

SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT TEACHERS
NEED TO MAKE
PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING
WORK p. 51

JSD

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL



**Los Angeles puts
Literacy Design
Collaborative
to work** p. 18

**Common goal unites
content-area teachers
in Wyoming district** p. 24

**The view from
the principal's
office** p. 46

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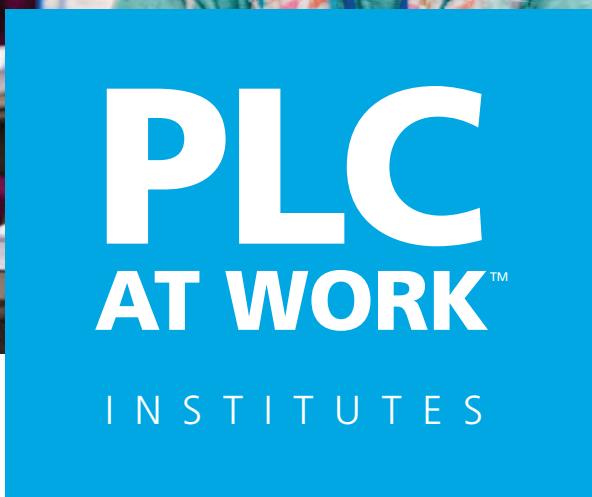
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October 10–12	San Antonio, TX	
October 19–21	Des Moines, IA	



Solution Tree

8 UP CLOSE

DEEP SMARTS

START HERE

- Make the connection.
- What is an instructional framework?

10 Smart currency:

DEFINING LITERACY IN THE MODERN AGE IS CRUCIAL TO BUILDING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THAT PREPARES STUDENTS FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY.

By Eric Celeste

Our challenge is to understand what literacy is, how essential it is to learning, and therefore how important it is in the context of professional learning.



12 Power plan:

HIGH SCHOOL FINE-TUNES INSTRUCTION TO BUILD READING STRENGTH AND STAMINA.

**By Douglas Fisher
and Nancy Frey**

To help students read more and better, teachers at a California high school incorporated three instructional additions to their literacy efforts.

18 Tailored for a perfect fit:

FLEXIBLE TEMPLATES PROMOTE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT AND TEACHER COLLABORATION.

By Linda Jacobson

Literacy Design Collaborative's templates and tools support students in doing work aligned to the Common Core. In the process, teachers work with colleagues to refine the lessons and tasks to ensure they are asking students the right questions.

24 Common goal unites district:

LEADERS AND TEACHERS BUILD LITERACY AND A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENT LEARNING.

**By Joanna Michelson
and James A. Bailey**

Wyoming's Uinta County School District #1 is engaging in literacy-focused professional learning in social studies, science, and vocational education. Here's how the district got everyone on board and what they've learned along the way.

28 Literacy mash-up:

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC PRACTICES EMPOWER CONTENT-AREA TEACHERS.

**By Hannah Dostal
and Rachael Gabriel**

Explore a process for building teachers' capacity to identify, develop, and engage in discipline-specific literacy instruction that supports both content and literacy aims.

34 Delicate layers of learning:

ACHIEVING DISCIPLINARY LITERACY REQUIRES CONTINUOUS, COLLABORATIVE ADJUSTMENT.

**By Jacy Ippolito,
Christina L. Dobbs,
Megin Charner-Laird,
and Joshua F. Lawrence**

Explicit professional learning about disciplinary literacy combined with tools that increase collaborative capacity form a powerful combination that leads to inventive and invested participation in implementing disciplinary literacy in a variety of classrooms.

40 Dive into the deep end:

ANCHOR TEXTS BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF COMPLEX IDEAS.

**By Diane P. Zimmerman,
Katrina M. Litzau,
and Vicki L. Murray**

Professional learning based on anchor texts uses pivotal texts

selected to anchor a complex set of ideas. When the anchor text is paired with short readings, the discourse among learners deepens understanding and moves theory into practice.

46 The view from the principal's office:

AN OBSERVATION PROTOCOL BOOSTS LITERACY LEADERSHIP.

**By Sandi Novak
and Bonnie Houck**

Minnesota principals use the literacy classroom visit to gather data on the status of literacy teaching and student learning, then draw on the data to discuss the strengths and needs of a school community using broad data patterns that focus on the school or district, not on individual teachers.



feature

51 The power of teacher agency:

WHY WE MUST TRANSFORM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SO THAT IT REALLY SUPPORTS EDUCATOR LEARNING.

By Laurie Calvert

How can schools and systems bridge the gap between the professional learning teachers need and what they are getting? The key is teacher agency — the capacity of teachers to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues.



departments

4 FROM THE EDITOR

BY TRACY CROW

6 ESSENTIALS

KEEPING UP WITH HOT TOPICS IN THE FIELD

- Evaluating evaluations
- Feedback tools
- Professional learning success
- From improvement to learning
- Deeper learning
- Common Core support

57 learningforward.org

Site highlights.

58 LESSONS FROM RESEARCH

BY JOELLEN KILLION Changes in coaching study design shed light on how features impact teacher practice.

61 @ LEARNING FORWARD

NEWS AND NOTES

- Agents for Learning competition
- On Board
- Book Club
- Foundation seeks your stories

64 TOOL

Speak up for better learning.



66 ABSTRACTS

for April 2016 *JSD*

68 FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH With a continuous improvement mindset, we can achieve equity and excellence.



Are you professional learning literate?

I didn't realize until recently that people use the term wine literacy — that is, being able to talk knowledgeably about the fundamentals of wine or being able to read a wine. The idea makes sense for talking about a field where there are experts and then there are people who buy bottles based on how pretty the labels are.

It's common to hear the terms financial literacy, computer literacy, social literacy, and many others. While Eric Celeste explores what literacy means for educators and its implications for professional learning (see p. 10), I've been thinking about what would constitute professional learning literacy. What does an educator have to know to be considered literate in professional learning? And what does he or she have to know to be considered an expert?

At Learning Forward, the fundamentals always start with the Standards for Professional Learning. We do it on p. 8 when we draw connections between the standards and the role content has in professional learning. We dove into the standards in the February issue of *JSD*. We consider them whenever we approach a particular topic.

And is that where professional learning literacy starts? Or is there a

•

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

more fundamental set of concepts, perhaps contained within the standards — really elementary ideas that are the first things a professional learning novice picks up. If I had to start a professional learning ABCs, I might start with these ideas and build from there.

Educators don't know everything they need to know when they graduate from college or obtain their teaching certificates. Just as professionals in any field need to continue to grow throughout their careers, so do educators. What we know about students and learning increases, what we expect from educators changes, and the world continues to evolve in ways we can't anticipate.

All learners are not alike. All adults don't have the same needs or learn in the same ways as each other. At the same time, all adults don't have the same needs or learn in the same ways as students. Adults at any stage of their career have expertise and prior knowledge to inform their ongoing growth.

Practice makes perfect. Gaining awareness of a new strategy or new content doesn't change what educators do in classrooms. Sustained opportunities to investigate ideas over time, consider multiple contexts, and practice with colleagues and students leads to real application of learning.



Collaboration amplifies learning.

Given the wide range of expertise in every school, colleagues benefit from frequent opportunities to talk, observe one another, share successes and challenges, and intentionally problem solve and gain new knowledge.

Professional learning is tied to student learning. If educators aren't engaged in learning that helps them change and grow in ways that ultimately help their students change and grow, they are wasting precious time and resources.

Maybe for some stakeholders, being professional learning literate is enough. If parents and community members knew these ABCs, they'd understand the importance of supporting, for example, time for teams to meet, or for sustaining funds to keep coaches in schools. For others, the basics are just a first step on the way to expertise as they become learning leaders responsible for planning and sustaining meaningful learning across a building or district.

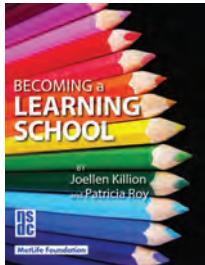
What would be in your professional learning ABCs? Let me know or post your thoughts on Twitter to @LearningForward. ■



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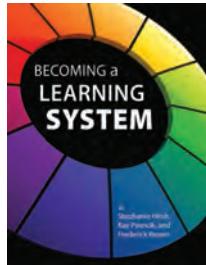
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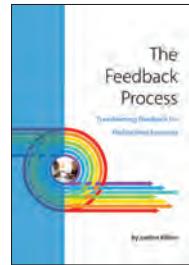
From setting the stage to engaging the community in understanding the purpose of collaborative professional learning, this volume covers what you need to know to implement more effective professional learning.



Becoming a Learning System

Stephanie Hirsh,
Kay Psencik, and
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The Feedback Process: Transforming Feedback for Professional Learning

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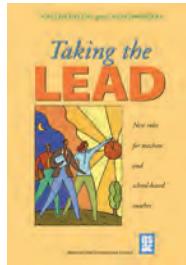
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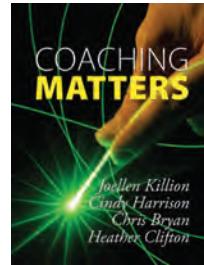
Lois Brown Easton
Design learning experiences that change teacher practices



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Joellen Killion,
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This book explores the complex, multifaceted roles played by teacher leaders and school-based coaches and examines district and school expectations, hiring practices, and deployment of these educators.



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EVALUATING EVALUATIONS Revisiting the Widget Effect: Teacher Evaluation Reforms and the Distribution of Teacher Effectiveness

Brown University, 2016

In 2009, a study by TNTP (The New Teacher Project) documented the discrepancy between formal teacher evaluation and perceptions of actual teacher effectiveness, showing that administrators rate more teachers above proficient whom they actually believe should be rated below. This discrepancy, named the "widget effect," is revisited in this working paper, which examines 19 states that have adopted major reforms to their teacher evaluation systems. The report finds that the widget effect has improved only slightly: In a majority of these states, for example, less than 3% of teachers are rated below proficient. The authors find that a lack of professional development support is a key reason why some principals don't feel it is fair to evaluate their teachers stringently.

http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mkraft/files/kraft_gilmour_2016_revisiting_the_widget_effect_wp.pdf

FEEDBACK TOOLS

The Examining Evaluator

Feedback Survey

*Institute of Education Sciences,
November 2015*

This survey was designed to help administrators gather information from teachers about their perceptions of evaluator feedback and teachers' self-reported responses to that feedback. District and state administrators can use this survey to collect information on teacher perceptions of five key characteristics of evaluator feedback: usefulness, accuracy, credibility, access to resources, and responsiveness. Administrators can also use the information to better understand teacher perceptions of new evaluator feedback procedures. This report contains the Examining Evaluator Feedback Survey itself, along with information about how it was developed, how it can be used, and its reliability and validity.

www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/central/pdf/REL_2016100.pdf

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUCCESS

Impact of the National Writing Project's College-Ready Writers Program on Teachers and Students

SRI International, 2015

In 2012, the National Writing Project (NWP) won an Investing in Innovation grant to provide professional development for secondary teachers in high-poverty rural school districts in 10 states (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Tennessee). NWP designed a professional development program to improve teachers' ability to teach to college- and career-ready

writing standards, with a specific emphasis on improving students' skills in writing arguments based on nonfiction texts. In this evaluation, SRI International found that NWP's College-Ready Writers Program had had a positive, statistically significant effect on four attributes of student argument writing — content, structure, stance, and conventions. In particular, students demonstrated greater proficiency in the quality of reasoning and use of evidence in their writing.

www.sri.com/sites/default/files/publications/sri-crwp-research-brief_nov-2015-final.pdf

FROM IMPROVEMENT

TO LEARNING

Beyond Ratings: Re-Envisioning State Teacher Evaluation Systems as Tools for Professional Growth

New America, March 2016

By conducting in-depth interviews with state education agency leaders in 30 states and the District of Columbia, the authors found that states have prioritized implementing teacher evaluation systems and are largely not using them to promote ongoing teacher learning and growth. The report looks at this as one example of how the evaluations, despite dismissing very few teachers, have bred distrust among some educators. "While most educators believe in the goals of new



college- and career-ready standards," it says, "they do not want to be set up to fail. For educators to succeed, they want and need targeted support."

Despite recognition of this by local agencies, the authors say that the dominant narrative around evaluation has been about whether teachers are being fairly rated as "ineffective" or "in need of improvement" rather than the ongoing development of all teachers. This is unfortunate, the authors say, because although these teacher evaluation systems are still relatively young, some evidence exists that investing in better systems for both accountability and development could help all teachers (and their students) improve.

www.newamerica.org/education-policy/beyond-ratings-2

DEEPER LEARNING

Teacher Leadership & Deeper Learning for All Students
Center for Teaching Quality, 2016

The author examines current reforms' limitations as an introduction to exploring the promise of deeper learning — for both students and teachers. By exploring how teachers learn to lead as well as the conditions necessary for their expertise to spread, this paper identifies three promising shifts: "next-generation accountability approaches that tap (and make more visible) teacher expertise; increasing awareness of how top-performing nations invest in teacher leaders (as well as of how leadership is flattening in the private sector); and online networks that make it easier than ever for teachers to learn from and collaborate with one another." One predicted innovation: the use of microcredentials in the digital professional learning environment.
www.scribd.com/doc/303397058/CTQCollab-DeeperLearning



COMMON CORE SUPPORT

What Supports Do Teachers Need to Help Students Meet Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy?

RAND Corporation, 2016

This report provides U.S. educators' perspectives on their readiness and needs for support to help students meet state standards. Findings are drawn from surveys of the American Teacher and School Leader panels, national samples of K-12 teachers and school leaders. It found that the majority of K-12 teachers may need additional support to address state English language arts and literacy standards. It highlighted that, among other findings, English language arts teachers in Common Core states reported less familiarity with their state literacy standards than their counterparts in non-Common Core states, and that the majority of non-English language arts teachers expected to address literacy standards "felt not at all or only slightly prepared to do so, were not familiar enough with the standards to use them in lesson planning, and had a high need for professional development related to the standards."

www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1300/RR1374/RAND_RR1374.pdf

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MAKE THE CONNECTION

Content is a key component of the Standards for Professional Learning

Sometimes Learning Forward's tight focus on the Standards for Professional Learning as the fundamental building blocks for meaningful educator learning can lead members to ask a logical question: What about content? Isn't content-specific professional learning essential if educators are increasing their effectiveness in helping all students learn and perform at high levels?

The answer to that question

is absolutely yes. Yes, content-specific professional learning is essential.

Content is embedded throughout the Standards for Professional Learning, both implicitly and explicitly. The introduction to the standards makes the first connection between what educators need to learn and what students need to learn: "The standards make explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the

knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels" (Learning Forward, p. 14). With that key purpose for professional learning, content-specific learning will always take center stage.

Let's explore how each standard has an indelible connection to content and consider how these connections are critical to planning, implementing, and evaluating professional learning.

OUTCOMES

The standard that most fully and explicitly describes the importance of content in effective professional learning is the Outcomes standard. It states: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards" (p. 48).

The rationale for the standard describes educator learning focused

on student learning outcomes, and "whether the learning outcomes are developed locally or nationally and are defined in content standards, courses of study, curriculum, or curricular programs, these learning outcomes serve as the core content for educator professional learning to support effective implementation and results" (p. 50).

Such professional learning, the rationale continues, engages educators in the kinds of learning experiences that

they are expected to offer students in their classrooms.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Learning Communities standard puts content at the core of team learning through its vision of the cycle of continuous improvement, where teams engage in inquiry and research to solve specific classroom challenges. The adult and student learning needs that drive their collective work are content-based

and determined through an examination of data.

The work learning team members do together is driven by the content they teach, along with how they will teach it. The Learning Communities standard also describes the importance of goal alignment across school and system visions and goals, many of which encompass content-specific benchmarks and outcomes.

LEADERSHIP

Content-specific learning is one element of the learning that leaders do as they fulfill their role as models for, leaders of, and advocates for high-quality professional learning. As instructional leaders and learning facilitators, school and system leaders share responsibility for understanding and achieving content-based visions for students.

As advocates for professional learning, they see the connections between the demands that college- and career-ready standards place on students and those they place on teachers, and they help to create systems and structures that give educators opportunities to deepen content knowledge and content-specific pedagogical skills.

RESOURCES

The Resources standard explores the time, money, materials, and people essential to effective professional learning. Some of those resources will have an obvious content connection — for example, materials might include an online resource designed to deepen content knowledge within a discipline. Or an instructional coach might be content-oriented, providing support particularly in math or literacy. Other resources might not have such an obvious content connection, but without dedicated time, for example, there isn't a widely accessible means for job-

embedded teams to focus on specific content challenges in their learning.

DATA

Among the multiple sources of data that educators use in determining adult and student learning needs are student performance data from particular classes and subject areas along with content-specific data from high-stakes assessments. As they analyze data in sufficient depth to form learning goals for themselves and their students, they look at specific content areas to a level of precision that helps them set goals for the time period their learning will cover, whether it is a six-week grading period or over the course of a year.

LEARNING DESIGNS

In the Learning Designs standard, educators use their understanding of learning theory, learning strategies, and the desired outcomes of professional learning to determine the best approach to engaging educators in their learning experience. Specific content tied to student and adult learning outcomes is embedded throughout that equation and helps learning leaders make decisions about the approaches that will be most appropriate in any given situation.

IMPLEMENTATION

Without attention to the Implementation standard, educators aren't likely to get the sustained support that helps them apply what they are learning in their classrooms. None of the content that adults and students need to learn will stick if learners don't have frequent opportunities to practice, ask questions, get feedback, or apply content-specific strategies in context.

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

WHAT IS AN INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK?

The book *Becoming a Learning System* explores the importance of an instructional framework to create coherence in a school system, connecting student and adult learning goals and purposes. Consider how such a framework puts the content students learn within the larger learning system.

A FRAMEWORK OFFERS:

- A clear, research-based vision that includes high-quality professional learning standards and a set of student performance expectations, along with a description of the instructional strategies that will help ensure students meet them;
- The district's stated beliefs and assumptions about student learning expectations aligned with its strategic plan and goals, and a summary of the research that supports those beliefs and assumptions;
- Structures and supports to help school communities develop purposeful, thoughtful curriculum maps, assessments of and for learning, and inspiring and engaging instructional designs;
- A districtwide assessment plan;
- A collection of reference materials to help school-based teams understand the framework's concepts and assumptions;
- A description of effective instruction and assessment strategies with an analysis of how they address Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning;
- A guide for planning professional learning at the district and school levels; and
- A tool to communicate the goals of the standards to the community.

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



SMART CURRENCY

**DEFINING LITERACY IN THE MODERN AGE
IS CRUCIAL TO BUILDING
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
THAT PREPARES STUDENTS
FOR THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

By Eric Celeste

Policymakers and education professionals have emphasized the importance of literacy in a global economy many times this century — in no instance more directly than when a young U.S. senator from Illinois addressed the American Library Association in June 2005:

“[L]iteracy is the most basic currency of the knowledge economy we’re living in today,” then-senator Barack Obama told the library association. “Only a few generations ago, it was OK to enter the workforce as a high school dropout who could only read at a 3rd-grade level. ... But that economy is long gone” (Obama, 2005).

The speech was given more than a year before Facebook was available to anyone other than university students and more than two years before the iPhone was announced. To suggest that the literacy demands of the knowledge economy have increased and diversified greatly would be

an understatement. How fast are such demands shifting? A 2016 World Economic Forum report on skills stability notes that “nearly 50% of subject knowledge acquired during the first year of a four-year technical degree [will be] outdated by the time students graduate.”

It’s crucial then that we understand what literacy is, how essential it is to learning, and therefore how important it is in the context of professional learning. If we don’t thoughtfully examine our students’ most essential learning needs now and into the future, we are unlikely to conceive professional learning that ensures educators have the knowledge and skills to meet those needs.

In 2012, a joint report by Princeton University and the Brookings Institute attempted to define literacy for the digital age. It concluded that literacy does not mean “simply the ability to decode words or read a text, as necessary as these elementary skills are. Instead we mean the ability to use reading to gain access to the world of knowledge, to synthesize information from different sources, to evaluate argu-



ments, and to learn totally new subjects” (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012).

The following year, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) updated its own definition of 21st-century literacies, noting that “[a]s society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies.”

Noting that these literacies are “multiple, dynamic, and malleable,” NCTE said that those entering the 21st-century global society must be able to do six things:

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;



- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts; and
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013).

Given this broad, complex definition of literacy and its centrality to all learning in schools, it's no wonder that many professional learning efforts at the district or school levels begin with tackling literacy challenges.

