

# JSD

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

**Principals  
boost  
coaching's  
impact** p. 48

## COACHING

Build buy-in, strengthen teaching,  
and meet learning goals

**DATA DISPLAYS  
ARE AN EFFECTIVE  
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**A simple  
but powerful  
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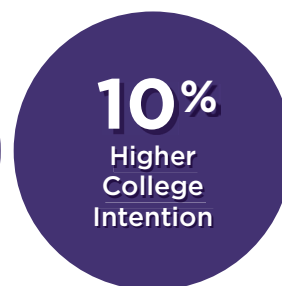
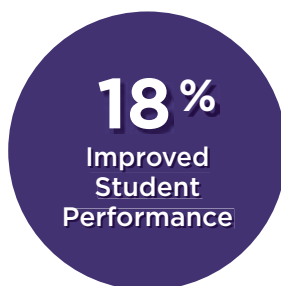
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# JSD

The  
Learning Forward  
Journal

## theme COACHING:

BUILD BUY-IN, STRENGTHEN TEACHING,  
AND MEET LEARNING GOALS

FEBRUARY 2015, VOLUME 36, NO. 1

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## Coaching as a continuous improvement tool

If Disney movies have taught me anything, it is the importance of a wise and trusty sidekick. Jiminy Cricket has often been perched on my shoulder to guide me to making a better decision, particularly when the shortcutting side of my nature would rather push ahead and get something done quickly.

The practice of coaching is far more complex than the work that Jiminy Cricket does for Pinocchio — or for me, for that matter. What coaches share with Jiminy Cricket is a commitment to offering their best thinking to those they counsel. Those effectively filling the coaching role in education, whatever their job title, have deep expertise in communication, collaboration, facilitation, planning, instruction and curriculum, reflection, and feedback, to name just a few.

In this issue of *JSD*, we see coaching examples and strategies that align with these areas and more. When I look at the larger picture portrayed here, however, I am struck by the crucial role of coaching in the cycle of continuous improvement. It is exciting to see the many ways that schools and districts embed a cycle of continuous improvement into any improvement agenda. When organizations are intentional about continuous

•  
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improvement, how do they best support it? Coaching is key.

Cycles of continuous improvement take many forms. There is more than one model portrayed in this issue, whether explicitly or implicitly. In “3 steps to great coaching: A simple but powerful instructional coaching cycle nets results” (p. 10), the authors talk about an identify-learn-improve cycle applied specifically to coaching practice. At its simplest is the plan-do-reflect cycle. The cycle of continuous improvement embedded in our Standards for Professional Learning and definition of professional learning includes seven steps, starting with collecting data and cycling through evaluation of results.

Throughout this issue, consider how coaching supports the high-fidelity implementation of a learning cycle. In “Talking points: Data displays are an effective way to engage teachers” (p. 24), for example, the authors highlight how coaches help educators understand and use data meaningfully — an essential part of any planning step. The educators in “What we learned from a tomato: Partnering with a content expert plants new ideas for instruction” (p. 30) dig deep into content specifics to refine instructional practices, supporting both learning and implementation steps. Those responsible for coaching will learn about effective feedback and reflection strategies vital to keeping learning continuous in “Clear goals, clear results:



© Andylid, Dreamstime.com-USA Disney Character Postage Stamp Photo

Content-focused routines support learning for everyone — including coaches” (p. 34).

Clearly, coaching can be useful at any or every step in a learning cycle, often assisting learners to understand the very notion of continuous learning and how it works in practice. When schools and systems are intentional about the effective use of coaching, they ensure support from a skilled coach at the points that educators need it most and demonstrate their commitment to operate as a learning organization.

Who is it that sits on your shoulder, offering advice or an opportunity to reflect on what you already know and believe? I consider myself quite fortunate to have had Jiminy Cricket supplanted by better coaches, both professional and personal.

Whether we rely on those who coach us as trusted advisers or go-to experts, anyone committed to performing better each day benefits from such support. ■

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## **BUILDING LEADERS**

### **Leading From the Front of the Classroom:**

#### **Teacher Leadership That Works** *The Aspen Institute, October 2014*

Teacher leadership is emerging as a key strategy to increase retention of effective teachers and distribute responsibility for improving instruction, but it must be designed and implemented strategically to meet these goals. This report highlights promising practices from leading states, districts, and charter schools and provides practical guidance for system leaders. The report highlights current innovations, from emerging pilots to mature programs. Profiles of promising work in Tennessee, Denver Public Schools, and Noble Street charter network in Chicago show how these systems integrate teacher leadership with other top priorities (e.g. implementing Common Core, strengthening teacher evaluation) to increase impact and sustainability.

[www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/leading-front-classroom-teacher-leadership-works](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/leading-front-classroom-teacher-leadership-works)

## **TALK AROUND THE CLOCK**

### **Rethinking Teacher Time** *Center for Teaching Quality*

A team of Kentucky teacher leaders is posing a challenge: Rethink professional learning and restructure the school day to improve learning for students and teachers. After analyzing current teacher schedules and conducting an intensive three-day chat discussing teacher needs and opportunities for reallocating time, the group created a shareable infographic with three recommendations for reallocating teacher time:

Redesign school schedules to prioritize learning for students and teachers, promote teacher-driven professional learning communities, and rethink classroom structures and needs. The team also created a series of blog posts on professional learning and a presentation with a video on teacher time.

[www.teachingquality.org/teachertime](http://www.teachingquality.org/teachertime)

## **IMPLEMENTATION ROADBLOCKS**

### **Teachers Know Best: Teachers' Views on Professional Development**

*Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, December 2014*

To gain insights into the roadblocks to implementing effective professional development, researchers interviewed or surveyed more than 1,300 teachers, professional development leaders in district and state education agencies, principals, professional development providers, and thought leaders. What they heard was consistent: Professional learning is highly fragmented and characterized by disconnects between what decision makers intend and the professional learning teachers actually experience. At the same time, teachers and administrators largely agree on what good professional learning looks like. That consensus, coupled with teachers' increasing use of self-guided online resources and their desire to work together to focus on planning, designing, and delivering instruction, provide directions for the future.

<http://redesignchallenge.org/>



## **GOING DIGITAL**

### **Today's Learning Paradigm**

*AdvancED, Fall 2014*

How has today's digital age student changed the learning environment? As teachers and administrators around the world are adapting educational cultures, embracing social media, and applying technology and new instructional techniques, students are becoming their own teachers, accessing media for content and knowledge beyond the classroom. In the inaugural digital issue of *The Source*, authors explore how classrooms and other platforms of learning are preparing the next generation of teachers, engaging students in defining their own outcomes, integrating technology as a tool for producing and creating, and educating today's students for their futures.

[www.advanc-ed.org/source](http://www.advanc-ed.org/source)



**SHARE EXPERIENCES****ECET<sup>2</sup>: Celebrate Teaching**

The ECET<sup>2</sup> Celebrate Teaching Network is a way for teachers to connect with peers nationwide to tackle common challenges and support student success. Begun in 2012, the ECET<sup>2</sup> professional network was born out of a desire to provide a forum for exceptional teachers to learn from one another and to celebrate the teaching profession. Since then, teachers around the country have organized regional convenings to bring together motivated colleagues at home, develop their collective leadership potential, and hone their craft. Teachers also share their experiences through online communities.

<https://celebrateteaching.com/communities/ecet2>

**LEARNING TECHNOLOGY****Digital Promise: Accelerating Innovation in Education**

Digital Promise is an independent, bipartisan nonprofit whose mission is to improve the opportunity to learn for all Americans through technology and research. Its initiatives include designing and developing digital learning tools that address the needs of adult learners, creating and documenting innovative learning environments at eight U.S. middle schools, developing a micro-credentialing system that offers teachers the opportunity to gain recognition for skills they master throughout their careers, and building a national coalition of school district superintendents that fosters collaboration between education leaders and entrepreneurs, researchers, and thought partners.

[www.digitalpromise.org](http://www.digitalpromise.org)

**TEACHER VOICES****Teach to Lead**

Teach to Lead is an initiative jointly convened by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the U.S. Department of Education to advance student outcomes by expanding opportunities for teacher leadership, particularly those that allow teachers to stay in the classroom. Through the online Commit to Lead community and through a series of regional Teacher Leadership Summits, the initiative seeks to highlight existing state and district systems that are working to support teacher leadership, share resources to create new opportunities for teacher leadership, and encourage people at all levels to commit to expanding teacher leadership. To create systemic and sustained change, Teach to Lead involves stakeholders at every level of education and is informed and driven by teacher voices.

<http://teachtolead.org>

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**HOW TO GET IN TOUCH**

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# TEACHERS' COACHING PREFERENCES

When executed well, the value of professional development formats like coaching and collaboration can be substantial. And teachers in strong collaborative environments see significant benefits in their day-to-day work. But the way these formats are offered in many places falls short of the ideal and leaves many teachers unsatisfied.



## TEACHERS EXPRESS STRONG PREFERENCES FOR COACHING PROGRAM DESIGN.

RANK	ATTRIBUTES OF IDEAL COACHING EXPERIENCE
1	My coach knows what it's like to be in my shoes.
2	My coach is an expert in my subject area.
3	Coaching sessions give me specific actions I can try in my classroom immediately.
4	My coach is well-trained at providing feedback.
5	My coach is not the same person who does my evaluation.

## TEACHERS EXPRESS CONCERNS OVER WHO SERVES AS A COACH AND REPORT NEGATIVE STIGMA AROUND COACHING.

Demand for content expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "If they could bring retired teachers out to serve as coaches ..."</li> </ul>
Preference for ongoing relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't want someone coming in on their high horse telling me what to do ... They don't know my strengths and weaknesses. I'm a little territorial."</li> </ul>
Skepticism of administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Most administrators don't have enough classroom seat time to coach teachers. Many of them went in just to be administrators, did the minimum time in the classroom."</li> <li>• "Coaching shouldn't be done by the person who evaluates you. It's a conflict of interest."</li> </ul>
Negative stigma; coaching is perceived as a "last resort" for low performers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I got told I was going to be meeting with the district reading coach. I thought, 'Oh, no, they're talking about me at the district.'"</li> </ul>

Source: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2014, December). *Teachers know best: Teachers' views on professional development* (pp. 5, 7). Seattle, WA: Author.

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**powerful WORDS**

“The ingredients for successful coaching are neither magic nor mysterious. They are essentially the same ingredients included in nearly all effective school reform efforts: strong leadership, a clear focus and goals, essential resources, well-prepared staff, ongoing measures of assuring and monitoring progress, and rigorous evaluations.”

Source: Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012). *Coaching matters* (p. vii). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.



## QUESTIONS *for* LEADERS

Leaders who work closely with coaches need the skills to adapt to quickly changing schools and communities. Leaders will want to consider:

- What knowledge and skills do coaches need in order to be able to affect teaching and learning?
- How can coaches help teachers connect neuroscience with student instructional needs?
- How can coaches help teachers become globally knowledgeable?
- How will coaches help teachers align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to prepare students to be citizens in a global society?
- How will leaders and coaches address factors of school culture that contribute to, as well as threaten, teacher leaders' development?
- How do leaders and coaches create the type of culture that supports teacher leadership development?
- How might leaders and coaches apply Killion and Harrison's coaching framework in *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Coaches* (NSDC, 2006) to develop building-level professional learning for classroom teachers?
- What professional learning will help develop a school culture in which teachers take a stance of inquiry and take on leadership roles?
- How might the roles of noninstructional support personnel, such as special education providers, psychologists, and social workers, be reimaged in order to build teachers' knowledge?
- What are the special challenges in different kinds of schools, such as rural, small, large, urban?

**Source:** Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012). *Coaching matters* (p. 177). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

## Mindsets matter

“How people think about change influences how they approach it. This is true for coaches and teachers. A coach's mindset influences the coach's ability to support teachers.

Coaches with a mindset of appreciation, inquiry, and assets will have safe and constructive



relationships with their colleagues.

“When a coach's mindset is limited by judgment and focused on the gap between the ideal and current practice, the coach will have a more difficult time acknowledging teachers' small successes, may not



value progress over time, and may not have the patience and perseverance to help teachers become independent

with the new practices. These coaches may be more directive, neglect to listen to individual needs or concerns, and fail to provide appropriate support.”

**Source:** Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012). *Coaching matters* (p. 80). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.



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# 3 STEPS *to* GREAT COACHING

A SIMPLE BUT POWERFUL INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING CYCLE NETS RESULTS

By Jim Knight, Marti Elford, Michael Hock, Devona Dunekack, Barbara Bradley,  
Donald D. Deshler, and David Knight

*“Coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance.”*

— Atul Gawande (2011)

**A**tul Gawande’s comment is often used to justify coaching. What people overlook in his comment, however, are the words “done well.” Coaching “done well” can and should dramatically improve human performance. However, coaching done poorly can be, and often is, ineffective, wasteful, and sometimes even destructive.

What, then, is coaching done well? For the past five years, researchers at the Kansas Coaching Project at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and at the Instructional Coaching Group in Lawrence, Kansas, have been trying to answer that question by studying what coaches do. The result of that research is an instructional coaching cycle that fosters the kind of improvement Gawande describes.

One coach who uses the instructional coaching cycle is Jackie Jewell from Othello School District in Washington. A participant in one of our research projects, Jewell used the coaching cycle when collaborating with Melanie

Foster, a new elementary teacher in her district. Foster had sought out Jewell for coaching because she felt she needed to improve the way she gave positive attention to students. While Jewell would happily have focused on increasing Foster’s positivity ratio, instead she suggested that it might be worth confirming that encouragement was the right goal.

To start, Jewell recorded one of Foster’s lessons using her iPad and shared the video with her.

After watching the video separately, both agreed that Foster was effective at encouraging students. But Foster saw something else she wanted to work on: student engagement. Her students were not staying focused during small-group activities. Armed with this new insight, she set a goal that students would be on task at least 90% of the time during small-group activities.

Jewell recorded another lesson, which revealed that students were on task about 65% of the time. It also showed that students didn’t fully understand the expectations for their activities. In other words, students were off task because they didn’t know what to do.

Agreeing that Foster needed to set more explicit expectations for small groups, Jewell and Foster created a checklist describing the expectations, and Jewell modeled how to teach them. Foster also decided that she and her learning

assistant would talk to each small group at the start of activities to make sure groups were clear about what they were to do.

Once students understood their tasks, they hit the goal quickly after only a few modifications. Eventually, students were consistently on task 90% or higher, and this showed up in their test scores as well. Before coaching, students received scores on quizzes that were on average about 20%. After coaching, their scores averaged above 70%. Coaching helped Foster teach more effectively, and her improved instruction led to better student learning.

### HOW WE STUDY WHAT COACHES DO

Kansas Coaching Project and Instructional Coaching Group researchers have studied instructional coaching since 1996, focusing in the past five years on the steps coaches move through to help teachers set and hit goals.

In the process, we experimented with a research methodology that we used to identify a process to be studied, assess what works and doesn't work when the practice is implemented, and refine the process based on what is learned during implementation.

To study instructional coaching, Kansas Coaching Project researchers worked with coaches from Beaverton, Oregon, and Othello, Washington. In addition, Instructional Coaching Group researchers conducted more than 50 interviews with coaches around the country. In large part, the instructional coaching cycle is the result of what was learned from these studies and interviews.

Researchers followed these steps:

1. Instructional coaches implement the coaching process.
2. They video record their coaching interactions and their teachers' implementation of the teaching practices.
3. They monitor progress toward their goals.
4. Researchers interview coaches and teachers to monitor progress as they move through the coaching cycle.
5. Researchers meet with coaches two or three times a year (at the end of each coaching cycle) to discuss how the coaching process can be refined or improved.
6. Refinements are made, and the revised coaching model and research process is repeated.

Researchers have moved through this cycle eight times in Beaverton and Othello. Over time, moving through increasingly effective coaching cycles, we have come up with a simple but powerful way to conduct instructional coaching.

### THE INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING CYCLE

The coaching cycle that Jewell used involved many steps embedded in three components.

**1. Identify:** Jewell and Foster got a clear picture of reality (by video recording the class), identified a goal (90% time on task), and identified a teaching strategy that would help them hit the goal (teaching expectations).

**2. Learn:** Jewell used a checklist and modeling to make sure

Foster understood how to use the identified strategy.

**3. Improve:** Jewell and Foster monitored progress toward the goal and made modifications to the way the strategy was used until the goal was hit. Here is how the cycle works. (See diagram on p. 10.)



### The coach and teacher collaborate to set a goal and select a teaching strategy to try to meet the goal.

This involves several steps.

First, the coach helps the teacher get a clear picture of reality, often by video recording the teacher's class. Then the coach and teacher identify a change the teacher would like to see in student behavior, achievement, or attitude.

Next, they identify a measurable student goal that will show that the hoped-for change has occurred. For example, a coach and teacher in Othello set the goal of reducing transition time from a four-minute average to a 20-second average. Since there were four transitions per period, hitting the goal added 15 minutes of instructional time to each 50-minute period — giving students 40 more hours of learning over the course of the year.

Other data besides video that might be gathered include student work, observation, and formal and informal evaluation results. Video, however, is quick, cheap, and powerful, and, if teachers only look at student work, they may miss some important aspect of their teaching.

Teachers frequently have an imprecise understanding of what their teaching looks like until they see a video recording of their class. When video is used within coaching, it is best if teacher and coach watch the video separately (Knight, 2014).

After data have been gathered, the coach and teacher meet to identify next steps. Coaches can use these questions to guide teachers to set powerful goals:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how close was the lesson to your ideal?
2. What would have to change to make the class closer to a 10?
3. What would your students be doing?
4. What would that look like?
5. How would we measure that?
6. Do you want that to be your goal?
7. Would it really matter to you if you hit that goal?
8. What teaching strategy will you try to hit that goal?

Once a measurable goal has been established, the instructional coach and teacher choose a teaching strategy that the teacher would like to implement in an attempt to hit the goal. To support teachers during this step, coaches need to have a deep knowledge of a small number of high-yield teaching strategies that address many of the concerns teachers identify. Coaches in Beaverton and Othello learned the teaching strate-



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## SPEAKERS



Michael Fullan



William M. Ferriter



Adam Garry



Meg Ormiston



Kamela Patton



Will Richardson



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gies in *High-Impact Instruction: A Framework for Great Teaching* (Knight, 2013).

Goals that make the biggest difference for students are powerful, easy, emotionally compelling, reachable, and student-focused.

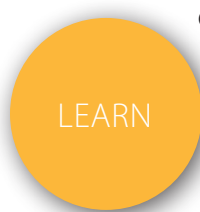
**Powerful.** The most effective goals address important aspects of student learning. Also, powerful goals address ongoing issues in the classroom rather than single events.

**Easy.** Not every goal is easy to reach, and goals are not improved if they are watered down or made less than powerful. However, given the choice between two equally powerful goals, take the one that is easier to reach. An easy-to-achieve goal leads more quickly to meaningful change for students, reinforces teachers' and students' efforts sooner, and frees up time for other tasks, such as setting other improvement goals.

**Emotionally compelling.** If teachers are going to invest a lot of time in changing their teaching to reach important goals, they have to choose goals that matter to them.

**Reachable.** Reachable goals have two characteristics: They are measurable, and they are ones teachers can reach because they have strategies to do so.

**Student-focused.** Usually these are goals that address student achievement, behavior, or attitude. The power of a student-focused goal is that it is objective and, therefore, holds coach and teacher accountable until meaningful improvements are made in students' lives.



**Once teacher and coach set a goal and choose a teaching strategy, the teacher must learn how to implement the strategy. For the coach, this means explaining and modeling teaching strategies.**

When instructional coaches explain teaching strategies, they need to give precise and clear explanations. Coaches are clearer when they use checklists. This doesn't mean coaches prompt teachers to

mindlessly implement every step on a checklist. However, before teachers make adaptations, coaches need to be certain teachers know what they are modifying.

Coaches need to be precise and provisional when they explain teaching practices. They should clearly explain the items on a checklist while also asking teachers how they might want to modify the checklist to best meet students' needs or take advantage of their own strengths as teachers.

One benefit of establishing objective goals as a part of instructional coaching is that goals provide a way to assess whether teachers' modifications improve or damage the teaching strategies they use. If teachers modify strategies and hit their goals, their modifications didn't decrease effectiveness and may have helped students hit their goal. However, if the goal is not met, the coach and teacher can revisit the checklist to see if the strategy needs to be taught differently.

Coaches who explain strategies in precise and provisional ways foster high-quality implementation yet give teachers the freedom to use their professional discretion to modify teaching strategies to better meet students' needs.

The next step is modeling. To understand how to implement teaching strategies, teachers need to see them being implemented by someone else. The coaches from Beaverton, Oregon, found that modeling can occur in at least five ways.

**In the classroom.** Teachers report that they prefer that coaches only model the targeted practice, rather than the whole lesson. While coaches model, collaborating teachers complete checklists as they watch the demonstration. Coaches may ask someone to video record the model so that coach and teacher can review it later.

