

# JSD

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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SHIFT FROM 'ME' TO 'WE' WITH A COACHING CULTURE p. 42

**District aligns individual, school, and system goals** p. 36

Online protocols net results for group learning p. 48

## INDIVIDUAL & COLLECTIVE

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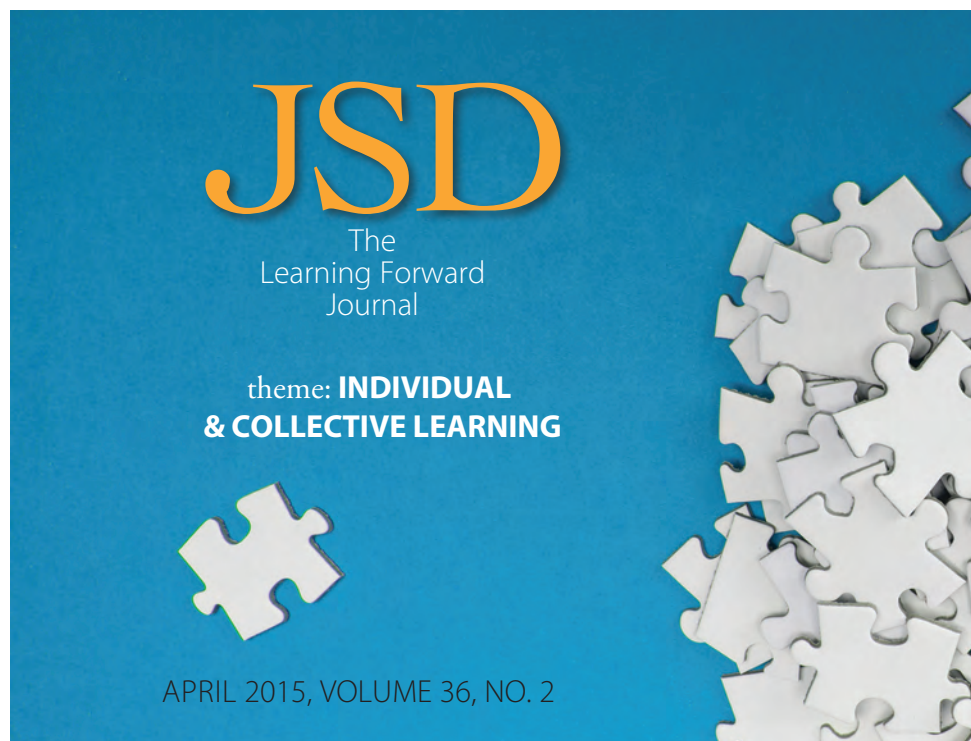
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“Satisficing” — selecting the first option that meets a given need but which might not be the most optimal — is a critical problem of practice for educators. It interferes with deep, sustained reflection on practice and the learning that results.





## Take ownership of your learning

A couple of weeks ago, one of my colleagues related a coaching experience where she was in the position of sitting and watching, when she could have been trying and doing. She knew she wouldn't be able to apply her learning until she put it into practice. While she needed her peer's expertise, she also recognized how her knowledge and skill would grow most efficiently. With that in mind, she stood up for herself as a learner and asked to take control.

Being intentional as a learner in any context is easiest when we each recognize how we learn best and then take the next step to make it happen. This applies in both individual and collaborative learning environments. For individuals, this might mean seeking opportunities that emphasize observation or video rather than loads of reading — or vice versa. Or maybe particular individuals don't have opportunities or preferences to network face-to-face but find that virtual networks suit them best.

On teams, each member has the opportunity to assert his or her needs as a learner even while contributing to a collective outcome. For example, one member learns best by writing things down, so he volunteers to keep notes. Another member needs more

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preparation time, so she contributes to agenda setting. Yet another learns best with visuals, so he takes the responsibility for finding related infographics and videos to bring to the team.

Throughout this issue of *JSD*, we highlight examples of schools and systems that find a successful balance of collective and individual learning practices. For example, in several districts in New Jersey, teachers across grades and subjects learned together about using argument in their classes and applied their learning in their individual classrooms (see p. 12). In the York Region District School Board in Ontario, learning leaders addressed the challenge of personalizing learning in a context where all educators work toward systemwide goals (see p. 36).

However, none of these successes is possible without the active engagement of the individual adult learners participating in them. While we know more than ever about how to engage learners in different ways, engagement is not a one-way street. Professional learners have the responsibility to dig into their learning in the ways that will change their practices and increase their skills to reach all students. A glance across the Twittersphere shows that teachers are certainly up for the challenge, asking for more voice and choice in their learning.

One part of taking ownership of learning is understanding deeply our own best ways of learning.



Learners who can explicitly share their understanding of how they learn best help their colleagues contribute to better learning for all. Such discussions also emphasize the importance of knowledge about adult learning. Prioritizing learning about learning helps students and educators alike.

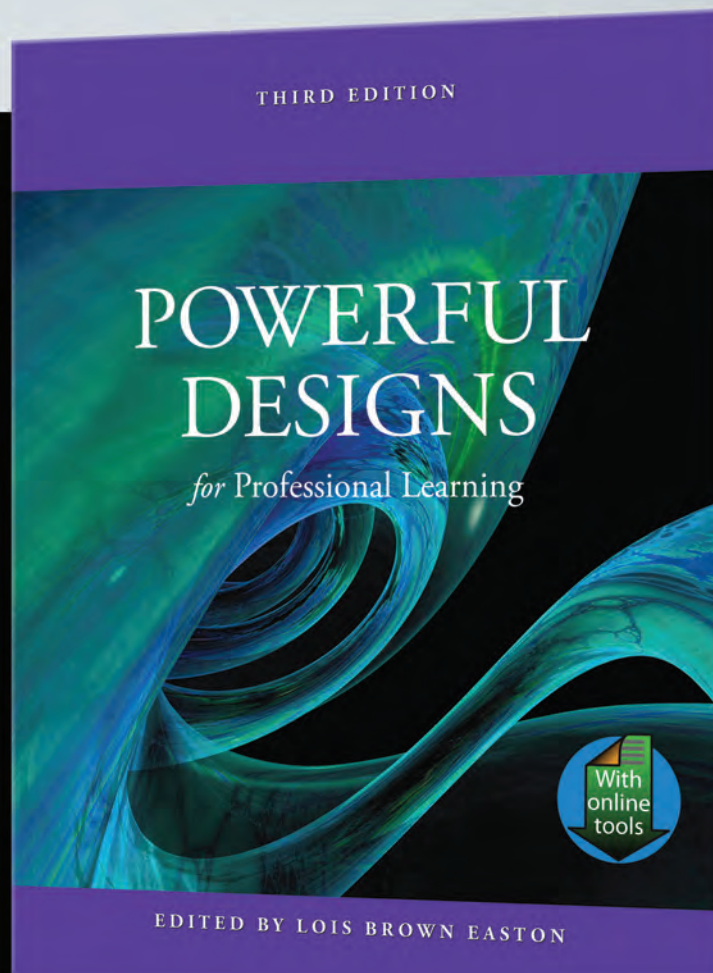
While Learning Forward has high aspirations for schools and school districts to create comprehensive professional learning systems that include all of the elements that ensure sustained and effective professional learning for all educators, the learner herself has an enormous responsibility for making sure learning happens. Effective learning designs, skillful leadership, trusting cultures, sufficient resources, relevant data are essential — and the learner ultimately pulls it all together by committing to and participating in sustained engagement and improvement. ■

# What does powerful professional learning look like?

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## DEEPER LEARNING

### DL Planning Guide

The DL Planning Guide, based on the book *Deeper Learning: How Eight Innovative Public Schools Are Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century* (The New Press, 2014), offers practical guidance on the conditions that have to be established for schools to change their practices to ensure students leave school with the sophisticated content knowledge and skills needed to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and communicators. The guide is organized into four phases and includes a user guide and downloadable exercises. Facilitator notes help estimate the length of time and pacing needed to help teams move through the exercise and develop their plans.

[www.dlplanningguide.com](http://www.dlplanningguide.com)

## BLENDED LEARNING

### Supporting Student Success Through Time & Technology

*National Center on Time & Learning, 2014*

This guide reveals insights and experiences from school practitioners, researchers, and experts to provide a planning and implementation road map for schools that are looking to

personalize student learning through expanded learning time and blended learning. The guide is organized into two parts. The first profiles six expanded learning time schools across the country that have implemented blended learning for various purposes, in various ways, and with varying degrees of success. The second part of the guide offers a seven-step road map for planning and implementation, based on the experiences of the six schools profiled, along with insights from blended learning and expanded learning time experts.

[www.timeandlearning.org/blendedlearningguide](http://www.timeandlearning.org/blendedlearningguide)

## CONTENT REVIEWS

*EdReports*

EdReports.org is an independent nonprofit that provides free, web-based reviews of instructional materials focused on alignment to the Common Core and other indicators of high quality as meaningful to educators, including usability, teacher support, and differentiation. Reviews highlight instructional materials that are aligned to the higher standards states have adopted so that teachers, principals, and district and state officials charged with purchasing materials can make more informed

choices. EdReports.org's goal is to elevate the overall level of rigor and quality of instructional materials by helping more informed consumers — teachers and parents — demand better materials from those who supply the market.

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

## TEACHER LEADERSHIP

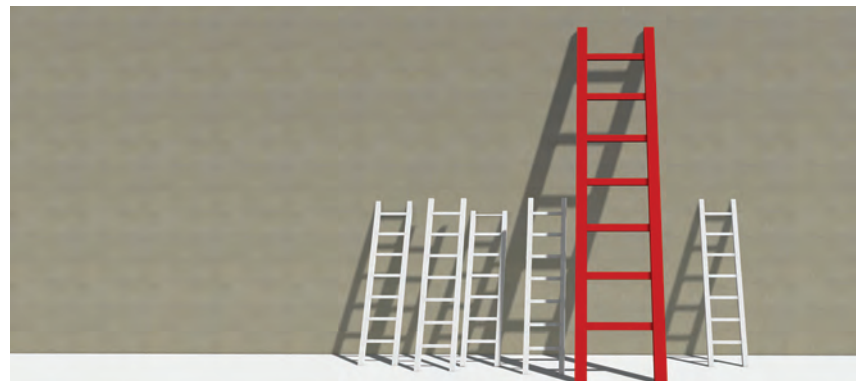
### The Decade-Plus Teaching Career

*Teach Plus, 2015*

Schools, districts, and charter management organizations need to think creatively about how to capitalize on the abilities of their best teachers and create leadership positions for teachers. This would allow them to contribute to their profession and student learning with a larger, sustained impact. This paper highlights three strategies for retaining the best teachers for a lifelong career in the classroom. Those strategies are:

1. Create career ladders with opportunities for leadership and specialization.
2. Partner with organizations to grow teacher leadership.
3. Restructure staffing and scheduling to meet teacher needs.

[www.teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/decade-plus\\_final.pdf](http://www.teachplus.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/decade-plus_final.pdf)







**TRANSFORMATIVE THINKING**  
**Designing for Transformative Scale:**  
**Global Lessons in What Works**  
*Rotman Management, 2015*

This article in University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management magazine takes a global perspective on transformative scale, illustrating nine strategies for guiding organizations. The authors outline three principles that, no matter what strategy is chosen, shape how an organization's leaders think and act in pursuit of their chosen mission: Listen to your beneficiaries, focus on affordability, and build a model that can scale. The article also includes examples from organizations at work in developing countries. The authors conclude that organizations that get these three principles right greatly increase their chances of achieving transformative scale. Those that don't have no chance at all.

[www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Global-Development/Transformative-Scale-Global-Lessons-What-Works.aspx](http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Global-Development/Transformative-Scale-Global-Lessons-What-Works.aspx)

**MOVING TOWARD EQUITY**  
**Equitable Access Toolkit**

*Center on Great Teachers & Leaders*

To ensure that all students receive equitable access to excellent educators, the U.S. Department of Education created the Excellent Educators for All Initiative, which requires each state, alongside stakeholders, to create a plan to ensure equitable access. The

Equitable Access Toolkit includes resources and materials to guide state leaders through the most critical aspects of developing these plans — stakeholder engagement, root-cause analysis, and data review. Also available are a sample equity plan template and a Sample State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators to assist with this process.

[www.gtlicenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit](http://www.gtlicenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit)

**STRONG PRINCIPALS**  
**Building a Stronger Principalship,**  
**Vol. 3: Districts Taking Charge**  
**of the Principal Pipeline**  
*Policy Studies Associates, 2015*

This is the third in a series of reports evaluating a multiyear initiative from The Wallace Foundation. The report documents ways in which six districts are working to improve school leadership districtwide. It describes several new measures districts are implementing, including systematic support for assistant principals; the use of performance standards to hire and evaluate principals, as well as to inform training and support for them; and the establishment of data systems to promote more effective hiring, identify principals in need of support, and provide feedback to the programs that trained them.

[www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/principal-training/Pages/Building-a-Stronger-Principalship-Vol3-Districts-Taking-Charge.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/principal-training/Pages/Building-a-Stronger-Principalship-Vol3-Districts-Taking-Charge.aspx)



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**COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

“Collective participation advances the goals of a whole school or team as well as those of individuals. Communities of caring, analytic, reflective, and inquiring educators collaborate to learn what is necessary to increase student learning. Within learning communities, members exchange feedback about their practice with one another, visit each other’s classrooms or work settings, and share resources. Learning community members strive to refine their collaboration, communication, and relationship skills to work within and across both internal and external systems to support student learning. They develop norms of collaboration and relational trust and employ processes and structures that unleash expertise and strengthen capacity to analyze, plan, implement, support, and evaluate their practice.”

**Source:** Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*, p. 25. Oxford, OH: Author.



# SELECTING *a* DESIGN

Different learning designs require different amounts of trust and organization. Designs also result in different outcomes and may support individual or collective goals to varying degrees. Some are more likely to shift practice, and effective leaders select designs carefully.

Characteristics	Learning design
Shifts practice over time Requires high trust Greater complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesson study</li> <li>• Analyzing student work</li> <li>• Tuning protocol</li> <li>• Videotaping and analyzing lessons</li> </ul>
Medium results in shifting practice Medium level of trust required Medium complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Friends Groups</li> <li>• Designing lessons, assessments, and curriculum maps together</li> <li>• Analyzing student performance data</li> <li>• Peer observations</li> <li>• Action research</li> </ul>
Low yield in shifting practice Low level of trust required Easy to organize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Book studies</li> <li>• Classroom walk-throughs</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Online learning (such as webinars)</li> </ul>

Adapted from Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

**Learn more** ABOUT LEARNING DESIGNS

- See “Net results: Online protocols boost group learning potential” on p. 48.
- Explore the newly published third edition of *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, available at [www.learningforward.org/bookstore](http://www.learningforward.org/bookstore).

# How is my learning aligned?

Use the self-assessment below and the statements at right to explore, either on your own or with a team, how effectively individual and collaborative learning is aligned in your context and how that alignment impacts shared priorities.



Feedback from periodic evaluations informs my individual learning.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

Feedback from periodic evaluations informs the collaborative learning in which I engage.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

Other members of my learning teams know what my individual learning goals are.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

Other members of my learning teams help me advance toward individual learning outcomes.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

I help other members of my learning teams advance toward their individual learning outcomes.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

Our shared team goals are connected to our individual learning goals.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

I see a connection between my individual learning goals and school- or systemwide improvement priorities.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

My learning teams explicitly make connections between our team goals and school- or systemwide improvement priorities.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

The leaders in our school or system have strategies or structures to align our learning goals at the individual, team, school, and system level.

ALWAYS                                      SOMETIMES                                      NEVER

## SEEKING GREATER COHERENCE

Our learning would have a greater impact if we did more:

The professional learning in my context that is most discreet from shared learning goals is:

The individual learning that most profoundly impacts my work is:

The collaborative learning that most profoundly impacts my work is:

The people who can most directly impact the coherence of my learning and my team's learning are:

I can contribute to greater coherence in my team's and school's learning by:

If our learning had greater coherence, the biggest impact on my school would be:



# PIECES *of the* LEARNING PUZZLE

By Tracy Crow

**E**ducators are demanding opportunities to access learning specific to their needs, and there are more options than ever for school systems to personalize learning. Sometimes these personalized learning options go hand-in-hand with teacher effectiveness systems that districts use to identify areas for educator growth.

At the same time, schools and teams set collective goals for improvement, and years of research tell us that collaborative learning has many benefits for educators, schools, and students. Learning Forward's definition of professional learning and Standards for Professional Learning prioritize collaborative learning and outline the need for time dedicated to team learning in the workweek.

So how can learning leaders balance what may at times seem to be competing needs and strategies for learning?

In schools and districts that don't have comprehensive professional learning systems established — or at the very least aligned — and cohesive learning outlined, these needs can indeed be competing. A teacher may be faced with addressing a relicensure regulation that requires one kind of learning, an evaluation from her supervisor that outlines

## ALIGNED GOALS SHAPE LEARNING FOR ONE AND ALL

a different individual learning need, a weekly professional learning community tasked with an entirely unrelated goal, and a school improvement goal on another track. While the learning opportunities tied to each of these might have value, they may not add up to a whole that leads to optimal growth — and improved teaching for students — for the individual teacher or her team.

However, this combination of individual and collective learning can in many situations add up to a meaningful and logical learning plan. In fact, for most educators, both individual and collective learning will be ideal to meet their needs and improve their practice.

In schools and districts that have professional learning systems established, a vision and standards for learning guide everything associated with what and how educators grow. Educators will have resources and structures for setting learning goals — as individuals, on teams, and across schools. They will have multiple sources of student, educator, and system data to analyze as they set learning goals. They will have strategies for identifying the exper-

tise in their teams and buildings and for knowing when they need to tap external support. Their supervisory, peer, and coaching support will align to sustain and extend their individual and collaborative learning.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

In every learning context, learning leaders take into account several factors for skillfully balancing individual and collaborative learning needs and strategies. The Learning Designs standard is central to these considerations: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes (Learning Forward, 2011).