For example, schoolwide literacy learning supported by instructional coaches has often been a first step in addressing achievement gaps, especially those in high-poverty systems or those deemed underperforming under the No Child Left Behind Act, recently replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). As Learning Forward (then known as National Staff Development Council) noted in a 2010 report co-published with the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, "In some cases, whole-school efforts to improve literacy instruction ... through intensive school-based literacy programs and coaching may have had the positive effect of providing greater opportunities for teachers to engage in intensive, sustained, school-based professional development activities that are coherent with district curriculum, assessment, and ac-

countability policies" (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010).

This still fits today with our belief that professional learning is meaningless if it is not embedded in content that students are learning and that teachers need to understand deeply. That such literacy has broadened from a text-based definition to "a symbolic representation of ideas" (as noted in this issue's feature, "Literacy mash-up: Discipline-specific practices empower content-area teachers," p. 28) doesn't change the fundamental alignment necessary between content-specific teachers and student learning goals.

It's equally crucial that literacy efforts in professional learning are also aligned to state accountability standards under ESSA and college- and career-readiness standards. ("Scaling up," as Linda Jacobson calls it in her story on this alignment effort, "Tailored for a perfect fit: Flexible templates promote standards alignment and teacher collaboration," p. 18.) The importance of helping teachers learn and convey literacy in a way that helps students meet and exceed English language arts college- and career-readiness anchor standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening is crucial. Nearly six years after the release of the Common Core standards and the beginning of its state-by-state implementation, we know it won't reach its promise if teachers are not fully prepared to teach them.

Thus is content alignment key between student achievement outcomes and the professional learning and student learning needed to meet state standards. It is a relationship best explained by the Outcomes standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning:

Outcomes: *Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum*

standards (Learning Forward, 2011).

With student learning outcomes as the focus, professional learning deepens educators' content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and understanding of how students learn the specific discipline. Nowhere is this more important than in discipline-specific literacy. It's an area rich with both a history and knowledge base that adds needed coherence to the professional learning challenge, but also one changing daily to meet the rapid growth and development of the 21st century's knowledge economy.

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POWER PLAN

By Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

**HIGH SCHOOL
FINE-TUNES
INSTRUCTION TO
BUILD READING
STRENGTH AND
STAMINA**

"There's still a question on the table. How can we get our students to read more and better? I mean, they read what they have to, and they're doing OK. But how do we ensure that they are ready for what comes after high school?"

This comment, made by an English teacher at Health Sciences High & Middle College in San Diego, California, focused the conversation that a group of teachers were having as part of a whole-school professional development session in February 2012. Health Sciences High students performed adequately for the school to meet accountability demands, but, as a history teacher noted, "We don't get breakthrough results. It's not like they're blowing us away with their understanding or their performance on assessments."

Over the course of the meeting, the teachers set a goal to help students read more

and better. A task force of teachers set out to determine what staff and students would need to make this goal a reality.

Teachers regularly asked students to read texts, often from textbooks but also from primary source documents. Students interacted with each other in collaborative ways each day, in nearly every classroom. Collaborative learning was a part of the culture of the school and occurred regularly.

In addition, teachers were skilled in checking for understanding and adapting instruction accordingly. Teachers used exit slips, audience response systems, Foldables, online discussion boards, Quizlet, and a host of others ways to determine what students still needed to be taught. In other words, Health Sciences had a lot going for it.

The school serves about 600 students, about 70% of whom qualify for free lunch, 14% for special education services, and 82% speak a language in addition to English. While collaborative learning, checking for understanding, and adapting instruction are important prerequisites for high-quality literacy learning, we came to see that there is more that can be done. We needed a literacy plan that would ensure students' skills improved.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

The first component of the task force's professional learning plan focused on teacher expectations of student reading levels. A reading assessment provides individual students' Lexile scores. Lexile estimates text complexity based on the quantitative aspects of a text, such as average sentence length, vocabulary, and average number of syllables. During this session, teachers examined student scores, grade-level averages, and overall school averages. Teachers then compared student reading profiles to the demands of several careers.

As one teacher noted, "Given they path they're on, lots of our students won't be prepared for work in hospital as a CNA [certified nursing assistant] much less go to college." Another asked, "Why didn't we know this before? I

thought our students were doing pretty well. I know that some don't make it in college. I thought that was maybe finances or family demands. But maybe they're really not ready." Another said, "I don't think that I expect enough from my students. I've never asked them to read texts that were this hard. I guess I wonder if they can handle it, but I'll never know unless I try."

In response, another said, "Our expectations have become the students' reality. We have to raise our expectations and then figure out how to get students there." This generated a lot of conversations about text selection and appropriate instruction with complex texts, which aligned perfectly with the direction of the professional learning planned for the staff.

BUILDING STRENGTH AND STAMINA

As a significant part of ensuring that students read more and read better, the focus for professional learning turned to building strength and stamina in reading. Much like an athlete who focuses on one aspect and neglects the other, students who fail to experience instructional strength building do not get much stronger, and their proficiency stagnates. Similarly, neglecting stamina can result in students who can read but don't persist.

Reading volume remains highly correlated with achievement. As a teacher noted, "You can't get good at something you don't do." The professional learning plan focused on three instructional additions to the already reasonably strong literacy efforts: think-alouds with complex texts, close readings with complex texts, and wide reading from a constrained choice of texts.

Think-alouds. As part of the professional development, which includes seminar meetings as well as in-class peer coaching, teachers read complex texts aloud and shared their thinking about these texts with their students. This is part of the effort to build students' strength in reading. By introducing students to complex texts, they begin to implement the behaviors, skills, or strategies modeled for them (Duffy, 2014).

The professional learning included discussion about the qualitative factors of text complexity, such as levels of meaning, structure, language conventions and clarity, and knowledge demands (see chart on p. 16). In these sessions, teachers analyzed sample texts collaboratively to determine which factors contributed to the complexity.

In doing so, teachers from across content areas learned how to analyze texts for teaching points. For example, a group of teachers analyzing a math word problem focused on the language conventions used in the text, whereas a group of science teachers analyzing an informational text focused on its structure and knowledge demands, specifically background knowledge and vocabulary.

The second aspect of this component addressed the teacher behavior of modeling while reading aloud. As a group, we decided that think-alouds should not last more than 10 minutes. We didn't have much evidence for this, other than personal experience. In their presentation, the group of teachers who recommended this said that they hoped that think-alouds with complex texts occurred daily, but that they "didn't eat up too much of the instructional time. Students need to hear expert thinking and then get to work to do something with that thinking."

As part of the sessions focused on think-alouds, teachers watched video clips of their colleagues and identified aspects that the videos, taken from across a number of content areas, shared in common. The faculty agreed to two aspects: "I" statements and metacognitive comments.

The effective think-alouds included teachers using self-reflective "I" statements to focus their students, rather than directive "we" or "you" statements. For example, while sharing a text about Navajo code talkers with her history students, a teacher said, "I noticed that the author provides some background knowledge about the war in the opening paragraphs. I know all of this information, so I don't really feel the need to take notes or reread."

Later, after reading the section of the text, the teacher said, "I noticed some important details about the code itself. I found this interesting, but it doesn't really help me answer my research question about the role that the code talkers played in the war, so I am going to move on."

After reading the third section, the teacher said, "In this section, I know that the author used cause-and-effect structures because he describes an event and then shows how the code talkers were successful. When I add up all of these causes and the positive effects they had, I see that the Allies are on their way to winning the war. This is the part of the text that I want to reread because I believe it will help me when I write my response to the research question I have selected."

Close reading. Another aspect of the strength-building effort focused on students' close reading of complex text. Although not new, close reading has regained attention in recent years (Boyles, 2013). Close reading involves a number of in-

structional moves for the teacher as well as specific actions for students.

One of the most important aspects of close reading is that it requires students to engage in collaborative conversations about the text. Students negotiate the meaning of the text with others in response to questions they, or their teachers, ask about the text. Of course, the text has to be sufficiently complex to warrant this type of instruction, not to mention the time investment.

In addition, close reading requires that students read and reread the text as they mine it for information and ideas. In doing so, they make annotations so that they can easily find parts of the text to discuss or to write about later.

The professional learning evolved from a focus on the routines of close reading to the types of supports that students require to read complex texts closely. At the outset, professional learning focused on appropriate annotations. We determined that all students would learn three common annotations:

- Underline central ideas, which requires that they learn the difference between key details and main ideas.
- Circle words and phrases that are confusing or unclear, which requires that they monitor their own comprehension, providing teachers with information about areas of concern.
- Write margin notes, in which important information is summarized and synthesized.

In addition, these early sessions focused on ways to encourage students to reread the text. The most common ways we identified included:

- Changing the task, such as inviting students to read to get the flow and then reread to annotate.
- Asking a really good question, such as "What support does Rilke provide to support his assertion that it is important to be 'lonely and attentive when one is sad'?"
- Pressing for evidence, such as, "In which paragraph did the author provide evidence for that?"

Over time, the focus shifted from the procedures to the process. We identify three phases useful in engaging students in close reading. Importantly, teachers regularly reported that students were using this three-phase process in their own reading. The phases allow student to engage more deeply with the text as they understand more about it. These phases are:

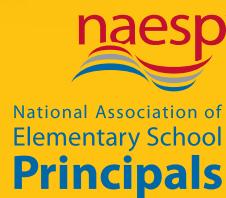
- **What does the text say?** This is the literal analysis of the text in which students focus on general understandings and key details. The answers to these questions are typically right on the page and would be general comprehension questions.
- **How does the text work?** This is the structural analysis of the text in which students focus on vocabulary, text structure, and author's craft (e.g. genre, narration, literary devices). The answers to these questions are not as obvious and require searching through the text.
- **What does the text mean?** This is the inferential analysis of the text in which students focus on logical interpretations,

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QUALITATIVE FACTORS OF TEXT COMPLEXITY

COMPONENT	ASPECTS	WHEN A TEXT IS COMPLEX ...
Levels of meaning and purpose	Density and complexity	Many ideas come at the reader, or there are multiple levels of meaning, some of which are not clearly stated.
	Figurative language	There are many literary devices (e.g. metaphors, personification) or devices that the reader is not familiar with (e.g. symbolism, irony) as well as idioms or clichés.
	Purpose	Either the purpose is not stated or is purposefully withheld. The reader has to determine the theme or message.
Structure	Genre	The genre is unfamiliar or the author bends the rules of the genre.
	Organization	It does not follow traditional structures such as problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast, sequence or chronology, and rich descriptions.
	Narration	The narrator is unreliable, changes during the course of the text, or has a limited perspective for the reader.
	Text features	Fewer signposts such as headings, bold words, margin notes, font changes, or footnotes are used.
	Graphics	Visual information is not repeated in the text itself but the graphics or illustrations are essential to understanding the main ideas.
Language conventionality and clarity	Standard English and variations	Variations of standard English, such as regional dialects or vernaculars that the reader is not familiar with, are included.
	Register	It is archaic, formal, scholarly, or fixed in time.
Knowledge demands	Background knowledge	The demands on the reader extend well beyond his or her personal life experience.
	Prior knowledge	The demands on the reader extend well beyond what he or she has been formally taught in school.
	Cultural knowledge	The demands on the reader extend well beyond his or her cultural experiences and may include references to archaic or historical cultures.
	Vocabulary	The words used are representations of complex ideas that are unfamiliar to the reader, or they are domain specific and not easily understood using context clues or morphological knowledge.

SOURCE: Frey & Fisher, 2013.

the arguments they can draw from the text, and the ways in which multiple texts work together. The answers to these questions require more complex thinking and connections.

Teachers began to select much more complex texts than they had used in the past, but finding appropriate texts to use became a challenge. As a science teacher said, “I’m more than willing to do this, but I’m not sure where to find the texts.” To address this, the professional learning task force devoted a session to locating appropriate texts worthy of close reading instruction. As part of each session, teachers collaborated to create text-dependent questions that could be used to facilitate collaborative conversations.

Wide reading. To build stamina, we needed to devote more class time to reading. Despite the evidence that spending time during class independently reading topically related texts im-

proved achievement (Fisher, Ross, & Grant, 2010), not a lot of this was happening at Health Sciences. The plan included devoting about 10 minutes a day, several days a week, with students engaged in reading texts related to the topics under investigation. Students were allowed to select the texts they wanted to read from a content-aligned collection of texts.

In some classes, teachers started every day with this reading time. In other classrooms, teachers devoted three days a week to this. In addition, all English teachers required students to read 80 informational articles a year (and pass a short quiz on each) and join a book club with other students reading texts that they selected. The book club texts were aligned with essential questions. Students nominated and voted on the questions each May for the following school year. Some of the past essential questions were:

Continued on p. 45

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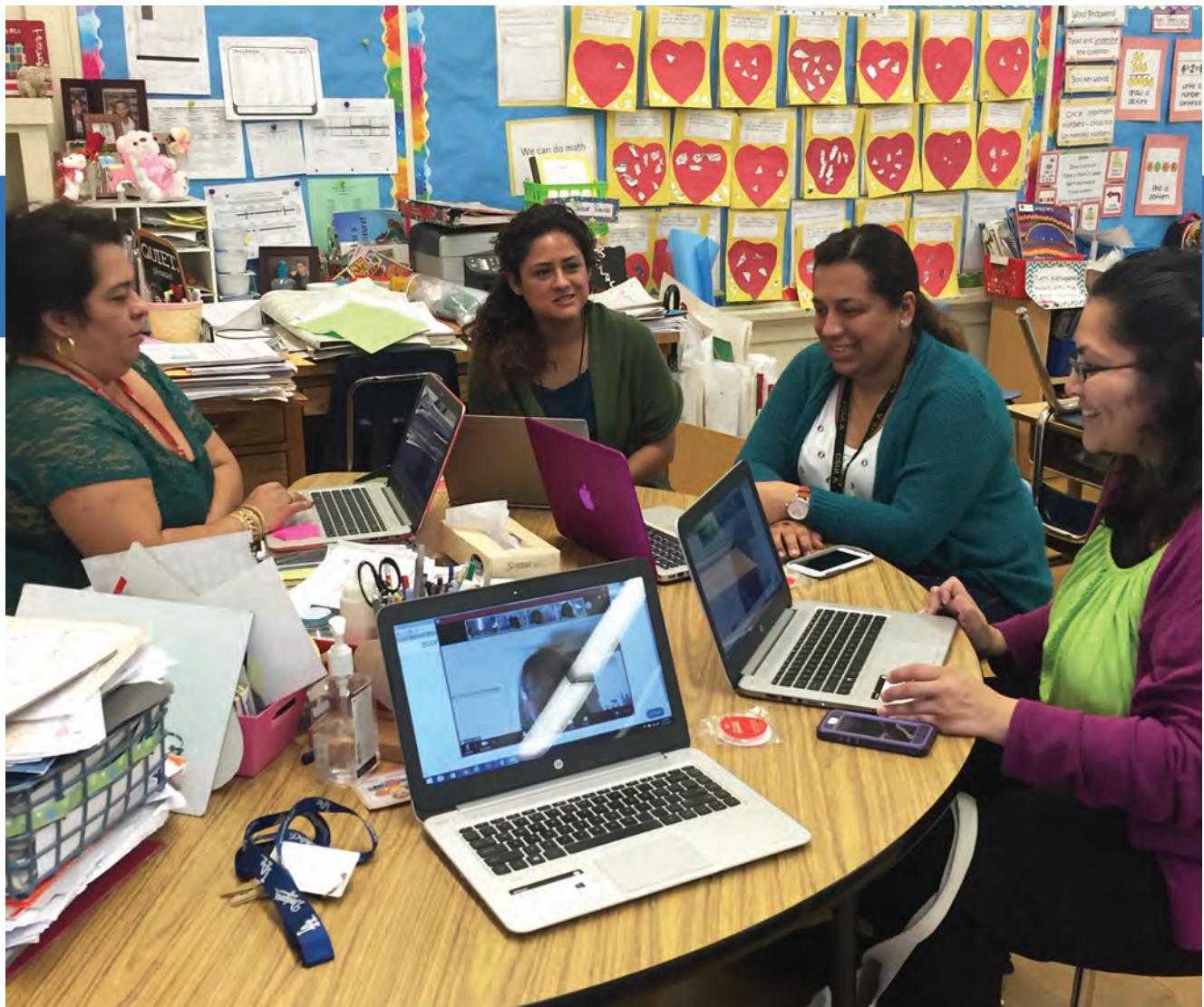


Photo by JOSE EQUIHUA

Florence Elementary School teachers participating in the Los Angeles district's implementation of Literacy Design Collaborative hold a weekly planning meeting. Left to right are Susana Velasco, Denise Hernandez, Adriana Avila, and Maria Blanco.

TAILORED FOR A PERFECT FIT

**FLEXIBLE TEMPLATES PROMOTE
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT AND
TEACHER COLLABORATION**



Literacy Design Collaborative's templates and tools support students in doing work aligned to the Common Core and provide a growing experience for teachers as they work with colleagues to refine the lessons and tasks.

By Linda Jacobson

Susana Velasco always thought she designed lessons for her kindergarten students to help them meet the academic standards for their grade. But now she feels better equipped to adapt instruction to meet the needs of all the children in her class — a skill she has developed through her school's participation in the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC).

"I can be flexible with them, even my nonreaders and nonwriters," says Velasco, who teaches at Florence Avenue Elementary School in South Los Angeles. Her students have been making booklets about the life cycle of plants in preparation for a larger project on what plants need to live.

LDC gives teachers templates and tools that support students in doing more challenging work aligned to the Common Core. But the process is also a growing experience for teachers as they work with colleagues to refine the lessons and tasks to ensure they are asking students the right questions.

As part of a team of five Florence Avenue teachers receiving support in implementing LDC, Velasco is sharing what she's using with other kindergarten teachers, which shows Principal Consuelo Acosta that LDC also offers teachers the opportunity to set an example for their peers.

"These are my lifelong learners," Acosta says. "Anything I give these teachers, they run with it."

Learning more about how LDC impacts teachers' practice is one of the goals of a five-year, \$12 million Investing in Innovation (i3) "validation" grant from the U.S. Department of Education. LDC is providing coaching, summer institutes, and online training to groups of teachers in 12 Los Angeles Unified School District schools, including Florence Avenue. Another 15 New York City schools are also participating this year, but the numbers of schools will expand substantially over the course of the grant with the goal of involving 3,000

teachers in the New York and Los Angeles sites.

"We really think there are these fundamental teacher competencies that are being impacted through LDC work," says Suzanne Simons, LDC's chief of instruction and design. "They are getting wiser about certain core teaching competencies."

SCALING UP

Now a nonprofit, LDC began in 2009 as an effort to create templates that would assist teachers in incorporating literacy instruction into all subject areas — not just English language arts. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation brought together a design team of curriculum and literacy experts who created the LDC framework and shared it with a wide variety of groups, including state education agencies and districts, professional development providers, and other groups that were each able to bring their own expertise to the table.

The focus of the LDC process is the development of a module — a reading and writing assignment or prompt built around the standards and connected to the specific topics teachers are teaching in their content area. Because it is a template approach, LDC allows teachers the flexibility to choose the texts and tasks that best fit their goals and their students' needs. "Minitasks" help build students' skills and organize information as they prepare to complete the longer paper or project in the module and allow teachers to see whether students are understanding and meeting the expectations.

In Maria Blanco's 6th-grade class at Florence Avenue, for example, posters hang along the walls showing information the students have gathered from their research and organized into a "close reading quadrant" — a minitask the students are using to describe different aspects of government in early civilizations.

As she walked through classrooms, Megan Jensen, LDC's project director for the Los Angeles district, also

noticed one teacher had posted a prompt: “What were the four key problems faced by Mesopotamians? How did Mesopotamians attempt to meet each challenge?” The paper also lists the standards students will be working toward by responding to the questions. It’s a practice Jensen would like to see other teachers follow as well.

“To me, it’s about how does using the tools push teachers to plan with skills and standards in mind,” Jensen says. “The larger goal is that you’re building capacity at the school level and teachers would remain doing this work.”

In the 2010-11 school year, LDC was piloted in six school districts and among a teacher network and a network of schools. Since then, LDC’s growth has exemplified what it means to “scale up” something in education. There are now 2,000 modules and minitasks available to the public, and Simons estimates that about 50,000 teachers are now part of the system. The goal is to have at least 150,000 teachers by next year, but in a survey by the Gates Foundation, 275,000 teachers said they had heard of LDC or used one of the tools.

