out of a nine-period day, so for the first six, I'm available to work with and talk with teachers, to be a resource. Starting a new position that has never existed before, my co-instructional coach and I were wondering how people were going to react and how it would change our dynamics with friends and colleagues. It's been very positive. My co-coach is co-chair of the building social committee, working to bring teachers together to form relationships. She does it because she thinks it's important. That helps.

We've had great conversations with teachers about what's going on in their classrooms, and

about what's going on in our classrooms. They've taken things away from what we've done; we've taken things away from what they've done. Their ideas have been as beneficial as ones we've given them. It's the give-and-take that really gives you a relationship with people. And the fact that we're still teaching three classes a day grounds us in the day-to-day experiences. It shows that we're still out there, still one with the other teachers.

People are encouraged by good experiences with peer coaching. With the peer coaching we've done, we've modeled for other teachers what we're asking them to do with one another. We know they are strong professionals, and the ultimate goal is to have teachers spread the value of what they are learning.

This type of environment — the fact that teachers are leading this staff development — is so empowering because we're all equals, all working together for the common goal of improving instruction for our students, to enhance their lives and their futures. ♦

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Opportunities flow from use of data

Data, data everywhere, yet what do we really know? Schools today are inundated with data. Access to and use of data are receiving considerable attention because of the prominent placement of data systems in the education portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. States have access to substantial funds to “establish pre-K through college or career data systems to track progress and foster continuous improvement” (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/recovery/implementation.html>).

Schools and districts have several opportunities related to data use. First is identifying the appropriate types of data to collect and maintain that will be useful in decision making. A second opportunity is ensuring that data systems are easily accessible to system, school, and classroom users. The third opportunity is to ensure that system and classroom users know how to use data to make informed decisions.

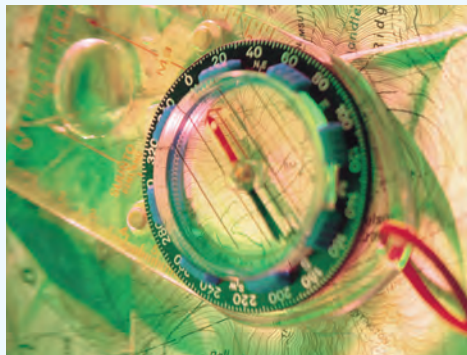
Teacher leaders can contribute in several ways to supporting effective use of data within their schools and districts to lead to improved student and professional learning.

Key responsibilities

Six key responsibilities of teacher leaders and coaches related to data use are:

1. Preparing disaggregated data from multiple sources for teacher use;
2. Teaching data access and organization;
3. Teaching analysis and interpretation of data from multiple sources;
4. Engaging teachers in data analysis and interpretation to determine student and teacher needs;
5. Designing professional learning that improves student achievement based on disaggregated data; and

NSDC STANDARD



Data-Driven: Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.

6. Ensuring continuous analysis of school and classroom data to refine improvement strategies (Killion and Harrison, 2006, pp. 174-177).

Having access to data is meaningless if there is no plan for how to use them. When schools and districts attempt to solve problems by collecting data, they will fall short unless data collection is complemented with substantial opportunities to learn how to use data and receive support in the use of data. This work will require that developers and managers of data systems seek input from teachers on what they want to know about their students and their learning; from principals about what they want to know about their students and teachers; and from central office about what they want to know about student learning and staff and school performance.

A common myth about teachers and data is that teachers are apprehensive or fearful about data



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

Describe a problem, test a hypothesis

Data inform the learning processes for educators. Start with the fundamental questions below. Using those areas as a guide, coaches and teacher leaders support teachers in forming hypotheses that can be tested and designing classroom experiments to test them. Through shared experimentation and examination of results from the experiments across classrooms, teachers will have significant opportunities for professional learning connected deeply to their practice. When conducted across classrooms, the experiments described at right provide teachers evidence to examine and inform their learning and practice.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Of the factors educators influence and control, which might explain the results?

