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13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS

MOTIVATION and MASTERY

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT LEARNING

By Tracy Crow

What does it take to be really good at something? That's what Kathleen Cushman, of the nonprofit organization What Kids Can Do, asks students to ask themselves. "Our goal is to get students and teachers talking about this question together," said Cushman. She'd love to see cross-generational, respectful conversations about what it means to learn how to do something well, in the hopes that such dialogue can transform school practices.

Through the Practice Project, an initiative of What Kids Can Do, students learn that what it takes to get really good at something is hard work — hours and hours of the right kind of practice. As part of an effort to



explore motivation and mastery, Cushman has worked with teachers in schools around the country to enlist their students on this exploration of expertise. A writer and speaker whose work on the project aims to elevate student voices, Cushman has written a new book with students about the project, *Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery* (Jossey-Bass, 2010). A MetLife Foundation grant to What Kids Can Do has supported the Practice Project and the sharing of its perspectives and methods with teachers across the country.

"This project speaks to the kids' strengths that aren't necessarily academic," said Felice Piggott, teacher librarian at The Young Women's Leadership School of East

**What's
inside**

NSDC tool

Explore talents and interests.

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Lessons from a coach

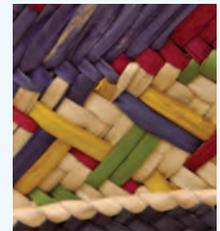
The administration and coach need clear goals, says David Holden.

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Focus on NSDC's standards

Complexities of quality teaching weave an intricate tapestry.

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

Harlem. “This is a great way for those students to shine.”

Piggott volunteered to be part of the project when Cushman came to her school. She noticed that at the beginning of the project, students say that they aren’t really good at anything. Once teachers and Cushman open up the discussion and students realize they can talk about what they do outside of school, beyond their academic lives, they reveal all kinds of strengths, strengths that they might not have thought “counted” in school. “By paying attention to a wider spectrum of their development, all students could point to, and analyze, something they did well,” said Cushman. “When they get recognition,” Piggott said, “they puff up.”



What it takes

Together in their discussions of what it takes to excel, Cushman and more than 150 students unfolded the process of getting good at something. The passion to get good starts with a spark, an interest in a new skill or activity. As kids develop their skills through practice, the moments of success and of frustration are both critical. What do learners do when they run into problems? Do they give up? Or do they persevere? And what factors push learners through the challenges? When Cushman asked students to think about these questions, they described the importance of a relationship with someone who was supporting them in their learning journey.

Piggott recalled one student, a quiet girl who didn’t speak up much in class.

“I didn’t really know anything about her.” It turned out she was an expert double dutch jumper and had competed with a group. She “didn’t think it was an important thing,” said Piggott, “and we’re all impressed, saying, wow, you can do that? I can’t do that.” Piggott said she could see how her confidence from that experience carried over to her other classes.

Piggott’s students aren’t unusual for seeking a connection between the real world and the work they do in school. In the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009), large numbers of students agree somewhat (45%) or disagree (23%) that their teachers give examples of what they are learning in school can be used in the real world, including 26% of secondary students who disagree. Eighty percent of the teachers and principals surveyed agreed that connecting classroom instruction to the real world would have a “significant impact” on improving student achievement.

A critical piece of

these students’ investigations into mastery was interviewing adults they considered very accomplished in some field. Each selected an expert from the community, whether in music, car repair, or medicine, and asked the same questions they had explored in their own areas of interest. From the interviews came similar insights: the role of opportunity, encouragement, and feedback; having successes and challenges at the right times; the importance of persistence.

Honor Moorman, internship coordinator at the International School of the Americas in San Antonio, noticed that her students, all seniors, were “really invested in the idea that they were uncovering wisdom about this question.” They were honest and open about the question and excited about seeking insights about what were real-life authentic challenges to them.

“My impression was that the students’ sense of efficacy, their own confidence in being able to tack-

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LEARN MORE AT www.firesinthemind.org

See Fires in the Mind online for the Practice Project blog and other content tied to the book.

- ✓ Short videos show students talking about developing mastery in different areas.
- ✓ Practical tips on “getting good.”
- ✓ Teachers contribute ideas and examples.

le anything really grew. It was an intellectual pursuit into nonintellectual kinds of things,” said Moorman. She was intrigued to see that Cushman was building bridges from nonacademic areas of mastery to encourage students to see a similar learning process in mathematics or English class. “Some of the kids already had a strong sense of metacognition and reflection; others weren’t as strong,” said Moorman. “They gained a greater ability to apply deep reflection and introspection to their own learning process by listening to these adult experts and thinking about these out-of-school expertise areas.”



been teaching a long time and I have that ‘senior teacher’ stance.” For Piggott, that stance includes clear boundaries with students. The project gave her a structured way to get to know the personal side of students. “It’s helped me grow that way as a teacher,” she said. “I’ve been teaching long enough so I have a lot of the management stuff down. I tend to be very much all business in the class-

room. This helps me get to another side of kids’ lives.”