**In the classroom with no students.** Some teachers prefer that coaches model teaching strategies without students present.

**Co-teaching.** In some cases, such as when a lesson involves content unfamiliar to the coach, coach and teacher co-teach.

**Visiting other teachers' classrooms.** When teachers are learning new procedures or management techniques, they may

### IMPROVEMENT QUESTIONS

DID YOU HIT THE GOAL	
↓	↓
YES	NO
<b>Do you want to:</b>	<b>Do you want to:</b>
A. Continue to refine your use of the practice?	A. Revisit how you teach the new practice?
B. Choose a new goal?	B. Choose a new practice?
C. Take a break?	C. Stick with the practice as it is?





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**INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING CHECKLIST**

COACHING BEHAVIOR	OBSERVATION
<b>IDENTIFY</b>	
Teacher gets a clear picture of current reality by watching a video of their lesson or by reviewing observation data. (Video is best.)	
Coach asks the identify questions with the teacher to identify a goal.	
Teacher identifies a student-focused goal.	
Teacher identifies a teaching strategy to use to hit the goal.	
<b>LEARN</b>	
Coach shares a checklist for the chosen teaching strategy.	
Coach prompts the teacher to modify the practice if he or she wishes.	
Teacher chooses an approach to modeling that he or she would like to observe and identifies a time to watch modeling.	
Coach provides modeling in one or more formats.	
Teacher sets a time to implement the practice.	
<b>IMPROVE</b>	
Teacher implements the practice.	
Data is gathered (by teacher or coach, in class or while viewing video) on student progress toward to the goal.	
Data is gathered (by teacher or coach, in class or while viewing video) on teacher's implementation of the practice (usually on the previously viewed checklist).	
Coach and teacher meet to discuss implementation and progress toward the goal.	
Teacher makes modifications until the goal is met.	

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choose to visit other teachers' classrooms to see how they implement them.

**Watching video.** Teachers can also see a model of a teaching strategy by watching a video, either from a video sharing website or provided by the coach.



**Instructional coaches monitor how teachers implement the chosen teaching strategy and whether students meet the goal.**

Coaches can accomplish this by video recording classes and sharing the video with collaborating teachers so they can assess for themselves how they implemented the new teaching strategies and whether students have hit the identified goals.

Many goals cannot be seen by looking at video, so coaches may have to gather observation data, or teachers and coaches may have to review assessment data or student work.

Next, coach and teacher get together to talk about how the strategy was implemented, and especially whether students hit the goal. This conversation usually involves these questions:

1. What are you pleased about?
  2. Did you hit the goal?
  3. If you hit the goal, do you want to identify another goal, take a break, or keep refining the current new practice?
  4. If you did not hit the goal, do you want to stick with the chosen practice or try a new one?
  5. If you stick with the chosen practice, how will you modify it to increase its impact? (Revisit the checklist.)
  6. If you choose another practice, what will it be?
  7. What are your next actions?
- (See table on p. 14.)

When teacher and coach meet, they should use these questions to focus their conversation. Many coaches begin by asking teachers what they think went well. Following that, they discuss whether they met the goal.

When teachers reach their goals, coaches ask whether they want to set and pursue other goals or take a break from coaching. When teachers don't reach their goals, they identify changes that need to be made.

Teachers and coaches keep moving forward by modifying the way they use the identified teaching strategies, trying another strategy, or sticking with an identified teaching strategy until they reach the goal. (See table on p. 16.)

**MEASURE OF EFFECTIVENESS**

The instructional coaching cycle is only one element of effective coaching programs. Effective coaches also need professional learning that ensures they understand how to navigate the complexities of helping adults, have a deep understanding

of a comprehensive, focused set of teaching practices, communicate effectively, lead effectively, and work in systems that foster meaningful professional learning (Knight, 2007, 2011, 2013).

However, as important as those factors are, it may be most important that coaches understand how to move through the components of an effective coaching cycle that leads to improvements in student learning.

Instructional coaches who use a proven coaching cycle can partner with teachers to set and reach improvement goals that have an unmistakable, positive impact on students' lives. And that should be the measure of the effectiveness of any coaching program.

**Instructional coaches who use a proven coaching cycle can partner with teachers to set and reach improvement goals that have an unmistakable, positive impact on students' lives.**

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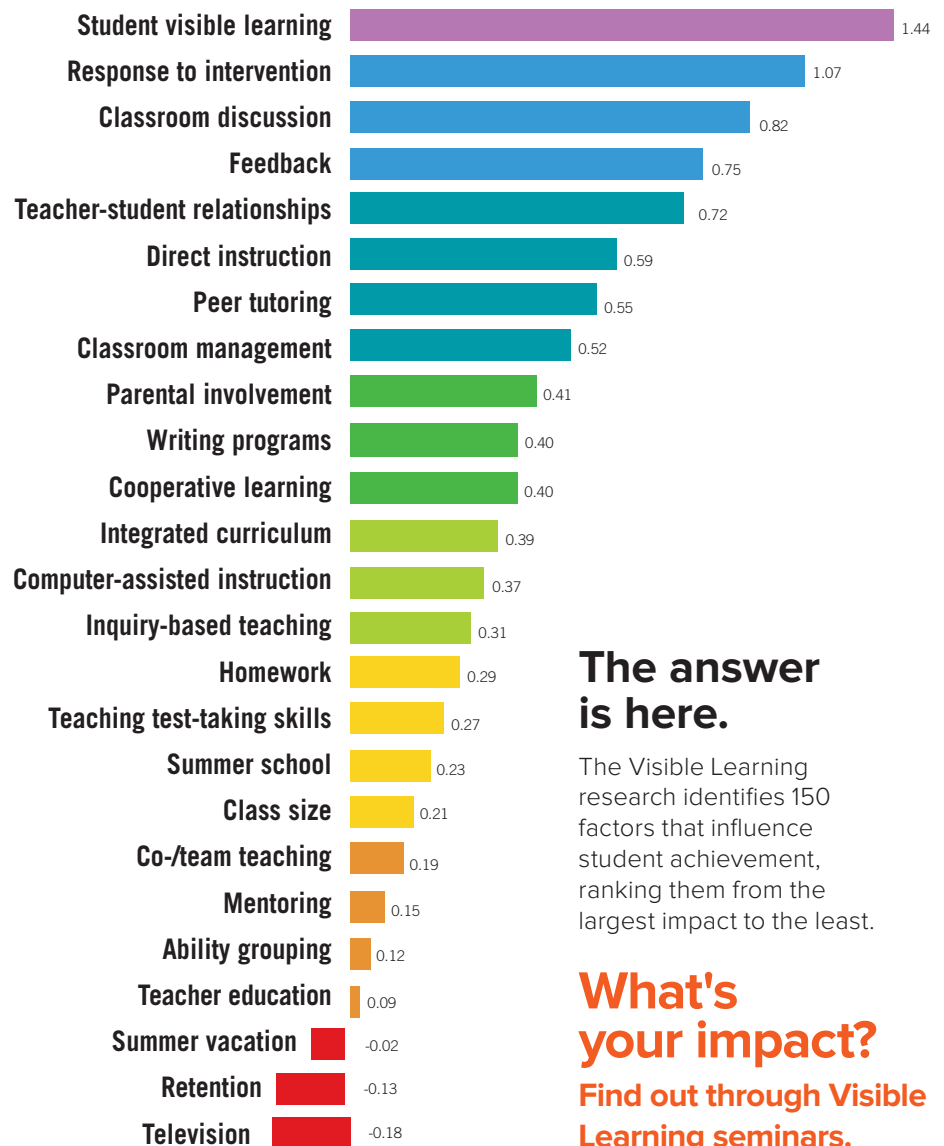
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# PROBLEM SOLVERS

*In fall 2013,* Boston Public Schools math content specialist Christine (Christy) Connolly met with the principal of the Hurley School, a dual-language school in Boston, Massachusetts. The principal outlined the strengths and needs for mathematics instruction in the school and possible areas of concern. She then asked Connolly to meet with teacher leader Sara Zrike to create a plan to improve instruction. What follows is Zrike's story.

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## TEACHER LEADER TEAMS WITH CONTENT SPECIALIST TO STRENGTHEN MATH INSTRUCTION

By Sara Zrike and Christine Connolly

**I**n early November 2013, I (Sara) started talking to Christy about visiting the Hurley School. I felt that the Hurley had spent considerable time transitioning to the Common Core State Standards on literacy, but little time addressing the shifts in math. I worried that our math classes were no longer rigorous enough to meet these more demanding standards.

Christy and I decided that she would do a round of observations in K-8 classrooms, specifically on the types of questions that teachers were asking students during math class. I created a schedule for her to visit classrooms for 20-minute intervals to see as many grades as possible and arranged for her to meet with Jen Muhammad, the math facilitator and 4th-grade teacher, and me to plan next steps.

When Jen and I met with Christy during her visit, she shared with us her initial thoughts after visiting classrooms. She noted that teachers were following the pacing guides, but that their level of questioning was not engaging students in higher-level thinking. The three of us discussed how to address this low level of questioning with grade-level teams during our common planning time meetings in January. Christy agreed to type up the transcript of the questions she heard in classrooms, in no particular order, for use during common planning time.

### FUNNELING VS. FOCUSING

Over the next few weeks, I collaborated with Jen and Christy to plan the agenda (see p. 22). Christy suggested we read the article, “Questioning our patterns of ques-

tioning” (Herbal-Eisenmann & Breyfogle, 2005), which discussed the difference between funneling (leading) and focusing (more open-ended) questions during math class.

I looked at trends in the observations that Christy recorded. In addition to the transcript from Christy’s visit, I created a list of questions I observed in Jen’s classroom. I felt that to get buy-in, I needed to show teachers what this looked like in a real classroom in their own school. We decided to ask teachers to read the article before common planning time and be prepared to discuss it. We planned for this work to occur over two sessions of common planning time so that teachers could leave with next steps for their own classrooms.

For two weeks in January 2014, I attended the common planning time sessions in all grade levels. Teachers discussed the data trends around questioning that Christy provided, connected this work to the Common Core, sorted the questions from Jen’s classroom into funneling and focusing piles, discussed the article, practiced how to convert some of the questions from the Hurley transcript from funneling to focusing, and planned for next steps in their own teaching.

Teachers said they had no idea that they were asking so many funneling questions and felt that it would be easy to make some of the same questions more focusing. All teachers left the two meetings with actionable items and with the knowledge that Christy would be back for another round of observations in March.

### SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT

When Christy returned in March 2014 for her follow-up observation, Jen and I met with her to discuss her find-



Sara Zrike



Christine Connolly

ings. She reported, “The improvement efforts regarding questioning in mathematics at the Hurley over the past three to four months was evident during this second round of observations. A majority of the questions asked by teachers probed students to explain how they solved a problem, why they solved it that way, and how do they know they problem solved correctly. Often, teachers exhibited longer wait times, which is necessary when asking cognitively demanding questions requiring significant language in the answers. The funneling questions have decreased significantly, allowing students to think critically through their own processes.”

After comparing her notes to her last observation, Christy made suggestions for next steps, and this was shared with the staff.

Overall, the math question cycle of inquiry was quite successful. Initially, teachers seemed a bit reluctant to look at Christy’s transcript for fear that it would unveil poor instruction. However, through readings, observations, and first-hand experiences with classroom practices, teachers were able to discuss their own strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers eventually felt comfortable pointing out which questions in the transcripts were theirs. Ultimately, they recognized that small changes, such as altering the order of words in a question, could yield big results for deepening student thinking.

A 5th-grade teacher later told me that she had become much more aware of how she asked questions and was actively making sure she asked more focusing than funneling questions. In fact, “focusing vs. funneling” has now become a part of the Hurley vernacular. This new and improved awareness and level of questioning allows for more student-to-student discourse in class, informs the teacher of any misconceptions that need to be addressed, and deepens mathematical thinking.

The ultimate goal of effective professional learning is improved student learning. In August 2104, preliminary Hurley

## COMMON PLANNING TIME AGENDA:

MATHEMATICAL QUESTIONING AT THE HURLEY K-8

### Big question:

How can we facilitate rigorous student conversation, as opposed to teacher-to-student conversation, through the types of questions we ask?

### The data show:

- In five out of 10 classes, teacher talk was more frequent than student talk.
- In three out of 10 classes, students offered comments and questions regarding other students’ work without prompting.
- In seven out of 10 classes, teachers asked questions in back-and-forth style.
- In three out of 10 classrooms, teachers illuminated misconceptions as learning opportunities (i.e. found errors that are common and had a discussion).

### Agenda:

- Establish connections between this work and the Massachusetts State Frameworks for Mathematics, including the Standards for Mathematical Practice.
- Sort questions from Ms. Muhammad’s math lesson.
  - What did you notice?
  - How did you sort? Why?
  - How is this connected to the article “Questioning our patterns of questioning.”
- Discuss the article “Questioning our patterns of questioning.”
  - Aha! moments.
  - What types of questions do you think you ask in your classroom?
- Identify the types of questions in Hurley School classrooms.
  - One color = funneling questions; another color = focusing questions.
  - What did you notice about questioning at the Hurley?
- Practice rewriting funneling questions as focusing questions.
  - How can these questions be rewritten to encourage student-to-student discourse, extend mathematical thinking, and allow students to learn from misconceptions?
- Where do we go from here?
  - What are the implications from this article and these activities for your own teaching?
  - What is one takeaway?

School Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System data showed student improvement in math. The percentage of students who scored proficient or higher was 65%, a 5% increase from the year before. The composite performance index for English language learners went from 75.3 to 78.9, and the overall student growth percentile went from 47 to 50.5. In fall 2014, the Hurley K-8 received a

letter of commendation from the Massachusetts State Department of Education for narrowing proficiency gaps.

### NEXT STEPS

This year, I am working to implement some of Christy’s suggestions for next steps in math. These include increasing opportunities for student-to-student talk

*Continued on p. 29*



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# TALKING POINTS

**DATA  
DISPLAYS  
ARE AN  
EFFECTIVE  
WAY TO  
ENGAGE  
TEACHERS**

By Alyson Adams, Dorene Ross, Jamey Burns, and Lauren Gibbs

Although many models of coaching exist, one that promotes a high level of active adult learner engagement is instructional coaching using Jim's Knight's partnership coaching model (Knight, 2007), in which teachers engage in the coaching cycle with a coach or peer and have significant voice in shaping their own learning.

The power of instructional coaching comes through teachers' active involvement in choosing the focus for coaching and their engagement in interpreting data collected during the coaching observation. Consistent with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), this element of teacher voice through active learning processes helps to "promote deep understanding of new learning and increase motivation to implement it" (p. 42).

In our work with coaches using Knight's partnership model of instructional coaching, we have found that the quality of the data display dramatically influences the conversations that occur. To that end, a program created by the

Lastinger Center at the University of Florida is helping instructional coaches become effective change agents in their schools by using a professional learning design that includes creating high-quality data displays to engage teachers in conversation about instruction.

The yearlong program begins with a four-day summer institute. During monthly follow-up meetings, coaches bring videos of themselves conducting coaching conversations in which they share and discuss data displays with their coaching partners. Coaches receive targeted feedback on their growing coaching skills based on a rubric that examines their ability to establish a focus, develop a strong data display, and conduct a collaborative coaching conversation.

This ongoing, job-embedded model allows coaches to implement their new learning in their context with support. Through this work over time, we have observed that creating effective data displays has been both the most problematic for teachers and the most powerful when done well.

#### THE POWER OF THE DATA DISPLAY

A descriptive, nonjudgmental data display that captures a teacher's prac-

#### IS YOUR DATA DISPLAY HIGH-QUALITY?

- Is the data display responsive to the teacher's guiding question and designed to lead/guide the coaching conversation?
- Are data nonevaluative, descriptive, and easy to understand? Try to avoid interpretation.
- Is the data display brief — no more than two pages long?
- Does the data display focus on only one key area of practice?
- Does the data display reflect data collected during the entire observation?
- Did you and the teacher agree on the data collection plan and data display?

tice around an identified focus provides the foundation for a productive collaborative coaching conversation. The data display is a visual representation of what the coach observed. The coach uses the display to engage the teacher in conversation about instruction. It ensures that the coach steps out of the role of evaluator, allowing coach and teacher to discuss what the data show.

Clear, descriptive data enable the teacher to feel ownership of successes and challenges in his or her teaching because the data display provides a snapshot of classroom practice that the teacher can recognize and analyze.

The data display leads the conversation. If the coach wants to raise an issue

**SAMPLE DATA DISPLAY** ELEMENTARY LEVEL

**Teacher focus:** Student engagement

**Key practice:**

- Teacher provides multiple learning opportunities involving a range of learning methods, including hands-on activities that lead to student participation and attention.

**Teacher question:** Are children actively engaged in learning throughout my lesson?

- Begin five or 10 minutes into the lesson.
- Do one tally for each student in the room. Estimate if necessary.
- Do a tally once every three minutes for 15 minutes.

	TIME 1	TIME 2	TIME 3	TIME 4	TIME 5
Listening to or watching the teacher or another student					
Reading or writing alone					
Reading or writing with a partner					
On-task talking (e.g. partner work or one student answering a question)					
Every person response (e.g. choral response, white board, thumbs up)					
Off task					
Probably zoned out					
Other					

the teacher has not considered, the coach can point to data for the teacher to review, ensuring that any judgments developed are either generated collaboratively or by the teacher. The teacher feels ownership of the feedback and sets goals for future learning and more coaching.

Before participating in our program, many coaches used an observational checklist, a district instructional framework, or their own conceptions of high-quality instruction to observe the teacher and provide feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. At the suggestion of coaches in the program, we changed the term for what coaches do in classrooms from “observation” to “data collection” to highlight this important conceptual shift in their work.

Through this model of using data displays to lead coaching conversations, coaches we have worked with are realizing powerful results with teachers. The use of data displays creates a structure for the conversation and allows teachers to interpret and own the data.

One coach said, “Creating data displays after the observations gave me time to prepare questions that would lead to self-reflection by the teacher. I included the date, time, class period, focus question, and Marzano indicator on the display. Graphs and charts were created to display the information collected. Allowing teachers to look at the data and draw conclusions is a

positive approach to coaching. Teachers lead the conversations by discussing their interpretation of the data. Coaches help facilitate the discussion by asking questions about the display. Teachers can then make informed decisions about their own pedagogy.”

One of the teachers being coached added, “Data displays are essential. They are concrete evidence of what happened during the observation, and they can’t be ignored. The display provided me a fresh perspective on my class.”

Although coaches easily see the power and importance of the data display, collecting data is a radical shift for many, and developing a high-quality data display is a new and challenging skill. Here are the elements for creating a strong data display.

**CREATING A STRONG DATA DISPLAY**

**Connect to one key area of practice.** The data display must be clearly connected to the guiding question the teacher has asked, and that guiding question must be clearly linked to one key area of practice in the instructional framework used by the district or early learning community.

If the focus is too broad, there is danger that the data display will resemble a good practice checklist. Several coaches experienced difficulty creating data displays because the teacher’s opening question was a broad statement: “Just come in and tell

**SAMPLE DATA DISPLAY** EARLY CHILDHOOD LEVEL**Teacher focus:** Instructional support**Key practice:**

- Teacher facilitates concept development by linking concepts to what students already know.
- Teacher facilitates concept development by providing real-world examples of concepts.

**Teacher question:** Am I supporting the development of new concepts by linking new learning to what students already know and providing real-world examples?

Note: Before collecting data, ask the teacher to identify key concepts or vocabulary that will be part of the activity. If an important term or concept emerges during the activity, record that as well. List all important concepts in the activity — even if there are no links to real-world or previous knowledge.

Vocabulary term or concept	Teacher talk (or elicited student talk) that links concept to what students already know (record exact language)	Teacher talk (or elicited student talk) that provides real-world example of concept (record exact language)

me what I need to work on.”

In those cases, the coach’s first task is to gently push the teacher to identify one focus to guide the observation. Until the teacher selects an area for improvement, coaching cannot occur. To help coaches make this shift, we provide samples of data displays for commonly asked questions, and we offer a data display format that requires them to list the instructional focus area, key practices, and the teacher’s question. Our guideline is that the teacher should target no more than two key practices.

**Align data to the guiding question.** The data display must specifically provide data that match the guiding question. For example, the data display created for a teacher focused on student engagement (see sample on p. 26) is substantively different than the one focused on concept development (see sample above).

Because of this, coaches need to use judgment and expertise in developing the data display. Providing a selection of potential data displays for common teacher questions helps coaches get started in the data collection process and provides a model for them to follow as they begin to develop their own displays.

**Make it clear and simple.** The data display must be easy to understand. Notice that both sample data displays include explicit directions about how the data are collected. Explicit

data collection directions clarify what data to collect and how to collect it. This often means the coach suggests a data collection/display tool for the teacher to consider.