### Purposes of the learning

Generally speaking, professional learning has three major purposes: to support individual educator growth, to achieve a team or school goal, and to support program implementation. At times, an educator's learning needs might align along more than one pur-

pose — perhaps she needs to strengthen her questioning strategies to help students in her classroom at the same time that a team has identified that same area of need for the whole 6th grade.

### Learning goals and outcomes

Once the purpose of the learning is clear, leaders and learners can use student and educator data to identify learning goals and desired outcomes for individuals and teams. Desired outcomes are critical to determining optimal learning strategies and designs.

### Learner preferences and engagement

Active engagement in learning — where learners interact meaningfully with the content and with other learners — leads to change in practice. Learners' preferences and identities as educators, their beliefs, backgrounds, experiences, and motivations, all play a role in understanding how they learn most effectively.

### Resources available

Resources for learning — time, money, people, technology, and other materials — are largely determined at the system level. If a district has a learning management system in place, learners may be identifying and documenting much of their learning through that platform. If a district or school has established job-embedded time for collaborative learning, then learning in concert with other colleagues is more likely to be the norm.

While the reality in schools often dictates that learning options will be driven by the resources available, learning leaders will ultimately want to build systems where learning needs determine what resources the system provides.

### NAVIGATING THE OPTIONS

Many educators, regardless of their context, already combine these types of learning and navigate their opportunities skillfully. For example, an advanced math teacher in a high school needs to

strengthen high-level content learning expertise and doesn't have colleagues in her building who have or need this sort of expertise.

She seeks for her professional learning network other advanced math teachers in other schools, districts, or regions, who together deepen their understanding of math content and pedagogy to support meaningful instruction. Perhaps she meets other teachers online or through a local university. Her individual needs are unique, and she is growing because of her collaborative learning.

In the same school, an English language arts teacher meets weekly with a subject-area team concerned with strengthening instruction for English language learners. They develop collective learning goals and use a range of strategies to deepen their knowledge. Because this teacher tends to learn best through reading, he brings academic research studies to the group and shares information that way, while other team members may seek information about teaching strategies in another way.

### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Individual learners, coaches, school leaders, and system leaders all have responsibilities for creating the optimal balance between individual and collective learning for every educator in the system.

**The learner** takes responsibility for her own growth by understanding her learning needs and preferences; seeking and reflecting upon feedback from peers, coaches, and supervisors; working with others to identify and create appropriate learning; engaging deeply as a learner; and evaluating the impact of learning on herself and students.

**The coach** assists the learner in setting learning goals and deciding which learning is most appropriate to achieve particular goals; offers feedback, support, and additional resources; facilitates or supports team and school learning; and helps to measure impact of learning and determine next steps.

**The school leader** offers feedback and support to the learner; advocates resources for both individual and collaborative learning; engages visibly as a learner individually and in collaborative settings; builds alignment between individual, team, school, and district goals; and helps to measure impact of learning and determine next steps.

**The system leader** offers feedback and support to the learner, particularly when the learners are school leaders; advocates and secures resources for both individual and collaborative learning; engages visibly as a learner individually and in collaborative settings; builds alignment between individual, team, school, and district goals; and helps to measure impact of learning and determine next steps.

Even in schools and districts that don't yet have a comprehensive system established, both leaders and learners find ways to align their learning meaningfully. Whether through a schoolwide focus on improving literacy that drives an entire faculty's learning, for example, or a science team's yearlong emphasis on student engagement, shared goals help individuals shape their specific learning so they can best meet the collective needs of the students they serve.

### REFERENCE

**Learning Forward. (2011).** *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

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# AN ARGUMENT EVERYONE WINS

SHARED LEARNING UNITES TEACHERS  
ACROSS SCHOOLS AND GRADE LEVELS

By Lauren Goldberg, Brad Siegel,  
and Gravity Goldberg

**D**o you like hot chocolate or chicken noodle soup on a cold winter day? Would you prefer to travel by bus or train to New York City?

A 2nd-grade teacher recounted these verbal interchanges as examples of arguments facilitated routinely in her classroom. She lauded the accomplishments of her 2nd-grade students maturely engaging in conversational arguments, citing their ability to make a claim and provide evidence as support without preparation.

## PROCESS FOR LOOKING AT STUDENT ARGUMENT WRITING

- Name what you see without judgments.
- Describe what you think the writer is doing.
- Avoid jargon while being as specific as possible.
- Discuss and imagine next steps for this writer.
- Compare pieces and name specifically what is similar and different.
- Create continuums with clear descriptions that outline teaching moves and ideas.



The teacher, sitting among a diverse group of educators, acknowledged that these arguments take a great deal of time and guidance. Clearly impressed, the 6th-grade science teacher, 12th-grade AP English teacher, elementary principal, and K-8 literacy coach congratulated the teacher and considered similar uses of argument in their classrooms.

School districts across the U.S. are bombarding teachers with professional development to meet rigorous expectations of the Common Core State Standards with mixed levels of success. On occasion, districts implement creative and unique practices to recast the nature of professional learning.

The three authors of this article — a K-12 regional director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment responsible for orchestrating professional learning, a high school English teacher who participated in the professional learning, and an independent literacy consultant who supports four districts' professional learning — share their experiences about K-12 professional learning involving argument and writing. We offer insights from these three perspectives on how sustained and dynamic professional learning can cut across many groups of educators coming from different schools.

The goal at the outset was to eliminate the boundaries often existing between curriculum and professional learning. Our work explored the nature of one form of writing — argument — with the intention of making the process of argument transcend a particular writing experience.

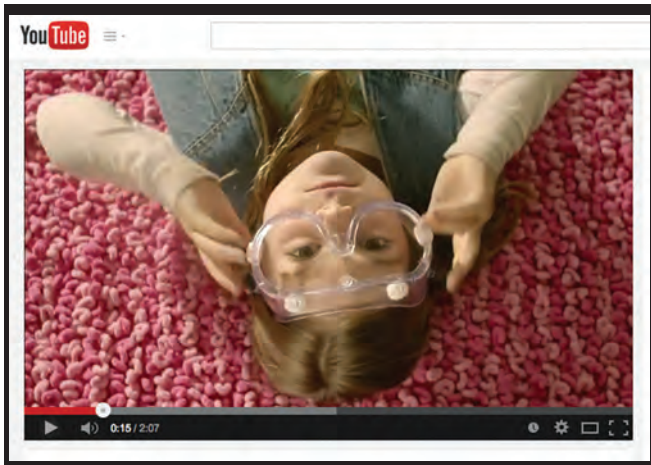
Argument, a construct grounded in British philosopher Stephen Toulmin's work and researched extensively in current education writing, is a way of thinking that cultivates students' cognitive capacities and is most effectively taught through multiple mediums and forms of expression (Kuhn, 1992; Lunsford & Ruskiewicz, 2009). This deeper, conceptual examination of argument is important, realizing instruction cannot reside merely at the surface of standards prescribed by the Common Core.

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Teachers discussed Internet ads from the toy company GoldieBlox, then used the same activity with their students the next day.

**EXCERPTS OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE GOLDIEBLOX “PRINCESS MACHINE” AD**

Question 1: What is the argument?	
Grade 1	Girls should use their brains.
Grade 2	Girls like building cool stuff.
Grade 6	1. All girls don't like only girl stuff, but they also like boy stuff. 2. Don't underestimate girls. 3. Girls want better toys, like boys have. 4. Girls don't just want to be known as playing with dolls but want things to help them be smart.
Grade 10	Girls can do what boys can do; girls should pursue careers in STEM; girls are creative; girls' toys are limiting; advocating gender equality; challenging gender norms; to empower girls; to challenge the toy industry.

DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

## A multidimensional approach

By Brad Siegel

This small region of public districts in northern New Jersey includes three high-

performing K-8 schools sending students to one high school. Students attending these schools come from affluent homes of

relatively homogeneous ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Shared curricular services across districts are a long-standing tradition.

These districts encounter many roadblocks when teachers come together from different grade levels with varied professional interests, but Common Core and other curriculum initiatives require us to approach literacy education with deliberate attention to transitions,



coherence, and reinforcement.

Unpacking standards and constructing writing prompts are common practices in these districts. In choosing a different, multidimensional approach, the districts' goals were to invigorate teachers, reach all educators in the districts, and directly impact classroom practice.

Determined to meet these aims, the districts' writing articulation committee — made up of teachers, coaches, curriculum coordinators, principals, a literacy consultant, and the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment — chose to explore the nature of argument with an end goal of collecting student writing samples, reviewing the merits and pitfalls of their writing, and identifying prototypes representing a progression of writing along a K-12 continuum.

This close and collaborative review of student pieces would inform teachers about elements of argument writing at each grade level and enable the group to discuss what features they value.

Beginning in fall 2013, the literacy consultant and I led

interactive instructional exercises that allowed educators to experience argument in small-group settings of K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 and move between language arts literacy and content areas, such as social studies and science. Most importantly, teachers participated in experiential learning in debates, role-plays, and interpretations of music and media from popular culture.

In one example that illuminates the multifaceted, differentiated professional work with argument, teachers reviewed Internet ads from a toy company called GoldieBlox. While promoting the company's products, the commercials also have a distinct social justice angle: encouraging young women's pursuits in STEM education.

Ads are concise and complex texts containing myriad messages. Interpreting the arguments implicitly evident in the creator's messages became the central instructional focus of one professional learning activity. Teachers worked in mixed groups to dissect the ads, first as a consumer of information and then from the lens of a student sitting in their classroom.





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Comparing the rich and varied perspectives among educators was revealing and provocative. At a glance, though, one can see the limits of teachers merely assuming the role of the student.

We took this professional learning a step further by asking all 45 teachers to use the same activity in class the following day. All students in 1st through 12th grade watched the same ad and answered the same questions the teachers had the day before. Teachers then compiled and shared their experiences in an online document for all members of the committee to review.

This short and simple exercise pushed teachers to examine the nature of argument in a complex text, attain useful pedagogical knowledge, collaborate with colleagues across grade levels, and reflect on students' abilities to analyze multimodal arguments.

TEACHER

## Bringing the learning back to the classroom

*By Lauren Goldberg*

A cross-section of English teachers and content-area teachers from eight schools came together to focus on the genre of argument, sharing strategies and experiences that could apply to all grade levels.



Unlike much of the professional learning I've experienced, this was interactive and playful, allowing teachers to read argumentative

texts and engage in arguments with colleagues. Instructions varied. Sometimes the facilitator assigned our positions, sometimes we chose; sometimes we had time to prepare our arguments, sometimes not. The day repeatedly immersed participants in engaging activities covering a wide range of topics across content areas that could be adapted for immediate use in the classroom.

The group began by viewing a GoldieBlox commercial titled "Princess Machine." The ad depicts three girls, bored by a TV commercial featuring dress-up princesses, grabbing tools and safety goggles to create their own larger-than-life Rube Goldberg machine out of pink teapots, feather boas, and other "girly" toys.

This machine is ultimately used to change the channel on their television from the video featuring stereotypical princesses to a cartoon featuring a female engineer and the slogan, "GoldieBlox: Toys for Future Engineers."

After watching the commercial, we interpreted the argument and imagined our students' responses. How would our students interpret this digital text? Would they be able to identify the argument of the video and describe its intended audience? Could they provide evidence for those claims? Would students pick up on specific lyrics in the song or rely more heavily on visuals?

A kindergarten teacher thought that her students might believe the video was showcasing pink toys instead of repurposing them. A 1st-grade teacher insisted that her students would be able to recognize the video's argument that girls don't really need pink toys. A 12th-grade AP English teacher imagined that her students would want to investigate the context of the text,

**Based on their experiences learning about and doing the work of argument themselves, teachers were able to try similar lessons with their students.**

such as the story behind the creation of the commercial.

At the end of a lively discussion, the facilitator suggested that we show the two-minute video to our students the next day and ask them our three discussion questions about purpose, audience, and evidence. We wondered if we'd be able to see differences in our students' interpretations across grade levels.

My 10th graders were enthralled by the commercial. They asked to see it a second time so they could pay closer attention to its details before answering the questions. Without much instruction or planning on my part, students launched into arguments about the possible purposes of this text, supporting and challenging each other's interpretations with details from the video. In three different class periods, I watched as this nuanced yet accessible text fueled provocative and impassioned discussions.

Days later, I read the collaborative document containing all of the participating K-12 teachers' reports of student reactions. I had asked my students to analyze a text's argument before, but I had never given them a chance to see how their responses compared to those of students in other classes or grades. They were excited to evaluate how their own responses measured up to students across the grade levels.

Weeks later, without my



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prompting, many students drew connections to the commercial during our discussion of the representation of traditional gender roles in the Tennessee Williams play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The day after the Super Bowl, students burst into my classroom with news that they'd seen another GoldieBlox ad. A particularly inspired student announced that she wanted to create her own version of the GoldieBlox video. While so many workshops I attend are teacher-focused, it was refreshing to see my students at the center of the learning.

This is what effective professional learning looks like — immediate and practical results derived from risk taking and collaboration.

LITERACY CONSULTANT

## Learning through articulation and application

By Gravity Goldberg

Three main elements contributed to this successful professional learning experience. First, there was time to learn about and discuss the topic. In this case, that meant learning what argument writing is, what the characteristics are, how it is different than other text types, and what the standards require at each grade level. This type of learning was mostly done in regional workshops with time and space to study the topic away from the daily demands of the classroom.



The second element was the focus on immediate classroom application. Teachers were encouraged and excited to go back to their classrooms and try out the strategies they had experienced and discussed.

Finally, there was an emphasis on looking at student work and keeping students at the center. This meant teachers went beyond summarizing what they felt students took away from classroom experiences and focused on documenting student work and sharing it for collaborative conversations and analysis.

**Learn about a topic.** During the initial regional meetings, several experiences helped all teachers deepen their understanding about argument writing. Four distinct yet complementary activities supported teachers' learning. These activities included trying the argument writing and reflecting on their own argument process, looking at examples of argument writing and naming what they noticed, analyzing types of everyday arguments such as songs, commercials, and images, and using an argument protocol to have debates.

**Classroom application.** Based on their experiences learning about and doing the work of argument themselves, teachers were able to try similar lessons with their students. This was true even though the teachers spanned K-12 and taught different subject areas.

As a consultant, I supported teachers in the classroom in a number of areas. Teachers read and discussed mentor argument texts with their students. We also looked closely at student conversations and behaviors and pointed out where they already successfully used argument skills in their everyday lives.

**What made this professional learning powerful was the careful planning and intersection of articulation and professional development.**

Students were invited to use multimodal texts in and out of class as well as across subject areas to analyze arguments and form their own. Students engaged in debate in many classrooms on topics they were passionate about. We began to see these skills being used independently when it came time to write arguments.

**Collaborative assessment conversations.** By looking at student work, teachers began to deepen their own understanding of argument, writing techniques, and teaching. These conversations were not about creating or using rubrics. They were also not about a final product, although teachers chose and shared an impressive selection of student work. Instead, conversations focused on looking closely at what students did as writers and thinkers in their work with argument.

What made this professional learning powerful was the careful planning and intersection of articulation and professional development. Teachers were energized, much more knowledgeable about argument writing, and more cohesive across schools, grade levels, and departments. Argument actually brought these teachers and classrooms closer together. ■

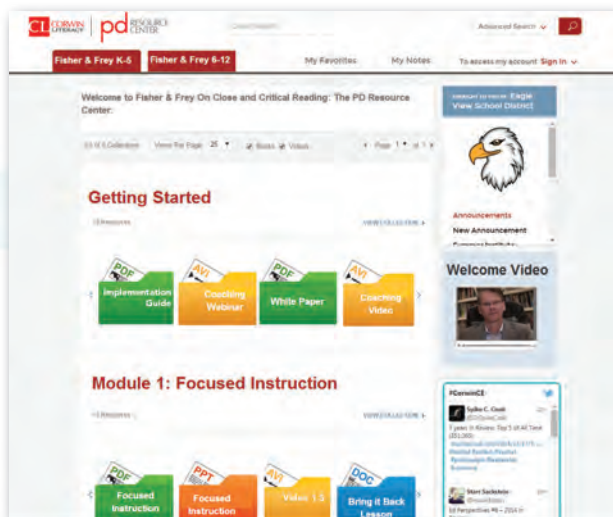
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# DATA DRIVE THESE COACHES

**LITERACY PROJECT MERGES SCHOOL GOALS  
WITH TEACHERS' LEARNING NEEDS**

**By Anne Ittner, Lori Helman, Matthew Burns,  
and Jennifer McComas**

**G**o to any school board meeting and you will hear about the projects, goals, and initiatives taking place in the district's schools. School-based staff must continue to learn and enact more effective instructional practices to ensure that students are reaching higher benchmark expectations.

Research highlights the importance of individualized approaches and coaching to ongoing professional learning (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

An initiative that set out to help all students become proficient readers by 3rd grade demonstrates how coaching can support both collective and individual learning. Literacy coaches in the project balanced the goals of the initiative with professional learning that addressed the varying



needs and aspirations of individual teachers.

The project was a three-year partnership among six schools (both public and charter schools), a research university, a nonprofit organization, and a private corporation in the Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota.

Four components bolstered the work: enacting quality



core literacy instruction in all classrooms, using data-based instructional decision making, providing tiered supports for students who were not progressing well, and augmenting teacher learning through embedded professional learning (Burns et al., in press).

