Everyday practices that address students' differing needs p. 18

Equity audits put the focus on English learners p. 28

The challenges content teachers face — and how to support them p. 24

MIND THE GAP
Professional learning to improve equity

learningforward

THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

"" **Adult learning, especially around issues of race and poverty, is no less fraught with fears than is student learning."**
— Eric Celeste, p. 11

contents

Crayola Creativity Champion™

JOIN the movement!

CREATE a Professional Learning Community focused on creativity as a 21st Century skill.

BUILD creative capacity school-wide.

TRANSFORM your school with art integration, design thinking, and project-based teaching strategies.

Crayola

Become a Crayola Creativity Champion today.
www.crayola.com/champions

What do you believe you believe?

Discussing our beliefs about people whose race, religion, or socioeconomic backgrounds differ from our own can get uncomfortable. For one thing, we may not feel safe saying what we really believe. For another, we may not know how to speak skillfully about such topics in productive ways.

A new study from the Yale Child Study Center exposes another reason it can be difficult to talk about topics like race: Sometimes our biases are implicit rather than explicit (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). As the study demonstrated, educators' unconscious biases shape their expectations for and interactions with children. In the study, researchers showed video clips to teachers, asking them to hit a key when they saw challenging behavior. Using eye scan technology, the researchers found that participants' eyes followed the black children — particularly the African-American boys — more than they did the white children.

As Patricia Guerra and Sarah Nelson share on pp. 8-9, educators' beliefs matter. Understanding and addressing those beliefs will be critical to ensuring all students experience excellent teaching. According to

•

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

recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the student population continues to diversify. If educators at all levels are operating in ways that create barriers for entire segments of children, gaps in achievement, access, and opportunity will persist.

Attending to our beliefs is central to continuous improvement. When we talk about adult learning and how educators grow and change, we look at more than knowledge and skills. With thanks to Joellen Killion, Dennis Sparks, Ellie Drago-Severson, Peter Senge, and many others, we know we must also address beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions. If we don't consider the mental models that educators hold, whether about specific students in their classrooms or their own efficacy, it can be difficult to transform practice or sustain the implementation of new learning.

Shifting beliefs and assumptions isn't simply a matter of engaging in a well-facilitated discussion or hoping for a new attitude. A range of influences shapes our beliefs, including our experiences, families, religion, culture, ethnicity, and society in general. Still, as educators undertake the important work of prioritizing equity in schools, they can't ignore an examination of implicit and explicit beliefs.

In this issue of *JSD*, we offer several articles to build readers' understanding of relevant equity concepts and promising models in the field. At the

same time, I invite you to start your own belief and assumptions audit. Enlist your colleagues and seek out skilled facilitators to guide what can be difficult critical conversations. A few questions to consider as you start are:
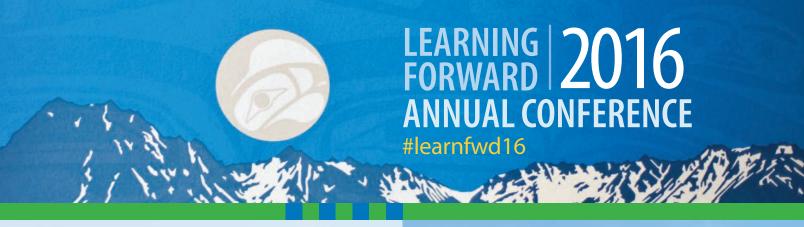
- What do I learn when I examine my own beliefs and attitudes?
- What tools can I use to help others surface their assumptions and beliefs?
- How can I contribute to a culture that encourages difficult reflection and conversation around a range of equity questions?
- How can I help myself and others shift assumptions and mental models in ways that advance practices and benefit students?

What other practices and questions have helped you to discuss beliefs and assumptions? What are the benefits when you do? Please let us know.

REFERENCES

Gilliam, W.S., Maupin, A.N., Reyes, C.R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016, September 28). *Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions?* New Haven, CT: Yale Child Study Center.

U.S. Department of Education. (2016, June 7). *2013-2014 civil rights data collection: A first look.* Washington, DC: Author. ■

LEARNING FORWARD | 2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
#learnfwd16

Register today!

CONNECTING LANDSCAPES for LEARNING
VANCOUVER

Some Keynote and Thought Leader speakers:

MICHAEL FULLAN · ANDY HARGREAVES · PASI SAHLBERG · MILTON CHEN · AVIS GLAZE · ANTHONY MUHAMMAD · TOM GUSKEY

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves
The State of Professional Learning in Canada

Pasi Sahlberg
Reinventing Innovation: Leadership Lessons from Successful Education Systems

Milton Chen and Avis Glaze
Social Justice

Tom Guskey
Program Evaluation

Anthony Muhammad
Achievement Gap Trap

...and many more!
#learnfwd16

WHAT'S NEW

- **REDESIGN PD TRACK** to reimagine and rethink professional learning.
- **REDESIGN IMPLEMENTATION AND COACHING SUPPORT SESSIONS** to think creatively about how to address problems and measure impact.
- **TECHNOLOGY SHOWCASE** demonstrations with the latest technology solutions to your professional learning challenges.
- **SUMMIT SESSIONS** provide a 3-hour, in-depth look at topics.
- **NETWORKING** meet-ups with skilled facilitators for superintendents, principals, teacher leaders, Big 50 districts, state education agencies, and a study group on research.

VANCOUVER
learningforward
2016 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
DEC. 3-7, 2016

Canada CUSTOMS DOUANES
GET YOUR PASSPORTS NOW!
03 DEC 16 E

www.learningforward.org/conference
DEC. 3–7, 2016 | VANCOUVER CONVENTION CENTRE | 800-727-7288
Artwork provided by local artist Roy Henry Vickers.

essentials

PDK POLL
The 48th Annual PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools
PDK International, September 2016

The 2016 Phi Delta Kappa national survey shows Americans overwhelmingly (84% to 14%) prefer trying to improve failing public schools than closing them. If a failing school is closed, there's sharp disagreement about what to do next: Americans split (48% to 47%) between sending affected students to other schools or opening a new school in its place. When asked about recent changes in educational standards, parents were split between those who believe the new standards have been for the better (45%) and those who believe standards have made things worse (51%).
http://pdkpoll2015.pdkintl.org

PLC GUIDE
Measuring Instruments for Assessing the Performance of Professional Learning Communities
Institute of Education Sciences, August 2016

This guide from Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic guide can help researchers and practitioners who are planning, implementing, and evaluating professional learning communities (PLCs). The guide features an annotated bibliography that identifies and describes the teacher/principal, team and student indicators that can be used to assess the different dimensions of teacher PLCs. To help users choose and apply an appropriate measurement instrument, the guide also includes a logic model to determine which indicators may be most valuable to measure; a decision aid to help select a relevant instrument; and a profile sheet for each instrument with information about the instrument and how it may be accessed and used.
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/ edlabs/projects/project. asp?projectID=444

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES
Better Evidence, Better Choices, Better Schools
Center for American Progress & Knowledge Alliance, August 2016

As part of a series on implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this report clarifies the definition of evidence-based school improvement practices as defined in ESSA, distinguishing it from the "scientifically based research" provisions of No Child Left Behind and providing a framework for how state education agencies can maximize collaborative efforts to implement evidence-based school improvement practices. Included are recommendations to encourage state education agencies to work with national and local governmental and community agencies to act as a single, cohesive system that promotes clarity and coordination to achieve the promise of evidence-based school improvement.
www.americanprogress. org/issues/education/ report/2016/08/31/143223/better-evidence-better-choices-better-schools

SUMMER LEARNING
Learning From Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth
The Wallace Foundation, September 2016

Since 2011, five urban school districts and their partners, the RAND Corporation and The Wallace Foundation, have been working together to find out whether and how voluntary-attendance summer learning programs combining academics and enrichment can help students succeed in school. The study analyzed outcomes for 3,192 students. Researchers found that those who attended a five- to six-week summer program for 20 or more days in 2013 did better on state math tests than similar students in the control group. The results are even more striking for high attenders in 2014: They outperformed control group students in both math and English language arts on tests in the fall and spring. This report is the third in a series that will result from the study.
www.wallacefoundation.org/ knowledge-center/Pages/ Learning-from-Summer-Effects-of-Voluntary-Summer-Learning-Programs-on-Low-Income-Urban-Youth.aspx

10-YEAR TRENDS
2016 Education Next Poll:
10-Year Trends in Public Opinion
Education Next, 2016

Education Next's annual survey presents 2016 opinions on education policy together with trends in opinion among the general public and among teachers. Among the findings: Public support for the Common Core State Standards and school vouchers continues to fall. Support for charter schools remains steady, as does backing for the federal requirement that students be tested annually. Support for teacher tenure slides, but the percentage of the public thinking teachers deserve a salary increase reaches its highest level since 2008. This year's results include two interactive graphics providing both 2016 findings and as much as decade-long trends.
http://educationnext.org/ten-year-trends-in-public-opinion-from-ednext-poll-2016-survey

PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE
Impact Evaluation of the Teacher Incentive Fund: Implementation and Impacts of Pay-for-Performance After Three Years
Institute of Education Sciences, August 2016

This study measures the impact of pay-for-performance bonuses as part of a comprehensive compensation system within a large, multisite random assignment study design. The report provides implementation and impact information after three years.

Among the findings:
- Pay-for-performance had small, positive impacts on students' reading and math achievement.
- Few evaluation districts structured pay-for-performance bonuses to align well with Teacher Incentive Fund grant guidance.
- Teachers' understanding of performance measures continued to improve between the second and third year of implementation, but many teachers still did not understand that they were eligible for a bonus or underestimated how much they could earn.

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20164004/index.asp

SCHOOL REIMAGINED
What Matters Now: A New Compact for Teaching and Learning
National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 2016

The report calls for a new system of teaching and learning in the United States that represents a dramatic transition from how schools are currently organized. Among the recommendations made to achieve this vision:
- Teacher preparation should be more relevant and clinically based.
- States should support all new teachers with multiyear induction and high-quality mentoring.
- Education leaders should evaluate all professional learning for responsiveness and effectiveness.