Four states have formally adopted LDC as a primary approach to meeting the Common Core as well as several districts, including the Fresno Unified School District in California, Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, and Baltimore City Public Schools in Maryland. In 2013, LDC became an organization separate from the Gates Foundation. Its website provides an extensive library of minitasks, modules, and other resources, such as student work samples and rubrics. LDC also created Core-Tools, an online collaborative space where teachers and curriculum specialists can design and revise the own LDC modules.

To bring a consistent level of quality to LDC as it continues to grow, the organization partnered with Fresno Unified to launch a series of three online LDC courses. Even though states and districts are still providing training, Simons says “there are not enough coaches in America” to reach all the teachers using LDC. The first course introduces teachers to the process of creating an LDC teaching task, the second focuses on how to develop a larger instructional plan that includes the task, and the third covers implementation of a module and reviewing student work. In addition to receiving coaching every other week, the Los Angeles and New York teachers are also completing the courses.

‘A WRITING TEACHER AS WELL’

Teachers, especially those in social studies, say LDC has expanded their thinking about literacy in the classroom. Amanda Minnich, a social studies teacher at Woodland Middle School in Latonia, Ky., says it has changed the way she teaches historical documents.

“I had always taught the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Declaration, and other important documents, but now my students are truly digging deeper and becoming historical thinkers. And not only historical thinkers, but historical questioners,” she says.

“With the training and implementation of LDC, I started to believe and see that I am a writing teacher as well.”

Language arts teachers, however, are also seeing benefits to their practice — even if some at first thought the templates were too prescriptive.

“It can be very transformative for traditional English teachers who think they are just going to teach the content of a novel,” says Renee Boss, initiative director at the Fund for Transforming Education in Kentucky, one of LDC’s partner organizations. A former English teacher, Boss led LDC implementation in a district and says the reflection process involved in reviewing whether the module accomplished what was intended is a deep professional learning experience.

“LDC is a consistent reminder of how to intentionally sequence student learning for maximized student learning and success,” says Eddie Mullins, an English teacher and department cluster leader at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Ky. “[The] minitask library and template tasks have been invaluable resources.”

Rebecca Reumann-Moore, a senior research associate at Research for Action in Philadelphia, says science teachers are sometimes the least positive about LDC because incorporating writing tasks into their lessons is an even greater shift for them than it is for social studies teachers. But still, there are many who say LDC has given them a broader perspective on their students.

“As high school science teachers, we assume that all students come to us as good readers and writers. That is not always the case,” says Tara Clopper, who teaches environmental science and astronomy at Greencastle-Antrim High School in Greencastle, Pa. “Since implementing LDC, I am now cognizant of my students’ reading and writing abilities. I can now tailor their learning by scaffolding lessons to their needs.”

She and her colleagues worked with teachers in the English department to design a module in which students write an essay arguing whether or not the gray wolf should be reintroduced into the forest ecosystem in the U.S.

“The beauty of this module is that the science and literacy concepts that we teach are used throughout the semester, not just during the module,” she says, adding that LDC has “forced me to eliminate the ‘fluff’ that I used to include in some of my units. If a minitask does not relate to the task, then it is eliminated.”

The schools involved in the i3 grant are also largely elementary schools, which indicates that LDC’s reach is broadening beyond middle and high school teachers. Using the templates and tasks at the elementary level flip-flops the purpose of LDC because it incorporates more content knowledge into reading and writing instruction, Simons says.

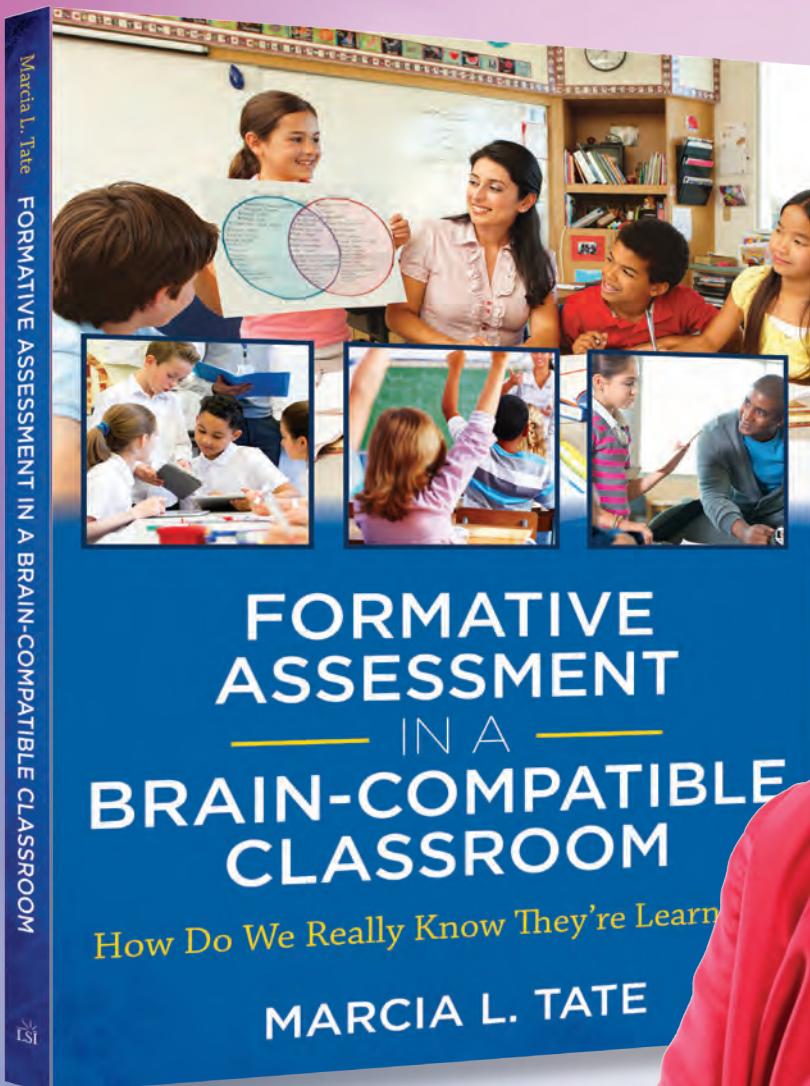
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reading and writing — and pride they feel in seeing a higher level of work from their students — teachers say they've grown the most from LDC because of the opportunity to collaborate and swap ideas with other teachers.

"LDC has connected me to other educators through a few different networks and projects and allowed us to collaborate with a common language and goal," Mullins says.

At Florence Avenue, the other four members of Velasco's LDC group are all 6th-grade teachers — colleagues with whom she wouldn't typically have the chance to work. "I can tell them what I'm doing, and they give me some real purposeful questions," she says. "It helps me see the bigger picture."

Clopper adds that, especially at the high school level, teachers often work alone or only with others in their content area. "I have learned so much from my peers and vice versa," she says. "We all have strengths and weaknesses when it comes to educating today's youth."

Since it began, LDC training and collaboration has occurred both through online platforms as well as in face-to-face settings. Boss finds that there are benefits and pitfalls to both formats.

For example, bringing "a bunch of people" together in a room to write modules is not effective unless someone there has a lot of LDC experience, she says. Then there was the time that she participated in an LDC webinar with people she had never met.

"It felt disastrous to me — too many loose ends," she says. "I think a lot of that has to do with a trust factor and really being willing to put your work out there for people to see."

The Los Angeles and New York teachers involved in the i3 grant meet together at their schools, but receive virtual coaching using Zoom, a videoconferencing program. LDC also has a project director in each site as well as a district staff person to provide in-person support to the teachers and principals. Sarah Arroyo, the Los Angeles district's LDC specialist, adds that her position also helps to establish some credibility for the project among teachers who are so used to having outside school improvement organizations come and go.

When the grant is gone, "we're still going to be here," Arroyo says. "It's about changing the mindset of how you plan so instruction is rooted in the standards."

'WORTH THE TIME AND EFFORT'

The grant will be evaluated by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at the University of California Los Angeles. Researchers will compare performance in reading and writing of students receiving LDC to a similar group of students using other college- and career-ready curricula. They will also examine how teachers' skills are improving by analyzing the modules they create and look at the long-term use of LDC teacher practice in the schools.

Long before the i3 grant, however, LDC leaders, partners,

and other researchers have thought about which aspects of LDC have the greatest impact on teachers' growth.

"The diehards believe the value is in the design process," Simons says. "But not all teachers are going to design curriculum."

One reason could be due to the fact that developing modules takes a significant amount of time. In a 2013 paper from Research for Action — which has been following LDC implementation since 2010 — 85% of the teachers interviewed said it was difficult to find time to work on LDC modules. But the researchers also found that the more experience teachers gain with LDC, the more likely they are to say that their participation "is worth the time and effort involved." Eighty-one percent of those with two years of LDC experience agreed with that statement, compared to 74% of first-time users.

"Developing and implementing modules is a rigorous process, which teachers seemed to embrace more fully as they gained more experience," the authors wrote.

Simons adds, however, that there are many other ways teachers can benefit from LDC besides designing modules. For one, "even if you didn't write it, teaching LDC modules is still better than not," she says.

Another powerful experience is analyzing student work and discussing whether the students' writing accurately addressed the prompt, says Ruemann-Moore. Revising modules is a third way for teachers to plug in to LDC even if they weren't originally involved in the design.

In another report, published in 2015, Research for Action researchers summarized what they've learned about LDC implementation by surveying more than 1,500 teachers about their experiences. More than 80% of the teachers said using the modules had helped them increase the rigor of writing assignments and had raised their own expectations of their students' writing. Eighty percent also said that they had developed new ways to teach literacy skills in their content area, and almost three-quarters of the teachers surveyed said they were applying LDC strategies to other parts of their instruction.

As Acosta noted, LDC work is also opening up opportunities for teachers to develop leadership skills without leaving the classroom. As part of the i3 grant, each school will have a project liaison — a teacher who will stay in contact with the coach and perhaps facilitate sessions when coaching time isn't scheduled.

"The opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other has been a really positive experience for me as an educator," Mullins says, adding that working with modules has led to "rich, thought-provoking discussions about not only individual lessons and units, but pedagogy, curriculum, and many other relevant topics that have made me a more effective and reflective teacher."

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COMMON GOAL UNITES DISTRICT

**LEADERS AND TEACHERS
BUILD LITERACY
AND A COLLECTIVE
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR STUDENT LEARNING**

By Joanna Michelson and James A. Bailey

It was the morning of the last social studies content-area literacy studio of the year. Five middle and high school social studies teacher leaders, the high school principal, the superintendent for instruction, and a coach from the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership gathered around a table in the middle school library in Evanston, Wyoming.

It was late March. The snow had started to thaw, and teachers in Uinta County School District #1 were already talking about spring break. After Doug Rigby, the high school principal and social studies lead, welcomed the teachers to the professional development session, the host teacher, Tim Herold, started passing out copies of a one-page text about early Puritan life in the New England colonies.

"I read this article last night and thought about why I want the students to read it," Herold said. "I have some thoughts about why they may struggle with it, and I drafted some questions that I think will help them stay focused on the meaning. But I really want to know all of your thoughts first."

The content coach nodded and reminded the group that they would have two hours to plan this lesson collaboratively before teaching it, as a team, at 10 a.m., to Herold's 8th graders.

As had become the norm, the teachers and district leaders prepared to read through the text and take notes to track key ideas, show their own thinking, and indicate where they expected students might struggle. But, before they began, Rigby said, "Thanks, Tim. Tell us, what is your purpose for having students read this text today?"

Herold pulled out some notes. "I want the students to determine the central ideas in this text so that they can explain how religion shaped the lives of the early New England settlers."

The teachers made note of this and started reading the article, referring to their handout from Achieve the Core (<http://achievethecore.org>, an online resource for Common Core State Standards materials) describing the process for creating "text-dependent questions." Rigby added that he saw how this particular purpose lined up with one of the Common Core State Standards for reading history that

the group had been discussing all year.

The superintendent for instruction, James Bailey, said he appreciated how Herold had tied the lesson to a standard that was critical to students' understanding as they read in the content areas. "And that's a standard that we continuously assess as a system," Bailey added. "In fact, you will be reviewing summative student learning data on this type of reading in another month. This lesson should give us information about how we are doing in progressing toward that standard."

After about 15 minutes of reading, teachers began talking to each other about the text, navigating between the content and the way the text was written. Nate Conrad, a high school teacher, said, "I think it's really describing how the Puritans found justification in their religion for trying to set up the perfect society."

Gwen Stiegelmeyer, a middle school teacher, added, "I also see here the author talking about people who got kicked out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, but he is just mentioning it, not making a big deal out of it. ... I think the students would get really interested in that."

The content coach spoke up once or twice to remind the teachers to stay rooted in the text and the goals that Herold had set for his students. She also nudged them to think about how they determined the central ideas themselves as a way to guide their lesson planning.

After about half an hour, teachers reached consensus about the central ideas in the text and Herold recorded them on a large flip chart. The content coach reiterated the key ideas and asked teachers to discuss what made the text challenging, using the Common Core State Standards' model of text complexity.

Teachers agreed, after discussing the vocabulary and knowledge demands of the text, that the biggest challenge would be the structure. As Stiegelmeyer summed up, "It jumps around a lot, and the students may not know what to do with that. It's not chronological."

Herold agreed that the structure would be most challenging for his 8th graders and said, "This lesson belongs to all of us, not just me. I am curious to hear how you would all divide up the text, where you would ask the students questions, and what those questions would be. I'll wait to hear your questions before I share mine."

The team discussed places in the text where they would

ask students to pause and answer a specific text-dependent question, a question with answers rooted in the text. Teachers had previously agreed this was the most challenging part of the process, writing questions that would force students to reread the challenging parts and attend to the overall purpose.

As a team, the group brainstormed questions for students to consider during and after the reading, refined the wording of those questions, reviewed them again, and then checked the questions against Herold's overall purpose for reading the text. Herold said that some of the questions the group had brainstormed were similar to his, but the group had pushed him to think about the text in a different way.

Rigby pressed them to identify how they would know students had been successful. "What will it sound like if students answer these questions correctly? What will we look for in student writing and discussion? How will we know if they are navigating the confusing structure and making meaning?"

Then, at 9:30, with half an hour to spare, the group decided who would teach what part of the lesson. Herold would frame the purpose and guide students through the first read of the text. Stiegelmeyer would guide students through the first set of text-dependent questions. The other teachers would take turns with the rest of the questions, and Rigby would ask students the last question to catapult them into a final written prompt about what they had read.

Throughout the teaching process, teachers would circulate the classroom and take notes as they listened to students talk to their partners and as they recorded their thinking on the text.

By 10 a.m., the five social studies teachers, Rigby, and Bailey had lined up at the door to Herold's classroom, copies of the newly created lesson in hand, ready to go.

After teaching the lesson, the group knew they would be analyzing student work and considering implications for future lessons as well as for supporting students with social studies texts in general. Then the group of teacher leaders would decide what to teach their peers during the next districtwide social studies teacher professional development. They would be pulling key learning from this studio and deciding how to engage their peers with that information.

LOOKING BACK

Educators across the nation have been responding to the push for content-area literacy instruction in their systems. While the press for higher academic standards has sharpened national focus on the reading of complex, discipline-specific informational texts, educators have been grappling with how to help science, social studies, and vocational education teachers support student literacy for decades (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

Traditionally, content-area focused teachers, particularly at the secondary level, have not been trained to teach students how to access rigorous texts, including which disciplinary-specific

strategies to use, how to break down and think about disciplinary text, or how to grapple with difficult questions while reading closely.

Content-area teachers at the secondary level may not know how they, as readers, perform these tasks when they read in their discipline, and then they may struggle to teach their students to implement these skills while integrating texts into the big ideas in their curricula. District leaders, principals, and teacher leaders across the country continue to ask how to create collaborative, content-specific, inquiry-based professional learning for content-area teachers to learn to understand what it takes to read texts in their discipline and how to teach students to do so.

After three years of focus on content literacy, Bailey, the superintendent for instruction, said that the content literacy studio work in Evanston had become "almost self-sustaining." Teachers and district leaders at the March social studies studio had enough content knowledge to almost independently determine a purpose for reading a text, analyze complex content-area articles, and design a sequence of text-dependent questions to guide students towards that purpose.

During the three years, social studies teachers, as well as their other content-area colleagues, developed what Lee and Smith (1996) might call "collective responsibility for student learning," or a shared ownership of how students performed in their classes and their collective role in designing that learning through lesson and formative assessment planning. Teachers came to the sessions with the expectation that they would work together, struggle, teach a co-designed lesson, and step back to analyze it based on student data.

The level of collegiality, openness, and content knowledge among social studies teachers didn't happen by chance. The interactions among these teachers and with the text during this March studio was the result of seven years of systemwide learning about literacy and the Common Core State Standards — three focused years for this particular group of secondary content-area teachers — about what makes texts challenging, how students make sense of texts, and how to collaborate as a team.

This amount of literacy-focused professional development for secondary level content-area teachers represented a sharp departure from typical professional learning for teachers in Uinta. Even though their English teacher colleagues had been experiencing professional development of this type for years, during the first few studio experiences, some social studies teachers sat with their arms crossed.

In the fall of the first year, one teacher said, "We have too much content to teach. There's not time to have students read like this." Others said that, as social studies teachers, they did not know how to teach students to read texts, and that furthermore they had no idea how to examine their own reading processes.

Perhaps most strikingly, during the first studio sessions, teachers would come to the table with their lessons already planned, unwilling to change them. What explains this change

in Uinta teachers? What has been the result for the students in Uinta?

KEY LESSONS

When reflecting on the process of building the community of secondary content-area educators in Uinta, several lessons emerge. These lessons involve the role of leadership, content-embedded professional development, teacher leadership, and a focus on student achievement.

Uinta made the commitment to literacy learning throughout the system by involving district and school leaders from the start. Principals and district leaders participated in every professional development session, learning alongside teachers, even jumping in and teaching part of the lessons. Between studios, the principals observed teachers trying out literacy instruction in their classrooms.

Over time, the principals took more and more responsibility for making opening and closing comments at the professional development sessions, communicating the importance of the learning and how it fit with school and district goals. District leaders also worked with principals between sessions in analyzing classroom instruction for patterns and developing specific feedback protocols.

Uinta built capacity through content-area focused, job-embedded professional development. Teacher leaders in each subject area worked collaboratively with a Center for Educational Leadership content coach four times a year for three years to learn about adolescent literacy, text complexity, their own reading processes, and how to teach literacy processes through minilessons and close reading. This learning took place in day-long content workshops.

Additionally, teacher leaders collaboratively designed and co-taught literacy lessons “live” in classrooms in front of each other and then debriefed what they saw using student work. These lessons featured texts that teachers were already teaching in their curriculum and focused squarely on the students in these classrooms.

During the first year, the content coach modeled some of the teaching. Over time, teachers took on more of the teaching themselves. Meeting in content-area departments to engage in learning became critical over the three years as teachers learned more and more about what made reading in different content areas different.

The system spread the learning by leveraging teacher leadership and keeping a focus on data. Teacher leaders designed and facilitated professional development for their colleagues based on what they learned in their professional development sessions. All teachers set inquiry-based goals for student learning in literacy and brought student learning data to each session

with their content-area colleagues.

In Uinta, reading in content-area classrooms looks very different from how it looked five years ago. Principal observations suggest that students are no longer just assigned tasks and told to figure them out. Instead, teachers in social studies, the arts, science, and vocational areas now model for students how to tackle complex texts, figure out challenging vocabulary, and navigate various structures that often inhibit understanding.

Principals also discuss how teachers’ professional conversations have changed and how teachers are now focusing on student work samples to make frequent and ongoing adjustments. From the district leader level, principals are now more able to identify specific and exact next steps in feedback

to teachers and can articulate the amount of reading work done in content classes.

Student results also show how a studio model of professional development has impacted student’s skill level. At the high school level, the ACT suite of tests has shown a yearly increase in average score and the number of students meeting the college readiness benchmark. From 2010 to 2015, 12th-grade scores increased from 19 to 20.2, 11th-grade scores from 19 to 19.9, 10th-grade scores from 17 to 17.6, and 9th-grade scores from 16 to 16.6 (see above).

Transforming a school system’s professional learning capacity for literacy does not happen over the short term. As Uinta’s experience shows, a long-term, comprehensive approach provides the necessary key to propelling educators past initial resistance and toward a self-sustaining community focused on student achievement.

