JSD
THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Annual Conference spotlight

Teachers use action research to measure impact p. 12

DIGITAL BADGES RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE ADULT LEARNING p. 24

Why I go to the conference: Reflections of a frequent attendee p. 43

WELCOME TO THE 2015

IDEALAB

LEARNING WITH THE BEST

PLANNING CHANGE? FOCUS ON OUTCOMES FIRST p. 44

August 2015 Vol. 36 No. 4 **www.learningforward.org**

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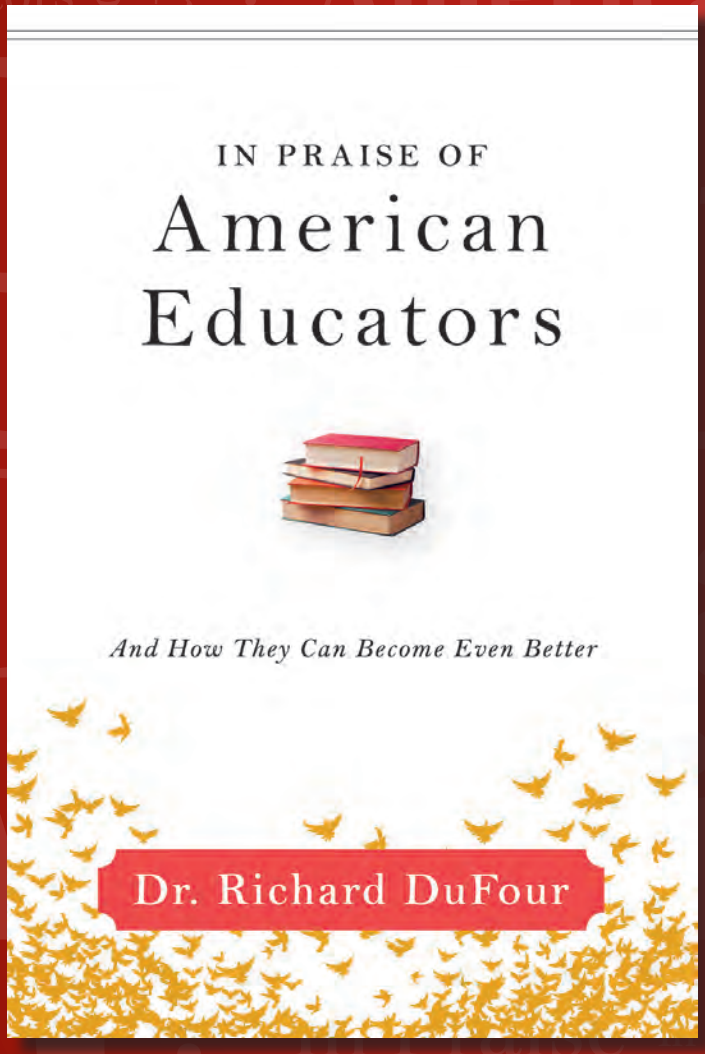
IF YOU READ ONE BOOK THIS YEAR

THIS IS IT



The attacks educators face are blatantly unfair. In fact, contrary to popular belief, today's educators are the greatest generation of educators in American history. But, at a time when the stakes for students have never been higher, there's still a great deal more that needs to be done to promote student success. From cover to cover, this bold masterpiece is packed with invaluable insights and specific steps policymakers, administrators, and teachers must take to transform American schools into places where 21st century students can thrive.

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departments

features

Open your ears, eyes, and minds to unexpected learning

I was chatting recently with Learning Forward member Mary Beth Bazzanella of Jefferson County (Colorado) Public Schools — known as Jeffco — about our upcoming conference in December. She works in the central office of her district and has attended the conference with teammates. She reflected on how much she and her peers get from the conference.

She noted, however, that sometimes folks would go to exciting sessions on their own and soak up great information and strategies without having that learning spread to others in the district. "This year, we're thinking of sending folks in smaller teams," Bazzanella said. "Maybe each team will take a problem of practice of sorts, or an area of focus, and attend sessions with that in mind." Then, she imagines, these teams can learn together, strategize at the conference and after, and consider next steps. Like other educators who invest in learning opportunities such as Learning Forward's conference, Bazzanella intends to create meaningful outcomes from the learning, and she's planning the best ways to do that.

While we're using this issue of *JSD* to highlight the meaningful content and insightful leaders that help our conference feed your hearts and minds throughout the year, my conversation with Bazzanella reminded me of another important element: There is no learning at conferences without the attendees. In one sense, it's a ridiculous picture: An empty ballroom with a speaker, a room set up in rounds with two facilitators and no one engaged with them. But in another sense, imagine those settings as I described with just one difference — you're sitting in the room. You're in the ballroom, with the speaker. You're at one of the round tables, ready to engage in group work. It's still a learning wasteland compared to what you signed up for.

The people you learn with, whether in an online course, keynote speech, or facilitated breakout session, are an extremely valuable element of taking away lessons to apply in your own context. Whether it's a tablemate who raises a compelling question or shares a new strategy or a teammate putting a unique lens on what you're hearing, the other attendees at a conference are among the thought leaders you'll meet. Sometimes these attendees will be reflective thinking partners with you; sometimes they'll become a colleague for life through sustained networking. Attendees help one another make meaning of what they see and hear, and they expand the learning by adding to it with their own ideas and experiences.

What are some ways you can plan to leverage collegial learning at the

conference? Perhaps, like Jefferson County, you'll be forming teams and strategizing ahead of time about what to cover. Perhaps, as longtime conference attendee Mark Onuscheck describes on p. 43, you have a group of Learning Forward colleagues you look forward to working with when you get the chance. Or maybe you're just ready to be open when you sit down in the first session of your conference — ready to learn, ready to share, ready to listen, reflect, and offer input to your newest peers in the field.

For many attendees, this learning is not the learning they plan for, but it has the highest value of all. I invite you to keep you ears, eyes, and minds open for the experts you'll meet in the seat beside you. ■

•

Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is director of communications for Learning Forward.

What others are saying…

> The institute was well designed, using top-notch presenters. It's a great way to have focused, professionally supported time to address planning or problems in a delightful environment.

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BETTER SOLUTIONS
What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise
Pearson, June 2015

How can we ensure that every student achieves at least one year's progress for one year of schooling? Governments and schools have spent billions of dollars trying to fix education, but evidence shows that many popular solutions have little impact on student learning. In two reports, education researcher John Hattie explores common policy "fixes" that distract from other, potentially better, solutions. The reports are part of Pearson's Open Ideas series, which shares independent insights on unanswered questions in education.
www.pearson.com/hattie/solutions.html

5-YEAR OUTLOOK
NMS Horizon Report: 2015 K-12 Edition
The New Media Consortium, 2015

A team of experts looks at what's on the five-year horizon for K-12 schools and trends and technologies that will drive change. The experts agreed on two long-term trends: rethinking how schools work in order to bolster student engagement and drive innovation, as well as shifting to deeper learning approaches, such as project- and challenge-based learning. The three key sections of this report constitute a reference and technology planning guide for educators, school leaders, administrators, policymakers, and technologists.
www.nmc.org/publication/nmc-horizon-report-2015-k-12-edition

FLEXIBLE LEARNING
Personalized Learning and the Teacher Experience
Rodel Foundation of Delaware, 2015

For teachers to be successful, they must be empowered to concentrate their time, energy, and expertise on individual students' needs. Not only must their roles be more flexible, the means through which they experience relevant professional learning throughout their careers must also be relevant and flexible. This report articulates the need for personalized and relevant professional learning for teachers and offers policy recommendations for decision makers in the department of education, district administrators, and teachers.
www.rodelfoundationde.org/blueprint/the-teacher-experience

THE FUTURE OF CREDENTIALS
Certifying Skills and Knowledge: Four Scenarios on the Future of Credentials
KnowledgeWorks, 2015

The four scenarios presented in this paper represent future images of credentials — defined as "a specific qualification issued by an authoritative third party to signify that a person has achieved a particular transferrable skill set or accomplishment" — based on current trends. Each scenario reflects different drivers of change and a different set of fundamental assumptions about how changes affecting credentials might play out across the K-12, post-secondary, and employment sectors.
http://bit.ly/1KEDxC4

DEEPER LEARNING
Developing a System of Micro-credentials: Supporting Deeper Learning in the Classroom
Digital Promise, 2015

Digital Promise explores deeper learning and identifies specific skills students must master to succeed in college and careers. The report outlines the six key categories of skills for deeper learning: Master academic content; think critically and solve complex problems; work collaboratively; communicate effectively; learn how to learn; and develop academic mindsets. Additionally, the report showcases 40 educator microcredentials Digital Promise designed to recognize educators who have developed the competencies necessary to support deeper learning in their classrooms.
http://bit.ly/1yqvj4E

THE BIG PICTURE
The Chief Academic Officer's Evolving Role: Powering Big-Picture Learning Goals
Education Week, 2015

This report includes multiple articles addressing the challenges chief academic officers face and how they are working to improve academics in the age of common standards and digital teaching and learning. It features findings from a survey of district leaders. Current and former chief academic officers talk about their evolving role and the strategies they use to improve teaching and learning. Chief academic officers from three different districts discuss a range of issues from classroom resources to academic expectations.
www.edweek.org/ew/collections/chief-academic-officers-2015

TEACHER VOICES
Teacher Leadership: The Pathway to Common Core Success
Center for American Progress, 2015

This report describes districts throughout the country that have taken collaborative approaches between management and unions to ensure that teachers have significant voice and leadership in implementation of the Common Core. In many cases, these collaborative approaches are not new. Districts and unions across the country — many of them profiled in this report — have been working together to involve teachers in meaningful ways for decades, but these systems have taken on new importance with the rollout of the Common Core.
http://ampr.gs/1SQUV5L

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE?
Developing Great Teaching: Lessons From the International Reviews Into Effective Professional Development
Teacher Development Trust, 2015

The Teacher Development Trust commissioned a review of international research into what constitutes effective teacher professional learning. The review's key finding is that professional learning that is carefully designed and has a strong focus on pupil outcomes has a significant impact on student achievement. The findings also give detail around the role of external facilitators and some insight into the importance of leadership around professional development.
http://tdtrust.org/about/dgt

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HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

JSD is published six times a year to promote improvement in the quality of professional learning as a means to improve student learning in K-12 schools. Contributions from members and nonmembers of Learning Forward are welcome.

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MAKING MEANING FROM INSPIRATION

Conferences, institutes, meet-ups, workshops, TED talks — whatever the event, you're sure to walk away with new ideas and information. While serendipity brings amazing connections and unexpected possibilities, goal setting and planning lay the groundwork for a productive learning experience.

The questions below will help individuals or learning teams prepare for a learning event. Use or adapt these questions to suit a particular context or type of learning experience, whether virtual, face-to-face, short-term, or ongoing.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE:

1	**Why did I/my team sign up for this experience?**
2	**What specific learning goals will this experience help me/us accomplish?**
3	**What data or information will help me/us be optimally prepared for this learning experience?**
4	**How can I/we put ourselves in the best frame of mind for intentional learning through this experience?**
5	**What changes in knowledge, practice, skills, or habits do I/we hope this will make possible?**
6	**What supports can I/we put in place now to ensure time and support for practice, reflection, and follow-up to this specific learning?**

IN THIS ISSUE OF *JSD*
THE LEARNING STARTS HERE ▼

Browse your program or the conference website (**www.learningforwardconference.org/annual15**) to explore all of the learning options at this year's conference.

TIPS FOR FIRST-TIMERS

Every education conference has its own culture and traditions. Learning Forward is certainly proud of the conference atmosphere we create every year, yet we understand that newcomers to any learning experience don't know where to start. Below are several suggestions for getting the most out of your first — or next — Learning Forward conference.

Attend the first-timers session.	Learning Forward always offers a short session to orient novices to the conference. Not only will you pick up suggestions for navigating the conference, you'll have an opportunity to meet other attendees from all over the world.
Scope out the conference space.	The layout of every conference is different, and there's nothing more frustrating than finding yourself at the end of the wrong hallway when the rest of your team is gearing up to learn.
Find a conference mentor.	Anyone you meet who has been to a few conferences would be happy to help you make smart choices about where to go, whom to meet, and when to step out for a breather.
Sample the wide range of opportunities.	Like most conferences, Learning Forward offers a variety of learning options. While you may be inclined toward lectures or full-day sessions, allow yourself the flexibility to sample a shorter session, a FastForward presentation, or a Q&A after the keynote.
Eat with new friends.	Until you sit down with them, you'd call them strangers. Once you start sharing your stories, you're building a network that can help you find answers and make enduring connections. Learning Forward is one of the few conferences to build in common meal times for just this purpose.
Introduce yourself to the executive director, keynote speakers, and your heroes from the field.	You're in the richest gathering of professional learning thought partners — take advantage of it. You'll find that everyone on site is eager to learn with you and establish new relationships.
Make time for reflection.	With session after session to attend, a learner's brain fills up quickly. Create space in your day to process what you're hearing, whether with a team, on a tablet, or using social media.

What's new, what's next

Over the last couple of years, Learning Forward has introduced new formats and learning designs to broaden the options for conference attendees. At this year's Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., you can try:

Networking sessions
Take advantage of networking opportunities to meet up with colleagues facing similar challenges in job-alike and special interest sessions. Sessions are available for principals and assistant principals, superintendents, and educators from the 50 largest school districts in the nation.

FastForward
Attend these fast-paced, concise presentations, also known as PechaKucha, Ignite, or Bytes. Each presentation includes 20 slides at 20 seconds each. Stop in for some or all of the presentations.

Technology Showcase and Smart Choices Experience
Experience vendor demonstrations in the Exhibit Hall Technology Showcase. Find cutting-edge solutions to your greatest professional learning challenges. Explore the latest in tools, resources, and strategies to help develop and support educators in implementation efforts.

Summit sessions
Top off your learning on Wednesday, the last day of the conference, with a summit session. Summit sessions provide a three-hour, in-depth look at topics ranging from leadership to 21st-century skills.

Field trips
Explore the D.C. area with one of three field trips or site visits. Two options take attendees to area schools, while another offers an opportunity to visit Capitol Hill for a policy briefing.

BRAINSTORMERS WELCOME

By Tracy Crow

For the second year in a row, we're excited to use *JSD* to highlight insights, thought leaders, and promising work in progress in the field that will also be featured at Learning Forward's Annual Conference. We call this issue the Idea Lab because, like our conference, we intend for this issue to be a starting point to launch readers and learners into exploring ideas. While there is often overlap between the educators and writers we feature in *JSD* and the conference, this issue is a special opportunity to put session facilitators front and center in the magazine.

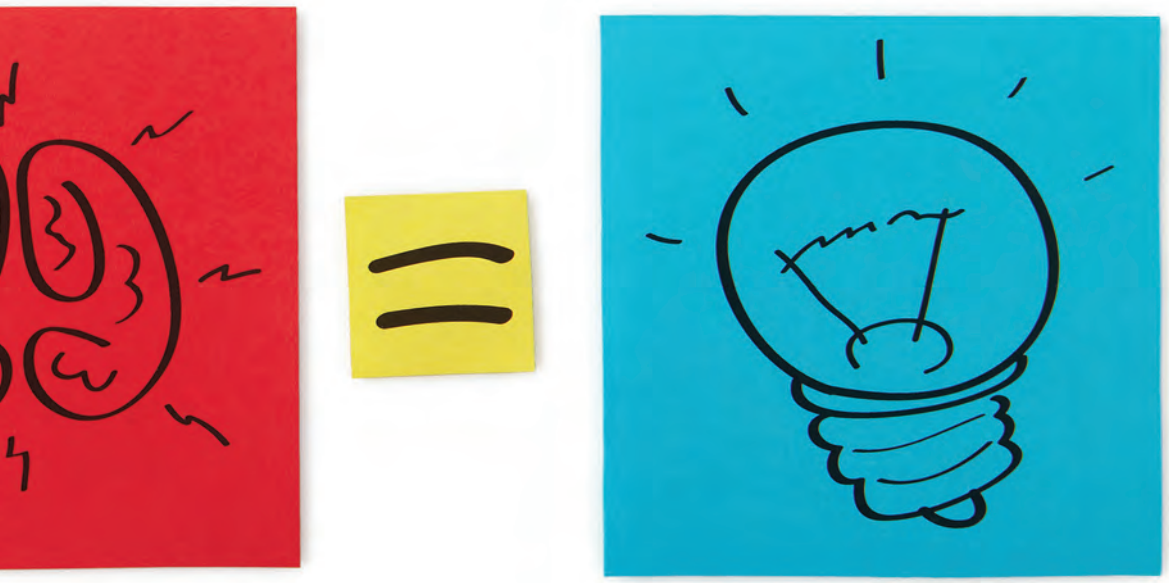
We know that not every reader of *JSD* can attend our conference, yet that doesn't mean readers need to miss out on all of the information available through the face-to-face event. Our intention is to share valuable information via every forum to help learners find new ideas wherever and whenever they most need them.

Whether learners are flipping through a magazine, browsing new titles on e-readers, scanning conference session options, or sampling TED talks, what place do new ideas have in improving practice? How do educators move from interest to inspiration to integration?

PLAN TO LEARN …

No matter the source and forum for new ideas, busy adult learners enter any learning opportunity with at least some sense of what they most need to know to strengthen their capacity to serve students. When they have skills and structures to plan even more carefully, educators analyze student data, often collaboratively, to understand specifically what they need to know and be able to do to improve instruction.

With deliberate goal setting based on multiple sources of data, educators can more precisely pinpoint information sources to locate what they need to learn.



They can go idea shopping, so to speak, with a detailed list, ignoring the options that don't meet their specific needs to get to the information that fits previously determined criteria.

… AND ALSO MAKE WAY FOR INSPIRATION

Searching for information with too much precision, however, can put learners in a position to miss out on the aha moments they need to motivate them to learn more or push their practice to a higher level. Learners maintain an ideal balancing act when they can understand their own learning needs deeply at the same time that they remain open to possibilities for inspiration from unexpected sources.

For example, a principal searching for information about effective frequent teacher observations might have identified the need to understand strategies and structures to drop into classrooms frequently and use those visits to talk meaningfully and specifically with teachers about instruction. When she leafs through an issue of a management magazine in her dentist's waiting room, she gets even more inspiration from an article on body language and communication style that will help her better implement some of the new classroom visit strategies.

… AND CREATE TIME FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

A constant barrage of information, no matter how directly relevant, well-presented, timely, or motivational, won't have an impact for educators if they don't have time to do more than take it in. To transform information into knowledge, learners need opportunities to unpack information in various ways, perhaps in partnership with colleagues, a learning team, or a coach.

This step may include a range of activities, from discussion to writing to practicing particular strategies to examining how the new skills or practices are working with students or other learners. Learners may realize at this stage that they need still more sources of information on a particular topic, so they add to their idea shopping list and keep up their search.

… TO KEEP THE CYCLE GOING

Learning is continuous. No matter how much they strengthen their skills and fill their toolboxes, educators stretch and grow constantly over the course of their careers. Not only do they encounter new challenges with other educators, students, new standards, and shifting demands, educators also strive to achieve higher levels of mastery in areas where they already have significant expertise. When they find themselves in cultures and contexts where the stream of ideas never stops flowing, educators — the ultimate learners — will thrive and help others to thrive.

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Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's director of communications. ■

THE BIG MONEY QUESTION

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS GIVE DISTRICT A CLEAR PICTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT

By Barbara Dill-Varga

How do you know if the resources you have allocated to support professional learning in your school district are actually improving the quality of teaching and impacting student performance? In an increasingly challenging financial environment, this is important to know.

Six years ago, I joined the district administrative team in Maine Township High School District 207, a district with three high schools in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. The district was facing a multimillion-dollar deficit, effectively eliminating professional development, which forced us to ask tough questions and reimagine how we might support teachers.

First to be evaluated was the district's longstanding commitment to training teachers in cooperative learning. Six years later, and at no small expense, 250 teachers had moved through at least the introductory workshop, but we really weren't sure just how many classrooms were truly cooperative environments, nor even if some of the teachers were using cooperative structures in their lesson designs. Had this investment paid off?