To support implementation, the commission also developed a companion guide with data, examples, and recommended reading and resources.
http://nctaf.org/research/what-matters-now

INSIDE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

To create schools where every student is successful, educators must address relationships, especially with students and families who have been historically disenfranchised from the educational system. To develop such relationships, educators must be culturally proficient to help them know and understand students and families from backgrounds different than their own. Two foundational premises of cultural proficiency are that cultural understanding matters and that teacher beliefs matter in improving student performance.

1 CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

A primary function of schooling is to transmit culture. In our society, this means teaching students the democratic values of independence, equality, autonomy, initiative, and individuality so they become productive citizens. For students who acquire these cultural values at home, schooling is about learning knowledge and skills, and these values are reinforced at school. But students who come with a different value set must learn not only the academic content, but also the values or implicit rules of schooling.

For example, because white middle-class Americans value verbal prowess as evidence of initiative, assertiveness, and responsibility, students are expected to jump in to class discussions to express their thoughts. In contrast, many other cultures view this free-flowing participation as rude and believe students should wait to be recognized before responding. Without this cultural understanding, teachers may misinterpret student behavior.

When a student sits quietly during class discussions, the teacher may assume the student doesn't have anything to say or is not very bright, rather than considering the alternate explanation of cultural difference. Because the teacher believes that the problem lies within the student (deficit thinking), he or she may respond by lowering expectations for the student, reducing the curriculum rigor, or using "drill-and-kill" assignments. In turn, students become bored, disengaged, or alienated, resulting in underachievement and overreferral to discipline and special education.

Culturally proficient teachers see students for what they bring and use student knowledge and contributions as a bridge for teaching and learning. As a result, students feel valued and are engaged in learning, leading to higher achievement.

This article is an excerpt from "Cultural Proficiency," a series of columns by professors Sarah W. Nelson and Patricia L. Guerra that appeared in *JSD*. Here, Nelson and Guerra describe why learning leaders should advocate for a culturally proficient school system.

> **W**hen a student sits quietly during class discussions, the teacher may assume the student doesn't have anything to say or is not very bright, rather than considering the alternate explanation of cultural difference.

2 TEACHER BELIEFS

Personal beliefs have a powerful influence on what we know and do. When we are exposed to new information, we unconsciously sift it through our personal beliefs to make sense of it. In doing so, we often reject or modify aspects of the information that do not fit with the beliefs we hold (Bandura, 1982). For example, when we attend professional development on a new reading program, what we take away depends heavily on our personal beliefs (Pohan, 1996). If we do not believe all children can learn, we may not implement the reading program as intended. Rather than using the critical thinking activities recommended in the teacher's guide, we might instead ask certain students to answer basic recall questions.

Few of us are even aware of our personal beliefs, which is troubling because, for many, life experiences and education have led to developing deficit beliefs about certain cultural, linguistic, and economic groups. Those who hold deficit beliefs see some students as having deficiencies (lack of intelligence, limited motivation, poor social behavior) that interfere with learning (Valencia, 1997). As a result, the focus of education becomes fixing students rather than building on their strengths and assets.

Decades of research suggests that teachers' personal beliefs about diverse students lead to differential treatment, expectations, and outcomes (Baron, Tom & Cooper, 1985; Delpit, 1996; Love & Kruger, 2005; Rist, 1970). Educators who develop cultural proficiency can examine their beliefs from a new standpoint. Because what was once unconscious is now conscious, they become mindful of how their beliefs drive their practices. By being mindful, they are able to avoid judging the behavior of students and families based on a single perspective of how things should be done.

REFERENCES

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*(2), 122-147.

Baron, R., Tom, D., & Cooper, H. (1985). Social class, race and teacher expectations. In J.B. Dusek, V.C. Hall, & W.J. Meyer (Eds.), *Teacher expectancies* (pp. 251-270). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Delpit, L. (1996). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York, NY: New Press.

Love, A. & Kruger, A. C. (2005). Teacher beliefs and student achievement in urban schools serving African American students. *The Journal of Educational Research, 99*(2), 87-99.

Pohan, C.A. (1996). Preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity: Uncovering factors leading to multicultural responsiveness. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 29*(3), 62-69.

Rist, R.C. (1970, September). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review, 40*(3), 411-451.

Valencia, R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice.* London, England: Taylor & Francis.

Source: Adapted from **Nelson, S.W. & Guerra, P.L. (2007, Fall).** The journey to cultural proficiency is a sizeable challenge. *JSD, 28*(4), 59-60.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES:
A TOOL KIT FOR EDUCATORS

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, restorative practices are processes that build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. In schools, restorative practices are emerging as tools used to change a disciplinary culture that too often disproportionately affects students of color. Broadly speaking, restorative practices maintain that there be a shared responsibility between teachers and students to create an environment of safety, trust, and respect — and to hold each other accountable for this.

> **Find more information on restorative practices in the classroom and download the guide at www.schottfoundation.org/restorative-practices.**

The Schott Foundation in 2014 produced a guide for educators called *Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships and Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools*. The foundation hopes the tool kit can illustrate how restorative practices can be "seamlessly integrated into the classroom, curriculum, and culture of schools, and how they can help transform schools to support the growth and health of all students."

WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY 'EQUITY'
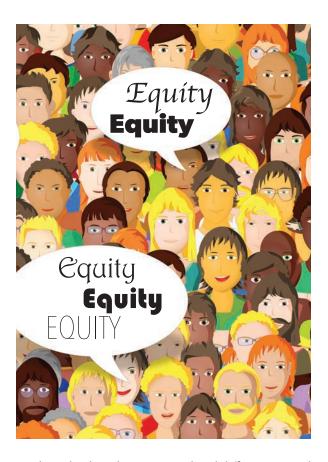
By Eric Celeste

Equity is discussed with such regularity in education that it's shocking to discover many of us probably aren't sure how to define the term. To be more specific: When two people talk about equity, it's very possible they're assuming agreement but really talking about different things.

That's my takeaway from a recent survey commissioned by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of its quest to better understand what other charitable foundations are doing to incorporate equity (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016). Their findings suggested that:

- Funders are confused by the definition of equity;
- Everyone strongly desired a clear definition of what equity meant to their organization; and
- Groups that had a clear definition of equity — "however unique to that institution" — had more evolved theories of change, frameworks, and plans around equity than foundations that didn't.

This is understandable, especially in education. Equity can cover so many scenarios and subsets that it can be overwhelming. We're usually talking about societal inequity and all its categories (race, ethnicity, language, religion, disabilities, etc.). But we can also be talking about ineq-

uity brought about by poverty, cultural differences, social and emotional health, family trauma, and other student-centered concerns. Or the blame for inequity in education can be attributed to organizational faults, be they instructional, programmatic, staffing, or due to other systemic deficiencies.

So before we thin-slice this issue in the stories that follow, it seems important that we talk about what Learning Forward means when we discuss equity and why we think examining equity is crucial to developing high-quality professional learning.

EQUALITY ISN'T EQUITY

First of all, we're not talking about equality. We're discussing a cousin of that term: fairness. Equality is one possible outcome of an equitable system, and often it is the primary outcome sought. But there are many equitable processes that lack equality in design or implementation. Because the outcome we're seeking is one that moves us toward a fair, just educational system — that corrects an imbalance.

What does that mean in terms of professional learning? Until 2011, Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning included one on equity. (For the reason this was wrapped into the Outcomes standard, read Stephanie Hirsh's column on p. 68.) The standard called for learning "that improves the learning of all students; prepares educa-

tors to understand and appreciate all students; creates safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments; and holds high expectations for their academic achievement."

When revised in 2011, this emphasis was incorporated into the Outcomes standard, which says that professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards (Learning Forward, 2011).

Educator performance and student achievement are key, interdependent aspects of professional learning equity — overcoming challenges that center on the student's learning experience so she can achieve her fullest potential and addressing elements of the education system that we can control. This fits neatly with what we believe constitutes equity in teacher development: All students have a right and a need to be exposed to excellent teaching. This is dependent on ensuring that all teachers have access to high-quality professional learning.

HOW THIS LOOKS IN PRACTICE

Michelle Kinder knows what this looks like in practice. Kinder, principal at Momentous Institute in Dallas, oversees a pre-K to 5th grade nationally acclaimed lab school that grew out of the organization's umbrella therapeutic and education service provider for impoverished kids. As such, social-emotional health and equity is baked into its DNA systemwide.

Kinder says that worrying about equity is a constant, in both the mental health and education aspects of the institute. Example: Just as too many high-needs students in urban areas are put in front of the newest, least-equipped teachers, so, too, do many community mental health centers pair out-of-school hires with their highest-need, most-complex-trauma patients.

"To combat this in both our therapeutic and education areas, one of our strategies is robust learning," Kinder says. "We want our staff to be highly trained, be involved in research, and have our best people be involved in service to those who need it most."

At Kinder's school, that means creating an environment where adults feel like professionals, which means taking their development and learning seriously. "If you don't, they don't have the willingness to tackle tough, tough stuff," she says. "That approach is tough to nurture unless they feel that you take their approach seriously."

Again, this approach is baked in. Students are dismissed two hours early every Wednesday so that everyone can devote three hours to professional learning. This is not directionless learning. Themes are selected for the year to work on as a group, and given the student population at Momentous — 86% free or reduced-price lunch, 39%

English language learners — they always have an equity component. "This sends a message that this is a learning field, and that our goal is closing gaps created by their circumstances," Kinder says.

DISTRICT CHALLENGES

Momentous is testing its professional learning-based equity mental-health approach with larger systems. For example, the institute is now in its second year of coaching in Fort Worth (Texas) ISD (86,000 students, 89% nonwhite, 77% economically disadvantaged).

"In larger districts, the biggest challenge in creating an equity-focused professional learning environment is the culture piece," Kinder says. "Asking, 'Has the school cracked the code on creating a sense of pride, professionalism, etc.' sufficient to tackle the difficult challenges of equity. When you look at motivation research, that has to be in place so the teachers can step into greatness — which the high-needs kids require more than anyone."