Explicit directions about data collection also help keep the coach focused on data and mean that the collected data can be interpreted by the teacher with minimal explanation by the coach, helping to keep the coach from slipping into evaluation during the conference. It also helps the teacher own the data.

In order for data to be easily understood, the coach must be cautious about the amount of data collected. In the sample on student engagement, data are represented by tallies that are easy for the teacher to examine. In the sample on instructional support, the data involve reading text (the language used by the teacher), but the language is categorized by type and concept. This makes it possible for the teacher and coach to chunk the data for analysis and conversation.

As a general guideline, we suggest to coaches that a data display should be no longer than two pages. The clear focus on one or two key practices also prevents a coach from focusing on too much data in one observation.

**Use specifics.** The data should communicate what happened over the entire observation period. In the sample on student engagement, the coach collects data about the

**SAMPLE OF COMPLETED DATA DISPLAY**

**Teacher focus:** Wait time

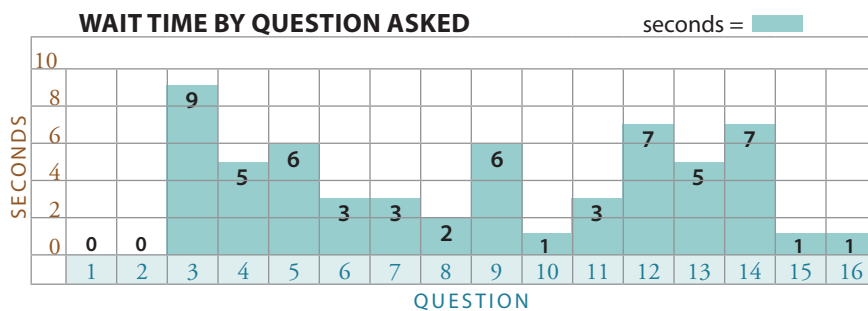
**Key practice:**

- Teacher provides wait time after posing questions in order to give students time to think and process.

**Teacher question:** Am I providing enough thinking time after I ask questions?

- Begin five minutes into the lesson.
- Write down each question the teacher asks and wait time (seconds) for each.

	QUESTION	WAIT TIME (seconds)
1	How many cuts?	0
2	So how many cuts are we making?	0
3	Does anyone know how fossils and coal are made?	9
4	Take a look at the pictures. What do you see?	5
5	Is there anything in the world that reminds you of this?	6
6	Is there anything in the real world that can help you remember what a mineral is?	3
7	Does anyone remember anything else about minerals?	3
8	How can we test minerals?	2
9	How else can we figure out a mineral?	6
10	What does luster mean?	1
11	What does origin mean?	3
12	Where do you think we would find the most igneous rocks?	7
13	What root word do you see in the word metamorphic?	5
14	What else have we learned that has the word morph in it?	7
15	What does metamorphosis mean?	1
16	Do we understand difference between sedimentary and metamorphic?	1



engagement of every student at fixed intervals over a 15-minute block of instruction. A data display that simply records who is engaged without focusing on time blocks can be misleading rather than illuminating: A student who is engaged for 12 minutes and disengaged for three might be tallied in a disengaged category along with a student who was disengaged for all 15 minutes.

In the sample on instructional support, the coach lists every concept the teacher plans to introduce and any other major concepts introduced over the entire period as well as the language the teacher uses to provide links to previous experience or real-world examples. In this way, the teacher might “see” that while she is carefully linking some concepts to previous experience, others, important for children’s understanding of the lesson, are not as carefully developed.

**Be descriptive, not interpretive or evaluative.** The data display must present descriptive data rather than interpretive data. Notice that the data display in the sample on student engagement recognizes that engagement itself is a judgment and provides a “probably” category that the coach can use when engagement isn’t clear. This instrument enables the coach and teacher to engage in a conversation about what engagement is and how engagement should be judged.

The sample on instructional support asks the coach to write the language used by the teacher so that they can explore how the teacher is linking to previous experience and real-world examples. If the coach simply recorded a tally in the columns, the data would reflect the coach’s evaluation of whether the teacher had made the link, and the conversation would not be able to focus on the quality of connections or missed opportunities.

A completed data display is shown at left. In this display, the teacher wanted data related to her use of wait time after posing questions. In this data display, the questions the teacher asked along with the number of seconds of wait time are recorded on both a chart and a graph.

There is no interpretation here: Data are recorded as agreed upon by the teacher and coach. During the coaching conversation, the teacher can interpret what is happening guided by careful probing and prompts from the coach to encourage self-reflection and deep understanding by the teacher.

In our work with coaches, we find that coaches must develop a balance between ensuring data are descriptive rather than evaluative while simultaneously making the data digestible. For example, if a teacher is working on higher-order questioning and the coach categorizes questions as higher- or lower-order, that judgment may eliminate important avenues for conversation about the exact nature and purpose of higher-order questioning.

Instead, we encourage coaches to record teacher questions and the approximate length of student responses (or exact language if possible) so teachers can begin to examine the connection between questioning and student thinking rather than focusing on whether questions fit a particular category.

### THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION AND CRITIQUE

Learning to create strong data displays requires strong knowledge of instructional practice. In addition to providing coaches with tips, samples, and instructor feedback, we have found that opportunities to work collaboratively to create data displays and bring sample data displays to group meetings for peer critique and revision are critically important in improving the quality of data displays and increasing the power and impact of coaching conversations.

### Problem solvers

*Continued from p. 22*

over teacher-to-student talk, spending more time unpacking the Common Core math standards, and discussing their implication for student learning.

Additionally, I would like to do a similar round of observations and common planning times with questioning and text-dependent questions in literacy. I would like to see if the work we did around questioning in math at the Hurley had any effect on literacy instruction.

I will collaborate with the literacy coach to plan and follow up on these common planning times. I believe that professional learning that highlights best practices and has realistic, specific takeaways has the most impact on student achievement.

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Through these strategies, teachers and coaches we have worked with report changes in teacher practice. One teacher connected her growth directly to the use of a clear, concise data display: “From the organization of the data display, I was quickly able to discern the types of questions I asked my students. I was able to make specific changes to my teaching as a result.”

Although not all teachers directly link their learning to the data display, many appreciate the value of having another set of eyes to help them examine their practice. The data display is a tool coaches use to enable teachers to see what they saw and thus engage in collaborative professional conversations that change teacher thinking and practice.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HURLEY SCHOOL

- Unpack the math standards by grade level.
- Consider how the Common Core’s Standards for Mathematical Practice are evident and are planned for during student learning.
- Use formative assessment as a way to inform practice day-to-day.
- Encourage staff to participate in professional learning when possible.

— Christine Connolly

**a teacher leader at Hurley K-8 School and Christine Connolly (cconnolly@bostonpublicschools.org) is director of Network E Academics for Boston Public Schools. ■**



# WHAT WE LEARNED FROM A TOMATO

## PARTNERING WITH A CONTENT EXPERT PLANTS NEW IDEAS FOR INSTRUCTION

By Bradley A. Ermeling

**R**esearchers from the Pearson Research and Innovation Network investigating partnerships between teacher teams and outside content experts got a close-up look at how these relationships impact teachers' instructional practice.

The partnership model they have been studying is called Learning Studios, developed by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Learning Studios are project-based learning environments in which interdisciplinary teacher teams collaborate with local scientists, researchers, and university faculty to develop and implement yearlong project investigations with students (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, n.d.).

Through these partnerships, teachers gain access to

experts' extensive content knowledge, exposure to latest research, practical experience in the field, and resources and perspectives that can help teachers expand their professional knowledge and move beyond persistent images of traditional practice (Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, 2003; National Research Council, 2012).

Using the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future 2013-14 Learning Studios project in Maryland, Pearson researchers conducted case studies of planning meeting interactions between outside experts and teacher teams at secondary schools, explored the effects of these interactions on teachers' instructional plans, and examined specific actions that might be important for coaches and experts to productively partner with teacher teams (Ermeling & Yarbrow, in press).

### HIGH SCHOOL CASE STUDY

In one case study, a research fellow from the National





Institutes of Health partnered with an interdisciplinary teacher team from an urban high school in Maryland. The high school team included six veteran teachers responsible for English, math, science, and technology education.

For the 2013-14 school year, the high school team worked on a project called Tomatosphere, sponsored by the Canadian Space Agency. The project's goal was to engage students in the study of life support requirements for extended space exploration.

Students would design and conduct a scientific experiment with dependent and independent variables by comparing germination rates and plant growth for an experimental group of primed tomato seeds (i.e. presoaked in water) and a control group of unprimed seeds. The project also included resources for cross-curricular application in areas such as nutrition, energy, weather, and environmental studies (Canadian Space Agency, n.d.).

During the initial summer collaborative design sessions, the teachers and the research fellow agreed that it would be valuable to connect some of her studies on health and aging to why lycopene or other nutrients might be beneficial and why tomatoes, which are rich in lycopene, might be a viable crop for space travel. However, while conducting research on lycopene over the summer, the research fellow discovered there was limited evidence to support the nutritional benefits of lycopene supplements.

Between the summer and fall planning sessions, the research fellow offered teachers three scenarios for how they might approach a lesson involving the idea of supplements and health. The options included:

**Through partnerships, teachers gain access to experts' extensive content knowledge, exposure to latest research, practical experience in the field, and resources and perspectives that can help teachers expand their professional knowledge.**

- Ignore the role of lycopene and focus on antioxidants in general;
- Discuss the studies pointing to limited evidence for lycopene and use them as an opportunity to engage students in critical thinking; or
- Press forward with their plan to discuss the benefits of lycopene and focus on the few available studies that demonstrated an effect.

This served as a launch point for the team's planning discussions at the next design session in September. The following edited excerpt from that session captures the changes in instruction that resulted from the research fellow's suggestions.

#### **PLANNING DISCUSSION EXCERPT**

**Teacher 1:** Since most of us have introduced the Tomatosphere project design, I was thinking we could have you come in and they could learn, "Why tomato?" — with the lycopene.

**Research fellow:** I was looking online for evidence of lycopene and human health, and, unfortunately, there is not very strong support. So the direct role of lycopene itself seems to be pretty tenuous. It doesn't seem to have a great

connection to human health. But I think that this could be a learning opportunity. Another option is that you can use it as a critical thinking opportunity to have them look at the evidence, see what there is, and have them decide if it's good evidence.

**Teacher 1:** I was going to go with that.

**Research fellow:** It could be a little bit trickier, but it may be rewarding.

**Teacher 1:** I like both things, but what I was thinking when you started talking is not just learning facts from a textbook, but learning how scientists learn the science that we teach in our classrooms. So when you just said that there's not a whole bunch of evidence to say that lycopene is perfect, I thought it was good for students to see that it's an ongoing process.

**Research fellow:** Looking at different studies and identifying why they're flawed or why they don't agree with one another is not only teaching the material of what evidence there is for lycopene in health but also critical thinking skills.

**Teacher 1:** So maybe you could give them something and then say, "Does this look like it's reliable data?"

**Research fellow:** What if I went to the studies and looked at the abstracts and wrote a simplified version? Then I could provide a couple of abstracts about lycopene and, let's say, prostate cancer. The students could read it over and hold up a letter grade for how good they think the study supports it and say why they think it's a great study or why they

think it's a bad study.

**Teacher 1:** That's a good idea.

**Teacher 2:** I like that idea.

**Teacher 3:** I think it directly relates to what we've been talking about for our writing samples for claim, evidence, reasoning. We've been discussing having students as a goal for the year increase their ability to write a scientific explanation. The components of a scientific explanation are claim, evidence, reasoning. So if they can evaluate a simplified version of the abstract, they're processing through that filter of, "Does this evidence support this claim or not and why?"

**Research fellow:** I could write up the abstracts, and you could print them out and give them to the students to read the night before so they have some time to digest it. And then I could come give a 15-minute talk about lycopene and human health or what makes a good research study solid.

**Teachers 1 & 2:** I like what makes a good research study solid.

## EXPANDING HORIZONS

These interactions represent a clear example of teachers

expanding horizons of instructional plans as a direct result of outside expert contributions. After alerting teachers to oversimplified claims about the benefits of lycopene, the research fellow presented the team with a wider range of instructional options to consider that might better support their learning goals.

In follow-up focus groups, teachers described how their lesson plans became more focused on helping students think critically about the scientific process than would have been possible without the outside assistance. They also described how these lesson changes directly supported important learning outcomes for students.

## KEY FACILITATIVE ACTIONS

Pearson researchers noted facilitative actions by the external expert that contributed to teachers' rethinking of the project design and instructional plans.

**Adapt expertise to local needs.** The research fellow stressed the importance of listening, genuinely tuning in to the needs of the group, and learning from the group's knowledge and experience to effectively adapt and assist the emerging project.

This approach not only laid a foundation of trust and shared understanding, but also helped the outside partner gain insight into teachers' thinking, sometimes revealing important gaps in lesson plans or a specific blind spot where teachers might need assistance.

**Follow up between meetings.** After learning from teachers and gaining knowledge of their local context, the research fellow was able to apply her expertise and contribute ideas through diligent follow-up work between meetings. The research fellow not only made a substantial effort to review existing literature on lycopene, she carefully outlined three specific instructional options for how they might approach this teaching opportunity. Teachers reported that they appreciated the follow-through and responsiveness.

**Judiciously apply pressure.** After taking time to listen and develop a shared understanding of project plans, the research fellow also looked for critical junctures to stretch teachers' thinking.

In the interaction between the research fellow and teachers related above, she patiently guided teachers to new insights and judiciously applied pressure to expand their vision of instructional possibilities. While she had clear ideas of instructional activities that might help increase scientific rigor and critical thinking, she introduced these ideas through a sequence of understated facilitative moves rather than aggressively asserting opinions or overtly leveraging her authority as an outside expert or researcher.

She frequently chose words that softened her tone to engender respect and cultivate openness, while at the same time pushing teachers to consider an alternative instructional approach. She reinforced teachers' interest with slightly more direct state-

*Continued on p. 39*

**After alerting teachers to oversimplified claims about the benefits of lycopene, the research fellow presented the team with a wider range of instructional options to consider that might better support their learning goals.**

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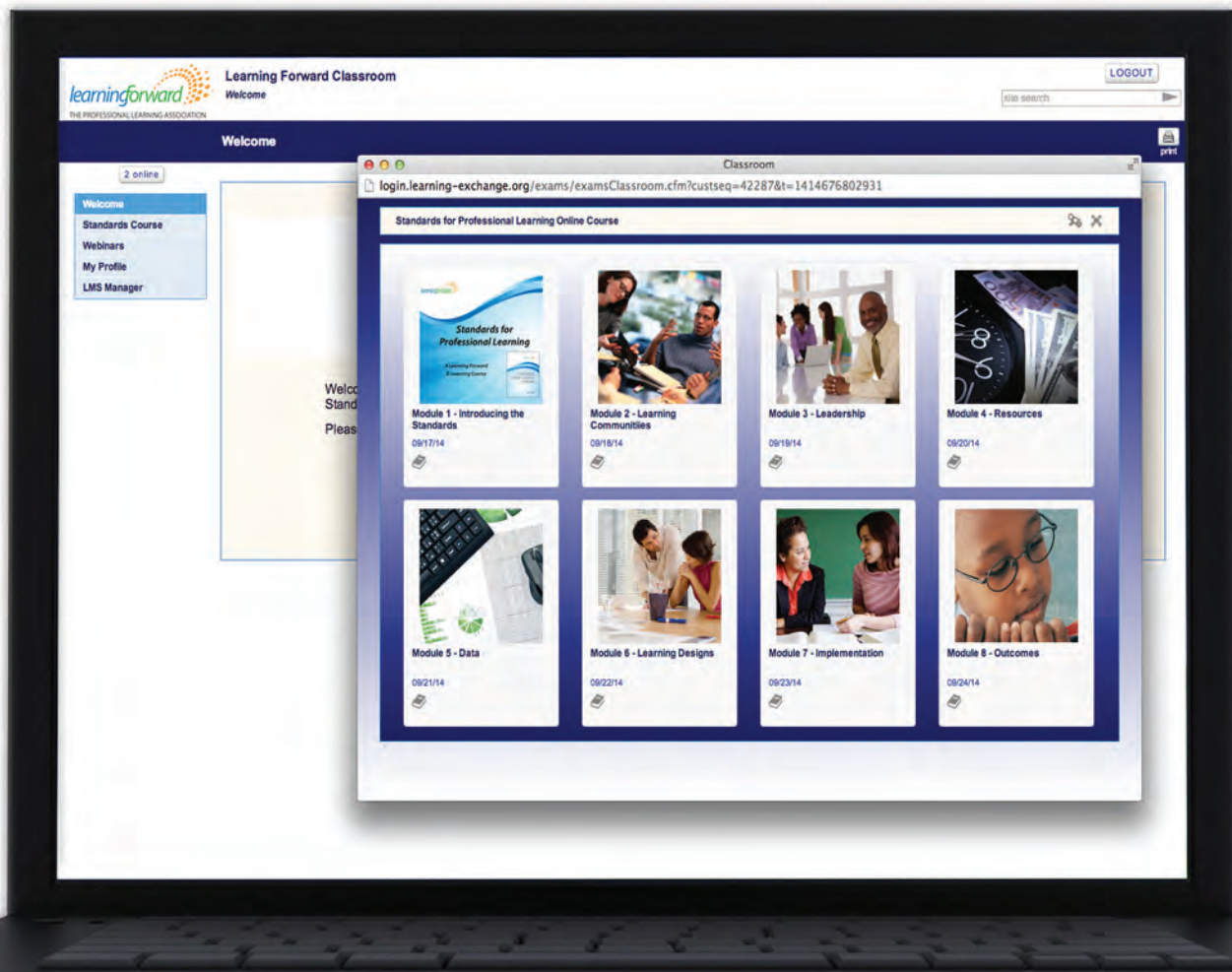
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**CONTENT-FOCUSED ROUTINES  
SUPPORT LEARNING FOR EVERYONE  
— INCLUDING COACHES**

**By Donna DiPrima Bickel,  
Tabetha Bernstein-Danis,  
and Lindsay Clare Matsumura**

**L**earning how to give effective feedback can be a difficult task for teacher leaders. This is especially true for what is called “hard feedback”— that is, feedback that challenges the teacher’s practice and therefore may cause some level of professional discomfort.

Educators at the University of Pittsburgh’s Institute for Learning have developed a coaching model that eliminates the need for hard feedback. This coaching model, called content-focused coaching, sets clear expectations about outcomes for applying new pedagogical practices in the classroom, uses routines that support everyone (including the coach) as learners, and relies on cognitive tools to guide conversation and provide substantive feedback. The institute has found that content-focused coaching allows coaches to be effective without resorting to hard feedback.

And the proof is in the results: A four-year (2006-10) Insti-



tute of Education Sciences randomized control trial that tested the effectiveness of content-focused coaching showed an increase in effective literacy instruction and student achievement (Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2013). Findings demonstrated that:

- 4th- and 5th-grade students in Title I schools performed better on the state achievement test than similar students in the comparison schools.

- Teachers scored higher on classroom observation measures related to the rigor and interactivity of text discussions than did teachers in the comparison schools.
- Teachers reported more intensity and variety of in-class assistance from literacy coaches than teachers in the comparison schools.

### WHAT IS CONTENT-FOCUSED COACHING?

Content-focused coaching is practice-based professional learning implemented at district, school, and classroom levels. Created by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh Learning Research and Development Center, the program was originally used in mathematics and later adapted for use in literacy instruction.

To date, content-focused coaching has been implemented by school districts and early childhood education programs in cities across the country, including Los Angeles, California; New York, New York; Denver, Colorado; Providence, Rhode Island; Austin and El Paso, Texas; Guilford, Connecticut; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

At the district level, the institute provides intensive professional learning to literacy coaches to ensure they have a high level of pedagogical expertise and ability to work effectively with teachers. District leaders and principals also participate to create a shared vision of effective teaching and to support coaches' work with teachers.

At the school level, literacy coaches use what they learn to work with teachers in professional learning groups and individually in their classrooms.

The institute works in districts to assist current coaches and help hire new ones. A practice-based hiring kit (McCarthy, Bickel, & Artz, 2010) educates district leaders in how to clearly define the coach's role, form criteria for selecting coaches, and create an application and hiring process to attract strong candidates.

Districts decide which grade levels of teachers a coach will work with during a school year, and all teachers in that grade level work with the coach. Focusing coaches' time on a particular grade level ensures that coaches have enough time to work intensively with teachers. More importantly,

focusing on particular grades — as opposed to particular teachers — promotes a culture of continuous improvement where all teachers — not just teachers who are new, seen to be struggling, or serve the lowest-performing students — participate.

The institute works with coaches and principals for two to three years. Coaches meet with teachers in grade-level teams weekly. They engage teachers in one-on-one conference cycles monthly or two to three times in a six- to eight-week period. These cycles include a preconference planning meeting; an in-classroom component that involves modeling, co-teaching, or observing teaching; and a post-conference to reflect on the lesson's impact on student learning.