Project-focused literacy coaches at each school site,

guided by university faculty members and district leadership personnel, were key to the initiative's success. Coaches used data to design professional learning to improve student outcomes over the course of three professional learning community sessions during a school year.

Through follow-up coaching and observations, they tailored professional learning to meet individual teachers' needs. By the end of the school year, data revealed positive changes in the instructional practices of individual teachers as well as the strengthening of quality core instruction schoolwide.

#### **PLANNING**

Implementing purposeful support for teachers to become even more effective in literacy teaching requires forethought and planning. Professional learning embedded throughout the day using tools such as observations, modeling, reflective dialogue, and professional learning communities allows the learning to happen in real time.

The daily presence of coaches in classrooms and throughout the school community could ensure a deeper understanding of the work at hand and would give them access to both student and teacher data to inform their work.

The literacy coaches understood the importance of using Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) to guide their work. These standards became touchstones for developing professional learning structures and leveraging resources at each school.

At the heart of their planning, literacy coaches focused on improving schoolwide literacy practices as well as teachers' individualized learning. They hoped that attending to these two goals would result in the most important outcome of all: increased student learning.

The literacy coaches chose tools and structures that reflect these goals of schoolwide and individualized learning.

#### **WAYS TO SUPPORT POWERFUL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

- Actively engage with data.
- Share practices with peers.
- Create lesson plans to use in class.
- Provide collaborative feedback.
- Reflect on learning.
- Set an action step.

For example, results from the observation tool used to collect data on classroom practices were aggregated to show schoolwide trends that could be used to inform objectives for professional learning communities.

**IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING TRENDS**

Coaches used outcome data for both teaching and learning throughout the initiative. Twice a year in every classroom, coaches used an observation tool called the Literacy Environment and Instructional Survey (PRESS Research Group, 2014) to gather data on the physical environment in classrooms as well as the instructional practices in evidence.

The research-based, faculty-designed measure included a rubric that detailed critical components of a rich classroom literacy environment and elements of effective literacy instruction. The survey’s purpose was to identify high- and low-scoring trends overall in schoolwide literacy practices.

The aggregated data provided a snapshot of classroom practices across the school, and literacy coaches used the information to help teachers and instructional leaders address professional learning. When handling the data, coaches used codes in place of teacher names to focus on schoolwide trends.

To check for inter-rater reliability, two observers conducted 20% of all observations. When there was a discrepancy, scorers calculated the average. The rubric accompanying the survey detailed 28 components of the classroom literacy environment and 25 components of effective literacy instruction.

After collecting data from all K-3 classrooms, coaches averaged the scores in each grade level for each survey element. Scores ranged from 0 (the element was not evident in the environment or instructional practices of the classroom) to 3 (exemplary). Grade-level averages below 1.75 were deemed low-scoring trends; averages 2.5 or higher were considered high-scoring trends.

Using the schoolwide survey data helped open up discussions that promoted schoolwide reflection and change. Coaches first met with school and teacher leaders to examine schoolwide literacy practices using a tool called Analysis to Action (see above). By acknowledging the high-scoring trends found in the classroom environment and instructional practices, coaches confirmed the work of past professional learning. Then the instructional leadership team discussed low-scoring trends.

**FOCUSED CONTENT LEARNING**

The literacy coaches determined that the best place to discuss schoolwide trends and opportunities for professional growth would be in professional learning communities, which were designed as a space to use data to foster collective learning. Project leaders assigned the literacy coaches the role of facilitating the content to be shared, with support from site instructional leaders and teaching staff.

Coaches planned professional learning that would expose

**ANALYSIS TO ACTION**

Literacy Environment and Instruction Survey

Element number	High-scoring trends Classroom environment and instruction
40	Identifiable focus on core element.
41	Adequate time to address content.
42	Practice or review is provided.
43	Effective support of concept development.
Element number	Low-scoring trends Classroom environment and instruction
37	Provides a summary.
48	Differentiates based on students’ levels.
50	Fosters discussion.
51	Gives students an opportunity to ask questions.
52	Checks for understanding.

teachers to content and instructional methods that addressed the site’s low-scoring trends. Over the course of three monthly professional learning community meetings, literacy coaches zeroed in on seven learning objectives driven by the data that had surfaced from the survey observations.

Learning designs included modeling evidence-based practices, time for teachers to practice together, and small-group discussions. At the beginning of each session, a short activity immersed teachers in working with data and connecting it to their teaching practices.

For example, on one occasion teachers used a Likert scale activity to comment on how they fostered discussion in their classrooms. Because the Turn and Talk discussion strategy was part of their school’s literacy lesson plan, teachers were asked to comment on this sentence: “I incorporate Turn and Talk into my comprehension lessons.”

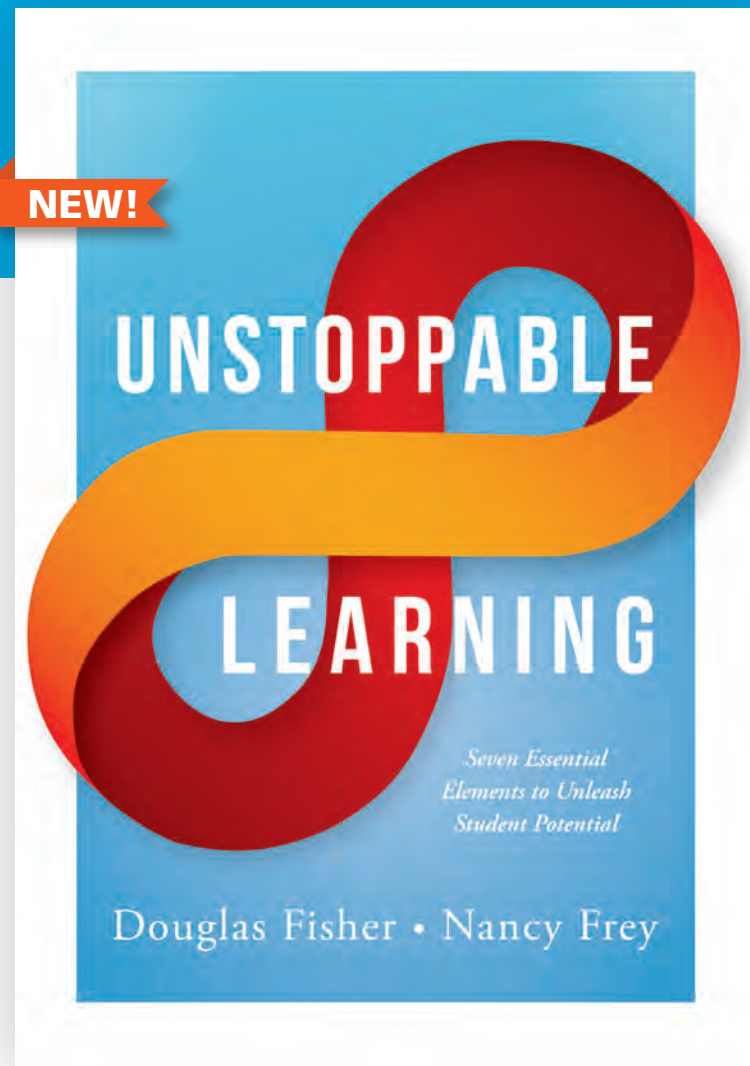
Teachers responded: 18% always, 39% sometimes, and 42% never. These responses verified the survey observation results. The example data, as well as teachers’ remaining reflection data on the low-scoring trends, prompted further planning of professional learning on fostering discussions and differentiating in literacy lessons. Coaches shared data from this activity with teachers in subsequent sessions and used a preassessment to monitor changes in the use of these literacy practices.

The coaches used several learning formats to foster and sustain understanding of the six learning objectives. During professional learning community meetings, grade-level teams of teachers sat together at tables to facilitate small-group discussions. As literacy coaches guided the sharing of essential components in effective literacy instruction, teachers developed lesson plans collaboratively, thereby incorporating the learning directly into their classroom practice.



“Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey explain that efforts to improve teaching only work when we see our classrooms as systems: **every person and process** impacts all the others, and seemingly small changes can have large effects on learning.”

—Lauren Porosoff, middle school teacher,  
Ethical Culture Fieldston School, New York



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- Examine the seven elements of the Unstoppable Learning model necessary for systems thinking.
- Incorporate the four overarching principles of systems thinking into the classroom.

**INDIVIDUALIZED DESIGNS**

The literacy coaches employed key principles of effective professional learning. Powerful professional learning is active (Donnelly et al., 2005): Coaches prompted teachers in the professional learning community sessions to use the lesson plans they created to practice fostering discussion by providing feedback to each other. Brandt (1998) says that powerful learning often occurs through opportunities for social interaction, getting helpful feedback, and acquiring and using strategies.

Further, sustained learning takes place when learners receive additional support in implementing new strategies. Each session ended with a reflection and action step in which teachers could decide how the learning would be demonstrated in their classrooms.

Coaches asked teachers to come to the next session with information about how they used specific literacy practices in their classrooms. The third and final session began with teachers sharing their experiences implementing new strategies into literacy instruction.

To continue the momentum of learning and reflection after the final session, literacy coaches shifted to individualized feedback and coaching. They created a walk-through form that reflected the low-scoring trends of the school. The walk-through form mirrored the rubric used in the survey tool.

To be transparent about expectations, coaches emailed the walk-through form to teachers before visiting classrooms. During the walk-through, coaches spent seven to 12 minutes in classrooms and shared their written feedback with the teacher by following up with an email and leaving a copy of the walk-through form in the teacher’s mailbox.

Several weeks later, coaches visited classrooms for another observation. In a postobservation meeting, coach and teacher discussed the learning objectives from the professional learning community sessions. In some cases, coaches extended the support by modeling lessons or creating materials. This process ensured that issues were addressed as teachers implemented the new literacy practices.

**CHANGES IN TEACHER PRACTICE**

The table above details the change from fall to spring of one school year in the low-scoring trends observed using the survey tool. Literacy coaches used the fall scores to develop learning objectives and design learning spaces to improve schoolwide literacy practices and individualize teacher support.

Low-scoring trends were those where grade-level averages scored below 1.75, and high-scoring trends were those with averages of 2.5 or higher. Though the change was positive in almost all areas of core instruction that had started as a low-scoring trend, only three of the elements surpassed the low-

**LOW-SCORING TRENDS**

Element of quality core instruction	Fall	Spring	Change
Provides summary.	0.9	1.3	+0.4
Provides feedback on student performance.	1.4	2.1	+0.7
Asks questions for evaluation.	1.4	1.9	+0.5
Assesses student work during the lesson.	0.9	1.9	+1.0
Differentiates based on student’s levels.	0.6	1.0	+0.4
Fosters discussion.	1.2	1.0	-0.2
Gives students an opportunity to ask questions.	0.5	1.1	+0.6

scoring trend range.

The most likely reason for this is the time it takes for teachers to transform their practice. The professional development cycle of mastering a new teaching skill through learning, implementing, and coaching can take up to 80 hours (Corcoran, McVay, & Riordan, 2003). Though this instance did not meet the criteria for the 80 hours needed, teachers reported through an online survey and email communication how the professional learning sessions and further coaching had given them tools and support to start improving their practice.

**SUPPORTING TEACHER LEARNING**

Building systems to support effective teaching requires a dual approach that uses evidence-based tools to increase content knowledge and ongoing support during implementation of new teaching practices.

For this initiative, the observation tool gave instructional leaders, literacy coaches, and teachers the common language around effective teaching and how to recognize it. In professional learning community meetings and during individual coaching sessions, coaches and teachers focused their conversations on the elements of quality core instruction outlined in the survey tool.

A primary responsibility of a literacy coach, or any other instructional support person, is to help teachers continuously improve through job-embedded professional development (Elish-Piper & L’Allier, 2010). In this initiative, data-based systems for sharing schoolwide trends informed the professional learning. Identifying high- and low-scoring trends in literacy instruction at the school level provided a focus for developing professional learning that built content and pedagogy as well as tailored coaching and ongoing support.

When literacy coaches spent time in teachers’ classrooms after the professional learning community sessions and coaching, they saw teachers attempting new instructional methods and students reaping the benefits of quality core instruction.

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By Alyson Adams and Vicki Vescio

**P**rofessional learning communities have long been considered a powerful form of collaborative professional learning, as the Learning Communities standard in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning attests (Learning Forward, 2011). This focus on communities can engage teachers in ongoing professional dialogue and examination of student work as members learn with and from each other over time. Mounting evidence shows that professional learning communities impact both teacher practice and student learning outcomes (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

However, what is less examined in both the theory and practice behind professional learning communities is how individual teachers learn within these collaborative groups, especially when one critical definitional aspect of professional learning communities is a shared vision and mission.

Just as educators differentiate learning for diverse students in their classrooms, they must also remember that professional learning communities consist of individuals who need different things in order to learn and who may be at drastically different places in their careers or their teaching capabilities. To maximize the potential impact

of professional learning communities for teachers' professional development, educators need to maintain a simultaneous focus on both collective and individual learning.

#### INDIVIDUAL LEARNING TRAJECTORIES

Some interesting research about the use of professional learning communities in higher education faculty groups highlights the interplay of individual and collective learning. Hadar and Brody (2013) outline four stages of group learning processes: breaking isolation, talking about student learning, improving teaching, and professional growth.

Using a year of interviews and observations, they mapped individual learning trajectories onto the larger group learning process and found four stages of individual growth. Individuals often begin at the stage of anticipation/curiosity, then experience withdrawal/resistance, characterized by defensive or resistant feelings as they question their own practice or current understandings.

Some move beyond that stage to experience the stages of awareness and then dispositional change. Progression through these individual stages occurs at different paces, but the study authors made some important connections to group processes that helped individuals move forward. Interestingly, the key to engagement of individuals beyond the withdrawal stage was the group process of talking about



student learning. And the key to moving individuals beyond awareness was the group process of improving teaching.

Individuals at the withdrawal stage show resistance to adopting new practices and complacency with their current practice. These individuals may feel defensive and protective, unwilling to engage in significant learning. What seems to move these withdrawn learners toward awareness is conversation around students, rather than a focus on themselves as teachers. Individuals who move to the awareness level can push their learning further with a subsequent group focus on improvement of teaching.

So, what does this all mean for the average professional learning community operating in a pre-K-12 setting? Here are three solutions that can improve individual learning within collaborative groups.

## 1 CONNECT TO STUDENT LEARNING IN EACH TEACHER'S CLASSROOM.

Hadar and Brody's (2013) findings confirm that a focus on student learning is one of the most powerful dimensions of a learning community. Teachers need to be able to connect their learning within community to individual learners back in their own classrooms.

Bringing student work for collaborative analysis is one way that individuals can do this. The National School Reform

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### Step 6: Discuss implications for teaching and learning.

The facilitator invites everyone (participants and presenting teacher) to share any thoughts they have about their own teaching, children's learning, or ways to support this particular child in future instruction.

**Source:** National School Reform Faculty, [www.nsrffharmony.org/system/files/protocols/cac\\_0.pdf](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/system/files/protocols/cac_0.pdf).

Faculty (<http://nsrffharmony.org>) has numerous protocols for collaborative examination of student work through structured dialogue. However, when one teacher presents her student work in a group, the danger is that other professional learning community members may be focusing so much on how to support that teacher that they may not always make the connection to their own classrooms.

Skilled facilitators can use these opportunities to help other individuals connect the group discussion back to their own students, unearthing implications for their own teaching and their own contexts. Most well-designed National School Reform Faculty protocols have an explicit step designed to do this (see box above), but time limitations for professional learning community collaboration may cut these conversations short since they

often occur at the end of a protocol.

It is through these conversations about implications that teachers remind each other to think about individual students. In our work with schools, we've seen some professional learning community members focus so hard on helping the presenting teacher and his or her students that the type of critical reflection necessary to internalize connections to one's own practice does not occur.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that even the professional learning community members who are not presenting their own student work can make connections back to their own students.

## 2 FOLLOW UP ON IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING AS A RESULT OF GROUP LEARNING.

If professional learning communities are to help individuals move beyond awareness into deeper professional growth, the learning that occurs must extend beyond the physical setting of the professional learning community and back into classrooms, where changes in practice can be examined.

Most educators enjoy a rigorous conversation about teaching and learning, but if the conversation stays within the confines of the meeting room, then individual knowledge may increase, but teacher practice may not change.

Although professional learning communities are powerful, they can be even more powerful when combined with lesson study, coaching, or instructional rounds that occur in classrooms with students. These collaborative learning structures focus more directly on teaching moves, but must be combined with powerful conversations about the observed teaching practices.

In lesson study, this reflective dialogue occurs after the group observation during lesson debriefing, and in instructional coaching, it happens during a coaching conversation using observation data. When coaching is used as a follow-up to deepen concepts learned in collaborative professional development, teachers can see how their new knowledge and skills play out in the classroom. One elementary teacher we work with noted the value of learning about engaging students in her professional learning community, followed up with coaching and data collection on student engagement. The teacher brought the results back to the group, and they discussed next steps. As this illustration suggests, it is essential to connect teaching strategies and practices back to the kinds of deep conversations that can occur during professional learning community meetings.

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## 3 IMPROVE NORMS AND PROCESSES THAT FOSTER DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT.

One simple yet often overlooked strategy to improve individual learning within collective groups is to set group norms that recognize and appreciate the diversity of thought within groups. Individuals need to feel safe enough to voice dissent and push back in order to clarify understanding or unearth assumptions underlying conversation.

The box at left has a list of sample norms that professional learning community members can discuss, modify, and then establish. It is important to revisit these norms frequently to make modifications if the norms are not creating conditions for a strong learning environment for members. The key is that the norms continually guide the work that professional learning community members engage in on a regular basis.