Another key: understanding that adult learning, especially around issues of race and poverty, is no less fraught with fears than is student learning. Kinder found that when her coaches worked with Fort Worth teachers to explore their own bias challenges — and connect them to student learning — student achievement improved.

Kinder notes it's very different saying to someone who has just confessed his or her culture-barrier challenges with students, "You're in a flooded place. Let's talk about what's going on in your life." She said results improved when they said, "You're in a flooded place. Let's see how that shows up in the classroom."

This approach aligns with what Learning Forward believes is the appropriate, outcomes-based focus of equity within professional learning. It's a process of trying to make sure teachers have access to excellent continuous learning and that all students benefit from first-rate teaching as a result.

REFERENCES

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

Putnam-Walkerly, K. & Russell, E. (2016, September.) *The road to achieving equity: Findings and lessons from a field scan of foundations that are embracing equity as a primary focus.* Westlake, OH: Putnam Consulting Group. Available at http://putnam-consulting.com/wp-content/uploads/Equity-Field-Scan_Layout_FINAL.pdf.

•

Eric Celeste (eric.celeste@learningforward.org) is associate director of publications at Learning Forward. ◼

HOW WE CAN BRIDGE THE CULTURE GAP

By Gregory Peters

American public education has a long-documented pattern of serving, and failing, certain student communities more than others with a predictability based on cultural demographics — especially race and its intersection with gender, class, and language (Center for Public Education, 2012; Hilliard, 1995).

If we accept that the U.S. public school system is a manifestation of a history rooted in white supremacy and colonialism, then we can better make meaning of our failure to educate all youth equitably regardless of social predictors and our persistence to strengthen the school system as a hegemonic social structure.

As the cultural and experience gap between an increasingly diverse student population and predominantly white, female educators widens, schools continue to rely heavily on the pedagogies, curricula, assessments, and interventions that more effectively served a homogeneous group of educators than they do a heterogeneous student population.
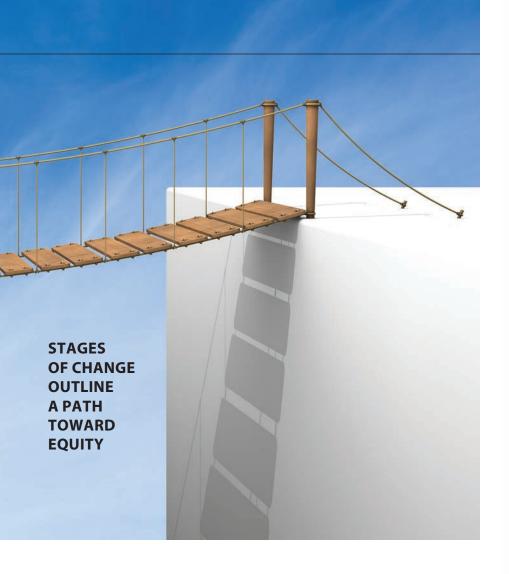
In 2011, I worked with teachers who were considered to have transcended this prescriptive path within education. These teachers met three criteria: principal recommendations, student recommendations, and student achievement data as evidence that they were progressing students who were on the cusp of success or failure. Referred to as transforming teachers, they were described as existing successfully within the educa-

tional system and also transcending the predictive role given to them to reinforce the same system (Peters, 2012).

Students discussed how these teachers were transferring the skills of working in and against an unfair system to the students themselves. Seeking to learn from them, I conducted a facilitated, participatory, interpretive study that included an extensive literature review as well as interviews, focus groups, and a writing retreat with teachers, students, and administrators.

The result — a Conceptual Framework for Teacher Transformation — outlines stages of work necessary for educators and schools to shift beliefs and practices and maintain a commitment to interrupting and transforming inequities within individual and collective practices.

In the years since, my colleagues

STAGES OF CHANGE OUTLINE A PATH TOWARD EQUITY

at the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools and I have worked with hundreds of educators, schools, and districts guided by this framework. An assumption of the framework (and of transformation) is that the work is constant and continuous. No individual and no community are ever done.

In this article, I focus on one area of this work: developing equity-centered professional learning communities. Professional learning communities (PLCs) go by many names, including intentional learning communities and transformational learning communities. We call ours equity-based iGroups (which stands for individual inquiry groups) because our groups are designed specifically to facilitate individuals to cycle continuously through these stages.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual Framework for Teacher Transformation highlights stages of development common to transforming teachers. While the work within each stage was unique to the person, patterns emerged based on teacher identities — especially racial identity.

In general, those who identified as teachers of color were able to locate work they had done consciously throughout their lives and within their communities to cycle through these stages, while teachers who identified as white referenced powerful experiences occurring later in life (usually as part of their teacher identity) pushing them into these stages of transformation.

In the years since the study, much work has been done to further define the stages as well as examples of content, curriculum, strategies, structures, and supports needed to cycle through the stages. The focus of this work has been to support schools not only to develop the

"Taking time to understand my own history — even before understanding the structure of school — was eye-opening! As a Latino male, I was hurt by education. In my family, my parents had jobs of servitude, and that translated to me as a student catering to my teachers — even when they were treating me unjustly because I was Mexican. Even though I wanted to be a teacher to do differently than what I experienced, I realized I was replicating how I was taught — and I was replicating that same harm for students like me.

"It really hit me how this is a systemic issue. With my awareness came anger that I needed to process through. … This work is really painful, but it needs to be done. Nobody else can do it for you. And you cannot just read a book or take a workshop. Like anything, you have to put in the work. To transform, you really have to work hard."

— *Gil Guzman,
4th/5th-grade teacher,
Garfield Community School,
Menlo Park, California*

"I always have cared about and had glimpses of the work needed to serve all students. But when I started to do the work of looking at who I am as a white woman and how, in this system, I work with others, my consciousness raised to a new level.

"It is exhausting. It needs to be. Every interaction I have with students and other adults is changed. Now when faced with someone who needs support, I no longer go to autopilot for what worked for me. I now think about what I am doing and why.

"I now know I have to remain open to other perspectives, especially those across difference, in every situation. This is not limited to my students — my co-leader is a woman of color, and our relationship, how we communicate and collaborate, has changed dramatically. We now know that we always have to consider dynamics related to race, power, and lived experiences in our leadership."

— *Michelle Griffith,*
principal,
Garfield Community School,
Menlo Park, California

conditions needed for educators to engage in transformational cycles, but also to transform their organizational culture to one rooted in the discourse, decisions, and design committed to interrupting and transforming inequities impacting the least-reached students.

FIRST STAGE
Stance and schema awareness

What is my (our) history? What does it tell about why I act and react in the way I do? What is my (our) current reality and results? Why do I need to interrupt and transform them?

It is important to know from what or where we are transforming to better differentiate between being caught in the continuous work of minor tweaks to a self-repairing system versus engaging in a cycle of transformation toward a radically different reality.

To develop awareness of our own stance and schema, we engage in work to identify and understand who we are and how we came to be. We must explore our own identities and histories as it relates to our beliefs and values and how we make meaning of the world. Our stances define the automatic responses we bring to interactions and conflict. By engaging in the reflective practice of making our schema and stance visible — first to our-selves — we can critically examine our intentions and actions.

This work needs to be done at the individual and collective levels. If the work of making our identity and history more transparent and connecting it to our day-to-day actions is essential for teacher transformation, then it is a natural extension to recognize the importance of examining our organizational and social history and identity as it relates to our collective decisions and actions that show up in our day-to-day design.

The work schools can do toward this effort includes any number of curricula in which we explore, make meaning of, and share stories about our histories and identities. This exploratory work is necessary for individuals and community alike to develop awareness and make transparent our identities and schemas we use to make meaning of day-to-day occurrences.

Here are examples of work a school may do to raise identity awareness and develop shared knowledge of our collective history:

- Foster regular guided reflections (i.e. Socratic seminars, text-based discussions) — individually and collectively — to explore and make transparent the role of identity in our lives and work.

WHAT IS AN EQUITY WALK?

An equity walk is a collaborative process in which school teams gather observational data to take a pulse of the school within a brief snapshot of time. The data serve as one narrative used to explore an agreed-upon focus, such as a critical incident or a larger problem of practice, that contributes to an identified, student-related inequity within the school. While this is a facilitated process, there are general guidelines:

- The team visits every classroom together.
- Each visit lasts at least three minutes. The team spends a few minutes after leaving each classroom to share and calibrate examples of evidence.
- Visits are not classroom observations of any specific teacher, but rather an observation of a school or program as a whole.

In one equity walk, a team chose to focus on patterns of student participation by race and gender for a grade level where an experience gap

- Engage research, texts, and other media from experts to deepen the understanding of identity and history as it relates to schooling.
- Create opportunities for individuals to share and hear each other's stories related to our identities and histories.
- Work to calibrate shared meanings for essential language (i.e. equity, excellence) and concepts (i.e. purpose of school versus the purpose of education).
- Interrogate the espoused versus actual impact of the school, district, or system mission and history by examining key artifacts and data.
- Conduct regular equity walks (see below) and focus groups to reveal the school's (and students') current narrative in real time.

SECOND STAGE
Interruptive and catalytic experience

How should we best conduct ourselves and engage others in order to interrupt the inequities our least-reached students experience in our care?

In the second stage of work, schools must work to develop conditions that allow for interruptions to inequities when they occur. While the term "interruption" may conjure a variety of meanings and emotional reactions, in this context,

the term refers to developing the tools, practices, and agreements or permissions to interrupt inequities in design and practices.

Given that the objective is a disturbance to a current mental model, interruption also requires and assumes that with the interruption is an agreement to remain engaged and collaborate on the work needed toward transformation.

Some of the most powerful ways to create and sustain these conditions include developing and adhering to discourse and collaboration norms (or agreements) that encourage dissonance — rather than comfort — in our working relationships. For example, we don't consider "be on time" to be a norm as much as a work requirement, while norms such as "trust best intentions" frequently serve as permission to avoid questioning root beliefs and values behind our discourse or actions. Rather, norms such as "speak your truth" and "pay attention to patterns of participation" foster ongoing inquiry and invite multiple perspectives in our work.