During their first year, coaches learn new instructional models, which they practice and hone by teaching in front of other coaches. They become skilled lesson planners and, by working with other coaches individually and in small groups, they internalize the cognitive tools they will later use with teachers.

Once coaches start their work with teachers, they try out their new instructional strategies for teachers in the teachers' classrooms. Afterward, they reflect with teachers on the impact of the coach's instruction on student learning. Coaches also share with teachers the content-focused lesson plans they developed. This process establishes the coaches as master teachers and creates a learning culture where both teachers' and coaches' methods are up for reflection and analysis.

One coach said that having other coaches direct questions to him (in the lesson planning sessions) helped him by presenting issues he hadn't considered. When he ultimately met with teachers, he felt better prepared.

### KEY FEATURES

So how does content-focused coaching eliminate the need for hard feedback? Here are several features that support this way of working.

**Learning how to give effective feedback can be a difficult task for teacher leaders.**

**Right-size the goals.**

Content-focused coaching asks first that central office leaders work with principals to “right-size” the focus of the coach’s work. Right-sizing means describing the goal of the coaching initiative in manageable, observable, and realistic terms, given the amount of time and effort expected from all role groups (principals, coaches, and teachers). In the Institute of Education Sciences study, this meant focusing on improving 4th- and 5th-grade students’ reading comprehension by learning to engage students in rigorous, text-based discussions of worthy texts using open-ended, text-based questioning to support meaning-making.

**Establish clear expectations.**

Institute fellows work with teachers, principals, and key central office leaders to develop a common vision of the pedagogical practices, along with clear criteria for evaluation. In the Institute for Education Sciences study, the instructional practice was the Questioning the Author (Beck & McKeown, 2006) approach to text discussion, which was distilled into a set of guidelines. These guidelines form the criteria for fair and credible self-, peer, and coach evaluation of the new practice. (See text discussion guidelines at right.)

**Model receiving feedback.**

Coaches model pedagogical practices for teachers, who learn to take descriptive, nonjudgmental notes on what they see and hear the coach do and say that adheres to text discussion guidelines.

During repeated opportunities to observe these teaching models, teachers record evidence illustrating what the coach did that meets one or more of the criteria in the guidelines (e.g. Marilyn stopped reading in the middle of a paragraph to ask the students, “How does what we just learned in this passage fit with what we said before?”) and think about the lesson’s impact on student learning. Afterward, teachers discuss what they observed, using the evidence they wrote

**GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNING TEXT DISCUSSIONS OF LITERARY AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS**

BASED ON THE QUESTIONING THE AUTHOR APPROACH

Components	Approach
<b>Texts</b>	Select texts that contain a sufficient range of complexities to provide grist for students to build meaning.
<b>Major understandings</b>	Decide on the major ideas to be developed by students about the text. Where? How? By whom?
<b>Challenges to comprehension</b>	Determine where inferences are needed, where abstract language is used, where transitions are omitted or ineffective, how the text structure may pose difficulty.
<b>Text segments</b>	Decide where to stop to initiate discussion.
<b>Initial queries</b>	Intersperse open-ended questions during the first reading (rather than saving them until the end). Use questions that require students to describe and explain text ideas, rather than recall and retrieve words from text.
<b>Desired student responses</b>	Determine in advance the desired student responses that signal comprehension, and use them as the road map for the conversation.
<b>Follow-up questions</b>	Use questions that encourage student elaboration and development of ideas; listen carefully to student responses and take these into account when formulating follow-up questions; scaffold students’ thinking.
<b>Illustrations</b>	In general, if there are illustrations, present them after students have heard and responded to the related section of text.
<b>Background knowledge</b>	Use invitations for background knowledge judiciously to support meaning building but not to encourage students to tap into tangential experiences.
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Select some sophisticated words for direct attention after reading and discussion of the story are completed.

down, rather than merely stating unsupported opinions.

When coaches teach in front of others first, they demonstrate a willingness to be in the vulnerable position of the observed before taking on the role of observer. This lays the groundwork for a collegial and trusting relationship between teacher and coach that positions the coach as a thinking and discussion partner for teachers rather than as a judge of teacher performance.

Once teachers observe and give sub-

stantive feedback to the coach, they are more willing to present their practice to others and to listen to what others have to say about improving their practice.

**Combine group learning and one-on-one coaching.**

Content-focused coaching uses a gradual release of responsibility framework (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Coaches first provide teachers with video and live teaching models, then guided practice opportunities, and finally independent appli-

**LEARNING LAB: REFLECTION ROUNDS**

Teachers take descriptive notes as they observe a fellow (host) teacher teaching students. Participants provide substantive feedback about something they saw or heard the host teacher do that aligns with the practice under study and its impact on student learning.

**REFLECTION ONE: EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING****LEARNERS**

Use observation notes to address questions such as:

- What specific responses did students make that are:
  - Evidence of their understanding of the intended learning?
  - Evidence of misunderstandings or confusions?
  - Evidence of the impact of certain instructional moves?
- What might be the next learning for these students?

**HOST TEACHER:**

Reflect on evidence of student learning using experience teaching the lesson, knowledge of student strengths and needs, progress over time, classroom dynamics, etc.

- Respond or not to any of the questions posed for reflection or clarification.

**REFLECTION TWO: EVIDENCE OF TEACHER LEARNING AROUND FOCUS QUESTION****LEARNERS:**

Use observation notes to address questions such as:

- What did you see or hear the teacher or students say or do relative to the teacher's focus question?
- What questions do you have that might prompt reflection?

**HOST TEACHER:**

Use experience teaching this lesson to clarify or provide additional context based on the learners' reflections.

- Respond or not to any of the questions posed for reflection or clarification.

**REFLECTION THREE: COMMITMENT AND ACTION STEPS****LEARNERS AND HOST TEACHER REFLECT:**

- What was new learning for me about our learning focus question?
- How did this observation deepen my understanding?
- How did this observation challenge my thinking?
- What are the implications of this observation for my practice?
- What additional professional learning do I need to support or sustain the instructional practices observed in my school?
- What should our next learning be to build on this experience?

**REFLECTION FOUR: LESSON OBSERVATION PROCESS****LEARNERS AND HOST TEACHER REFLECT:**

Was this lesson observation a useful professional learning opportunity? Why or why not?

- In what ways was the reflection process meaningful? How could the process be improved?
- How and when will we revisit our learning from this observation?

ation (one-on-one coaching) in the classroom with substantive coach feedback. After refining their understanding of the practice with their coach, teachers teach a lesson in front of their peers. Through these steps, teachers move from awareness of a new approach to instructing students independently.

**Use routines and cognitive tools.**

One routine developed to support this vision of professional learning is the Learning Lab, in which teachers from the same school or across schools who teach the same content take notes while observing a fellow (host) teacher instruct students.

## EVIDENCE-BASED REASONING TOOL

THIS TOOL LENDS STRUCTURE TO PARTICIPANTS' COMMENTS.

Participants:

- Name what they saw or heard;
- Identify how it aligns with/illustrates something they've been studying;
- Say what this seems to indicate in terms of teacher or student learning; and
- Raise questions/comments about what they saw or heard.

1 Observations	2 Analysis	3 Interpretation of cause and effect	4 Questions or suggestions
<p>I SAW OR I HEARD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher provided a lot of information to students about the text they were about to read.</li> <li>• Bella said, "I'm not sure that's right. Can we look at that again?"</li> </ul>	<p>THIS SEEMS TO BE EVIDENCE OF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher is trying to build background knowledge.</li> <li>• Students' commitment to accuracy.</li> </ul>	<p>THIS LEADS ME TO THINK THAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher is trying to support student learning by scaffolding their reading.</li> <li>• Students have internalized the norms for classroom discussion.</li> </ul>	<p>I WONDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was this necessary or could they have determined some of this information for themselves while reading?</li> <li>• What did this teacher do to support students to take on this role for themselves?</li> </ul>

In a prescribed, round-robin sequence (see Learning Lab: Reflection Rounds on p. 37), teachers provide substantive feedback to the host teacher (after students leave) — specific, descriptive comments using the previously discussed criteria for effective implementation of the pedagogical practice — about something they saw or heard their peer do that aligns with the practice under study and its impact on student learning.

The Evidence-Based Reasoning Tool (see above) shapes the substantive feedback to the host teacher in the Learning Lab. It lends structure to participants' comments by asking them to describe what they saw or heard, identify how this aligns with or illustrates something they have been studying as a group, say what this seems to indicate in terms of teacher or student learning, and finally, raise questions or comments about what they saw or heard.

These tools reduce a teacher's anxiety about teaching in front of peers because they focus feedback on specific agreed-upon evidence/criteria, ensuring that judgments and evaluative language don't overshadow an analysis of teaching and learning.

Ideally, when professional learning communities are established and active, teachers can be both observer and observed, and the professional learning community becomes a venue for ongoing collaborative learning.

Using these cognitive tools and routines eliminates the need for hard feedback from coaches. It puts coaches and teachers on more equal footing and makes feedback about teaching more palatable because it is focused squarely on the very specific pedagogical practices they have been studying as a group and practicing independently and with the coach. The criteria establish clear expectations, and the evaluation by peers and coach is fair and credible.

## TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

A midsized urban school district used this learning sequence recently with its 9th-grade English language arts teachers. Teachers attempting new pedagogies struggled with how to be faithful to the design while adjusting it to fit student needs. The lab structure allowed a volunteer host teacher to explain how she used the institute's curricular materials with her class.

Here are observations from teachers who participated.

- "Teacher and coach organized feedback thematically and responded with thoughts for further reflection and practice. I saw an immediate problem-solving approach to feedback."
- "When [the teacher] was talking about giving kids more space so they could take more ownership over their learning ... it seemed that maybe [the teacher] came to a realization about that from what we said."
- "I feel that the Learning Lab did help support our previous professional development, as we had the opportunity to see much of what we discussed in theory actually put into practice. Seeing how [the teacher] took the lesson and crafted it to fit her classroom and teaching style showed me that there is a little flexibility for me to make this lesson fit my teaching style."

## COACHES AS VALUED FACULTY MEMBERS

Rather than altering power relations and learning how to give hard feedback, coaches need school administrators who communicate publicly agreed-upon evidence for student outcomes and right-sized, clear expectations for pedagogical practices. Administrators also need to position coaches as valued



faculty members on whom teachers can and should rely (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009).

When used regularly within professional learning communities, routines such as the Learning Lab, which focuses on agreed-upon criteria for evidence of teacher and student learning, along with tools like the Evidence-Based Reasoning Tool, which reshapes the conversation, making everyone a learner, establish the conditions necessary for improved teaching.

Content-focused coaching helps create these conditions by enacting effective coaching and opening dialogue among teachers. Teachers, as informed peers, can then contribute to each other's learning, enhancing their own professional development and expanding their ability to raise student achievement levels.

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## What we learned from a tomato

*Continued from p. 32*

ments such as, "It could be a little bit trickier, but it may be rewarding." She then added a few specific points of rationale as interest was building.

These subtle and judicious applications of pressure provided just enough stretch to help teachers grow beyond their existing visions of practice while not demanding so much as to close off communication or create resistance. She confronted gaps without being confrontational. She intentionally and carefully pursued opportunities to help teachers improve the design of project lessons and address important learning goals.

## INQUIRY AND EXPERTISE

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) write that "knowledge of practice" is generated "when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time as they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation" (p. 250). This case study provides a concrete example of that convergence between well-structured collaborative teacher inquiry and well-timed, purposeful involvement of outside expertise.

Changes in instructional plans documented in this example would be unlikely to occur without this combination. The research fellow's facilitative actions serve as a useful example for other coaches and experts working to foster expanded visions

of teaching and learning.

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By Francesca Pomerantz and Jacy Ippolito

**CUSTOM PROTOCOLS ENRICH  
COACHING CONVERSATIONS**

**D**iscussion-based protocols — an “agreed upon set of discussion or observation rules that guide coach/teacher/student work, discussion, and interactions” (Ippolito & Lieberman, 2012, p. 79) — can help focus and structure productive professional learning discussions.

However, while protocols are slowly growing into essential elements of professional learning in schools (Ippolito, 2010, 2013; Peterson, Taylor, Burnham, & Schock, 2009), there remains little research to

guide educators in the process of exploring and implementing protocols to advance specific instructional goals.

With this in mind, we have begun to document how teams of teachers explore and use protocols to support professional learning (Ippolito & Pomerantz, 2013/2014).

We investigated how the use of protocols enhanced professional learning among a group of reading specialists when Salem State University partnered with a suburban school district. The goal was to support eight elementary and two middle school reading specialists as they became data coaches, helping classroom teachers examine the implications of literacy data for their instruction.

This project took place in a northeast U.S. suburban school district with one high school, one middle school, and five elementary schools. Of the district's roughly 5,000 students, fewer than 20% are of African-American, Latino, or Asian descent, and fewer than 10% report that English is not their first language.

To document how the 10 middle and elementary reading specialists implemented protocol-based data meetings, we asked the following questions:

- Which protocols would teachers adopt, adapt, and find most useful when presented with an array of options?
- What processes would facilitate the adoption and implementation of the protocols?
- In what ways would protocols influence the quality of the conversations at instructional data meetings?

Here are the results of our research.

#### **Which protocols would teachers adopt, adapt, and find most useful when presented with an array of options?**

Over the 2011-12 school year, we conducted a series of 10 two-hour workshops to build reading specialists' capacity for designing and using protocols to lead instructional data meetings with teachers.

Using the collaborative assessment conference protocol, we began by examining two short case studies of struggling readers. In this protocol, a facilitator asks participants to make observations about student work or data brought by a presenting teacher, raise questions, and discuss the implications for teaching. Initially, one of us played the roles of both the presenting teacher and facilitator.

The reading specialists enjoyed sharing their expertise as participants in the conversation, examining data, and discussing ideas for instruction. In this first phase, as teach-

### **RESOURCES FOR ADOPTING AND ADAPTING PROTOCOLS FOR ADULT AND STUDENT WORK**

School Reform Initiative

[www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org)

Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse Tools

[www.literacycoachingonline.org/tools.html](http://www.literacycoachingonline.org/tools.html)

Project Zero's Visible Thinking Routines

[www.visiblethinkingpz.org](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org)

EngageNY Teaching Practices & Protocols

[www.engageny.org/resource/grades-3-5-ela-curriculum-appendix-1-teaching-practices-and-protocols](http://www.engageny.org/resource/grades-3-5-ela-curriculum-appendix-1-teaching-practices-and-protocols)

Continuum of Protocols

[http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/continuum\\_discussion\\_protocols.pdf](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/continuum_discussion_protocols.pdf)

#### **SPECIFIC PROTOCOLS USED IN THIS PROJECT**

Carousel brainstorm: For generating and displaying a group's ideas on multiple topics.

[www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/carousel\\_brainstorm\\_protocol.doc](http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/carousel_brainstorm_protocol.doc)

Collaborative assessment conference: For looking deeply at student work.

[www.schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/cac.pdf](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/cac.pdf)

ers new to protocols, they gained an appreciation for the focus and productivity of the protocol-based discussions.

We then turned over responsibility for facilitation and presentation to the reading specialists so that each participant played both roles in the first few sessions. Participants in the role of the presenting teacher wrote and brought in their own case studies based on real questions about students with whom they worked. These conversations had immediate implications for the presenting teachers' work with the

students, and the reading specialists valued the new and specific teaching suggestions they received from colleagues.

After experiencing firsthand the benefits of professional learning through protocol-based discussions, the reading specialists reflected on the process of using the protocol to structure the case study discussions. They identified advantages of using the protocol: increased professionalism, a common goal, mutual respect,

validation from colleagues for one's ideas, and highly focused, productive conversation.

While all agreed that the protocol was useful in structuring a conversation about an individual student, it quickly became clear that such extended conversations about individuals were rare in their school settings. They needed a protocol to discuss classroom data sets, not just individual students.

We reviewed other protocols from the School Reform Initiative website, and participants determined which ones might suit their purposes better. No single existing protocol fit the bill. As a result, one of the reading specialists drafted a protocol, based loosely on the collaborative assessment conference protocol, for use in grade-level meetings with classroom teachers specifically to discuss DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) and Fountas & Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment System data.

The newly designed protocol relied on four rounds of teacher observation and conversation: examining data, making observations about the data, sharing implications for practice based on observations, and reflecting on the conversation. (For a copy of the final protocol, see Ippolito & Pomerantz, 2013/2014.)

Reflecting on the project in a written survey, one participant cited the importance of the reading specialists collaboratively developing their own protocol: "I felt empowered in the implementation of our protocols for data team meetings because I had participated in the development of those protocols."

Another participant valued the formality of the protocols. She wrote: "The information, materials, and instruction by the consultants provided us with the opportunity to discuss and 'experience' the data meetings, which were always done informally. The formality improved the success!"

### **What processes would facilitate the adoption and implementation of the protocols?**

In the remaining sessions, reading specialists tried out the draft protocol in three small groups, switching roles, increasing their comfort level with facilitation, and revising the protocol in response to debriefing conversations.

At this point, questions about logistics and implementation loomed large. When would the instructional data meetings occur? Was there enough time? Who would cover teachers' classrooms? Who would inform the principal about the need for the meetings? How would the school and district leadership "sell" the meetings to teachers?

Here, the support of district leadership was essential. The assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction drafted a letter to classroom teachers explaining the purpose of the meetings and shared it with the reading specialists for their input.

It became clear that some of the reading specialists were anxious about their new roles as facilitators and data coaches. They were concerned about encountering resistance from colleagues and conversations that could get off track. They shared stories about teachers using meetings to complain about lack of time — both in the classroom and in their personal lives.

Consequently, the final session before the first instructional data meetings focused on two key questions: How might you explain your role at your first meeting with classroom teachers, and how will you explain the purposes and goals of the meetings? We provided several suggestions to get the reading specialists thinking about their introductory statements at their first instructional data meetings.

Recommendations included making statements regarding confidentiality (what is said in the room stays in the room), setting goals for working as a team to facilitate student learning and growth, and creating a definition and explanation of the importance of the facilitator's role. Participants then drafted and shared introductory statements of their role and the purpose of the meetings.

We used a carousel brainstorm protocol to elicit their concerns about what might get in the way of accomplishing the purpose/goals of the meetings, worries about working with colleagues, and the kinds of resistance they expected. They then discussed where the resistance might come from and the key messages teachers might need to hear in response. With these key messages in mind, participants revised their introductory statements.

Reconvening after the first instructional data meetings, the reading specialists reflected on their work and discussed next steps. Effective practices included reading specialists managing meetings in pairs of facilitators and timekeepers (a solution made possible by two reading specialists working together in each school) and sending data to teachers before the meetings. This allowed teachers to examine data in advance and provided more time for discussion. Finally, the group further tailored their protocol based on their experiences.

This careful scaffolding built confidence and eased implementation of the protocols. On the end-of-project survey, one reading specialist wrote, "Running through the protocols built my confidence to hold the instructional data meetings."

Another participant said, "This partnership has prepared



us to conduct different types of data meetings using protocols. It has given us the confidence to encourage rich conversation among our teachers with a mutual end goal — to move students along and encourage success.”

One participant said she valued “having us each take part of the case studies and follow the protocol so we feel more confident in leading our data meetings.” Another reading specialist said, “It gave me more confidence talking with colleagues.”

### In what ways would protocols influence the quality of the conversations at instructional data meetings?

In survey responses, reading specialists emphasized the value of protocols for promoting equity in speaking time and keeping discussions focused on the interpretation and implications of student data.

One reading specialist said, “Our data meetings and use of a protocol gave everyone a voice.” Another participant said classroom teachers valued the protocol: “I learned that the teachers want us to lead them in the right direction and respect the idea of using data to drive instruction. They saw the benefits of the protocol in keeping the meetings focused and productive — valuing their time.”

According to many of the reading specialists, the protocols led to productive conversations with teachers focused on teaching and next steps in instruction. Comments included:

- “We met with teachers to discuss the data that they collected on students. We discussed patterns and trends that they saw and how they could move their students forward in the classroom.”
- “[We looked] at implications and planning (i.e. fluency instruction, progress monitoring, word work).”
- “[We] looked at data from multiple assessments to make decisions about who needed to enter/exit intervention groups.”

### PROTOCOLS AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Protocols can be powerful tools for professional learning. As one reading specialist explained, “We rarely have the time to have sustained conversations with colleagues. It surely is in these continued, rich conversations that we grow professionally and become more effective as teachers and as supporters of classroom teachers.”

However, protocols need to be collaboratively explored, tweaked, and designed. Like the reading specialists involved in this case study, education leaders and teachers might find that they need to strategically select and tailor protocols in order to find a perfect fit for their purposes and context.

