



LEARNING SIDE BY SIDE

TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WORK TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN INSTRUCTION

By **Patty Maxfield and Sharon Williams**

The Kent (Washington) School District evaluation team — a partnership of principals, district leaders, and teachers union representatives — had been working together for seven months. The group’s task: to agree on one of three state-approved evaluation tools for the district.

With the aid of a Washington Education Association facilitator, the team adopted the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership’s 5D+ Teacher Evaluation Rubric and an instructional framework called the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. The group

then shifted to creating a professional learning plan for the district’s 1,400 classroom teachers. The plan’s initial goals were to:

- Consistently observe instruction;
- Create a common language to analyze instruction; and
- Develop a growth-oriented stance to build teacher and principal capacity and leadership.

In addition, the group strove to balance the learning needs of teachers, principals, and district leaders.

COMMON LANGUAGE

The correlation between teacher quality and student achievement is unequivocal: Teaching matters above all else, including family income and education (Haycock, 1998; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Differences among stu-

dents, as well as schools, are a small factor compared to differences in the quality of teaching from classroom to classroom (Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002).

A growing body of research evidence suggests that leadership ranks second to teaching in impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). That illustrates the important role central office leaders play in supporting student learning across a system (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Honig, 2008; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010).

These realities drive the Center for Educational Leadership to help educators identify and strengthen effective instruction.

According to the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, an instructional framework:

- Identifies a vision for high-quality teaching and learning while creating the opportunity for a common language within and across schools in a system;
- Supports the enhancement of teacher and principal instructional expertise and emphasizes continuous learning and improvement; and
- Keeps teachers and principals focused on the way each student learns, while simultaneously providing insight and strategies into how dilemmas around classroom learning can be addressed (Fink & Markholt, 2011).

The 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning framework helps educators

discern the instructional core elements identified by City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel (2009) for continually improving teacher expertise, changing the role of the student as learner, and increasing the complexity of the content that the student is learning. The components of the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning framework are:

- Purpose;
- Student engagement;
- Curriculum and pedagogy;
- Assessment for student learning; and
- Classroom environment and culture.

KENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Kent School District is the fourth-largest district in Washington and one of the most diverse, with more than 130 languages spoken. The 28,000 students in the district attend 41 schools over 71 square miles in South King County in Washington, a suburb in the Seattle metropolitan area with rapidly changing demographics. From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of minority students rose by 19%. More than 50% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

The Washington State Teacher/Principal Evaluation Pilot was created as a result of legislation passed in 2010 that established eight new criteria for teacher and principal evaluation. The Kent School District chose the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning for an evaluation framework based on the district's changing demographics, increasing achievement gaps between student

COMPONENTS OF A GROWTH-ORIENTED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

- Instructional framework.
- Rubric.
- Strengths-based, growth-oriented process.

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groups, and the Center for Educational Leadership's efforts to eliminate the achievement gap.

In June 2013, Kent School District implemented its professional learning plan. The yearlong plan focused on side-by-side learning: teacher leaders working with principals and teachers working with teachers. The plan supported and connected to three of the district's seven strategic goals: high student achievement, highly effective staff, and a culture of collaboration. The evaluation team also connected the professional learning to three districtwide initiatives: the instructional framework and evaluation system, professional learning communities, and implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

To encourage collaboration, the plan incorporated learning walks, professional learning communities, and the Center for Educational Leadership's 5D+ Inquiry Cycle to develop a strengths-based stance for observation and feedback. A strengths-based stance allows for the conversation between teacher and principal to be an objective way to analyze instructional data together. It helps build on the teacher's skills, expanding and deepening those skills over the course of the inquiry cycle.

As part of the professional learning plan, team members thought that it was important to be able to practice and learn the 5D framework together, and learning walks were the perfect way to build on principal and teacher understanding and use of the framework.

The director of professional development and the instructional leadership coach collaborated to group schools for learning walks. Schools were grouped according to factors such as principal experience, student achievement status, proximity, and grade configuration. A Center for Educational Leadership facilitator led a series of classroom walk-throughs to help participants practice using the 5D instructional framework within the context of the host school.