Additionally, creating conditions for interrupting inequities requires communities to practice using tools and skills to foster such engagement. As scaffolds, these tools can be removed while the deeper collaboration continues. When

"Even as a leader, I have felt isolated as a person of color. It makes me wonder how other people of color without the same authority in my school feel. When we came together in affinity, at first it was healing and cathartic. We had felt less valued and had limited power and voice in conversations and decisions that directly impacted our students and us.

"Wanting our voices to be unapologetically powerful and to be heard, we supported each other to engage authentically and patiently as our school makes meaning of the inequities. We supported each other to come together in solidarity — and with love and compassion."

— Harini Aravamudhan,
assistant principal,
Everett Middle School,
San Francisco, California

and achievement gap persisted for its male students of color.

Before conducting the equity walk, the team calibrated examples of authentic, observational data and discussed hopes, fears, and biases that may surface during the observations. They prioritized looking at seating and grouping arrangements as well as coding student-to-student and student-to-teacher discourse.

After an equity walk is complete, the team compiles, shares, and discusses individual observations to identify

patterns and outliers and reflect on the findings and related implications for the school and its leadership. During this time, the team also determines next steps to share the equity walk synthesis and analysis with the larger school community.

One school's strategy that proved particularly effective was to share its equity walk data with a series of probing questions at staff meetings following the walk so that teachers could reflect on the data in relation to their individual practices.

the work reaches new levels of difficulty, the scaffolds can be reintroduced until a community's habits and skills improve as well.

In the first stage, we are getting to know ourselves individually and as a larger community. In this stage, we need to learn more about how to engage with each other and develop the trust to do so. There are many ways to establish strong, ethical working conditions as a base for the discourse needed to invite interruptions and interrogate inequities. Examples include:

- Develop and adhere to working and discourse norms.
- Learn and practice using protocols as scaffolds.
- Foster opportunities to make one's work public — moving from sharing celebrations to exploring equity dilemmas.
- Practice using different forms of feedback.
- Practice shared facilitation and leadership.
- Develop and practice engagement strategies to ensure equitable participation.
- Refer to the school's mission, vision, or other focusing agreement to prioritize work.

THIRD STAGE
Making new meaning

What can I learn — from myself, from those with whom I share affinity, and from allies across difference — to change how I understand and react to inequities in my practice, especially for my least-reached students?

Interruption alone is not enough. If we knew how to be more effective, we would be doing what we needed to do, and interruption would not be necessary. Thus, even when we have created the conditions and culture where we can interrupt inequities as they present themselves, we may not always know what to do next.

Without the opportunity to reflect and collaborate for new meaning making, we potentially see our dilemmas through the same eyes and run the risk of repeating our original actions based on the same beliefs. Schools that invest in developing the will and skill to interrupt inequities need to commit time for staff to engage in discursive reflection and discourse to consider new ways of looking at old dilemmas. This work is quite specific and occurs in three different spaces: alone, in affinity, and with allies across difference.

- **Alone:** The work of transformation cannot happen without collaboration, but it also cannot happen without doing work by ourselves. Each of us has a unique story. Schools cannot be expected to provide every level of support for every individual, nor can any professional educator expect to progress as a social justice leader only doing work while on the clock. Schools can support individual work by making transparent this expectation and providing resources to which individuals can connect.
- **In affinity:** There is an experience gap between the cultures and demographics of educators and students. The gap wid-

ens when we look specifically at our least-reached students. Given this reality, we need places to go and work with others who share similar identities. These affinity groupings may be based on race, gender, class, or other significant identity. They should be safe spaces formed around the work necessary to interrupt inequities faced by students within these groupings. A specific benefit is that affinity groups support individuals to find and offer mentorship and to engage in discourse that is feared or not yet appropriate for mixed groups but is still necessary to address.

- **With allies across difference:** Ultimately, we do work alone and with those in affinity so that we may better be prepared to engage as allies across difference. We make this part of our professional expectations in order to expand our own frames of reference for defining our work, dilemmas, and solutions. As a result, we need spaces to come together across difference in ways that allow us to hear and seriously consider new ways of thinking and making sense of our world.

FOURTH STAGE
Changed or new action

How should I (we) radically change what I (we) do to transform the inequities the least-reached students experience in our care? What conditions are necessary for me (us) to be courageous to take such risks?

The long-term goal of engaging in this cycle is a sustained shift in practice, but the path to success is not seamless. Changing the way we do school can lead to additional inequities in need of interruption or may surface the need for additional meaning making.

This notion of radically different action in the context of education brings a new set of hurdles, some of which are less in a school's control than creating the conditions for the first three stages. The trust that was built to engage in interruptive and meaning making discourse is different than the trust needed to risk failing publicly.

In a climate of blaming schools for societal problems, schools and educators have developed a counterproductive defensiveness for innovation and risk taking. The status quo, even with its predictable failure for specific communities, remains a more comfortable choice.

Leaders from schools, districts, and communities must engage in their own cycles of transformation to support similar work in schools. Meanwhile, schools can respond to this reality by increasing efforts to deepen trust and develop systems that reward informed risk taking. Examples include:

- Support teachers to engage in regular, formal, data-based inquiry so data support and justify radical actions.
- Regularly recognize and honor informed risk taking. Normalize healthy failure from informed risks, using these opportunities to reinforce the urgency of success.

Do you know how your system aligns to the Standards for Professional Learning?

Standards Assessment Inventory

Quickly and easily assess the quality of your system's professional learning with Learning Forward's **Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI)**.

ASSESSMENT
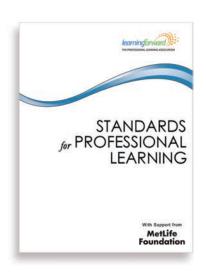
- **Determine your system's alignment** of professional learning to the standards;
- **Collect data on the quality of professional learning** as defined by the Standards for Professional Learning;
- **Discover teachers' perceptions** of professional learning;
- **Understand the degree of success and challenges you face** with professional learning practices; and
- **Examine the relationship of the standards to your improvements** in educator effectiveness and student achievement.

INTERPRETATION AND PLANNING

Learning Forward guides educators through data interpretation and action planning.

Systems can leverage data from the SAI to guide the planning, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning to maximize its impact and investment.

To learn more, call Renee Taylor-Johnson at 800-727-7288 or visit www.learningforward.org/consulting

learning**forward**

THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

learning**forward**
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

STANDARDS
for PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING

With Support from
**MetLife
Foundation**

AN EQUAL CHANCE *at* SUCCESS

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING PRACTICES ADDRESS STUDENTS' DIFFERING NEEDS

By Vicki Vescio

The Outcomes standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) emphasizes professional learning that impacts teacher practice in a way that supports high levels of achievement for all children.

Educators at all levels need to be asking, "What are the teaching practices that support equitable contexts and help students feel comfortable in taking the risks to learn?" One way to address this is to focus on relationships, relevance, and responsibility.

If educators are to support the learning of students who have traditionally struggled for success in school, administrators and teachers must understand the difference between equity and equality and engage in classroom practices that support the former.

In simple terms, *equality* reflects the idea that every student should get the same thing. In contrast, *equity* is defined by the idea that every student should have an equal opportunity to be successful.

Embedded in this definition is the understanding that an equal opportunity to be successful means students' differing needs are met in differing ways. In my work with teachers, I have found that the most effective way to promote equity for students is through enacting culturally responsive practices that focus on relationships, relevance, and responsibility. Here are examples of everyday practices teachers can engage in that will support their efforts to move toward greater levels of equity in their classrooms.
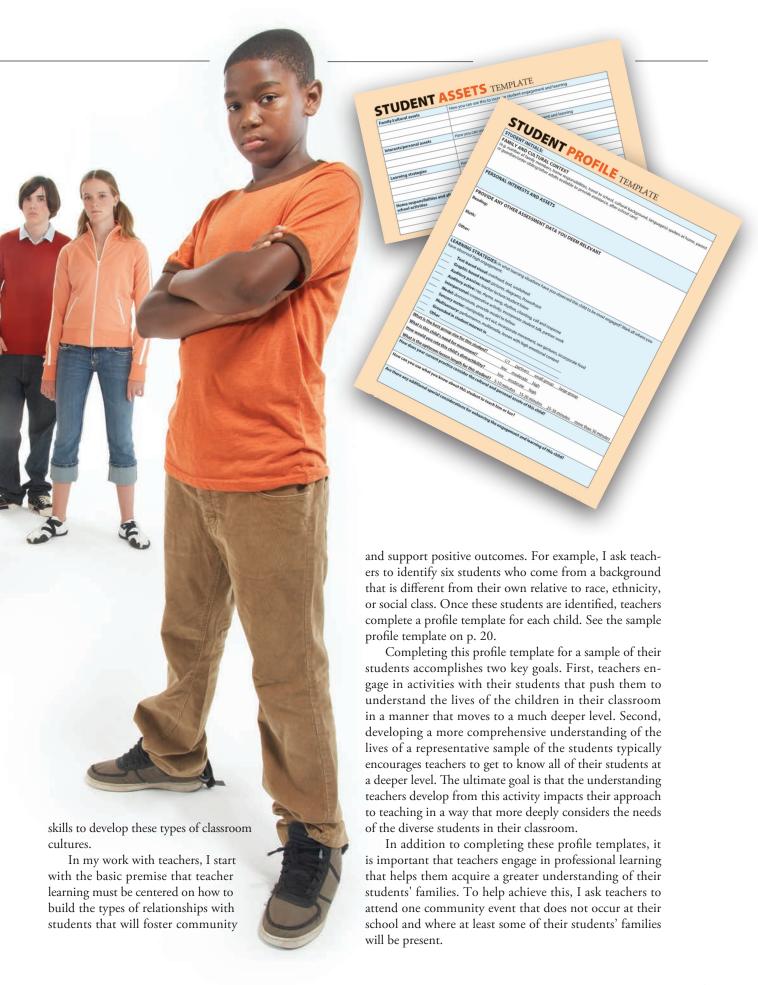
RELATIONSHIPS:

The importance of knowing children, families, and community

Much of the literature on culturally responsive teaching practices supports the idea that a teacher's relationships with her or his students are critical to creating a classroom culture where children feel safe and cared for (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

This is important because it is only after these basic needs are met that children will be able to take the risks to learn. However, one should not assume that all teachers, by virtue of their tendency to care about children, have the

STUDENT **ASSETS** TEMPLATE

STUDENT **PROFILE** TEMPLATE

and support positive outcomes. For example, I ask teachers to identify six students who come from a background that is different from their own relative to race, ethnicity, or social class. Once these students are identified, teachers complete a profile template for each child. See the sample profile template on p. 20.