If great care is not taken to introduce protocols in a respectful manner, in a sequence of slowly increasing challenge and intensity (in terms of the levels of trust needed to engage in the collaborative conversation), participants may easily be turned off by what could be perceived as stilted conversation. In our

project, the process of collaboratively exploring and designing protocols was key to creating a sense of ownership on the part of the reading specialists.

If protocols are introduced as panaceas, without clear modeling of best facilitation practices, teachers can easily miss the power of these important tools. Instead, carefully demonstrating protocols, noting and exploring the underlying purposes of various steps, and inviting participants to design their own subject- and context-specific protocols allows teachers to own and use these tools in meaningful ways.

If collaboration is key to understanding and implementing new curricular standards, then protocols are the structures for spurring and supporting that necessary collaboration.



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# CHECK YOUR GAUGES

**CALIBRATING CONVERSATIONS ASSIST TEACHERS IN FINE-TUNING INSTRUCTION**



**By Arthur L. Costa and Robert J. Garmston**

**T**eachers maintain a capacity for learning throughout their careers. However, experience alone is not enough to promote learning. Growth occurs when teachers reflect on that experience and use higher-order thinking processes to plan, monitor, evaluate, and modify educational tasks.

Coaching is a way to support teachers in assessing and improving their practice. By engaging in rich, rigorous, and reflective professional conversations with colleagues, teachers can continue to develop and grow as they construct meaning, reinvest their cognitive resources, and apply new learning.

Calibrating conversations are a way to foster this type of career-long development and growth. Calibrating — meaning to measure and attune performance against an

established standard — is based on the assumption that a teacher is a continuous learner looking to refine his or her craft and, as a result, turns to other sources and research to improve personal practice.

## **TEACHING EXCELLENCE**

Many descriptions of teaching excellence are available. All draw on the rich knowledge base about instruction. Such lists of standards are usually categorized into at least six domains of inquiry, though frequently with different terminology. They are:

1. What's worth learning? (Content knowledge)
2. What works in teaching? (Pedagogy)
3. What factors influence student learning? (Knowledge of students and how they learn)
4. Who am I, and who am I becoming? (Self-knowledge)
5. How does the brain learn? (Knowledge of cognitive processes of instruction)

## CALIBRATING CONVERSATIONS

### STAGES

*Coach mediates by having the coachee:*

1. Select a focus.
2. Identify existing level of performance or placement on a rubric and give supporting evidence.
3. Specify desired placement, explore values and beliefs, and identify congruence with desired placement.
4. Establish behavioral indicators for new placement on rubric or level of performance.
5. Describe support needed to get to a higher level of performance and commit to action.
6. Reflect on the coaching process, explore refinements, and explore ways of using this process on his or her own.

### TOOLS

*Coach navigates the stages using these tools:*

1. Pause to allow you and your partner time to think.
2. Paraphrase from time to time.
3. Pose questions to specify thinking by asking, for example, "Specifically, which area might you want to focus on?"
4. Pose questions to explore thinking by asking, for example, "What are you aware of in your students that is causing you to move to a higher level of performance?"
5. Pay close attention to your partner. Attend with your mind and your body.

6. How are collegial interactions continually strengthened and enhanced? (Knowledge of collegial interactions)

School or school districts might develop their own standards based on their mission or beliefs. Schools may adopt standards approved by the state, or they may use descriptions of excellence based in instructional research developed by Marzano, Danielson, Hattie, Saphier, Silver, Tsui, or others. (See resources on p. 47.)

Calibrating conversations are designed to assist a staff member in measuring his or her progress against an agreed-upon standard to determine where his or her skill level falls. Standards, test scores, and rubrics that propose to define teaching quality but are developed and imposed without the teacher's involvement, comprehension, and commitment lead to short-term, shallow results and, ultimately, to failure (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

For insights to be useful, they need to be generated from within, not given to individuals as conclusions. In-

volving teachers in developing and applying these practices promotes self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-modifying — and provides a mental rehearsal prior to performance.

### CALIBRATING CONVERSATION

A calibrating conversation has six stages, each with a specific purpose designed to support the coachee in reaching objectives or goal(s) reflected in the standard. (See above.) During the calibrating conversation, the coach uses the basic tools of rapport, pausing, paraphrasing, posing questions, and especially paraphrasing before questions to stimulate the coachee's thinking.

Here are the stages of the calibrating conversation.

#### Select a focus.

The coach asks the coachee to decide on what aspect of the standard he or she wants to focus. This is important, given that most contain a great deal of information. The se-

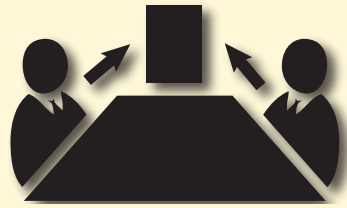
**CALIBRATING: A THIRD-POINT CONVERSATION**

The document being used in the calibrating conversation becomes what is called a third point in the communication. The third point serves as a focus separate from each of the parties in the conversation.

A conversation between two people may signal a difference in status (Rock, 2009) — with one person as evaluator or judge and the

other being judged. In a third-point conversation, however, the data — for instance, the standards rubric — is set in a position that both parties can observe free of judgment.

The value of designating a third point is that both parties can refer to it in an impersonal way. The third point does not belong to



either party; it is simply a reference point for the conversation.

Physically referencing the third

point in a space off to the side between the parties provides a psychologically safe place for information and depersonalizes ideas. Thus, placement of the conversational focus creates a triangle, either literally or

referentially, keeping the conversational container psychologically safe (Wellman, 2009).

Establishing a visible “third point” for the conversation increases psychological safety for the teacher by shifting the focus to the data and promotes conversations about the factors producing positive results and what may be causing any perceived performance gaps (Grinder, 1997).

lected focus should be one that can be addressed in the amount of time scheduled for the conversation. The coach might ask, “On what aspect of the standard would you like to focus today?” or “What aspect of the standard is of interest to you for today’s conversation?”

**Identify existing level of performance or placement on a rubric and give supporting evidence.**

The coach is interested in finding out where the coachee sees himself or herself on the document. The coach poses questions to specify thinking in order for the coachee to be clear about the data that supports his or her self-assessment. Questions the coach might ask include:

- “Where do you see yourself currently?”
- “What might be some examples of how that plays out for you?”
- “What do you see in your students’ performance that leads you to see yourself here?”

**Specify desired placement, explore values and beliefs, and identify congruence with desired placement.**

The coach asks the coachee where he or she would like to be. This supports the coachee in establishing a goal or objective toward which he or she wants to move. The coach might ask, “At what level of competence would you like to be on this behavior?”

This stage is designed to go to the deep structure of the coachee’s thinking to validate the importance of the desired placement. The coach is interested in raising the coachee’s consciousness about the importance of the desired placement. The coach might ask:

- “What might be some of the values motivating you to

reach this level?”

- “What makes this important to you?”
- “How do you want to see your students performing when you reach this level?”
- “What would you need to tell yourself ...?”

**Establish behavioral indicators for new placement.**

The coach is interested in having the coachee envision himself doing what he aspires to do. The coachee should be specific in identifying what it looks, feels, and sounds like to achieve the level he desires. The coach might ask:

- “What might students notice that’s different about you when you are performing at this level?”
- “What might this change cause students to do differently?”
- “What might it look and sound like when you reach that level?”
- “What might be some examples?”
- “By when do you want to achieve that?”

**Describe support needed to get to a higher level of performance and commit to action.**

The coach is interested in having the coachee draw on his or her resources to determine what it’s going to take to reach the goal or desired placement. The coachee should identify what support he or she will need to reach the goal. This support might be in the form of strategies, materials, or the support of other people.

Once support is described, the coachee should state what he or she will do to implement the plan and the data collection tool(s) that might be used. The coach might ask:

- “What might be some resources you will need to reach



this level?”

- “What might it take for you to apply these strategies?”
- “What kind of help might be useful to you?”
- “What is the most powerful step you might take?”
- “As you implement your plan, what will you be aware of to know it is working?”
- “What data collection tool(s) might be helpful to you?”

### Reflect on the coaching process, explore refinements, and explore ways of using this process on your own.

In this stage, the coach asks the coachee to reflect on the conversation in which he or she just engaged. The intent is to give the coachee the opportunity to identify what was helpful and what supported thinking and to raise to consciousness the process of self-calibrating. The coach might ask:

- “How has this conversation been helpful to you?”
- “How has this conversation supported your thinking?”
- “Where are you now in your thinking compared to where you were when we started?”
- “Given your desire for continuing improvement, how might the process that we engaged in today assist you in doing this on your own?”
- “How might you use this same process when I’m not with you?”

### CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Based on the assumption that professional teachers are constantly searching for ways to improve their craft, standards originating from external sources can be a source of continuous learning.

By supporting self-directed learning, assisting teachers in gauging current performance with aspirations as noted on locally developed statements of excellence or adopted standards or rubrics from other sources, the calibrating conversation embodies the values and goals of self-directed learning which, in turn, translates into instructional processes with students as well.

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### RESOURCES

*Here are resources on standards for teacher and leader performance.*

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# PRINCIPALS BOOST COACHING'S IMPACT

**SCHOOL LEADERS' SUPPORT IS CRITICAL TO COLLABORATION**

By Les Foltos

For the past 12 years, I have worked with peer coaches in more than 40 countries, and I have seen schools where peer coaches have collaborated with colleagues to improve teaching and learning in classrooms across the school. In other schools, coaches have played a critical role in creating a culture of collaboration that helps build the school's collective capacity to improve teaching and learning.

But in many schools, coaching is yet another small-scale, short-lived educational experiment. Explaining the differences in success is key to understanding how to implement coaching successfully.

Successful coaches know their effectiveness in collaborating with peers to improve teaching and learning hinges on the support of principals who control the budget and other key resources. Many coaches also understand that the leadership they provide plays an important role in creating the support needed to sustain coaching.

Their accomplishments, and their abilities to communicate them to their principal and colleagues, are essential to support and expand coaching in a school. Successful coaching is a result of an interdependent relationship between the principal and coaches.

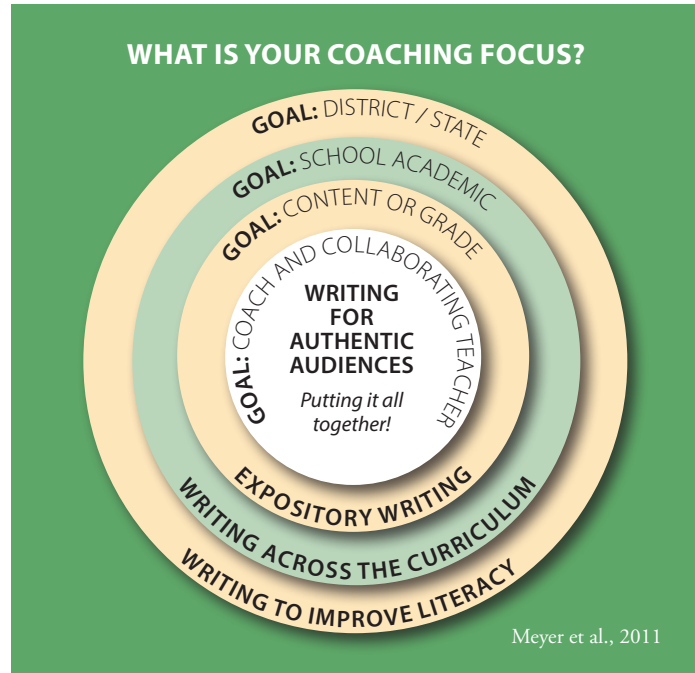
### IS COACHING RIGHT FOR YOUR SCHOOL?

Coaching is a powerful strategy for schools that embrace these beliefs:

- Educators act on their understanding that ongoing collaboration among teachers is essential to improve teaching and learning.
- Collaboration aimed at improving learning is led by teacher leaders who are supported by the school's leadership. Improvement comes when it is both bottom-up and top-down (Fullan, 2001, 2011).
- Educators believe they are encouraged to innovate and take risks to improve teaching and learning.

### CREATING SCHOOL SUPPORT

One proven way to assure school support is for the coach and principal to work together to shape a plan to implement coaching in the school. Experienced peer coaches



understand this collaborative process ensures the principal has a strong buy-in to coaching and the school provides the resources necessary to support it. Successful coaching plans address a few critical issues.

### Align coaching with school or district goals.

No school has time for one more new thing. Initiatives — like coaching — need to align with existing school goals. The graphic above offers one example of how coaches align their work.

### Start with willing partners.

Successful coaches start with the willing, or as Jerker Porat, a Swedish peer coach, puts it, “teachers who don’t know but want to know” (J. Porat, personal conversation, May 24, 2012). Coaches need assurance that their learning partners are open to collaboration to improve teaching and learning. This willingness to collaborate and improve is essential.

If peer coaches are full-time teachers, they typically choose to collaborate initially with only one or two teachers. This doesn’t limit the long-term impact of coaching. Effective coaches encourage their learning partners to share

what they are learning with and from their coach with other teachers. Success with one teacher can have a ripple effect that spreads coaching to include more teachers, even those who might have been resistant to the idea of coaching initially.

**Define roles and responsibilities.**

Coaches, their learning partners, and their principal must define the key roles the coach will play. These typically include co-planning learning activities, modeling or team teaching, and observing peers and reflecting afterward. Knight (2011) observed that, without agreement on roles, coaches are so often off task that some coaches “spend less than 25% of their time, often less than 10% ... on coaching” (p. 99).

It is equally important for collaborating teachers to define their roles so that they understand their responsibilities. Both partners must understand and act on their individual and collective responsibilities for coaching to be effective.

**Measure success.**

Many schools measure success based on coaching’s impact on changing teacher practices. They want to know if peer coaches are helping teachers offer students learning activities that will help them master Common Core, state, or 21st-century standards. Other schools gather student work samples to see how their learning is changing as the coach and teacher collaborate over time or consider student achievement data.

**Allocate resources — especially time.**

The resources required for successful coaching vary widely from school to school, but time is the one commodity that is always in short supply. Time may be scarce, but creative principals and coaches follow strategies like those outlined by Killian and Hirsh (2013) because time is essential to coaching success.

**Establish communication.**

If a school wants to sustain and expand coaching, it is critical for the coach and principal to share their coaching plans with the school staff so they understand how coaching will be implemented, assessed, and aligned with the school’s educational goals. This step is critical to win support from the staff.

Another element in effective communication is routine, ongoing communication among the coach, collaborating teachers, and the principal. This communication can’t play a role in teacher evaluation, but it is critical for the principal to understand the impact of coaching and how it is achieving school goals.

**Engage in ongoing professional learning.**

Coaches need ongoing professional learning to sharpen their craft and fuel their continued growth. That learning might come from routine collaboration among a school’s coaches. Some districts provide ongoing professional learning for their coaches. Coaches are also likely to benefit from joining online

professional learning communities that focus on coaching.

Without this kind of careful planning, coaches might find they have the same feelings as coaches at a recent gathering who reported they felt “overworked,” that their work was “unfocused,” they were “stretched too thin,” and at times felt “ineffective.” Many coaches who have struggled to get their school leader’s support may be just one step from failure.

By contrast, coaches who collaborate closely with their principal in shaping and reshaping an implementation plan for coaching typically find they have the support needed to sustain and expand coaching. Many coaches report that sustained collaboration with peers produced significant improvements the learning activities for students when measured by indicators like critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, and real-world connections.

**Build foundations of collective capacity.**

One outgrowth of this process of rethinking and revising coaching plans is that coaches and principals in many innovative schools have aligned the coaches’ work with efforts to build their school’s collective capacity to improve.

Coaches in Apache Junction, Arizona, worked with teachers in their schools to create a concrete norm that describes 21st-century teaching and learning. Coaches at the International School in Bellevue, Washington, and in the Everett School District are following that same process. In these schools, coaches and their learning partners use the norm when they co-plan learning activities or reflect after observations. There are clear rewards from creating and using clearly defined goals for teaching and learning.

Defining the norm creates a common language that fuels collaboration. Kathy Stilwell, secondary math instructional facilitator and coach from Everett, says, “The process of agreeing on what is vital to include in the norm was powerful. Instead of finding that teachers had very different meanings for the same term, they were developing a common language that makes for more efficient and effective collaboration to improve learning.”

The norm also provides a common goal for innovation among the school’s educators. Tony Byrd, associate superintendent for curriculum and assessment in Everett Schools, says, “We cannot transform learning without clearly defining what we mean by effective learning. It’s a step that is often overlooked in the rush to get things done. Having a norm is an essential first step toward transforming learning.”

Having a common goal is critical to reach broader school goals for Jennifer Rose, principal of the International School in the Bellevue School District. “Historically, teachers in secondary schools worked in silos,” Rose said. “They are very content-focused. Having agreement on the attributes of 21st-century teaching and learning allows the whole staff work toward common goals like our school’s goal of helping students develop critical thinking skills.”

As teachers and coaches apply the norm as they co-plan learning activities and reflect after observing each other, they expand their capacity to improve. Georgia Lindquist, literacy and humanities specialist and coach in Everett, says that by choosing one attribute from their norm that they want to incorporate into a learning activity, both coach and learning partner “have a starting point and a navigation system that leads to deeper thinking as they puzzle together how to reach their common goal.”

Tina Jada, math teacher and coach at Cactus Canyon Junior High School in Apache Junction, Arizona, uses her school's norm for 21st-century learning “to assess what's going well, and as a check system to see ways to improve.” With time and experience, Jada says, the norm becomes a tool for self-reflection that teachers use to assess and improve their own work.

Coaches at many schools have taught their peers a variety of communication and collaboration skills, such as paraphrasing, probing questions, or the use of protocols to structure safe discussions focused on student learning. Developing these skills fosters more effective collaboration and helps develop a school's collective capacity to improve teaching and learning. Lindquist helps teacher teams learn and use collaborative skills because “they allow people to truly hear one another and deepen understanding. Even adopting a single norm like presuming positive intentions can change the way a group interacts and works together.”

As head of the math department, Jada used her coaching skills to remake the department into a professional learning community. She realized her team “all worked really hard, but weren't always working toward the same goal.” To get them moving in the same direction, the professional learning community meets weekly to look at student data and develop strategies to assure they reach every student.

During these discussions, she uses active listening and paraphrasing to ensure her teammates know everyone's voice is heard and encourages her peers to do the same. She works to build relationships by celebrating when things go well and models risk taking by sharing when things she tried didn't succeed.

In the beginning, Jada says, “teachers thought working in a team meant more time and effort —just one more thing to add to their plate. Now, they understand the value of collaboration: better ideas, better products, and less work in the long run.” Another indicator of success Jada notes is her peers' “willingness to ask for help when things aren't going right.”

## COLLABORATION IN ACTION

A growing number of schools have adopted a collaborative culture where teachers assume a collective responsibility for the success of all students and routinely collaborate to assure the success of each teacher and each student. Coaching is part of the DNA that supports this culture and is a powerful tool that drives systemic improvement across the school. What follows is an example of coaching in a culture of collaboration.

When Valerie Karaitiana became principal at Dallas Pri-

mary School, in Dallas, Australia, several years ago, the school had some of the lowest test scores in the state. Dallas Primary is a high-poverty school where few of the students speak English at home. She and her leadership team decided that one solution to improve learning was to emphasize collaboration.

Today, when you walk into the school's classrooms, it is clear that collaboration is part of daily life for students and teachers. There are constant collaborative conversations going on between students, between students and educators, and among educators. When you talk to the school's leaders, they will tell you that the school's six teaching and learning coaches have played a central role in building the school's capacity to improve teaching and learning and the school's test scores, which are now near the midpoint for schools across the state.

Their success led the state to ask the school to combine with another nearby school, with Karaitiana and her team providing leadership for Dallas Brooks Community Primary School.

A closer look at the school reveals a culture that drives improvement in student achievement and coaching success. That culture rests on four principles:

- Students' needs will continue to change.
- We are all learners and will be for life.
- Everyone is likely to need support to help every student reach his or her goals.
- Everyone is a leader. We all have different skills sets and can use those to help everyone succeed. It's not about you or me; it's about us.

Karaitiana and assistant principals Lynne Gunning and Amanda Henning knew that if teacher isolation was the enemy and collaboration needed to be part of the daily professional practice of all teachers, they had to set the expectation that all teachers would collaborate with a coach, budget for coach training, and provide time for teachers to collaborate regularly with one of the school's coaches. They wove coaching into the culture of collaboration by assigning coaches a role in each of the school's data professional learning teams.

The coaches promote professional dialogue at weekly data professional learning team meetings, where teachers analyze student data for the cohort of students they teach (e.g. the grade 3 students). These teams also define the goals, strategies, and resources they need to support each group, and may ask the coach to serve as a resource by modeling the strategy the team wants to adopt.

Coaches then join teaching teams in weekly planning sessions to provide support while teachers develop curriculum plans that align with the work of the data professional learning teams. Once the learning activities are created, coaches observe the teachers to give feedback within a coaching conversation and participate in the evaluation of the unit of work. At this point, the cycle begins again.