In addition to norms, groups need structures and processes that not only allow all voices to be heard, but also to find ways for those voices to enter the conversation where they are, even if that is in conflict with the majority of the group. For groups to foster individual learning, it has to be okay for individuals to push back. One highly successful strategy is a protocol called Yeah, But ... (see p. 30).

This activity takes place after a group learns about or discusses a new teaching strategy or school reform approach. In this protocol, all group members are asked to play devil's advocate and think about how their most resistant colleague might react to what the group just discussed.

Using the sentence stem, "Yeah, but ...," each participant completes the sentence with an example of resistance. For instance, after professional learning that introduced inquiry to a school group, one teacher said: "Yeah, but is someone going to mandate the inquiry topic I have to study?" This question, which the facilitator did not anticipate, created space for a deeper discussion on a topic that might not have been safe for individual teachers to voice otherwise.

Participants put each sentence on a sticky note (anonymously) and place the sticky note on chart paper. Group members sort and categorize the sticky notes before engaging in a discussion of anticipated resistance.

By making the posts anonymous, participants are able to voice concerns they may have under the guise of using a resistant colleague's voice instead of their own. This allows individual teachers to push back and deepens the conversation instead of painting an overly rosy, compliant tone. It also helps group members see where learners at other levels may be operating, whether those learners are in the group or in the larger school setting.

### FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

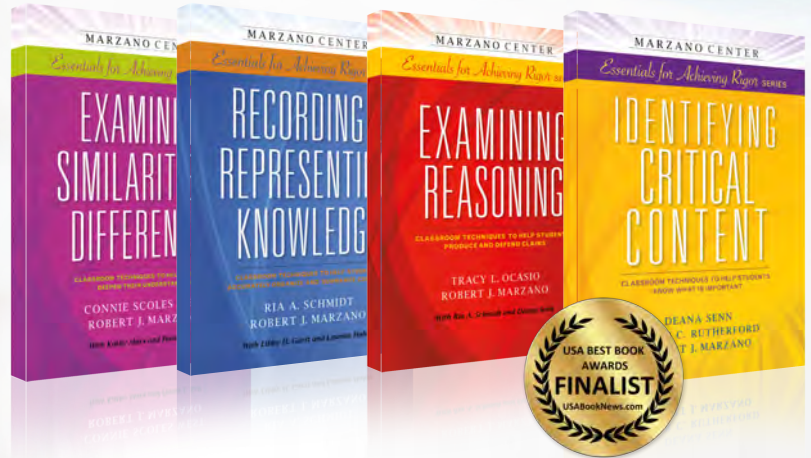
Although the three solutions outlined here oversimplify the complexity of individual learning within collaborative groups, they are actions that any professional learning community

### SAMPLE GROUP NORMS

- Acknowledge each other as equals.
- Speak from your heart.
- Get what you need.
- Assume good will.
- Trust the process.
- Expect it to be messy at times.
- Respect confidentiality when requested.

GROW YOUR EXPERTISE

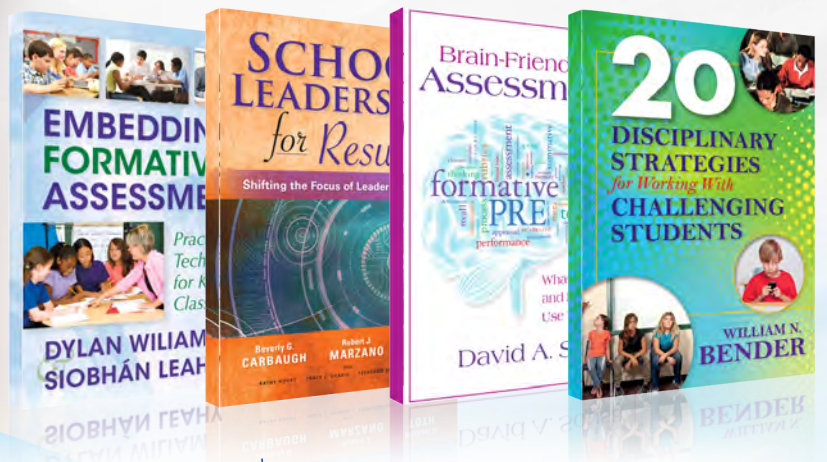
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## PROTOCOL FOR “YEAH, BUT ...” ACTIVITY

This protocol works well after the presentation or discussion of an idea or reform concept that is likely to meet some resistance. It allows professional learning community members to voice ideas of resistance in an anonymous way by assuming a devil’s advocate role.

- **Materials:** Sticky notes, chart paper, and markers.
- **Time:** 20-45 minutes, depending on depth of discussion.
- **Ideal group size:** 8-10.



### STEPS

Group members are asked to play devil’s advocate and think about how their most resistant colleague might react to what they just discussed. Due to potential controversial opinions about to be voiced, remind the group about norms that respect confidentiality and equality of voice and opinion.

Using the sentence stem “**Yeah, but ...**,” each participant completes the sentence with an example of resistance. Each sentence is put on a sticky note (anonymously) and placed on chart paper. Participants can contribute more than one idea, but each one should be on a separate sticky note. **(8-10 minutes)**

When everyone has finished, the group gathers around the chart to read and think about general themes emerging across responses. Group members sort and categorize the sticky notes, using markers to label the theme/categories. **(5-8 minutes)**

If multiple groups created their own charts, do a short gallery walk so groups can see each other’s charts. **(2 minutes)**

Facilitator leads a group discussion of anticipated resistance to clarify and extend the conversation. **(10 minutes; add more time if the issue discussed was very complex)**

should be able to take.

If educators hope to achieve the potential of learning communities, they need to recognize that communities are comprised of a collective of individual learners who might want to be on the same page, but rarely are. By helping individual teachers connect group analysis of student work back to their own classrooms, and by opening up classroom practice to public conversation and analysis, groups can deepen and broaden learning for all members.

The concept that all students can learn applies to adults, too. To achieve this in professional learning communities, educators need to understand and accept where each individual is in his or her professional growth trajectory.

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Photo by ALYSSA TOOMES

Teachers Heather Larsen, from left, Anna Olekrug, Yvette Rushing, Brandee Timms, and Kara Ornelas participate in a Weber U course.

# ‘WHAT IF’ SPARKS *a* NEW WAY TO LEARN

## TEXAS ELEMENTARY DESIGNS ITS OWN TEACHER-LED POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

By Alyssa Toomes

**I**n trying to make professional learning as individualized as possible, have we sacrificed collaboration and made the personal impersonal?

This question came to mind as I took my school district’s standardized, required courses covering such topics as copyright, conflict of interest, and bullying. I completed the forms and received credit. Along the way, there were a few checkpoints to ensure I was attending to the topic at hand, but at no point was I held accountable for my learning nor was I expected to do something with the information.

Some professional learning only requires disseminat-

ing information. These courses are far from engaging and lack collaboration, but they are a necessity. As I began to ponder the relevance of these courses, I wondered about upcoming virtual professional learning experiences I had planned for teachers at my school — Weber Elementary in Houston, Texas.

I worried that these professional learning experiences would become just another chore to check off teachers’ to-do lists. Out of this concern grew an idea: What if we created a whole new way of developing professional learning courses? What if we built a postgraduate school right on campus?



Alyssa Toomes

The courses I envisioned had teacher leaders leading the courses, and teachers choosing the topics they wanted to study. Some courses could be facilitated in person during the school's professional learning hour from 8 to 9 a.m., while others could be offered through a variety of virtual avenues allowing participants to study topics at their convenience. From this idea grew Weber U.

#### A COLLEGIAL EXPERIENCE

Although Weber U is not a real university, it is collegial, offering an inclusive professional learning experience. In the past, the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches decided what campus-level professional learning would be offered each semester. They based their decisions on feedback from teacher surveys, administrator observations, and changes in state standards. While these are all strong reasons for taking teachers out of the classroom to give them time to study, they were prescriptive and did not meet the needs of the diverse staff with varying years of experience. Teacher feedback proved this. It wasn't uncommon to receive comments on exit surveys that said the professional learning offered good information, but nothing new.

The only real positive feedback came after a full day of curriculum study, where teachers collaborated and left with a month or two of lesson plans. These days often left me, the instructional coach, mentally drained and exhausted, but teachers were excited to have the materials and plans they needed for upcoming units of study.

After a long day collaborating with teachers, I wondered: Why are these days so good? Why do I leave so mentally drained? What makes these so different than our regularly scheduled professional learning?

The answers came when the campus leadership team met in summer 2014. A new principal and assistant principal were eager to create a campus culture that valued three key components: relationships, respect, and rigor. These components would help us support teachers' professional growth.

"As a new principal, I wanted to bring fresh ideas to

## REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING

Here is an excerpt from an electronic forum on anchor charts created on Tackk that includes comments from 3rd-grade teacher Lacy Prahm, special education teacher Kelly Carlile, course facilitator Jennifer Stoner, and administrators Cheryl Chaney and Nuri Gonzalez.

**LACY PRAHM:** "I think anchor charts are key in the classroom. They can serve as tracks of learning while also used as guides to refer to throughout units of learning. I have to admit, though, that my new obsession is ladders. . . . Ladders have helped me tighten up those key points or strategies. I try to also model looking back at the charts to help me as I think aloud — therefore my students can see the importance of our anchor charts. When creating an anchor chart, I try to engage the students by sharing the markers with them, and also I really like the idea of leaving an anchor chart up for the kids to finish in their free time."

**JENNIFER STONER:** "Lacy, you are right when you said that the ladders help tighten up those key points or strategies. That is a great way to put it. We feel like the kids are using them almost more than the traditional anchor charts."

**KELLY CARLILE:** "I used to organize my charts into Google Docs so I'd remember them for the next year, but I find that each year is different and needs are different as well, so I simply make the charts for the year, take them down at the end and create charts that are the most applicable with my new groups next year."

**JENNIFER STONER:** "Kelly, the Google Docs idea is awesome. We would have never thought of that. It is good to still re-create your charts each year, but it is super helpful to have a reference to look back at. Thanks for the idea."

**CHERYL CHANEY:** "The learning and sharing of ideas/information is so amazing. I see anchor charts in classrooms, but the information for usage, ideas for ladders, and pictures/videos for reference really support our own learning of this topic."

**NURI GONZALEZ:** "What a wonderful collection of knowledge. All of the links have very valuable information. . . . I agree that keeping them short and simple is your best bet. I always added visuals/icons to support ELLs."

Weber,” says principal Cheryl Chaney. “We knew that we had a wealth of knowledge and talent in our own staff and wanted to utilize those strengths. With a teaching staff of 60-plus, we also knew that everyone was in a different place in their learning, and our leadership team came to the conclusion that we need to offer individualized professional learning for staff members. From this discussion, an idea was hatched and Weber U was born.”

It was clear to everyone in the group that the school was ready for something new and different. The leadership team wanted to value experienced teachers and support the handful of first-year teachers who would be joining the faculty. “What if?” became our mantra that day. What if we let teachers decide what they want to learn? What if we find a way for teachers to lead professional learning? What if we created a way to include virtual learning opportunities as an option for time-strapped educators? In asking these questions, the team found its way to Weber U.

### GROUNDING IN DATA

Engaging educators in learning communities to apply a cycle of continuous improvement is not easy. Schedules, levels of expertise, and district initiatives can easily derail a campus professional learning plan. The leadership team decided Weber U needed to be grounded in data when determining course offerings. The team also drew inspiration from the district’s mission statement and statement of beliefs, which addressed personalized learning.

Basing those initial decisions on district goals ensured that the foundation of the school’s on-site professional learning was closely aligned to desired outcomes. The school’s diverse needs provided a hurdle for the team to tackle early in its discussions. To stay focused on educator effectiveness, the team needed to collect data. This data would keep student achievement at the forefront of all decisions.

Determining what Weber’s students need based on data drove the team’s discourse as it created a sample list of courses. The findings led the team to include: content-specific courses, courses that bridge grade levels, and lab courses that offer teachers a way to observe each other in action.

Weber U includes course offerings for all staff, including pre-K teachers and music, art, and physical education coaches who had never been offered job-embedded professional learning. Art teacher Alphonse Argieard says, “Weber U provides for creative freedom.” As a facilitator for courses such as Storytelling and Storyboarding With Technology, he has felt the nudge for risk taking that “allows teachers to think differently and learn differently in a highly creative space.”

As the list grew, the team began to identify teachers at the school who were already trying out new strategies or were leaders among their peers for their content knowledge. Encouraging them to join the Weber U faculty became another challenge.

Conversations with those teachers took the viewpoint that we all have a collective responsibility for the learning of all students and teachers. This provided the motivation some needed to take the leap and facilitate a course in the inaugural semester at Weber U. In a recent survey, a Weber U teacher facilitator said, “I feel good helping other people learn and grow and have learned some new things myself.”

Through this collective participation, the leadership team was able to advance the lofty goals it began with in developing Weber U courses. Weber U faculty members were analytic, reflective, and compassionate educators. This helped stimulate teachers’ interest in course offerings.

As a result, the leadership team created a catalogue of course offerings. Weber U faculty members marketed their courses through enticing blurbs and engaged in professional learning to build their skills as presenters and facilitators. Members of the new faculty participated in a Cognitive Coaching planning session with a member of the leadership team as a way to support their endeavor.

### SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

Cognitive Coaching is defined as “a process during which teachers explore the thinking behind their practices. Each person seems to maintain a cognitive map, only partially conscious. In Cognitive Coaching, questions asked by the coach reveal to the teacher areas of that map that may not be complete or consciously developed. When teachers talk out loud about their thinking, their decisions become clearer to them, and their awareness increases” (Garmston, Linder, & Whitaker, 1993).

As a literacy coach in Clear Creek Independent School District, I studied Cognitive Coaching through a district initiative to support coaches and administrators helping teachers plan, reflect, and problem solve through this method.

The leadership team chose the Cognitive Coaching approach to support teachers in creating collaborative course designs that would help them apply what they study in their instructional practice. Teachers often lack confidence when asked to lead professional learning for their peers. The leadership team remained flexible and supportive as teachers considered whether to facilitate a course. The team’s patience and flexibility paid off when 30 educators joined the team for the first semester of Weber U.

Having that many teachers leading courses created a scheduling stumbling block. How would Weber U be able to offer 30 courses during the school day? The previous schedule provided class coverage three days a week, but that wouldn’t be enough. The leadership team’s passion for this project lay in the individual choice provided by the comprehensive professional learning plan.

To make this happen, we extended class coverage to four days a week. The block teachers (music, art, physical education) and the counselor would continue to cover classes, and we

added others, such as the instructional coach, to allow as many teachers as possible to sign up for a course.

The leadership team recognized the need for teachers across multiple grade levels to share ideas. Vertical alignment was something the school lacked. The school had struggled in the past to find a way to get teachers from different grade levels in the same room discussing topics such as how to bridge the gaps between 2nd- and 3rd-grade math instruction. These conversations rarely happened but became necessary as we acquired new state standards and new standardized tests.

The key to getting teachers from different grade levels in the same course was to limit the number of teachers in each session, which had an added benefit. Both facilitators and participants reported in post surveys that the smaller class sizes gave everyone the chance to be engaged in the learning. Dorian Massey, 2nd-grade teacher, says, “Weber U has provided me with the power of choice along with professional dialogue with colleagues I would not normally interact with. The conversations and ideas that are being shared are very meaningful to the success of our students at Weber.”

## BUILDING LEADERSHIP

Another benefit to the new professional learning plan was providing teachers more leadership opportunities through Weber U. Mickey Shannon, a gifted and talented specialist at Weber, says, “Facilitating a Weber U course has helped me build stronger peer relationships. It has allowed me to better understand the needs of the classroom teacher and to offer ideas to aid.”

The district’s new teacher accountability system requires teachers to provide evidence of self-reflection that positively impacts school culture. The section that covers professional development includes several critical standards:

- a. The teacher attends professional development activities above and beyond the campus/district required staff development. The professional development must be aligned with the state and district curriculum relative to the teacher’s assignment.
- b. The teacher’s professional development goals are to support student improvement.
- c. The teacher seeks out appropriate opportunities for professional development and systematically applies new knowledge in his/her classroom.
- d. The teacher initiates activities to contribute to the profession, such as mentoring new teachers and/or making presentations.
- e. The teacher demonstrates through conversations and/or actions self-reflection that leads to meaningful and effective professional development.

Sustained, long-term change was the objective for implementing the new courses at Weber U. Offering teachers opportunities to observe their peers directly affects instructional

practice. One teacher connected her change in instructional practice to on-site professional learning: “I enjoyed learning from educators at Weber because I could go talk to them even after the training as a follow-up.” Providing teachers a variety of ways to stay connected perpetuates the collaboration the leadership team valued as it developed Weber U.

Through technology, the virtual professional learning courses allow teachers to study topics of their choice on their own time while adding ongoing support as a way to collaborate and share ideas while they try out new instructional strategies. In course surveys, teachers noted how much they enjoyed the flexibility of the virtual courses. One teacher said, “It allows me to fit training into my schedule.”

Teacher facilitators have created virtual learning spaces on sites such as Google Classroom, Tackk, and Edmodo. Through these electronic forums, teachers collaborate and share ideas. In Anchor Charts That Grow Engaged Learners, 3rd-grade teachers Jennifer Stoner and Khan Dong explore ways to improve anchor charts in classrooms. This course covers all grade levels and content areas. Using Tackk to provide participants with the course information, Stoner and Dong asked teachers to read and watch videos, try out some of the ideas they learned in their own classrooms, then upload photos and reflections in the comment stream. The box on p. 33 includes excerpted comments from a forum on anchor charts.

Professional learning that is personal was at the heart of designing Weber U. Celebrating the diverse levels of expertise rather than requiring teachers to study prescribed topics created the collegial culture the leadership team hoped for. Weber U courses provide professional learning unlike anything else in the district. Teachers report that they appreciate engaging in professional learning that pertains to their interests.