Students are likely to appreciate teachers’ inquiry into their abilities beyond schools. The 2009 MetLife survey revealed that a majority of students (53%) report that their teachers speak to them one on one about their interests and things important to them a few times a year (28%) or never (25%).

Moorman found that she was on a similar journey of exploration while her students were learning about the concept of mastery. In her development as a teacher, she started with the idea that she had to know the content and impart the content. Over several years, she re-envisioned her role. “I moved more into thinking in terms of facilitating the students, creating opportunities, locating resources, creating a context for them to uncover knowledge and develop skills,” said Moorman. Now, she finds she’s still transitioning, seeing herself more as a connector and a facilitator, “but not in the sense that I have a structure and I know the outcome, but that I’m on a journey with the students,” she said. “I’m discovering that being an expert teacher is not about imparting expertise to students; it’s about guiding them to develop expertise for themselves.”

References

Cushman, K. (2010). *Fires in the mind: What kids can tell us about motivation and mastery.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
MetLife. (2009). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Collaborating for student success.* New York: Author. ◆

As simple as the process sounds, what Cushman and the kids discovered aligns precisely with what cognitive scientists have discovered about how we learn. Even the popular press is recently buzzing with the figure 10,000 — 10,000 hours of practice is what scientists agree is essential to becoming great at something, a figure popularized recently by both Malcolm Gladwell (*Outliers*, Little,

Brown, 2008) and Matthew Syed (*Bounce*, Harper, 2010) and taken from the work of researcher K. Anders Ericsson.

Ultimately, Cushman hopes the reflection on what helps students become proficient at what they care about will translate into recognition that being good at school takes the same attributes, including hard work at the right things and a relationship with someone who provides both challenge and support.

Teacher learning

In considering how the project changed her own practice as an educator, Piggott noted, “It’s made it easier for me to take risks with kids. I’ve

More from the MetLife survey

CREATIVITY

When asked if students in their school get to be creative and use their abilities in school, student views vary by level:

Strongly agree

- ✓ 32% overall
- ✓ 39% elementary school
- ✓ 27% secondary school

Disagree

- ✓ 19% overall
- ✓ 15% in elementary school
- ✓ 22% in secondary school

RESPONSIBILITY

- ✓ 96% of students across grade levels believe they have the responsibility to pay attention and do the work it takes to succeed in school.
- ✓ 42% of teachers believe that all or most of their students have this sense of responsibility.

The entire 26-year series of the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* is available online at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey/.

It starts with a spark

A DISCUSSION EXERCISE FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH

Write down something that you enjoy doing and want to get better at:

- ✓ What first got you interested in trying it?
- ✓ Starting at No. 1, check all the answers that apply, and add your own thoughts on what motivated you.
- ✓ Then share your thoughts with the group.



1. It looked like fun!

- It seemed like something you could probably do.
- It involved peers you wanted to be with.
- Success didn't all depend on you.
- No one would be judging you, so the stakes were low.

2. Someone supported and encouraged you at the start.

- They broke it down into steps.
- They did it with me.
- They praised your small successes.
- They showed you how to do better.

3. The activity had an audience that mattered to you.

- At work or school.
- Among friends or family.
- In a public setting.

4. You had a personal interest in getting good at it.

- To express yourself.
- To grow into who you want to be.
- To feel the pleasure of mastering new challenges.

Source: *Fires in the Mind: What Kids Can Tell Us About Motivation and Mastery*, by Kathleen Cushman, Jossey-Bass 2010.

Many interests, many strengths

DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

FOR YOUTH

What are you good at that your teachers may not have noticed? _____

When did you start it, and why? _____

Make some notes about it here: _____

FOR TEACHERS

Think about one class of students whom you teach. Next to the following areas of interest, write the names of those students who you notice have strength in that area.

Sports and physical challenges ball, double-dutch, acrobatics, martial arts	
Arts music, dance, visual arts, drama	
Crafts knitting, sewing, carpentry, cooking, etc.	
Logic/puzzles/games computer or other games, chess, Rubik's cube, etc.	
Communication reading, writing, questioning, listening, languages, telling or drawing stories/jokes/comics/cartoons	
Nature, science, gardening, animals	
Life skills wayfinding, caregiving, service, collaboration, friendship, entrepreneurship, management, politics	

If there are students whose strengths you are not sure of, write their names here.	How could you learn more about the strengths, interests, habits, affinities, pastimes, hopes, families, neighborhoods, and cultures of these students?