Given our finances, we faced difficult questions that can be asked of any professional development initiative:

1. Was nearly a decade of the professional development making a difference?
2. How many teachers were implementing cooperative learning in their classrooms with fidelity?
3. What was the evidence that cooperative learning had made a positive impact on student learning?
4. Given the district's reduced resources, how could we energize teachers to implement this practice — if we still believed it to be central to our core mission?

After meeting with the cooperative learning facilitators to address these questions, we developed the CLEAR (Cooperative Learning Education Action Research) Project. Teachers leading teachers has always been a core principle in District 207, so it made sense to explore teacher action research as a mechanism to find answers to our questions.

WHY TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH?

Since the project's inception, we have seen the power of asking teachers to lead their own improvement process. We provide Richard Sagor's *Collaborative Action Research for Professional Learning Communities* to help teachers develop what he calls five habits of inquiry for a continuous cycle that starts with clarifying a shared vision, designing an action plan, implementing it while collecting data, analyzing the data, and using that data to continue improving (Sagor, 2010). The heart of his action research project process asks teachers to focus on three important questions:

1. Action: What specifically did we do?
2. Change: How did our students improve?

HOW TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS ALIGN WITH LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Standard	How teacher action research projects align
Learning Communities	Teacher action research projects are teacher learning communities that meet frequently to find answers to common questions of importance about their instructional practices. They work together to understand the research about best practices, then design ways to apply and study those practices in their own classrooms. They share, discuss, and analyze classroom data to understand what is and isn't working. They make adjustments in what is a continuous cycle of collaborative learning.
Leadership	Action research teachers who later move into mentoring roles for novice action researchers form necessary webs of support to sustain the professional learning.
Resources	Teacher action research projects that focus on questions about district learning initiatives can provide direction on how best to allocate resources for professional learning that will make a difference in teacher quality and impact student achievement.
Data	Teacher action research projects make use of all types of data gathered through surveys, classroom observations, and student achievement measures. The analysis of this data drives future decisions about classroom instruction.
Learning Designs	Teacher action research projects model the core attributes of adult learning theory. Teacher experiences include a balance of research theory and practical application. They are given choice and autonomy and are supported to deepen and share their expertise to improve the larger group.
Implementation	Teachers find support by working together and with trained coaches or other experienced action research mentors who help them implement this reflective process.
Outcomes	Teacher action research projects build professional skills clearly defined in the Danielson Framework for Effective Teaching.

3. Relationship: What was the relationship between my actions and change in performance?

The answers to these questions, when looked at in aggregate, helped us answer our initial questions about resource allocation.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Teacher action research projects with characteristics similar to the CLEAR Project directly align with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. (See chart above.)

These reflective practices are also deeply embedded in many of the component descriptions in Charlotte Danielson's *The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument* (Danielson, 2013), the instrument we use for teacher evaluation. In particular, Domain 4 of the framework focuses on professional responsibilities, which speaks to how distinguished teachers reflect on their teaching and practice and seek out professional learning by participating in the professional community to enhance their knowledge and pedagogical skill. They actively receive and give feedback from and to colleagues and supervisors. They also make a point of contributing to the larger profession.

WHAT IS THE CLEAR PROJECT?

District 207's CLEAR Project is a group of 18 high school teachers who make an 18-month commitment to participate in an action research project studying the impact of cooperative learning on teaching and learning. Teachers accepted to the project spend the first year learning the principles of action research, take part in a whole-group pilot project, design and carry out a building-based group project, and present an analysis of their results to an audience of teachers and administrators. During the last six months, these teachers become mentors to the next group of CLEAR Project teachers.

HOW DO TEACHERS APPLY AND GET ACCEPTED? WHAT ARE THE INCENTIVES?

All teachers receive an email invitation to apply each winter. They are required to have taken at least an introductory level cooperative learning course before applying. Participants receive support, released time to meet as a district group, materials, and an iPad or digital device to aid collaboration and data collection. Teachers aren't paid for the hours of work the project necessitates. We partnered with a local university to provide up to six hours of course credit for the 18-month experience. We wrote the syllabi for three courses, ensured that project directors met university requirements, and negotiated a low-cost tuition rate.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE FIRST SUMMER OF CLEAR?

Each CLEAR Project has a mandatory, four-day summer launch week. Participants get a refresher course on the core principles of cooperative learning, an overview of peer-reviewed research in cooperative learning, and instruction on the basics of action research. They also hear presentations from previous CLEAR participants.

The project co-directors work with the new CLEAR group to help members build relationships necessary to sustain the project, crystallize a vision for their ideal cooperative classroom, anticipate obstacles and possible solutions for the work to come, and lay the foundation for a practice study that will involve the whole group beginning in September.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING EACH SEMESTER OF THE SCHOOL YEAR DURING CLEAR?

CLEAR meets for a full day once each semester, for a half-day once each semester, and then schedules building-based meetings as needed to support group projects. During the first semester, teachers administer a classroom survey tool that forms a baseline for many of the projects.

Next, the group engages in a small practice study, where we together decide on a research question, the independent and dependent variables, and the ways we will collect and analyze data in classrooms. This allows teachers to experience the action research process before their building-based projects begin. They learn from each other's mistakes, figure out how better to collect data while teaching, and feel a degree of success from completing a very doable mini-project.

In the second semester, they formalize their project design. Soon they are collecting data, reviewing it, analyzing it, and, by late spring, planning the presentation that will be given in August of the second summer. Their final task in August is to present the findings and be trained as mentors to assist the next CLEAR Project cohort during their final semester.

WHAT TYPES OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS DOES A CLEAR PROJECT ASK?

Research questions don't have to be original. They can replicate, refine, or extend questions other researchers have asked in past research studies. Typically, teachers ask questions about the impact of cooperative learning on the classroom environment and/or student performance. They have also examined choices they might make about construction of groups or implementation of certain core elements. (See list of sample research questions above.)

This year, CLEAR is expanding to allow questions on teaching and learning issues beyond cooperative learning. As a district, we have begun immersing ourselves in John Hattie's concept of visible learning, which calls for teachers to focus their energies on high-impact instructional strategies that thousands of meta-analyses verify actually make a difference for students.

SAMPLE CLEAR PROJECT ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Construction of groups and implementation of cooperative learning core elements:

- Does using homogeneous or heterogeneous gender grouping increase student participation and reduce teacher interventions?
- Do people learn better in two-person or three-person teams?
- How do different instructional methods of teaching social skills within base groups increase the frequency of that skill outside of base groups?

Student learning: Impact of cooperative learning on student performance:

- Do cooperative teams demonstrate a performance advantage?
- Will working with a partner on class activities increase the comprehension of an individual student's learning?

Classroom environment: Impact on student attitudes and interactions:

- How does group processing affect student attitudes in the classroom?
- Does teaching social skills in the classroom increase positive interactions among students and transfer outside of the classroom?
- How would use of cooperative learning reduce student isolation in the classroom?

While cooperative learning is one such strategy, there are other areas that interest teachers. The "C" in CLEAR now stands for collaborative learning because we still believe in the power of groups of teachers learning and leading together.

HOW DOES THE DISTRICT SUPPORT CLEAR?

The district uses local and grant funding to cover stipends for nonadministrative leadership, substitute teachers so teachers can meet during school time, digital devices, books and materials, and expenses to support consultants. More importantly, the district publicizes project activities to the school board and the community advisory committee and dedicates time at annual meetings to share project presentations with all faculty.

HOW DO INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES AND COACHING PLANS SUPPORT CLEAR?

Each high school has four instructional coaches. These are classroom teachers who teach half of the day and are released half of the day to work with teachers on coaching plans and other activities to improve their classroom practices. Many are facilitators or experts in the use of cooperative learning and work with CLEAR participants throughout the year.

They provide coaching on how to design and support cooperative classrooms. They conduct classroom observations upon request and assist with data collection using tools they have created or adapted. They help teachers reflect and refine practices based on data. In addition, 10 cooperative learning facilitators host workshops and serve as specialized coaches and mentors.

WHAT ARE REQUIRED COACHING PLANS?

A team of teachers and administrators designed four coaching plan choices: individual coaching plans, peer-to-peer coaching plans, learning walks, or CLEAR Project participation. Each requires teachers to connect with one of the building coaches to identify goals and activities to further one's growth as a teacher.

CLEAR Project participants seek activities involving cooperative learning facilitators or coaches to help them refine their understanding of core principles, gather classroom observation data, reflect and analyze the current status, and plan future actions. Teachers want assistance developing common formative assessments, questioning strategies, differentiated instruction, behavior strategies, and cooperative learning.

WHAT DATA WILL BE COLLECTED TO EVALUATE CLEAR'S IMPACT?

Here are the ways we gather data to evaluate the CLEAR Project's impact.

Participation: We track the number of teachers who enroll in workshops and who take advanced levels within a strand or initiative. We look at the correlation between frequent participants and teacher evaluation ratings. In general, the data suggest that frequent participants receive slightly higher evaluation ratings.

Tracking growth in Danielson components through evaluation process (Domain 4): If teachers are improving in practices that are aligned to Danielson, then we should see growth in the number of ratings that move from accomplished to distinguished in certain components. Similarly, we can disaggregate our teaching rating component data to see where a building or a department may have some deficits in performance.

A review of this data a couple of years ago led us to bring a focus to questioning strategies because, across the board, ratings were lower in the corresponding Danielson component. A similar process revealed the need to focus on assessment literacy. Recently, we reviewed component ratings for teachers who either had been CLEAR participants or were cooperative learning facilitators. In 20 of the 22 components in the Danielson framework, ratings for this subset of teachers were 5% to 7% higher than their teaching colleagues.

Coaching plan requests and identified goals: We can track the number of coaching plans focused on cooperative learning or specifically on activities related to the CLEAR Project. While we have a firewall between the coaching process and teacher evaluation, we hope to collect anonymous data next year that helps us know more clearly whether those teachers who are not in CLEAR are still choosing to focus on cooperative learning activities.

Teacher attitudes: Our survey data point to what teachers value and what they need, as well as how they value their coaches. This information is analyzed at the building level and used for coaches to identify a SMART goal for their work the next year. To gather data on our coaching plan program, we surveyed teachers about their experiences. In their responses, 69% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that the coaching plan benefitted their students and improved their teaching. Moreover, 80% said the coaching plan was relevant, and 81% said the coaching plan was positive.

The coaches have set SMART goals for next year aimed at increasing these percentages. After reviewing the data and noting a correlation between levels of satisfaction and contact time with a coach, they are looking at ways to increase those points of contact for more teachers.

Student attitudes: A classroom life survey tool presents 91 statements that students rate on a five-point scale. Seventeen clusters of questions provide information on student attitudes about how they view support from teachers and peers, their preferences for how they best learn (individual versus group), and whether they see the value in working together toward a goal. The data show that students prefer to work together and find value in tasks that require this interdependence.

Career and college skills rubric data: In addition to the academic grade, all teachers rate their students each grading period in four categories: respect, collaboration, habits for success, and time management. This data is printed next to their grade on their report card, and, while not printed on the transcript, it is shared with parents each quarter. The use of this tool in classrooms fosters talk about the importance of cooperative work habits and executive functioning skills prevalent in successful students. (See chart on p. 17.)

Classroom observation data: To provide meaningful and specific feedback to teachers and for program evaluation, teacher leaders need an observation tool that is easy to use. Using iPads or Chromebooks, observing teacher leaders access a Google Form with an observation and reflection tool to collect data that helps us understand to what extent the professional learning has taken root and is blossoming in classrooms.

Sometimes students are involved in collecting and/or analyzing similar data by tracking students exhibiting "encouraging behaviors" or other social skills that a teacher might have previously documented with the class. Students chart this observational data to see class growth on this group goal.

Recent data show that group processing skills is an area that presents challenges. It is easy to run out of time in a class period and not focus on this final component so important in student learning. We will redouble our efforts to help CLEAR teachers make this commitment by more overtly modeling group process-

CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS SKILLS

Category	#	Skill	S or U
Respect	1	Listening to input from others and accepting their opinions.	
	2	Interacting positively with adults and peers.	
	3	Demonstrating self-control.	
	4	Making ethical decisions.	
Collaboration	5	Participating (and leading when appropriate).	
	6	Providing thoughtful ideas and feedback.	
	7	Encouraging and valuing fellow group members.	
	8	Reflecting on group outcomes.	
Habits for success	9	Demonstrating curiosity by asking questions and engaging in learning activities.	
	10	Persevering in the learning process and seeking assistance as necessary.	
	11	Setting goals, tracking progress, and recognizing improvement.	
	12	Showing attention to detail and striving for accuracy.	
Time management	13	Completing assignments on time.	
	14	Organizing materials necessary for class.	
	15	Attending class regularly and on time.	
	16	Managing time in class.	

Unsatisfactory (U) Needs improvement in a majority of the behaviors.
Satisfactory (S) Meets expectations in a majority of the behaviors.

Source: Maine Township High School District 207.

ing protocols in our work together, collecting classroom observational data during the year for the purposes of study and analysis, and making it a focus of instructional rounds for select teachers.

EMPOWER TEACHERS TO SUSTAIN LEARNING

Six years ago, our team, driven by financial considerations, wanted to know whether cooperative learning should remain a priority initiative in the district. While we have found different ways to understand its positive impact on classroom environments, student achievement, and student attitudes about their learning experiences, the greater value has been in what we have learned about sustaining authentic professional learning by empowering teachers to investigate and evaluate their own instructional practices. The CLEAR Project's future expansion to embrace Hattie's research will involve teachers in making better research-based decisions about how best to help students reach their potential.

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VISIBLE LEADING

PRINCIPAL ACADEMY CONNECTS AND EMPOWERS PRINCIPALS

By Jennifer Hindman, Jan Rozzelle, Rachel Ball, and John Fahey

"I've conducted thousands of classroom observations and never thought to focus on what the students were doing rather than the teacher," wrote an experienced principal participating in the School-University Research Network (SURN) Principal Academy at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The SURN Principal Academy's mission is to build a leadership development program that increases principals' instructional knowledge and develops mentor principals to sustain the program. The academy is designed to connect and empower principals to improve their instructional leadership and relationship-building skills. Such professional learning results in high-impact teaching and student learning by:

- Developing knowledge of effective teaching and learning strategies;
- Increasing formative feedback that supports teacher reflection and distributive leadership in professional learning communities;
- Providing multiyear cohort support for participating principals;
- Recruiting a cadre of expert, veteran principals to mentor early-career principals; and
- Disseminating project findings through digital/electronic media and division, regional, state, and international conferences.

ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL ACADEMY

This two-year program consists of professional learning

days, intersession activities, coaching, and mentors using John Hattie's *Visible Learning* (2009) as one of the research foundations and leadership techniques. The program grew out of Hattie's challenge to School-University Research Network leaders in 2010 and each year involves urban, suburban, and rural leaders divided into two cohorts, each with about 25 instructional leaders and 10 mentors. Leadership team members include assistant superintendents and university faculty. The research network is a partnership of 28 public school systems, the Virginia Department of Education, and the College of William & Mary in Virginia.

Mentors lead job-alike teams from throughout Virginia. Participants include new and experienced principals working in a wide range of settings. Together, they engage in professional learning throughout the year at the College of William & Mary. They visit each other's schools to conduct collaborative observations and build their knowledge of high-impact strategies identified in *Visible Learning* and share their knowledge with their faculties.

Principals complete a minimum of 20 fall and 20 spring observations using an observation protocol called the School-University Research Network (SURN) Indicators of Student Engagement Observation Protocol (see p. 22). They conduct collaborative observations with each other, then train their staffs to conduct them as well.

This work rests on the foundation of education research from The Wallace Foundation (2013), *Visible Learning* (Hattie, 2009), Carol Dweck's *Mindset* (2006), and James Nottingham's *Encouraging Learning* (2013). *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012) serves as the book study. Instructional leaders receive access to a closed wiki containing professional learning resources modeled during sessions that they can use with their faculties.

Principals also receive support from School-University Research Network staff to conduct action research analyzing teacher surveys and their data from classroom observations. This research is used to identify schoolwide strengths to celebrate, as well as identify common needs for professional learning.

FOUR LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

Four key leadership actions drive the SURN Principal Academy professional learning.

1. Build relationships and a community of practice.

To develop a culture focused on student engagement and feedback, effective principals recognize their role as lead learners. At SURN Principal Academy sessions, principals engage in relationship-building activities that they can use with their faculties. They focus on establishing a culture of reciprocal trust. In order for teachers to reflect on observational data, they accept the administrator as an instructional coach who provides objective feedback aligned with research-based indicators. During this trust-building phase, principals develop shared language, use transparency when introducing the observation tool, and provide a clear picture of their vision for student success.

Recognizing that these instructional shifts are not immediate, principals engage the faculty in ongoing professional learning across multiple settings. One strategy for developing reflective practitioners is book studies. Led by their principals, teachers read and digest the research, share their interpretations, and discuss practical implications.

Through alignment of school improvement goals,

professional learning, and classroom observations, a learning community emerges. This community values the role of formative feedback, commits to ongoing learning, and consistently evaluates its impact based on evidence.

2. Observe for and talk more about learning than teaching.

Student engagement dialogue begins by asking principals what characterizes active student engagement. Teams brainstorm before crafting a definition. Participants compare their strategies with the SURN Indicators of Student Engagement Observation Protocol, which emphasizes the high-yield and lower-yield learning strategies shown on p. 22.

The tool includes 12 high-impact and five lower-yield strategies. Both types yield data useful in conferencing, planning, and goal setting. Principals first interact with the tool to identify learning strategies they observe most frequently and least frequently, then participate in frequent simulations using a video of classroom teaching and learning to experience the observation tool.

A hallmark of the Principal Academy is collaborative observation. Organized in job-alike teams with a mentor, principals meet at a school, observe at least four classrooms, use the tool on an iPad to code strategies, and discuss student engagement strategies observed.

Powerful dialogue happens when teams debrief. One example: Some observers mark writing when students complete a fill-in-the-blank worksheet. However, the high-yield strategy writing specifies "sustained writing," such as journals and blogging. The mentor principal creates a nurturing learning environment for principals and a shared language of learning and understanding of terms and strategies evolve.

3. Provide targeted feedback: Evidence of impact on learning.

Providing feedback to teachers for their reflection on observation data presents a powerful growth opportunity, but can challenge and even stump administrators. To increase skill and comfort in leading the data dialogue, principals read articles on how to lead an effective post-observation dialogue, discuss strategies with their mentors, view an exemplary conference, and role-play conferences that hone their skills using conversation starters and questions to clarify and probe.

Effective feedback opportunities occur during lesson planning and reflecting after the lesson. Teachers use the observation tool to think about the variety of ways students can interact with and learn the content. When teachers discuss upcoming lessons during shared planning time, the principal validates ideas and asks clarifying questions.

After the lesson, teachers can review the observation data and share their thoughts on student engagement. Sometimes a teacher will say, "I know I did that," and question why an item is not marked. The instructional leader may acknowledge that the teacher used a high-yield strategy, but not the students. Teachers share what occurred before and after the principal left. Discussion of relationships between particular strategies may occur, such as when students read, engage in partner or small-group discussion of the text, and question each other. The impact on learning will be higher than orally responding to a teacher's questions in a whole-class format.

4. Empower stakeholders to assess impact.

Academy principals take on the role of lead learner as they design and lead professional learning for faculty on the observation tool and high-yield strategies. Changing the focus to student

A SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

By John Fahey

John Fahey

Three principals in my school district participated in the SURN Principal Academy. The high school principals (two within the past two years) led a school that was not fully accredited. It is now fully accredited, and math end-of-course state assessment scores have improved 40 points over the past two years. This is visible and high-yield data that increased community pride in a high school that was once labeled "a dropout factory." The high-poverty (76%) middle school's new principal participated in the Principal Academy with a largely new staff and new schedule. They also experienced visible growth.

The middle school's transformation is visible and evident in its culture. The principal and staff reviewed every aspect of school governance to examine student engagement, high-yield strategies, and visible student and staff learning. The staff and principal engaged in professional learning that targeted tangible evidence of student engagement.

The principal led by example. He taught in classrooms to model his expectations and his focus on engaged instruction. The school became the most improved in the district. The payoff has been a much happier middle school staff, student body, and community. In two years, state assessment math scores improved by 25 points. We attribute this focus to the Principal Academy.