- **Curriculum:** What we are teaching and what we expect students to learn?
- **Instructional methodology and time:** How we teach and how much time we devote to teaching and practice of the learning?
- **Instructional materials:** What we use in the classroom to support instruction?
- **Assessment:** How we assess the learning? How well it matches authentic application of the learning?
- **Teacher knowledge and skills:** What we know about the content, how to teach it, how to accommodate differences in student learning, how to design student learning, and how to assess student instruction?

Sample experiments

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY AND TIME

Possible explanation based on data:

We spent inadequate time in the classrooms practicing the learning.

Hypothesis to test:

If we add additional time for practicing the learning in more authentic ways, students will perform better on classroom, district, and state assessments.

Experiment:

Teachers add time in their schedule for additional practice and spread practice on this concept throughout the school year.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Possible explanation based on data:

We have insufficient classroom instructional resources to differentiate the learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners.

Hypothesis to test:

If we add resources to the classroom designed to meet the needs of students who are underperforming, students will perform better on classroom assessments.

Experiment:

Teachers work together to design instructional resources to meet the needs of students who are underperforming and implement them regularly in the classroom over the course of the school year.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Explanation based on data:

Teachers have inadequate knowledge about how to teach ELL or special needs students.

Hypothesis to test:

If we develop teachers' pedagogical expertise to meet the needs of students performing below expectations, teachers will implement new instructional strategies that meet students' learning needs, and students will perform better on a variety of assessments including state assessments.

Experiment:

Teachers participate in professional learning on pedagogy focused on meeting the needs of low-performing students and receive support in applying the learning in their classrooms.

and uncertain how to use it. Experiences with teacher teams and conversations with teachers and principals support a different view. Teachers find

data informative and useful when they know what data are available, have easy access to them, and know how to use them within the framework of

their everyday experiences. When teachers leaders facilitate meetings in which teachers talk about the data they want about student learning, they build buy-in for data use.

Having data to confirm that something occurs does not offer solutions or even possible explanations. This is where inquiry meets hypothesis. The data can show that a small group of students in a class all miss the same questions on a math assessment the teacher used to check students' understanding. The underlying reasons and the needed actions are mysteries until the teacher mines the data and formulates one or more hypotheses, and ultimately conducts experiments to find out what strategies might address the issue. What the results of the quiz don't tell the teacher is whether students were misled by the one student in the group who thought she was helping and modeled something incorrectly for the small group; whether the teacher's instruction was insufficient; whether the students did not have a firm grasp on the prerequisite skills necessary to solve the problems, or whether the language on the assessment was unclear to students. Of course this list could continue.

Teachers' professional judgment and use of

data come into play concomitantly to form hypotheses and test them as a part of their action planning. They can begin this process with a few fundamental questions on p. 8.

While it is possible to identify explanations that lie outside of the school or beyond the control or influence of educators within the school, it is only by focusing first on what is within the control of educators that they can have their greatest impact.

Student achievement results determine the content for teacher professional learning. The use of data offers multiple opportunities for teachers to formulate explanations, generate hypotheses within a framework of what is within their control or influence, and design within and across classroom experiments to test their hypotheses. It is within the scope of this work that teachers demonstrate their professionalism through continuous evidence-based practice.

Reference

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

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“The NSDC Academy experience helped me gain a better understanding about my own learning. It provided me time for reflection, which I craved and built in for myself after I left our Academy sessions. It forced me to think about my own thinking and challenge myself to ensure my actions and beliefs were in alignment. It also solidified my belief that once you’ve learned something, you need to use it, or you won’t remember it.”

Lisa Mank Reddel
Principal, Cherry Creek Schools,
Englewood, Colo.,
Academy Class of 2008

“Our entire organization is thinking differently about professional learning. It is more of a vital part of our organization than ever before. Our administrative team understands the importance of things like follow-up and evaluating impact... so do a lot of the teachers... slowly, we are building an understanding of professional development as much more than Institute Days.”

Jeanne Spiller
Staff Development Coordinator,
Kildeer Countryside School District 96,
Buffalo Grove, IL, Academy Class of 2008

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