Completing this profile template for a sample of their students accomplishes two key goals. First, teachers engage in activities with their students that push them to understand the lives of the children in their classroom in a manner that moves to a much deeper level. Second, developing a more comprehensive understanding of the lives of a representative sample of the students typically encourages teachers to get to know all of their students at a deeper level. The ultimate goal is that the understanding teachers develop from this activity impacts their approach to teaching in a way that more deeply considers the needs of the diverse students in their classroom.

In addition to completing these profile templates, it is important that teachers engage in professional learning that helps them acquire a greater understanding of their students' families. To help achieve this, I ask teachers to attend one community event that does not occur at their school and where at least some of their students' families will be present.

skills to develop these types of classroom cultures.

In my work with teachers, I start with the basic premise that teacher learning must be centered on how to build the types of relationships with students that will foster community

STUDENT PROFILE TEMPLATE

STUDENT INITIALS:

FAMILY AND CULTURAL CONTEXT
(e.g. number of family members, home responsibilities, travel to school, cultural background, language(s) spoken at home, parent or guardian/order sibling/other adults available to provide assistance, after-school care)

PERSONAL INTERESTS AND ASSETS

PROVIDE ANY OTHER ASSESSMENT DATA YOU DEEM RELEVANT

Reading:

Math:

Other:

LEARNING STRATEGIES: In what learning situations have you observed this child to be most engaged? Mark all where you have observed high engagement:

_____ **Text-based visual:** overhead, text, worksheet

_____ **Graphic-based visual:** pictures, diagrams, PowerPoint

_____ **Auditory passive:** teacher lecture/student listen

_____ **Auditory active:** rap, rhyme, song, rhythm, chanting, call and response

_____ **Interpersonal:** cooperative activity, incorporate student talk, partner work

_____ **Model:** demonstrate, provide model to follow

_____ **Sensory motor:** manipulate, act out, incorporate movement, use gestures, incorporate food

_____ **Multisensory:** performance, multimedia, lesson with high emotional content

_____ **Grounded in student interest in** _____

_____ **Other** _____

What is the best group size for this student?   1/1   partners   small group   large group

What is this child's need for movement?   low   moderate   high

How would you rate this child's distractibility?   low   moderate   high

What is the optimum lesson length for this student? 5-10 minutes   15-20 minutes   25-30 minutes   more than 30 minutes

How does your current practice consider the cultural and personal assets of this child?

How can you use what you know about this student to teach him or her?

Are there any additional special considerations for enhancing the engagement and learning of this child?

STUDENT ASSETS TEMPLATE

Family/cultural assets	How you can use this to increase student engagement and learning
Interests/personal assets	How you can use this to increase student engagement and learning
Learning strategies	How you can use this to increase student engagement and learning
Home responsibilities and after-school activities	How you can use this to increase student engagement and learning

I let them know that the goal of this activity is to have a one-on-one conversation with at least one caregiver to see how their classroom rules, policies, procedures, and teaching strategies are congruent or incongruent with what is expected at home. Almost without exception, teachers report how the anxiety of doing this activity gives way to a sense of connection and greater understanding of a child and his/her family.

For example, in a written reflection, one teacher said, "I see what a huge difference it can make when you build strong relationships with your students' families. First of all, families are windows into children's lives outside of school. It is clear that if the school life is drastically different from the child's home life, it will make it difficult to keep them engaged and learning."

RELEVANCE:

Connecting learning to lives

Once teachers have spent the time to get to know their students on a deeper level, I will typically work with them to incorporate this information and use it in their daily teaching practices. This is where relevance becomes an important piece in working toward greater equity in the classroom.

Delpit (2006) reminds us that, when working with racially and economically diverse students, it is imperative to connect the curriculum to their lives and create lessons that target students' assets. This is the rationale behind an activity in which

teachers take the information they learned from the profile templates and the community event to create a chart of each child's assets.

Framing this activity from the perspective of students' assets pushes teachers to think about how their current pedagogy considers students' strengths. See the student assets template above.

After teachers develop a chart for each of the six original students, I ask them to look across the charts to plan and implement a lesson based on assets that are common to two or more of the students. A typical example of this is when a teacher notices that students have kinesthetic learning styles and, as a result, works to develop a lesson that incorporates greater levels of movement for the children.

A second example is to have teachers plan lessons in which students work collaboratively with a partner or small group of peers. The idea is that teachers plan a lesson based on students' assets, implement it, and reflect on evidence of the success of the lesson based on student learning and engagement.

One teacher implemented a spelling game that targeted her students' needs for movement. "The Sparkle strategy is a sure winner," the teacher noted in reflection. "Students are improving academically and behaviorally. The game has increased the excitement around spelling."

If I am working with groups of teachers over several weeks, I ask them to engage in this cycle of planning, implementing,

and reflecting at least three times. This reinforces the process of using practices that are relevant to students' lives and demonstrates to the teachers that doing so is a relatively simple way to engage students in learning activities that lead to positive learning outcomes.

The premise behind getting teachers to try to use what they have learned about their students is an important step in getting them to really "see" the significance of making the curriculum relevant to children's lives. In addition, the practice of making the curriculum relevant supports greater equity because it helps to reframe classroom practices in a way that more effectively meets the learning needs of racially and economically diverse children.

RESPONSIBILITY:

An imperative to enact socially just practices

Responsibility means developing a sense of obligation to using practices that foster an equitable classroom culture. To accomplish this, I ask teachers to reflect on their experiences with developing relationships and using relevant curriculum and make three commitments to how they will continue these efforts in their daily practices.

The intention is that the commitments serve as a reminder of the responsibility educators have to be persistent in their efforts to support the success of all students. Typically, the commitments teachers make connect to the concepts of relationships and relevance.

For example, one teacher wrote, "A commitment I am making is to modify curricular materials to reflect the cultural and familial lives of my students. This means creating big books, math problems, science experiments, and other instructional materials that are meaningful to their lives. A commonality that

I discovered among my target students was the fact that their cultural and personal assets are rarely reflected in the curriculum. I believe relevant lessons will help them to make connections beyond simple understanding."

This reflection demonstrates how one teacher has reframed her thinking as it relates to her day-to-day practices and how they need to shift to connect more successfully with her students. In my own work leading professional learning, my next steps are to find a way that I can reconnect with teachers to discuss how their efforts to enact their commitments have progressed. This will allow me to take the next step in fulfilling my own responsibilities to foster the reframing of teaching practices that promote greater equity.

Teachers, administrators, and teacher educators must work consistently to find ways to meet the needs of all students in a manner that will help them to be academically and socially successful. Following an axiom of relationship, relevance, and responsibility will focus educators' efforts to create more equitable schooling environments that support success for all students.

REFERENCES

Delpit, L. (2006). Lessons from teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education 57*(3), 220-231.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). T*he dream keepers: Successful teachers of African American children* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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

•

Vicki Vescio (vescio@coe.ufl.edu) is a clinical assistant professor at the University of Florida. ■

How we can bridge the culture gap

- Engage the wider community — including students — to determine urgent priorities, risks, and actions to consider.
- Include policymakers in the school's transformation work; make the process and practices public and shared.
- Reconceptualize support and evaluation systems so progress and change are valued variables.

CONTINUOUS AND CONSTANT WORK

This article is an introduction to a framework that is much more complex and responsive than a simple program or set of activities. The work of transformation — and in particular, transformation for social justice — must remain continuous and constant. As such, for as long as inequities remain and interruption is needed, we must create and sustain conditions in schools where this cycle of awareness, interruption, meaning

making, and radical action for improvement can occur.

REFERENCES

Center for Public Education. (2007). *The United States of education: The changing demographics of the United States and their schools.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Hilliard, A.G., III. (1995). *The maroon within us: Essays on African American community socialization.* Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.

Peters, G. (2012). *Teacher transformation: Transcending hegemonic roots* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Department of Educational Leadership, California State University, East Bay, CA.

•

Gregory Peters (gpeter@sfcess.org) is executive director of the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools. ■

HOW DO I TEACH ENGLISH LEARNERS?

THE CHALLENGES CONTENT TEACHERS FACE — AND WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS CAN DO TO SUPPORT THEM

By Felice Atesoglu Russell

High school content teachers are often unfamiliar with teaching English learner students in the mainstream. They are sometimes unsure of the needs of English learner students and do not know how to teach them or what expectations to set (Lucas & Villegas, 2010).

As a researcher, I spent over a year at Vista International High School (all names of people and places are pseudonyms). The school was in an urban district outside a large metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest. After observing and interviewing teachers, I unpacked the perceived instructional challenges that content teachers articulated in their work with English learners in the mainstream. At the time, the school was focused on inclusion for English learner students within mainstream content classes, and the principal provided focused support and professional learning opportunities.

The school included English learner students in mainstream classrooms and gave them access to curriculum in the content areas as quickly as possible. Those English learner students designated as beginners had several periods of English learner-specific support classes in the content areas. Students identified as intermediate or advanced, however, had a class schedule of entirely mainstream classes except for one period of English learner writing support.

The curriculum in the English learner writing support class aligned with the mainstream language arts curriculum and supported the assignments from the mainstream class. The design of English learner student class schedules gave students expanded access to the core content curriculum.

INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES

Teachers at the high school were responsible for teaching a large number of students. A content teacher had about 150 students. With roughly 30% of the student population identified as English learners, each content teacher was responsible for the instruction of about 45 English learner students.

The content teachers recognized that each English learner student came to school with his or her own experiences in formal schooling and in a particular content area as well as with the English language and U.S. schools. This awareness of student backgrounds and the differences between individual English learner students and their experiences with school did not necessarily facilitate the content teachers' ability to meet the instructional needs of English learner students. In fact, teachers described numerous challenges.

Teachers identified four areas of perceived instructional challenge: Meeting disparate individual needs; insufficient preparation for working with English learner students; insufficient information about English learner students' knowledge, backgrounds, and abilities; and assessment demands and accountability.

MEETING DISPARATE NEEDS

Katie Hanover, a science teacher with a few years of teaching experience, had spent enough time at the school

to gain an understanding of her English learner students and their needs. Still, meeting the individual and varied needs of English learner students in the context of her content classes challenged her.

"There's definitely distinct different groups," Hanover said. "You can characterize the African students a lot differently than the Latino students. … There are some students who speak Asian languages that don't have any sort of translation services or anything." Noting the different ways these students approach school, Hanover said, "In my head, English learner is too broad because there's these English learner kids and those English learner kids — and they're different."

Teachers recognized that the label for English learner students was too broad, yet weren't clear how to make sense of that and differentiate instruction in a way that would meet individual English learner students' needs.

Liz Phillips, a first-year biology teacher, experienced competing instructional needs with two English learner students. One had a limited science background and was struggling to understand the concept of a scientific model. The student had missed class, so Phillips talked with him one-on-one about the material he had missed from class. At first, he struggled with the concept. When Phillips offered multiple examples, he began to understand.

The second student had very different needs. The student

> **The second student had very different needs. The student had studied the topic of cells in his native language, yet he did not have the English vocabulary for sharing his knowledge. The student knew what mitochondria were and what they did, but Phillips could tell the student was frustrated by not being able to explain his thinking and knowledge to her.**

had studied the topic of cells in his native language, yet he did not have the English vocabulary for sharing his knowledge. The student knew what mitochondria were and what they did, but Phillips could tell the student was frustrated by not being able to explain his thinking and knowledge to her.

The first student struggled with understanding a scientific concept due to lack of background knowledge and experience in science. The second student struggled with how to communicate his already deep content knowledge in cellular biology. This example highlights the complexity inherent in teaching a diverse English learner student population. Teachers recognized that there were individual differences among their English learners and perceived this to be one of the challenges.

Furthermore, English learner students' limited ability to self-advocate emerged as a common theme. Many teachers identified this as a challenge. They wanted their English learner

students to be proactive in accessing print resources, getting support from other students, or asking the teacher for extra help or to clarify assignments. Enabling English learner students to self-advocate was a way to ensure meeting their individual needs.

In addition, teachers were not always sure how to group students. Balancing native language use with the need to practice English during group work was a difficult task for teachers. Teachers were uncertain about how to support English learner students' individual needs through peer support versus when to push students to work independently. Some noticed that, when given the choice, many English learner students would gravitate toward their common language peers. In some cases, this seemed beneficial, but teachers were not always sure that this was true in all cases.

It was difficult for teachers to generalize across all English learner students. Each student brought his or her own linguistic and cultural background. Teachers had greater success identifying instructional challenges when they focused on individual students and the demands those students posed for the teacher.

INSUFFICIENT PREPARATION

In the face of these diverse individual learning needs, teachers' lack of preparation to work with English learner students was apparent. All of the teachers interviewed graduated from traditional teacher education programs within higher education. Most noted that their programs didn't prepare them for teaching English learner students.

Many teachers noted that their student teaching placements were not at schools with a linguistically diverse population. Others said that the comprehensive high schools where they did their student teaching had programs specifically for English learner students. As a result, the preservice teachers didn't come into contact with English learner students. For many of the teachers, Vista was the first school where they were responsible for meeting English learner students' needs in their content classrooms. They saw themselves as learning on the job.

For some teachers, the lack of preparation in dealing with a culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse content class led to a lack of confidence in working with English learner students. Many noted that they did not always know when to provide specific scaffolds or supports. They weren't sure when to provide a visual, a model of what was expected, or simply write out the directions for a particular task.

INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENTS

Another common challenge teachers noted was how to de-

termine their English learner students' levels of understanding. Among the many areas of insufficient preparation was familiarity with tools and processes for assessing English learner students' language proficiency.

Many teachers recognized that written work did not always convey a true level of understanding of a particular topic. Some teachers relied heavily on oral assessment, including one-on-one conferring and oral defenses. They saw these as opportunities for English learner students to express their learning, providing a more accurate measure of their understanding.

Hillary Bosley, the Advanced Placement (AP) language arts teacher, recognized that there was often a disconnect between what English learner students were able to do orally versus what they were capable of in writing. For instance, she described how one of her students was able to explain her thinking when pushed in a one-on-one conversation conference but was unable to do so in her writing.

"Karen and I conferenced yesterday about her essay," she said. "Orally she's good … but she doesn't come across in her writing." In addition, Bosley noticed that, even though students often had the oral academic language skills, they were apprehensive about speaking up in front of the whole class. It was not always clear what students understood. A math teacher described the ongoing tension of determining English learner students' mathematical ability versus their English language proficiency, regardless of the type of assessment.

In addition, teachers were often unsure about when and how to solicit oral output from English learner students to determine levels of understanding. Teachers recognized a challenge in helping English learner students develop their confidence in using English and speaking up in class.

Stephanie Mackey, the social studies teacher, described the difficulties English learners displayed with speaking during presentations, group work, and social activities. "I do ask students to do oral presentations, and last year, every single student did it and did it well, even the English learners, but getting them to that point where they're confident and prepared and able to stand up and speak — how can I figure out how to support the English learners so they're ready to share an idea, they're prepared, and, therefore, they can participate?"

The challenge for her seemed to be how she could figure out the necessary supports and scaffolds that were most likely to encourage English learner students' oral participation in class. This included giving students an opportunity to prepare before they were asked to share an idea.

Beginning teachers new to the building and to the profession seemed particularly vulnerable. Even if the teacher knew a student's English proficiency level, there were still pieces of the story that made it challenging for content teachers to meet their English learner students' needs.

Jamie Smith, a first-year science teacher, said that, while she had information regarding language proficiency levels, "it doesn't tell you how much science they ever had, how much school they've ever had, where they came from. It's a massive amount of information to get and then process and then apply."

Considering the large number of students and English learner students that a beginning content teacher was responsible for, the amount of information and the learning curve for getting to know this large number of students could be overwhelming. Of course, this was also within the context of learning how to plan instruction, be an effective classroom manager, negotiate the school and district processes, and collaborate with colleagues.

ASSESSMENT DEMANDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Many of the teachers experienced an ongoing balancing act between meeting students' instructional needs and the demands and expectations of state assessments and the AP curriculum. This reality added to the perceived challenges and pressures content teachers expressed. While many of the content teachers felt this pressure, Bosley provided the best example of this.
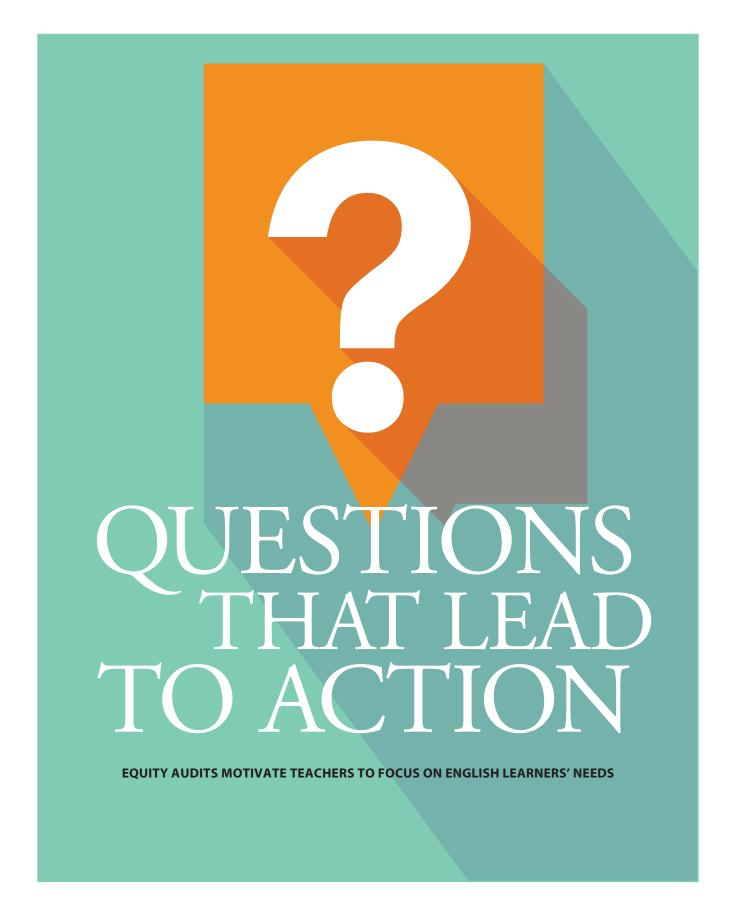
Bosley approached the topic of instructional challenges related to teaching English learner students with the lens of the AP curriculum. Her focus was on the tension of teaching advanced language arts classes to a large English learner student population with the aim of taking the AP exam. She was not always sure where to focus her instructional energies. She noted: "A lot of it's the time — processing time. AP is a timed test. You have to prepare them to read something and write an essay about it in 40 minutes. Kids who have a hard time, it just takes them longer to read, it takes them longer to write."

Bosley challenged her English learner students in AP language arts academically, and they responded. This was evident through classroom observations. She described how one of her English learner students wanted to use higher-level vocabulary in his writing. He made the attempt but, as a result, his writing did not always make the most sense.