During the learning walks — held in October and May — participants gathered evidence of teacher practice and student learning to assist in their analysis of classroom instruction and guide the improvement of teaching and learning. Before the learning walk, the host principal and the facilitator worked together to develop a problem of practice in literacy or mathematics. This problem of practice guided the conversations throughout the day.

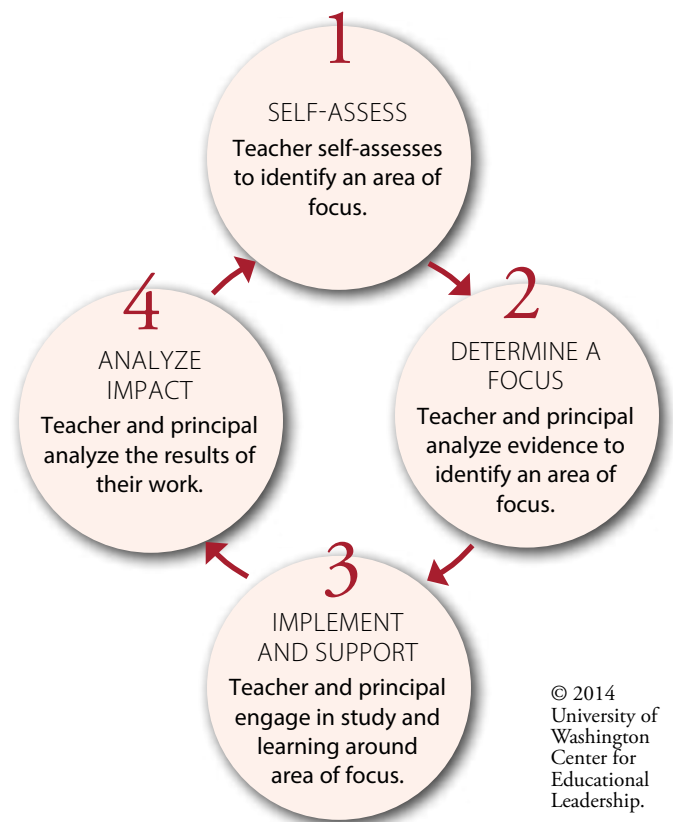
Teacher leaders, principals, and district leaders learned side by side. Principals and teacher leaders attended all components of the yearlong professional learning plan together. Principals recruited teacher leaders to become a part of the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Project teacher leader cadre.

Teachers and principals learned how to use the framework and rubric to collect and analyze instructional practice evidence, what each of the five dimensions for teaching and learning look and sound like in the classroom, and how to engage in the 5D+ Inquiry Cycle. Each stage of the learning emphasized reciprocal accountability and professional scrutiny.

The inclusion of teacher leaders as partners in learning capitalized on Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin's (1996) view that effective teacher learning involves teachers both as learners and teachers and allows them to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role. Effective teacher learning must be:

- Experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminate the processes of learning and development;
- Grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven;
- Collaborative and interactional, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than individual teachers;
- Connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students;
- Sustained, ongoing, and intensive, supported by the modeling, coaching, and collective problem-solving around specific problems of practice; and
- Connected to other aspects of school change.

5D+ INQUIRY CYCLE



STRENGTHS-BASED STANCE

Traditional teacher evaluation often focused on what teachers weren't doing but should be. It also focused on single lessons instead of ongoing teacher practice. With a strengths-based stance in teacher evaluation, principals and teachers engage in formative feedback cycles that provide immediate, focused, and relevant feedback to teachers about their instructional practice. It builds on what teachers are doing, deepening and expanding their practice across all of the five dimensions of teaching and learning.