A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

By Rachel Ball

Rachel Ball

My participation in the SURN Principal Academy coincided with my first year as a principal at Cool Spring Primary School in King William County (Virginia) Public Schools. As an administrator, I immediately experienced how various responsibilities and tasks compete for my time. However, the Principal Academy reiterated the need to prioritize my role as an instructional leader.

My goal for the school year was to align our professional learning, classroom observations, and decision making with John Hattie's research (Hattie, 2009). I envisioned a professional staff whose practices reflect evidence of high-yield strategies within the classroom. Through book studies, ongoing professional learning, monthly emails in which I highlight classroom applications of research-based strategies, weekly sharing of captioned images or video clips identifying high-yield strategy use observed in our school, observations, and post-conferences, staff members found themselves constantly immersed in visible learning. Conversations at faculty meetings, team planning sessions, and leadership meetings revolved around strategies that support increased student engagement.

Through full immersion in high-yield strategies, I witnessed the development of a school culture that centered on student engagement. Teachers' commitment to their own professional growth translated into positive outcomes for students. A year of observation data established the groundwork for next year's professional learning.

engagement during instruction instead of exclusively looking at teacher behavior presents a strategic risk. Teachers need to know that, as they change their instruction to have greater impact on student learning, they are safe to try and even fail.

For example, a science teacher and an art teacher co-developed a multiday lesson integrating high-yield strategies into a unit on physical and chemical changes using clay and glazes. Despite planning and high student interest, day one flopped. After a follow-up dialogue, the teachers restructured parts of the remaining lesson to better share expectations so that students could set appropriate learning goals. Through the process, teachers and students used the "language of learning" to further their learning (Hattie, 2012, p. 165).

Principals conduct action research using the fall and spring data to monitor growth and assess impact. The data collection and analysis are multipurpose. School leadership teams can use observation data to guide planning. For example, the data can be used to identify professional learning needs and target particular strategies as part of the school improvement plan.

One high school principal said that his leadership team outlined the professional learning topics for the school year and deliberately left some days blank so topics that emerged during the year could be addressed. Principals share action research in the SURN Principal Academy's culminating session with peers, refine the presentation based on peer feedback, then present to faculty and even school boards.

IMPACT

Administrators use the SURN Indicators of Student Engagement Observation Protocol in formative observations to collect engagement data. Teachers use it when planning lessons, and students use a modified version to reflect on their learning. Then the principal and teacher engage in dialogue using the data. Here are recent results:

- 2013-14: More than 3,000 observations, with a 6.5% decrease in lower-yield strategy use and a slight increase in high-yield strategies. For example, the use of certain high-yield strategies (discussing text, problem solving, cooperative learning, meta-cognitive strategy, and learning tool use) increased 3% to 6% between the fall and spring cycles.
- 2014-15: More than 3,400 observations in 48 schools, with an overall 3% decrease in lower-yield strategies. For example, responding orally decreased by 6.8% and listening (e.g. lecture) decreased by 5.5%. Some higher-yield strategies such as applying meta-cognitive strategies increased.
- Six schools whose principals participated in the 2012-13 program were recognized for no longer being among the lowest 5% of performing schools by the Virginia Department of Education.

These data show that a shared focus and an informative tool cultivate a shared language of learning across grade levels and content areas. Relationships grow stronger and learning increases among principals, teachers, and students.

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INDICATORS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Name		School	Grade/content
Date	Time in	Time out	Observer

The observer uses this tool to record occurrences of high- and low-yield practices. Check the middle column only if an item is observed. In a single observation, not all items will be observed. Indicators are not checked without evidence. Use the far right column to write specific examples or nonexamples for discussion with the teacher.

OBSERVATION "LOOK-FORS"	OBSERVED	SPECIFY EXAMPLES/NONEXAMPLES
INDICATORS FOR HIGH, ACTIVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT		
1. Engages in setting learning goals.		
2. Engages in making choices.		
3. Engages in reading.		
4. Engages in writing.		
5. Engages in discussing text or other input.		
6. Engages in problem solving.		
7. Creates products.		
8. Engages in peer tutoring, cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, or other cooperative group structures. Specify:		
9. Applies metacognition strategies. Specify: a) Making connections b) Inferring/generating hypotheses/predicting c) Asking/generating questions d) Determining importance/big ideas e) Summarizing f) Visualizing g) Synthesizing h) Monitoring and clarifying		
10. Creates/uses learning tools. Indicate: a) Concept mapping b) Advance/graphic organizers c) Manipulatives d) Technology e) Other. Specify _____		
11. Engages in self-assessment of their work, what they learn, and how they learn.		
12. Engages in asking for and giving specific feedback to peers and to the teacher.		
LOWER-YIELD PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS		
1. Completes worksheet, homework.		
2. Engages in oral turn taking.		
3. Responds orally.		
4. Engages in listening.		
5. Engages in off-task behaviors.		

Source: Developed by Jan Rozzelle and School-University Research Network (SURN). Reproduced with permission.

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DIGITAL DISTINCTION

BADGES ADD A NEW DIMENSION TO ADULT LEARNING

By Kellie Ady, Keli Kinsella, and Amber Paynter

As a part of a professional learning team, we are constantly looking for new approaches and designs that promote deeper adult learning. If we really want teachers to be motivated to change behaviors and aspirations, we need to tap into what motivates adults to learn. According to Daniel H. Pink's *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us,* these motivators are autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2011). And this is where digital badges come in.

Badges aren't exactly new. Perhaps best known from organizations like the Scouts, badges can be physical representations of things accomplished or they can be digital icons associated with particular skills or tasks. Apps like Lose It! or Fitbit (programs designed to motivate users for health and weight loss) use digital badges to mark milestones for people with personal goals. As an article in *Edu-*

cause Review reports, "Higher education institutions and other organizations interested in supporting learning are experimenting with digital badges to guide, motivate, document, and validate formal and informal learning" (Diaz, 2013). The article defines digital badges as "symbols that represent discrete academic achievements or valued skills not represented by course outcomes or a degree. These smaller achievements can represent incremental learning and progress toward more significant goals." In other words, badges tap into intrinsic motivation as they can reflect autonomy, mastery, and purpose.

So why digital badges? While the Scouts rely on items that can be sewn onto a sash or vest, digital badges can be attached to someone's digital or online profile. Like a physical patch, these badges can be viewed publicly and represent achievements for specific endeavors. Unlike stickers, which can be more generic and not necessarily a learner's goal, badges can be attained by choice (autonomy), are a direct reflection of specific tasks (mastery), and can help guide one toward a larger goal (purpose). And from what we've seen, using digital badges adds a new dimension to adult learning.

CREATE A LEARNING DESIGN

Our efforts to implement digital badges began with a small group of educators from one high school and two coaches from the Office of Instructional Technology in the Cherry Creek School District in Colorado. While planning the 2014-15 school year, we brainstormed creative solutions for ongoing and meaningful professional learning based on identified needs at the school level. We wanted to create a system that would allow for personalization, and, to appeal to the intrinsic motivation that autonomy provides, we needed to give teachers choice of time, location, and focus areas. We chose a blended learning model to provide that autonomy. Teachers would have flexibility in choosing when they worked and which topic to pursue for their professional growth.

This blended learning model provided opportunities for face-to-face learning as well as independent online work. While blended learning provides autonomy, we were also cognizant of the need to recognize and celebrate incremental steps toward teachers' professional goals in that push to mastery. A digital badge system for the professional learning strands creates a consistent and intentional structure for both publicly recognizing the work teachers are doing and supporting a culture and climate of celebration. This system also focuses learning on mastery of content in smaller steps — which led us to rethink our learning design.

To scaffold learning and embed badges, all courses are structured in a similar way. Each course is broken into tiers or levels (exploration, application, and integration), and those levels are broken down into smaller chunks or modules. The exploration level provides a base level understanding of concepts and potential tools (e.g. blended learning models and learning management), the application level encourages reflection on how these concepts and tools impact student achievement when used in the classroom (e.g. using digital assessments both formatively and summatively), and the integration level is built to encourage new ways to build on the application level (e.g. online portfolios, flipped instruction, and differentiation). These levels use a common color-coding system across all courses to help readily identify content and badges associated with those levels.

In this model, teachers are free to explore multiple pathways based on their professional goals or interests, which means they can explore multiple topics at differing levels or dive into a particular strand for advanced learning. The flexibility of going into different courses or levels necessitates the common course structure and helps teachers recognize the purpose in each module or level. And while graduate credit is an option for participants, we use digital badges to recognize successful implementation of incremental learning in the classroom for each level.

THE LEARNING PROCESSES

As a teacher, the process to earn a badge involves two aspects: personalized learning coursework and application of that learning for student achievement. As facilitators of our section, we model effective pedagogy in blended learning environments and incorporate both professional learning and educator effectiveness standards. As part of our learning design, we created, curated, and aligned digital resources in each discrete module to build knowledge and skills. Teachers can experience the learning in the same way a student would before implementing or trying it out with their own students.

Implementation into classroom practice takes the form of an assignment, but participants can decide the best way to capture and share their learning and evidence of mastery. Sometimes this evidence is a screencast, in which teachers record themselves talking through a process. Sometimes the evidence is a collection of screenshots with accompanying commentary. Reflection is an integral part of this process as participants include their thoughts on how their work impacted student engagement and achievement. For level 2, for example, the alignment and mastery module requires teachers to align an online learning element to standards and then assess it digitally. After assessing, teachers then look at the resulting data and reflect on what the data reveal about both the learners and the use of blended instruction. This assignment is then incorporated into the process of earning a badge.

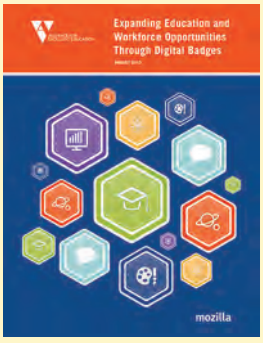
FACILITATOR PROCEDURES AND WORKFLOW

Managing multiple levels with multiple participants in multiple blended learning courses (without due dates) can get pretty messy. One of the most successful structures we established is the use of a Google form. Once teachers provide evidence of mastery, they use the form to request a badge. Once we receive their request, we make sure that all components are complete before awarding the badge in Schoology, a learning management system that allows users to create, manage, and share content and resources. Participants receive a congratulatory email telling them that the badge is on their profile. While our district uses the Schoology platform **(www.schoology.com)**, digital badges exist in other learning management systems and can also be awarded through website services such Credly **(https://credly.com)** and Mozilla Open Badges **(http://openbadges.org).**

All course facilitators have access to the results from the form, and this is used not only to communicate with each other about participant progress in varied levels, but it also offers useful feedback about participants' successes and struggles.

LEARN MORE ABOUT DIGITAL BADGES

Expanding Education and Workforce Opportunities Through Digital Badges
Alliance for Excellent Education & Mozilla, August 2013



Digital badges offer students the opportunity to pave their own learning pathways and allow employers to verify necessary workforce skills, according to this report from the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Mozilla Foundation. The report defines digital badges as "credentials that represent skills, interests, and achievements earned by an individual through specific projects, programs, courses, or other activities." A credible badge stores information online through a digital hyperlink about the associated skills, as well as what projects and tasks the badge holder completed to obtain it. This report explores digital badges and how they can be used to improve student learning and outcomes, as well as expand vocational and interest-based skills for learners of all age.

http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/expanding-education-and-workforce-opportunities-through-digital-badges

Our section also uses this form as a management tool to keep tabs on which badges are awarded. We mark when someone earns a badge or make a notation about why a badge hasn't been awarded (such as when submissions were incomplete). This works so well that other course facilitators adopted the practice.

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Revisiting Pink's ideas about how autonomy, mastery, and purpose play a significant role in motivation, using digital badges in a blended model is one way to incorporate those aspects into professional learning. We receive feedback each time a badge is requested, and there are repeated comments about how teachers "liked the flexibility and the convenience." Built into the structure is choice — choice in how to show evidence of mastery, which levels or modules to complete, and when to complete work. In the application level for the blended learning strand, for example, a teacher can opt to submit evidence of student work, videos, or lesson or unit plans to receive that level's badge and then either continue on to the integration level or pursue a level in a different strand, like text complexity.

As facilitators, we feel that autonomy is critical, but a structure that includes established target dates for submitting work is also necessary, especially for those using this for their professional evaluation process. Because we gave teachers the option to tie this work into professional goals for our district, submissions came in waves based on dates defined by our district's due dates for goals.

This sometimes made it difficult to give timely and effective feedback. Gathering work and managing feedback can be a challenge for any teacher, whether in the classroom or in professional learning, but being able to anticipate crunch times could have helped us facilitate our workflows more efficiently.

While our goal is to impact student achievement by helping teachers master aspects of the digital learning environment, each course's badge levels and embedded modules lead teachers through exploration, application, and integration. This helps us frame how each level's content differs, and it also helps teachers clearly see what will be mastered in that level. Participants, in providing evidence of mastery of each level, have evidence of that achievement with the earned badges.

Our team provided help for teachers in a twice-monthly drop-in format. During these face-to-face meetings, teachers showed noticeably increased interest, engagement, and perseverance once we implemented the badge-based system. We often heard teachers express excitement about being "so close to earning a badge."

One of our takeaways about this tiered approach is the need to be clear about what constitutes mastery. Focused conversations about what constitutes mastery at the exploration level versus the integration level would yield more clarity and consistency across courses. While our system requires completion of components, it could be improved by attaching a framework for defining mastery and purpose.

CONNECT TEACHING AND LEARNING

According to Daniel Pink, "Purpose is the yearning to do what we do in the service of something larger than ourselves" (Pink, 2011). As educators, we do what we do because we believe in learning and we believe in kids. The badge-based professional learning approach ties in more traditional motivators like graduate credit for horizontal advancement and the professional goal-setting process for annual evaluation. However, built into the course is a focus on how what is learned extends to teaching and learning.

Another way this approach supports a larger purpose is by building a culture of celebration and recognition. As the year progressed, we publicly recognized departments for completing levels and introduced an element of competition by celebrating teams that were first to complete a level successfully. This encouraged participants to feel as if they were part of a larger push to improve instruction across the school.

As we consider how we might adjust this approach in the future, we realize that we need to connect purpose to student data. Our questions about impact in the classroom were anecdotal in nature, which tells part of the story, but using student data in the reflections might help us connect professional learning to student achievement.

As part of our learning design, we created, curated, and aligned digital resources in each discrete module to build knowledge and skills. Teachers can experience the learning in the same way a student would before implementing or trying it out with their own students.

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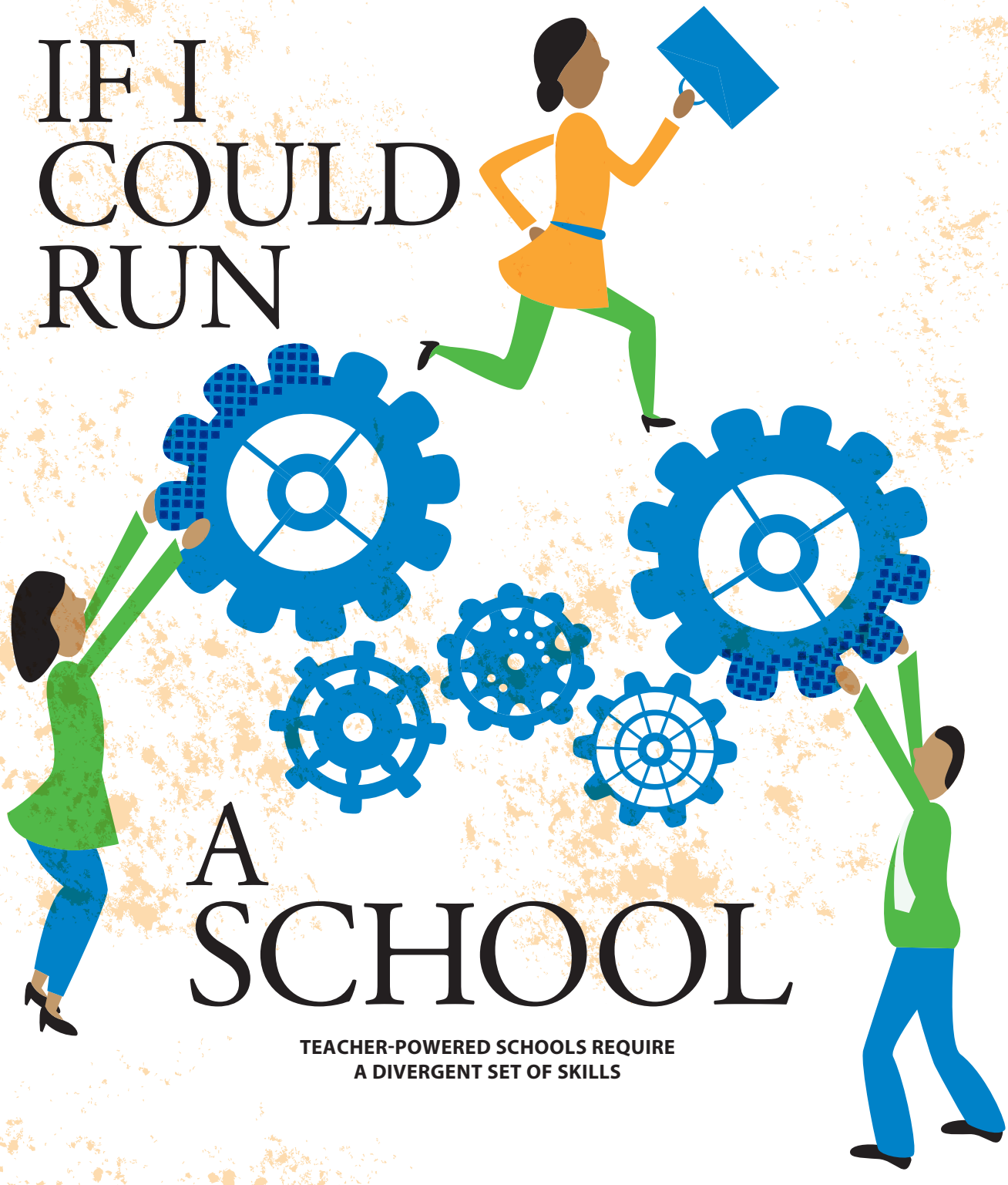
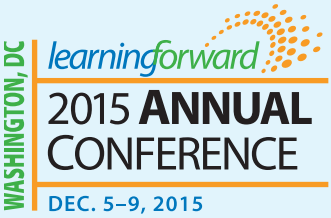
IF I COULD RUN A SCHOOL



TEACHER-POWERED SCHOOLS REQUIRE A DIVERGENT SET OF SKILLS

Learn more about teacher-powered schools at Learning Forward's Annual Conference Dec. 5-9 in Washington, D.C.



By Lori Nazareno

Every creative, dynamic, and intelligent teacher I know has played the "If I could start (or run) a school, I would …" game. Many of these teachers finish the sentence in similar ways, with answers like:

- Have teachers involved in whole-school decision making;
- Have teachers observing, giving feedback, and evaluating one another;
- Have students engaged in activities that allow them to learn real-world skills; and
- Have everyone who has a license teach (at least a little bit).

Perhaps you are one of those teachers. If so, how would you complete that sentence?

While people at all levels of education are talking about teacher leadership, few are talking about the bold type of leadership that puts teachers in charge of whole-school success. Many current forms of teacher leadership have teachers carrying out solutions that others have created. Rarely does teacher leadership involve teachers designing and implementing their own solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

But this is the type of teacher leadership that is demonstrated in teacher-powered schools. In over 75 schools across the United States, teachers are creating, implementing, and leading their own whole-school solutions, taking on the monumental task of transforming schools and the profession. Many of these schools started with teams of teachers stepping up to the challenges that arose in their local contexts. Since then, the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative — a joint effort of Education Evolving, an organization involved in school redesign, and Center for Teaching Quality — has identified many of the existing teacher-powered schools and begun to coalesce these efforts into a grassroots movement.

Teacher-powered schools vary significantly. Some have principals, while others have leadership teams; some are district schools, and some are chartered; some are elementary schools, and some are secondary. But what these schools have in common is that they are teacher-powered — places where teachers have the collective autonomy to make decisions that impact whole-school success.