In some schools, peer coaches have been so successful at en-

*Continued on p. 61*

*“There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world — one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love. On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet it is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time. That one thing is trust.”*

— S.M.R. Covey, 2008

# THE CHARACTER *of a* COACH

SUCCESS DEPENDS ON TRUSTWORTHINESS

By Kay Psencik

The elementary school’s teachers lounge was an active center for meeting and collegial conversation — and the place to find out the latest news on anyone and everything. So it was no surprise one day to walk in on a group of teachers with their heads huddled together, shooting glances over their shoulder as the door opened.

As they continued their conversation, the gasps and whispers signaled that what they were saying probably wasn’t going to be helpful to anyone. In fact, one teacher was sharing a destructive rumor about a colleague whose students had scored very well on a recent round of districtwide common assessments.

The school’s staff had begun analyzing these data in their professional learning teams. The allegation being made was that the teacher whose students had done well had helped them cheat on the test. Of course, there was no validity to the accusation; however, the teachers in the lounge seemed to all agree and laughed.

The school coach, who was present, didn’t dispute the rumor and joined in the laughter. As rumors do, this one spread quickly. The coach even shared it with the principal’s secretary. By the end of the school day, emotional tension was high throughout the building. The teacher who was being talked about also heard the rumor — and left the building in tears.

As the story at left illustrates, coaches must be continuously guarded in their language and actions. Coaches can be drawn into casual conversation and make comments that violate trust. Trust, which often takes years to build, can be destroyed in seconds without thought.

By intentionally focusing on trust, however, organizations and individuals can endure fallout from everyday problems and more monumental crises. For example, Isadore Sharp, founder, CEO, and chairman of the Four Seasons hotel chain, attributes much of his organization’s success to building trust with employees and customers. “We can’t communicate



This article is adapted from *The Coach's Craft: Powerful Practices to Support School Leaders* (Learning Forward, 2011), available in the Learning Forward Bookstore, [www.learningforward.org/bookstore](http://www.learningforward.org/bookstore).

effectively across a trust gap. ... So I sat down with our public relations director and detailed a formal credo based on the Golden Rule, the cornerstone of what would be called our corporate culture” (Beslin & Reddin, 2006, p. 1).

Deloitte Canada, like many accounting firms, has had fallout from corporate ethics scandals. In an e-conference of the Deloitte Leaders Forum in June 2005, Deloitte Canada CEO Alan MacGibbon stressed the need for leaders to initiate change and act decisively. “Trust is a concept that is so fundamentally important yet so hard to define, earn, and keep,” MacGibbon said. “Moral and ethical leadership is perhaps the single most important contributor to success over the long haul” (Beslin & Reddin, 2006, p. 1).

Stephen M.R. Covey (2008) described 13 trust behaviors: Talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, get better, confront reality, clarify expectations, practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust. The coach’s role is to help leaders develop and model the character traits that lead to trusting relationships. And a coach’s success in doing so depends on the coach’s own trustworthiness. Developing trust requires coaches to take on moral leadership and develop bonds with those they coach in order to model trust throughout the school.

In the teachers lounge scenario, an effective coach, knowing her role and how trust was being violated, might have intervened. What might have been the outcome by the end of the day if the coach had asked the group of teachers some thoughtful questions: “I wonder if there is any real evidence that cheating took place? Is what we are talking about right now going to facilitate our working together well in the future or hinder it? What other conversations should we be having right now? I wonder what we could be learning from her classroom, or how her strategies and ideas might contribute to all of our learning?”

The coach might have chosen many questions that would nurture and build trust in the organization, allow others to see the coach as trustworthy, and build positive energy in the organization.

As people focus energy and work on developing their own trustworthiness, they become like a mighty oak tree. In Austin, Texas, an ancient grove of oak trees known as the Council Oaks were, according to Native American legend, the location for launching war parties and for hosting peace treaties. Beneath one of these trees, Native Americans reportedly signed a treaty with settlers, represented by Stephen F. Austin. That tree now is known as the Treaty Oak.

In 1989, the tree was vandalized, poisoned with such a powerful hardwood herbicide that scientists were certain it would die. Lab tests showed the oak had received enough poison to kill 100 trees. However, the Treaty Oak survived. Eight years later, it once again produced a crop of acorns. City workers gathered and germinated the acorns, then distributed the seedlings throughout Texas. Two decades after the poisoning, the tree is thriving, although its shape is a reminder of its struggle to survive. Many Texans see the Treaty Oak as a symbol of strength and endurance.

Like the Treaty Oak, good coaches remain constant, symbols of strength and endurance through life’s vicissitudes. People who understand their values and what is important to them are able to nurture relationships. But to build the trust that sustains relationships over time, coaches work to develop at least six traits based on the work of Daniel Goleman (2002), Megan Tschannen-Moran (2004), Julio Olalla (2003), and Stephen Covey (2008).

### THE SIX TRUSTY OAK ROOTS

A “trusty oak” coach has six essential deep roots: self-awareness, honesty, sincerity, competence, reliability, and the ability to be other-centered.

#### 1 Self-awareness

Effective coaches have a deep sense of their own values and live by those values in such a way that others cannot doubt their principles. In *The Learning Educator* (2007), Stephanie Hirsh and Joellen Killion state, “Each person lives by a set of principles. Some of our principles are unquestioned and fundamental to who we are. Some are new to us, and through

## THE SIX TRUSTY OAK ROOTS

### 1. SELF-AWARENESS

- What drives me? What inspires me?
- What values guide my actions?
- What contributions do I want to make to the world?
- What is my purpose for living?

### 2. HONESTY

- How does what I think, do, and say align with my observations of the world?

### 3. SINCERITY

- How do I act intentionally on my values?

### 4. COMPETENCE

- What do I do so well that I am credible to others?
- What attitudes and aspirations do I have that inspire me to learn continuously?
- What effect does the technological, global world in which we live have on my competence?
- What results am I most proud of?

### 5. RELIABILITY

- What do I do to ensure I keep my promises?
- What do I do when I fail to keep my promises?

### 6. INTENTIONS

- When I am with others, am I truly interested in them and what they have to say?
- Do I genuinely want the best for others on my team and regularly acknowledge their contributions?

our experiences and dialogue we continue to clarify and deepen our understanding of them. Our principles guide our work, thoughts, goals, actions, and decisions” (p. 11). Dennis Sparks (2007) says we become clearer about who we are by making clear our assumptions in writing and by talking with others about them. Effective coaches spend time reflecting on and articulating the principles that guide their actions and attitudes. When self-awareness is practiced regularly as a skill, it becomes an essential part of the coach’s character.

## 2 Honesty

In a training session on strategic planning, administrators in the group were discussing how they shared district student performance data with the public. One participant said he struggled with sharing data when the news was not good. The facilitator, without much thought, agreed.

Then a superintendent spoke up. “Is it really difficult to tell the truth?” he asked.

Although the facilitator and the administrator may have been referring to the challenges of sharing bad news, the superintendent who spoke out never forgot the facilitator’s comment. She lost his trust, and he subsequently dismissed all she had to say.

Building trusting relationships is not about how honest we think we are. It is how honest others believe us to be. Truth releases the power of positive change. We build meaningful, healthy relationships and become positive role models for others through self-examination and being honest with ourselves and others.

## 3 Sincerity

In today’s fast-paced world, it is tempting to overcommit and make promises we do not really want to keep. When we hastily respond to an email, glance furtively at a phone

message, or jot a note on a to-do list when with another person, we are not totally focused or present, and that is obvious to the listener. Distractions keep our minds floating from issue to issue and cut our conversations short. The pressures of pending commitments keep us from listening. Effective coaches are truly present in the moment.

Sincerity requires that people follow through on those actions that they really are committed to doing. They plan and schedule appropriate time for those tasks they want to make their priorities.

Praise is another challenge to developing sincerity. When praise is not grounded, others may view it as insincere. “You are great!” and “You do fantastic work!” are examples of unspecific praise. When comments are unconnected to a particular event, others may think, “She always says that, but she has no idea what we do.” Beware the habit of giving false praise.

## 4 Competence

Competent people inspire trust. Competent people have the skills, attitudes, and dispositions to achieve what they say they can. Taking on challenges outside one’s area of expertise can be tempting, but staying focused in one’s area of competence is essential to having others pay attention to the coach or leader and to feel confident in the leader. The coach’s competence gives others the courage to act.

Aggressive learners are most likely to be viewed as competent. As Eric Hoffer states: “In times of drastic change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to work in a world that no longer exists” (2008, p. 32). Competence is developed through continuous learning.

## 5 Reliability

The root of reliability is the most easily severed as people



attempt more in limited time. Those who are reliable can be counted on to keep their promises. Samuel Hamlin chose to participate in a three-year principal development coalition. In three years, he never missed a session. When his children were sick or he had a crisis at school, he found someone to help him so that he honored his commitment.

At the last session, he seemed tired. The leader asked if he was OK. Hamlin replied, “I am tired. I attended my aunt’s funeral yesterday, and I’ve driven all night to be here this morning.” Hamlin’s commitments were meaningful to him.

Administrators often find themselves in a meeting running overtime or caught by someone who just has to talk, or lost in a phone call with an angry parent. While these may be excuses for not meeting a commitment, they are not reasons. No matter how many apologies are given, others’ recall of the situation will be the failure to honor a commitment.

Phil Blake, president of Bayer, said, “It’s all about authenticity ... plus consistency that you will always perform according to the contract of understanding. You’re doing the right things for the right reasons and what’s best for all” (Beslin & Reddin, 2006, p. 30).

Effective coaches honor others as they would want to be honored. When coaches are transparent, honest, and forthright with issues they are facing, others grow more confident they are what they say they are and that they can be counted on.

## 6 Intentions

Highly effective coaches have the best intentions for those they coach. They accept people for who they are — brilliant, wonderful gifts to the planet — and want them to succeed. Jim Meehan, British psychologist and poet, puts it this way: “Having spent many years trying to define the essentials of trust, I arrived at the position that if two people could say two things to each other and mean them, then there was the basis for real trust. The two things were ‘I mean you no harm’ and ‘I seek your greatest good’ ” (Covey, 2008, p. 80). The best coaches’ motives are other-centered.

### TAXES AND DIVIDENDS

Trust takes time to earn and can be destroyed almost instantly. Covey uses the idea of taxes and dividends to explain.

Positive, high levels of trust in relationships with others and in organizations produce joy, effortless communication, transparent relationships, and high levels of energy — dividends. Organizations with low trust relationships have unhealthy working environments, hostility, guarded communication, defensiveness, and constant worry and suspicion (Covey, 2008, pp. 22-24).

Feeding trust results in greater dividends, while mistrust taxes everyone and has long-term costs to relationships. Effective coaches strive to constantly earn dividends with those they coach.

Covey outlines four ways leaders build dividends:

- **Inspire trust.** Believe in others’ capacity to live up to expectations, to deliver on promises, and to achieve clarity on key goals. Avoid micromanaging and second-guessing.
- **Clarify purpose.** Involve others in creating the goals to be achieved. When people are involved in the process, they psychologically own the goals and share the mission, vision, and values.
- **Align systems.** Match what is said to what is measured. Organizations often claim, for example, that people are important but have structures and systems that identify professional learning as an expense or cost rather than an asset and investment in their people.
- **Unleash talent.** Empower others by aligning systems and developing a shared purpose. When people feel empowered, the organization benefits from their capacity, intelligence, creativity, and resourcefulness.

### CORES OF CREDIBILITY

Stephen Covey emphasizes building trustworthiness through four cores of credibility:

- **Integrity:** Are you congruent?
- **Intent:** What’s your agenda?
- **Capabilities:** Are you relevant?
- **Results:** What’s your track record?

Source: Covey, 2008.

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# PHILOSOPHY *of* COACHING

By Kay Psencik

**G**reat coaching is an art. It involves skillfully asking questions and challenging assumptions. Coaching opens participants to changing the way they think about themselves, their leadership, and the opportunities they have to shape their own futures and the future of their schools. Coaching does not mean telling others what to do or how to solve their problems. It is not training. It is not being an empathetic friend. Coaching helps those being coached grow more confident and competent in leading and learning.

Here is a sample of one coach's philosophy of coaching. Use the form on p. 57 to develop your own philosophy of coaching.



## The values that guide my actions in coaching others:

- I care greatly about my coachee's success. I will do whatever it takes to listen well, to be thoughtful about my questions, and to learn aggressively how to coach well.
- I will treat the coachee with respect at all times. I will keep my coachee's confidence. I will build trust by being reliable.
- I will focus on developing my coachee's competence and confidence to lead. Both are significantly important to being respected by others.
- I will listen from the coachee's point of view. I know I have experiences that shaped my leadership, but my experiences are not my coachee's experiences, my solutions not his solutions.

## My beliefs about learning:

- Learning means changing behavior.
- Learning is energizing and a powerful force in a leader's success in complex times and within complex organizations.
- Learning is collaborative and organic. The more I work with others, the faster and better I learn.

## My hopes and aspirations for those I coach:

I hope that they develop the skills, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors essential to lead communities where all are learning aggressively.

## My purpose in coaching principals:

I want to watch school leaders grow and learn so that more children in our community and nation are skilled, confident, and ready for the challenges they will face when they leave K-12 education.

## The things I need to learn to be more effective as a coach:

- To listen well and ask strategic questions.
- To develop the wisdom and thoughtfulness to lead others to discover who they are, what they are learning, and the power they have to shape their futures and the futures of others.

ESTABLISH YOUR OWN

# PHILOSOPHY *of* COACHING

The values that guide my actions in coaching others:

My beliefs about learning:

My purpose in coaching principals:

My hopes and aspirations for those I coach:

The things I need to learn to be more effective as a coach:

Source: Psencik, K. (2011). *The coach's craft: Powerful practices to support school leaders*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.



Photo by LAUREL HEIDEN

Longridge Elementary School Principal Jeremy Smalline and Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams review Grade 3 reading growth using the New York State Expeditionary Learning Curriculum modules.

# A STEP *in the* RIGHT DIRECTION

LEARNING WALKS BUILD A BRIDGE BETWEEN CENTRAL OFFICE AND SCHOOLS

By Barbara Deane-Williams, Shaun Nelms, and Sheila B. Robinson

**W**hat does an effective classroom look and sound like? What does it mean to have students engaged in learning? What is high-quality instruction? To answer these questions, the Greece Central School District in New York created a common language around teaching and learning as a way to support

student achievement.

The district developed a five-year strategic plan to implement a standards-based instructional program, a viable and guaranteed curriculum, and a progress-monitoring system to accelerate student achievement. The strategic plan lays out key goals, strategies, targets, and initiatives that mobilize the district to ensure all students are college- and career-ready. The whole-system reform identifies drivers — “those policy and strategy levers that have the least and best

**District leaders are systems thinkers, creating the conditions for success in every school in the district.**

chance of driving successful reform” (Fullan, 2011, p. 3).

A theory of action for change underpins the strategic plan and links the district’s beliefs, vision, and mission. District leaders are systems thinkers, creating the conditions for success in every school in the district.

The district’s theory of action, based on Harvard University’s Public Education Leadership Project coherence framework (n.d.), revolves around an instructional core defined as the relationship among teacher, student, and content — the key lever for student success. A district reorganization moved service and support closer to classrooms and students, intensifying the district’s efforts to ensure teachers and school leaders receive professional learning linked to performance feedback and student achievement.

To support job-embedded professional learning at the building level, central office leaders are organized into teaching and learning teams. These teams, designed to focus on implementation of curriculum and instruction, conduct teaching and learning walks on a rotating schedule throughout the school year in order to provide individualized support to principals and teachers.

Teaching and learning team walks are a key component of the district’s central office transformation, providing a vehicle for district leaders, as well as teachers, students, parents, and the community to develop and refine a common language around quality instruction and effective classroom practices (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009).

Teaching and learning teams, led by assistant superintendents and supported by other central office administrators, lead principals, and teacher leaders, review student work and examine data showing each student’s progress, looking at data walls and portfolios. They troubleshoot intervention systems and strategies with the school principal and teacher leaders.

Team members also talk with and listen to teachers, clerical staff, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers as they see

the work and hear how each staff member helps to support students and the strategic plan. The teams collect descriptive data to inform purposeful dialogue in a supportive, capacity-building relationship with the principal and other school leaders.

#### **SEE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT**

Beth Bentley, principal of Brookside Elementary School, says that classroom visits allow teaching and learning teams to see evidence of the impact of professional learning as they walk the halls, visit classrooms, analyze student work, and talk with teachers and administrators. This evidence serves to strengthen the feedback loop among central office, building principals, and teachers. “The walks help district office see what the needs are in schools and then be able to help schools get the supports to meet those needs,” Bentley says.

She cites a time when her teachers had questions about the pacing of the district’s new English language arts curriculum modules. Because the modules were new, teachers had many questions. When she relayed those questions to the teaching and learning team, they collaborated with Bentley and teacher leaders to create a document that responded to teacher questions and could be shared with teachers at Brookside and across the district.

The fluid nature of teaching and learning teams is key to their success. At times, they visit a school with a particular focus in mind. At other times, the principal or teacher leaders may drive the discussion.

“It’s great because visits are based on your needs and questions,” Bentley says. During one visit, only one administrator was available, and his area of expertise was math. “He showed me how to run various reports in aimsweb (an assessment system for response to intervention implementation), and then we visited math classrooms together,” she says.

Bentley appreciates the access teaching and learning walks give her to district office thought partners. “To be able to tap into those people through that context is a great idea,” she says.

The teaching and learning teams help her to support teachers in implementing curricular resources aligned with Common Core learning standards and using data to inform instruction. “We look at data on specific students to identify their unique learning needs, then plan instruction and targeted interventions accordingly,” Bentley says.

### FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

Assistant superintendent Kathleen Graupman agrees that the flexibility of teaching and learning teams is critical and describes how they can vary from building to building. “We might spend more time in classrooms than in the principal’s office, or we might spend more time in the office reviewing data or working through a problem of practice,” Graupman says.

A key feature of teaching and learning team walks is collaborative reflection sessions with principals and other school staff members, which generally begin with the question, “What did we see?”

Each school is identified for teaching and learning team walks using a tiered approach. Schools are organized into tiers based on their performance. As district leaders review student data (i.e. performance on state assessments combined with progress toward targets outlined in the strategic plan) on a quarterly basis, they determine each school’s need for assistance.

While all schools receive at least weekly visits from their teaching and learning team, schools at tier 2 receive additional support from central office directors for math, English language arts, and response to intervention. Tier 3 schools receive additional support and coaching from a turnaround initiative principal, selected for her specific

competencies in achievement, influence, and impact (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). This principal works closely with administrative teams.

Jeremy Smalline, principal of Longridge Elementary, appreciates that he can guide the focus of the teaching and learning team walks when they occur in his building. He says the walks may focus on “what we’re up against and what professional development we need,” and he likes the opportunity to take the teams into the classroom when “it’s real and authentic. That’s the value we get out of it.”

Smalline is comfortable with team visits because he knows the walks are “not a critique or catching you doing something wrong.” He cites a time when the district created professional learning to support students in need of special education services

as a result of a teaching and learning team walk in his building.

Both Brookside Elementary School — which made the largest English language arts gains of any elementary school in the district — and Longridge Elementary School were identified in a presentation by New York State Department of Education as high-growth and high-poverty schools.

### LEARNER-CENTERED PARTNERSHIPS

Teaching and learning team walks come as no surprise to staff. They are planned and announced districtwide through the community newsletter. District leaders also ask principals to publish the times and purpose of the walks in their weekly staff updates, with a reminder that visits are not evaluative in nature, but rather intended to create learner-centered partnerships in order to continue to build principals’ capacity as instructional leaders (Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009).

Teaching and learning team walks are used to:

- Build capacity of teachers and leaders;
- Provide individualized support to schools;
- Allow central office leaders to learn from schools and promote the replication of effective practices;
- Engage in and model the types of inquiry-based interactions the district wants to see in schools, especially between principals and teachers;
- Develop a culture of interpersonal accountability (Sparks, 2005);
- Collect data to support professional learning plans for teachers and leaders;
- Inform fiscal decisions and resource allocations;
- Guide support of the Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment;
- Inform support from the departments of Facility Operations and Planning and Human Resources; and
- Expand the district’s coaching model for enhanced collaboration.

Much of the district’s transformative work, including teaching and learning team walks, tools, protocols, modeling, and meta-cognitive strategies, is informed by the work documented in the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership report, *Central Office Transformation Toolkit: Strengthening School District Central Offices in the Service of Improved Teaching and Learning* (2013). All components of the district’s central office transformation are characterized by a focus on improving teaching and learning through the development of assistance relationships and improving principals’ capacity for instructional leadership (Honig, Lorton, & Copland, 2009, p. 27).