The Center for Educational Leadership's teacher evaluation process has three components:

1. An **instructional framework** that is grounded in research-based practice and appropriately represents the nuances of student learning, content, and teacher expertise.
2. A **rubric** that provides a continuum for developing specific practices outlined in the framework. The rubric should contain a single best practice for each indicator so that teachers and their evaluators can identify specific areas of instructional expertise to focus on and ultimately assess each practice without the confusion of assessing multiple practices simultaneously.
3. The third component — the one most often ignored when implementing teacher evaluation rubrics — is a **growth-oriented process** that requires the teacher and evaluator to

How practice is changing

Using a strengths-based approach has fostered professional conversations that energize teachers and principals. This dialogue leads to changes in teaching practice that impact classroom culture and student learning. Here are examples of how teacher and principal practice has changed in Kent School District.

CARA HANEY, TEACHER
Panther Lake Elementary School



"I KNEW I WAS A GOOD TEACHER before. Now I realize that there is so much more I can do.

"When we were in college, we got the theory. The framework shows us what to do. New teachers feel that they know what they are doing because they have the framework in front of them.

"I definitely know the rubric and the pieces behind it at a deeper level. If I'm going to teach it, I have to know how it works and that it will work in the classroom.

"The stance of the principal is the reciprocal responsibility. ...

The principal has the responsibility to say, 'I want you to be the best teacher, and this is how we're going to do it. What professional learning can I get for you? What videos can I get for you?' The conversation is the most important part. The conversation is the biggest change.

"I'm very proud of what I'm doing. I want people to see."

ELIZABETH (BETH) WALLEN, PRINCIPAL
Panther Lake Elementary School



"I WAS ALWAYS LEADING. Now I have these other experts with me. We check our understandings together, getting us on the same page.

"The shift is that this is a collaborative

process. We are looking at practice together. The stance is moving away from 'Am I doing a good job?' or 'Do you think this was OK?' Now it's 'Let's look at the evidence' or 'Let's look at the script together.' The conversations are the most critical part of it, especially those post conversations.

"Teachers' perception of feedback is different. I used to just give the running record and compare that against the rubric. This is all about their professional growth."

work side by side to develop instructional practice expertise.

5D+ INQUIRY CYCLE

The 5D+ Inquiry Cycle has four steps, each with a specific purpose.

1. Self-assess.

Before meeting with the principal, the teacher engages in self-assessment by examining student work, classroom-based student assessment data, and student feedback to determine the learning strengths and challenges of the students in his or her classroom. The teacher makes connections between student learning needs and building or district initiatives. Finally, the teacher uses the rubric to assess his or her practice.

2. Determine a focus.

The principal and teacher meet to review the self-assessment data, along with any additional evidence the principal provides, and decide on an area of focus within the instructional framework and rubric.

3. Implement and support.

Together, the teacher and principal spend several months working on the identified area of focus. The teacher works to implement what he or she is learning, and the principal works to support implementation through feedback and professional

learning, which might include reading an article, observing or collaborating with a colleague, or attending a class.

4. Analyze impact.

The teacher and principal review what was learned and identify next steps. Throughout the process, evaluators take a strengths-based stance when analyzing observation data and giving feedback to teachers.

Learning this strengths-based stance has allowed teachers and principals in the Kent School District to use the evaluation process to improve instruction. Teachers and principals work together to examine instructional practice and student learning data to determine areas of strength and opportunity.

Together, they use the instructional framework and rubric to determine next steps in the teacher's learning. The principal supports that learning through feedback and professional development. The teacher adjusts his or her practice accordingly. Together, they continually look at instructional practice data, compare it to the research-based practices in the instructional framework, and use the rubric to determine next steps.

A strengths-based stance, with teachers and principals learning side by side, analyzing instructional data, and determining next steps, has allowed the Kent School District to shift its resources to a practice that impacts teacher growth and student learning.

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How to choose the right learning design

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A design must be flexible enough to fit the needs of the district or school without compromising its integrity. At the same time, since no design is perfect and can fill *all* the professional learning needs of *everyone*, schools and districts need to think about how they will supplement the design with their own devices.

For example, a school or district may decide that a design is somewhat weak on implementation and, therefore, decide to establish a coaching program to be sure that educators apply what they are learning through the design.

One approach to this reality is to think of *design* as plural. It may take multiple designs — coordinated as a program — to fill the needs of the organization, its personnel, and its students.

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