Teacher-powered schools have shifted the century-old factory model of schooling to one that better aligns with the needs of 21st-century students. Today's students need to see teachers function as knowledge workers, especially if they are to become knowledge workers themselves. These

FREE GUIDES FOR TEAMS AVAILABLE

The Center for Teaching Quality and the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative have developed a set of free discussion guides to support teams in developing some of the skills needed to successfully operate a teacher-powered school. These guides contain lessons learned from teachers in existing teacher-powered schools, tips, and discussion questions for teams to use in designing and managing teacher-powered schools. Access the guides at **www.teacherpowered.org/guide.**

schools support the development of knowledge workers by functioning as democracies and providing all members of the team an opportunity to actively participate in making decisions influencing the school's success. And, in exchange for collective autonomy, they accept responsibility for student outcomes and hold one another accountable to the collective commitments that impact student outcomes.

Most teachers are accustomed to operating in the traditional model of teaching and learning, so they have developed the requisite skills needed to be successful in a typical boss-worker relationship. But teacher-powered schools are different, requiring teachers to develop a divergent set of skills. Two of the most important are how to manage a school collaboratively and how to observe and evaluate one another. Traditional schools have a principal who calls the shots, making it unnecessary for teachers to do these things. But when teachers design and operate teacher-powered schools, they must learn these skills so that their students, team, and school can thrive.

Let's learn more about these important skills and see how teacher-powered teams put them into action.

COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

It can be difficult for some to imagine how teachers would go about managing a school collaboratively. Hierarchical leadership structures dominate the education space and have had a major impact on how teachers view and operate in the profession. Yet many teams that design and run teacher-powered schools are able to build capacity for leadership among their colleagues, who share responsibility and accountability for school success.

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

Teacher-powered schools are committed to functioning as democracies by providing all members of the team an opportunity to actively participate in making decisions influencing the school's success. When teachers design schools with a real responsibility for their success, there's no need to cultivate buy-in. Teachers own what they create.

As Carrie Bakken, a teacher at Avalon School in St. Paul, Minnesota, says, "The only power we don't have is the power to complain, because if we don't like something, we can change it for the better." Avalon was designed and has operated as a teacher-powered school since its inception. Teachers there have full autonomy to operate the school and have had success in positively impacting student learning, especially for students who have been historically underserved.

Teacher-powered teams feel strongly that collaborative management models the way most students will work in their future jobs and careers, as well as the way citizens behave in a democracy. After all, most professionals don't operate in silos like what we see in traditional models of schooling. Instead, they hone their skills as collaborators, learning to value how democratic decision making yields an informed result that considers the needs of the whole community.

It can be difficult for some to imagine how teachers would go about managing a school collaboratively. Hierarchical leadership structures dominate the education space and have had a major impact on how teachers view and operate in the profession. Yet many teams that design and run teacher-powered schools are able to build capacity for leadership among their colleagues, who share responsibility and accountability for school success.

In collaborative management scenarios, team members learn when to challenge their team and when to compromise. They recognize when to maximize individuals' strengths and minimize the team's weaknesses. They allow for individuals to cultivate new ideas for the team's benefit. They make mistakes but lean on the collective knowledge of the group to find solutions.

The Mission Hill K-8 School, a Boston Public Pilot School, is an example of a teacher-powered school using collaborative management. Jenerra Williams, a teacher at the school, says, "When schoolwide things are not working, we set aside time to specifically address the concern. We lay out the concern so that everyone has the same understanding about what isn't working and our goal in the end. We brainstorm ways to work toward fixing the issue, and then we make an action plan or action steps toward that."

To learn more, see the video at: **http://learningmatters.tv/blog/on-pbs-newshour/watch-teacher-power/12568.**

In addition, when students see and hear their teachers co-creating their work environment and the policies that govern it, they learn collaborative management skills themselves. They begin to understand what active participation in a democracy looks like.

REQUISITE SKILLS

Decision making

Collaborative management and shared governance do not mean that every teacher is involved in every decision, nor do they mean that there is 100% agreement among the entire team about every issue. In order to be successful in teacher-powered schools, teachers need to develop the skills and abilities to be able to operate in a system where they make decisions — but

not all decisions, and some of those decisions may not go their way.

Key to the success of this model is absolute transparency about what decisions have been made and why. Sean Woytek, a Colorado teacher who worked in a teacher-powered school and recently became school leader of another, defined transparency and his working arrangement this way: "I can't be involved in everything, nor do I care to be. I'm satisfied if I can sit down and either read through or talk with someone who is involved and know what occurred. I'm not satisfied with just the public display — I want to be able to know the entire process. And if I want to get involved, I want to have the ability to get involved."

Leading from the middle or the back

Most schools today are structured so that teachers are followers and there is only one identified leader, usually the principal. Even in cases where there are official teacher leadership positions, those teachers are expected to follow the school leader and often carry out his or her vision for the school.

However, in teacher-powered schools, everyone is considered a teacher leader who makes his or her own contribution to the school's success. This dynamic creates a need to think differently about how to morph multiple perspectives into a common vision, what it means to be a leader, and how leaders learn to lead one another. Often, teams in teacher-powered schools cultivate a strong shared purpose that is based on a collective vision of success. They then delegate some decision-making authority to various individuals and committees, who act according to the school's shared purpose and decision-making policies.

Teachers in teacher-powered schools report that effective "leaders among leaders" in a teacher-powered school, especially those working in a principal or lead teacher position, must know how to lead from the middle or the back. These leaders shouldn't be out in front of the group setting the agenda or making the decisions. Instead, they must step aside and facilitate the team toward collective decisions.

These leaders need to understand that people will own what they help create, so they should support the team in creating and implementing their own vision. This type of leader recognizes that collective effort is the bedrock on which the teacher-powered structure is built and is an absolute necessity for the school to function effectively and efficiently.

Strong leaders also need to resist the temptation to take charge just because district leaders will view them as bosses and seek to hold one individual accountable. Instead, they should act on behalf of their team, even if district leaders fail to understand or adapt to what teacher-powered collaborative management means.

EVALUATION

Teacher teams designing and running teacher-powered schools — many of whom have secured full or partial autonomy to design their own evaluation policies — have long understood that teacher quality impacts student and school success. As a result, these teams have chosen to take greater responsibility and accountability for student and whole-school outcomes via teacher evaluation. Many teams choose to use the evaluation process to inform personnel decisions and identify teachers' strengths and areas for improvement in instruction and collegial management.

EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP

Teachers' responsibilities in teacher-powered schools include both in-class instruction and whole-school leadership. They operate on the premise that school success is as much dependent on the contributions of all personnel as it is on teachers' instructional practices. As a result, teams with full evaluation autonomy often choose to include assessments of both instructional practice and contributions to school management/leadership.

EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

Most teams design a peer observation and feedback process in a way that is primarily intended to improve teachers' instructional practice — but also informs personnel decisions. In some cases, when the school is small, the whole team participates in the observation and evaluation process. But most of the time, a select group of colleagues serves as evaluators — such as a personnel committee trained in state evaluation laws or a team that includes all teachers from a grade level or subject area and an elected school leader.

Strong leaders should act on behalf of their team, even if district leaders fail to understand or adapt to what teacher-powered collaborative management means.

When selected groups evaluate, they frequently gather additional feedback from a broader peer group via surveys or other rubrics that the whole team designs or chooses. Also, if one exists, teams often adapt the district's rubric for peer review or for individual teachers. For schools that do not have district rubrics or choose not to use them, teams design and use their own.

Once all the data are gathered, the group doing the evaluation discusses teachers' results with each individual in a private, formal meeting. For example, at the Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, Colorado, teachers are put in teams of three and substitute teachers are hired so that they can observe each other using the district's evaluation rubric to collect evidence of effective teaching. Once the observations are complete, the team convenes during a staff meeting to provide feedback to each other.

Based on the feedback from teammates, teachers then sets goals for improving their practice over the coming weeks. Dur-

ing the next observation cycle, the team revisits those goals, then conducts another observation. And the cycle continues. As a result, teachers are responsible for continuous improvement of their practice that leads to improved student outcomes.

EVALUATING LEADERSHIP

Teachers in teacher-powered schools understand that, by having responsibility and accountability for school success, teacher teams *as a whole* are responsible for addressing many factors that influence student outcomes. Teams choose the curriculum, allocate the budget, select leaders, set the schedule, and more. As a result, these factors are often included in teacher evaluations.

Areas for evaluation might include teachers' work in their specific school management positions as well as their contributions to the team as a whole.

REQUISITE SKILLS

Observation

Historically, teachers have not been engaged in the process of teacher evaluation as evaluators. As a result, most have not been trained in how to conduct observations, use the instruments, and engage in the process. Thus, in a teacher-powered school, teachers need to develop these skills. As teacher evaluation systems have become more sophisticated over time, this need has amplified.

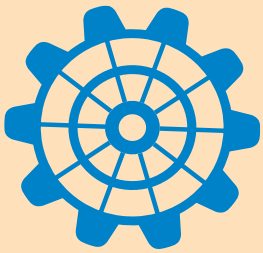
Teams in teacher-powered schools using instruments designed by others have come to realize that it is helpful to connect with state- or district-level professional learning that addresses the use of evaluation instruments. Teams who have created their own instrument and processes typically design and conduct the training themselves.

Alysia Krafel, co-founder of Chrysalis Charter School in Palo Cedro, California, says, "Observation skills must be taught to be helpful. The most useful skill is to be able to watch a lesson and nonjudgmentally take data. Data as to what students are doing, rather than making judgments, is most useful to the teacher being evaluated."

Having difficult conversations

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching in a teacher-powered school is engaging in difficult conversations with colleagues. Whether the conversation is about improving instructional practice, determining how budgets will be allocated, or any other issue that causes controversy, teachers are not accustomed to having these conversations. In the factory model of schooling, the principal handles all difficult conversations. But in teacher-powered schools where there is collective responsibility for the whole school, there is also collective responsibility to handle difficult situations. This is an area where professional learning is vital.

If a school is to be successful, everyone must get past the "culture of nice," which occurs when teachers don't want — or don't know how — to have open, honest conversations about instructional practice. The "culture of nice" can be particularly evident when there is a definite need for improvement but the teachers involved are not equipped for engaging in those types of conversations.



If a school is to be successful, everyone must get past the "culture of nice," which occurs when teachers don't want — or don't know how — to have open, honest conversations about instructional practice. The "culture of nice" can be particularly evident when there is a definite need for improvement but the teachers involved are not equipped for engaging in those types of conversations. However, there is professional learning that can support teachers to engage in difficult, but crucial, conversations. For example, some staffs engage in Cognitive Coaching, others in Adaptive Schools, and yet others seek other training.

Autonomy and accountability

A recent report from Education Evolving noted that 85% of the public thinks that teacher-powered schools are a good idea. And about 75% of teachers say they are eager to accept accountability for student outcomes — as long as they are given the autonomy to make decisions that impact that success (Education Evolving, 2014).

For teacher-powered schools to succeed, teachers are going to need a variety of skills that traditionally they have not used. Collaborative management requires teachers to be able to work together to make decisions, while learning how to be a leader among leaders is likely unfamiliar to most teachers. And few teachers know how to conduct evaluations of their colleagues. Professional learning that develops and strengthens those skills will help teachers lead and create teacher-powered schools.

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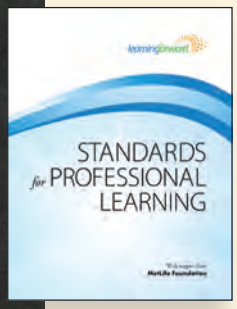
Standards for Professional Learning



The standards define the essential elements of and conditions for professional learning that lead to improvements in educator effectiveness and student learning.

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Designed to assist facilitators in introducing and helping others implement the standards, this guide is for educators new to the Standards for Professional Learning as well as those familiar with the previous Standards for Staff Development.

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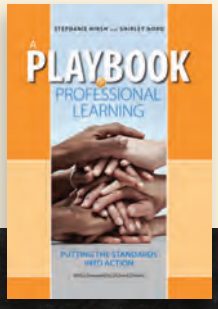

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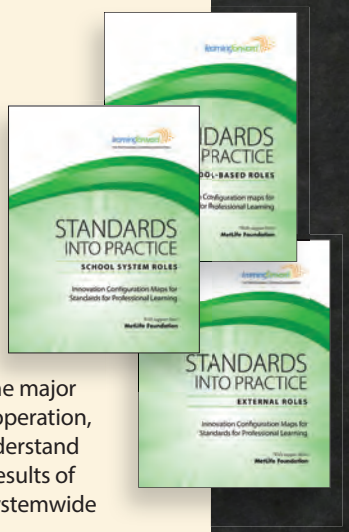

STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE: EXTERNAL ROLES

STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE: SCHOOL-BASED ROLES

STANDARDS INTO PRACTICE: SCHOOL SYSTEM ROLES

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HOW PRINCIPALS CAN RESHAPE THE

TEACHING BELL CURVE

By Kim Marshall

In my work in schools over the last few decades, three hard truths have gradually come into focus. First, within every school there is a bell-shaped curve of teaching quality. Some teachers are using highly effective practices almost all the time, a larger group is solidly effective, others are working at a mediocre level, and a few are mostly unsuccessful with their students. Although the curve may tilt left or right from year to year and place to place, teaching variability is a reality everywhere, from struggling inner-city schools to expensive prep schools.

The second hard truth is that teaching practices at the lower end of the spectrum have a disproportionately negative impact on some students. Children who are fortunate enough to enter school with family and community advantages can survive mediocre and even ineffective teaching

(although their parents may squawk and get their children moved out of certain classrooms). But for children with disadvantages — poverty, no books in the home, special needs, language difficulties, abuse and neglect — mediocre and ineffective teaching are like a stuck parking brake on normal progress. Several years of poor teaching in a row can have a devastating lifelong impact. These children desperately need effective and highly effective teaching. The less of it they have, the wider the achievement gap and the more the American dream becomes a false promise.

The third truth: It's really difficult for a school to increase the amount of solid and superb teaching and reduce or eliminate less-than-effective practices. Why? It's not that some teachers get up in the morning stubbornly determined to be mediocre. The reason is that, over the last few decades, the strategies we've been using to improve teaching have been largely ineffective. Some examples:

Hire good teachers and leave them alone. Given inevitable hiring mistakes and regression to the mean, this always produces some weak instruction.

Mandate scripted, "teacher-proof" curriculum materials. This is a weak strategy that's likely to drive away the talented, dedicated people we need in our classrooms.

Require teachers to turn in lesson plans a week ahead and inspect them all. This level of micromanagement (the average faculty produces about 25,000 lesson plans a year) is impractical and has little impact on actual teaching since a great lesson plan can be poorly executed and a mediocre lesson plan can be salvaged during instruction.

Schedule a once-or-twice-a-year preobservation conference, full-lesson observation, detailed write-up, and post-conference. It's laughable to think that evaluating one or two classes, often atypical lessons put on for the administrator's benefit, can significantly improve a teacher's performance. This approach is best described by three adjectives: inaccurate, ineffective, and dishonest. How many parents are aware that this is the way we evaluate teachers?

In the last few years, policymakers have come up with some new ideas that purport to do a better job improving teaching and learning. I have concerns about each of them.

Hire more administrators and conduct weekly classroom visits. Too expensive for almost all districts.

Bring in outside evaluators to second-guess principals. The theory is that school leaders get too cozy with their staff and shy away from difficult conversations, but this model is costly and avoids the essential work of improving the way principals supervise and evaluate — or replacing them.

Rate teachers using electronic checklists during classroom visits and elaborate rubrics afterward. This provides a false sense of precision about teaching, prevents supervisors from being thoughtful observers in classrooms (including asking one or two students, "What are you working on today?"), and short-circuits thoughtful coaching conversations.

Conduct once-a-year surprise videotaping to capture what's really happening day to day. The idea is to see past the dog-and-pony show, but an annual video inspection is likely to throw teachers and students off and is a totally inadequate sampling of daily reality.

Install cameras in all classrooms to monitor instruction continuously. This NSA-style supervision freaks teachers out and misses the nuances of actually visiting classrooms.

Have teachers submit videos of their best lessons. Will they be representative of daily ups and downs?

Have teachers submit voluminous binders of "evidence" of their work. One Connecticut teacher whose principal asked for this kind of documentation said, "I've never worked so hard and taught so little."

Use value-added analysis of test scores to rate teachers, rewarding the best with merit pay and firing the worst. This idea sounds logical, but data are available for only about 20% of teachers, and researchers have cautioned that value-added analysis has serious shortcomings and shouldn't be used for consequential personnel decisions.

THE FORK IN THE ROAD

What all these approaches have in common is that they are high-stakes and seem to spring from the assumption that teachers are doing bad things that need to be caught and punished. They are judgmental rather than constructive.

If we picture a fork in the road, many schools are taking the left fork leading to evidence gathering, rating, and compliance rather than the right fork — working to improve teaching and learning. As I've worked with numerous principals and faculties over the last few years, I'm disheartened to see administrators spending most of their contact time with teachers on cumbersome bureaucratic processes. The result? Teachers shift to a defensive mode, worry constantly about their status, and look for ways to game the system.

My sense is that the new methods aren't improving teaching and learning — and may even be making things worse. In all too many schools, a similar amount of mediocre and ineffective teaching continues day after day, week after week, year after year. Good principals and teachers get discouraged and cynical, and some are driven out of the profession or flee to charter or private schools.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

So how *do* we improve subpar teaching and motivate solid teachers to take their work to a higher level? How can school leaders be more successful at their core mission — getting more effective teaching in more classrooms more of the time? For the answer, we need only look at the research and commentary on our most successful schools. Their "secret sauce" is a mix of five key elements, conducted mostly in a medium-stakes environment:

Professional working conditions: Effective principals create a sense of purpose and possibility, a positive student and parent culture, and the support, materials, and guidance so teachers can teach an appropriate curriculum well. A key aspect of support is creating a schedule that gives teacher teams the time to collaborate every week and providing skillful facilitation to keep them on track. Professional conditions are far more important than cash bonuses for retaining and attracting good teachers.

Teacher teamwork: An essential task for the leadership team is structuring, supporting, and monitoring teacher teams as they backward-design curriculum units, analyze interim assessments and student work, and push themselves to confront what's not working, experiment with new ideas, and continuously improve teaching and learning.

Guiding teacher collaboration is not a simple matter, but we have excellent models to follow, including Japanese lesson study and the professional learning community work in a number of American schools. The best teams create a dynamic where top-notch teachers open their classroom doors and share wisdom and expertise and everyone listens to good ideas and tunes in to research and effective practices in other schools. The best principals shift the conversation to results and constantly monitor how teacher teams are doing on the endlessly complex task of getting all students to proficiency.

Rather than waiting for state test results, effective teams use good local measures — Fountas & Pinnell reading assessments, the Six-Trait Writing Rubric, diagnostic math inventories, and others — to get detailed information on their students four or five times a year and constantly tweak their classroom practices.

Coaching teachers: The best way to accomplish this is for principals to flip the traditional process. Instead of making announced, infrequent, full-length classroom observations followed by lengthy write-ups (often several weeks later), make unannounced, frequent, short visits followed promptly by face-to-face conversations focused on one or two affirmations and a key leverage point for improvement.

The ideal place for these conversations is in the teacher's classroom when students aren't there. By keeping classroom observations and conversations to 10-15 minutes each (it's amazing how much happens in a classroom in a few minutes and how much can be accomplished in a brief, focused conversation) and following up with a short written narrative, principals can visit two or three classrooms each day so that each teacher is observed about 10 times a year — and still have time to do the rest of their incredibly demanding job.

By avoiding checklists and refraining from rubric-scoring teachers after each visit, principals are much more likely to have authentic conversations with teachers, understand the world they live in, and help them improve. Teachers also have the opportunity to coach their principals on the finer points of their lessons.

When principals interact with teachers in this way throughout the school year, they can put together accurate end-of-year evaluations and fulfill the essential mandates of the supervision/evaluation process: quality assurance, wise personnel decisions, affirmation and improvement, and motivating teachers to continuously reflect and bring their A-game every day.

Student surveys: Many teachers ask their students to fill out short questionnaires at the end of the year and learn a lot from the feedback. Kids are remarkably astute and usually take the process very seriously. The problem with this scattershot approach is that the educators who most need improvement are the least likely to ask for students' opinions.