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LITERACY MASH-UP

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC PRACTICES EMPOWER CONTENT-AREA TEACHERS

By Hannah Dostal and Rachael Gabriel

In our work with middle and high schools, we often find teachers and leaders grappling with the same set of essential questions on how to incorporate literacy instruction across content areas:

1. What does literacy instruction look like for someone who isn't a literacy teacher?
2. Does literacy in content areas mean literacy, content literacy, or both?
3. What counts as content literacy in my area?

Recent efforts to integrate literacy standards across content areas from the Common Core State Standards have fueled these questions, yet questions about how to support literacy and use literacy to support learning in content areas are not new.

Existing research and practice about reading in the content areas falls along a wide-ranging spectrum (Wenz & Gabriel, 2014). Efforts to infuse, embed, or support literacy in content areas have often alienated secondary content teachers who identify conceptual and practical barriers (Bean, 1997; Lesley, 2004; O'Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995).

In this article, we describe a process for building teachers' capacity to identify, develop, and engage in discipline-specific literacy instruction that supports both content and literacy aims. This process uses an alternative set of questions:

1. What counts as text?
2. What are the specific purposes for reading and writing in this discipline?

EXAMPLES OF GENERIC AND CONTENT-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

GENERIC READING STRATEGIES (Duke & Pearson, 2002)	CONTENT-SPECIFIC READING STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Predict• Connect• Infer• Clarify• Question• Summarize• Evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scan for dates and places• Categorize information• Evaluate statistics• Visualize functions• Prioritize information• Identify the structure of arguments• Infer the source or author's purpose

3. How are these purposes accomplished step-by-step?

These questions can frame inquiry and guide discussions that support a discipline-specific approach to literacy in content areas that resonates with both content and literacy goals.

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC PRACTICES

Disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2008) instruction is a way to conceptualize the purpose of literacy instruction in content-area courses that foregrounds the discipline itself. Literacy is used in and for discipline-specific purposes, thus students develop discipline-specific literacy practices that support content and literacy learning.

For example, rather than ending science class early to engage in 10 minutes of vocabulary work or independent

reading, students receive explicit instruction about the strategies needed to work with texts that come along with the content focus for the day. This might mean a five-minute minilesson about how to approach a set of lab instructions as a reader, formulate a written observation within a lab notebook, or interpret or generate labels for charts or figures used to represent scientific ideas.

Though science-specific, learning about literate practices in science builds students' awareness of text and engagement with a range of text types and purposes for reading while providing exposure to the words and formats most closely associated with this content.

An example from social studies might include embedding a short minilesson on how to read a current events article to determine possible sources of bias. Rather than focusing on reading strategies that apply generally (making predictions, connections, etc.), social studies teachers might identify and demonstrate specific things they do when reading to identify a source. This approach builds a library of content-specific strategies that make students more strategic, flexible readers across settings.

Mathematics is often a place of challenge for incorporating literacy strategies because texts take such different forms when compared to the longer texts found in English language arts and social studies, and even when compared with the word-heavy texts of science. Math consistently includes symbols and numerals in the expression of mathematical ideas, requiring students to read more than just words and go back and forth between modes of representation to comprehend and communicate mathematical ideas.

Disciplinary literacy instruction represents the full integration of literate practices in the doing of each discipline. Rather than *adding on* literacy or *taking away* content in order to address literacy, teachers engage with the literacies already associated with discipline-specific practices or the “doing” of the discipline.

This means there is often overlap and that generic reading strategies (like making inferences) are often called up when working toward a discipline-specific goal. Yet it allows teachers to concentrate on what they are most prepared for and passionate about: their content. This means content-area teachers work from a place of expertise and use this expertise to guide the focus, content, and amount of reading and writing in each lesson.

BUILD AWARENESS

To support faculty as they move toward a disciplinary literacy approach as content experts, it is necessary to build awareness of often-tacit knowledge content-area teachers hold (or can develop) about reading and writing in their content areas.

We begin by reframing what counts as a text that can be used for literacy instruction to draw teachers' attention to the texts that naturally exist in their discipline as tools for learning and action. This allows teachers to focus their efforts on integrating literacy support on texts that matter for their content and already exist in their curriculum.

The next layer of knowledge building involves identifying how these texts can or should be read. Students often read the same type of text in different content areas, but they read them for different purposes and thus need appropriate strategies and approaches for understanding in each.

For example, students might read poetry in English language arts and social studies, current events in science and social studies, or charts and graphs in science and math. They may at times read the same text in more than one course. However, they are reading those texts for different reasons in each setting.

Scientists might be interested in an article about solar-powered cars because of the information about how solar panels work. Social studies teachers might have students read the same article to identify how technology related to natural resources is tied to geographic locations. English teachers might have students read this article to identify the structure of the argument, persuasive techniques, or bias in the reporting.

Generic reading strategies, such as making predictions, connections, and inferences, will undoubtedly help students make meaning of a current events article in all content areas. However, students may not understand the article the way they need to for a content-specific purpose unless teachers are explicit about how to read in a way that accomplishes this purpose. See the table on p. 29 for examples of generic and content-specific strategies.

What follows are examples of activities designed to address these questions in short sessions that can be completed in a 60- to 90-minute gathering or remotely with an online or in-person follow-up discussion. Exploring these questions with colleagues helps teachers tap into their existing funds of knowledge for literacy instruction in their content areas while also expanding it by building on each other's expertise.

1 WHAT COUNTS AS TEXT IN MY DISCIPLINE?

To address this question, we begin by asking teachers of similar content areas to work together to brainstorm the kinds of texts students routinely see in their classrooms as they go about the work of that particular content area. In doing so, we use a broad definition of text as *the symbolic representation of ideas* in order to release teachers from print-centric notions of what counts as texts and reading.

Within our broader definition, everything from faces, measurement tools, skies, clocks, numerals, and colors count as “texts” that can be “read” and interpreted. In this way, a math problem without words, an image without a label, and a graduated cylinder without full sentences can all be viewed as texts

We begin by reframing what counts as a text that can be used for literacy instruction to draw teachers' attention to the texts that naturally exist in their discipline as tools for learning and action.

students need to be able to read, reproduce, and make sense of.

Being literate in each content area means understanding the conventions and modes of representation used to convey ideas about that content. Teachers that begin the activity only thinking about textbooks or class notes as sources of text can often expand their list of texts to lists of 20 or more when they embrace this broader concept of what counts as literacy in their settings.

This broader definition of text leaves room for a flood of content-specific texts that help content teachers identify exactly what kinds of literacy or literacies they might be teaching if they take on the challenge of disciplinary literacy instruction. However, made-for-school texts do not always reflect or fully encompass the texts experts actually use in professional settings.

Sometimes real-world texts can offer more challenging but also more authentic and purposeful examples to teach and learn from. So we often extend this brainstorm by encouraging content-area teachers to draw on their own experiences, imaginations, and colleagues in related fields to generate a day in the life of a professional in a career related to this field of study.

We ask them to consider what texts a professional would use for daily routine tasks as well as more formal communication within and about their work. This list sometimes closely mirrors the original brainstorm with a few exceptions, but when teachers consider the range of professions associated with their content, the list is often flooded with additional text types and purposes.

The purpose of starting with a brainstorm of text types associated with each discipline is to orient content teachers to the literacy practices that are inherent in their work. This limits the idea that teachers should stop teaching content in order to teach literacy by pointing out how much room for literacy practice already exists in content courses.

These lists can also be used to foster dialogue between content areas about places of overlap and possibilities for inter- or transdisciplinary efforts. At the same time, it highlights the need for content teachers to take ownership of their unique text types as it becomes clear that we cannot assume reading or English classes could ever adequately prepare students for the range of texts they encounter as they move through their school day.

After identifying the long list, we encourage groups to explore overlap and contrasts and prioritize the texts they believe are most important and worthy of instruction. This provides a starting point for considering the next question as they move toward understanding how they might provide instruction for reading or writing the texts they have identified.

2 WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR READING AND WRITING IN THIS DISCIPLINE?

To design discipline-specific literacy instruction, teachers have to be able to articulate the purpose or goal for reading or writing each text they prioritize for instruction. This is especially important for texts that might appear across disciplines and settings.

As noted above, students may know how to read a current events article for plot (what happened), but reading for argument, scientific merit, or statistical reasoning requires some direction. For each of the texts teachers prioritize, we invite them to describe a purpose for reading and share this with a teacher from a different content area. It is important that the purpose is specific, so prompts such as “What can this text be used to do?,” “What is this text an example of?,” or “What would this text be used for in class?” often help focus teacher responses.

Sharing purposes for reading across content areas often allows teachers to sharpen their understanding of what makes their content area unique by noting contrasts with other areas. However, this level of specificity can be a challenge, especially for content experts who interact with the same texts repeatedly and do so automatically.

With this in mind, we offer a brief cross-content reading activity as a warm-up or follow-up to the generation of content-specific purposes. In this activity, we select a news story of 1,000 words or less from a major newspaper that appeared in the last seven days. We try to find a story on a topic of recent relevance that is short enough to read in the context of a short meeting, but we do not try to manufacture a story that has specific content or content references embedded. Instead, we ask teachers to surface content-specific areas of interest where they may not be so obvious to others.

After handing out the same article to teachers across content areas, we ask them to do two things:

1. Read the article in order to identify how you could use it if you had to use it in one of your classes this year. What could be relevant to your content area and why?
2. Keep track of your process as a reader and be ready to share. What are you paying attention to, what do you skip or skim, where does your eye go first on the page, and when do you decide you are done reading?

When teachers have had some time to read the article, we ask them to share how they could use it to surface the varied purposes for the same text. We invite teachers to make connections between the purposes they identify and the very nature and focus of the content area they represent.

This does not create a static list of what scientists or historians always look for in a news article. It does, however, demonstrate that readers can read the same article for a wide range of reasons. Keeping track of the reading processes associated with these reasons further demonstrates how readers need specific strategies to accomplish their varied purposes for reading.

Though we teach students to read fiction stories by starting at the top of the page and reading left to right all the way to the bottom, this is rarely how adults approach content-specific

Being literate in each content area means understanding the conventions and modes of representation used to convey ideas about that content.

texts. They navigate text features, start at the end, skim the middle, read the introduction last, etc., based on their specific purpose for reading and their knowledge of how texts are organized.

It is this knowledge about purpose, text structure, and conventions of communication that students need to learn in order to read a range of text types for a range of purposes. Teachers may not be fully aware that their personal approach to the article is at all specialized or unique to their particular purpose. This activity invites them to reflect on their own process and displays a range of alternatives to highlight the range of possibilities and need for specific instruction when using a given text for a content-specific purpose.

3 HOW ARE PURPOSES FOR READING AND WRITING ACCOMPLISHED STEP-BY-STEP?

We use the shared current events article reading to generate examples of different purposes and processes for reading. The

next step for content teachers is to consider the purposes and processes associated with texts they are currently using in class and increase their awareness of how they, as expert readers, accomplish these purposes.

If teachers can break down their expert reading and writing processes so that they can be modeled and explained, they have the raw materials for a minilesson or overview of a content-specific literacy strategy that supports students' use of content texts as well as their literacy development.

To address this question, we engage in an activity called 60 Seconds of Reading. For

this activity, we invite teachers to bring a sample text that they use in class to share with a teacher from a different content area. The activity has four steps:

1. Read your own sample text while considering your natural or routine reading process for this text. (Prompts: What do you pay attention to? What seems most important? What do you think this text is for?)
2. Share your content text with an out-of-area colleague without any introduction or explanation.
3. Invite the colleague to read it for 60 seconds while paying attention to his or her process as a reader. (Prompts: What do you pay attention to? What seems most important? What do you think this text is for?)
4. After 60 seconds, invite your colleague to share his or her thoughts on the text and compare them to those you generated as a content expert. Consider the differences and similarities between your approach, as a content expert, and an outsider's approach to the same text.

For the purpose of this assignment, out-of-area colleagues are similar to students in that they bring some literacy knowl-

edge to the task but are not often aware of the content-specific purposes, processes, or assumptions that guide your reading of the task.

Comparing novice vs. expert reading processes on a given text often highlights what each teacher is doing to make sense of the text they use in class. This not only shines light on the existence of a specific process for reading, but also demonstrates how and why students may need explicit instruction to engage in this process on their own.

Increasing teachers' awareness of their processes for meaning making as readers and connecting these processes to the text types and purposes for reading that accompany their discipline generate the content of disciplinary literacy instruction. This content — the habits, strategies, processes, and approaches that are unique to each text or purpose — may be highlighted within and between existing content lessons as interactions with text arise.

Addressing these three questions can empower content-area teachers to incorporate literacy in ways that resonate with the content they already teach while addressing the need for explicit instruction in reading and writing a wide range of text types for a wide range of purposes.

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ACHIEVING DISCIPLINARY LITERACY REQUIRES CONTINUOUS, COLLABORATIVE ADJUSTMENT

By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, Megin Charner-Laird, & Joshua F. Lawrence

For middle and high school teachers facing the challenge of implementing the Common Core State Standards, disciplinary literacy instruction is a critical element — and one for which many are unprepared.

Disciplinary literacy focuses attention on the reading, writing, and communication skills unique to each discipline (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Students need to become literate in discipline-specific ways, but most secondary teachers have had little or no explicit training in disciplinary literacy instruction techniques.

For the past five years, we — a team of instructional coaches, university consultants, and professors teaching courses in adolescent literacy, instructional coaching, and teacher leadership — have learned a great deal about the possibilities and pitfalls of supporting middle and high school teachers' professional learning about disciplinary literacy instruction. We have made mistakes, wrestled with complexity, and learned many lessons from teachers and students as we work with them to understand what disciplinary literacy instruction means in each content area.

This article summarizes some of what we have learned about the delicate endeavor of working across content

Many of our insights have come directly from our collaborating teachers as they have shared their reflections, struggles, and triumphs.

areas, across grade levels, and supporting content-area teachers (experts in their respective domains) in tackling the difficult yet rewarding work of enacting disciplinary literacy.

One of our own mentors used to push us to consider how our thinking changed over time, using the now-familiar “I used to think … now I think …” format. We use this framing here to describe our most important learnings about helping teachers learn about and implement disciplinary literacy. Importantly, many of our insights have come directly from our collaborating teachers as they have shared their reflections, struggles, and triumphs.

1 We used to think that disciplinary literacy professional development was just about learning to marry content and literacy practices.

Now we think that disciplinary literacy professional development must pay equal attention to the “what” and “how” of marrying content and literacy instruction through sophisticated collaborative learning systems, such as professional learning communities (PLCs) and inquiry cycles.

We have found that it is just as important to build teachers’ capacity to work with and learn from each other as it is to introduce new ways of thinking about merging content and literacy practices (Ippolito, 2013; Ippolito, Dobbs, & Charner-Laird, 2014; Charner-Laird, Ippolito, & Dobbs, 2014). In fact, we have seen repeatedly that guidance from a trusted teacher leader is key to colleagues’ engagement, learning, inquiry, and changes in practice.

One high-leverage approach to disciplinary literacy professional learning uses discipline-specific PLCs led by designated teacher leaders and focused on collaborative inquiry cycles investigating new disciplinary literacy instructional practices (Ippolito et al., 2014).

2 We used to think that literacy coaches were best positioned to lead disciplinary literacy professional development.

Now we think that, while coaches can be supportive and effective, most secondary schools benefit greatly when supporting teacher leaders as drivers of disciplinary literacy efforts.

While literacy coaches have been shown to be effective in large, systemic literacy professional learning endeavors in elementary schools (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010), coaching in secondary contexts can be more challenging. At these levels, curricular design decisions need to take into account both content-specific objectives and discipline-specific reading challenges to a greater degree than in earlier grades.

Teacher leaders, who carry content-area expertise, are better positioned to “lead from within,” as one of our teachers put it, serving in the role of leader and learner simultaneously (Charner-Laird et al., 2014). Content-area expertise, coupled with a willingness to learn alongside team members, helps to create buy-in and a sense of shared purpose among members of each disciplinary team.

Drawing on and leveraging the expertise that

already exists within departments or teams, in conjunction with support in facilitation and leadership, helps teacher leaders to facilitate meetings in which teachers engage in creative, adaptive conversations about how best to enact new disciplinary literacy routines.

3 We used to think that learning about disciplinary literacy was largely a technical process of adopting specific disciplinary literacy strategies.

Now we think that learning about and implementing disciplinary literacy is largely an adaptive and iterative process of continually and collaboratively tweaking and tinkering as well as layering intermediate and disciplinary practices.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) describe different sorts of challenges: technical challenges, in which solutions are known and must be implemented, and deeper adaptive challenges, requiring new solutions and shifts in beliefs and habits. Across our projects, with districts both large and small, nearly all teachers enter with the notion that we (as outside consultants) will provide clear, technical answers about how to implement disciplinary literacy.

We used to think that, too, to a certain extent. We used to share, a bit naively, sets of strategies about teaching vocabulary or close reading, without much conversation about how these strategies were simply examples. The best strategies were likely ones that didn't exist yet.

As teachers shared their expertise with us over time, we began to see that much about disciplinary literacy instruction was still to be invented and adapted from older ideas of literacy instruction. Much of the expertise for that invention lives within content-area teachers themselves. It does not take long for participants to realize that

the best results do not come from prepackaged strategies and routines, but instead come from collaborative conversations within and across content areas.

This switch in focus, from searching for “silver bullets” (Rotberg, 2014) to collaboratively inventing new practices, is a classic example of an adaptive change that requires new ways of thinking and working. Furthermore, focusing exclusively on discipline-specific literacy practices (e.g. identifying bias and sourcing in history) robs teachers and students of rich, responsive instruction that makes use of general, or intermediate, literacy strategies (e.g. summarizing, visualizing, and inferring).

Adapting our own work in response to what we have seen

As teachers shared their expertise with us over time, we began to see that much about disciplinary literacy instruction was still to be invented and adapted from older ideas of literacy instruction.

in effective classrooms, we now believe the best disciplinary literacy professional learning and instruction responds to students’ needs and carefully layers intermediate and disciplinary literacy strategies. Teachers who have begun to teach with awareness of this layering effect have found great success in meeting students’ needs while simultaneously moving toward disciplinary literacy practices.

4 We used to think that we knew what secondary teachers needed to learn in order to effectively enact disciplinary literacy.

Now we think that all effective disciplinary literacy professional learning must begin with a needs assessment designed to reveal teachers’ and students’ current thinking and practices.

All too often, professional development has little connection to what teachers and students at a particular site really need most. Using free, online teacher and student assessments of beliefs and practices about literacy instruction can go a long way in the design and implementation of disciplinary literacy professional learning.

The Content Area Literacy Survey (CALS) is a tool that helps secondary schools pinpoint their needs before co-designing a professional learning project (see <http://adlitpd.org/category/assess>). It also becomes a starting point for collaborative design conversations. Additionally, teacher and student needs change and emerge along the way. By following the lead of teachers engaged in the work of developing new practices, we can develop responsive professional learning as initiatives progress.

5 We used to think that disciplinary literacy professional development was best delivered through intensive institutes.

Now we think that the best disciplinary literacy professional learning occurs over time, including a blend of summer, online, and school-year team-based experiences.

We have been invited by districts to offer stand-alone summer workshops. We have also been invited to conduct yearlong embedded coaching sessions only. Often, finances and traditional school schedules, rather than research and best practices, guide decisions about the timing and format of professional learning.

While both approaches have benefits and drawbacks, shifting teachers’ beliefs and practices often requires a combination of formats. Coupled with the ongoing collaborative model mentioned earlier (PLCs, led by teacher leaders, focused on cycles of inquiry), we have found that schools often require, at minimum, a three-day summer

DISCIPLINARY LITERACY IN ACTION

A team of six Spanish teachers from Brookline High School in Massachusetts taught a range of introductory, intermediate, and advanced Spanish courses. This group initially characterized its work as building a solid foundation in Spanish oral language, with students learning over time to read complex texts in Spanish. As part of our disciplinary literacy professional learning project, one of the team's goals was to help students reach higher levels of proficiency in Spanish.

The Spanish team's initial way of thinking emphasized the need to help students decode

Spanish words and increase oral and reading fluency. However, team members quickly chose to focus on being more explicit in their classes about the range of "habits of mind" that language learners must adopt in order to effectively read, write, and communicate in Spanish. In a professional learning community, facilitated by a teacher leader, the group then engaged in collaborative conversations about the habits of mind it deemed most critical.