The challenge for her was how she could work with this student to help him figure out how to use these higher-level vocabulary words but know if they make sense or not. This student was using a thesaurus and other available resources in the classroom, but there was a disconnect between what he wanted to be able to do academically — using the higher-level vocabulary — and what he was able to write.

Bosley noted that she graded student work on the AP rubric and that this could be problematic in a class with many English learner students. "The way I'm grading this class is based on the AP rubric. In order to get the highest score, you have to write with really high-level diction — automatically that rubric puts English learner kids at a huge disadvantage. It's also graded on mechanics and punctuation and spelling, so Zaid is playing with big words and is not so successful right now."

The challenge for Bosley was how to help this particular stu-

QUESTIONS THAT LEAD TO ACTION

EQUITY AUDITS MOTIVATE TEACHERS TO FOCUS ON ENGLISH LEARNERS' NEEDS

By Luis R. Soria and Margery B. Ginsberg

Marcella and Michael have near-perfect 4th-grade attendance records at a pre-K-8 public school in Chicago, Illinois.

Marcella and her family are recent immigrants. With the highest national level of immigrants in 105 years (Zeigler & Camarota, 2015), recent immigrants comprise 13.3% of the U.S. population. Given both the rise in students who speak a language other than English at home and dwindling resources for professional learning in urban public schools, the need for schools to develop in-house systems for teachers to continuously learn from one another has never been stronger.

Like Michael, Marcella is eager to learn. Yet student learning data reveal significant disparities in their performance. This baffles their teachers, who participate in professional learning and regularly meet with grade-level colleagues to learn from one another.

Marcella's teachers wonder: How do we know students are being educated in a manner that best supports their needs as learners? How do we extend and deepen our conversations about equity? How do we know that we are asking the right questions?

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXCEL

Last year, as chief of schools for Network 8 in Chicago Public Schools, Luis R. Soria was responsible for supporting, leading, and assessing the teaching and learning of nearly 30,000 students at 34 schools. Like Michael's and Marcella's teachers, Soria worked hard to

Data showed that English learners with high attendance, from 95% to 100%, were earning a D or F at nearly double the percentage of non-English learners.

ensure they have every possible opportunity to excel.

Every five weeks, the district team generated an on-track report for the 27 elementary and middle schools in Network 8. This comprehensive report provided a routine way to follow each student's progress in reading and mathematics for grades 3 through 8.

The team also documented students' attendance rates and designed and facilitated a series of four full-day learning sessions to assist instructional leadership teams from each school as they reviewed, analyzed, interpreted, and responded to data.

As the instructional leadership teams examined their own teaching, they also developed their capacity to work with grade-level teams at their schools through a similar process for continuous instructional improvement.

Data revealed that, across schools, a high percentage of English learners were off-track for 15 consecutive weeks. Like Marcella, these students were earning a D or F in reading or mathematics.

When Soria filtered the data for students with low attendance to see if that might be the culprit, he saw that English learners with high attendance, from 95% to 100%, were earning a D or F at nearly double the percentage of non-English learners.

In addition to examining data for student learning trends, the school needed a way to surface some of the less-transparent causes of educational inequity.
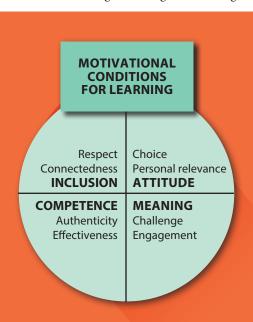
In a leadership class taught by Margery B. Ginsberg at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Soria learned about the equity audit — an approach to inquiry that examines one or more aspects of a learning environment (community, district, school, classroom) related to opportunity gaps in public education.

According to Groenke (2010), equity audits became popular during the Civil Rights era, when activists sought to make nondiscrimination a condition to receive federal funding. Although there is limited consensus on how best to structure and implement an equity audit, its potential has attracted the attention of theorists, schools, and organizations that serve schools (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004, p.141).

Soria decided to introduce the idea of an equity audit to one school before introducing it to others. To do this, he drew on two resources: the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Ginsberg, 2011) and the unpublished draft of an equity audit developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Urban Education Leadership.

Using the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Ginsberg, 2015) as a guide, Soria asked, "How can I work with the school team so that they want to explore the correlation between high attendance and consistently low grades for English learners?" The Center for Urban Education Leadership equity audit provided categories and items from which educators could draw to customize an approach.

MOTIVATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Respect
Connectedness
INCLUSION

Choice
Personal relevance
ATTITUDE

COMPETENCE
Authenticity
Effectiveness

MEANING
Challenge
Engagement

To Soria, it seemed intuitive that effective facilitators build relationships and present new challenges in an environment for learning where educators feel safe to raise questions.

Yet, from examining the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching, Soria could see that there are four primary considerations, and these are mutually interdependent. While safety is essential, so are choice, relevance, challenge, and authentic and valued evidence of success.

To introduce the idea of an equity audit, Soria sought a research-based approach to support adult motivation to learn each step of the way, from introducing the idea of an equity audit to the school team — prioritizing goals and related questions to investigate — and field-testing its implementation. The motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching was a helpful scaffold for facilitation.

MOTIVATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

The motivational framework serves as a meta-language for facilitators of adult learning (and teachers of younger learners) to share knowledge and develop learning experiences that are motivationally coherent (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Ginsberg, 2011, 2015).

Everyday wisdom, research, and personal experience support the idea that when four primary motivational conditions are present in a learning environment, greater learner initiative and growth will result (Elliot & Dweck, 2013; Wlodkowski, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1991). As shown in the figure at left, these conditions and related questions are:

Establish inclusion. How do we create or affirm a learning environment in which educators feel respected by and connected to one another and to the facilitator (e.g. large-group and small-group norms for respectful interactions, teaching and learning that includes adults' lives, languages, and cultures)?

Develop a positive attitude. How do we create or affirm a favorable disposition toward learning through personal relevance and choice (e.g. personalized goals based on interests, strengths, and needs; opportunities for different perspectives)?

Enhance meaning. How do we create engaging and challenging learning experiences that include educators' perspectives and values (e.g. problem posing, inquiry, and experimentation)?

Engender competence. How do we create an understanding that educators have effectively learned something they value and perceive as valuable to their school (e.g. multiple ways to reach goals, clear criteria, and formative feedback for success)?

Soria kept these four conditions in mind as he thought through how to introduce an approach to an equity audit focused on improving instruction for English learners.

For background, Soria reviewed the Center for Urban Education Leadership's five equity audit categories: parent, community, school connections; leadership to dismantle racism and bias; safe and equitable classrooms for deep learning; student leadership and voice; and professional capacity.

Next, he thought through six questions as he prepared his approach, with a strong focus on question 3:

1. What do you want to learn from experimenting with this process?
2. Why this particular focus?
3. How and to whom will you introduce and explain the opportunity?
4. How will you initially prioritize items and/or work with others to prioritize items?
5. Who will assist with the audit?
6. What is your timeline for introducing the audit, prioritizing

items, and so forth?

Soria understood that the nature of his role as a network chief of schools could interfere with teacher initiative to uncover educational inequities related to English learners. The school team could simply ask, "What does the chief want us to do now?"

Soria knew he had to think carefully about how to build a willing environment for this work. He also wanted to resist telling the school team how to respond to data findings related to English learners at their school.

CREATING A TEAM APPROACH

Returning to the five Center for Urban Education Leadership equity audit categories, Soria prioritized the category of safe and equitable classrooms for deep learning. The 22 items in this section focus on teacher actions and decisions for English learners, and this is what he wanted to learn from experimenting with this process.

Soria developed six questions based on this section and organized them from teaching strategies to student identity and finally to planning for student motivation. He planned to introduce these to the school team by saying, "This is my best thinking for six important questions. But we need your best thinking. Would you like less? More? Different?"

Soria wanted the school team to make its own decisions while eliminating the time-consuming work of asking them to start from scratch. The initial questions were:

1. To what extent do teachers use teaching strategies that are inclusive, relevant, challenging, engaging, and focused on the academic success of all students?
2. To what extent do teachers make meaningful connections to students' cultural identities, interests, and personal goals?
3. To what extent do teachers use collaborative inquiry and authentic projects to support inclusive, relevant, and high levels of student engagement in learning?
4. To what extent do teachers use specific teaching strategies to support the strengths and needs of English learners?
5. To what extent is authentic evidence of student learning a central feature of assessment practices?

6. To what extent is instructional planning also motivational planning where supporting student motivation is proactive rather than a matter of default?

After Soria selected and ordered these questions, he worked with the principal and assistant principal to create a team approach. To begin his conversation with administrative leaders, he said, "I need a school team to serve as a collaborative thought partner. I'm hoping that this learning team can help me resolve an issue that I have discovered from the on-track reports. I know your instructional leadership team dives into these reports with thoughtful diligence, and I believe I can learn from your expertise. What do you think?"

They agreed, and together the school leaders decided that a small but significant team, representative of the instructional leadership team, was the best way to plan its work. They set the date and time.

WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL TEAM

The school is in a significantly underresourced neighborhood in Chicago. Its 480 students include 95% current or former English learners and 97% low income.

Teacher mobility is low, and the current school administrators have co-led the school for more than six years. The instructional leadership team has evolved over the last two years, moving from compliance tasks such as monitoring grades and planning field trips to designing and implementing cycles of continuous improvement with specific district-endorsed powerful practices.

The eight-member instructional leadership team includes representatives from pre-K-2, 3-5, and 6-8, and teachers of fine arts, diverse learners, English learners, and the two administrators.

A subset of the instructional leadership team worked with school leaders and Soria on a first phase of the equity audit. This included the fine arts teacher, a middle school science teacher, and a diverse learner teacher. The district counts as diverse learners students who have an individual instructional plan, commonly referred to as an IEP.

Soria invited a member from the network team, an instruc-

SAFE AND EQUITABLE CLASSROOMS FOR DEEP LEARNING

The unpublished draft of the equity audit developed by the Center for Urban Education Leadership at the University of Illinois at Chicago includes a section on safe and equitable classrooms for deep learning. The items in this section focus on teacher actions and decisions for historically underserved students, including English learners.