The central office transformation began with a commitment from the board of education, superintendent, and staff to increasing academic achievement for every student. The district also included the voices of parents, staff, elected officials, business leaders, service providers and organizations, and community members, as well as staff and students. The district’s route

**The central office transformation began with a commitment from the board of education, superintendent, and staff to increasing academic achievement for every student.**

to improved achievement and results is grounded in the use of data, open dialogue, courageous conversations, and interpersonal accountability.

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## Principals boost coaching's impact

*Continued from p. 51*

encouraging collaboration that I have been asked if coaching can transform school culture. Dallas Brooks' experience answers the question. Teachers tell visitors that coaching has helped them improve their practice and student learning. But the coaches quickly point out that their success rested on the vision, guidance, and support of the principal and assistant principals (Foltos, 2013).

## BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUPPORT

Dallas Brooks offers one model of a culture of collaboration. The culture in collaborative schools is often shaped by new roles for the school's principal as lead learner or lead coach. In some schools, teachers are encouraged to have fun.

Many schools, such as Silverton Primary in Noble Park, Australia, have added another building block to the foundation of collaboration. Recognizing that teachers may feel uneasy about innovation and the mistakes that often come with it, principal Tony Bryant encourages teachers to take risks, try new things, and even fail. The only thing they can't do is move backward to traditional instruction.

When new practices don't work as expected, teachers at Silverton are encouraged to learn from failures and use that learning to continue to move toward innovative practices.

Today, the baseline for effective coaching is a school with a principal and coaches who have a clear plan that aligns the work of the coach and learning partners to the school's educational goals and provides ongoing support. But the bar is being raised.

The new model for schools to work toward is one where

school leaders encourage coaches to serve as catalysts for a collaborative culture and create the collective capacity essential to assure success for all teachers and students.

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**Les Foltos (lfoltos@peer-ed.com) is founder and director of Peer-Ed, which helps teacher leaders develop the skills they need to coach colleagues. This article is adapted from his book, *Peer Coaching: Unlocking the Power of Collaboration* (Corwin Press, 2013). ■**



## Fidelity of implementation proves key to achieving student results

### WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

A three-year, randomized controlled trial study demonstrates that, when implemented with high levels of fidelity, the Responsive Classroom approach results in achievement gains in reading and math for 5th graders in schools participating in the intervention for three years. For students with initial low math achievement, the effect is greater than for students with initial high achievement. The study emphasizes the importance of fidelity of implementation.

#### Study description

The study examined the relationship between the specific teaching practices associated with Responsive Classroom, a professional development program, and 2nd- through 5th-grade students' achievement in reading and math. Teachers developed the "capacity to create a caring, well-managed classroom environment characterized by respectful social interactions and academically engaging instruction" (p. 569). This study builds on previous research on the

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#### At a glance

In a randomized controlled field trial, Responsive Classroom, a professional development intervention that strengthens teaching strategies to support students' social, academic, and self-regulatory skills, resulted in positive effects on 2nd- through 5th-grade student achievement in math and reading when implementation fidelity was high.

#### THE STUDY

**Rimm-Kaufman, S., Larsen, R., Baroody, A., Curby, T., Ko, M., Thomas, J., Merritt, E., Abry, T., & DeCoster, J. (2014, June).** Efficacy of the Responsive Classroom approach: Results from a 3-year, longitudinal randomized controlled trial. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(3), 567-603.

Responsive Classroom approach and is the first randomized controlled trial that examines the approach. The study examined the effects over three years of Responsive Classroom practices in elementary schools randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group.

#### Questions

Researchers examined three questions:

1. What is the impact of the Responsive Classroom approach on students' reading and math achievement over three years?
2. To what extent does fidelity of implementation mediate the relation between treatment assignment (intervention vs. control) and reading and math achievement over three years?
3. To what extent is the mediational relation affected by whether

students are qualified for free and reduced-priced lunch and students' initial achievement?

#### Methodology

The randomized controlled trial study of the Responsive Classroom approach included 24 elementary schools in a single school district in a large, mid-Atlantic state. The district's students are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. The district required all its elementary schools to select and implement an approach to foster social, emotional, and behavioral learning for students.

The research team worked with district administrators and principals to invite school participation. All 24 invited schools agreed to participate in the study and had not previously selected a program or begun formal training in a program to comply with



## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

**F**idelity of implementation is a continuing challenge in professional learning. This study demonstrates that sustained focus and support over three or more years is necessary to achieve effects for teachers and students.

When educators learn new practices, especially those grounded in research, it is their accurate and frequent use of the practices rather than their knowledge about the practices that influence results for students. In this study, professional learning to prepare and support teachers to use Responsive Classroom practices included multiple designs, such as summer workshops, coaching, access to ongoing support, and print and electronic resources. Deep change requires intensive professional learning and implementation support over a multiyear period.

In addition to professional learning and implementation support for teachers, school administrators engaged in

workshops, coaching, and fall and spring planning meetings to focus their attention on schoolwide efforts to implement the new practices.

Researchers note that in other Responsive Classroom studies, teachers' perceptions of their principals' engagement and buy-in positively influenced teachers' use of Responsive Classroom practices, especially if the principals made structural changes to influence teachers' use. Teachers' use was negatively affected if they perceived principals bought in to gain prestige or recognition or if principals adopted practices that conflicted with Responsive Classroom practices or principles.

In the design of this intervention, researchers address five of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). They strongly address Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, and Implementation. They fail, however, to explain how they addressed Learning Communities or Outcomes, especially

in relationship to the degree to which Responsive Classroom practices aligned with teacher or administrator performance expectations. The inattention to the Learning Communities standard, especially given the principle-focused nature of Responsive Classroom, may have been a significant oversight.

Overall, implementation of a new set of practices requires deliberate, persistent, and thoughtful attention to the fidelity of implementation, the culture in which the practices are implemented, the characteristics of the implementers, and the support provided by administrators and the organization. No set of new practices is likely to succeed without substantive attention to developing capacity in implementers and their supervisors, the conditions in which the implementation will occur, and consistent support for implementation fidelity.

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the new district policy. Schools were subsequently assigned to either the intervention or delayed intervention group. The delayed intervention group served as the control group.

Researchers examined the comparability of the two groups of schools for gender, free and reduced-priced lunch, ethnic composition, and English language learner status. After the initial tests, researchers discovered that two schools within the control group had received some initial exposure to the Responsive Classroom approach. One of the two schools was selected through random assignment to be included in the intervention group, while the other remained in the nontreatment group. There were 13 schools in the intervention group and 11 in the nonintervention group. After re-examining the comparability of

the two groups of schools, researchers found no statistical difference in ethnicity, achievement, free and reduced-priced lunch, gender, or ELL status prior to the treatment.

The 276 teacher participants taught 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades in the 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11 school years. Teachers were mostly Caucasian with an average of 10 years of experience (range 1-38). Students were ethnically diverse, with slightly more than a third Caucasian; 11% African-American; 19% Asian; 24% Hispanic; and 5% other. Both the treatment schools and control schools experienced sizable, yet comparable, student attrition between 2008 and 2011.

The 3rd-, 4th-, and 5th-grade teachers engaged in professional development in the Responsive Classroom approach in two weeklong

sessions during consecutive summers. Teachers also participated in three days of school-based coaching and additional workshops during each school year following the sessions. Teachers also received printed materials, on-demand support from their coaches via email or in person, and access to additional electronic resources on the Responsive Classroom website.

School administrators in the treatment schools participated in the two summer sessions, three administrator coaching sessions per year, and twice-yearly planning support from Responsive Classroom consultants. Treatment schools received resource materials for the school library.

Teachers in the control group received no professional learning and operated as usual. Within the control group, four principals reported taking

actions to address social and emotional learning and classroom management. However, none implemented Responsive Classroom practices. The remaining seven schools implemented no schoolwide program for social and emotional learning.

Researchers used five classroom observations per teacher per year, teacher questionnaires, principal interviews, and principal questionnaires to collect data to assess implementation of Responsive Classroom practices within the intervention schools. Observations occurred on a planned schedule to ensure balance in reading and math instruction and morning and afternoon times.

Students in 5th grade took the state's standardized test or the alternative if they were not English proficient. Baseline math proficiency was measured using an abbreviated version of the Stanford 10.

### Analysis

Researchers applied structure equation modeling analyses to examine the relationship among multiple sets of variables: the main effect of treatment on outcomes; the mediate effect of treatment on outcomes through fidelity; the effects of treatment through fidelity based on free and reduced-priced lunch and initial achievement. Interclass correlation values for 5th graders indicated that 4% of math and 14% of reading variance could be attributed to school-level rather than child-level variance.

Fidelity of implementation was computed based on school level rather than classroom level for the duration of the three years to take into consideration that student enrollment in a class varies over the three years of the study and because some students moved among classrooms within a single day for different subjects.

Student attrition in both treatment and control groups was about 30% over the three years and, after further analysis,

researchers determined that missing data were random. Ceiling effects were noted in student performance, with 23.7% and 5.9% of 5th-grade students scoring at the maximum. Variables that suggested ceiling effects were treated as censored variables.

### Results

Researchers conclude that the correlation between treatment assignment and fidelity of implementation was very high and statistically significant, as was the 5th-grade reading and math. Intervention and control group schools differed significantly in fidelity of implementation.

For each of the research questions, researchers concluded that:

1. Treatment was not significantly correlated to 5th-grade reading or math. While there are multiple possible explanations for the lack of effects, one that is notable is that implementing new classroom practices may interrupt instruction or that, as critics of the Responsive Classroom approach have noted, that Responsive Classroom practices detract from instructional time. Many other variables not mediated may also influence results, such as the schools' history with change, teacher efficacy, or burnout; competing commitments; leadership skills, or organizational culture.
2. Fidelity of implementation was positively related to 5th-grade math and reading achievement. Treatment related positively to fidelity. The indirect effects of treatment through fidelity on 5th-grade math and reading were positive and significant. Assignment to the Responsive Classroom treatment caused increased fidelity and that, in turn, is associated with increases in math and reading achievement. For students, being in a treatment school with higher levels of fidelity related to gains in

3. Mediated effects show greater impact for student with initially low achievement in math than for students who had higher initial achievement in math.

While the overall treatment effects are not statistically significant, it is important to note that the effects change when the variance is examined in light of fidelity of implementation. Other notable results indicate that teachers' level of experience is negatively related to fidelity of implementation, while free and reduced-priced lunch is positive related to fidelity of implementation.

Study results demonstrate the important role of fidelity to implementation on student achievement in reading and math.

### Limitations

Researchers note several limitations. Among them is the choice of the measure of student achievement in reading and mathematics, particularly one that has been cited for its persistent ceiling effects. Another is the timing of observations. The first series of observations occurred after teachers received only the first summer institute and not all the coaching provided throughout the program. This might have influenced levels of implementation and benefits to students as well.

The study design, including the number of schools in the study, selecting a district with a new policy mandating implementation of a social and emotional learning program, and the location of all treatment schools within a single district, might also have impacted the study's results. In addition, data were collected during teachers' first and second year of implementation because of constraints imposed by the period of grant funding. Researchers acknowledge that change is a three- to five-year process. ■

## Let's make 2015 the year of impact

As the U.S. Department of Education and Congress debate the future of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh pledges to work toward three goals in 2015 that will offer compelling evidence of professional learning's importance and affirm stakeholders' commitment to invest in it.

These goals are:

**Highlight professional learning successes.** Learning Forward is gathering stories about how effective professional learning has improved educator practice and results for students in order to share them with local, state, and federal decision makers, educators, and parents. These stories need to include specifics about the professional learning, including the goals, processes, and measures of success. Educators are invited to share examples of effective professional learning in action at [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story).

**Challenge ineffective professional development practices.** Learning Forward is working to put an end to professional development that wastes resources — human, time, and financial — and find effective alternatives. To do this, educators must ask tough questions, such as: Is professional development an acceptable use of resources if only one teacher is touched when

so many need help? Just because the way we've always done it leads to some growth, is that all we should expect? Is scheduling schoolwide professional development the day before a holiday the best timing? What are the best uses of professional learning dollars — large auditoriums filled with educators or small groups working on writing common formative assessments?

**Study the field.** In order to be respected spokespersons for the field, educators need to be connected to the latest information and research on adult learning and development. While the Standards for Professional Learning provide educators a foundation for organizing study, discussing understandings, raising questions, and supporting future study, learning must extend beyond the standards because the field continues to evolve. Educators can accomplish this by following new learning from the field's chief advocates as well as those with different perspectives and focusing on the learning process that enables successful spread of practice in other sectors.

"Our expertise in our subject provides the foundation and credibility required to recognize and share success and eliminate waste," says Hirsh. "Please join me in sharing your observations, questions, and new learning related to the standards."

Share successes at [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story)

### book club

#### OPENING DOORS TO EQUITY:

A Practical Guide to Observation-Based Professional Learning  
By *Tonya Ward Singer*

How do we make educational equity a reality, lesson by lesson? This book focuses on observation-based professional learning to elevate teaching practice.

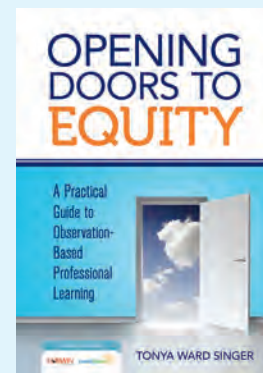
Learn how to bring team observation into the classroom to test, refine, and transform instruction so that students of all backgrounds achieve. Ideal for classroom teachers, grade-level team facilitators, department chairs, and all education leaders, this guide shows how to:

- Create a culture of deep collaboration that closes opportunity gaps among students;
- Effectively redesign instruction to reach culturally and linguistically diverse learners, using observation data and shared best practices; and

- Center instructional conversations on developing students' skills for college and career success, including hard-to-assess skills.

The book includes tools and handouts for facilitators and teachers as well as video clips of teams to illustrate and practice essentials of the process.

Through a partnership with Corwin Press, Learning Forward members can add the Book Club to their membership at any time and receive four books a year for \$69 (for U.S. mailing addresses). To receive this book, add the Book Club to your membership before March 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email [office@learningforward.org](mailto:office@learningforward.org).





## Learning Forward paves the way to a new future

The board of trustees anticipates an exciting year ahead for Learning Forward. We look forward to working with Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh and the senior leadership team to develop a new vision and plans for the organization.

The board is responsible for reviewing and approving the final strategy and will do everything in its power to help implement it. My primary responsibility is to maximize the value of your investment in a Learning Forward membership and to maximize the value of Learning Forward's investment in you.

How will I do this?

- Working with my board colleagues and the senior leadership team, we will review Learning Forward's new mission and vision statement. Our goal is to ensure that it's clear, inspiring, actionable, and applies to all stakeholders, whether they are agency consultants, veteran educators, or newly hired novice educators.
- We'll review Learning Forward's annual operating plan to ensure we're satisfying members' short- and long-term needs.
- We'll engage in discussions with staff and membership about where Learning Forward needs to be five, 10, or even 20 years from now.

**Deborah Jackson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.**

### on board DEBORAH JACKSON

- In addition, the board will work with the leadership team to identify emerging leaders.

Those are my general responsibilities as your board president. There are several significant areas I'm eager to focus on over the next year.

- A key priority will be **continued professional development and support for our core membership groups**. One of the means for doing this is through *JSD*, a valuable professional learning tool that focuses on ways to increase quality leadership and organizational knowledge. This issue's topic is coaching, and, as a leadership coach for my district, I value my own professional learning. Coaching teachers and leaders to develop their leadership competencies ensures schoolwide coherence, increases their effectiveness in school roles, and builds their capacity to successfully plan, implement, and evaluate their impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
- Another goal is to see us reach out beyond our core membership — to **engage all levels of our profession, both nationally and globally**. For this to happen, Learning Forward's board and staff will need to make the organization as inclusive

as possible for all education professionals.

- Growth will require us to **identify what's next for our profession and prepare our membership to respond** to those future challenges. For this to happen, we'll need to strengthen our networking and outreach to more external stakeholders.
- I want to ensure that our voice is always a part of the local, national, and international conversation.

By achieving these goals, Learning Forward will continue to be the world's leading voice on professional development. The work that Learning Forward's board and staff engage in over the next year will ensure that our general membership and affiliates are prepared for that responsibility.

Stakeholders like you make a profound impact on this profession and the people and organizations you serve. I know what you do, why you do it, and the difference you make in districts, classrooms, and educational agencies.

More than anything, I am honored to serve as your primary advocate at every level and opportunity possible. My commitment is to communicate with you openly, sincerely, and transparently to advance our profession.

Thank you, members, affiliates, and volunteers for everything you do. And thank you for the privilege to serve you in this role during the next year. ■

# Galveston County project supports school leaders

Learning Forward has launched a professional learning initiative that will help Galveston County, Texas, area superintendents and their leadership teams support school leaders, change educator practice, and improve student results.

The Galveston County Learning Leaders initiative, with support from the Houston Endowment, will provide participants the intensive training and coaching necessary for developing essential knowledge and skills to build strong district systems of support for their schools.

Working in learning communities will enable participants to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their school districts' professional development investments as well as solve their immediate challenges.

In addition, participants will apply continuous improvement processes toward achieving district priorities, including helping principals become more effective instructional leaders and coaches.

This initiative will impact system leaders, principals, teachers, and students across multiple districts and diverse populations in the Galveston area. By working with leadership teams from multiple districts, Learning Forward's goal is to strengthen the existing network of superintendents and central office leadership in the region so they can sustain support for one another beyond the three-year program.

Participating districts are Dickinson ISD, Friendswood ISD, LaMarque ISD, Santa Fe ISD, Texas City ISD, Hitchcock ISD, Clear Creek ISD, and Galveston ISD.



## SPRING WEBINAR SERIES BEGINS

Learning Forward's spring webinar series kicks off Tuesday, Feb. 10, as Jennifer Abrams hosts "Being Generationally Savvy."

Participants will learn strategies for embracing generational differences in their schools and gain resources and tools to enhance communication with all generations.

Additional spring webinar topics include assessment that supports learning, building leadership capacity, planning and designing professional learning, and more.

Webinars are free for Learning Forward members. Learn more at [www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars).

## LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION'S REACH IN 2014

Donations and gifts to the Learning Forward Foundation fund scholarships and grants to individuals, teams, systems, and affiliates. Here's a quick overview of the foundation's impact in 2014. Grants and scholarships involved:

- 669 elementary, middle, and high school educators representing six states: Georgia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.
- 69 elementary, middle, and high schools.
- Of those, 42 are Title I schools.
- 27,761 elementary, middle, and high school students.
- A 13.2% increase in the number of students in the proficient or advanced range as compared to the year before.

Projects focused on increasing student learning in mathematics, reading, and writing, with an additional focus on enhancing teacher leadership and equity, induction programs for new teachers, individual learning plans for experienced educators, developing collaboration, and job-embedded professional learning. Participants learned to use and apply the Standards of Professional Learning to enhance and extend educator knowledge and skills.

One grantee described a key learning from her grant: "A deep culture of collaboration must be present in order for high-fidelity implementation to occur. This includes trust and respect amongst team members, presence of vulnerability, consistent use of norms, and a belief in students."

To learn more about the foundation or to make a donation, visit [www.learningforward.org/foundation](http://www.learningforward.org/foundation).



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## ENROLL IN THE WINTER INSTITUTE IN PHOENIX

**B**lack Canyon Conference Center in Phoenix, Arizona, is the site for Learning Forward's Winter Institute Feb. 26-27. Learning Forward's Institutes offer two days of intensive learning that dig deep into topics that matter to educators.

Winter Institute topics include:

- Developing facilitation and presentation skills for effective leadership;

- Learning-focused feedback: The key to educator effectiveness; and
- Transforming professional learning: Applying proven strategies and tools to elevate educator practice and student results.

Learn more at [www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/institutes](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/institutes).

**learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/institutes.**

## Be a conference volunteer

Volunteers support Learning Forward staff and host committee with Annual Conference activities by assisting the host committee with registration, hospitality, publicity, student presence, program execution, exhibits, sponsors, and operations.

Each conference host committee recruits volunteers 12-18 months prior to the conference convening. For more information, visit [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/volunteer/conference-volunteers](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/volunteer/conference-volunteers).



## Apply for Academy Class of 2017

The Learning Forward Academy brings together like-minded education professionals for a 2½-year, coach-led, collaborative learning cohort to tackle their biggest challenges in advancing teaching and learning in their systems.

The academy is a guided learning and problem-solving experience based on what we know about the causal relationships between professional learning, educator effectiveness, and student results.

Application deadline for the Academy Class of 2017 is March 15. To register or get more information, visit [www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/academy](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/academy).

### LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- Feb. 15:** Manuscript deadline for the August 2015 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Learning with the best.
- Feb. 26-27:** Learning Forward Winter Institute in Phoenix, Arizona.
- March 15:** Application deadline for Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017.
- April 15:** Manuscript deadline for the October 2015 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Career pathways.
- May 15:** Learning Forward Spring Institute in New Jersey.

Academy graduates  
are changing practice  
and improving results!