Ultimately, the team agreed on a short list of habits it wanted to foster, created in response to state and national world language standards, literacy materials from our initial summer institute, and



Use your bicultural vision. It's a habit of mind that a team of high school teachers determined is key to learning Spanish.

members' experiences as language learners and teachers.

Members cited persistence in tackling Spanish texts as one foundational habit, as they sometimes saw students giving up in Spanish class. Other habits of mind included: finding the

words you need, checking your understanding, and making connections and comparisons. The list also included more discipline-specific habits, such as "use your bicultural vision," prompting students to note similarities and differences between Spanish-speaking cultures and their own.

Team members described and modeled their list of habits in their classrooms, asking students to write reflections after class activities about which "habits" they thought had been successfully adopted. Ultimately, the team observed students using these habits independently over time as they acquired cultural and literacy knowledge in Spanish.

institute, followed by several online webinar sessions and a handful of "check-ins" in person throughout a school year, to create a robust and strategic approach to disciplinary literacy professional learning. This approach also has an explicit focus on building internal capacity to continue the learning over time.

6 We used to think that researchers had arrived at the most effective approaches to professional development.

Now we still think that professional learning must be responsive to the needs of teachers and students in a specific context — as noted by researchers (Borko, 2004; Bryk, 2015; Elmore, 2004).

But we have also learned that the ideal approach to disciplinary literacy professional learning is beyond "context-specific" and could actually be characterized as "context-emergent," as the ideas for approaching disciplinary literacy instruction arise from teachers themselves, aided by the information, supports, and guidance provided along the way.

Locating the wisdom regarding problems of practice within the very group of teachers struggling with that problem has

been a shift in our perspective as we have seen the powerful ways that new information, coupled with team-based inquiry led by teacher leaders, can lead to insightful, thoughtful, "just-right" approaches to professional learning.

PUTTING OUR NEW LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

Having learned a great deal from our K-12 district partners, we have hit on a model for disciplinary literacy professional learning that appears to be shifting teachers' thinking and practice. We believe that explicit professional development about disciplinary literacy has some power for helping teachers become aware of disciplinary literacy and begin implementing it.

However, we have also seen tools that increase collaborative capacity, such as PLCs and a focus on inquiry cycles, which increase teacher engagement. The powerful combination of content and process leads to inventive and invested participation in implementing disciplinary literacy in a variety of classrooms.

Building and supporting structures that focus on content and process simultaneously is neither simple nor quick. In our most effective partnerships, we have done the work by cycling through three phases over time: assessment, collaboration, and evaluation.

We begin with a needs-assessment process, ideally of both

teachers' and students' understandings of literacy teaching and learning. We often employ the Content Area Literacy Survey (CALS) as an expedient way to gather information.

We then engage in one or more collaborative design conversations, ideally with a team of teachers and administrators in the partner school or district. These collaborative conversations are essential for building understanding of the adaptive nature of this work. We disabuse participants of the notion that we are going to come in with lists of simple strategies for them to implement immediately and flawlessly. Schools and districts also realize through these conversations that a number of pieces need to be put into place before jumping into a disciplinary literacy professional learning initiative.

Then we offer professional development for teachers on key ideas in literacy at a time when teachers have space to do

some extensive learning. This often occurs during the summer for several days. We focus on how foundational ideas, such as vocabulary instruction or academic discussions, can be inventively applied in content-area classrooms in general and discipline-specific ways to encourage content learning. We ask that some teachers be willing during these sessions, and beyond, to serve as teacher leaders to facilitate conversations and help colleagues process learning over time.

Following this initial work, we set dates during the school year to continue the conversation, through webinars and in person, to support teachers and teacher leaders as they work in teams. We encourage school

leaders to set dates when teachers and teacher leaders within and across content-area teams can share the products of their inquiry cycles and compare notes about how disciplinary literacy instruction is taking shape across content areas. Importantly, the best work takes place in schools where teams of content-area teachers are given time and administrative support to meet regularly between consultant visits in order to push the work forward.

Finally, whenever feasible, we assess teachers' learning through a series of teacher interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and short reflective writings. This gives us a snapshot of how teachers' thinking and practice shifts over time.

Designing and engaging in disciplinary literacy professional learning requires us to continually revise our own thinking about how best to support a wide range of teachers and leaders. At the end of a project, we sometimes find ourselves somewhere we did not expect, with teachers who have invented and adapted practices we had never imagined. And we continue to learn that what works for one site may not work for another.

We must remain open to the possibility that different schools and disciplinary teams will need different professional

learning experiences. The model described here is flexible enough to allow a great deal of tailoring for specific schools and teams, while also allowing us to follow research and best practice guidelines. But much like the teachers with whom we work, we are continually learning.

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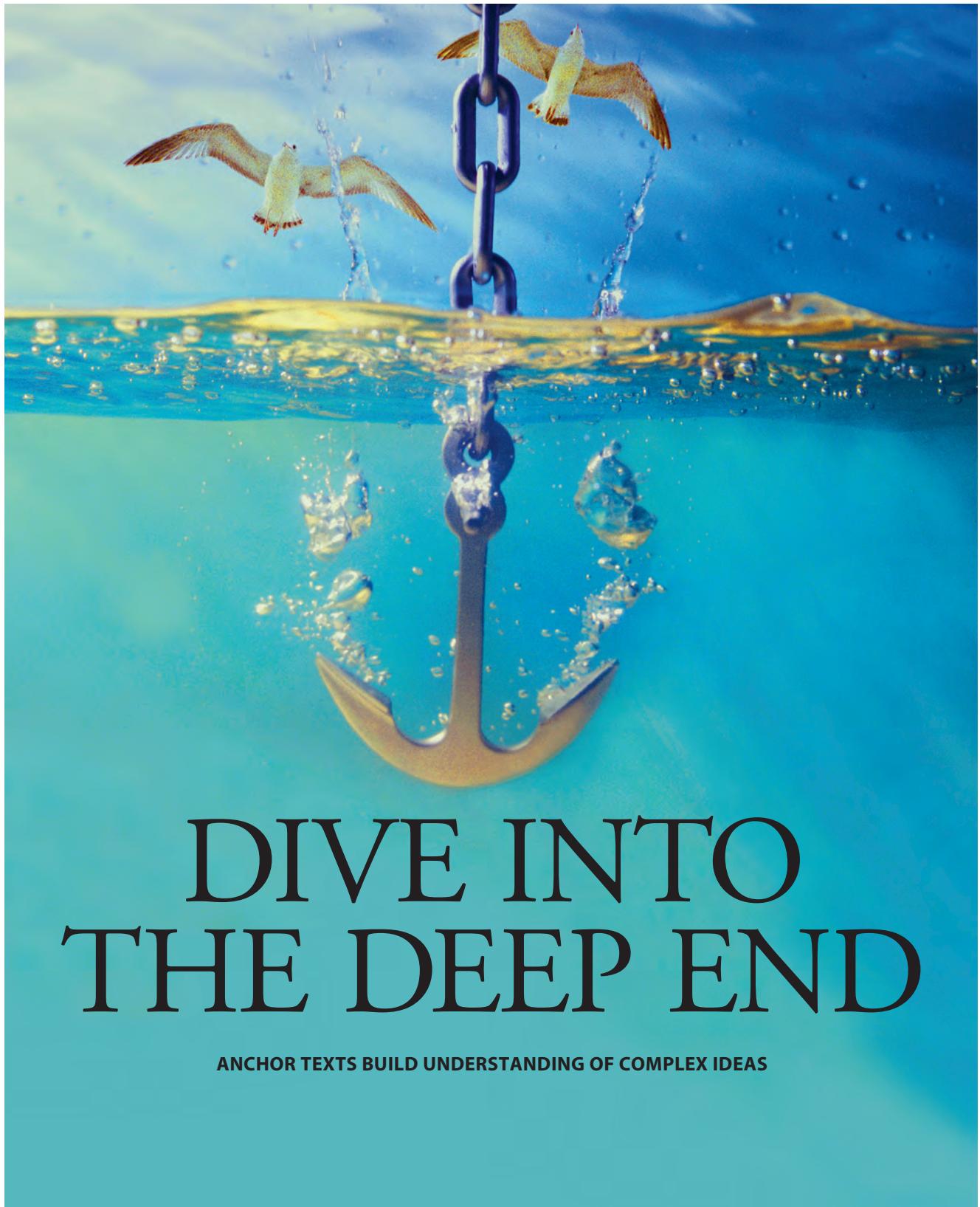
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DIVE INTO THE DEEP END

ANCHOR TEXTS BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF COMPLEX IDEAS

By Diane P. Zimmerman, Katrina M. Litzau, and Vicki L. Murray

The Internet has opened new avenues for professional learning design — especially the use of text and video to extend learning and create opportunities for the social construction of knowledge.

When text is paired with collaborative designs, participants engage in powerful learning, which provides quality time to think out loud together. Engaging adults in text invites them to be active interpreters of critical themes. When a reader knows that a social contribution is expected, she comes prepared to explain personal understandings.

In 2014, instructional coaches Katrina Litzau and Vicki Murray designed professional learning to support teachers and principals in developing a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes of leadership. Steeped in the Common Core State Standards and building on quality literacy instruction, they designed the professional learning based on anchor texts.

The anchor text process focuses learning on a central theme by using one text as an anchor and supplementing with other readings or video clips. For example, if an English teacher were to use the book *The Giver* as an anchor text, she might extend the learning by bringing in other readings that either support or challenge the ideas of community.

"The idea behind an anchor text is that it serves as a foundational text along with other texts that can be used to enhance complex thought around critical themes," Litzau and Murray (2014) write.

Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators from Adams 12 Five Star School District in Thornton, Colorado, participated in the professional learning, and it is their work that serves as the centerpiece for this article.

ANCHOR TEXT DESIGN

Litzau and Murray chose the book *Cognitive Capital: Investing in Teacher Quality*, by Costa, Garmston, and Zimmerman (2014), as the anchor text. They believed the ideas could serve as an anchor for the ongoing work of the instructional coaches in helping them better understand important thinking processes for leadership.

They defined an anchor text, when used with adults, as a pivotal text selected to anchor a complex set of ideas. When the anchor text is paired with short readings, the discourse among learners deepens understanding and moves theory into practice. Much like the anchor prevents a ship from drifting, an anchor text keeps the learner focused on complex ideas.

An anchor text becomes a reference point for other forms of interpretation, including other readings, visual representations, or real-life experiences. Collectively, the readings create a common structure for discourse and learning around a complex set of ideas. Situated in this way, anchor texts solidify learning and promote applications to practice.

Diane Zimmerman, a co-author of *Cognitive Capital*, established a website to capture and support this collaborative work. (See www.cognitivecapital.org for more detailed lesson planning.)

Over the past 30 years, a lexicon for teaching literacy has emerged as a set of central tenets about how to engage students in print. Those familiar with this student-centered genre of teaching (Graves, 1994; Calkins, 1994; Atwell, 1998) will recognize the terms: mentor texts, literature circles, guided reading, anchor texts, and others.

Much like the anchor prevents a ship from drifting, an anchor text keeps the learner focused on complex ideas.

SUMMARY OF WEEKLY PLANS				
Week	Cognitive capital focus	Supplemental text themes	Participatory structure	Reflection
1	Chapter 1: Defining cognitive capital Chapter 2: Building cognitive capital		Circle of viewpoints	How shall we invest so that collective capital grows and produces wealth in mind and spirit for our teachers and students?
2	Chapter 3: Valuing states of mind	"In the zone" engagement, creativity and the nine elements of flow	3-2-1 bridge	What patterns are we noticing about the authors' opinions?
3	Chapter 4: Mediative functions Chapter 5: Mediating conversations	Core theory of success	Word splash	Based on the influences of the texts, what beliefs have you become more aware of? What beliefs are emerging?
4	Chapter 6: Balancing the portfolio	Knowers and learners	Text to text	How might polarity inform our roles?
5	Chapter 7: The dividends of collective thinking		Systems thinking: Icebergs	What evidence of collective holonomy do we find in our mental models?
6	Chapter 8: Promoting systems accountability	<i>Multipliers</i> by Liz Wiseman chapter summary sections	Four A's Protocol	How do the texts influence our roles as leaders?
7	From study to action: Synthesizing our learning	Participant leadership action plans	Four C's	How do we invest so that cognitive capital grows and produces wealth in mind and spirit for our teachers and our students?

Johnston and Goatley (2014) recently cited this genre of teacher as researcher in the classroom as the most influential research for literacy and for changing classroom practices.

It makes sense that these literacy design principles ought to be applied to professional learning. This type of immersion in text, the active engagement in the process, not only provides a model of instruction, but also heightens the metacognitive understandings of the teacher learner.

As one teacher put it, "I had not fully realized the importance of background knowledge until I had the experience of not understanding part of a text. Another teacher filled in the missing pieces for me. I have found that by starting with the students, I can almost always find students who can fill in missing pieces, which builds in background knowledge."

For many adults, the act of reading has long become invisible. Adult readers do not fully understand how they come to comprehend. Furthermore, unless teachers are active members of a book club, they forget that reading is an interpretive act and understandings can vary widely.

And unless teachers have become experts in literacy instruction while on the job, most do not have a personal metacognitive map to guide them as they bring students to text. With the interpretation of complex text as a central tenet of the Common Core State Standards, teachers benefit from experiencing text-based immersive learning.

Without strategies, teachers often fall back on teacher-di-

rected instruction. In contrast, using anchor texts in a collaborative setting allows students to be active interpreters of text as they choose their own points of entry, with teachers facilitating, rather than directing, students' understanding.

We believe that designing professional development using this genre of self-directed learning design, paired with overt processing of the experience, is one of the best ways to deepen complex understanding about reading comprehension and help teachers build these internal maps.

Through this approach, teachers come to understand the fluidity of content knowledge and how to grapple with conflicting views, so it makes sense to model professional development on how the learner comes to understand text, and in particular, in community. Why not engage educators, just as we do students, in text-based learning using anchor texts, mentor texts, and literature circles?

CONNECTING TO THE ANCHOR

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards was at the forefront of this work. Along with understanding the standards themselves, Litzau and Murray had new insight into the concept of "close reading" through the study of Lehman and Roberts' (2014) *Falling in Love With Close Reading*.

This work spurred them to look at professional development through book studies in a different light. They wondered: How can the learner find deeper meaning of a text? How can

COLLABORATIVE LITERACY DESIGN STRATEGIES LISTED FROM MOST COLLECTIVE CAPACITY BUILDING TO THE LEAST				
Name of process	Definition	Professional development purposes	Classroom applications	Application to professional learning
ANCHOR TEXT	This process uses one text as the conceptual anchor and expands the knowledge base with additional links to parallel texts or videos.	Develops shared knowledge around key concepts. Invites deep thinking about key concepts over a period of time, from several months to a year.	Anchor texts strengthen key conceptual understandings. With Common Core, the emphasis on close reading of text highlights the use of this strategy.	Choose a central text that is essential to the group's learning. Find shorter texts, videos, or real experiences in which participants can link to the anchor text to expand knowledge.
MENTOR TEXT	A mentor text shows how to do something. The reader returns to it as a reference guide.	Develops shared skills in an area of need. Invites practice-based learning with collegial support. With print, the learner can return again and again to better understand the nuances. Creates a group understanding of practices and builds capacity.	Mentor texts were first identified as texts that served as a model for student writing. Any text that "shows how" would be applicable.	Choose a book that demonstrates how to do something. Learners can return to and reference it to improve their skills.
LITERATURE CIRCLES	Participants read different but similar themed texts and discuss the links between them to gain a deeper understanding.	Builds capacity for collaborative understanding. The group chooses a theme of interest, then each person chooses a book of interest to read and share with the group.	Literature circles grew out of the text sets as a way to build conceptual understanding. By providing students choices, this strategy increases engagement.	Choose an important theme and ask each person to choose a book that supports a deeper understanding of that theme. Conduct a collaborative discussion that maps key understandings that are emerging.
GUIDED READING	The facilitator provides direction and focus to the reader to build skills and knowledge. This is particularly useful for reading complex information such as a research article.	Builds capacity in a short time through selective reading of parts of a text, such as a research paper or selected readings from a longer text. The facilitator selects the text and designs meaningful activities for the collaborative review of the text.	In the classroom, guided reading is a small-group process in which the teacher provides focused instruction in decoding and comprehension of text. For adults, this definition is stretched to describe focused reading led by a facilitator.	The facilitator chooses important parts of texts for the group to read in the professional development session, then designs ways for the groups to generate collective meaning.
BOOK STUDY	Similar to the popular genre book club.	Builds small-group capacity. A group chooses a book of common interest, reads it, and then discusses.	While this can be applied to classrooms, it was not developed by teachers, whereas these other strategies were.	Teachers have often spontaneously formed their own self-guided studies about a book of common interest.
BOOK TALKS	Short oral summaries that focus on some aspect of a series of texts or as an introduction to a specific text.	Provides a quick introduction to a collection of books. This can be used to narrow down and select books that provide the most interest.	Teachers developed this strategy to model the ways that readers think in order to understand text and foster interest in a broad genre of reading opportunities.	Use this strategy as a quick way to review multiple texts and learn from them or as a way to choose one in which to go more in depth.

teachers create an environment where learners are driven beyond the surface of the words? How does the learning come alive in the work?

After reading *Cognitive Capital*, Litzau and Murray decided to create a shared experience where other educators would engage with the text. They invited leaders to sign up for a book study that met for seven weeks, with each session lasting 90 minutes.

In planning the professional learning, they searched inside and outside education for supplemental texts to support, refute, or challenge the central ideas. The key was to find the right supplemental texts to spark discourse among learners.

These texts needed to be compelling and short, yet meaty enough to engage the learners. They considered works by Senge on systems thinking, Wiseman on multipliers, and Csikszentmihalyi on flow, as well as others.

To design these collaborative sessions, they developed questions and organized structures for discourse. Participants read the identified chapters from the anchor text before each session and came prepared to engage in structured conversations. At the beginning of each session, participants read a parallel text, then discussed the key ideas in both readings.

Some structures — those frequently used in classrooms — were simple but powerful. Others were more complex, requiring participants to synthesize their own learning along with the learning of others. (See “Summary of weekly plans” on p. 42.) Particularly challenging were the structures designed to unearth mental models (systems thinking; iceberg) and those requiring participants to make connections with the diverse thinking in the room (circle of viewpoints).

Through reflection, processing, and debate, participants’ beliefs evolved. One participant said, “The structure provided multiple perspectives that shifted my thinking in the moment,

taking me deeper into the content.”

Over the course of the study, the routine provided a ritual that was important to developing new mental models and putting the learning into practice. Each participant ended the seven-week book study with a leadership action plan — an accountability plan to implement their new learning. The action plans focused on each person’s role as an instructional coach, principal, or central office leader.

OTHER LITERACY STUDY DESIGNS

This experience inspired us to consider other ways to support adult learning using student-centered literacy designs. By using these design principles, teachers experience the processes just as their students would and learn how to apply these principles without having to participate in additional training. Through their own reading and collaboration with peers, teachers gain a deeper appreciation about drawing knowledge from text.

The chart on p. 43 illustrates other collaborative literacy designs that can be used for professional learning. The six literacy strategies are listed in the order of the greatest capacity for long-term learning, beginning with anchor and mentor texts.

When adult learners study and discuss texts over time, the learning community develops capacity by formulating and sharing a knowledge base. When adults share that knowledge base in their daily work, the learning becomes job-embedded, further strengthening its power.

SET ASIDE TIME FOR REFLECTION

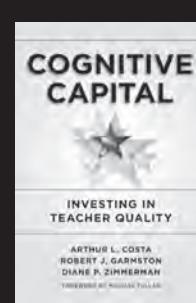
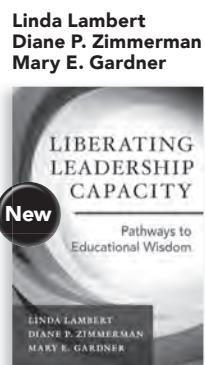
To make the learning about the literacy design processes explicit, participants need time to reflect on their own learning, the process, and any insights they might have about how to transfer this learning into the classroom. As the group reflected, they realized that not all supplemental resources were equally useful for extending understanding. Discussing their experience, the group developed criteria for choosing supplemental texts.

More than a year later, we have found that the key ideas

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have stayed with the participants and have become reference points for their professional work. Powerful texts have staying power. Add professional dialogue and collaboration, and the learning begins to shape a knowledge base.