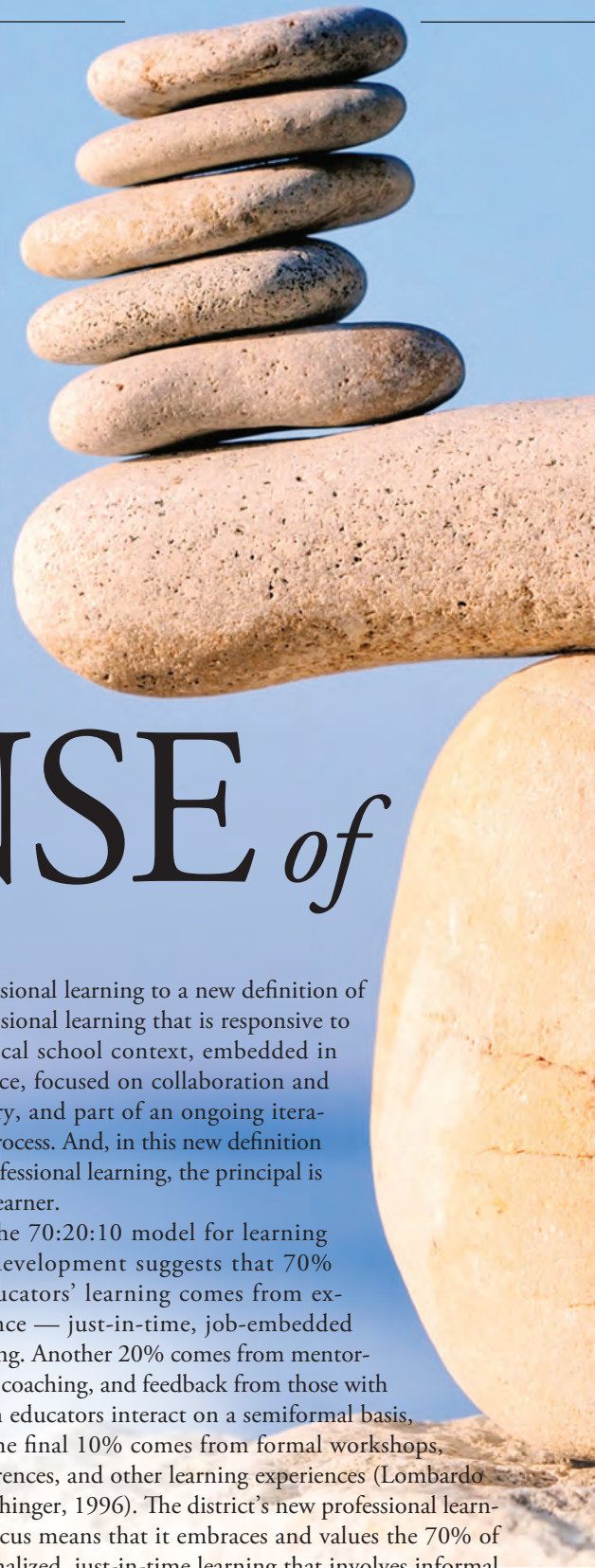
Leadership plays a vital role in the success of any new school-wide program. “At Weber U, the teachers get to learn from each other and with each other,” Chaney says. “The conversations are deeper, the insights are greater, and the outcomes are richer because teachers have choice and voice in their learning.”

Starting from scratch to develop a new form of job-embedded professional learning was a challenging endeavor but worth the effort to support teachers expanding their teaching repertoire as part of the ultimate goal: increasing student success.

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# A SENSE *of*

**By Debbie Donsky and Kathy Witherow**

**T**he York Region District School Board in Ontario, Canada, is moving to what Hargreaves and Shirley call the fourth way of learning (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), which emphasizes teacher professionalism and the importance of leadership that is responsive to student and teacher needs.


Leaders of this high-performing district knew that what took it from good to great would not take it from great to excellent. The district's early model of improvement, centered around prescribed diagnostic assessment and prescriptive professional learning, didn't ensure ownership from teachers, nor did it value the voices of students, teachers, and other stakeholders. Moreover, with increased access to social media and online professional learning tools, staff members were finding their own ways to learn.

The challenge, then, has been to personalize learning while also ensuring alignment with system and school improvement plans. Working at both the system and school level to balance the need for individual and collective learning, the district has shifted away from top-down

professional learning to a new definition of professional learning that is responsive to the local school context, embedded in practice, focused on collaboration and inquiry, and part of an ongoing iterative process. And, in this new definition of professional learning, the principal is a co-learner.

The 70:20:10 model for learning and development suggests that 70% of educators' learning comes from experience — just-in-time, job-embedded learning. Another 20% comes from mentorships, coaching, and feedback from those with whom educators interact on a semiformal basis, and the final 10% comes from formal workshops, conferences, and other learning experiences (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996). The district's new professional learning focus means that it embraces and values the 70% of personalized, just-in-time learning that involves informal structures and relationships.

As the district moves toward this culture of personalization, system leaders have had to address how to maintain clear goals for increased student achievement and



DISTRICT  
ALIGNS  
PERSONALIZED  
LEARNING WITH  
SCHOOL  
AND SYSTEM  
GOALS

# BALANCE

well-being as well as support staff in their learning. They have found that the key is to balance accountability and responsibility both at the school and system level.

Debbie Donsky, principal of curriculum and instructional services and a former elementary school principal, recounts this transition at the school level (on p. 38), and Kathy Witherow, superintendent of curriculum and instructional services, describes the district's efforts at the system level (on p. 39).

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THE SCHOOL STORY

# Focus on collaboration and inquiry

By Debbie Donsky

As a school principal, each year I consider how the school, our learning, and our improvement will become more effective. This does not happen at a predetermined start date, but rather through an ongoing monitoring cycle of implementation and reflection, refining of goals, and experimenting with efforts to build a collaborative learning culture with staff.



Debbie Donsky

The school’s leadership team, made up of representatives from across the school, meets to talk about what has gone well, what has been challenging, and where growth needs to be. We begin planning for the following year by asking ourselves:

- Have the interventions and professional learning impacted our targeted areas for growth in our school improvement plan?
- Have we continued to build a professional learning culture in the school? What are barriers to a trusting professional culture that allows for collaborative inquiry with and among staff? What has been a support to this?
- Have students responded to the changes we have focused on this year? How do we know? What is our evidence?

At the same time, informed by the district’s improvement plan, we consider the direction the system is taking:

- What are key messages being relayed through the system senior leadership team?
- What initiatives are coming from the province that will impact school operations?
- What, if any, change in legislation will guide our decision making?

The district is working to build professional culture. Through a strategic partnership with the elementary teachers’ union, we have continued to develop our

understanding of the instructional rounds process, which is collaborative and tied directly to classroom practice and student learning needs.

This process, along with recent legislation that releases teachers collecting mandatory diagnostic data, has steered the school leadership team toward supporting staff members in learning about processes that will support their professional judgment as it relates to increased student achievement and well-being.

At the school level, we grow this collaborative professional culture through structures that mirror what we expect in effective classroom practice, such as carefully designed learning teams that create cross-divisional and heterogeneous groupings similar to the leadership team. Just like a classroom, we talk about purposeful groupings and, as such, the same practice benefits learning in staff meetings.

## INQUIRY METHOD

Staff meeting agendas are designed to follow the inquiry method, with sections labeled “minds on,” “hands on,” and “reflect on.” Talk time is always on the agenda and facilitated by lead teachers. Over time, the meetings became a series of small- and large-group dialogue focused on identified areas for growth. Agendas are sent out at least three days before meetings with links to learning resources: articles, videos, and graphics that would allow for blended and flipped learning for all staff.

As principal, I had difficulty giving up control of the meeting, but I learned how important it is to get out of the way and let the learning happen. The turning point for me came during a meeting where the discussion moved to a shared dialogue among staff without the need for my voice or direction. My first instinct was to keep to the timelines set out in the agenda, but I just listened and recognized what was happening.

The staff was having a sustained professional dialogue, engaging in honest discourse based on

*Continued on p. 40*



## THE SYSTEM STORY

# Alignment and coherence are key

By Kathy Witherow

It took a series of events for the York Region District School Board to adapt its approach to professional learning. With the district's early success in literacy, the system approach to improvement including systemwide messages and large-scale professional development made sense.

Changes in educational policy, however, made innovative practices necessary. The district could no longer demand that all teachers use systemwide assessment tools with all students to identify areas of focus. At the same time, the district's standardized mathematics assessment showed a decrease in student achievement. We needed to re-examine not just what we were learning, but also how, when, and where we were learning.

This renewed focus took us away from activity-based professional learning and led us to examine how we assessed the impact of the work of instructional consultants. System leaders adopted John Hattie's mantra of "know thy impact" (Hattie, 2011) and realigned their work with teachers so it is embedded in schools and focused on student learning.

We developed protocols for teacher collaborative inquiry and organized the learning around the instructional core (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). System consultants now go directly into schools to work alongside teachers and principals, as co-learners, based on their own identified learning needs as outlined in the schools' challenges of practice.

Alignment and coherence were essential elements to bring about the change needed. It is important for system leaders to support schools to see how their work connects with the broader board improvement plan and the provincial direction. Greater collaboration between and among departments is key to ensuring this alignment.



Kathy Witherow

The curriculum department can no longer work in isolation. System leaders partnered with departments such as student services and leadership development to provide support at the school level.

The district also began an in-depth look into what makes professional learning effective. System leaders began by asking the district's consultant team to remember a particularly effective professional learning experience. What made it so good? While responses varied, common themes emerged: student-centered, having personal relevance, ensuring voice and choice, and opportunities for practice.

Using this feedback, we modified professional learning to allow for personalization, ongoing opportunities for practice and refinement, and support at the point of implementation with students. System leaders reviewed the literature on effective professional learning and adopted many of the ideas put forth by Guskey & Yoon (2009) and Blank (2013) in developing our own theory of professional learning.

## NEW KINDS OF LEARNING

System leaders began to embrace and support new kinds of learning using personalized web-based learning networks. In the era of social media, teachers are seeking their own professional learning and not relying on system messages to change practice. To keep up, we needed to jump in feet first.

We have a new understanding of just-in-time learning, and it involves Twitter chats and online collaboration using Google Apps for Education. The district's consultant team is now fully immersed in curating online learning in order to understand relevant content and create personalized learning networks that support teachers and school leaders as they examine practice with a new lens.

As our system continues to evolve, professional learning practices at both the school and system level inform and adapt to each other in a responsive cycle of reflection, implementation, and dialogue. There is an iterative feedback loop from school to system and back

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## THE SCHOOL STORY

*Continued from p. 38*

classroom practice and professional challenges while in alignment with school improvement goals. This has become the norm when staff comes together. We are no longer searching for the right answer, but rather asking complex questions that will in turn impact classroom practice.

Communication is key in building this professional culture. Weekly staff memos reinforce concepts tied to the school improvement plan. The structures and processes that are put in place can reinforce the learning culture within a school. In the context of an inquiry-focused learning, teachers need opportunities to explore, reflect, and question what inquiry looks like in their classrooms and among colleagues — effectively creating inquiry among teachers by making my own reflections explicit. Memos include videos, links to articles, and my personal reflections about where our learning is going, with examples from classrooms in our school and system.

Staff found ways to use these memos to personalize their learning by engaging in dialogue with colleagues either face-to-face or online. This is one example of how we have expanded our thinking about opportunities to learn.

If we only focus on learning at staff meetings, we miss the informal learning opportunities that exist in every moment of every day: conversations in the hallway, professional dialogue linked directly to classroom practice, opportunities for co-teaching and co-planning with our teaching staff, shared reading and investigation with staff, and online engagement through email, Twitter, Google Communities, and other social media tools. The learning must be pervasive, embedded, and always aligned to system and school goals.

### CHALLENGE OF PRACTICE

During last year’s instructional rounds process, the school developed a key challenge of practice that staff created collaboratively based on student learning needs, which in turn led us to our staff learning need.

Simultaneously, the school leadership team developed its

## THE SYSTEM STORY

*Continued from p. 39*

again through learning networks, system senior leadership team, and school leaders.

To support learning across the system, members of the curriculum and instructional services department are developing coaching and facilitation skills that will support the move from prescribed to personalized learning. Our goal is to serve the system and staff through reflection, monitoring impact, and checking for our own biases in what we presume are system needs.

own leader learning need that drew from the staff learning need. That does not preclude leaders from learning with staff. In fact, school leaders join staff, when invited, for professional dialogue, book studies, online discourse, and team meetings. What we then take for ourselves is the leader learning.

For example, in an effort to go deeper into inquiry-based learning in the classroom, a teacher team investigated the role of documentation for assessment purposes. Through team members’ collaborative inquiry, they set specific goals for documentation, experimented with different apps, worked with a consultant from the curriculum and instructional services department, and visited classrooms throughout the system with a focus on documentation.

My role was to ensure that they had released time to do the work, create a structure for feedback and accountability, engage in dialogue about their learning, and observe the implementation of their learning in their classrooms throughout the year. But my leader learning focused on these questions:

- How do I continue to support this group and its learning needs?
- How do I build staff capacity to better understand the process these staff members have engaged in?
- How do I share their work within the system? How will their sharing in the system continue to inspire and provide support for their work?
- How do I ensure that parents understand the work so that they begin to see the benefits of such a model of learning?

My questions centered on my learning and how this learning could benefit each of the groups I serve as a school principal — students, staff, and community — and then scaling that work through the system.

So often, when school leaders have these dynamic teams, whether a grade team or an entire school, we think we have arrived at a practice that is sustainable, scalable, and repeatable, but when we go to a new location, the same strategies don’t work. Leaders need to commit to investigating the culture, the processes, and pitfalls along the way to sustain staff members’ energy and interest. ■

We work toward being both adaptive and responsive to school and individual teacher needs. We recognize that job-embedded, personalized learning represents 70% of professional learning. We support those who coach and mentor staff with feedback, which represents 20% of professional learning. And we understand that the 10% of formal training needs to be limited and include components of personalization through opportunities from the other two categories while capitalizing on blended learning through social media. ■

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# THE SHIFT FROM 'ME' TO 'WE'



## SCHOOLS WITH A COACHING CULTURE BUILD INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CAPACITY

By Holli Hanson and Christine Hoyos

**T**he athletic coach's focus is to develop individual skills as well as the collective capacity of the team to perform at the highest level. A coaching culture applies the same concept to schools. What might this dual approach to coaching — the individual and the collective — mean and look like in schools? How is it different than having a few specialized building-based coaches? How might a focus on individual and collective development affect a school's culture to impact student and adult learning?

Coaching in schools is not new. What is fundamentally different in a culture of coaching is that all members of the school community see themselves as coaches. While there may be formally appointed coaches and teacher leaders to lead the work, developing all staff to coach each other and making coaching the culture's norm accelerates adult learning which, in turn, accelerates student learning. Professional learning becomes human-centered, focusing on the human interaction of learning.

A coaching culture requires staff members to be aware of the duality of their roles and to know when to adopt a researcher's perspective before diving back in, as the educator, to impact the learning that's taking place. Developing this capacity, while challenging, is instrumental to a coaching culture. It's a culture that develops through powerful adult learning experiences that integrate collaboration, inquiry, and reflection.

### CREATING A COACHING CULTURE

A coaching culture is acquired through development, not training. Development is a learning process in adaptive work, whereas training is typically procedural in nature to address technical work.

An emphasis on development has implications for adult learning across the school and larger system. The shift to authentic, human-centered adult learning occurs through a discipline of inquiry, where the learner works from data and engages in rigorous content; multiple opportunities for reflection in ways that create relevance and insight to new content; and collaboration that is used to expand perspective, build sustainability, and move learning from "me" to "we" so that professional development



enables true organizational learning (Rasmussen, n.d.). Authentic professional development encourages risks and values mistakes as learning opportunities. Cultures that embrace this way of being know that these learning opportunities lead to creativity and innovation.

Developing a coaching culture happens in a variety of contexts through action learning. This shift in the way staff members interact puts pressure on the structures and processes in place, demanding that they evolve as well, to provide increased opportunities and time for adult learning to occur. A key factor in this process is job-embedded support, nested within the everyday reality of the school and its classrooms. What does job-embedded support of a coaching culture look like? Here are a few examples.

**Studio classrooms.** A colleague articulates a dilemma spurred by student and/or teacher evidence. The teacher invites peers to the classroom, where they note student evidence through the lens of the dilemma. The host teacher and his or her colleagues analyze the student evidence. Colleagues provide reflective feedback to the host teacher, who then reconsiders his or her practice.

**Instructional rounds.** The school identifies a problem of practice. Peers visit colleagues' classrooms, where

## USING COLLABORATION, INQUIRY, AND REFLECTION

**Collaboration:** Opportunities for adults to come together to discuss teaching and learning is critical in transformative work, and meaningful collaboration must focus on the relationship of the learner (or learners in a collaborative task) and the teacher (or designer of the learning experience) in the presence of content that needs to be learned. Often called the instructional core (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), this is what matters most in affecting learning.

- *What do we notice about the learning that's taking place?*
- *What's our evidence?*
- *And then, what do we see that needs attention in the instructional core?*

**Inquiry:** Curiosity about teaching and learning is key to engaging learners in the work. Inquiry begins with information that sparks a question or dilemma. Analyzing information in order to make sense of a situation is key to being strategic in decision making. The next step is to make design decisions that can be put into practice for an improved learner experience.

- *What do I know about the learner?*
- *What am I wondering? How will this inform my practice?*

**Reflection:** For learning to be meaningful, learners need time to reflect. Reflective questions cause introspection — an impetus to describe or define what we do and why we do what we do. Considering what we know and do against the information we've gathered and examined gives the learner pause to reconsider practice.