MAJOR IMPACT

Thinking about the future of education, large majorities of teachers and principals agree that the following are among factors that would have a “major impact” on improving student achievement.

- ✓ A school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their own education (**80%** of teachers, **89%** of principals)
- ✓ Connecting classroom instruction to the real world (**80%** of teachers, **80%** of principals)
- ✓ Addressing the individual needs of diverse students (**77%** of teachers, **86%** of principals)

Source: *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009)

GETTING BY

Many students (**36%**) across levels agree that they only do enough work as needed to get by in school.

- ✓ Many principals (**30%**) and a majority of teachers (**51%**) agree that students in their school only do enough work to do as well as needed to get by.
- ✓ However, large majorities of teachers (**77%**) and principals (**82%**) believe that most teachers in their school hold high standards for all of their students.
- ✓ No principals disagree with that statement, and only **3%** of teachers disagree.

Source: *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009)

HOMEWORK

Many students (**26%**) believe homework is just busywork and unrelated to what they are learning in school, including **30%** of secondary school students.

- ✓ Even more parents (**40%**) say a great deal or some homework assigned is busywork
- ✓ One third (**33%**) of parents say the quality of homework assigned in their schools is fair or poor.

Source: *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience* (2007)

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Goals help coaches get a good start

Q How does a coach get started on the job?

Frequently the coach is hired and simply told, “Go out and do some good things with teachers.” There’s no job description, no introduction to the staff. It helps if the school leader is clear about the school’s goal for coaching and establishes some schoolwide areas of focus so it’s a natural fit for the coach to support teachers in these initiatives. The school leader introducing the coach to the staff is critical for having a successful experience.

The coach should have clear goals set jointly with the administration from the beginning. Distance yourself from any evaluative activities. Talk with the administration about objectives and the game plan. For instance, are you trying to foster a culture of collaboration, get people talking about instruction? Or are you working to implement a particular initiative? Then, who’s your audience? Is it just science teachers; is it the whole school? How are you going to operate? Is the goal to do observation cycles or to influence how groups

meet and collaborate?

Then it’s all about building relationships and trust. In one case in my own coaching, teachers did not have a culture of collaboration at all. I began by asking if I could teach a lesson, videotape it, and use my instruction to do a tuning protocol on myself to start the reflective process. When people see that working with the coach is safe, that it’s nonjudgmental, that I’m not perfect, that I just really want to support people, then they start to open up.

It’s easier to move schools forward when you can work with small groups rather than one-on-one. As you’re working with Teacher A on one thing and with Teacher B on another, we’re making progress, but the school as a whole doesn’t see any large scale benefit because we’re all working on different things. I engage different groups; for example, the sophomore English teachers or the algebra teachers. Then when I’m not around they have each other for support. I’m trying to leave a legacy, a culture of collaboration around a common focus where teachers learn how to collaborate to the point that they move me to a true consultative model. ♦

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

Quality teaching is a tapestry of skills

Teacher effectiveness is getting a lot of attention in the mass media and education press lately. Some writers explore the conditions that support effective teaching. Others concentrate on teacher preparation and admission into teaching preparation programs. At the same time, private foundations and federal grants are making substantial funds available to determine how to measure effective teaching.

Measuring effective teaching is only one part of the comprehensive framework of improving student learning. District and school leaders, including teacher leaders and coaches, have essential day-to-day work to ensure quality teaching for all students. NSDC's standard on quality teaching states that all professional development that improves student achievement integrates three critical elements: teacher content knowledge, instruction, and assessment.

The Quality Teaching standard does not intend to reduce teaching to three elements. Rather, it focuses professional learning with a laser-like precision on the core elements of teaching, emphasizing that professional development is essential to integrating these three components to produce the results desired.

Aiming for integration

Three examples illustrate the importance of integrating these elements well.

One is the challenge of introducing new instructional methodologies, such as the high-yield strategies of Robert Marzano. Even when the research base to support the methods is strong, the way teachers learn about them may not be. Too often when teachers learn how to implement new pedagogies, they have insufficient support in three areas: examining their curriculum to identify which standards or outcomes are best taught using them,

NSDC STANDARD



Quality Teaching: Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately.

adapting them to meet the needs of different types of learners, and remodeling their lessons and daily curriculum to take full advantage of the benefits of the pedagogies. Instead, the pedagogies are used occasionally and sometimes without careful analysis of when and where they are appropriate.

The second example concerns curriculum revision, such as how a district implements a reform mathematics program. I know about one district where teachers had only a one-day introductory workshop on the new materials; this is not uncommon. Yet many curricular and instructional revisions are dependent on deep teacher content knowledge. Without this, teachers may inadvertently find themselves resorting to familiar methods, thus compromising the integrity and potential benefits of the new curriculum.