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Power plan

Continued from p. 16

- What sets your heart on fire?
- What does #YOLO mean to you?
- Avenge or forgive?
- Can you buy your way to happiness?
- Are humans naturally good or evil?
- Which is worse, failing or never trying?

Students exercise a lot of choice in reading. The content-area reading students do for 10 minutes several times a week allows them to choose texts from a collection, all of which are related to the topics they are studying. The book club texts are drawn from a list of at least 40 choices, each addressing the essential question.

In addition, the essential questions introduce inquiry into English language arts. There are no required whole-class novels that students must read. Rather, teachers read texts in class, modeling their thinking, and students read texts of their choice to discuss with classmates. Inquiry and choice are directly related to motivation. And motivation to read helps build stamina.

REALIZING RESULTS

Just 2½ years after implementing this professional learning plan, the school received a Title I academic achievement award because the performance of students living in poverty had doubled for two consecutive years. Only 106 schools in California (out of thousands) met this standard; only three others besides Health Sciences were high schools.

Internal tracking also suggested significant increases in students' literacy development. Before this schoolwide effort, Lexile scores increased on average about 65 points. The first full year of implementation of this plan, average Lexile scores

increased by 113 points from the September assessment to the June administration. In the second year of implementation, scores increased an average of 133 points — and that's on top of the first-year gains.

Student performance on state accountability tests showed improvement as well. For the first time, no 9th-grade students scored far below basic. The Academic Performance Index (the measure of progress used in California to monitor schools) rose above 800 for the first time, meeting the goal set by the state. Clearly, students were reading better, and a dual approach to building reading strength and reading stamina have contributed to these gains.

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✓ Teacher is guiding students' reading, strategy application, and collaborative discussions.

THE VIEW FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

AN OBSERVATION PROTOCOL BOOSTS LITERACY LEADERSHIP

By Sandi Novak and Bonnie Houck

"Leadership content knowledge in regard to teaching young children to read must focus both on how students learn literacy and how teachers support that learning."
— Stein & Nelson, 2003

Educational leaders understand their role in creating a schoolwide goal of continuous learning for teachers and students. They know the importance of identifying and providing the resources and professional learning necessary to foster improvements with the greatest potential to increase student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). However, not all principals have a strong knowledge base in all areas of instruction.

School leaders often lack the specific teaching experience, knowledge, or expertise needed to be an instructional leader in reading and literacy learning (Hoewing, 2011). Principals and other administrative leaders need professional development, resources, and tools to guide

them in building a continuous progress model in literacy learning.

In order to create a schoolwide system of improved practices that focuses on a strong literacy culture, we need to pay attention to school and district leaders' professional learning needs. Their needs are different from teachers.

✓ Students are actively listening, purposefully engaged, and interacting with peers.

LITERACY LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Although research emphasizes the principal as instructional leader, little has been done to examine the literacy knowledge principals need regarding literacy teaching and learning or how districts build literacy leadership capacity.

Principals who value literacy know they need to gain the knowledge necessary to collaborate with teachers to ensure all students learn to read and write. Stein and Nelson (2003) found that educational leaders who aren't proficient in their knowledge of literacy instruction have a dif-



ficult time determining the key qualifications that excellent teachers possess.

To develop this expertise, principals must understand the foundational research-based practices that support literacy instruction and what effective instruction that fosters student growth and achievement looks like. In addition, they must understand how to work with the school community to create a literacy culture within a professional learning community (PLC).

Creating a literacy culture begins with working to develop a common belief system about learning and literacy, common language, and instructional practices related to reading development.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association offered Minnesota principals professional learning that placed a high priority on literacy instruction and developing a collegial culture. As facilitators, we envisioned principals as instructional leaders who support teacher learning. To accomplish this, we designed a four-day professional learning experience focused on literacy leadership for principals to learn about and discuss effective literacy teaching and student learning.

Groups of principals met for their first two days of professional development during the summer to learn about

and be able to identify quality literacy instruction. They worked together to identify and gain the ability to discuss key components of effective reading instruction. They observed videos of teachers applying the learning target across the gradual release of whole-group, small-group, and independent reading, then later discussed what quality teaching and student learning looks and sounds like in strong literacy cultures. They gained access to tools and resources to use in their schools to determine teachers' understanding and use of best practices in literacy.

Back at their schools, they used an observation protocol called the Literacy Classroom Visit Instrument (see p. 49) to gather data to determine the status of literacy teaching and student learning. Principals observed all classrooms at least two times and gathered data using the instrument before returning one month later for their third day of professional learning on literacy leadership.

Principal Pete Otterson, a participant in the literacy academy, said, "Literacy classroom visits are very intentional and focused on specific strategies and components of literacy, unlike other walk-through forms I have used in the past. Literacy visits help administrators like me find trends within the entire school, whereas other walk-through forms are very broad and only allow me to give feedback to specific teachers."

On Day 3, they learned how to look for patterns in school data to determine next steps for their staff's professional learning. They reviewed, discussed, and learned from each other's data while thinking collaboratively about next steps. Later, they modified the Literacy Classroom Visit Instrument to help them determine whether the professional learning their teachers would receive was being implemented with fidelity.

Day 3 also focused on how to include reflective practices into the professional learning culture within the school. This helped principals understand that this model is based on the importance of teachers' professional growth and enhanced learning opportunities for students rather than evaluation of individual teachers.

At the end of Day 3, principals returned to their schools to conduct another series of literacy classroom visits in all classrooms. A month later, they returned for Day 4 of the professional learning with their updated school data.

During Day 4, leaders learned how to use the data to engage in professional learning discussions as well as to identify common patterns that would determine the potential professional learning for staff and additional resources needed within the school. They discussed how to share their data analysis and recommendations for resources and professional learning with teachers by using critical, nonevaluative language seated in data and how to elicit collegial conversations about a long-range plan.

Lisa Masica, a principal from Edina, Minnesota, said, "Many teachers completed teacher training coursework prior to the use of learning targets. Teachers are successful teach-

ing small-group lessons but are less familiar using a learning target across the gradual release. Using the same learning target within whole-group, small-group, and independent reading is not common practice. The data gained through our classroom visits helped us to identify further need for professional development."

Jen Mahan-Deitte, an assistant principal from Minneota, Minnesota, noted trends of whole-group instruction from the literacy classroom visit data. When she shared the data with teachers, they thought the solution would be to have her visit the classroom at different times during the literacy block of time. Prepared with the observation instrument, Mahan-Deitte strategically mapped herself in classrooms at alternate times for a couple more rounds of data collection. When the data revealed a similar pattern of whole-group instruction being done in most classrooms, teachers were ready to address this area of need with professional learning.

Mounds View Public Schools sent all 10 of its principals to the literacy academy. Later, the group conducted a round of literacy classroom visits as a team. Principal Nathan Flansburg said that it helped the principals build common language and become more aligned across schools. "By conducting the literacy classroom visits together and reviewing the data as a group, we feel like we are improving systematically," he said. "The data tells a story of our strengths and where to go next."

Equipped with extended knowledge of what good literacy instruction looks like and how to monitor if professional development is implemented with fidelity, these principals returned to their schools with confidence to lead their literacy improvement efforts.

LITERACY CLASSROOM VISITS

The literacy classroom visit captures the essential research-supported elements of the literacy culture and components of effective instruction. It provides a framework and resources that guide and support a principal as she works with her team to create a school and classroom culture of literacy and establish effective instructional literacy practices that cultivates self-motivated readers, thinkers, and problem solvers.

The data collected provides a basis to discuss the strengths and needs of a school community using broad data patterns that focus on the school or district, not on individual teachers. The heart of the model is the Literacy Classroom Visit Instrument. This tool guides principals, leaders, and teachers in observing critical look-fors in literacy classrooms and in the overall literacy culture of a school.

The literacy classroom visit uses the best aspects of walk-throughs as they are brief, frequent, informal, and focused visits to classrooms by observers for the purposes of gathering data about literacy practices and engaging in some follow-up.

Like instructional rounds, literacy classroom visits can be done with teams and focus on student learning and collabora-

LITERACY CLASSROOM VISIT INSTRUMENT

Teacher /grade	Date/time	Observer
CLASSROOM CLIMATE AND CULTURE		NOTES
<input type="checkbox"/> Students are actively and purposefully engaged in literacy-focused learning activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom library is organized to support self-selection and supports class size/level (300+ texts). <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom library has a balance of fiction/informational texts at varied levels. <input type="checkbox"/> Rituals, routines, and procedures in place (Interactive I-Charts, process for book selection, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Displays of student work show development and celebrate literacy learning. <input type="checkbox"/> Interactive word walls are used to support writing and vocabulary development.		
LEARNING TARGET/INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL		
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning target/goal is posted in student-friendly language. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning target/goal identifies demonstration of learning (performance criteria). <input type="checkbox"/> Learning target/goal is taught and monitored across the gradual release of responsibility.		
OBSERVED METHOD OF INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY		
<input type="checkbox"/> Whole-group lesson/minilesson <input type="checkbox"/> Small-group <input type="checkbox"/> Independent reading and application		
WHOLE-GROUP INSTRUCTION		
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is leading a focused minilesson or lesson using time effectively for age range. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is explicitly teaching/modeling effective skill/strategy (learning target). <input type="checkbox"/> Students are actively listening, purposefully engaged, and interacting with teacher. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are actively listening, purposefully engaged, and interacting with peers.		
SMALL-GROUP GUIDED PRACTICE		
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is guiding students' reading, strategy application, and collaborative discussions. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is listening to students read individually while others read quietly. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is assessing strengths/needs and collecting anecdotal notes. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are reading and discussing texts at their instructional level. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are practicing the skill or strategy explicitly taught and modeled in whole group.		
INDEPENDENT READING AND APPLICATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is conferring one-on-one with reader. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher is assessing development and recording data. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are reading self-selected books from a bag or bin and applying strategies learned. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are conferring with teacher for reading skills and/or demonstrating learning target. <input type="checkbox"/> Students are actively working at some other connected literacy enhancement activity.		
STUDENT INTERACTION AND UNDERSTANDING		
<input type="checkbox"/> Students can explain the skill/strategy. <input type="checkbox"/> Students know what they are supposed to learn and how they are expected to demonstrate that learning in whole or small group or on their own. <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (Did not speak with student).		
COMMENTS/FEEDBACK:		
POSSIBLE PROMPTS FOR PEER DISCUSSIONS (PLCS):		

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tive discussions around descriptive, nonjudgmental data. However, they are unique in that they concentrate specifically on research-supported literacy practices that have a direct effect on literacy achievement.

Over time, they illuminate patterns in these areas related to the whole school and grade levels rather than on individuals, documenting observed evidence of a developing culture of literacy as well as research-supported effective instructional practices throughout a school.

Instructional leaders find literacy classroom visits to be an important tool in that they are unique in purpose, process, use of data, and implementation. The purpose is to provide educators with the tools, strategies, and processes to foster learning environments where children become successful and motivated readers and writers.

The process is a system of ongoing three- to five-minute planned visits focused on best practices of literacy instruction and student learning. Data patterns that emerge over time through the practice of visiting classrooms regularly provide a rich tapestry of information about student learning and teacher development.

Analyzing the accumulated data by employing deep reflection and conversation about the patterns that arise can tell the current story of literacy instruction. Ensuing conversations among leaders and teachers build community and partnerships, providing neutral data for discussions about common practices, and can guide ongoing professional learning experiences in schools and districts.

Sandy Giorgi, an elementary teaching and learning coordinator in Minnesota, said, “I believe once educational leaders see the data from literacy classroom visits and what is actually happening in the classrooms through the lens of what a student knows and can do, they will never go back to past practices. Resources are limited and the return on investment is critical to school communities. These visits provide a rich source of data that paints a clear picture of where schools and/or districts need to focus these limited resources.”

ONE DISTRICT'S STORY

Lakeville Area Public Schools is a second-ring suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota, serving 10,000 students in eight elementary, three middle, and two high schools. District leaders are committed to building a long-term professional learning plan with a focus on literacy for elementary staff.

District leaders, principals, and learning specialists teamed up to develop an ongoing system of observation and data collection using literacy classroom visits as the core method of data collection to identify the resource and professional learning needs of elementary teachers.

The data collection process began with a survey to assess teachers' foundational knowledge of literacy practices reflected in the Literacy Classroom Visit Instrument. Leaders and teams

engaged in professional learning on its use and later visited every classroom in every elementary school using the tool. Then they analyzed and discussed the data to determine the current literacy culture and instructional practices in the district as a whole and in each school to establish overall strengths and needs.

The district developed a three-year, sustained, job-embedded professional learning plan for leaders as well as teachers using a cycle of quarterly professional learning provided by literacy experts. Leadership professional learning communities were built into the plan to support teachers and leaders.

The district used the Literacy Classroom Visit Instrument three times a year to collect data about the ongoing cycle of professional learning. Monthly check-ins using segments of the instrument helped identify the specific look-fors related to the professional learning. Leaders and school teams continuously discussed and analyzed data to differentiate professional learning opportunities to build common foundational knowledge as well as provide choice and voice in learning.

As the end of the first year of implementation approached, the district saw significant change in the development of common practices and the establishment of a literacy culture.

The majority of classrooms across the district now have established routines, procedures, and classroom management practices to support literacy learning. Lessons are more focused, and students practice the skills and strategies modeled while teachers monitor ongoing progress. More students are reading independently in self-selected texts and are using them to practice their learning.

Common practices can be observed within and across grade levels. Teachers have a common language to discuss their professional learning and development, and this practice has a positive effect on students' understanding. The commitment to develop a culture of literacy within schools and across the district is growing.

WHY INVEST IN LITERACY CLASSROOM VISITS?

Investing in professional learning for leaders and teachers using literacy classroom visits can:

- Establish a body of evidence about the overall literacy culture and instruction;
- Identify instructional patterns in teacher teams, grade levels, and content areas;
- Provide data to identify resource needs and reduce unnecessary budget expenditures;
- Guide professional learning planning and PLC team content;
- Inform a school community about the implementation of professional learning goals; and
- Ensure that students are learning and mastering grade-level standards and expectations (Houck & Novak, *in press*).

The most critical elements of effective classroom visits are

Continued on p. 56

THE POWER of TEACHER AGENCY

WHY WE MUST TRANSFORM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SO THAT IT REALLY SUPPORTS EDUCATOR LEARNING

By Laurie Calvert

It may be a well-worn trope, but for many educators, the problem with professional learning really is a modern example of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

On the one hand, school leaders need professional learning to implement successfully a range of teaching and learning initiatives driven by the state and district. They rely on professional development to ensure the success of systemwide improvements, such as college- and career-ready standards and closing gaps. They count on educators keeping up with research to teach shifting student populations, use technology effectively, and make use of emerging information about the science of learning.

On the other hand, something seems to hamper professional learning and impede our ability to roll out systemwide improvements. What if the very professional development strategies that we expect to help schools achieve their goals do not effectively support teachers’ continued growth? What if we are operating under faulty assumptions about how adults learn and what motivates them to improve? Are the



\$2.6 billion spent on professional development at the federal level (Layton, 2015) and the \$8,000 to \$12,000 spent per teacher in districts (Knowledge Delivery Systems, n.d., p.8) squandered funds?

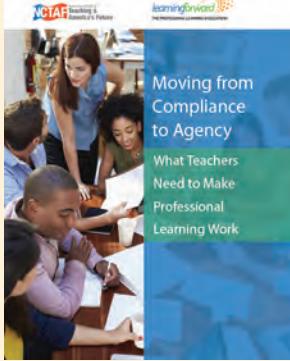
The heart of the matter is this: For many teachers, professional development has long been an empty exercise in compliance, one that falls short of its objectives and rarely improves professional practice. School leaders who disagree would be wise to check out a study released in 2014 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. *Teachers Know Best* found that the majority of school systems still struggle to provide valuable professional learning experiences for teachers.

The more than 1,600 teachers surveyed characterized their professional development as irrelevant, ineffective, and “not connected to their core work of helping students learn.” Similarly, TNP’s 2015 study, *The Mirage: Confronting the Hard Truth About Our Quest for Teacher Development*, concluded that, despite extraordinary financial and time investments, “most teachers do not appear to improve substantially from year to year — even though many have not yet mastered critical skills.”

A CONUNDRUM THAT HAS BECOME A CLICHÉ

The education industry has produced volumes of research describing what professional learning should look like, and, for the most part, researchers agree about many of the critical components. In 2011, Learning Forward updated — and most states since have adopted — Standards for Professional Learning that align with this research. The standards call for professional learning that is ongoing, embedded, connected to practice, aligned to school and district goals, and collaborative. The Gates study reinforced the Standards for Professional Learning and also found that teachers want professional development that is teacher-driven and recognizes that teachers are professionals with valuable insights.

This leads us to ask an important



This article is adapted from the report *Moving From Compliance to Agency: What Teachers Need to Make Professional Learning Work* (Calvert, 2016). The full report is available at www.learningforward.org/publications/teacher-agency.

question: If we know what good professional learning looks like, why aren’t teachers experiencing it?

To get closer to potential answers, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) and Learning Forward initiated a series of extensive conversations with teachers, former teachers who are now responsible for district-level professional development, and school administrators. We talked individually and at length with 26 educators in an attempt to understand causes for the disconnect between what teachers really need and what they are getting from professional learning and to discover how schools and systems might bridge the gap.

In the course of our research, we have come to believe that to transform professional learning so that it really supports educator learning, education leaders will need to pay greater attention to the importance of teacher agency.

WHAT IS TEACHER AGENCY?

In the context of professional learning, teacher agency is the capacity of

teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues. Rather than responding passively to learning opportunities, teachers who have agency are aware of their part in their professional growth and make learning choices to achieve their goals.

For years, educators and policymakers have referred to ongoing education for teachers as professional development (PD) or PD trainings that teachers “receive.” We use the term professional learning because it recognizes teachers as agents of their growth and emphasizes that learning is an experience driven largely by the learner.

The degree to which a teacher acts with agency in professional learning depends on a number of factors, including both a teacher’s internal traits, such as the motivation to engage in professional learning, as well as a school’s structural conditions for professional learning, including the degree to which the system involves teachers in decisions about what and how they learn.

Though we discuss teachers’ need to own their agency and take responsibility for their learning, the focus of this paper is on what schools and systems can do to improve teacher agency so that teachers continue to develop their craft and students learn well.

7 STEPS FORWARD

We do not propose teacher agency as a panacea. We understand that creating effective professional learning is complex and difficult. Instead, this paper sheds light on the importance of teacher agency in effective professional learning and offers school leaders and policymakers strategies they might adapt within their own contexts to create greater avenues for teacher agency that improves learning.

We noticed in our conversations about professional learning that the teachers’ tone improved considerably when describing learning experiences where they have had agency. Instead of

bemoaning meetings hijacked by “administrivia,” they brightened as they expressed the value of being part of a nurturing professional community, connecting to their real work, and being treated as experts and decision makers.

To make this happen, we recommend seven important actions that district and school leaders can take to improve educator agency in their professional learning systems. See these steps outlined at right.

When schools and districts begin to improve teacher agency, the potential payoffs can be big. The Gates study found that, while fewer than one in three teachers choose most or all of their professional learning opportunities, teachers with more choice report much higher levels of satisfaction with professional development learners (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014, pp. 10-11).

The work to advance agency and balance teachers’ needs with system goals is not easy. The challenges cannot be solved by instituting a one-size-fits-all program or marking through a checklist. However, as we describe in these steps, research and teachers’ experiences offer useful conditions that, when adapted to fit local contexts, can help schools and districts move toward greater educator agency and effective professional learning.

SYSTEMS THAT TAP INTO TEACHERS’ INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS

Effective teachers understand the value of giving learners opportunities to construct knowledge and discover an important truth built on their prior knowledge and their own search for information and relationships.

“Having a student discover a theme of a novel is much more powerful than if I tell her the theme,” one teacher told us. “When she discovers, she is more likely to internalize what she has learned.”

