

The INSIDE-OUT APPROACH

By Delores B. Lindsey and Linda MacDonell



Lindsey



MacDonell

The restaurant host asked Delores Lindsey if she wanted to be seated or wait for her guest to arrive. She asked to be seated while she waited. She ordered coffee, opened her coaching journal, and jotted down a couple of questions for today's coaching conversation: As you think about retiring within the next year, what are some things you want to sustain? What holds a sense of urgency for you and the division this year as you transition?

Lindsey couldn't believe Linda MacDonell was announcing her retirement as assistant superintendent of the Instructional Services Division of the Orange County (Calif.) Department of Education. Over the years that Lindsey had served as

MacDonell's leadership coach, MacDonell had talked about retirement only once or twice. MacDonell spoke of her long-term vision in terms of sustainability, transition, and growth, not retirement. When Lindsey had left the department to become a professor in education leadership, she promised to be MacDonell's leadership coach as part of her continued commitment to public service and to support her vision for leadership development within the Instructional Services Division. As Lindsey waited for MacDonell to arrive for their regular coaching and lunch conversation, she also knew they needed to write about their experiences as external/internal partners building internal capacity for culturally proficient leadership practices. They needed to share lessons learned from their success and their challenges as they planned, worked, and reflected together in the best interest of Orange County communities and schools.

In 1995, the California Department of Education convened a commission to develop academic content standards as part of a long-range plan for school accountability. California's standards-based curriculum and assessment model presented school districts the opportunity to examine instructional practices that focused on raising student achievement, especially for students who most often

fell below grade-level assessments. Rigorous content standards for students were quickly followed by rigorous instructional standards for teachers. School districts hoping to implement these new standards for teachers and students searched for new and different kinds of professional development to support the closing of the educational gap.

School districts throughout Orange County moved toward realigning instructional programs, curriculum materials, and support resources with standards-based models



for teaching and learning. The Orange County Department of

Education Instructional

Services Division responded to district needs by providing high-quality professional development (NSDC, 2001) to personnel in 28 school districts. As districts' confidence in the division's capacity to provide standards-based professional development grew, their requests for additional services increased. To meet these increased needs, Linda MacDonell, assistant superintendent of the Instructional Services Division, hired additional content specialists who were also excellent professional developers. She saw the opportunity to simultaneously enculturate new members and develop veteran members of the organization in new ways of being and of offering services. She envisioned top-quality professional developers who shared values for serving

teachers and students, especially those students who historically had not been served well and needed to be served differently. She wanted skilled facilitators who were knowledgeable in content and teaching standards. Furthermore, she envisioned these specialists as being knowledgeable about how to support districts in change initiatives focused on continuous improvement. MacDonell challenged her leadership team to find a capacity development model that would move the division closer to achieving that vision.

BENEFITS OF GROWING OUR OWN

To support her vision for professional learning, MacDonell and her leadership team explored various models. They looked for models that would provide the division with the capacity to “grow our own” professional developers. MacDonell reintroduced the leadership team to her longtime colleague, Bob Garmston. He recommended that the team explore his adaptive schools and cognitive coaching approaches to serving schools' professional development needs. These models were perfect fits and provided a way to begin the work on academic standards implementation.

In the early stages, MacDonell tried to put the vision of excellence out front for all to see. However, she had been unable to communicate her personal passion for the vision in a way that staff could internalize. During a division retreat to introduce adaptive schools and cognitive coaching as models for capacity development, she agreed to be coached publicly by one of the retreat trainers. During the coaching session, she revealed her vision, passion, and concerns about serving historically underserved students. She voiced her desire for professional efficacy for all involved in creating change in how all students must be well-served, especially those identified as underserved. The audience was spellbound as they listened to MacDonell reveal her thinking about the well-trained staff and her vision for this work. She shared that her deepest passion was to focus the division's work on student achievement. Hearing her story, many in the room experienced a breakthrough in their own thinking about the power of this vision and the potential for reflective inquiry. Many staff members had tears in their

ROLES OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PARTNERS



External partners

- Offer and develop expertise in:
 - Adaptive schools
 - Cognitive coaching
 - Cultural proficiency

Instructional Services Division

- Build internal models of service and delivery as external partners
- Develop culturally proficient professional learning practices

Local districts and schools

- Deliver culturally proficient professional learning practices and services for internal development
- Focus on teacher development and student growth

eyes by the end of the coaching session.