The idea of giving all students the opportunity to comment anonymously on their teachers' performance got a major boost from the 2013 Measures of Effective Teaching study funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and, since then, the idea has swept the nation. However, making student survey data a high-stakes part of teachers' evaluation is fraught with problems and has produced strong pushback in some districts. There's fear that surveys will become popularity contests, that teachers will pressure students to give them good reviews or dial back on rigor and expectations, that students may give low ratings to teachers who demand a lot of them (even though the students may appreciate them years later) and give high ratings to "nice" teachers who have lower expectations, skewing the data.

Fortunately, some schools and districts have hit upon a medium-stakes approach: Give brief, well-crafted surveys to all students twice a year (perhaps November and June) and have each teacher look over the results with an administrator or trusted colleague, focusing on three questions: *Which student responses are cause for celebration? What's surprising? And what are one or two things in the classroom that could be improved based on the feedback?* Getting surveys and thinking about the results with a critical friend is potentially one of the most powerful ways to affirm good teaching and improve classroom dynamics and pedagogy.

Hiring and firing well: Every teaching vacancy is a golden opportunity to strengthen the faculty, and recruiting effective teachers is a major part of every school leader's legacy. Principals and their leadership teams need to be able to screen a wide range of well-qualified candidates early in the spring, watch them teach demonstration lessons, and have them interact with potential colleagues to see if there's a good match. My biggest regret from my years as a principal was when I rushed to make a last-minute hiring decision rather than persisting until we found the right person — and when I cut corners on calling references or didn't push previous employers to give the full story.

Firing persistently ineffective teachers is hard, essential work. Before principals get to this point, there need to be frequent classroom visits with immediate feedback, lots of support to improve, help from instructional coaches and teacher colleagues with subject-area expertise, tough-love feedback, and an attempt to counsel the teacher out. Dismissal is an area where principals need better support from superintendents and boards (and possibly changes in state laws) so that there's a fair, streamlined process to expedite the departure of teachers who aren't getting better and are harming children's life chances every day.

STRUCTURES AND SUPPORTS

I believe that principals who do these five things well — create professional working conditions, foster teacher teamwork, coach teachers, use student surveys, and hire and fire well — will bend the teaching quality curve in the right direction. But is this work too hard? Are the principals who use these approaches gifted superheroes with powers that few mortals possess? Are these practices too challenging to take to scale? If that's the case, we need to focus on "principal-proofing" the teacher improvement process, perhaps by mandating checklists and clever iPad apps.

But I don't buy the premise. In fact, I believe it's an insult to almost all school leaders. The failure of most principals to bend the teaching quality curve is not a lack of innate ability but the result of ineffective policies they've been required to follow. I believe that with the right structures and support, principals can bring about major improvements in teaching quality.

I believe that with the right structures and support, principals can bring about major improvements in teaching quality.

Bending the curve is a matter of great urgency, especially for our neediest students. To make this happen, we need to dial back to medium stakes, get principals out from behind their computers and clipboards and into classrooms for frequent, authentic observations followed by thoughtful coaching conversations with all teachers, listen to what students have to say about their teaching, build trust and collegiality, and allow teacher teamwork to become the engine of improvement.

When difficult employment decisions have to be made, principals need to have the courage and backup to make them stick, but most of the work of improving teaching is changing workplace dynamics so that ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Our children deserve no less.

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MAKE TIME *to* RECHARGE

GROWTH AND RENEWAL PLAY KEY ROLES IN SUSTAINING SCHOOL LEADERS

By Ellie Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano

"All I need is a little piece of friendship bread — some support to feel renewed and rejuvenated. Even a little piece would allow me to care even more for adults in my building. I find myself giving and giving friendship bread to everyone [in my school] — all the time — to help them grow. And I realize that I need to grow myself, too. I know it's important. I just need a little bit of time and space to care for my own renewal, too."

— A school leader

Being a school leader in any role is hard, gratifying, and a gift of love. While it can be enormously satisfying to serve students, teachers, families, and school communities, leaders need to refill themselves in order to continue giving to others. As one dedicated educator emphasized in the quote above, all school leaders need some kind of "friendship bread" to sustain themselves and their work.

Learn more about growth-oriented leadership at Learning Forward's Annual Conference Dec. 5-9 in Washington, D.C.

REFLECTION

Please use these questions to reflect on your own work and leadership.

- What are you doing to care for your renewal? How is this working for you?
- What is one additional thing that you could do for yourself that would feel supportive and restorative?
- What is something that you would like to grow about yourself or your leadership? How might others (e.g. a reflective partner or inquiry group) help you grow and learn in service to this goal?

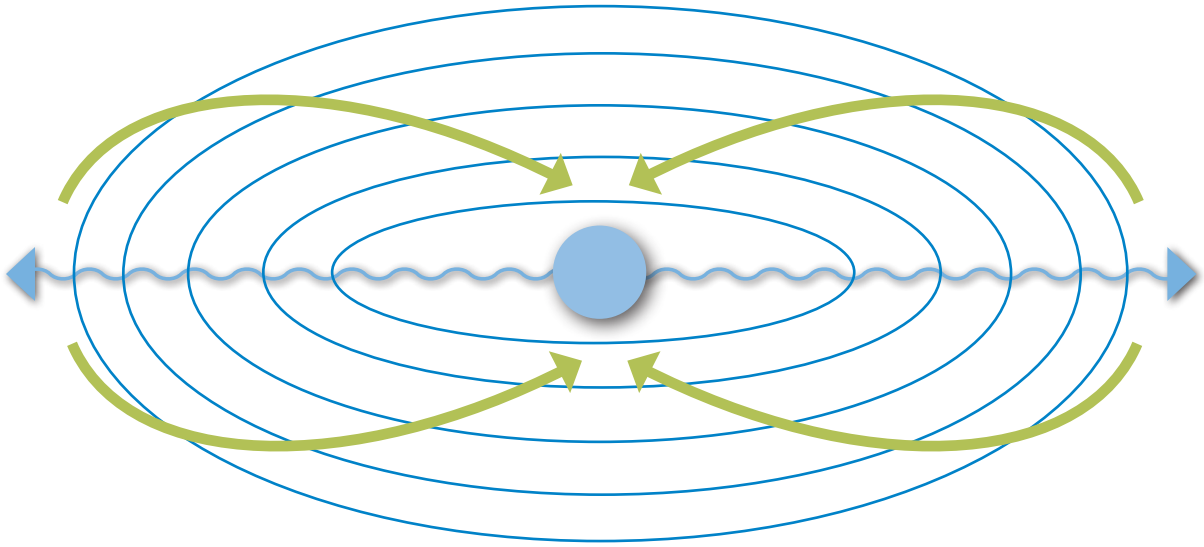
Recently, for example, a middle school principal in New York City confided her fear of burning out after seven rewarding and demanding years on the job. During a professional learning institute, which focused on how to support adult learning and development, this principal shared with us that she doesn't want to leave her school, but needs opportunities to grow and learn — especially given the nonstop demands piling up on her already overflowing plate. "Running without ever stopping," as she put it, just isn't sustainable.

Moreover, this principal explained that she wants her teachers to have meaningful and ongoing growing opportunities, too. She worries, though, that the pressures of teaching and leading — of "simply surviving" as an educator in the current high-stakes, accountability-driven climate — leave little room for much else for anyone.

These two leaders are not alone. Dedicated educators (e.g. principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and district leaders) everywhere echo similar sentiments. It is difficult, they say, to find and maintain a sustainable balance as both a leader and human being. How, they wonder, can educational leaders attend to their own development while also supporting the learning and growth of students and teachers? Both are essential, as they emphasize.

With this universal need in mind, this article highlights a learning-oriented model of leadership development and capacity building that emphasizes the importance of caring for one's own self-development and renewal while caring for and supporting others (Drago-Severson, 2012a). It also highlights the real-life renewal hopes and strategies of practicing school leaders who have shared their stories

LEARNING-ORIENTED MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING



The self of the leader (the central dot in the model) influences the values we hold, the decisions we make, the structures and learning opportunities we facilitate, and more. The arrows, which circle back from the last ring into the center, illuminate the importance of refilling the self in order to continue giving to others. **Source:** Drago-Severson, 2012a.

with us in our teaching, consulting, and longitudinal research (Drago-Severson, 2012a; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013).

The mounting evidence about the critical role of renewal in leadership lends additional urgency to this work. Education leaders need to renew themselves to maintain and improve their productivity (Schwartz, 2013) and better meet the complex challenges at their doorstep (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, in press; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). And they need to grow and renew to most effectively care for all school participants — and avoid burnout.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF SELF IN LEADERSHIP

Working to lead and support others is a tremendous expression of self. In fact, a leader's self sits at the very heart of any leadership enterprise and influences every aspect of the work we are able to do with and for others (Drago-Severson, 2012a). While many things make up the selves we bring to leadership — including our personal experiences, relationships, beliefs, and internal capacities — this research-based model for building leadership and organizational capacity (Drago-Severson, 2012a) emphasizes the central role that *who we are* plays in our teaching, learning, and leading.

As the graphic above shows, the self of the leader (the central dot in the model) influences all that we do, culminating in a series of interconnected growth rings that reflect the values we hold, the decisions we make, the structures and learning opportunities we facilitate, and more.

WHAT MAKES UP YOUR CENTRAL DOT?

Use these questions to consider the core elements that make up your own self (the central dot) and how they inform your leadership.

- What values, beliefs, and influences do you think inform your central dot or self?
- What values do you hope others see in your leadership?
- How do you try to share/communicate what is most important to you with others?
- What is something you would like to learn or grow about yourself to further strengthen your leadership?

In other words, what you value most — what you care for and prioritize as a leader and human being — can and should inform your practice in important ways. Authentically growing oneself by building our internal capacities to better manage the complexities of learning and leading today can help us become even more effective in supporting and growing others. In fact, this kind of authentic, transformational learning may be the only kind of professional learning that makes a real difference for students (Guskey, 2000; Murnane & Willet, 2010).

By growth or transformational learning, we mean increases in our cognitive, emotional, interpersonal (how the self relates

to others), and intrapersonal (how the self relates to itself) capacities that enable us to manage better the complexities of leading, learning, teaching, and living (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012a; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, in press; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Drago-Severson, Roy, & von Frank, 2015).

MODEL CORE VALUES

As a leader, understanding and prioritizing what feels most important and nonnegotiable about one's central values and convictions — what we refer to as the "core elements" of your leadership (Drago-Severson, 2012a) — are key. Moreover, understanding that the ways in which we act, listen, speak, see, and orient to others are always expressions of these values — and also our internal reserves and capacities — helps highlight the importance of intentionally modeling the core elements in our behaviors and relationships. Effective leadership is not just about doing certain things on the surface. It's about modeling and embodying the qualities for which we hope to stand, such as care, trust, and respect.

In this way, school leaders' words and actions take center stage in their work. How we listen, how we welcome and respond to questions, how we connect and build relationships with others, and how we seek out new knowledge and capacities matter and are parts of ourselves that we must continue to explore and develop. As Ralph Waldo Emerson has been quoted as saying, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." For leaders, too, when we aren't intentional about aligning what we do with what we say, it can be hard to establish a trusting foundation on which to build.

REFILL THE SELF

Given the vital importance of your self (or central dot) in your leadership — as the source from which all else springs — the model on p. 40 also circles back to the center and underscores the power of continually growing and refilling oneself as a leader. In addition to more traditional forms of renewal — like time away from work, exercise, reading, traveling, or spending time with family and friends — a learning-oriented conceptualization of refilling also emphasizes the power of seeking out supports to grow oneself.

For example, participation in collaborative pairs and groups builds individual and organizational capacity, and reflecting and engaging in dialogue with others is a proven developmental support. In light of this, the model highlights the power of mentoring and co-mentoring, which involves a mutual exchange of ideas and expertise in support to learning and growth — as well as the powerful benefits of collegial inquiry groups, which can help leaders learn from diverse perspectives and also unearth assumptions that drive thinking and action (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012a).

Ultimately, no matter what form they take, self-development and renewal are key to effective leadership, and doing so in the company of others can reduce the isolation of what can be a very lonely job. As one principal recently said, "It's so nice to feel supported, especially when you're supporting others."

RENEWAL STRATEGIES

Our longitudinal research with leaders who learned about and experienced a version of this model as part of their leadership training illuminates the very real importance of growing and sustaining oneself as a leader (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, in press; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013).

We learned through our research that — despite the growing awareness of the importance of renewal and self-development — making space for oneself as a leader is never easy. For instance, the leaders who shared their stories with us still yearn for ongoing support and opportunities to grow. In describing their current renewal strategies, suggestions, and hopes, these leaders emphasized the importance of:

- Prioritizing time for renewal and self-development — and how hard this is for many; and
- Finding and creating opportunities for meaningful collaboration.

FINDING TIME

These leaders emphasized the importance of making the time for self-growth and self-care. This, they explained, was challenging, even though they knew it was essential.

One leader said that his work as a charter school leader — while successful and very meaningful — just "doesn't fit within a 40-hour workweek." With experience, he came to understand that an important part of his job as a leader involved figuring out "ways to contain it [the job] so that it doesn't become 80 hours or 90 hours a week, like it used to be."

Stressing the essential importance of nourishing himself as a part of effective leadership, he said, "I've come to realize that our work is incredibly complex, incredibly urgent, incredibly important, and, at the same time, I do really believe in the notion that there has to be work-life balance in order for people to be their best selves in the work. And what I've learned in my own life — and this might sound funny, but it's true—is that the best way to have work-life balance is to have a life outside of work that is just as important as work."

Other leaders described this balance in terms of connecting with others and finding private time for rest and reflection. For many of the leaders we learned from, this kind of private time took many forms — like journaling, dictating thoughts to a recorder, exercising, watching television, or reading — but the space itself remained a sacred and important part of sustaining themselves and enhancing the work (Drago-Severson, 2012a, 2012b; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013). Making room in their hectic schedules for renewal required

intentional and ongoing effort, and the strength to put on hold — if even for a moment — the innumerable pressures and demands of leadership and life.

MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION

In addition to wanting more time for personal growth and renewal, leaders frequently requested the opportunity to collaborate with other leaders in the field. They recognized that additional opportunities to think, talk, and collaborate with others would be valuable to their work, lives, and leadership. In fact, nearly all of the leaders we spoke to in our different research studies requested this kind of support in the form of:

- Collegial inquiry opportunities;
- Mentoring relationships; and/or
- Networking/communication opportunities with like-minded colleagues.

Perhaps most poignantly, a number of these leaders lamented the loneliness of leadership. Many longed for opportunities to work closely with other administrators so that they could bring their similar and sometimes different experiences to bear in mutual support. As one middle school assistant principal said: "I would love to have more of a connection to the other people … who have the same background and same knowledge set … [so I could] find out about how they're implementing these types of professional development opportunities for their staff and … [learn more about] the nitty-gritty of helping their teachers become more reflective about their practice and work together more collaboratively."

These leaders' reflections confirm the importance and power of creating spaces for aspiring and practicing leaders to support themselves and each other. The fact that this continues to be hard for so many leaders has important implications for both practice and policy as well as for the fundamental ways we think about what it means to lead and serve (Drago-Severson, 2012b, in press).

'THE MOST IMPORTANT LEARNING'

Findings from our longitudinal study and the takeaways from the leadership development model highlight the critical importance of growing and sustaining oneself as a leader — for its own sake and given the positive link between renewal and productivity (Schwartz, 2013).

As one aspiring principal recently explained, he was excited to attain many skills as he prepared for leadership, but the experience of learning about himself, his development, and the need for renewal was "the most important learning for becoming a school leader."

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WHY DO I GO *to the* CONFERENCE?

IT'S WHERE CONVERSATION, COLLABORATION, AND CRITICAL THINKING ABOUND

By Mark Onuscheck

Over the past three years, Learning Forward's Annual Conferences have provided me with some of the best professional learning experiences in my career. Not only do the conferences bring together leading minds in education, they also open up important dialogue around continuous improvement.

That's why I go — to be a part of conversations that lead positive educational changes, collaborate with other educators working to actualize these changes, and think more critically about how we should all collaborate around the challenges educators face day to day.

Every year, our school brings a group of administrators and teachers to the conference. In this way, we are better able to build a shared understanding and commitment to the work we do together at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. Developing our decisions with multiple informed viewpoints helps us to better communicate, problem solve, and generate fresh ideas. A collaborative spirit drives our work at Stevenson, and Learning Forward conferences help to sustain our central mission: success for every student.

Taking the time out of our busy year to think and reflect about how we make a commitment to the growth of every student and to learn from other schools' successes helps us to identify ways we need to improve and how we can become better decision makers. I've been able to network and stay in touch with schools and leaders from around the country — which is key to my own commitment to staying a forward-thinking educator.

Mark Onuscheck

During the conferences, our team engages in optimistic conversations on wide-ranging topics such as student growth, the use of technologies, and the power of building equity through common formative assessment. Our work in these three areas continues to thrive. And in all of these areas, we are seeing the smart work take hold.

Likewise, the conference supports the more difficult questions we grapple with regarding using data wisely, the function of teacher evaluation, and the leadership behind change. The variety of topics and the expertise at the conferences are visionary and yet downright practical — both of which help me to think about my work in constant revision.

The lasting quality of Learning Forward's Annual Conference is the ongoing challenge to be innovative. Anyone who attends a conference like this is going to leave inspired and thinking differently. Whenever I go to a Learning Forward conference, I'm reminded of why we must come together as professionals — to think together, support one another, and help each other lead in our various roles.

I'm also reminded that we are responsible for pushing each other to be come better every day. The rich diversity of our students demands inventive educators who care passionately about the power of learning. Learning Forward's Annual Conference galvanizes education experts and thoughtful teachers and administrators. This powerful combination working side by side shapes and reshapes the best work we all must do for our students.

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FOCUS FIRST *on* OUTCOMES

WHEN PLANNING CHANGE, IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL

By Janice Bradley, Linda Munger, and Shirley Hord

"We're trying to determine what to do to gain expertise in developing students' understanding of fractions," 3rd-grade teacher Jose said to the teachers in his professional learning community. "We've studied multiple sources of achievement data endlessly, so let's decide what the data tell us and identify where and why our kids are performing so poorly."

"What do we need to do to be able to teach fractions, as defined by the core math standards? Is there something that we need to learn?" Bertha Mae asked.

Thomas said, "We have invested several professional learning community sessions in studying, analyzing, and interpreting student data. We've talked a lot, but now it's time to make a decision on what we need to do about our 3rd graders' lack of success in understanding fractions."

"I agree," Bruce said. "We are all being highly collaborative, as usual, and that's what makes our professional learning community so productive. But we've done enough data analysis. Let me suggest a goal for our own learning that includes the activities we have been discussing: *'We will review the research on how students develop understanding of fraction concepts and interact with our district mathematics coordinator, our math teacher leader, and our school's math instructional coach.'*"

"You have rattled off a bunch of ways to learn how to teach fractions," Judith said. "Are those activities the ones that will help us to reach the goal — whatever it is? We've been dancing around with these and other activities during our discussions. Your statement seems to lack precision about what we need to learn to improve student results. Do we know what it will look like if students understand fractions? Maybe our goal should be: *'We will learn how to effectively teach our students so they understand and precisely articulate their understanding of fractions.'*"

MAPPING A PATHWAY TO CHANGE

Baseball Hall of Famer Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." Educators working to achieve changes in classroom teaching practices that lead to improvement in student learning need to gain clarity in where they are going — what they want to accomplish.

Teachers in a professional learning community need a road map as they begin learning and applying a new practice to ensure they reach their intended goal focused on student learning results. A logic model — a tool used by change leaders to plan a change project and identify performance measures — describes a path toward a desired result. In building a logic model, the planning process focuses first on outcomes and requires the following questions to be answered in sequence:

1. What is the current situation that we intend to impact?
2. What will it look like when we achieve the desired situation or outcome?
3. What behaviors need to change for that outcome to be achieved?
4. What knowledge or skills do people need before the behavior will change?
5. What activities need to be performed to cause the necessary learning?
6. What resources will be required to achieve the desired outcome (McCawley, n.d.)?