Like their students, teachers long for opportunities to watch colleagues teach and choose for themselves the strategies they will adapt for their classrooms, following up with teachers they observed to

WHAT DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS CAN DO to improve education agency in their professional learning systems

1. Make all professional learning decisions only in serious consultation with teachers and principals. Ensure at least 50% teacher representation on school and district teams that are responsible for every stage of decision making, from planning and data analysis to design, implementation, and evaluation.
2. Rethink organization of the school day so that educators have time to meet regularly to collaborate with colleagues to improve teaching and learning.
3. Involve and support teachers in analyzing data and identifying teaching and learning challenges.
4. Establish learning communities where educators solve problems of practice and share responsibility for colleague and student success.
5. Give teachers choices regarding their professional learning, including with whom they work and where they focus their learning.
6. Ensure that professional learning is for the purpose of continuous growth, not evaluation.
7. Resist the temptation to scale up or mandate a particular form of professional learning without thoroughly examining the context in which it will be implemented. Understand that learners must want to improve their practice and see how the learning opportunity will help them do so.

talk about their practice and ask questions. Instead of sitting in generalized professional development sessions, they long to construct solutions to real classroom challenges.

For many teachers, these are the real motivations for learning. “Teachers are in it for the autonomy and the mastery. They want to master their craft and be free to innovate,” Kentucky English teacher Katrina Boone said. “Principals who get this [will] solve their professional development problems and a whole lot of other school challenges.”

Former teachers now working in district offices said that it is often difficult for districts to lighten their control over professional learning. “There is a central office fear of letting go, of giving educators agency to make decisions,” said a former teacher working on professional learning in a district office. “Various departments each have their thing, the program they want to emphasize. They believe this is the most important. They are afraid that if they don’t direct the PD, teachers will lose sight of it.”

Teachers admitted that they are sometimes complicit in relinquishing control for their own learning. They may be reluctant to push back against structures that don’t work or are unaware of how to make constructive changes in what they are offered.

“Teachers need to step up a little,” said a former teacher now serving as an assistant principal. He explained that teachers are free to call their district office and ask for specific professional development that they need, but that teachers rarely take advantage of this option. As teachers become aware of the importance of their agency, they must give themselves permission to lean into their own learning more often and more effectively.

SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES

When 6th-grade math teacher Bill Day of Two Rivers Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., described his school’s approach to professional learning, he emphasized Two Rivers’

strategy of balancing system needs with individual teacher needs. Day said that his school's mix of professional development offerings gives teachers agency within a framework of identified school learning objectives. School leaders survey teachers regularly, observe classes, and review data to determine objectives, but they define them broadly enough to be adapted to all subjects and grade levels.

In a practice called data analysis strategy loops, teachers work in multi-disciplinary teams to learn about an instructional practice, develop individual plans to use the skill, collect data, share the data, observe each other's classes, and act as critical friends. The teachers themselves determine how they will use each new strategy, including what lesson they will teach and what materials and

Within any school or district, there is enormous untapped teacher expertise that could be harnessed to improve professional learning.

content they will use. Yet everyone in the school is focused on a coherent goal, such as building student craftsmanship or effective use of classroom critique.

The strategy loops help Two Rivers teachers improve by exposing them to effective and research-based practices, while the observations and interpretive-stance discussions strengthen instructional practice. "It works because teachers have agency, but within an umbrella of instructional practice," Day said. "Districts and schools get to see the forest. Teachers get to see the trees. You need both."

We heard from some teachers being treated as experts and learning from one another, but other teachers told us that for teacher agency to improve professional learning, principals and system leaders would have to engage with teachers differently.

Working to improve professional learning in New Haven, Connecticut, former teacher Justin Boucher said that until very recently it was not unusual

to hear administrators say, "[The teachers] had the PD on that, but it's still not working," a stance that sees teachers as service providers rather than problem solvers or decision makers. Boucher says educational leaders sometimes see their job as getting teachers to do things, and then they "blame teachers when initiatives don't work."

HOW TO ADVANCE TEACHER AGENCY

- **Tap into teacher leadership.**

Within any school or district, there is enormous untapped teacher expertise that could be harnessed to improve professional learning. Recognizing this reality, district officials in Burbank, California, hired two of the district's best teacher leaders to work full time as teachers in residence, designing induction and professional development for educators.

For middle school English teacher Rebecca Mieliwocki and 5th-grade teacher Jennifer Almer, the first step was talking with the teachers. They surveyed the 400 teachers from their 16 schools and got clear marching orders: no "big binders" that will sit on shelves but make no impact on their practice. Instead, teachers asked for feedback on their instruction, ideas to be more creative, strategies to use technology, models of best practice, and time to collaborate during the day.

After conducting the survey, Mieliwocki and Almer brought together teacher leaders from each school to talk about the survey results and make teacher-directed plans for professional learning. The district team agreed to adopt a visible learning model, and the teacher leaders within each school are forming teams to deepen their practice in something they have been asked to learn so that student learning improves.

- **Support teacher engagement.**

Teachers who are passionate about professional learning often speak about how they have grown through professional learning networks to which their school has introduced them. Dwight Da-

vis, a former teacher who now serves as an assistant principal at the Wheatley Education Campus in Washington, D.C., credits his participation in the Education Innovation Fellowship and a Teach Plus Teaching Policy Fellowship as central to his continued growth as a teacher.

"I couldn't have done it without my principal, though," Davis said. His principal nominated him to participate in one of the fellowships and encouraged his full participation in the other, including authorizing absences from school to learn with colleagues.

Robin (Meme) Ratliff is a health and physical education teacher in Kentucky who says she owes much of her development to her experiences as a Hope Street Fellow and her involvement in an ECET2 network of educators. Formed in 2011 by the Gates Foundation, ECET2 (Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching) is focused on harnessing the power of teacher networks.

Ratliff was nominated to participate by her principal, who also supported her time away from school and nurtured her growth. She said her participation in ECET2's colleague circles and directed table conversations about problems of practice have helped her to cultivate her calling to teach, hone her skills, and stay in the classroom. The first ECET2 conference "was my light bulb moment," Ratliff said. "It created a huge shift in my thinking. I am much more invested in education now."

- **Balance loose and tight control with support.**

Several district officials emphasized the importance of balancing tight and loose control of professional learning based in part on teachers' needs. In New Haven, Connecticut, teachers are seen as professionals who may choose to participate in independent learning sessions and which sessions to join.

The control tightens for beginning and struggling teachers, who are required to participate in some specific, more intensive coaching and development, and

then gradually releases as they are ready. West Virginia Principal Jennifer Ross explained, “The secret is that as a principal, you have to turn things over and give up some control. You can’t micromanage. The teachers have to be part of the team. I am on the team, but I’m not the only one.”

One way to help ensure a balance between management and agency is to include structures for authentic accountability. Teachers told us that teams need constant check-ins and monitoring of their progress, but the touch need not be heavy. Some schools ask teachers to upload documents that show their progress after meetings. Others engage in regular, ongoing conversations that offer snapshots of how teachers are progressing so that school leaders know when teachers need help.

The key is to make sure every team member participating in the learning assumes a nonevaluative stance. And if it looks as if a team is in trouble, a principal might have a conversation with the team leader and support her through effective follow-up.

Districts can improve accountability and balance control with support by putting systems in place to collect and review data that can help educators evaluate the quality of professional learning. Support for this strategy can be found in the Data standard in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) as it describes “a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning” (p. 36).

- **Hire leaders who believe in professional learning.**

For teacher agency to contribute to quality professional learning, teachers and district leaders told us it is critical for school leaders to believe in professional learning and establish a culture of continuous learning. “The principal doesn’t have to be on every team,” North Carolina math and science teacher Ben Owens told us, “but she must ensure that

there is commitment of excellence and improvement through peer networks.”

The Leadership standard in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) emphasizes the importance of having “skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning” (p. 29). Peggy Stewart, 2005 New Jersey Teacher of the Year, said it is important to have a school leader who holds learning among the highest priorities for everyone in the school and who recognizes that with high expectations there must be support for continued learning.

“In schools where the principal doesn’t understand, giving teachers choice can be a disaster,” Stewart said. To illustrate, she described the experience in a New Jersey school where the teachers didn’t buy into learning communities, so they set up instructional learning goals like attending yoga classes, but the principal didn’t know enough about how to guide them toward more authentic professional learning goals.

- **Start small and go deep.**

Schools and districts that are just beginning to improve agency are advised to begin with small steps and reflect about what these changes really mean for their systems. In “In here, out there,” researcher James Noonan (2014) concludes, after observing and talking with educators at a middle school, that it can be very “difficult to shift norms of professional learning in schools” (p. 151).

Educators we talked with confirmed it takes time for new approaches to be shaped to fit individual contexts and begin to make a difference. Harnessing teachers who have operated as solo fliers into collaborative communities will not happen overnight. Teachers who have not been given much responsibility or agency in the past will have to learn to use them well.

Schools and districts need to provide capacity building and support so teachers can take advantage of the opportunity. School and system leaders will have to

prepare themselves for challenges from teachers who now have a voice and find themselves sharing in the leadership of the school and trust those teachers to make lasting improvements.

“We expect change to be this massive, rapid thing,” a district leader in Nevada told us. “The truth is it takes time to build trust and to move the needle. It can take five to seven years.”

CLOTHING THE EMPEROR

Lest we be guilty of inventing our own fairy tales, we must all acknowledge

Educators we talked with confirmed it takes time for new approaches to be shaped to fit individual contexts and begin to make a difference. Harnessing teachers who have operated as solo fliers into collaborative communities will not happen overnight.

that providing teachers with more agency in their development will not solve every challenge in professional learning. There will be times when the adults in the room will choose learning experiences that do not significantly change their thinking or their practice.

Nevertheless, teachers are making a clear statement that what we have been doing is not effective. More importantly, they make a compelling case that improving teacher agency is critical to their professional learning and to their profession.

When teachers tell us that the emperor has no clothes, they are not saying that all current staff development is pedagogically deadening. Some enjoy teacher meetings and appreciate time to catch up with colleagues. What they are telling us, though, is that they do not grow professionally from these experiences. They may receive “PD credits,” but they do not fundamentally change their practice.

This is what we learned by talking with educators: The opportunity is ripe to work together to clothe the emperor. Let’s bring in our teachers as partners to create job-embedded, authentic systems of learning for the whole school commu-

nity. Let's give them the time, structures, support, and choices they need to be fully engaged in improving practice and solving our most pressing educational challenges.

When we believe in our teachers, listen to them, and support their continual development, there is no telling what our educators and their students will accomplish.

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The view from the principal's office

Continued from p. 50

purpose, focus, and analysis. The literacy classroom visit model fosters development in all students with a particular focus on literacy learning to analyze how efforts within the school are affecting classroom practices that develop readers.

Literacy classroom visits meet the needs of leaders and teachers as they seek to collect and analyze accurate information about strengths and needs in current classroom practices in order to provide staff with the support necessary to grow. Continued visits can monitor ongoing progress in the developing literacy culture and instruction in a school or district.

School leadership experts say that robust and ongoing training can alleviate issues like rapid turnover rates and help keep new principals on the job. A 2013 report from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that "principals who did not get professional development the previous year were 1.4 times more likely to leave their school than leaders who did receive training" (Prothero, 2015, p. 10). Turnover in leadership ultimately means wasted resources for districts.

Although the specific professional development needs vary from new to experienced principals, the tenets of good career training remain the same. According to leaders in the field, it should be rooted in real-world/real-school issues, spread out over a period of time, and promote higher-quality instruction as well as develop a more powerful culture and climate within the school (Prothero, 2015).

Principals want and need to work in districts where their professional learning needs are fulfilled. In order to cultivate

a culture of literacy and support effective literacy instruction that fosters student achievement, leaders need access to strong support and development, far beyond a mentor program in the first two years on the job.

Just as we do for teachers, doctors, and lawyers, we must continue to invest in principal skill development and support them in the complex work of leading schools.

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Differentiating the Flipped Classroom

Eric Carbaugh and Kristina Doubet, associate professors in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and Math Education at James Madison University, lead the webinar *Differentiating the Flipped Classroom*. The professors and ASCD faculty

members work closely with practicing teachers to help them meet the needs of diverse learners. Carbaugh and Doubet conduct extensive training related to educational best practices throughout the United States and internationally.

Combined, they have worked with over 150 schools, districts, and organizations on the topics of differentiation, classroom assessment, flipped instruction, and curriculum design. The webinar discusses their practical, standards-aligned solutions to designing and implementing at-home and at-school learning experiences that check for individual student understanding.

Webinars are free for Learning Forward members. Members also get access to the on-demand library of webinars.

www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars/differentiating-the-flipped-classroom



Sign up for Summer Institutes

If you're looking to get tools, strategies, and skills you need to boost educator performance and student success, Learning Forward's Institutes offer intensive learning that digs deeper into a wide variety of topics.

This year's Summer Institutes run July 21-24 in Chicago. The two-day sessions include:

- Becoming Learning Principals;
- Collaborative Inquiry: Putting Learning Back in Professional Learning;
- Do As I Do: Modeling Differentiation in Professional Development;
- Transforming Professional Learning: Applying Proven Strategies and Tools to Elevate Practice;
- Common Core Literacy: Teaching Writing Using and Analyzing Sources; and
- Leveraging Coaching Partnerships for Continuous Improvement.

www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/institutes

Improving statewide learning

In her Learning Forward blog, Lisa Castro writes about the difficulties in navigating the wealth of options to choose from when planning for and participating in professional learning.

"There seem to be two distinct strategies," Castro writes, "each with its own champion: those who advocate for just-in-time, adult self-select learning, such as edcamps and Twitter chats, and those in organizations with comprehensive, systemic, required professional learning plans."

Castro explores what this dichotomy looks like in practice and suggests six ways districts and organizations can ensure instructional capacity and better meet the needs of educators.

www.learningforward.org/publications/blog/learning-forward-blog/2016/04/01/take-advantage-of-the-wealth-of-options-for-professional-learning



Redesigning principal preparation programs

In his Learning Forward blog, deputy executive director Frederick Brown writes about new efforts to strengthen leadership at the school and system levels by The Wallace Foundation. Brown notes that, in its most recent work, Wallace has been engaged in two initiatives to strengthen leaders.

First, its Principal Pipeline Initiative is helping districts get clear about the job leaders are expected to do, the training they need to perform their work, the kind of hiring practices that will get the right person in the appropriate position, and the kind of induction and ongoing support that will help them be effective.

A second Wallace initiative seeks to strengthen the practices of district principal supervisors — those key individuals who support building principals in their work. In both of these initiatives, the goal is to link the practice of system and building leaders to improvements in teaching and learning in schools across the district.

www.learningforward.org/publications/blog/learning-forward-blog/2016/04/04/new-initiative-to-redesign-principal-preparation-programs



Frederick Brown



Changes in coaching study design shed light on how features impact teacher practice

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

Teacher coaching is a powerful form of professional learning that improves teaching practices and student achievement, yet little is known about the specific aspects of coaching programs that are more effective.

Researchers used a blocked randomized experiment to study the effects of one-to-one coaching on teacher practice. When pooled across all teachers in both cohorts, there is no effect of coaching on teacher practice, yet considerable variability exists between the cohorts.

Changes in program design that occurred between the two cohorts provided researchers an opportunity to study how differences in program features influence positive effects in the first cohort on teacher practice and the absence of effects in the second cohort.

Study description

Researchers applied a blocked randomized trial design to study the effects of MATCH Teacher Coaching

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across two cohorts of volunteer teachers in selected charter schools in the Recovery School District in New Orleans. Three specific areas of teacher practice, behavior management, instructional delivery, and student engagement were examined.

Large positive effects on teacher

practice occurred in cohort 1, yet did not occur in cohort 2. Further exploratory analyses of the features of the coaching program, specifically focus of coaching interactions, dosage of coaching, and the coach, offer possible explanations for the difference in effects between the cohorts.

At a glance

Overall, a study of one-to-one coaching across two cohorts did not significantly lead to improvements in teaching practice. Exploratory analyses of the features and effects of the two cohorts, however, suggest that changes in the design and focus of coaching may explain the large positive effects on teacher practice in one cohort that were absent in the other.

THE STUDY

Blazar, D. & Kraft, M. (2015, December). Exploring mechanisms of effective teaching coaching: A tale of two cohorts from a randomized experiment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(4), 542-566.

Questions

Researchers sought to answer an overarching question about the effects of MATCH Coaching Program on teacher practice. Changes in the program design in cohort 2, primarily as a result of additional teachers and differences in impact between the two cohorts, created an opportunity to explore how the features of the coaching program influence the effects.

Methodology

In a limited blocked randomized trial study, researchers studied the effects of one year of coaching on two different cohorts of volunteer teachers. Cohort 1, with 30 treatment teachers, received coaching in 2011-12, and cohort 2, with 49 treatment teachers, received coaching in the subsequent school year.

Control-group teachers (cohort 1 = 29; cohort 2 = 45) received no coaching. Teachers were randomly assigned by block based on school and geography, and coaches were assigned primarily on teaching level (elementary, middle, and high school). Teachers within each cohort varied on a number of characteristics, including years of experience, demographics, type of preparation programs, and subject areas taught, yet across both cohorts the differences were insignificant.

Three coaches provided coaching each year, with only one coach, the director of the coaching program, remaining the same from cohort 1 to cohort 2. Treatment teachers received four days of training in the summer and then intensive coaching cycles of weeklong observations and feedback. Teachers received four weeks of coaching in cohort 1 and three weeks in cohort 2.

Coaches received training from the program director, who served as one of the coaches, in using the MATCH Classroom Observation Rubric to develop internal consistency and in giving feedback to teachers.

In cohort 1, coaches served about 10 teachers each, with some teachers receiving coaching from more than one coach during the program. In cohort 2, because of the increase in number of participating teachers, the amount of coaching was reduced from four to three weeks, and two coaches worked with about 20 teachers each, while the third coach (the program director) worked with only nine teachers.

Changes in the coaching program design for cohort 2 included a larger number of teacher participants; reduction in the dosage of coaching from four to three weeks; two new coaches; intentional sequencing of the focus within coaching interactions on behavior management until teachers

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

As a small study of the effects of coaching, the study provides multiple opportunities for examining how to examine impact of a program, as specified within the **Data standard** of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. New professional learning initiatives require rigorous evaluation to strengthen and refine them and to ensure that they produce the intended results. It is unclear how the design of the coaching program studied meets the other Standards for Professional Learning, yet the study offers an example of how to assess a professional learning program. In addition, it provides insights into the features of effective coaching programs that contribute to positive effects on teacher practice. Because coaching is an increasingly common professional learning practice and one that is not inexpensive, decision makers and policymakers want to consider thoughtfully how to design, implement, and evaluate coaching programs to increase their effects on both educators and students.

demonstrated mastery before addressing instructional delivery and student engagement; more explicit guidance and direct feedback for cohort 2 coaches on debriefing observations; and greater emphasis by coaches on teachers practicing and watching video on behavior management.

Analysis

In the spring before randomization and training and coaching, coaches

observed all participating teachers and rated their performance in three areas of teacher practice, behavior management, instructional delivery, and student engagement using the MATCH Classroom Observation Rubric. The rubric provides a holistic score in two areas, achievement of lesson aim and behavioral climate. Coaches used the rubric during the coaching cycle to evaluate teacher practice in three areas.

One additional outcome measure was the Tripod student survey, administered to upper elementary and secondary students at the end of the coaching year. The survey focused on two areas: challenge and control — the areas most predictive of teacher value-added scores in reading and math — and the specific item, “In this class, we learn a lot every day.”

Other outcome measures included a principal survey based on teacher evaluations in 11 areas that were aggregated into an overall effectiveness composite and external-observer evaluation ratings from two classes at the end of the school year using the MATCH Classroom Observation Rubric. These measures, rather than student test data, provided a way to examine teacher practice across multiple subjects and grade levels and to focus on teaching practice specifically in a generalized way that guaranteed similar data for both control and treatment teachers.

All five scores from the various outcome measures, two Tripod student survey items, principal surveys, and external observer evaluation scores in the two domains of the MATCH Classroom Observation Rubric, were aggregated into a summary index. Qualitative data from interviews with coaches and some teachers complemented the quantitative analyses and informed findings and explanations.

Results

Pooled effects of the coaching program across cohorts 1 and 2 are

not significant on any of the measures, including the summary index. Yet the pooled finding provides limited insight into the effects of variation in program features between cohorts. Further explanatory analyses examine the differences and offer explanations for effects in cohort 1.

To examine the variations in the cohorts, researchers applied substantive statistical analyses to examine the effects of multiple features and offer possible explanations for why teachers in cohort 1 received a statistically significantly higher scores on all measures with the exception of overall composite index and control at the end of the year of coaching than teachers in cohort 2, who showed no statistically significant differences at the end of their year of coaching.

Exploratory analyses of the effects of the variations in the coaching program features suggest that the treatment effect differences may be largely the result of the program features. In addition, researchers examine attenuation of spillover, school contexts, teacher characteristics, missing data, and participant dropout to eliminate other possible explanations for the effect differences.