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

I draw my third example from a national meeting of mathematics educators where I had been invited as a facilitator. One general session included a presentation of a teaching episode via video case. Participants were asked to determine if this episode represented good teaching. Knowing full well I was not a content expert, I hung back for awhile. Finally when no one spoke, I did. I cited ways the teacher engaged students in the class. I mentioned how she talked about the concept in concrete and representational ways before she described it abstractly. I identified the diagram she had on the board for students who needed non-linguistic representations of complex ideas. Others followed and offered their thoughts.

Shortly into the participants' comments, a distinguished gentleman (I learned later that it was Hyman Bass, world-renowned mathematics educator and researcher) rose from the dais, approached the microphone, and stated, "Yes, you are correct. Because she taught so well, it is now unlikely that these students will unlearn the incorrect concept she taught them in this lesson. Just because she can teach well does not mean she can teach the content accurately."

These examples demonstrate how critical the teacher's understanding is to the students' experiences. They also show that content, instruction, and assessment must be deeply integrated to achieve quality teaching. They are a part of a larger tapestry that weaves together what a teacher knows about the discipline, the students, how to teach, how to teach each discipline, how to assess students' learning, and how to use assessment data to make informed instructional decisions focused on the needs of individual students.

My experience in being too quick to look at the practice of teaching through a purely pedagogical lens has helped me look more carefully at teaching as a nexus of the content, teaching, learning, and assessment. So often the most complex concepts we hope students will learn are reduced to a series of facts and tested at the remembering and understanding levels as described in the new Bloom's Taxonomy.

Teacher leaders and coaches have a responsibility to integrate into professional learning the multiple dimensions and complexity of quality teaching.

When facilitators or teacher teams plan professional learning, they want to ensure that the learning for adults produces outcomes at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Leaders must consider how professional learning will engage teachers in applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating to refine their teaching practice and increase student results.

Moving professional learning to higher levels

Professional learning that moves from knowing about to applying and reflecting on results integrates the following factors: authentic practice, opportunities to explore evidence of impact, reflection on practice, and moving learning into practice.

If teachers are learning to implement non-linguistic representation as an instructional methodology, for example, their learning is incomplete until they:

- Have examined their curriculum to identify which concepts within the curriculum are best taught using non-linguistic representation;
- Adapt the use of non-linguistic representation for students of varying level of ability and those who are English language learners or have special needs;
- Design a lesson using non-linguistic representation;
- Develop an assessment of student learning appropriate to the level of learning;
- Reflect on how the use of non-linguistic representation influences student engagement and learning; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of non-linguistic representation on their student learning goals.

Finally, there are two conditions that make it far more likely that teachers will use a given instructional methodology appropriately and frequently to advance student learning. They are that coaches follow up with classroom support, and that collaborative learning teams extend teachers' learning and reflection on their application of the methodology.

Such comprehensiveness in professional learning increases the rigor of professional learning while raising expectations for use of the new instructional methodology, all while providing teachers sufficient support. ◆

My experience in being too quick to look at the practice of teaching through a purely pedagogical lens has helped me look more carefully at teaching as a nexus of the content, teaching, learning, and assessment.



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Shirley Hord Learning Team Award

Recognizing school teams
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Application deadline: Sept. 25



The Shirley Hord Learning Team Award

The Shirley Hord Learning Team Award honors excellence in professional learning. Based on NSDC's definition of professional learning, the award recognizes a school team that successfully implements the cycle of continuous learning for professional learning that results in student achievement.

Given by NSDC and sponsored by Corwin, this new award serves three purposes:

- Increasing application of NSDC's definition of effective professional learning;
- Recognizing schools that have fully implemented the definition in practice; and
- Providing models of effective teams to support others in implementing the definition.

Schools wishing to be considered for the award will submit the following:

- A 10-12 minute video that depicts the team engaged in the cycle of continuous improvement as outlined in NSDC's definition of professional learning and detailed in *Becoming a Learning School*. Use the "PD in Action" video clips on NSDC's web site (www.nsd.org/standfor/definition.cfm) as an example of the professional learning interactions we hope to see.
- A document (no more than 5 pages) describing results the team has achieved over time, schoolwide results in student achievement over the last 3 years, and the principal's letter of support.

The winning team will be announced in early November. The award to the learning team includes a travel stipend of \$4,500 to support team members or representatives of the team to participate in either NSDC's 2010 annual or 2011 summer conference. The award also includes a \$2,500 gift to the school to support collaborative professional learning and a gift of Corwin books for the school's professional library.

For more information on the Shirley Hord Learning Team Award, visit www.nsd.org/getinvolved/hordaward.cfm or e-mail Joellen Killion at Joellen.Killion@nsdc.org. The official deadline for submission is September 25, 2010.