- *What shifts, if any, will I need to make in my instructional practice?*
- *How will I know that what I've done is effective?*

they note student evidence related to the problem of practice. Through collaborative description and analysis of student evidence, they make sense of the evidence, looking for patterns and trends. This analysis leads to predictions about student knowledge and understanding as well as recommendations for professional learning.

**One-to-one coaching.** A teacher identifies a question or challenge in practice. A peer observes the interaction of teacher and student in the presence of content, noting student evidence. A reflective conversation, using student evidence, facilitates the consideration and reconsideration of teacher practice.

**Whole-group institutes.** Staff members come together to engage in adult learning that is collaborative, inquisitive, and reflective. Through their shared experiences, they develop common understandings about best practices and discuss ways to effectively implement them.

**Adult learning communities.** Colleagues learn together in teams using inquiry and reflection as guides for their collaborative work. Real-time student and teacher evidence are the vehicles for adult learning and refinement of classroom practice.

**Professional development leadership teams.** A representative group of staff members uses real-time information to design and implement adult learning in service of student learning and achievement. Patterns and trends in student evidence become possibilities for adult learning.

Developing the individual and the collective nurtures both personal and collective responsibility and action (Abelman & Elmore, 1999), fostering a can-do attitude and a growth mindset across a team and school. A culture of coaching causes a shift from compliance to commitment, from external accountability to collective responsibility, from “us” and “them” to “we” and “our,” to everybody’s success.

Two schools in Aurora, Colorado, and Tacoma, Washington, illustrate this culture shift.

## ARKANSAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AURORA, COLORADO

At Arkansas Elementary School in Aurora, Colorado, principal Kevin Shrum is working to develop a staff that collectively is responsible for student learning. With challenges stemming in part from high mobility among its teaching staff, Arkansas began its transformation work with a baseline goal of enabling teachers to learn from one another.

Reinvention needed to address the school’s weakest link: culture and community. Focusing on these aspects allowed adult relationships within the community to take center stage as the reinvention work progresses. Arkansas put into place new structures designed to foster key relationships: adult-to-adult, adult-to-student, and student-to-student.

**Adult-to-adult relationships** are developed through grade-level instructional planning using professional learning community processes as well as structured vertical planning focused on

reading development and writing units of study. The school also uses whole-group professional learning as a structure to learn and share across teams and grade levels. Adult learning designed to position teachers as researchers is empowering staff to learn with and from one another.

**Adult-to-student relationships** are nurtured throughout the day, but one critical structure is the paraeducator connected to each grade level. These staff members are dedicated to supporting positive behavior choices as well as an academic focus of support with small-group and one-on-one instruction. Paraeducators also connect with students outside the classroom at recess and lunch. Relationships are fostered through coaching conversations with students so that they, too, can be more reflective on their practice as learner and community member.

**Adult-to-student and student-to-student relationships** are further strengthened through multigrade-level academic communities. These communities foster vertical conversations among teachers, mentoring between intermediate and primary students, and support for the school’s positive choices program. Teachers in the community support each other and students by connecting with students and building relationships over the years.

This collaborative work supports an articulated perspective of how students do — and should — progress through their elementary education experience. It also enables key conversations and mentoring relationships via inquiry and reflection across grade levels.

Arkansas’ focus on culture and community is strengthening relationships and has resulted in a decrease in behavior incidents, allowing for a focus on learning and instruction. For a school identified by the Colorado Department of Education as turnaround (low academic achievement and low growth), this is critical.

Teachers now monitor student learning at greater levels and with more specificity than before and, as a result, a higher percentage of students are growing in their acquisition of critical content and skills. After three years in turnaround status, the school moved up two levels to improvement status and is still going strong in its efforts to provide a quality education for students.

School leaders anticipate that, through deliberate use of adult collaboration, inquiry, and reflection, facilitated by teachers, instructional practices will continue to improve and be shared.

“We have a collective responsibility to accelerate the learning for every Arkansas student every day,” Shrum says. “In order for this to happen, we have to accelerate the learning of every Arkansas teacher. Every adult takes personal responsibility for teaching and learning.”

Shrum credits coaching, both formal and informal, for making this happen. “We reflect on student data, summative and formative,” he says. “We reflect on our instructional practices and how they impact student learning. We leave each

learning meeting with a clear and focused next instructional step. Over the course of the week, we implement, we try things on, we take risks. Again, the focus is on how our actions impact student learning.”

Support is a key part of the school’s coaching culture. Shrum says teachers receive support from administration, instructional coaches, colleagues on the grade-level team, and from peers within the academic community through dialogue and feedback. Teachers make their instructional practice public and act as critical friends for each other, reflecting on the cause and effects of teaching and learning to refine practice.

## LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

### TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Several years ago, Lincoln High School, a highly diverse urban high school in Tacoma, Washington, began to take a close look at the skills needed for teaching urban students and how to match their instruction to student needs.

By engaging in inquiry around instructional improvement, they began to realize that, in order to make progress, they needed to shift their thinking about adult learning and collaboration. No longer could each teacher function independently. To be successful, they had to develop ways in which they could support each other as researchers into their own practice, exploring strong instructional practices, analyzing data differently, and acting on what emerged from the data.

School leaders recognized that they, too, would be required to reconsider how they supported staff as adult learners. The first step was to listen to teachers to determine what they needed from professional learning. That established the basis for creating structures and the time for adult learning to take place. And they had to be learners alongside the staff, engaging in inquiry into their own practice.

The school created a professional development leadership team, which developed an ongoing shared vision and plan for professional learning. The group’s work focuses on a simple inquiry question: How do we design and support high-quality professional learning that honors teachers as professionals, supports immediate instructional needs, and increases student learning?

What has emerged is a dramatic cultural shift. As one example, inquiry groups, functioning as a type of professional learning community, meet weekly. Inquiry groups focus on a common inquiry question but with more specific questions guiding each group’s research and examination of student data. Members provide feedback to one another related to lesson design, instructional practice, and a deeper connection to standards such as Common Core. They are each other’s real-time coaches.

Large-group professional learning, facilitated by various staff members, is a way to share and develop a common understanding. These experiences are no longer stand-and-deliver. Instead, they are interactive, well-designed learning experiences that incorporate collaboration, inquiry, and reflective practice. Across

Coaching culture is ...	Coaching culture is not ...
An ongoing use of inquiry to learn about individual and collective practice.	Event-driven or sporadic.
Inclusive of all levels.	Hierarchical or selective.
Supported by clear structures and processes.	Forms and checklists.
A shift in the type of collaboration as collective ownership (and authorship) and accountability (responsibility).	A singular process between coach and teacher.
About research into practice.	Evaluative.

the school, there is an increase in collective ownership of instruction, peer observation, peer coaching, and student success.

“In the same way that we need to have the locus of control of the knowledge to be with the students, the locus of control of the work in professional development needs to be with the teachers,” says Lincoln instructional coach TJ Purdy. “We embrace the Coalition of Essential Schools principle of ‘teacher as coach, student as worker.’ In the classroom and during professional development sessions, in whole- or small-group settings, the principle shifts to ‘teacher as worker, coach/admin as lead learner.’ I, as the instructional coach, act as an inquirer, wanting to know more about what a teacher is willing to adjust, try, and reflect on to improve the learning for all students.”

Lincoln’s science department exemplifies collaboration and providing feedback on each other’s practice. They engage in the studio model three times a year but also meet quarterly to analyze state test data, create common assessments, and discuss vertical alignment of strategies and vocabulary between the different courses. The individuals embody a growth mindset necessary to improve practice for student success.

Collaborative meetings are energizing, and everyone’s voice is heard and respected. As a result, members have adopted similar management strategies, such as interactive notebooks and using Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL). In addition, the group attends regional science conferences together in order to implement new strategies, whether content-specific or applicable to any classroom.

As they have begun to see one another as teammates on a mission to increase student achievement, the school’s state test data for science has grown tremendously — from 8.5% of students meeting standard in science in 2007 to 47% of students meeting standard on the biology end-of-course assessment in 2014, with a steady 7% growth in the last three years.

One of the most powerful things that has emerged is the practice of teachers asking students to be their coaches, helping them think differently about their teaching and be more reflec-

tive about what is effective and meaningful in the classroom. With this increase in collective ownership has come an increase in student success. Graduation rates are on the rise, climbing from 46.3% in 2010 to 65.7% in 2013. The number of students enrolled in AP courses has increased from 137 in 2010 to 536 in 2014. College-ready transcripts increased from 29% in 2008 to 59.4% in 2013.

“If we see ourselves as a team that is going to be successful year after year, we need to embrace a culture where it is OK to rely on each other as coaches, supporting our growth individually and collectively,” says principal Pat Erwin. “As the leader, it is my charge to empower all teachers to focus on what is happening in the classroom and their own learning, which includes risk taking and making mistakes, often revealing new opportunities for growth and learning.”

This changing culture has also meant changes for school leaders. For Erwin, that means becoming a partner in learning. “I must model being coached and being a coach to my staff,” Erwin says. “I have to be transparent about my inquiry questions. I must take time to be reflective and to be a collaborative partner, which can mean allowing my ideas and assumptions to be challenged. I have to invest in the intellectual and social capital of my staff. An interesting byproduct is that, as the adults in the school, teachers feel honored as professionals and a deeper sense of ownership and commitment to each other and our students.”

#### COLLEGIALITY AS THE NORM

Both of these school examples point to adult interaction based on deep professional inquiry, strong collaborative prac-

tices, and time and space for individual and collective reflection. This form of collegiality is the norm and way of doing business in these schools.

By developing sustainable structures and processes that support adult learning focused through collaboration, inquiry, and reflection, the capacity to maintain a coaching culture is strong enough to withstand the external factors and changes that systems continually face. By accelerating adult learning, these schools accelerate student learning and, in both cases, student achievement is increasing.

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#### Data drive these coaches

*Continued from p. 24*

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# NET RESULTS

ONLINE PROTOCOLS  
BOOST GROUP  
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POTENTIAL



By Alan Dichter and Janet Mannheimer Zydney

**P**rotocols are strategies for having structured communication to enhance problem solving, encourage different perspectives, and build shared knowledge. The protocol process helps professional development leaders build community.

The use of the term protocols by educators became popular in the 1990s. Reformers, needing tools to help them engage in the difficult work of strengthening practice and forming vibrant professional learning communities, began to construct ways of looking together at student and educator work, learning from text, and collaboratively solving problems.

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The Descriptive Consultancy protocol is adapted with permission of the publisher from McDonald, J.P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E.C. (2007). *The power of protocols: An educators' guide to better practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press. © Copyright 2007 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.

More recently, educators have begun to use protocols to facilitate professional development in online spaces — partly because people need to connect from different places, but also to take advantage of new environments for learning.

For example, asynchronous tools, such as discussion forums, blogs, or Google+, where participants post messages to one another at different times — extending a conversation over a week or two — enable participants to take advantage of additional time to reflect and give more thoughtful feedback.

Synchronous tools, such as WebEx, Skype, or Google Hangouts, allow participants to talk or text at the same time from places all over the world. They can share their own practices immediately through real-time video, for example, showing a classroom in action on Skype. They can also share student work, current teaching dilemmas, and educational issues and, through a protocol, gain insight and become more thoughtful about their practices.

Blended environments, which use a combination of online (both asynchronous and synchronous) and face-to-face time, allow participants to take advantage of different spaces for different purposes. Thus, professional learning leaders can strategize how to maximize the time the group has together physically when a richer and more constructive discussion is needed and use the online spaces when participants cannot get together physically or when they need more time to reflect.

#### WHY PROTOCOLS?

McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, and McDonald (2013) note that protocols “help us develop the habits we wish we had” (p. 13). By using protocols, leaders and participants are supported in developing the habits needed for a successful community. These habits assure that a time when professionals gather is maximally productive. This is the case for weekly staff meetings, teacher team meetings, retreats, and seminars, regardless of whether they are in person or online.

Protocols are also valuable tools for those seeking to develop facilitative leadership skills and to embed facilitative leadership within an organization. What becomes clear to individuals seeking to lead professional learning communities is that overcoming some initial resistance to working with protocols is going to take work and persistence. The structure of the protocols creates a safe and equitable environment, helping leaders take these steps.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACILITATOR

Those who seek to lead collaborative organizations know that the notion of a “strong collaborative leader” is not an oxymoron. In fact, it takes great strength and specific skills to successfully lead such a group. What is often referred to as “facilitative leadership” (Hord, 1992) is an approach that many successful leaders adopt.

Facilitation is an important part of any protocol. While protocols are designed for collaborative work and promote shared responsibility, facilitators must always keep part of their focus on the process and goal. McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, and McDonald (2007) note: “At its heart, facilitating is about promoting participation, ensuring equity, and building trust. This is true whether the facilitating involves a protocol or another kind of meeting format. The difference is that protocols are deliberately designed with these tasks in mind, while most other meeting formats are rife with opportunities for ignoring them. We all know the result: the faculty ‘meeting’ that turns into a monologue by the principal or the chairperson, the ‘whole-group discussion’ that two or three people dominate, or the task force that manages to suppress divergent thinking” (p. 15).

Successful facilitators realize that it would be difficult to facilitate professional learning without paying attention to promoting participation, ensuring equity, and building trust. For example, it’s difficult to imagine ensuring equity without having trust. For that matter, it’s difficult to imagine building trust without ensuring equity. Some people might think of them as sequential (e.g. first trust and then equity), but when they examine the ideas closely, they are

likely to see that trust and equity are all part of a web of conditions that allows for and promotes interaction and meaningful participation.

Many participants are eager to make sure that a group hears all voices. The skilled facilitator structures the conversations so that this is more than just being equitable with time and making sure as many points of view as exist are heard. Facilitators also want to make sure that the group can come to know more than any one individual in the group can possibly know.

Protocols explicitly value the collective — not over the individual, but because of the presence of the individuals: “When a facilitator promotes a group’s trust, it is not to help everyone trust every other individual member as an individual, but rather to help each trust the situation that has been collectively created. The purpose is not trust in general, but trust sufficient to do the work at hand. Nor is the goal to make everyone feel comfortable. Given trust, a group of individuals can learn from one another and their work together even when the work creates discomfort — as work involving worthwhile learning often does” (McDonald et al., 2007, p 17).

While protocols help prevent things from going wrong by providing a structure that participants can trust, things still happen that require intervention. Facilitators using protocols early in a group’s development might hear, “Why don’t we just talk?” Asking participants to “go with the process” and reminding them that they can share their feedback at the end often helps. It is also about this time when the facilitator who spent a few minutes on norms can reference them, and the facilitator who skipped doing norms remembers why that was a mistake.

## LESSONS LEARNED

An important lesson learned when using protocols is never to skip norms. This is particularly important for online groups,

which are susceptible to miscommunication because of the lack of nonverbal cues. Online groups need to establish norms for simple logistics, such as when, where, and how frequently to check in with one another (McDonald, Zydney, Dichter, & McDonald, 2012).

It is also particularly helpful in online environments to have a co-facilitator so that one person can focus exclusively on technology issues that may arise and the other can focus on the conversation. While facilitating, it is important for facilitators to listen, take notes, and summarize what they have heard so that participants know they are listening. This is especially useful in online environments, where participants can feel isolated and disconnected from one another (van Tyron & Bishop, 2009).

To wrap things up, the facilitator should also include time for reflecting and debriefing after the protocol. This helps participants be aware of what they have learned and helps the facilitator make changes to improve the experience next time (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2003). One of the most important lessons is to take risks and have “the courage, above all, to do business differently, to be a learner, to be a leader, to educate yourself” (McDonald et al., 2003, p. 102).

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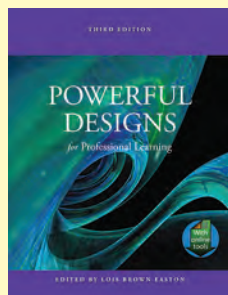
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# ONE PROTOCOL, TWO WAYS

**M**ost protocols are flexible and can be used or adapted for multiple purposes. The Descriptive Consultancy (McDonald et al., 2007), developed by Nancy Mohr, is a variation on The Consultancy, developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans, and Faith Dunne at the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Consultancies, in all forms, are protocols designed to support collaborative problem solving. One of the key aspects of the consultancy, in all its variations, is that advice, if given at all, is withheld until participants examine the challenge thoroughly. As a professional learning tool, it is one of the best for helping people develop the skill of asking good questions.

The use of probing questions, considered by many to be the most powerful dimension of this protocol, is a skill that practitioners readily apply in all sorts of interactions. The key to a good probing question is to ensure that it helps the person answering to think more deeply about the issue. The questioner shouldn't impose his or her own interpretations or solutions.

Probing questions often help people gain insight into a problem that is far more helpful than suggestions. It is also true that once the presenter shares those additional insights, whatever suggestions are made are far more likely to be on target.

- In-person version, p. 52
- Online version, p. 53

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## THE DESCRIPTIVE CONSULTANCY: IN-PERSON VERSION

### PURPOSE

**A**s with the original Consultancy, the Descriptive Consultancy has two purposes: helping practitioners think through a dilemma that they present and expanding their power to address it. Nancy Mohr liked this variation and used it especially to help groups of educators become facilitative leaders and gain the opportunity to learn how others frame their dilemmas.

### DETAILS AND GUIDELINES

The protocol requires about one hour to explore each dilemma, though times vary depending on the number of participants. The setting typically involves either one group of 10 to 12 or smaller groups of three to five meeting in a space where multiple conversations can be carried on simultaneously. Smaller groups — using a more constrained time frame — might consult on all its members' dilemmas in turn.