As the leadership team continued to work with Garmston, the desired outcome for the implementation of the professional learning models became clearer. The outcome of “external services focused on building internal capacity” would result in changes in behaviors for the division managers and program coordinators from “stand-and-deliver” highly skilled consultants to highly skilled professional developers who would facilitate, coach, and present based on the needs of the schools and communities they served. This outcome was a major shift in professional development strategies for members of the division. The feedback and responses to the first sessions were mixed and encouraging. However; one thing was very clear: While the division was using external partners to build its own internal capacity, members of the division were the external partners serving to build internal capacity of the local districts and schools as indicated in the figure above. One of the benefits of working with external partners is the expertise and validity they bring for committing to the work. When the authors of well-known books are presenters and facilitators, staff accepts the content. We also found an added bonus in working directly with experts from the field: Staff members became extensions of those experts as we served our local districts and schools. We had immediate access to our external partners, as did our clients. The personal connection to these experts gave us validity and expertise in our local context. The journey toward achieving a vision for supporting all teachers to teach all students had begun.

BENEFITS OF DOING OUR OWN WORK FIRST: THE INSIDE-OUT APPROACH

The original focus of MacDonell’s vision was to develop a supportive delivery system for standards-based instruction. As the accountability programs and pressures increased for districts, the focus for the division work moved to serving underperforming schools. MacDonell realized division managers needed an inclusive and equitable model, or lens, through which to examine their new work. With this shift in emphasis on students who had traditionally not been served well, the division’s work evolved to include the conceptual frame of cultural proficiency.

Kikanza Nuri, a leading voice in organization development and cultural proficiency, worked with MacDonell to give support staff an introduction to cultural proficiency tools while cultural proficiency authors and experts Randall and Delores Lindsey introduced the tools at the division’s retreat the following year. The facilitators focused on individual awareness of beliefs and values, organizational policies and procedures within the division, and cross-culturally with the schools and communities the division served. Division members embraced culturally proficient practices as a mind-set for examining their work with schools and districts. They were willing to self-assess long-held values and beliefs about who is well-served by traditional educational practices. Through skillful facilitation of dialogue and reflection (Garmston & Wellman, 1999), members of the division were able to confront deeply held assumptions and use breakthrough coaching techniques (Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2007) to mediate new thinking and implement new behaviors in service of their districts.

Districts began requesting services specifically focused on serving students’ diverse needs and addressing the achievement gap graphically demonstrated by statewide assessment data. As division members served districts using the new strategies of adaptive schools, cognitive coaching, and cultural proficiency, they reported developing a common language, learning to listen at deeper levels, reflecting on their own values, and engaging in collaborative work that was making a difference in schools.

BENEFITS OF TIME TOGETHER THROUGH RETREATS, REFLECTIONS, AND RESULTS

At annual retreats, external facilitators provided supportive learning environments for instructional division members to use strategies from book studies about cultural proficiency. Members used strategies for personal reflection, goal setting, crafting breakthrough questions, designing action plans, and assessing progress in developing culturally proficient practices.

As division members and the leadership team examined the results of their ongoing professional learning, they observed that inclusive goals and activities became the outcome of their work with schools and districts. They also required well-designed agen-

LESSONS LEARNED USING NSDC'S STANDARDS

As Lindsey and MacDonell finished their coffee and prepared to schedule their next coaching appointment, they spread a clean paper napkin on the tabletop and sketched responses to this question: **So what have we learned about having external partners to build internal capacity?**

Start with the standards. NSDC's Standards for Staff Development paved the way for continuing to provide high-quality facilitation and presentation skills and capacity development through internal support.

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement (NSDC, 2001).

Commit to the journey. MacDonell and her leadership team were strongly committed to the long-term vision through short-term goals. The work of the division had always been at a professional level. Now the work occurs at a personal level with deep commitment.