The theory of change on p. 47 is often used to plan and assess a change project and shows the relationship between the effectiveness of professional learning and its effects on educator practice and subsequently on student learning. The results for students should be the ultimate goal of the change project. The logic model on p. 46 uses the information from the opening scenario to show how to map a pathway to change.

In the opening scenario, the 3rd-grade teachers in the professional learning community want to increase their knowledge and skills in how to teach students to develop understanding of fractions (educator learning outcome). Some of the processes (activities) used to accomplish this learning outcome were to review the research on how students develop understanding of fractions and interact with math specialists for support.

As a result of these processes, teachers want to gain the necessary knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions (educator performance outcome) to increase students' understanding of fractions (student learning outcome).

Lindsey, Lindsey, Hord, and von Frank (2015) say that learning is key to change: learning what the new practice is and how to use it. The rationale for the Outcomes standard in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning states: "Professional learning that increases results for all students addresses the learning outcomes and performance

LOGIC MODEL AS A ROAD MAP TO REACH INTENDED GOAL

What do you want to accomplish?

Goal statement (intended results for students): By end of school year, 3rd-grade students will increase their understanding of fractions and be able to precisely articulate their understanding of fractions as a result of teachers learning how to effectively teach fractions.

RESOURCES *Time, materials, people*	PROCESSES/ ACTIVITIES *Professional learning*	EDUCATOR LEARNING OUTCOMES *Changes in educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions*	EDUCATOR PRACTICE OUTCOMES *Changes in educator practice*	INTENDED RESULTS FOR STUDENTS *Changes in student results*
• Professional learning community sessions. • Math specialists (school, district).	• Meet in professional learning community sessions. • Study, analyze, and interpret student data. • Review the research on how to teach students to understand fractions. • Interact with math specialists.	• Increased knowledge and skills in teaching students how to develop understanding of fractions. • Recognition of the value of teaching fractions.	• Implementation of effective teaching strategies to increase students' understanding of fractions. • Demonstration of enhanced content knowledge when teaching fractions.	• Evidence showing students' increased understanding of fractions. • Increase in the number of students scoring proficient or higher on fractions.

Sources: Killion (2008), Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna (2008).

expectations education systems designate for students and educators. When the content of professional learning integrates student curriculum and educator performance standards, the link between educator learning and student learning becomes explicit, increasing the likelihood that professional learning contributes to increased student learning" (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 48).

BACKGROUND

This article derives from the work of the Learning Forward Foundation's Research and Support Committee and from committee members' experiences working closely with schools and district staffs on school improvement. The foundation awards seven grants and scholarships through an application and selection process.

The applications focus on the use of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) to accomplish changes in schools and districts that will ensure improvement in classroom practice. With the grantees, the committee explored the complexity of the projects that grantees were undertaking to improve educational practices in their school or district.

Several years of structured and collegial conversations with the grantees provided consistent findings: Just like their colleagues engaged nationwide in school improvement, grantees expressed confusion about the goal(s) of their projects, the actions required to reach the goals, and exactly what results or outcomes they expected to achieve.

The foundation has a strong commitment to the success of those who receive its funds and to the donors who make the funds available. A key to this is to eliminate the confusion suggested in the opening scenario — and expressed by school improvement leaders everywhere — and provide clarity about the structure and content of an improvement project and use of terms such as goals, results, and outcomes.

WHY THE CONFUSION?

Beginning a change project without knowing where one is going creates confusion — uncertainty and doubt about what to do differently to see changes in educator practices and improvement in student results.

When educators focus on activities first, they assume that changes and improvements will result. However, without a clear image of the desired outcomes, educators' frustration occurs year after year when educator practices and students' learning do not change or improve.

In the 3rd-grade professional learning community, Bruce immediately reacted to the data showing low scores with fractions. His quick solution was for the team to review the research on how students develop understanding of fractions and inter-

act with school and district math educators. Bruce began thinking about the processes (reviewing the research and interacting with the math specialist) without clarifying desired outcomes or the changes that would result.

Instead, Bruce needs to define the desired outcomes first, then identify activities and resources that would support educator changes. His response is typical of educators who spend time in professional learning communities analyzing data, then assume that the solution resides in investing in finding resources or engaging in activities, not in envisioning the outcome first. Bruce deserves credit for knowing to review the research first, and then interacting with math specialists; however, this is not the goal of the project. The goals are the outcomes for educators and students.

Why is there confusion about writing goals for change projects? Three possible reasons are:

- Lack of awareness that the confusion exists;
- Habits of individual and collective thinking that have developed in a fast-paced school culture over time; and
- Lack of time and focus for learning about the difference between process-focused and outcome-focused goals.

Habits of thinking that exist in schools involve jumping to solutions to get things done. Principals have been known to say, "Don't just name the problem. Offer the solution." When the data indicate students' lack of achievement, educators rush to actions with which they are familiar.

The 3rd-grade teachers were quick to find activities to improve students' understanding of fractions. Their premise seems logical, yet leads to a conclusion that may be contradictory. When end-of-the-year state assessment scores arrive, teachers are dismayed and flabbergasted that student scores in the fraction areas did not improve or decreased. "We worked so hard! Our short cycle data indicated improvement. Why didn't student scores on the state assessments improve?"

School cultures promote jumping to solutions and not to thoughtful envisioning or planning. Contributing factors might include the fast pace of school life or educators' lack of knowledge of a planning process, such as a logic model.

It's difficult, yet not impossible, for educators to find time to change their mindsets and dispositions by learning about the relationship between professional learning and student results and about logic models as road maps to reach intended goals.

Once the school year begins, educators exist in a culture where they move at a fast pace managing multiple initiatives that change frequently. Some educators describe their day-to-day experiences as overwhelming, where the primary concerns are managing multiple initiatives, not gaining new knowledge to impact students.

SHIFTING FROM CONFUSION TO CLARITY

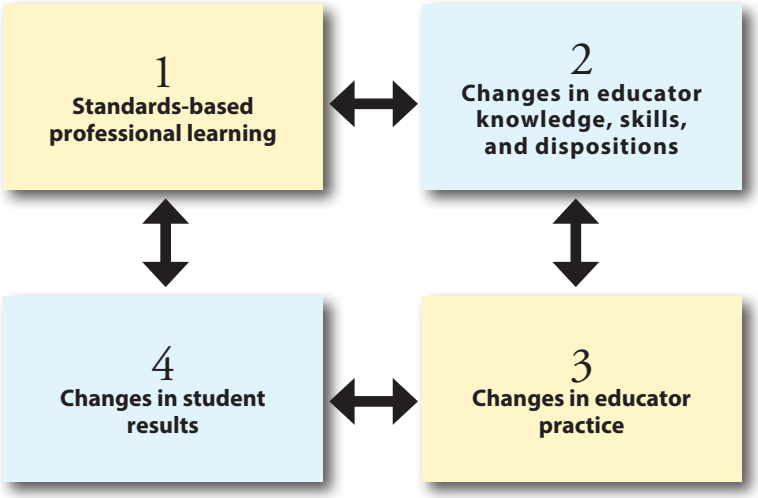
Confusion can serve as an opportunity for learning, as confusion is a natural part of learning. Without confusion about challenging new concepts, it's hard to have new insights. In this case, confusion can be a learner's friend (Mazur, 2012). Two shifts need to happen to address the confusion about the difference between activities and outcomes. First is *shifting mindsets* — the established set of attitudes and ways of thinking. Second is *shifting language* — from words that describe activities to words that describe outcomes.

Shifting mindsets implies moving from an established set of attitudes and ways of thinking about activities before thinking about outcomes to thinking about outcomes first. Carol Dweck's (2007) research on mindsets informs us that fixed mindsets can change. The 3rd-grade teachers' fixed mindset is illustrated by their insistence that a focus on doing something, such as reviewing and interacting with math specialists, will change their learning and practice to increase students' understanding of fractions.

It is essential for the teachers to create an awareness of this confusion — that thinking about activities as a solution before thinking about results will lead to change and improvements.

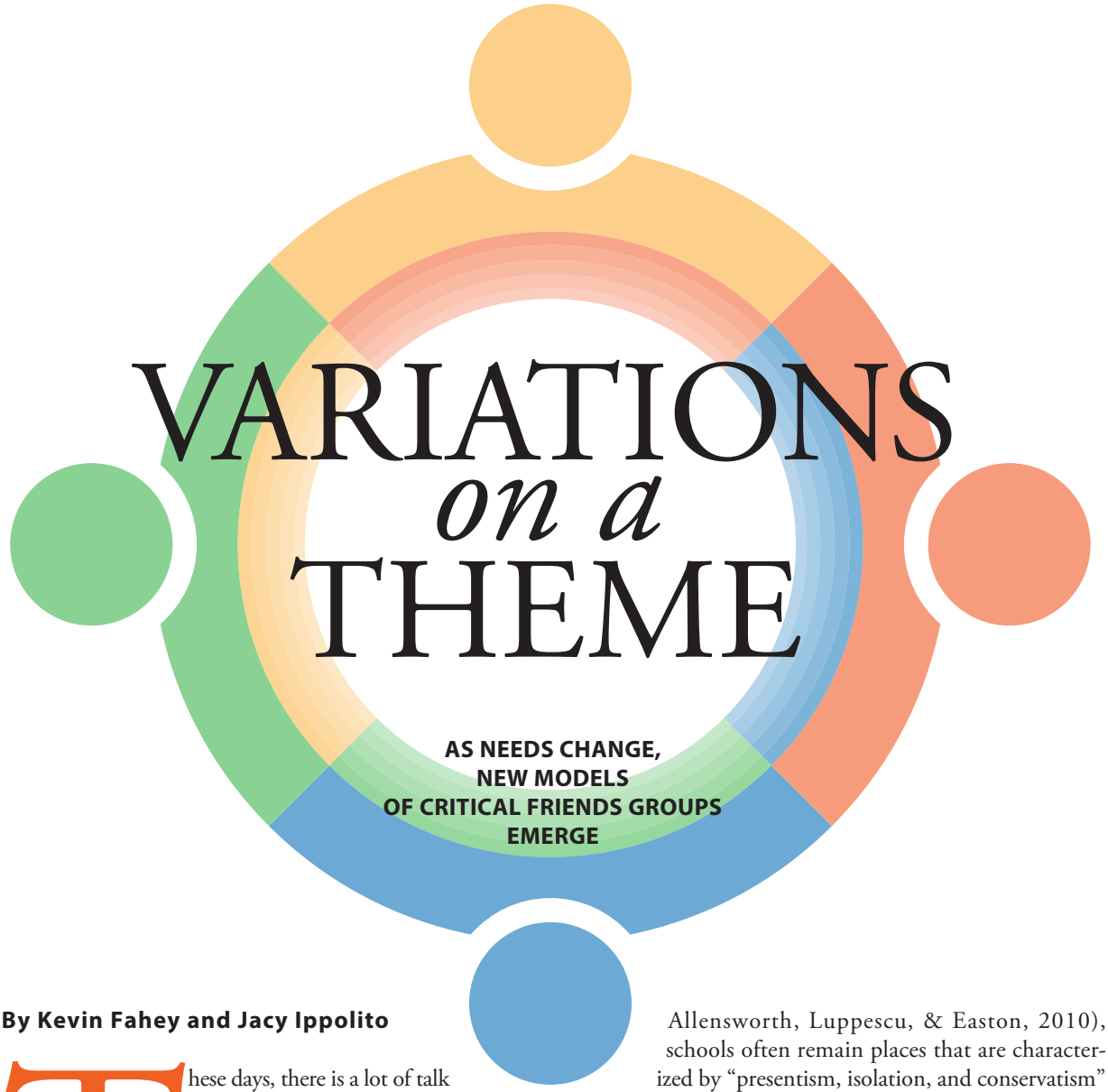
Continued on p. 52

THEORY OF CHANGE: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT RESULTS



1. When professional learning is standards-based, it has greater potential to change what educators know, are able to do, and believe.
2. When educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions change, they have a broader repertoire of effective strategies to use to adapt their practices to meet performance expectations and student learning needs. These changes in educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions are stated as learning outcomes.
3. When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results. These changes in educator practice are stated as practice outcomes.
4. When student results improve, the cycle repeats for continuous improvement.

Source: Learning Forward, 2011, p. 16.



VARIATIONS *on a* THEME

AS NEEDS CHANGE, NEW MODELS OF CRITICAL FRIENDS GROUPS EMERGE

By Kevin Fahey and Jacy Ippolito

These days, there is a lot of talk in schools. There are conversations about research-based practices, authentic assessments, accountability, effective evaluation, standardized tests, and much more. In all of this chatter, three ideas are emerging:

1. For schools to become better places for kids to learn, adults have to continue learning — and at higher levels than ever. They have to learn to work together in unfamiliar ways, think differently about students, and even redefine fundamental assumptions (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley, 2012).
2. Many conversations in schools, even those that are specifically designed to support much-needed adult learning, have marginal impact (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).
3. Despite increasing evidence of the value of coherent, collaborative adult learning in schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010), schools often remain places that are characterized by "presentism, isolation, and conservatism" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Adult conversations that take place in schools where teachers work alone, solving only the most immediate and pressing problems, never build teachers' collective capacity for reflecting on practice, shared understandings, or ability to collaboratively improve the learning of every student. Moreover, educators are often unsure about how to have the professional conversations they — and students — really need.

The Critical Friends Group, a highly articulated model of professional learning, posits that, in order for teachers to learn together in ways that change their practice, the content and nature of their conversations must change (National School Reform Faculty, 2012). The content needs to change from externally driven agendas that address (in a cursory way) their most immediate problems to sustained and rigorous examination of student work, their

own teaching practices, and the fundamental assumptions that guide their work. Not only what teachers talk about, but also how teachers talk needs to change.

What's more, the Critical Friends Group model holds that, for adults to do the challenging learning necessary to transform schools, they need to learn to be reflective, expose and explore fundamental assumptions, give and get feedback, and hold each other accountable for implementing what they have learned. However, talking and learning in this way often goes very much against the grain of how schools typically operate.

STRUCTURE FOR LEARNING

Critical Friends Groups are groups of educators who meet regularly with the intention of improving teaching and learning and are characterized by skilled facilitation and the use of protocols to guide learning (Breidenstein et al., 2012). Protocols push against the pull of how things are in schools, or how we typically talk, and they are the structures that help educators try on different ideas, examine assumptions, ask unsettling questions, and embrace discomfort in a way that is safe and manageable (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2013).

Protocols are not easy answers, and they certainly don't facilitate themselves. However, because the forces that conspire against adult learning in schools are so strong, the efficacy of protocols in supporting adult learning is directly related to the degree to which they are supported by skilled facilitation. McDonald and colleagues (2013) suggest, "At its heart, facilitation is about participation, ensuring equity, and building trust (p.15)."

While the original Critical Friends Group model has existed since 1994, the changing demographics of students nationwide, widening gaps in student achievement, new national standards, and increased accountability pressures are pushing educators to innovate. Over the past few years, we — along with a number of colleagues — have been documenting and creating case studies of new iterations of the model (Breidenstein et al., 2012; Ippolito, 2013), trying to better understand how educators are meeting their own individual professional learning needs and at the same time addressing a complicated set of external demands, polices, and practices that increasingly inform the work of schools.

Critical Friends Groups are typically used by groups of teachers in K-12 school settings for an increasingly broad range of purposes. However, more than 20 years after their emergence, Critical Friends Groups can now also be found in many forms: used by faculty in higher education settings, employed as bridges between university and district partnerships, developed by school leaders to meet across districts, and even taking the form of online virtual Critical Friends Groups.

NEW MODELS EMERGE

The twin pillars of the Critical Friends Group structure, skilled facilitation and structured conversations that support adults' collaborative learning, have proven to be quite generative, spawning multiple noteworthy iterations worth studying and replicating. While the Critical Friends Group model has been part of the professional development landscape for years, the new iterations we share here point to the continued power, versatility, and utility of Critical Friends Groups balancing the tension between collaborative and individual adult learning, which is particularly difficult in our era of increased standardization and accountability.

1. The whole-school Critical Friends Group.

The International School of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, has been using Critical Friends Groups to support the learning of every educator in the school since 2001, when several faculty were trained as coaches.

Principal Kathy Bieser says, "Teachers needed a conversation that was better than the five-minute consultation at the microwave or copying machine." Every teacher at the school is a member of a Critical Friends Group that meets regularly throughout the year

in order to look at student work, consider dilemmas of teaching practice, and give each other feedback.

The groups decide their own learning agendas and are led by an experienced facilitator who uses protocols to support learning-focused conversations among teachers. "Teachers value this work because they have built the capacity to name a question and figure out an answer in a safe, thoughtful environment, and then immediately transfer that answer to their teaching practice," Bieser says.

2. Implementing a strategic plan.

In a very different setting, Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn, New York, also has a long history with Critical Friends Groups. Since 1997, when faculty were first trained to facilitate Critical Friends Groups, the school has experimented with multiple forms of the concept.

However, a new iteration emerged after Packer adopted an ambitious strategic plan that asked teachers to think very differently about their practice, their school, and their students. Teri Schrader, principal of the upper school, says, "The strategic plan was so ambitious and so challenging — in a very good way — that we realized we needed to use our Critical Friends Group skills to build our capacity to work very differently with each other."

During their regular Tuesday meetings, the entire faculty uses the skills and structures they have learned in their Critical Friends Group work to understand, work together, and implement the Packer strategic plan. Schrader says, "We need to work in this way — collaboratively, rigorously, and in a structured way — because there is no hierarchy of good ideas. They can come from anywhere, and we need them all."

3. A content-area focus.

At Brookline High School in Brookline, Massachusetts, a group of teachers is using the tools of critical friendship to improve content-area instruction by adopting and refining disciplinary literacy practices (Ippolito, Charner-Laird, & Dobbs, 2014).

Aligning their instruction with new Common Core State Standards, the Content-Area Reading Initiative began as a group of 18 teachers (including three designated teacher leaders) who represented three departments: English, social studies, and world languages. The initial idea was to engage multiple departmental, Critical Friends Group-style learning communities in several two-year cycles of inquiry and instructional experimentation solely focused on improving how teachers supported students in becoming better content-area readers, writers, and communicators.

While each six-person departmental team could have easily spent its weekly meetings blaming students and flawed school structures — the default position of many ineffective professional learning communities — the participants in the project adopted Critical Friends Group-structured discussion protocols and were coached in facilitation techniques.

Teachers in the project are not only benefitting from using Critical Friends Group practices with each other, but also experimenting with the use of protocols with students and other school leaders. One English teacher reflected, "When we do a protocol around a piece of evidence or an assignment or question that we have, that has always been really productive."

The world languages teacher leader remarked, "We ran protocols during the year with other department heads, and there is no way I would have collaborated or had conversations like that unless I was doing this."

4. Cross-district leadership Critical Friends Group.

Since 2000, a group of cross-district school leaders in Massachusetts has been meeting monthly in a Critical Friends Group designed to help school leaders have essential conversations that in general support their continued learning about leadership and more particularly help each other make meaning out of the complex world of standards, district policies, and bureaucratic demands that characterize the world in which they work (Fahey, 2011).

One principal describes the conversation this way: "Critical Friends Groups are places where you can test your hypotheses. It is the safest place. I do not know any other place where I can do that. I cannot do that with my staff. I cannot do it with my boss. And the only place where you will be taken seriously in this way is the Critical Friends Group" (Fahey, 2007, p. 12).

Over the years, this leadership Critical Friends Group has used different protocols, for example, to consider issues of supervision, school culture, and district politics. Group members also gave each other feedback on data analysis procedures, parental communications, school improvement plans, and faculty meeting agendas.

Ruben Carmona, principal of the Lincoln School in Lowell, Massachusetts, summed up the importance of these conversations: "Our Critical Friends Group is where you learn with other principals and don't have to fake it — pretend to know the answer when you don't" (Breidenstein et al., 2012, p. 68).

5. A higher education Critical Friends Group.

In 2008, the faculty in the Department of Adolescent Education and Leadership at Salem State University in Salem, Massachusetts, began an experiment in which a few faculty meetings each semester were organized as Critical Friends Groups. In these

meetings, like most Critical Friends Groups, faculty presented problems of teaching practice, looked at student work, and gave each other feedback.

Jaime Wurzel, one of the department's senior faculty, described how different this conversation was: "In over 20 years as a university faculty member, I do not think I ever had a focused conversation on teaching practice. These were amazing meetings." In this case, the Critical Friends Group created a conversation that had never happened before.