### STEPS

**1. Presentation.** The presenter describes the dilemma, laying out its different dimensions as he or she sees them, including previous attempts to address it. *(10 minutes)*

**2. Clarifying questions.** Other members of the group, acting in the role of consultants, ask questions designed to elicit information they think they need in order to consult more effectively. *(5 minutes)*

**3. Reflecting back descriptively.** The presenter is silent while each of the consultants describes the content of the presentation, beginning with the facilitator's prompt, "What did you hear in this presentation?" The facilitator then adds prompts to spur additional go-rounds in order to ensure the fullest possible description of the problem and its complexities. Such prompts might include: "What seems important to the presenter?" "What, if anything, surprised you?" and "What does this problem seem to be about?" This is also a good time for participants to pose probing questions. Participants in the go-rounds are asked to pass if someone else has already offered their reflection. *(10-15 minutes)*

**4. Response.** The presenter briefly responds to the consultants' expressed understandings of the problem and provides further clarification of the problem as needed. *(5 minutes)*

**5. Brainstorming.** The presenter is again silent while the consultants brainstorm possible solutions or next steps, saying things like "What if ...?" or "Have you thought about ...?" This step often takes the form of open conversation among the consultants,

and sometimes in the third person (as if the presenter were not in the same room), a strategy that often helps the presenter listen more fully and the consultants speak more freely. *(10-15 minutes)*

**6. Response.** The presenter responds again, this time to answer any questions that might have arisen in brainstorming and to acknowledge any shifts in how he or she views the problem. Here, the presenter does not so much answer the group's questions as present his or her new insights gained during listening. *(5 minutes)*

**7. Debriefing.** The facilitator asks the presenter and participants about their roles: "How did it feel to be the presenter?" or "How did it feel to be the consultant?" The facilitator ends with, "Sometimes people other than the presenter learn something important from the Descriptive Consultancy — something useful in their own context. Does anyone have something to share along those lines?" *(5 minutes)*

### FACILITATION TIPS

- When the Descriptive Consultancy is conducted in multiple small groups, the facilitator oversees the process as a whole, having first modeled the process by allowing participants to observe. During the process, the facilitator should monitor groups' use of the steps and intervene if they are not being followed.
- In explaining and monitoring, the facilitator should emphasize the importance of Step 3: Reflecting back a description, rather than making a judgment or proposing a solution. This is a delicate step for the facilitator, who must gently nudge the group to remain descriptive.
- The facilitator should also emphasize Step 4, which involves the presenter's responding to the way the consultants understood the problem. The facilitator might tell the group: "The reason we reflect back and listen carefully to the reflections is to acknowledge that people inevitably have different takes on a complex problem. The power of the Descriptive Consultancy is in learning from these different takes." The facilitator may ask the presenter at the end of Step 4 if he or she wants to reframe or restate the problem at this time.
- Sometimes it is useful for a team to present a problem for consultation. This has the benefit for team members to become clearer about the problem as they think through how to present it.

## THE DESCRIPTIVE CONSULTANCY: ONLINE VERSION

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the online version is the same as the face-to-face one but allows participants more time to reflect on reframing of the problem.

### DETAILS AND GUIDELINES

This online version requires two weeks and works best with groups of up to 10 participants. In the online directions, the facilitator must allow time for participants to ponder the dilemma the presenter describes before posting responses in the discussion forum.

### STEPS

**1. Organization.** Before the first of the two online weeks, the facilitator recruits or invites a member of the group engaged in the Descriptive Consultancy to present a dilemma. With information from the presenter, about a week before the beginning of the two-week long consultancy, the facilitator creates a new discussion forum with the title of the presenters' dilemma (such as "Writer's Block in Adolescent Boys"), a few words to describe it, and directions for the protocol.

**2. Presentation.** In the meantime, the presenter has pondered the issue and prepared a presentation of the dilemma. *Within two days of the facilitator's creation of the discussion forum, the presenter posts the presentation of the dilemma as a new thread.*

**3. Clarifying questions.** Participants, in the role of consultants, read through the problem presented and post a response with any clarifying questions they want to address to the presenter. Answers to clarifying questions address gaps in understanding. Consultants title these "Clarifying Questions." *These clarifying questions are due two days after the initial posting, and the presenter should answer them by the end of the first week.*

**4. Brainstorming.** All consultants post a response to the presenter's dilemma. In their responses, they can write probing questions and/or suggestions for possible solutions or next steps. They title these "Probing Questions" or "Suggestions." *This posting is due in the middle of the second week.*

**5. Reactions.** The presenter reads the replies to his or her dilemma and posts a reaction to share with everyone. The presenter is encouraged to share any new insights he or she has gained as a result of reading the brainstorming or probing questions and suggestions. This post should be titled "Reaction" as a reply to the original thread. *The posting is due at the end of the second online week.*



**6. Debrief.** The facilitator creates a new thread called "Insights," and all participants post a reflection on the problem-solving process. They respond to these questions: "How did it feel to do the consultancy online?" and "Would you use this type of protocol in the future for your own work?" *This posting is due at the same time as the "Reaction" posting.*

### FACILITATION TIPS

- This protocol tends to run smoothly with few interventions, though monitoring for timeliness and attention to directions is always important.
- If coming together is possible, steps 5 and 6 could be done in person.
- It might be helpful to do the face-to-face version first before trying this online version.



# THE HIGH COST *of* CONVENIENCE

**SATISFYING SHORT-TERM NEEDS  
ERODES LONG-TERM LEARNING**

**By Diane P. Zimmerman**

**N**ovel ways of thinking often come from the cross-pollination of language from other professions. The term “satisficing” is one such term and is a powerful construct that fuses two concepts, satisfy and suffice, together to explain something new.

In the mid-1950s, social scientist and Nobel laureate in economics Herbert A. Simon defined “satisficing” as a way of describing a particular form of decision making in which humans select the first option that meets a given need but which may not be the most optimal (Simon, 1997).

Unlike its simpler derivatives, satisficing describes the often-paradoxical results that plague decision making. Depending on context, a particular option may be adequate or satisfactory in the moment, while later it is insufficient for full success.

While satisficing is an expedient strategy for everyday decisions such as what to cook for dinner in a given amount of time, it is detrimental to human activities, such as learning, that require sufficient investments of mental energy.

I can think of many times in my role as a professional developer when I observed satisficing but had no label for it. My vague descriptions were either that the participants were going through the motions or that they worked just enough to get by with the minimal requirements. Both stances were counterproductive to deep learning. Consider these examples.



### THE EXPEDIENT CHOICE

Often, professionals will satisfice in an effort to protect time. As a principal, I was sometimes surprised to find that when I thought I had consensus, I would learn later that participants had rushed to a “good-enough” solution.



When consensus eventually broke down, participants would explain that they had chosen the first satisfactory option because they were tired of talking about it. The decision satisfied their need for expediency, but it wasn't sufficient for building consensus. This example meets the classic definition of satisficing, in which participants chose a quick fix that is expedient, but later erodes the decision.

### JUST TELL ME WHAT TO DO

In just about every change initiative, there are always a few who, usually in exasperation, say, “Just tell me what to do.”

Having someone tell us what to do is an easy option and can appear satisfactory, but the complex decisions of excellent teaching and learning are never so simply applied. Lasting change requires deep reflection on practice; shortcuts are doomed to failure.

When a professional does not fully commit to thinking through the change, he will not have sufficient strategies for success. In systems theory, this is called “fixes that fail” in that the solution seems to satisfice, but over the long haul it is eroded by unintended consequences. In an attempt to satisfy the need for compliance, the teacher will find that, in the end, she does not have sufficient depth to adapt to students' needs.



### A RESPECTFUL VOID

A few years ago, I taught a group of principals about theory-based leadership. No matter what I did, I could not get deep engagement from these principals. They were polite, stayed for the entire day, but something did not work.

At the end, I asked one principal for feedback. She told me, “Don't feel bad. We treat all consultants the same way. Every time our boss goes to a conference, she brings her latest new idea. We are just sick of it.”

Being professionals, these educators did not want to appear rude, so they placated by giving sufficient attention to be polite, but not satisfying the requirements for deep learning. To be honest, most of us will admit to politely, or even not so politely, just sitting passively through workshops, giving sufficient but not satisfactory attention for learning.

For some of us, we do not want the added distraction of one more initiative. For others, it might feel like a distraction from an already chosen decision path.



### REVOLVING DOOR LEARNING

Serial change initiatives create a sense of “false clarity” — the idea that one or two workshops make an expert. So often we hear things like, “We did professional learning communities three years ago, writing prompts last year, and now we are on to Common Core.”

With so many competing demands, it is easy to fall into the trap of revolving door professional learning. The irony is that we ignore the research on professional development that has demonstrated the need for sustained commitment, coaching, and collaborative learning.

By colluding, we adopt a sense of false clarity about the power of professional learning. Short-term gains, while satisfactory for the moment, are never sufficient for long-term change. What appears satisfactory, counting staff development events for a report, is not sufficient for producing intended outcomes.



### GROUP ASPIRATION

Groups, like individuals, have limited cognitive capacity for sustaining complex thoughts. In their work on data-driven dialogue, Wellman and Lipton (2003) write that simplifying a problem can reduce cognitive load and facilitate more rapid decision making. It can also reduce the cognitive aspirations of the group.

Groups vary in their ability to persist and puzzle through when there is no immediate solution. Rushing to decisions can create low aspirations and thus diminishes the effectiveness of group learning.

Wellman and Lipton explain that aspirational levels are learned behaviors that lead to either self-limiting or group-expanding behaviors. One way to slow down decisions and keep groups thinking together is to frame the work around an unanswered question. Questions tend to keep everyone in the conversation a bit longer and, if left unanswered, sustain curiosities.

### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EDUCATORS

Satisficing is a critical problem of practice. Satisficing is an act that more often than not interferes with deep, sustained reflection on practice and the concomitant learning. The act of satisficing, in which only one side of Simon’s equation is acted on, erodes long-term learning by satisfying short-term needs. On the other side of the equation, it gives a short-term illusion of sufficiency for success. Wellman and Lipton (2003) state, “In the press of time, any action is sought over further reflection” (p. 49).

By applying this concept to education, the question of practice becomes: How can educators help learners take control of their own learning so as to optimize engagement? There is no easy solution. The examples in this article are but a few of the many ways we can become conscious about how we as professionals compromise learning.

By knowing what satisficing looks, sounds, and feels like,

educators can intervene in the moment, make adjustments, and help professionals engage in and take control of their own learning. Look for satisficing behaviors, and you will see them everywhere — in classrooms, in your personal life, and in professional learning. Be wary of the quick fixes or the lack of follow-through. Both indicate satisficing and will likely lead to failure.

To raise aspirational levels, we need to apply strategies that open up curiosity, engage in the moment, and seek immediate feedback. We need to be flexible and make adjustments to sustain engagement and the commitment to learning. The distance between teaching and learning needs be shortened.

How much more satisfied those principals would have been, all those years ago, if I had stopped early in the day to check in. What I was delivering was not wrong, but the process I had chosen did not match their needs.

If I had spent sufficient time checking in with them and grounding my work in relation to their current practices, everyone would have been more satisfied, and I might have been invited to engage in a sustained relationship. Our learning would have been both sufficient and satisfactory for long-term success.

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## Study links learning design to changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors

### WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

In this study of 16 teachers in two primary schools in the Netherlands, researchers built on findings from previous studies to demonstrate that a thoughtfully designed professional development program can be “effective and sustainable, if certain conditions are met” (p. 772) in changing teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, perceived problems, and classroom practices.

#### Study description

Linda Van den Bergh, Anje Ros, and Douwe Beijaard designed a teacher professional development program to improve teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, perceived problems, and classroom behaviors related to student feedback during active learning.

#### Questions

The study focused on the short- and long-term effects of a professional development program aimed at improving teacher feedback during active learning on:

- Primary school teachers’ beliefs

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#### At a glance

Professional development to improve teachers’ practice in giving feedback to students during active learning is difficult. This small-scale, pre- and post-test study of teachers of 9- to 12-year-olds demonstrates that professional development thoughtfully designed applying research-based features influences teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors.

#### THE STUDY

**Van den Bergh, L., Ros, A., & Beijaard, D. (2014).** Improving teacher feedback during active learning: Effects of a professional development program. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 772-809.

regarding feedback during active learning;

- The problems primary school teachers perceive regarding feedback during active learning; and
- Primary school teachers’ feedback behaviors in the context of active learning.

#### Methodology

The study included 16 teachers who taught 9- to 12-year-olds in two schools randomly selected from 13 schools that had previously participated in studies of active learning with a teacher training institute in southeastern Netherlands. All upper-grades primary teachers, nine in one school and seven in the other, participated as a group.

The schools were from a pool of 23 that indicated they practiced active learning. Active learning is defined as “any instructional method that requires students to do meaningful learning

activities and to think about what they are doing” (p. 773). The professional development program integrated a number of key features of effective professional development drawn from the literature, including:

- Sustainable and intensive;
- Collective participation;
- Clear goals that are communicated;
- Solving real-world problems with working examples;
- Modeling effective behaviors by trainer;
- Authentic and integrated activities;
- Plenty of opportunities for active learning;
- Building on teachers’ existing knowledge as a foundation for new knowledge;
- Demonstration and application of new knowledge; and
- Reflection on action.

Teachers participated for four months. In each month, a four-step

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

**R**esearchers provided evidence that well-designed professional development can result in changes in teachers' beliefs, perceived problems, and behaviors when it builds on teachers' existing knowledge, perceptions, and practices and when it integrates characteristics of effective professional learning.

The study confirms that deep change in teacher beliefs, perceived problems, and behaviors requires sustained support over time. Researchers conclude that it is possible to enhance teachers' classroom behavior in lasting ways by implementing a carefully designed professional development program (p. 804).

By improving teacher behavior associated with student academic success, such as feedback and active learning, professional development has the potential to improve student success.

cycle was repeated. Step one was an informational meeting that focused on theory about feedback during active learning and included videotaped examples.

Each month's information session focused on a different aspect of feedback. The first month focused on giving feedback that relates to student performance or understanding related to specific learning goals. The second month focused on confirming, critical, and constructive feedback. The third month focused on balancing directive and facilitative feedback. The last month focused on feedback on student metacognition and social learning.

In the second step of the cycle, researchers videotaped each participant leading a 20-minute active learning lesson in which teachers applied their new learning. Third, teachers analyzed their own videotape to select four clips in which they exhibited "optimal and nonoptimal feedback behavior" (p. 785) related to that month's goal.

Last, teachers met with colleagues to share and discuss their video clips and received tailored feedback from the trainer and their colleagues. Teachers used logbooks to note plans for applying feedback behaviors and reflecting on their behaviors.

### Analysis

Researchers used three measures to study the effects of the professional development program: videotapes of

each participant, a beliefs instrument, and a perceived problems instrument, all collected before the start of the professional learning, immediately after it, and seven months after it ended.

Teacher-student interactions from the videotapes served as the unit of analysis. Researchers coded and aggregated the interactions to the teacher level to permit analysis of focus and frequency of teacher feedback behavior and comparison between teacher pretest behavior and each of the subsequent post-tests.

The teacher beliefs instrument yielded 26 concepts that represented different beliefs that were coded as not mentioned or mentioned. New beliefs that emerged after the professional development program were added. Researchers analyzed differences in the proportion of teachers who mentioned each belief between the pretest and each of the subsequent post-tests.

The teacher perceived problems instrument yielded mean scores for the pre-, post-, and delayed post-test administrations. Researchers compared pretest means to each of the post-test means.

### Results

The study yielded findings related to each research question. At the first post-test following the professional development program, 63% of teachers noted beliefs related to learning goals, including focusing feedback on social

learning, giving goal-directed feedback, and giving confirmative, critical, and constructive feedback.

In addition, 50% of teachers mentioned that feedback should be constructive, and 44% noted that feedback can focus on student metacognition.

During the delayed post-test, similar changes in teachers mentioning of beliefs occurred. Other beliefs not addressed in the professional development program decreased over time. Researchers conclude, "These results indicate a change in the beliefs of teachers regarding these important facets of feedback during active learning" (p. 793). Although teacher beliefs changed, not all of their behaviors changed at the same level.

The professional development program did not have a significant effect on teachers' perceived problems related to their feedback behavior during active learning, although several problems identified in the pretest diminished following the program.

The professional development program had varied effects on teacher feedback behavior during active learning. Overall, the focus of teacher feedback did not change. However, there was a significant effect on the focus related to metacognition immediately after the program that was not sustained to the delayed post-test.

Statistically, more teacher feedback was related to the learning goal after the

professional development program and sustained through the delayed post-test.

In terms of the nature of teachers' feedback, they gave significantly more confirming feedback and significantly less neutral feedback during active learning during the first and second post-tests than in the pretest.

Researchers conducted a deeper analysis and found that the professional development program changed the way teachers gave feedback. They formed three subgroups of teachers: high, average, and low, based on teachers' pretest use of directive feedback behaviors.

After the program, teachers in the low subgroup gave statistically more directive feedback in the second post-test. A separate analysis revealed that teachers in the medium and high subgroups gave statistically less directive and more facilitative feedback in at least the first post-test situation.

The study confirms the relationship

among teachers' behaviors, their perceived problems, and their beliefs. In addition, it explores how professional development design influences the outcomes achieved.

By examining teachers' beliefs, perceived problems, and behaviors before the professional development program, researchers were able to build on their foundation and integrate them into professional development that motivated them and addressed their particular context. The use of video embedded within teachers' professional practice enhanced the professional development program with examples drawn from actual classroom experiences.

#### Limitations

The researchers cite a number of limitations of this study, including:

- The limited number of participants;
- The small number of schools;
- The short-term duration of the

professional development program; and

- The amount of time for implementation of the two latter foci of the professional development program cycle.