(Skillful leaders) are clear about their own values and beliefs and the effects these values and beliefs have on others and on the achievement of organizational goals. As primary carriers of the organization's culture, they also make certain that their attitudes and behavior represent the values and practices they promote throughout the school or district (NSDC, 2001).

Connect to the culture. For the vision work to be successful, the external facilitators were respectful of the organizational culture and delivered the training in the "OCDE way." They valued the sense of professionalism present in the Instructional Services Division.

These leaders make certain that their colleagues have the necessary knowledge and skills and other forms of support that ensure success in these new roles. These leaders read widely, participate in learning communities, attend workshops and conferences, and model career-long learning by making their learning visible to others (NSDC, 2001).

Build internal capacity of the organization to provide external support. The main purpose of the Instructional Services Division is to build internal capacity to deliver external resources to



school districts. The internal capacity of the division was already strong. However, the leadership team realized the members of the division could be even more effective with a personal commitment to equity and diversity. Such divisions and other external service agencies are often seen as outsiders by local schools and districts. Therefore, we must present ourselves and our services as if we are insiders. We demonstrate these "inside" services and values by:

- How we assess the culture of the schools and organizations we serve along with how well we know and assess our own organizational culture;
- How we value the diversity of the members of the school communities we serve;
- How we manage the dynamics of differences within the communities we serve;
- How we adapt to diversity of the communities we serve; and
- How we institutionalize the lessons and cultural knowledge we learn as we serve diverse communities.

Successful educators convey through various means the value and potential that is inherent in each student. They demonstrate understanding, respect, and appreciation of students' cultures and life experiences through their lessons and daily interaction with students and their caregivers. High-quality staff development provides educators with opportunities to understand their own attitudes regarding race, social class, and culture and how their attitudes affect their teaching practices and expectations for student learning and behavior (NSDC, 2001).

das with clearly stated outcomes as the standard for division professional development. Content specialists, team leaders, and support staff practiced and modeled high-quality staff development in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Members of the division have experienced their journey toward culturally proficient practices at various levels. At the most

recent retreat, several members experienced deep emotional responses to learning experiences designed by the cultural proficiency facilitation team. Members noted their responses deepened their understanding of the moral responsibility that must be shared by school leaders (Fullan, 2003). By the end of the final day in retreat, members were able to express what the personal

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journey toward cultural proficiency means to them. Many have reached an understanding of how the work of equity and access begins as an inside-out approach. The journey for each person begins within.

CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Time and money were the two main challenges in this journey. High-quality external partners are often expensive, especially over time. Weeks, months, and years are required to implement the kind of change we have described. Deep change requires a commitment to time and resources. People get tired and easily frustrated when they do not see immediate results or when they are asked for a long-term commitment of resources, time, and energy.

An investment in human capital is important and necessary. Not all organizations appreciate the need to develop people as a resource. Fortunately, this organization valued its human resources with the financial commitment to long-term, meaningful professional development. A large part of the investment in human capital was to develop our own experts. We now have cognitive coaching agency trainers and adaptive schools associate trainers. The Instructional Services Division has served as

Identity crisis

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opportunities for growth in future professional learning communities. Our intention is to focus professional learning community talk on learning by clearly defining roles for coaches, facilitators, and members. We would like to continue using de-centering as a central strategy and plan to support facilitators with creating common visions and frameworks for individual professional learning communities. More than anything else, as coaches, we commit to challenging and unpacking the difficult conversations that act as barriers to what ultimately leads to increased teacher learning.

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the home for the Center for Culturally Proficient Practice for the past five years. We have turned our challenges into opportunities to generate resources for our own social and human capital in ways to support our growth and the needs of the schools we serve.

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Delores B. Lindsey (dlindsey@csusm.edu) is associate professor of education at California State University San Marcos, San Marcos, Calif. Linda MacDonell (genelinhb@aol.com) retired as assistant superintendent, Instructional Services Division, Orange County (Calif.) Department of Education. ■

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Julie Horwitz (jhortwitz@ric.edu) is assistant professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Rhode Island College in Providence, R.I. Janice Bradley (jbradley@nmsu.edu) is program coordinator at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, N.M. Linda Hoy (hoyl@wnmu.edu) is assistant professor of educational leadership at Western New Mexico University in Gallup, N.M. ■