In 2012, Michelle Pierce, the department chair, reserved half of the year's faculty meeting time for Critical Friends Group work. "A university is still a school, and professors are still teachers," she said. "We need to focus persistently on becoming better teachers and helping our students learn at deeper levels. We need a more meaningful conversation about instruction."

In this case, the department's traditional focus on policy, university governance, and regulation had supplanted the important conversations about instruction. The Critical Friends Group structure helped the department reclaim it.

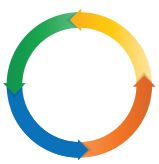
6. A district-university Critical Friends Group.

In 2011, the cross-district leadership Critical Friends Group, searching for ways to bring a broader, more theoretical element to its conversations, invited faculty from Salem State University to join its Critical Friends Group. The offer was accepted by four faculty who understood there is often an impoverished relationship between K-12 leaders charged with building collaborative, reflective schools and university faculty who research, report on, and evaluate those efforts.

After a few meetings, the university faculty reported that the use of protocols had enabled a group with no experience in dealing with substantive issues together to move quickly from the "very topical, parallel play that does not push us forward" to "sustained conversations that center on real issues" (Fahey & Ippolito, 2013, p. 11).

In this iteration of the Critical Friends Group model, university faculty and practicing principals, groups with little authentic experience talking to each other, were able to build very important, useful conversations that informed each member's practice.

7. A virtual Critical Friends Group.



Four years ago, Julie Moore from Kennesaw State University in Georgia realized that many of the teachers she knew wanted to have more learning-focused conversations, often connected to the complex standards that they were charged with implementing in their classrooms. The problem was that her colleagues were spread out across the country, from Maine to Hawaii.

Moore's answer was an iCFG — a virtual Critical Friends Group. Beginning in 2009, eight educators met regularly as part of an iCFG using Google Hangouts technology to learn together, use protocols to closely examine their own practice, and challenge each other's thinking. Learning the technology was easier because the members of the group were already familiar with Critical Friends Group processes and to some degree with each other (Moore, 2012). As one member summed it up, "We would find a way to do our Critical Friends Group, even if we had to do it in Morse code." Ultimately, the iCFG was propelled by the conversation, not the technology.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The simple conclusion after reviewing these iterations is: Educators really want to talk. But the more complicated conclusion is that they want something more than a check-in while using the copying machine or heating up their lunch at the microwave.

In increasingly complex environments governed by district goals and state standards, teachers want their conversations to make a difference — in their teaching practice and for their students. Yet having such conversations remains a challenge in schools.

Across states and school districts, balancing group and individual professional learning needs relies on facilitated conversations and structured discussion protocols — the simple and powerful ideas behind Critical Friends Groups. Moreover, teachers are adopting and adapting these structures in many new and exciting ways.

These iterations suggest that conversations that make a difference require structure, persistence, good facilitation, and courage to work and learn in unfamiliar ways. Experimenting with variations on these themes is where we need to head next. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

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Focus first on outcomes

Continued from p. 47

Awareness opens the door for thinking differently and changing mindsets. Now, mindsets shift to thinking about results first, then activities to achieve results.

Shifting language requires a shift in the difference in action words used to describe outcomes versus activities. Neil Mercer says that, in a community, "language for collective thinking depends on the shared, continuing activities of established groups with common interests and goals" (Mercer, 2000). Educators are in a habit of thinking about activities first when faced with a problem or challenge and, therefore, are quick to jump to solutions by setting process goals.

Teachers need to recognize the relationship between professional learning and student results and understand how logic models serve as road maps to reach intended goals. This opens the door to a new way of thinking and planning with a focus on the desired outcomes first.

Learning is the key to change. As stated in *Standards for Professional Learning,* "Standards for school and system leaders, like teacher standards, describe what effective leaders know and do so that every student and educator performs at high levels" (Learning Forward, 2011). The challenge becomes knowing how to use language to clearly articulate the desired outcomes so that everyone shares the same mental images of expectations.

Educators must build a coherent way of thinking and use language to connect the dots, following this path: data that identify what students need, clear articulation of what educators need to change based on student needs, an image of what it looks like in action in the classroom, ways teachers gain the knowledge and skills to make the changes in their practice, and, finally, activities to reach the desired outcomes.

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SHADOWING

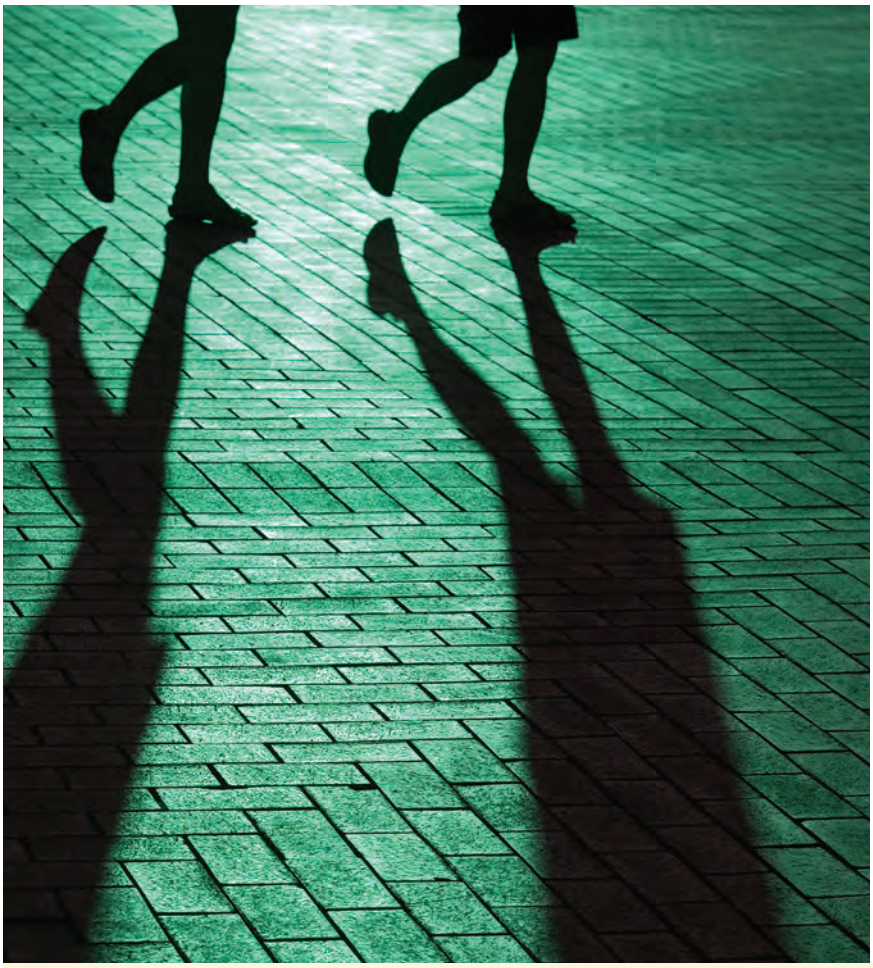
Shadowing is the process of following a student or educator through one day, part of a day, or longer, experiencing what that person experiences for the purpose of professional learning. Educators, including building and district administrators, can shadow in their own or other schools, individually or in a group. Noneducators can also benefit from shadowing. Parents, community members, business leaders, and policymakers can learn through shadowing how school works from a student or educator perspective.

Those being shadowed benefit, too. School staff members have said one advantage to having a shadow is that they have to be prepared. They have said they learn a lot through visitors' questions and comments. "It's almost like having a mirror held up to what I'm doing," said one staff member.

Students also benefit from having shadows. They practice presenting themselves, polish listening skills, and learn others' viewpoints. They learn how to relate to different kinds of people. Students also say they understand better what they are sharing with adults as they try to explain it.

Use this tool to guide your school in planning a shadowing experience.

Source: Soguero, M., Condon, D., Packard, C., & Easton, L.B. (2015). Shadowing. In L.B. Easton (Ed.), *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.



Steps in shadowing FOR THE SCHOOL HOSTING SHADOWS

Step 1	**Prepare the host school.**	• Determine reasons for hosting shadows. • Find a contact person to schedule and conduct visits. • Decide what shadows will do (and not do). • Decide if visitors can shadow teachers and administrators. • Involve students in the decisions, especially about logistics. • Decide how to select students who will be shadowed. • Determine whether students will need an orientation in order to host a shadow.
Step 2	**Prepare for the visit.**	• Talk with educators who wish to shadow to clarify purposes. • Send materials that can be read and discussed before the visit. • Custom design the visit as needed. • Alert the school's staff and students about the visit. • Select students who will host shadows.
Step 3	**The shadowing experience.**	• Orient the visitors as soon as possible. • Give the visitors some opening questions to ask students. • Pair up shadows and students/staff.

Step 4	**Debrief**.	• Debrief midday and at the end of the day for one-day visits.
		• Debrief at the end of the day for multiday visits.
		• Have visitors process their experiences by asking for the following:
		  • Descriptions;
		  • What they were struck by; what had import;
		  • How the important elements relate to visitors' own schools;
		  • What they might want to do about the important elements (next steps).
		• Modify for work with individuals instead of groups.
		• Ask how the school can help with next steps.

Step 5	**Debrief with the school community.**	• Share highlights by phone or email. • Share reflections with students. Include visitors' questions and comments when considering continuous improvement.

Source: Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Steps FOR EDUCATORS WHO ARE SHADOWING

Step 1	**Prepare.**	• Determine purposes for shadowing. • Study materials sent by the school; visit the website. • Note demographics, differences and similarities to own school. • Decide who will make the visit (including an administrator who sponsors the visit and ensuing initiatives).
Step 2	**Shadow.**	• Consider mindset. • Clarify purposes for shadowing. • Clarify differences and similarities between own and host school. • Determine protocol for shadowing (participation vs. observation, ability to record the experience). • Get started with students. • Use an observation form. • Make the experience valuable for everyone. • Check in with colleagues and share preliminary experiences, questions, comments.
Step 3	**Debrief.**	• Participate in the school's formal debriefing process. • Continue the informal process with colleagues. • Think about next steps.
Step 4	**Implement.**	• Consider rollout to the rest of the staff at your school. • Consider adaptations that will need to be made for innovations observed at the host school. • Begin the process of implementation.

Preparing to shadow

1. What is the purpose of the shadowing? What do those who shadow hope to learn?

2. What special conditions will be needed for the shadowing to be effective?

3. What critical elements affect the environment (school or district) within which the shadowing will be done? Describe the demographics and environment:

- ❑ Student demographics.
- ❑ Teacher and administrator demographics.
- ❑ Facts, such as:
  - Number of students;
  - Number of staff;
  - Grade levels served;
  - Length of day and organization of day;
  - Feeder school information; and
  - District information.
- ❑ Culture.
- ❑ School's mission, vision, and goals.
- ❑ Program parameters ("We always have a schoolwide gathering at the beginning of the day," for example, or, "We don't have interscholastic sports, but we do have very exciting intramurals.").
- ❑ Curriculum expectations (standards, instructional methods, assessment techniques, etc.).

4. How do these critical elements affect the purpose of the shadowing?

5. What do you hope to do with what you learn from shadowing?

Source: Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Observation form

What was the main goal of the class? What do you think the students were trying to accomplish? What were they intended to know or be able to do?

In what ways was it clear to you that what students were learning and/or doing was important in some way?

What was the design of the lesson? What were the students doing? What was the teacher doing? What do you imagine the teacher did before this class to help students learn and/or be able to meet the goal of the class?

What was the logic of the lesson? How did things connect — from yesterday to today, from today to tomorrow, from point to point, or part to part? What were the transitions?

Was there any point during your observation when a student (or more than one) became disengaged? What happened to disengage students? What happened to re-engage them?

Source: Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Observation form, *continued*

What did you think about the pace of the class? How did the energy feel? How well did the pace work? Was the energy appropriate? How were pace and energy established?

In what instances were students asked to use their minds well, push their thinking deeper, or use higher-level thinking skills? How did the teacher and/or students stimulate thinking?

How did the teacher and/or students deal with disruptions, instances that might otherwise have taken the class severely off course?

How were learning styles or modalities addressed in this class?

What else did you notice? What struck you? Why?

Source: Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (2015). *Powerful designs for professional learning* (3rd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Researchers pinpoint factors that influence teachers' responses to data

Coaches and professional learning communities influence how teachers respond to data and how they use data to change delivery of instruction — that is, reorganizing how students acquire knowledge and skills. The influence emerges from the relationship between vertical and horizontal expertise and coaches' and professional learning communities' facilitation of teachers' change in instructional delivery. The study also concludes that dialogue mediates changes in practice and that supportive school and district contexts increases the possibility for change.

At a glance

Coaches and professional learning communities within supportive contexts influence how teachers respond to and use data to change delivery of instruction.

THE STUDY

Marsh, J., Bertrand, M., & Huguet, A. (2015). Using data to alter instructional practice: The mediating role of coaches and professional learning communities. *Teachers College Record, 117*(4), 1-40.

Study description

Coaches and professional learning communities can influence how teachers respond to student learning data. More than two-thirds of the instances in teacher data response that resulted in changing delivery of instruction involved a coach or professional learning community, compared to 51% of those responses that resulted in no change in delivery of instruction. The overall number of teachers' responses to data resulting in change in delivery (57) in the schools studied is far less than those instances generating no change in instructional delivery (121).

Researchers draw on the theoretical concepts of vertical and horizontal expertise to explain how coaches and professional learning communities mediate change. Vertical expertise is an individual's knowledge and skill and typically explains novice versus accomplished practice. For coaches and professional learning community leaders, this type of expertise includes skills such as relationship building, content-specific knowledge and skills, data analysis, and connecting with adult learners. For teachers, to work effectively with coaches and in professional learning communities, it includes relationship, inquiry, collaboration, and data use skills.

Horizontal expertise, on the other hand, is "knowledge that is cocreated through interactions and movements across contexts" (p. 4). This type of expertise emerges when coaches, professional learning community leaders, and teachers step out of their individual roles and perspectives and cross boundaries to generate new or hybrid ideas. When both forms of expertise are strong, responses to data that generate changes in instruction are more likely to occur.

Researchers also note that dialogue focusing on both data and instruction is a stronger mediator of changes in instructional practice than dialogue about data alone. In addition, school and district context conditions are key contributors to teachers' responses to data that result in change in instructional delivery.

Questions

The exploratory research study focused on two questions:

- How does working with a coach or professional learning community mediate teachers' responses to data?
- What factors influence the activities and effects of coaches and professional learning communities?

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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

This exploratory small-scale study provides insights on several standards of effective professional learning. It illuminates the importance of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning: Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes.

In schools where response to data resulted in change in instructional delivery, there were structures for and commitment to continuous improvement. District leaders and principals reinforced the vision for data use for classroom instruction and supported learning leaders such as professional learning community leaders and coaches. Resources such as time, personnel, and data management systems supported teachers' responses to data.

Developing vertical and horizontal capacity for data analysis among teachers, coaches, and professional learning community leaders facilitated teachers' use of data for instruction. Selecting and applying learning designs such as dialogue, coaching, and professional learning communities developed teachers', coaches', and professional learning community leaders' vertical and horizontal expertise.

Coaches and professional learning communities provided personalized implementation support for transferring analysis and interpretation of data to change in instruction. Maintaining a focus on the expected performance regarding data and learning outcomes for students strengthens the coherence and goal orientation.

Additionally, this research study provides insights on effective use of coaching and professional learning communities; the role of professional learning community leaders, principals, and district in regard to data; and the necessary school and district contexts that facilitate teachers' responses to data that results in changes in instructional delivery. The leap to results for students is yet unsupported. However, creating changes in instructional delivery is an essential step in generating results for students.

Methodology

The research team conducted an exploratory comparative case study of six middle schools in two districts that employed coaching and professional learning communities as their primary or secondary intervention for improvement. Conditions identified in previous research as supportive of data use informed the selection of schools. These conditions included the presence of data coaches, literacy coaches, professional learning communities, multiple forms of accessible data, and data management systems. Each school had failed to meet state accountability targets for more than five years, served a majority (95% or greater) of nonwhite students, and had selected coaching and professional learning communities as their primary or secondary intervention for improvement.

Researchers, using multiple approaches, collected data in the 2011-12 school year. In each school, they interviewed the coach or professional learning community lead teacher, two to three case study teachers who taught language arts, and school administrators. Researchers interviewed district administrators, held focus groups with approximately 24 non-case study teachers in each school who mostly taught subject other than language arts, and surveyed monthly case study teachers. They visited each school three times during the year to observe district and school meetings.

Analysis

Through a yearlong process of continuous and iterative data analysis, researchers recorded, transcribed, and coded qualitative data for three areas, application of the data cycle, capacity building practices, and contextual conditions at several levels, including individual, school, and district. In addition, researchers applied descriptive analyses to the survey responses and compared them across schools.

Subsequent reanalysis of passages coded as response to data yielded 343 instances that were further narrowed to responses that were associated with reported action taken in response to data and to instruction. This latter analysis yielded 294 instances distributed fairly evenly across the six schools in which teachers responded to data. The 294 instances were further analyzed for change in instructional delivery that was defined as the adoption of a single strategy used once or a long-term change in instructional practice. Of the 294 instances, only a small portion, 57, resulted in actual change in delivery of instruction.

These practices were distinguished from responses teachers made to the data that involved no change in instruction. In the latter responses, teachers retaught the content in the same way, retested students, sent students for assistance out of class, or asked students to reflect on their own data. Researchers then analyzed the instances in which teachers reported using data to change delivery to determine similarities.

Results

Several factors contributed to teachers being able to use data to

change instruction. One factor that positively influenced change in instruction was the presence and strength of coaches' vertical expertise in areas related to working with adults, building trusting relationships, using data, and content knowledge and pedagogy. Another factor is teachers' horizontal expertise.

Researchers conclude that professional learning communities are likely to impede the potential for long-term change when members lack both vertical and horizontal expertise in areas such as collaboration and interpersonal skills and data analysis and focus on sharing discrete strategies rather than using their shared experience to create new understanding and hybrid ideas. Teachers' responses to data reinforced existing rather altered instructional delivery when professional learning communities were clearinghouses for existing practice.

When a coach or professional learning community leader with vertical expertise engaged with teachers in professional learning communities, their horizontal expertise was enhanced, thus leading to more change in instructional delivery. Using contrasting individual case studies of coaches, teachers, and professional learning communities, researchers demonstrate the differences in how vertical and horizontal expertise are applied.

Researchers also conclude that dialogue mediates teachers' responses to data. There were no instances of dialogue about data alone associated with change in instruction. In the schools with data coaches, teachers' responses to data did not lead to change in delivery, but rather other changes, such as reteaching in the same way or retesting students. When dialogue among teachers and coaches included simultaneously a focus on data and an equivalent focus on instruction, change in delivery was more likely. Researchers surmise that dialogue about data disconnected from instruction may fail to offer teachers sufficient guidance for substantive change in instruction.

School and district context factors influenced teachers' responses to data. In schools, these factors included the principal's role in establishing and communicating a vision about data use for instructional purposes, allocating of time for teacher collaboration, and protecting the role of coaches from noninstructional tasks.

At the district level, factors included a commitment to fund and support coaches, an investment in data management systems, and policies regarding data use. When these factors were present and supportive of teachers' use of data for instructional decision making, they facilitated rather than constrained the potential for teacher change in instructional delivery as a response to data.

Limitations

This small-scale exploratory study establishes a foundation for more extensive research and deeper analysis of the role of coaches and professional learning communities in mediating teachers' responses to data about student learning. Researchers note a number of limitations to their study.

The study focuses on six historically low-performing schools that are more resistant to change. Understanding how to implement change in schools with these attributes is essential to promote change in similar ones. The selection of schools, however does not present a full representation of all contexts in which teachers use data.

The use of self-report data with limited observational data is another limitation of this study. Case study teachers were willing participants in coaching and professional learning communities. Their willingness does not shed light on the more reluctant teachers who avoid engaging in coaching or professional learning communities.

Another significant limitation is that the study did not have longitudinal data about the duration of changes in instructional delivery or the effects of those data on students. ■

Learning Forward on YouTube

Learning Forward's YouTube channel features videos on a wide range of topics for educators, administrators, policymakers, and all stakeholders. Scroll through the listings or check out the playlists to find topics of interest to you.