Coaching program features affect results. Differences in the dosage of coaching; the sequence of coaching topics; the coaching techniques used, such as direct feedback, lesson planning, unpacking beliefs, practice, and video watching; and who the coach is offer promising explanations for the differences.

Teachers in cohort 1 received more coaching than those in cohort 2. In interactions with coaches, teachers in cohort 1 focused more on all three areas represented by the outcome measures rather than predominantly on behavior management, as they did in cohort 2.

Researchers suggest that “an additional week spent on instructional delivery [in cohort 1] is associated with positive and mostly statistically significant improvements in teachers’

practices” while “the time spent on behavior management [in cohort 2] is associated with negative and often statistically significant decrements in teachers’ practice” (p. 561).

Coaches in cohort 1 used less practice and video watching than coaches in cohort 2. There was a positive and statistically significant difference on the summary index between coaches in cohort 1 and cohort 2 (.87 standard deviation) and among coaches within each cohort.

Limitations

Researchers acknowledge some limitations in this study, including the lack of randomization of coach assignments and the potential effects of school context. Obviously the change in the program features presents another limitation, yet opened the door to unanticipated and informative exploration about how various features of the coaching program may influence effects.

Other limitations that may exist are the lack of intensive training and support for coaches, the structure of the coaching in a specific cycle focused around observation and feedback in intensive blocks, among others. Disappointing, yet understandable, is the decision to measure effects based on teacher practice without considering student achievement. A small concession to student learning is the component of the MATCH Classroom Observation Rubric focused on achieving the lesson aim and student response on the Tripod survey item on learning every day.

While the randomized trial experiment informs finding about coaching as a form of professional learning, the inclusion of subjects exclusively from charter schools who volunteered to participate limits the generalizability of the findings to those conditions and to this particular coaching approach. ■

Agents for Learning competition spurs teacher engagement in ESSA

Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF) are hosting a competition that invites teachers to submit written proposals for the best use of federal funding for professional learning under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

As part of their effort to highlight the critical role of teacher agency in professional learning, Learning Forward and NCTAF will use the competition to amplify and support teachers in understanding the provisions of ESSA aligning the allowable uses of funds under the law with their learning needs.

Through the Agents for Learning competition, teams of educators will be invited to submit proposals for best uses of Title II and other federal funds under ESSA. The proposals will include:

1. Analysis of teachers' primary professional learning needs;
2. An educator-informed theory of action around how to leverage professional learning to advance teaching and learning; and
3. Specific recommendations for states, districts, and schools to consider as guides to their Consolidated State Plans and/or state and district Title II plans, a requirement of ESSA, and the design of effective professional learning in their systems.

Teams interested in participating

AGENTS FOR LEARNING SPONSORS AS OF APRIL 15

- America Achieves
- American Federation of Teachers
- Center for American Progress
- Corwin
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- Educators 4 Excellence
- Hope Street Group
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- National Education Association
- National Network of State Teachers of the Year
- Scholastic Corporation
- Teach Plus

will be invited to a series of webinars helping them to understand the new law, including the rights and responsibilities of states regarding use of federal funds for professional development, as well as how those funds can support a systematic vision for continuous improvement in schools.

Teams will then respond to several questions that will be reviewed by an independent panel. The finalists will travel to Chicago in July to participate in further training and feedback to develop their plans, then present their proposals to a panel of judges.

The finalists' proposals will

COMPETITION TIMELINE

April 27, May 11: Informational webinars.

May 25: Live Q&A for support on team applications.

June 10: Applications due by 8 p.m. Eastern time.

June 21: Finalist teams announced.

July 21-22: Finalists present proposals in Chicago, Illinois.

be available online, as will the presentations and feedback to be used as a planning tool for states, districts, and schools as they work toward ESSA implementation. Supporting partners will disseminate the plans to advocate for effective professional learning with their stakeholders.

A number of educator advocacy organizations (see box above) will support educator teams' participation in the competition and deepen their engagement in advocating for the meaningful implementation of ESSA.

"Many teachers are already learning in effective and innovative ways alongside their colleagues in schools," said Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward. "Our goal with this effort is to raise the visibility of the learning that helps teachers improve in service to their students, and to influence policymakers at all levels as they implement ESSA."

GET STARTED

Gather your colleagues and your insights. Through the application process, you'll share a vision for effective professional learning and identify your highest needs. You'll also provide input on particular aspects of ESSA and how its implementation can most meaningfully support schools. See the tool on pp. 64-65 to begin the application process.

The deadline for applications is June 10. Learn more at www.learningforward.org/get-involved/agents-for-learning-competition.



Finding the sweet spot

Earlier this year, I engaged in professional learning with a group of elementary school teachers.

We were investigating Madagascar hissing cockroaches and how they behave under different conditions. Throughout the experience, teachers gathered observations to help construct a scientific explanation and developed additional questions to be researched and investigated. One of these questions had to do with the differences between male and female cockroaches.

As the teachers worked independently, my curiosity took over. I went to the *National Geographic Kids* website and began to read about hissing cockroaches. Suddenly, the room became disturbingly quiet. It turns out that my computer was connected to a projector, and all of the participants were reading along with me.

Although having learners read from a projected website isn't best practice, I believe that I hit the sweet spot. Allowing the teachers to experience a hands-on investigation created an intrinsic motivation to learn more about cockroaches. I left this session with a new question: How can we create experiences that intentionally take advantage of participants wanting to learn more?

Literacy coordinators in Colorado's

on board
JOHN EYOLFSON

Cherry Creek Schools have also been thinking about that sweet spot in literacy professional learning and believe they may have stumbled into it.

In the past, much of our literacy professional learning was centered around the acquisition of knowledge and skills that would improve classroom literacy practices. But, as with students, gaining knowledge and understanding doesn't necessarily mean the learner can use new skills. Because of this concern, the literacy coordinators shifted their approach.

Now, the learning begins in a master teacher's classroom, where teachers can see the knowledge in practice. The master teacher — in a real classroom with real students — instructs using the very knowledge and skills that teachers have been studying. She models the science *and* the art of pulling it off. The teachers are able to see the academic application unfold before their eyes.

After the experience, the coordinator and the master teacher debrief with the teachers. That's where the sweet spot comes. In this moment, there is a palpable hunger for learning in the room. The questions for each teacher's own practice begin to bubble up, and the afternoon is spent planning for upcoming lessons — with a new,

deeper understanding of the academic knowledge partnered with a developing tactical understanding.

At Cherry Creek, this lesson observation is part of the learning cycle we use now and part of a robust literacy professional learning approach:

- Teachers come in with a shared understanding of research-based literacy practices.
- Teachers are immersed in a master teacher's classroom, where those same practices are embedded in authentic instruction.
- As a result of the experiential learning, teachers are intrinsically motivated to dig into, refine, and apply the practices to their own instructional planning.
- Teachers have time with peers and coaches to design purposeful and authentic student learning experiences informed by the knowledge and experience of the immersion.
- Coaches and peers observe teachers implementing new practices and provide targeted feedback and coaching.

By combining academic learning with experiential focus, teachers can attach learning and strategy to their own ideas, students, and curriculum. This cycle can take the plethora of sound educational best practices from isolated knowledge chunks into authentic practice for student growth. ■

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John Eyolfson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

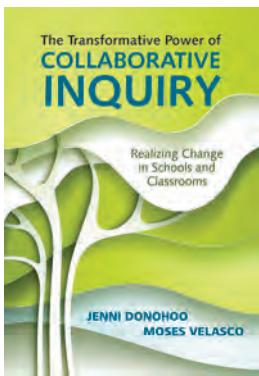
book club

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY:
Realizing Change in Schools and Classrooms
By Jenni Donohoo and Moses Velasco

This guide helps school leaders shape the development of a sustainable professional learning culture with practical suggestions and in-depth research. A follow-up to Jenni Donohoo's *Collaborative Inquiry for Educators: A Facilitator's Guide to School Improvement*, the authors explore:

- A rationale and framework for engaging in inquiry;
- The vital conditions needed to ensure systemwide collaboration; and
- Common pitfalls and the four stages of school improvement.

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



DON'T LOSE ACCESS TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Learning Forward is transitioning to a new member database in the coming weeks. Having your current email address is essential to keeping connected. Please take a moment to log in to the website and use the "update profile" link to verify your contact information, including your email address. You can also call **800-727-7288** anytime to verify your information.



LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION SEEKS YOUR STORIES

The Learning Forward Foundation wants to share stories that highlight the work and impact foundation grants and scholarships are having within the variety of settings in which foundation awardees and grantees work.

If you or your team have received a foundation grant or scholarship and would like to share your progress and learning with the larger community, contact the Foundation Publicity Committee at foundation@learningforward.org.

LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- June 10:** Agents for Learning competition applications due.
June 15: Deadline for February 2017 *JSD* manuscripts. Theme: STEM.
June 30: Last day to save \$75 off registration for the 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
July 21-24: Learning Forward Summer Institutes in Chicago, Illinois.
Aug. 15: Deadline for April 2017 *JSD* manuscripts. Theme: Measuring impact.



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SPEAK UP

The Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) new definition of professional learning and its requirements for evidence along with the allowable uses of funds under Title II have great potential for continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

If states and districts engage teachers who understand their learning needs, the needs of their students, and effective professional learning, then teachers can co-create learning systems that substantially improve teaching and learning.

Through the Agents for Learning competition, Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF) invite teams of educators to contribute their expertise and ideas to this vital process and, importantly, to exercise their agency in shaping their learning. (Read more about the competition on p. 61.)

The questions here form the heart of the application for the Agents for Learning competition.

Use this tool to expand and explore your vision for professional learning in your school and system and to consider the role of federal funds in supporting that vision. Interested teams can participate in the competition and learn more at www.learningforward.org/get-involved/agents-for-learning-competition.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ESSA

See excerpts from the law at www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/getinvolved/appendix-a---agents-for-learning-competition.pdf.

FOR BETTER LEARNING



1 Please write a comprehensive vision for effective professional learning for your state and, if appropriate, district context. Identify the needs/gaps that exist. Identify the professional learning investments and activities most important to closing the gaps. Finally, discuss the roles and responsibilities for states, districts, and individual educators in achieving this vision. (*Limit 1,000 words.*)

2 Title II of ESSA provides a list of allowable activities for states and districts to invest in teacher development and support, including a new definition for professional development that ensures that professional development activities are “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused.” How would you advise states and districts to use their Title II funding to address the most critical needs of teachers? (See the definition and the allowable uses of Title II funds at www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/getinvolved/appendix-a---agents-for-learning-competition.pdf.) (*Limit 500 words.*)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS: Please provide responses to three of the following five questions (your choice), keeping in mind that this feedback could be used by your state or as guidance for any state.

1 The great majority of ESSA/federal funding for professional learning will now go directly to school districts. We are aware that teachers and other educators often find their professional development unhelpful and unproductive. What can states, districts, and individuals do to ensure that ESSA funds learning that meets the needs of students and teachers and produces its intended outcomes? (*Limit 200 words.*)

2 Under ESSA, districts must report publicly how they are using their federal funds to improve educator effectiveness. States have authority to shift this process from a compliance to a growth orientation. How would you advise your state and district to make the shift to a process that inspires continuous improvement? What data would you encourage states and districts to report to document their support for teacher development and impact of their efforts? (*Limit 200 words.*)

3 Under ESSA, each state can choose to reserve a portion of their federal funds to focus exclusively on improving school leadership. If a state chooses this option, how do you think it should structure this support and on what should it focus? (*Limit 200 words.*)

4 Under ESSA, states may apply for competitive grants to support success for every student. What leadership roles for teachers can best ensure they can help every student succeed? What do they need to do to prepare for those roles? (*Limit 200 words.*)

5 ESSA requires states and districts to consult with teachers, school leaders, and community members as Title and/or consolidated plans are developed. How should states and districts ensure that teachers and other educators are provided the opportunity to share their professional expertise on ESSA planning and implementation? (*Limit 200 words.*)

Smart currency:

Defining literacy in the modern age is crucial to building professional learning that prepares students for the knowledge economy.

By Eric Celeste

Our challenge is to understand what literacy is, how essential it is to learning, and therefore how important it is in the context of professional learning. If we don't thoughtfully examine our students' most essential learning needs now and into the future, we are unlikely to conceive professional learning that ensures educators have the knowledge and skills to meet those needs.

Power plan:

High school fine-tunes instruction to build reading strength and stamina.

By Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

Teachers at Health Sciences High & Middle College in San Diego, California, set a goal to help students read more and better. The school already engaged in collaborative learning, checking for understanding, and adapting instruction, but needed a literacy plan that would ensure students' skills improved. The focus for professional learning turned to building strength and stamina in reading. Teachers incorporated three

instructional additions to their literacy efforts: think-alouds with complex texts, close readings with complex texts, and wide reading from a constrained choice of texts.

Tailored for a perfect fit:

Flexible templates promote standards alignment and teacher collaboration.

By Linda Jacobson

As part of a five-year Investing in Innovation (i3) grant, Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) is providing coaching, summer institutes, and online training to groups of teachers in Los Angeles and New York City schools. LDC gives teachers templates and tools that support students in doing more challenging work aligned to the Common Core. The process is also a growing experience for teachers as they work with colleagues to refine the lessons and tasks to ensure they are asking students the right questions.

Common goal unites district:

Leaders and teachers build literacy and a collective responsibility for student learning.

*By Joanna Michelson
and James A. Bailey*

Traditionally, content-area teachers, particularly at the secondary level, have not been trained to teach

students how to access rigorous texts, including which disciplinary-specific strategies to use, how to break down and think about disciplinary text, or how to grapple with difficult questions while reading closely. Wyoming's Uinta County School District #1 is working to change that by engaging in literacy-focused professional learning in social studies, science, and vocational education. Here's how the district got everyone on board and what they've learned along the way.

Literacy mash-up:

Discipline-specific practices empower content-area teachers.

By Hannah Dostal and Rachael Gabriel

The authors describe a process for building teachers' capacity to identify, develop, and engage in discipline-specific literacy instruction that supports both content and literacy aims. This process uses three questions to frame inquiry and guide discussions. Addressing these three questions can empower content-area teachers to incorporate literacy in ways that resonate with the content they teach while addressing the need for explicit instruction in reading and writing a wide range of text types for a wide range of purposes.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Corwin	inside back cover
Crayola	15
Heinemann	inside front cover
Just ASK Publications & Professional Development....	outside back cover
Learning Sciences International	21
Regent University.....	17
Solution Tree.....	1
Teachers College Press	44

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- 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.

Delicate layers of learning:

Achieving disciplinary literacy requires continuous, collaborative adjustment.

By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, Megin Charner-Laird, and Joshua F. Lawrence

A team of coaches, university consultants, and professors shares what it has learned about the possibilities and pitfalls of supporting middle and high school teachers' professional learning about disciplinary literacy instruction. In practice, explicit professional learning combined with tools that increase collaborative capacity form a powerful combination that leads to inventive and invested participation in implementing disciplinary literacy in a variety of classrooms.

Dive into the deep end:

Anchor texts build understanding of complex ideas.

By Diane P. Zimmerman, Katrina M. Litzau, and Vicki L. Murray

In 2014, instructional coaches Katrina Litzau and Vicki Murray designed professional learning to support teachers and principals in developing a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes of leadership. Steeped in the Common Core State Standards and building on quality literacy instruction, they based the

professional learning on anchor texts — pivotal texts selected to anchor a complex set of ideas. When an anchor text is paired with short readings, the discourse among learners deepens understanding and moves theory into practice.

The view from**the principal's office:**

An observation protocol boosts literacy leadership.

By Sandi Novak and Bonnie Houck

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association offered Minnesota principals professional learning that placed a high priority on literacy instruction and developing a collegial culture. A key component is the literacy classroom visit, an observation protocol used to gather data to determine the status of literacy teaching and student learning. The data collected provide a basis to discuss the strengths and needs of a school community using broad data patterns that focus on the school or district, not on individual teachers.

feature**The power of teacher agency:**

Why we must transform professional learning so that it really supports educator learning.

By Laurie Calvert

If we know what good professional learning looks like, why aren't teachers experiencing it? The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future and Learning Forward talked with educators about the disconnect between what teachers need and what they are getting to discover how schools and systems might bridge the gap. For education leaders, the key is to pay greater attention to teacher agency — the capacity of teachers to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues.

columns**Lessons from research:**

Changes in coaching study design shed light on how features impact teacher practice.

By Joellen Killion

Exploratory analyses of the features and effects of two cohorts in a study of one-to-one coaching suggest that changes in the design and focus of coaching may explain the large positive effects on teacher practice in one cohort that were absent in the other.

From the director:

With a continuous improvement mindset, we can achieve equity and excellence.

By Stephanie Hirsh

Learning Forward's theory of action is based on assumptions that educators won't achieve their high goals for student learning if they don't set and measure high goals for educator learning.

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With a continuous improvement mindset, we can achieve equity and excellence

Literacy proficiency is foundational to every child's success in school. Students take English language arts courses in every grade and apply their literacy skills in every course. Lacking literacy skills, students fall behind in all subjects.

Every teacher is a literacy teacher, and every teacher is a learner. The educator's learning cycle is similar to the literacy curriculum in most schools. Each semester, students' engagement with literacy concepts gets more challenging and rewarding, just as each time teachers tackle a new learning goal, they build on previous learning and their work becomes more challenging and rewarding.

Learning Forward's theory of action is based on assumptions that educators won't achieve their high goals for student learning if they don't set and measure high goals for educator learning.

I believe setting and achieving meaningful educator goals begins with a compelling vision for student learning. One example of a compelling student learning vision may be stated as: *All students will read and problem solve on grade level.* With that vision established, it is important to assess the current state of student literacy using multiple sources of data.

With that in hand, we have the

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



information we need to set goals for student learning as well as our own. We answer the question: *What do students need to know and be able to do, and, given that, what do we as their teachers need to know and be able to do to ensure our students are successful?* Only when we connect those dots can we be successful in achieving the vision and goals we set for students.

With the right goals in mind, the hard work begins. We determine the precise content expertise we need to develop and the strategies for translating that knowledge into powerful instruction in the classroom. Not only do we determine the source of that expertise, we also decide how we will learn.

We plan for translating our new learning into classroom instruction and assessments. We practice with

colleagues, and finally we are ready to begin applying our new learning with our students. At that stage, we'll gather information on the impact of our learning and adjust where our formative assessments tell us is necessary.

If the school and learning teams applying such a cycle are successful in changing practice, student literacy will begin to improve, and teachers' motivation and commitment to repeating this cycle of learning and implementation will increase.

This approach to improving literacy among students is far different than the "Houston, we have a problem" solution of sending everyone to a rocket workshop. Without making the shift to continuous improvement, we put students at great risk.

If I were to conduct a survey of school improvement plans, I would expect to find that the most common goal among them is to improve student literacy. And while I expect they will all have identified strategies for improving student literacy, I doubt few will have detailed the kind of adult learning that is essential to support the day-to-day improvements that will be required if they are to be successful in achieving their goals.

It is my hope that more and more schools adopt the continuous improvement mindset and achieve the results that we all know are possible for every student. Only then will our shared goals of equity and excellence be realized. ■



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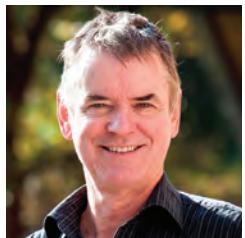
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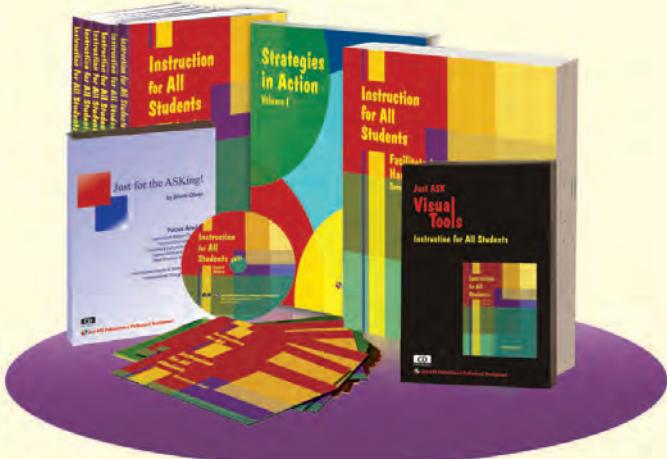
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