Overall, the duration of the professional development program was brief considering the degree of expected change in practice. Another major limitation was the pretest post-test design without a control group.

In addition, the professional development program was the same for all teachers without attention to the various ways teachers learn. By examining only mean differences among the 16 participants, the study yielded no information about variations in teachers' learning. These limitations suggest the need for further study of the professional development program for changing teachers' beliefs, perceived problems, and feedback behaviors during active learning. ■

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## Choosing between what matters and what counts

*Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh ponders ways to connect relicensure policies to meaningful professional learning for all educators.*

"Many states have recertification or relicensure rules that require educators to earn 100 to 200 professional development hours over a specified period of time. In my view, educator relicensure and recertification processes are a missed opportunity when it comes to ensuring that educators have access to the professional learning they want and need to help students succeed. ...

"Too few states and districts have systems in place for awarding credit for the professional development educators value most: job-embedded, team-based, and collaborative learning.

"This system needs to change. We know that educators want and deserve more and better professional learning to meet the challenges they face every day. We can find better ways to leverage these precious learning hours to support our educators."

<http://bit.ly/18OQwAd>

## Group takes a fresh look at adult learning

**R**ethinking adult learning is essential to the redesign of learning for children.

Learning Forward is facilitating a diverse group of leading thinkers, designers, and practitioners called the PD Brain Trust to inspire new thinking and generate new expertise about how to create demand for — and deliver — redesigned systems of support that guarantee all educators have access to effective professional learning.

The PD Brain Trust is a collaborative professional learning community, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, of individuals from organizations that have demonstrated leadership in all aspects of K-12 education.

PD Brain Trust partners:

- **Contribute to a professional learning community** where partners learn from each other and from leaders in other fields that

focus on changing human behavior;

- **Commit to openly share their own challenges** in the creation and support of professional learning systems;
- **Co-create new designs and solutions for professional learning systems** that can achieve new outcomes for individual learners, participating organizations, and networks of partners across the K-12 continuum; and
- **Design a strategy to advance professional learning redesign** and move people and organizations toward new practices and behaviors in the field.

PD Brain Trust partners first met in November 2014 in partnership with the Long Beach Unified School District, a national leader in the creation of professional learning practices that have led to significant improvements in student learning. In March, the group met in Cary, North Carolina, in partnership with SAS, IDEO, and the



Wake County Public School System, a leader in personalized learning for educators.

The next meeting is scheduled for June in partnership with the Florida State Department of Education, a national leader in developing a state system of professional learning.



### PD BRAIN TRUST PARTNERS

Members of the PD Brain Trust are among the field's leading thinkers, designers, and practitioners. They represent advocacy and research organizations, educator associations, foundations, school systems, higher education institutions, and state and provincial education agencies.

**Roderick Allen**, British Columbia Ministry of Education

**Barnett Berry**, Center for Teaching Quality

**Catherine Brown**, Center for American Progress

**Karen Cator**, Digital Promise

**Timothy Daly**, TNTF

**Jennifer Davis**, National Center on Time & Learning

**Dan Domenech**, American Association of School Administrators

**Segun Eubanks**, National Education Association

**Stephen Fink**, University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership

**Crystal Gonzales**, Helmsley Charitable Trust

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**Rosita Ramirez**, NALEO Educational Fund

**Wendy Robinson**, Fort Wayne Community Schools

**David Silver**, RTI International

**Marla Ucelli-Kashyap**, American Federation of Teachers

**Kate Walsh**, National Council on Teacher Quality

**Michael Watson**, Delaware Department of Education





## Choose learning that benefits one and all

Over the past year, I started a new coaching relationship with an administrator. Walking through the leader's school, I was transported back to eight years ago, when I was the new principal at a high-performing high school. It didn't take long to see I had a journey ahead of me.

Within weeks, I knew that I was leading a school that had great results — for most students. We had many skilled faculty members, but they didn't always see why we'd need to change. While I could set up a schedule that put every teacher into a team, could we really advance our school to excellence?

Looking back on that journey, I'd like to share a few lessons I learned along the way.

### **DIG DEEP INTO YOUR DATA.**

When the faculty in my school were complacent about change, it was time to learn about the students we were leaving behind.

By looking not just at the state or systemwide data but also what we could learn from homework and teacher-developed tests, we learned that students in a range of subgroups weren't proficient. Because those subgroups were small, our scores overall looked fine. But attaching names to the data helped the faculty realize that settling for fine was not an option.

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

### **on board** DEBORAH JACKSON

Every student had the right to strong teaching, and now we could figure out how to make that happen.

### **BUILD CAPACITY OF YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM.**

I quickly realized that if we were going to ask teams of teachers to, for example, become masterful at using data, I would need the help of a schoolwide leadership team. The 20-plus members of my instructional leadership team included assistant principals, department chairs, school librarians and technologists, an instructional coach, and directors of student services and activities.

In our work as a learning community, we strengthened our abilities to lead collaboration, facilitate teams, focus on cultural proficiency, and so much more. Without the commitment of this team, there is no way we could transform culture or skills schoolwide.

### **USE RESOURCES CREATIVELY.**

Every school or system leader has a unique set of resource constraints and opportunities. While I didn't have Title I funds to draw on, I did have an instructional fund that most principals would assume would be best spent on textbooks.

What if I didn't need textbooks?



Instead, we bought what we needed — for example, we found that using those funds to hire an assistant principal dedicated to instructional improvement would propel us forward. I also relied on parents and community members to support our learning. Some parents supported learning teams through refreshments and snacks, while community partners gave us offsite learning locations to help the leadership team look at our solutions in new ways.

### **INVEST IN YOURSELF.**

I wouldn't have helped my school succeed if I hadn't made my own learning a priority. By my second year in the job, I knew I needed more knowledge and skills, support, and a network of smart peers. That's just what I found with the Learning Forward Academy. I'm a proud graduate of the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2011. If I hadn't invested in my learning, I also wouldn't be the president of Learning Forward.

I can't wait to help my coaching colleague along the learning journey. We all have many more lessons to learn. ■

### book club

THE COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING:  
Professional Learning That Promotes Success for All

By Amy Colton, Georgea Langer, and Loretta Goff

This book is a comprehensive guide to implementing a research-based approach to professional learning that drives educator effectiveness and promotes learning for every student.

Aligned with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional

Learning, the CASL (Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning) model has been directly linked to student improvement. The book includes step-by-step guidance to implementation supported by tools, protocols, and examples.

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 June 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email **office@learningforward.org**.

## WANTED: Your story

Regardless of the theme of an issue, *JSD* editors are always happy to consider articles about these topics:

- Professional learning that leads to student success.
- Common Core and how professional learning supports effective implementation.
- Use of technology in professional learning.
- Content-specific professional learning — how your learning supports student advancement in mathematics, science, literacy, language arts, social studies, music, art, etc.
- Role-specific professional learning addressing the needs of principals, teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, etc.
- Population-specific professional learning — for example, what professional learning helps practitioners support English language learners, students in high-poverty areas, students with special needs, students in rural or urban areas, etc.
- How your professional learning aligns with or illustrates the Standards for Professional Learning.

Learn more at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines).



## Learning Forward affiliates

Affiliates offer members the opportunity to expand their professional development networks by connecting with other individuals by location. More than 35 state and provincial affiliates provide services and programs that connect staff developers within individual states or provinces or regions. Contact Learning Forward Deputy Executive Director Frederick Brown ([frederick.brown@learningforward.org](mailto:frederick.brown@learningforward.org)) if you're interested in facilitating a new affiliate in a state currently not served by a state chapter.

### TOP 10 REASONS TO FORM OR JOIN AN AFFILIATE:

1. Gain access to the most up-to-date information on professional learning.
2. Grow professionally through educational program offerings.
3. Promote a greater appreciation for the impact of educator learning on student learning.
4. Strengthen professional learning so that teaching, leadership, and student success improve.
5. Make a difference in your own school, district, and state or province.
6. Influence state/provincial and school system policies and practices related to professional learning.
7. Network and form relationships with other professionals as part of a learning community.
8. Grow as a leader and offer your own leadership skills.
9. Foster and maintain a code of ethics for practice.
10. Be affiliated with an organization that is recognized internationally as the premier voice for professional learning.

# Action alert on ESEA

Thank you to all who responded to Learning Forward's action alert last month. Congress is at work this year to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Many came forward to sign Learning Forward's petition encouraging policymakers to be sure the law includes funds focused solely on effective professional learning.

Learning Forward's advocacy efforts related to ESEA reauthorization will continue in the upcoming weeks, though it is difficult to predict the precise path this process will follow. As in past years, Learning Forward will encourage lawmakers to include at least elements of Learning Forward's definition of professional learning in the legislation.

In the meantime, watch for any additional action alerts and see related resources at [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy), including an archived webinar describing Learning Forward's recent related advocacy efforts.

## SPRING WEBINAR SERIES CONTINUES

Join authors and leaders in the field for webinars on key topics that will prepare teacher, school, and system leaders to successfully implement professional learning that increases teaching effectiveness and student achievement.



Webinars are free for Learning Forward members. Nonmembers may attend one webinar for \$20 or three for \$50. Members also get access to the complete webinar archive and can participate in facilitated online discussions and other activities following each webinar on the Learning Exchange.

Upcoming webinars include:

- April 30: Jan Chappuis, Assessment for Learning
- May 14: Alan Blankstein and Pedro Noguera, Courageous Leadership
- May 21: Gayle Gregory, Data-Driven Differentiation

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

## LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- May 15:** Manuscript deadline for the December 2015 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Professional learning for literacy.
- May 31:** Last day to save \$75 on registration for the 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- June 1-3:** PD Brain Trust meets in partnership with Florida State Department of Education.
- July 16-19:** Learning Forward Summer Institute, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Oct. 6-7:** Learning Forward Fall Institute, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Dec. 5-9:** 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.



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**LEARNING FORWARD'S VISION:** Excellent teaching and learning every day.

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## **Pieces of the learning puzzle:**

Aligned goals shape learning for one and all.

*By Tracy Crow*

In schools and districts that have professional learning systems established, a vision and standards for learning guide everything associated with what and how educators grow. Educators have resources and structures for setting learning goals — as individuals, on teams, and across schools. They have multiple sources of data to analyze as they set learning goals. They have strategies for identifying the expertise in their teams and buildings and for knowing when they need to tap external support. Their supervisory, peer, and coaching support align to sustain and extend their individual and collaborative learning.

## **An argument everyone wins:**

Shared learning unites teachers across schools and grade levels.

*By Lauren Goldberg, Brad Siegel, and Gravity Goldberg*

A group of districts in New Jersey developed professional learning that would explore the nature of argument as a means to invigorate teachers, reach all educators in the districts, and directly impact classroom practice. Teachers worked together across grade levels and content areas, then applied the strategies they learned in their classrooms. Afterward, they compiled and shared their experiences, bringing cohesiveness across schools, grade levels, and departments.

## **Data drive these coaches:**

Literacy project merges school goals with teachers' learning needs.

*By Anne Ittner, Lori Helman, Matthew Burns, and Jennifer McComas*

An initiative that set out to help all students become proficient readers by 3rd grade demonstrates how coaching can support both collective and individual learning. Literacy coaches in the project balanced the goals of the initiative with professional learning that addressed the varying needs and aspirations of individual teachers. Data from an observation tool gave instructional leaders, literacy coaches, and teachers a common language around effective teaching and how to recognize it.

## **Tailored to fit:**

Structure professional learning communities to meet individual needs.

*By Alyson Adams and Vicki Vescio*

Just as educators differentiate learning for diverse students in their classrooms, they must also remember that professional learning communities include individuals who

need different things in order to learn and who may be at drastically different places in their careers or their teaching capabilities. To maximize the potential impact of professional learning communities for teachers' professional development, educators need to maintain a simultaneous focus on both collective and individual learning.

## **'What if' sparks a new way to learn:**

Texas elementary designs its own teacher-led postgraduate school.

*By Alyssa Toomes*

Looking for a way to personalize professional learning, school leaders at Weber Elementary in Houston, Texas, created a postgraduate school right on campus and named it Weber U. At Weber U, teachers decide what they want to learn, teachers lead the professional learning, and virtual learning is an option for time-strapped educators. Courses are grounded in data that keeps student achievement at the forefront. Keeping the classes small encourages engagement from teachers across multiple grade levels.

## **A sense of balance:**

District aligns personalized learning with school and system goals.

*By Debbie Donsky and Kathy Witherow*

Working at both the system and school level to balance the need for individual and collective learning, the York Region District School Board in Ontario, Canada, has shifted away from top-down professional learning to a new definition of professional learning that is responsive to the local school context, embedded in practice, focused on collaboration and inquiry, and part of an ongoing iterative process. And, in this new definition of professional learning, the principal is a co-learner.

## **The shift from 'me' to 'we':**

Schools with a coaching culture build individual and collective capacity.

*By Holli Hanson and Christine Hoyos*

Coaching in schools is not new. What is fundamentally different in a culture of coaching is that all members of the school community see themselves as coaches. While there may be formally appointed coaches and teacher leaders to lead the work, developing all staff to coach each other accelerates adult learning, which, in turn, accelerates student learning. Professional learning becomes human-centered, focusing on the human interaction of learning. Developing a coaching culture happens in a variety of contexts through action learning. A key factor in the process is job-embedded support.

## features

### Net results:

Online protocols boost group learning potential.

*By Alan Dichter and Janet Mannheimer Zydney*

Protocols are strategies for having structured communication to enhance problem solving, encourage different perspectives, and build shared knowledge. The protocol process helps professional development leaders build community. Educators have begun to use protocols to facilitate professional development in online spaces — partly because people need to connect from different places, but also to take advantage of new environments for learning. The authors include an example of one protocol presented in both an in-person and online version.

### The high cost of convenience:

Satisfying short-term needs erodes long-term learning.

*By Diane P. Zimmerman*

“Satisficing” — selecting the first option that meets a given need but which might not be the most optimal — is a critical problem of practice for educators. It interferes with deep, sustained reflection on practice and the learning that results. To eliminate satisficing behaviors, educators need to apply strategies that open up curiosity, engage in the moment, and seek immediate feedback. They also need to be flexible and make adjustments to sustain engagement and the commitment to learning that leads to long-term success

## columns

### Lessons from research:

Study links learning design to changes in knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors.

*By Joellen Killion*

A program aimed at improving teacher feedback during active learning demonstrates the connection between effective professional learning and changes in classroom practice.

### From the director:

Spread effective teaching from room to room.

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

Schools that commit to everyone learning and sharing responsibility for the success of every student can ensure that every student in the school experiences great teaching every day no matter which teacher serves in the classroom.

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## share your story

Learning Forward is eager to read manuscripts from educators at every level in every position. If your work includes a focus on effective professional learning, we want to hear your story.

*JSD* publishes a range of types of articles, including:

- First-person accounts of change efforts;
- Practitioner-focused articles about school- and district-level initiatives;
- Program descriptions and results from schools, districts, or external partners;
- How-tos from practitioners and thought leaders; and
- Protocols and tools with guidance on use and application.

To learn more about key topics and what reviewers look for in article submissions, visit **www.**

**learningforward.com/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

### Writing for JSD

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



## Spread effective teaching from room to room

When I was a local school board member, parents frequently asked for my advice on how to ensure their child got a particular teacher in a school. I knew how the game would be played after I reminded them this wasn't the role of the school board: They would write the principal with their requests for the next year. The principal would respond to assure the parents that no matter which classroom their child was assigned, he or she would have a great year.

However, in some cases, the principal knew that wasn't entirely accurate. Some teachers were stronger than others in his or her school, and there was no mechanism to give all students access to the best.

That no longer has to be the case. Schools that commit to everyone learning and sharing responsibility for the success of every student spread the effectiveness of teaching from room to room, making sure every student has access to excellent teaching every day.

Both individual and collective learning are critical to support all teachers to be their best. Here are several assumptions I hold about balancing individual and collective learning.

- Teachers shouldn't have to choose between individual and collective

**Stephanie Hirsh ([stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org](mailto:stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org)) is executive director of Learning Forward.**

learning. Both are essential to ensuring student growth, and each has its essential place in the school improvement process.

- One is not necessarily more powerful than the other. What makes one a higher priority is the level of impact it can produce and the most urgent needs in a school or system.
- When teachers learn alone, they can pinpoint individual needs, feel less vulnerable, and address their own challenges more immediately.
- When teachers learn together, they learn that their colleagues share many of their needs or have answers to their questions. They also realize they themselves have expertise that can help others. They see that they can contribute to collective learning and wisdom that will benefit students beyond those assigned directly to them.

So what would it take for every principal to be able to say that every student in the school experiences great teaching every day no matter which teacher serves in his or her classroom?

- Start by telling teachers they work in a learning school committed to schoolwide, team, and individual learning. Learning at all levels is a priority.
- Implement a cycle of continuous improvement that clearly defines the data used to identify learning priorities, supports individual and collective learning strategies,



promotes follow-up support, and monitors for impact and improvement. Every individual and team follows this cycle: the school leadership team, grade-level and cross-grade teams, and department teams. Building alignment and coherence across these teams is essential for success.

- Elevate and celebrate the expertise that resides within the school, commit publicly to shared responsibility, and advocate for the resources necessary to sustain a learning school.
- Acknowledge that individuals closest to the job know it best and deserve to have resources to support their needs. Recognize that others have powerful perspectives to bring to those trying to improve.

When we embrace learning as everyone's responsibility, we'll change the conversations that happen before the start of each school year. I am pleased to see more schools every year that share our philosophy: At school, it's everyone's job to learn. ■

# Common Formative Assessments Workshops 2.0

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- Create quick progress checks to coincide with the learning progressions

\*CCSS standards will all be addressed, but this work is applicable to all standards or learning outcomes, all grades, and all content areas.



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