Among the playlists is Redesign PD, which focuses on the work of a diverse group of leading thinkers and designers looking for new solutions to challenges within the current professional learning system. Videos include:

- **Collaborating With Competitors:** Andy Hargreaves connects lessons from the beer industry to improvements in educator learning.

Andy Hargreaves

- **Leadership and Professional Development:** Hargreaves provides a cheeky metaphor that may get you tweeting.
- **Teachers Driving Innovation:** Hargreaves features lessons from reforms and innovative union practice in Ontario, Canada.
- **Push and Pull: Professional Capital:** Hargreaves discusses three types of capital and how we can use them in combination to "push" and "pull" behavioral change.
- **Thinking Schools for a Learning Nation:** Hargreaves outlines Singapore's approach to learning in schools.
- **Lessons From Corporate Learning Systems:** SAS leaders highlight the values and principles that drive the organization's success.
- **Uplifting Professional Learning: Hargreaves Stimulates Leadership Ideas:** Hargreaves speaks about lessons learned and conveyed in his book, *Uplifting Leadership: How Organizations, Teams and Communities Raise Performance,* as well as from *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School.*

www.youtube.com/user/learningforward

From mirage to reality:
Redesign professional learning to improve classroom teaching

A new study from TNTP on the impact of teacher supports in three large public U.S. school systems recommends that we re-envision professional learning by asking fundamentally different questions about what better teaching means and how to achieve it. The more than 25 organizations Learning Forward has convened to consider professional learning system redesign shared a response to the study that outlines a recommended course of action, including:

- Define the critical elements of professional learning systems essential to supporting teachers to bring effective teaching practices to scale;
- Establish tools and resources that help all educators measure the return on investment and impact of teacher supports and other models of professional development so they can make well-informed decisions; and
- Leverage the collective intelligence and work of the partners to invent new strategies and systems that take effective teaching and learning to scale and eliminate all barriers along the way.

www.learningforward.org/publications/blog

Is the school principalship a doable job? It depends

Learning Forward Deputy Executive Director Frederick Brown suggests ways that districts, provinces, and states can help support school leaders.

"What other supports do principals need? Here are a few I would offer:

Frederick Brown

- As part of their training, induction, and ongoing professional learning, principals need help understanding how to more effectively distribute leadership, particularly the management aspects of their work.
- Principals need central offices and regional service centers that are viewed by principals not as 'mandate generators' but as 'centers of support' and 'providers of resources.'
- Principals need opportunities to network with their colleagues in learning communities where they can take ownership of their own learning."

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning_forwards_pd_watch

Apply for the 2015 Learning Team Award

Learning Forward is seeking applications for the 2015 Shirley Hord Learning Team Award. The award honors a school-based team that demonstrates excellence in professional learning.

Based on Learning Forward's definition of professional learning, the award recognizes a school team that successfully implements the cycle of continuous improvement for professional learning that results in student achievement.

Application deadline is Oct. 1.

Winning team members receive a cash gift for their school to support collaborative professional learning, complimentary 2015 Annual Conference registrations, and a profile in *JSD* and on Learning Forward's website. The winning team will be honored at an Annual Conference general session.

Here's how to apply:

- Download and complete the 2015 Learning Team Award application.
- Produce a 10- to 12-minute video capturing the team engaged in the cycle of continuous improvement.
- Include a letter of recommendation from your school principal.
- Complete the brief, two-part essay describing how your learning team exemplifies Learning Forward's definition of professional development, including evidence of student results.
- Include a list of learning team members.
- Complete the talent release form.
- Include a high-resolution team photo.
- Submit applications to **awards@learningforward.org** by Oct. 1.

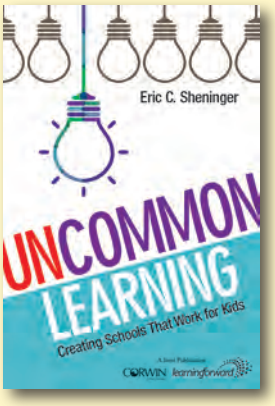
The application and talent release forms can be found online at **www.learningforward.org/get-involved/awards**. For more information, contact Tom Manning at **tom.manning@learningforward.org**.

ABOUT SHIRLEY HORD

Shirley Hord, Learning Forward's scholar laureate, has focused her career on research on the impact of professional learning communities. She has led research teams that have identified the attributes of effective learning teams and collaborative learning's benefits to staff and students. She has assisted schools and districts in building structures and acquiring strategies for this form of professional learning. She has written several books focused on her research and recommendations for school leaders.

book club

UNCOMMON LEARNING:
Creating Schools That Work for Kids
By Eric C. Sheninger



UnCommon Learning provides a process for schools to integrate digital media and new applications with purpose and build a culture of learning with pleasure.

The author shows school leaders how to transform a learning culture through sustainable and innovative initiatives into one that lets students use real-world tools to do real-world work and develop skills society demands. The book addresses such innovations as makerspaces, blended learning, and microcredentials.

Vignettes illustrate key ideas and implementation tips. Relevant links add depth and provide further details on each initiative. Pertinent graphics and data show how each initiative has had a positive impact on student achievement. An appendix at the end of the book provides additional resources to assist leaders with implementation.

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

Let's raise our voices together

on board
DEBORAH JACKSON

Over the past 30-plus years, I have attended many education conferences for different reasons. Now, as president of Learning Forward, I find I have an entirely new perspective on their potential value to support education professionals. Looking back, I see that my reasons for attending conferences go along with what I have needed from any kind of professional learning period, regardless of the venue.

When I was a teacher starting out, conferences were a great way to get exposed to new ideas, people, names, and products. Everything was new, and the ideas helped me develop a repertoire of strategies and a storehouse of information. At that point, conferences helped me develop a sense of the scope of the new world I had entered as a professional. I always returned home with bags of handouts and notebooks, business cards, and names to investigate further.

As I advanced in my career and became a principal, I still had so much to learn about what I needed to be able to do. I was in a new role with entirely new responsibilities. A different set of questions guided my thinking at this point. I was less attracted to the huge marketplace of ideas and ready to focus on specific subsets of skills I needed to develop in my bag of tricks.

•

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

It didn't take long for me to realize that, as a principal, I had responsibilities to other adults in my learning. As the instructional leader in the school, I knew that not only did my skills need attention, but what could I bring home to share with other educators in my building? What learning would help me improve in knowing how to help them? What learning would they need to help our team be our best for our students?

As an administrator supporting other leaders, my lens in attending conferences is quite different. I am still a continuous learner, so the inspirational thought leaders and intensive learning sessions focused on my areas of need are a high priority. I'm also thinking about what I say to my colleagues who lead schools: If you're not confident about the professional learning you facilitate so your staff is successful with their students, what do you need to learn so you will be? There isn't a higher priority for you as a leader. That's still true for me, so I carry my whole team with me when I attend any learning, thinking about their needs and how to ensure they have access to the best. And how I wish I could speak to myself as a new teacher and help her understand how important those connections to other adult learners are from day one.

Finally, as president of Learning Forward and a member passionate about our cause, I feel the Annual Conference offers a unique opportunity to articulate, recognize, and celebrate what we most believe in: that effective professional learning is the most powerful means we have to ensure the best teaching for every student in every school. The conference is an opportunity to raise our voices for what we believe in, together, as a membership association. We're

surrounded by the practitioners and thought leaders who know best what it takes to make professional learning meaningful, and our message is strongest when we speak it together. I look forward to joining you in December. ■

learningforward
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Art sale benefits Learning Forward Foundation

The Learning Forward Foundation will host a new fundraising event at Learning Forward's Annual Conference in December. Called ScholARTship 2015, the event will showcase student and adult artwork, followed by a sale of the original works to educators attending the conference.

Funds raised will be used toward scholarships and grants that give teachers and administrators opportunities to improve their skills and, as a result, improve outcomes for students. The foundation annually awards more than $65,000 in scholarships and grants focused on improving professional learning systems.

Artists, art teachers, and students are encouraged to donate artwork for the fundraiser. Deadline for donations is Oct. 30. Go to **www.learningforward.org/foundation** for more details and to download an art donation form.

LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

Oct. 1:	Application deadline for the 2015 Learning Team Award.
Oct. 1:	Last day to save $50 on registration to Learning Forward's 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
Oct. 6-7:	Learning Forward Fall Institute in Princeton, New Jersey.
Dec. 5-9:	2015 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
Jan. 31, 2016:	Deadline to apply to present at Learning Forward's 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

AdvancED OFFERS LEARNING SCHOOL DESIGNATION

AdvancED and Learning Forward are partnering to offer schools committed to providing quality professional development for their staff an opportunity to earn a Learning School Designation.

The designation provides schools with a set of criteria and research-based practices that indicate a quality professional learning program has been established and sustained at the school level. A school that earns the Learning School Designation is AdvancED accredited and has met or exceeded additional criteria for its quality professional learning practices and programs.

Each institution that earns the Learning School Designation receives a certificate of recognition similar to the AdvancED Accreditation Certificate. Additionally, Learning Forward provides the following benefits to all schools during their designation terms:

- Organizational membership providing access to publications, resources, and learning experiences;
- An invitation to conduct a breakout session at Learning Forward's Annual Conference;
- Recognition in an article in *JSD*;
- Recognition at Learning Forward and AdvancED conferences;
- Membership in an international network of recognized Learning Schools; and
- The opportunity to serve on an external review team for Learning Forward and/or AdvancED.

For more information, visit **www.advanc-ed.org/services/learning-school-designation-certification.**

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Dec. 5–9, 2015 | Washington, DC

Learning Forward 2015 Annual Conference

LEARNING FORWARD'S 2015 ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC

Learning Forward's 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, DC provides educators at all levels with the most powerful forms of professional learning strategies, content, and tools.

Gain practical solutions to the challenges you face in your classroom, school, or district every day, including powerful strategies to build leadership capacities.

WHAT MAKES A LEARNING FORWARD CONFERENCE DIFFERENT?

- ★ Family-style sit-down meals encourage conversation and promote relationship building.
- ★ Ticketed sessions mean your presenter is expecting you and has materials ready.
- ★ One-, two-, three-, and four-hour sessions promote deeper learning.
- ★ Exhibitors offer valuable products and resources specific to professional learning.

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*$50 savings on 3-, 4-, or 5-day registrations only.

abstracts

Brainstormers welcome.
By Tracy Crow

This issue's focus on the insights, thought leaders, and promising work in progress in the field that will be featured at Learning Forward's Annual Conference is a starting point to launch readers and learners into exploring ideas.

The big money question:
Action research projects give district a clear picture of professional learning's impact.
By Barbara Dill-Varga

How do you know if the resources you have allocated to support professional learning in your school district are improving the quality of teaching and/or impacting student performance? A Chicago-area district, facing a budget deficit, used teacher action research to determine whether its investment in cooperative learning paid off. Along the way, the district learned that empowering teachers to investigate and evaluate their own instructional practices is key to sustaining authentic professional learning.

Visible leading:
Principal Academy connects and empowers principals.
By Jennifer Hindman, Jan Rozzelle, Rachel Ball, and John Fahey

Answering a challenge from John Hattie, School-University Research Network leaders at the College of William & Mary in Virginia created the SURN Principal Academy to improve principals' instructional leadership and relationship-building skills. A hallmark of the academy is collaborative observation using a protocol that measures student engagement. Academy principals take on the role of lead learner as they design and lead professional learning for faculty and conduct action research using data to monitor growth and assess impact.

Digital distinction:
Badges add a new dimension to adult learning.
By Kellie Ady, Keli Kinsella, and Amber Paynter

Digital badges are icons that represent achievements for specific endeavors. These badges, which can be attached to someone's digital or online profile and viewed publicly, add a new dimension to adult learning. Educators at Cherry Creek School District in Colorado developed a digital badge system for professional learning that creates a consistent and intentional structure for both publicly recognizing the work teachers are doing and supporting a culture and climate of celebration. This system also focuses learning on mastery of content in smaller steps.

If I could run a school:
Teacher-powered schools require a divergent set of skills.
By Lori Nazareno

Most teachers are accustomed to operating in the traditional model of teaching and learning. Teacher-powered schools require teachers to develop a divergent set of skills. Two of the most important are how to manage a school collaboratively and how to observe and evaluate one another. When teachers design and operate teacher-powered schools, they must learn these skills so that their students, team, and school can thrive.

How principals can reshape the teaching bell curve.
By Kim Marshall

Within every school, there is a bell-shaped curve of teaching quality. Some teachers use highly effective practices almost all the time, a larger group is solidly effective, others work at a mediocre level, and a few are mostly unsuccessful with students. To improve subpar teaching and motivate solid teachers to take their work to a higher level requires five key elements: Create professional working conditions, foster teacher teamwork, coach teachers, use student surveys, and hire and fire well.

Make time to recharge:
Growth and renewal play key roles in sustaining school leaders.
By Ellie Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Being a school leader in any role is hard, gratifying, and a gift of love. While it can be enormously satisfying to serve students, teachers, families, and school communities, leaders need to refill themselves in order to continue giving to others. A learning-oriented model of leadership development and capacity building emphasizes the importance of caring for one's own self-development and renewal while caring for and supporting others.

Why do I go to the conference?
It's where conversation, collaboration, and critical thinking abound.
By Mark Onuscheck

Not only does Learning Forward's Annual Conference bring together leading minds in education, it also opens up important dialogue around continuous improvement, says an Illinois high school's director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. And that's why he's coming back — to be a part of conversations that lead positive educational changes, collaborate with other educators working to actualize these changes, and think more critically about how we should all collaborate around the challenges educators face day to day.

features

Focus first on outcomes:
When planning change, improved student learning is the ultimate goal.
By Janice Bradley, Linda Munger, and Shirley Hord

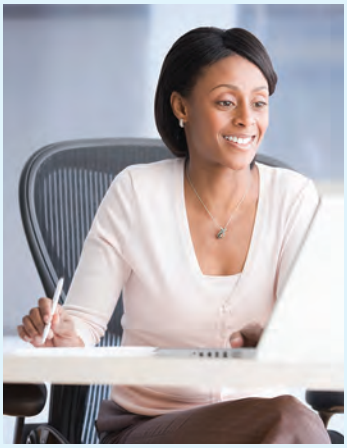
Baseball Hall of Famer Yogi Berra once said, "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." Educators working to achieve changes in classroom teaching practices that lead to improvement in student learning need to gain clarity in where they are going — what they want to accomplish. Two tools to help educators map this path are a logic model and a theory of change.

Variations on a theme:
As needs change, new models of Critical Friends Groups emerge.
By Kevin Fahey and Jacy Ippolito

While the original Critical Friends Group model has existed since 1994, the changing demographics of students nationwide, widening gaps in student achievement, new national standards, and increased accountability pressures are pushing educators to innovate. Critical Friends Groups can now be found in many forms: used by faculty in higher education settings, employed as bridges between university and district partnerships, developed by school leaders to meet across districts, and even taking the form of online virtual Critical Friends Groups.

Write for JSD

- Themes for the 2016 publication year will be posted soon 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.**



INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

columns

Lessons from research:
Researchers pinpoint factors that influence teachers' responses to data.
By Joellen Killion

Coaches and professional learning communities within supportive contexts influence how teachers respond to and use data to change delivery of instruction.

From the director:
Annual Conference opens the door to possibilities.
By Stephanie Hirsh

The unsung heroes of professional learning share their learning, resources, and results at Learning Forward's Annual Conference.

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.**

Annual Conference opens the door to possibilities

There's been a lot of talk lately about all the money wasted on professional development. Critics would have us believe that very little of what is labeled as professional learning is worth the investment.

There are times when I can appreciate their frustration and fury and commit to work even harder to see professional development improved for more educators. Then I think about the many educators I have met that can speak articulately about their professional learning plans, programs, and products. They understand the real purpose of professional learning, hold themselves to high standards, and produce the results they expect from it.

We can find these individuals in communities and school systems across North America and beyond. Fortunately, many of them take time away from their important day-to-day work to share their learning, resources, and results at Learning Forward's Annual Conference. These are the unsung heroes of professional learning. At the conference and within our publications, you can hear and read about learning and improvement efforts in:

- **Fort Wayne, Indiana,** the fastest-growing and improving school system in Indiana. The district attributes its success to its investment in its central office staff and school principals as lead learners and coaches for others.
- **Long Beach, California,** a former award-winning Broad school system. Long Beach embraces the process of continuous improvement and going slow to go fast in order to bring personalized and data-driven professional learning to its staff.
- **50-plus school systems in the state of Washington** committed to generating better results from their professional learning investments by redesigning their systems, articulating their theory of action, establishing accountable results, and implementing a steady course of action and being publicly accountable to their colleagues committed to the same agenda.

We use conferences and publications to identify, elevate, and showcase the best work on the continent and beyond. While we know that information alone does not provide adequate support to sustain change — particularly in our most challenging situations — it is absolutely critical to opening doors and maintaining momentum.

Through these venues, we can highlight powerful data, powerful stories, and powerful tools.

Powerful data remind us of what is possible and ask us to check our own assumptions. These data allow us to see how others made progress at similar moments, how they didn't give up, and how we might collect it to celebrate how far we've come.

Powerful stories inspire us to think differently about the directions we might take. They remind us of why we are doing this work and what we might expect around the next corner.

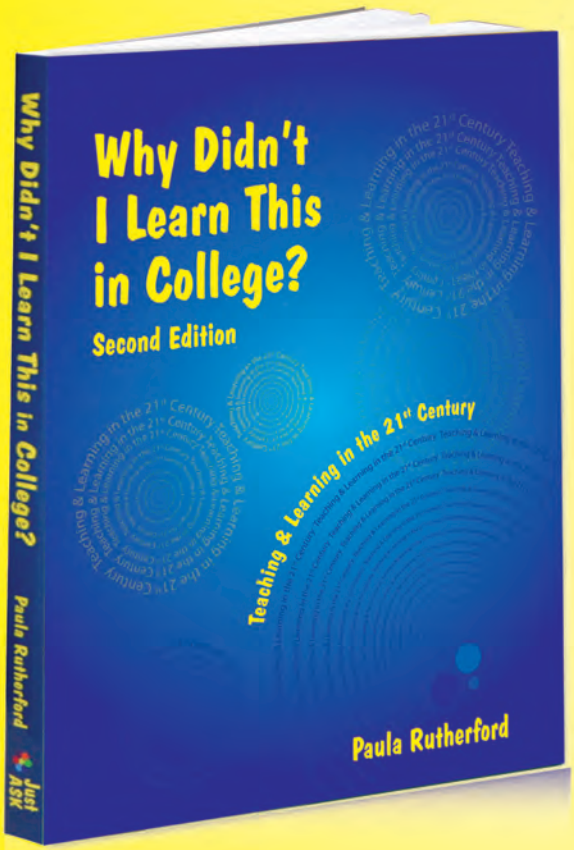
Powerful tools give the first step we need to try something different and experience the benefit of new pathways and possibilities. They help us overcome immediate barriers and maintain our pathway forward.

These are the kinds of help we get at conferences and in publications. While we would never suggest that adult learners can survive on conferences and publications alone, they are for many the essential ingredients that launch their learning and lead to the results we all desire.

My hope for you is that someday you have the opportunity to attend a conference that provides this level of change experience and community and that our magazine fills in the rest throughout the year. I look forward to seeing you in D.C. ■

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

Why Didn't I Learn This in College?



Support your new teachers by providing them with a resource that prepares them for 21st century classrooms. ***Why Didn't I Learn This in College?*** includes dozens of teacher-tested procedures, routines, suggestions for organizing classrooms for learning, and online tools and templates. If you believe that the best management program is a strong instructional program based on the **Common Core**, **TEKS**, **SOLs**, and other state standards, this book is the one you want for your new teachers.

Join over 600,000 new teachers and mentors who are using this text in their induction and mentoring programs. You will be glad you did!

While new teachers may say they need classroom management skills, what they really need to know is how to design rigorous and appropriately scaffolded lessons and how to create learning-centered classrooms where high-level engagement and learning can occur. We must help new teachers learn that the end they should have in mind for their students is not that they are well-managed, but that they are well-educated.

- Paula Rutherford

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