## Academy Class of 2014



*“Once you have another lens to view your own work and the organization that you are in, it is hard to go back to the tunnel vision. ... Everything I learned I was able to bring back in some capacity, and I was excited with each learning piece and its true application to our work. **I have not prepared adult learning the same since.**”*

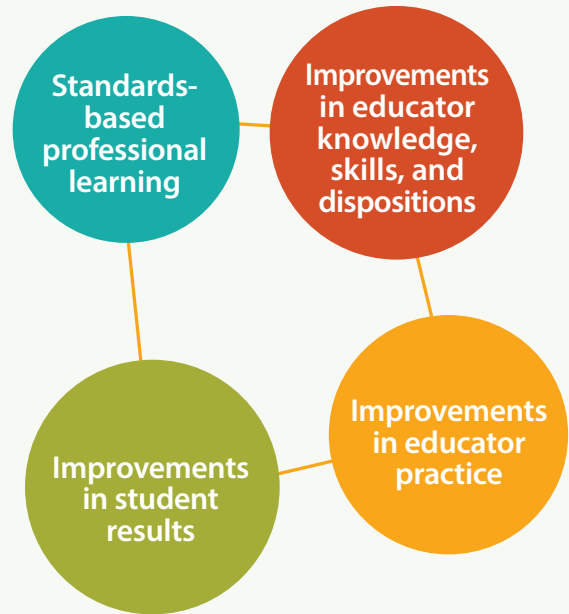
*“The value in academy is the relationships you build with your peers who face similar issues. I loved sharing ideas in the different groups we had.”*

THE LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY brings like-minded education professionals together for a 2½-year, coach-led, collaborative learning cohort to tackle their biggest challenges in advancing teaching and learning in their systems.

The academy is a guided learning and problem-solving experience based on what we know about the causal relationships between professional learning, educator effectiveness, and student results.

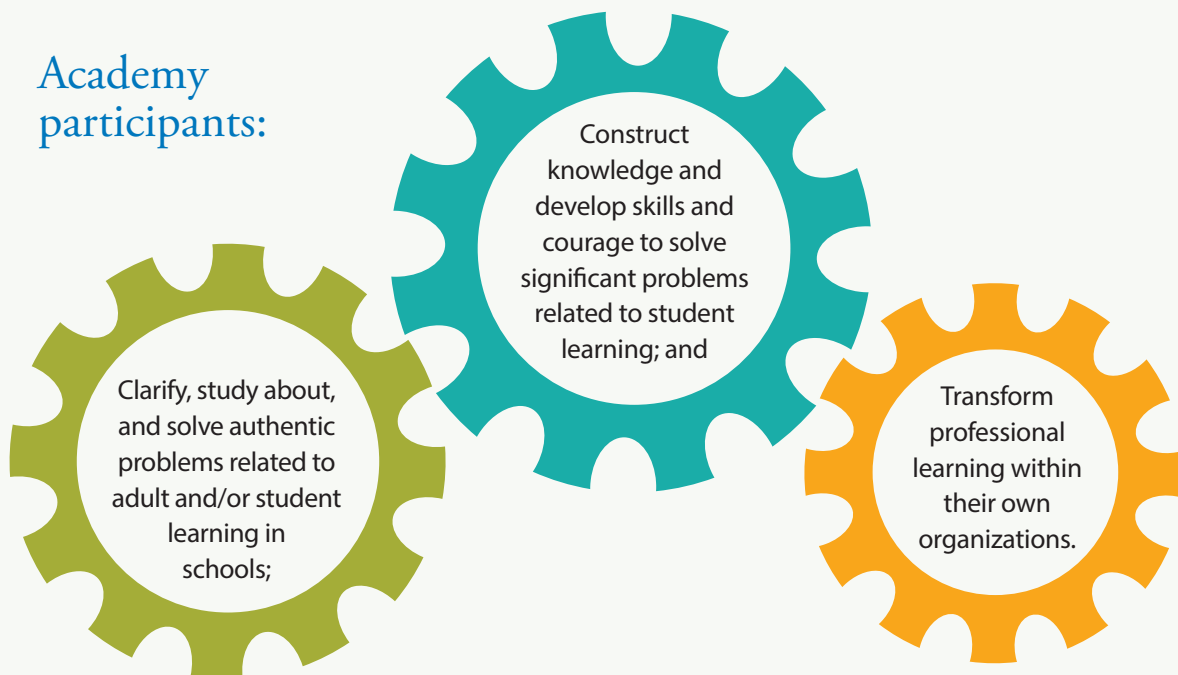
**What participants like most about the Learning Forward Academy**

1. Connecting with, learning from, and gaining the perspectives of people across the country.
2. Gaining new knowledge, tools, and resources to support professional learning.
3. Focused collaboration time.
4. Getting to know the coaches and learning from them.
5. Working with others in job-alike groups.



*“When the professional development is well-designed, it empowers people rather than embitters them. I take this as the most important thing that has come from my experience.”*

**Academy participants:**





*“The opportunity to collaborate and network with colleagues across North America has proven to be the most beneficial aspect of the academy. It has caused*

*me to reflect on my role, my beliefs, and my true convictions in leading others.*

*Thank you,  
Learning Forward!”*



### Academy graduates have a better understanding of how to:

- Apply the principles of effective professional learning and Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning into practice;
- Define a problem before pre-determining solutions;
- Create professional learning communities; and
- Plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning.

### Other benefits include:

- Team-based learning for in-depth instruction that builds relationships and fosters community;
- Admittance to two of Learning Forward’s Annual Conferences, to be inspired by and network with industry experts and peers (a \$1,390 value);
- Participate and collaborate by phone and virtually to extend your learning for continuous process improvement;
- Gain access to valuable resources, relationships, and evidence of results with a complimentary Learning Forward membership for three years — to advance your professional development journey (a \$447 value); and
- Celebrate successful completion with a formal graduation at Learning Forward’s Annual Conference.

*“How I have worked with adults in helping them grow has changed. ... I have a greater understanding of how adults learn and then are able to translate ideas into practice with children.”*



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Learning Forward’s mission is to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. We are the only association devoted exclusively to advancing professional learning for student success.

# Congratulations to graduates of Academy Class of 2014!

## **RACHEAL ADDISON**

Principal coaching advisor  
Memphis City Schools

## **WENDY A. ALLEN**

Assistant principal  
Scottsdale Unified School District

## **MARY T. BHARDWAJ**

Principal  
Aptakisic-Tripp School District 102

## **GERRI BOHANAN**

BTU liaison for support services  
Baltimore Teachers Union

## **ELENA MARIE PAJUNEN BRAND**

Principal  
Lloydminster Public School Division

## **JULIE A. BRUA**

Assistant superintendent for  
curriculum & instruction  
Aptakisic-Tripp School District 102

## **JACOB BRUNO**

Associate director of partner relations  
Corwin

## **MIKE CALLAHAN**

Director of student services  
Spring Lake Park School District

## **TERESA H. CARAWAY**

CEO — Oberkotter Foundation  
Educational Endeavor

## **LORRAINE CORNISH-HARRISON**

Director  
Baltimore Teachers Union Professional  
Development Center

## **SUZANNE DEWEES STRITE DALTON**

Coordinator of professional development  
Confederation of Oregon School  
Administrators

## **CHER DANIEL**

Principal  
Rapid City Area Schools

## **MARGUERITE DIMGBA**

Professional learning center director  
Greece Central School District

## **ROBIN L. ENGLISH**

Freshman academy coordinator  
Joliet Central High School

## **VICKY FISCHER**

Technology integration specialist  
Naperville School District 203

## **COACHES**

### **LISA CASTO**

Director of curriculum & staff development  
Allen ISD

## **ANDI FOURLIS**

Executive director instructional services  
Scottsdale Unified School District

## **KIMBERLY GILMORE MADKINS**

Principal  
Wylie ISD

## **LISA GRIMES**

Learning liaison instructional coach  
Grapevine-Colleyville ISD

## **DEANNE HAINLEN**

Coordinator for instructional technology  
Eagle Mountain - Saginaw ISD

## **JENNIFER A. HLAVKA**

Facilitator  
Howard County Public School  
System / Department of Professional  
and Organizational Development

## **REBECCA A. JENKINS**

Principal  
Aptakisic-Tripp School District 102

## **SUSAN P. JONES**

Professional development coordinator  
Clarksville-Montgomery County School  
System

## **STACEY A. KAMINSKI**

Executive director  
CONNECT Partnership

## **JAMIE LUERSSEN**

Assistant principal  
Fairfax County Public Schools

## **DIANNE MCDONALD**

Curriculum director  
Joliet Township High School

## **SELENA JONES MCNEILL**

Media and education technology instructor  
Stonewall Tell Elementary/Fulton County  
Schools

## **MATT K. MORELAND**

Principal  
Aptakisic-Tripp School District 102

## **MARY ELLEN NEVINS**

Director, auditory-based intervention  
University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

## **NICOLE MARIE STANZI NIELSEN**

Reading specialist/Literacy coach  
Killdeer Countryside School District

## **KATHLEEN E. O'FLYNN**

Co-ordinator of professional development  
Northern Valley Schools

### **NIKKI MOUTON**

Executive director of staff development  
Gwinnett County Public Schools

## **ROSEMARIE PLACEK**

Assistant principal  
Gwinnett County Public Schools

## **MICHAEL RICHARDS**

Instructional coach  
Gwinnett County Public Schools

## **CHERYL ROSS-WILLIAMS**

Instructional facilitator  
Cummings Elementary School

## **TERRI R. SCHRISHUHN**

Assistant principal for support services  
Joliet Township

## **PAMELA SITTON**

Assistant superintendent human resources  
Scottsdale School District

## **KATHLEEN SUSSMAN**

Executive director  
Weingarten Children's Center

## **ADRIENNE TEDESCO**

Assistant principal  
Gwinnett County Public Schools  
Staff Development Office

## **CHRISTY TIDWELL**

Coordinator of professional development &  
continuous improvement  
Texarkana ISD

## **CAROLYN M. TINSLEY**

Webster Professional Learning Center  
Director — Webster Central School District

## **SIGRUNN UNDERWOOD**

Curriculum support teacher  
Stonewall Tell Elementary School  
Fulton County Schools

## **TONIO VERZONE**

Facilitator  
Anchorage, Alaska

## **KATHLEEN WIEBKE**

Executive director  
Arizona K12 Center

## **SCOTT G. WOUTERS**

Superintendent of human resources  
Lloydminster Public School Division

Top changes or improvements  
in participants' schools or systems that  
connect to their Academy experience:

- + Shared visions and norms.
- + Richer dialogues among faculty.
- + More time for collaborative professional learning.
- + Professional development plans closely aligned with district and/or school goals.

## Annual Conference highlights



Hattie



Irving

Experience some of the great moments from Learning Forward's 2014 Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Watch clips from keynote speakers John Hattie and Barrington Irving. Download slides of Hattie's presentation on visible learning. Extend your learning throughout the year by participating in post-conference webinars, e-learning programs, and ongoing discussions with session presenters and fellow attendees in the Learning Exchange.

[www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/2014-conference-highlights](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/2014-conference-highlights)

## Explore the Leadership standard

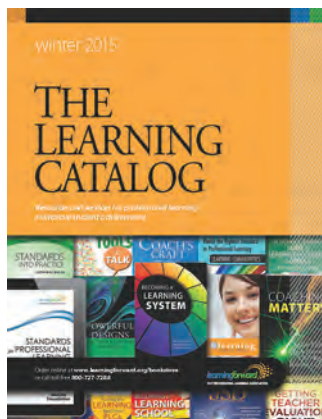
In one of many videos available to illuminate the Standards for Professional Learning, Mike Ford, former superintendent of Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District in New York, discusses the key components of the Leadership standard. Use this resource and articles featuring practitioners in the field to deepen educators' understanding of the standards.

[www.learningforward.org/standards/leadership](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/leadership)

## Bookstore catalog available

The Winter 2015 catalog for the Learning Forward Bookstore is now available. Browse new titles, peruse best sellers and member favorites, or search by category for resources and services for professional learning to improve student achievement. Offerings include books by experts in the field, co-publications with Corwin Press, and back issues of *JSD*. Learning Forward members save 20%. Overnight shipping and quantity discounts are available.

[www.learningforward.org/bookstore](http://www.learningforward.org/bookstore)



## Teachers' views on professional learning

*Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh discusses the findings in a recent report on teachers' views on professional learning:*

**"A**s frontline learners in our systems, teachers' needs must drive our overall professional learning agenda. Their satisfaction with and engagement in the learning is directly connected to what they will take away from it. I value teachers' voices in understanding and talking about effective professional learning, and I am not surprised that what teachers want and need align specifically with the Standards for Professional Learning."

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning\\_forwards\\_pd\\_watch/2014/12/teachers\\_needs\\_must\\_drive\\_the\\_professional\\_learning\\_agenda.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning_forwards_pd_watch/2014/12/teachers_needs_must_drive_the_professional_learning_agenda.html)

## Innovation Configuration maps

Innovation Configuration (IC) maps provide clear pictures of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in practice and guide educators in increasing the quality and results of professional learning. IC maps identify and describe the major components of the standards in operation, helping those in various roles understand the actions they take as part of systemwide implementation. Download free IC maps for teachers to increase educators' understanding of this valuable tool.

[www.learningforward.org/standards/innovation-configurations](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/innovation-configurations)



### 3 steps to great coaching:

A simple but powerful instructional coaching cycle nets results.

*By Jim Knight, Marti Elford, Michael Hock, Devona Dunekack, Barbara Bradley, Donald D. Deshler, and David Knight*

While working with coaches from Oregon and Washington, researchers developed a simple but powerful way to conduct instructional coaching. First, coach and teacher collaborate to set a goal and select a learning strategy. Next, the teacher learns how to implement the strategy. For the coach, this means explaining and modeling teaching strategies. Finally, instructional coaches monitor how teachers implement the chosen strategy and whether students meet the goal.

### Problem solvers:

Teacher leader teams with content specialist to strengthen math instruction.

*By Sara Zrike and Christine Connolly*

A math content specialist for Boston Public Schools and a teacher leader at a dual-language school worked together to improve math instruction in the school. Their process began with classroom observations to pinpoint strengths and challenges, followed by common planning time sessions that focused professional learning around the results of the observations. By the end of the school year, follow-up observations showed improvements in teacher practice and the results of state assessments showed improvements in student's math performance.

### Talking points:

Data displays are an effective way to engage teachers.

*By Alyson Adams, Dorene Ross, Jamey Burns, and Lauren Gibbs*

A program created by the Lastinger Center at the University of Florida is helping instructional coaches become effective change agents in their schools by using a professional learning design that includes creating high-quality data displays to engage teachers in conversation about instruction. While a data display is a powerful professional learning tool, creating effective data displays has been problematic for teachers.

### What we learned from a tomato:

Partnering with a content expert plants new ideas for instruction.

*By Bradley A. Ermeling*

Researchers from the Pearson Research and Innovation Network investigating partnerships between teacher teams and outside content experts got a close-up look at how these relationships impact teachers' instructional practice. A case study of an urban high school in Maryland reveals how instructional plans evolved during interactions between teachers and a research fellow from the National Institutes of Health.

## feature

### A step in the right direction:

Learning walks build a bridge between central office and schools.

*By Barbara Deane-Williams, Shaun Nelms, and Sheila B. Robinson*

What does an effective classroom look and sound like? What does it mean to have students engaged in learning? What is high-quality instruction? To answer these questions, the Greece Central School District in New York created teaching and learning teams to conduct learning walks through schools. During the walks, teams review student data, troubleshoot intervention systems and strategies, and talk with staff, collecting data to build a learner-centered partnership with the principal and school leaders.

### coming up

In April 2015 *JSD*: Tech tools, tips, and time-savers

## columns

### Lessons from research:

Fidelity of implementation proves key to achieving student results.

*By Joellen Killion*

A professional learning intervention that has positive effects on student achievement in reading and math shows the importance of fidelity of implementation.

### From the director:

Make coaching's purpose clear, and make its results known.

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

Effective coaching includes clarity of purpose, effective implementation, and a strong coaching methodology.

**Clear goals, clear results:**

Content-focused routines support learning for everyone — including coaches.

*By Donna DiPrima Bickel, Tabettha Bernstein-Danis, and Lindsay Clare Matsumura*

Content-focused coaching sets clear expectations about outcomes for applying new pedagogical practices in the classroom, uses routines that support everyone as learners, and relies on cognitive tools to guide conversation and provide substantive feedback. Using this method allows coaches to be effective without resorting to feedback that challenges the teacher’s practice and may cause professional discomfort.

**Power tools for talking:**

Custom protocols enrich coaching conversations.

*By Francesca Pomerantz and Jacy Ippolito*

While protocols can be powerful tools for professional learning, education leaders and teachers need to strategically select and tailor protocols to fit their purposes and context. When a group of reading specialists partnered with a suburban school district, the authors led a series of workshops to build the reading specialists’ capacity for designing and using protocols to lead instructional data meetings.

**Check your gauges:**

Calibrating conversations assist teachers in fine-tuning instruction.

*By Arthur L. Costa and Robert J. Garmston*

Teachers maintain a capacity for learning throughout

their careers, but experience is not enough to promote learning. Growth occurs when teachers reflect on that experience and use higher-order thinking processes to plan, monitor, evaluate, and modify educational tasks. Calibrating conversations, which help teachers measure their progress against agreed-upon standards, foster this type of career-long development and growth.

**Principals boost coaching’s impact:**

School leaders’ support is critical to collaboration.

*By Les Foltos*

Successful coaches know their success in collaborating with peers to improve teaching and learning hinges on the support of principals who control the budget and other key resources. Many coaches also understand that the leadership they provide plays an important role in creating the support needed to sustain coaching. Their accomplishments, and their abilities to communicate them to their principal and colleagues, are essential to support and expand coaching in a school.

**The character of a coach:**

Success depends on trustworthiness.

*By Kay Psencik*

The coach’s role is to help leaders develop and model the character traits that lead to trusting relationships. A coach’s success in doing so depends on the coach’s own trustworthiness. Developing trust requires coaches to take on moral leadership and develop bonds with those they coach in order to model trust throughout the school.

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**Writing for JSD**

- Themes for the 2015 publication year are posted at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes).
- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure ([christy.colclasure@learningforward.org](mailto:christy.colclasure@learningforward.org)).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines).



## Make coaching's purpose clear, and make its results known

Across a range of fields, we celebrate effective coaches and recognize their role in supporting growth and high achievement. Many of us hire coaches to assist us in meeting personal and professional goals. Parents with means hire coaches to give their children the extra edge in sports and academic competitions.

In the context of professional learning, we have seen the number of coaches and opportunities for educators to experience coaching grow exponentially.

Even as the use of coaches increases, many stakeholders question the real impact of coaching. There are research studies that show examples of coaching that doesn't impact student achievement. However, as Killion, Harrison, Bryan, and Clifton point out in their book *Coaching Matters* (Learning Forward, 2012), numerous studies show the value of coaching as well as the importance of considering the implementation of coaching practices when evaluating its impact.

The role of coaches has grown exponentially in the business field as well. According to an article on *Forbes.com*, companies invested \$1 billion in executive coaching in 2011. The author cites a global survey of coaching clients by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the

•  
**Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.**

Association Resource Center showing that the mean return on investment for companies investing in coaching was seven times the initial investment, with over a quarter reporting a return on investment of 10 to 49 times (Symonds, 2011).

These and other studies demonstrate that critical characteristics of effective coaching include clarity of purpose, effective implementation, and a strong coaching methodology. These findings lead me to make two requests of you:

**We must be clear on our purpose and goals for our coaching investments.** Just as with any professional learning, we must know the outcomes we seek and how we intend to measure them. Our coaches need to know the practices they are expected to employ and engage in ongoing learning themselves to implement them with fidelity.

Most of the failures in our field can be traced to poor execution, not poor planning. When we ground our plans — and our implementation — in the Standards for Professional Learning, we can have confidence in our strategy to improve outcomes for educators and students.

**We must share the results of our investments.** Where possible, hire external evaluators to examine and document the results of professional learning investments. You may need to write your own story and share it with those around you who are responsible



for supporting or funding your work.

Such stories and evidence of impact can elevate the importance of this work. We offer a place to share your story through [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/tell-your-story). Read more about this on p. 65.

I am a firm believer in the power of coaching. I have had my own coach since the day I was appointed executive director of Learning Forward. I attribute many of my most successful outcomes to the support of my coach. I am committed to seeing that every educator has the benefit of a great coaching experience. You can help us make that happen.

### REFERENCES

**Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012).** *Coaching matters*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

**Symonds, M. (2011, January 21).** Executive coaching — another set of clothes for the Emperor? *Forbes.com*. Available at [www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2011/01/21/executive-coaching-another-set-of-clothes-for-the-emperor](http://www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2011/01/21/executive-coaching-another-set-of-clothes-for-the-emperor). ■

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