Items are scored on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 = almost always, 3 = sometimes, 2 = rarely, 1= not yet.

		4 Almost always	3 Sometimes	2 Rarely	1 Not yet
1	Teachers have the self-knowledge and interpersonal skill to work with students who are from backgrounds that are different than their own.				
2	Teachers understand how extrinsic rewards and sanctions to motivate learning can undermine deep and creative learning.				
3	Teachers understand how extrinsic rewards and sanctions can exacerbate problematic power relations.				
4	Teachers understand the significance of intrinsic motivation as the foundation for teaching and learning in culturally diverse classrooms.				
5	Teachers understand how to create a learning environment that is respectful, relevant, challenging, engaging, and focused on the academic success of all students.				
6	Teachers use teaching strategies that are inclusive, relevant, challenging, engaging, and focused on the academic success of all students.				
7	Teachers use specific teaching strategies to support the strengths and needs of English language learners.				
8	Teachers make meaningful connections to students' cultural identities, interests, and personal goals.				
9	Teachers are aware of and use pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning related to controversial issues.				

		4 Almost always	3 Sometimes	2 Rarely	1 Not yet
10	Teachers know and use strategies to promote equitable and mutually supportive teamwork among students.				
11	Teachers use heterogeneous grouping for teamwork most of the time.				
12	Posters, literature, textbooks, and all learning materials, including handouts, reflect students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.				
13	The literature selections in the curriculum include relevant social issues and cultural perspectives.				
14	Teachers encourage and help students probe personal assumptions and perspectives.				
15	Teachers use collaborative inquiry and authentic projects to support inclusive, relevant, and high levels of student engagement in learning.				
16	Authentic evidence of student learning is a central feature of assessment practices.				
17	Formative assessment is an everyday practice.				
18	Grading practices are grounded in current research and respect that students learn at different rates and in different ways.				
19	Instructional planning is also motivational planning. (Motivation is not a matter of default.)				
20	Teachers differentiate instruction to build on students' strengths.				
21	Across the curriculum, teachers create substantive learning experiences that teach about social justice and encourage active community engagement.				
22	Teachers work with students to develop inquiry projects that contribute to their communities.				

GIVEN YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS SECTION, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

Effective current practices that support safe and equitable classrooms for deep learning currently include:

Evidence that supports your response to the previous prompt includes:

Based on your response to the first two prompts, priorities to improve safe and equitable classrooms for deep learning are:

Source: Center for Urban Education Leadership, College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago.

tional support leader, to help capture and archive the collaboration and initial exploration of the equity audit.

After a few minutes of informal conversation, Soria began, "I've been exploring the on-track data reports, and I'm trying to be more precise about how schools connect their analysis and interpretation of data to instructional practice.
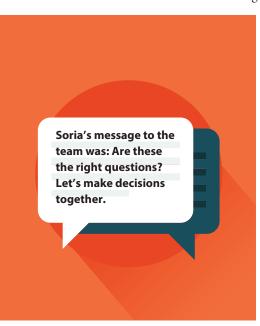
"To achieve this, I'd like to suggest six questions for us to explore as a team. I want to ensure they are the best questions to pose. Would you please silently read through them and consider their potential significance to the school?"

Team members read the questions and, after a wide-ranging discussion about school values, teaching challenges, and how to proceed, began working as a team to answer the questions.

On large chart paper, Soria drew an x- and y-axis chart with the six questions and a four-point scale. He asked team members to score each question independently, then asked them to place a dot on the chart for each question to reveal their scores. Once all the dots were placed, he asked, "What do you see?"

The principal said, "We are all over the place, and there's only five of us! What will happen when we try this with the whole staff?" Everyone laughed, and it united the group as a team.

To make sense of the team's findings, Soria asked for observational (factual rather than interpretive) comments based on where team members placed their dots. For example, an observation could be: For question 4, every one of us placed our dot in a different place along the x-axis.

> **Soria's message to the team was: Are these the right questions? Let's make decisions together.**

As group members moved from factual observation to interpretation and next steps, they arrived at a shared understanding. As one teacher said, "We don't really know the English learners. We don't understand what they really need. I'm listening and reflecting as I sit here, and I wonder if others will feel the same way. I look at this report, and I get frustrated. But I get frustrated at them (the students), and I'm learning today that I might not really know enough strategies for the English learners."

Around the table, a silence prevailed. After a minute, another teacher suggested, "Let's make plan. How do we start?"

LESSONS LEARNED

From this experience, Soria realized he needed to move away from a top-down approach to create a context where teachers are motivated to challenge themselves and their colleagues in new ways, using four primary motivational conditions:

- **Establish inclusion:** "From start to finish, I sought to communicate that we are a team, individual perspectives matter, and your input is invaluable," Soria said. He created safe conditions for this to happen by inviting team members to express their opinions, listening carefully, building on individual statements, and sharing humor.
- **Develop a positive attitude:** "I wanted this to matter to every team member," Soria said. The team shared an understanding that students learn more than data necessarily reveal, and they reviewed data through team-generated questions and observations. Soria's message to the team was: Are these the right questions? Let's make decisions together.
- **Enhance meaning:** Soria constructed an experiential process using authentic data and inquiry for the team to practice and further develop a process for professional learning with the rest of the staff.
- **Engender competence:** "Working with data and then generating data of our own through dot graphing on the axis chart allowed us to move to an essential next step —- putting together a staff workshop as a fully committed team," Soria said.

Soria says he also learned another valuable lesson. "As an educational leader, a primary responsibility is to enhance and support adult motivation so that the will and the means to teach Marcella and Michael will prevail, no matter what. While the influence of educators who encourage motivation through thought and deed may not always be quantifiable, it is difficult to dispute."

REFERENCES

Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (ed.), *Perspectives on motivation: Nebraska Symposium on Motivation,* 1990. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Elliot, A.J. & Dweck, C.S. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of competence and motivation.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Ginsberg, M.B. (2011). *Transformative professional learning: A system to enhance teacher and student motivation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ginsberg, M.B. (2015). *Excited to learn: Motivation and culturally responsive teaching.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Ginsberg, M.B. & Wlodkowski, R.J. (2009). *Diversity and motivation: Culturally responsive teaching in college.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Groenke, S.L. (2010). Seeing, inquiring, witnessing:

Using the equity audit in practitioner inquiry to rethink inequity in public schools. *English Education, 43*(1), 83-96.

Skrla, L., Scheurich, J.J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2004). Equity audits: A practical leadership tool for developing equitable and excellent schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1),133-161.

Wlodkowski, R.J. (2008). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Zeigler, K. & Camarota, S.A. (2015, August).

Immigrant population hits record 42.1 million in second quarter of 2015. Available at http://cis.org/Immigrant-Population-Hits-Record-Second-Quarter-2015.

•

Luis R. Soria (lsoria@hps.holyoke.ma.us) is chief academic officer of Holyoke Public Schools in Massachusetts. Margery B. Ginsberg (margeryginsberg@ gmail.com) is an author, educational researcher, and school improvement consultant. ■

---

dent become proficient at using higher-level vocabulary, knowing that eventually his writing would be graded using the AP rubric that required a high level of diction. Getting her English learner students to that level was the instructional challenge.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

Content teachers responsible for the instruction of English learner students will perceive myriad challenges when it comes to English learner students in the mainstream. School leaders can play a pivotal role in supporting and mitigating some of these challenges by recognizing what some of the pitfalls and issues might be for content teachers working with English learner students.

Schools that are successful in meeting English learner students' needs have a coherent vision for instruction and professional development (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Hakuta, 2011). Awareness of potential areas of resistance or tension can help school leaders as they create and support a vision for their schools and provide opportunities for professional learning related to the inclusion and instruction of English learner students.

School leaders can be more effective in how they lead and engage their staff by recognizing that content teachers will be meeting disparate needs of individual English learner students, were not necessarily prepared for working with English learner students in their teacher preparation programs, do not always have necessary background knowledge of English learner students, and are teaching in an era of accountability where assessments often do not align with English learner students' language proficiency levels.

School leaders can support the varied needs of English learner students, as well as their teaching staff, when they focus their instructional leadership efforts on setting a vision of inclusion and support for English learner students across the school and developing cultural norms, structures, and activities to engage content teachers in meeting the instructional needs of English learner students.

These targeted efforts include schoolwide supports for English learner students (e.g. common instructional practices across content areas, targeted academic supports) as well as alignment of program design for English learner students with supports for teachers responsible for the instruction of these students. Considering the dual needs of supporting both English learner students and their teachers will enable both parties the opportunity for success in their respective academic and professional realms.

In realizing the vision and means for such an inclusive school and supportive professional context, school leaders can begin to take steps to mitigate the gulf between developing academic English language proficiency and the demands of content learning in high schools.

REFERENCES

Elfers, A.M. & Stritikus, T. (2014). How school and district leaders support classroom teachers' work with English language learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(2), 305-344.

Hakuta, K. (2011). Educating language minority students and affirming their equal rights: Research and practical perspectives. *Educational Researcher, 40*(4), 163-174.

Lucas, T. & Villegas, A.M. (2010). The missing piece in teacher education: The preparation of linguistically responsive teachers. *National Society for the Study of Education, 109*(2), 297-318.

•

Felice Atesoglu Russell (frussell@ithaca.edu) is an assistant professor of education at Ithaca College in New York. ■

A PROCESS
of DISCOVERY

**TEACHERS EXAMINE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING**

"Here's a thought: Could Nika's sloppy paper reflect his anger about how the Native Americans were treated by the pioneers?"

— Group member

By Amy B. Colton and Georgea M. Langer

The collaborative analysis of student learning (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2015) is a professional learning design that transforms teachers' capacities and commitment to relentlessly pursue and use equitable ways to promote students' learning excellence. Our 30 years of experience and research indicate that when facilitated study groups analyze the work of carefully selected students over a period of months, all students benefit — especially those whose cultures are different from that of their teachers.

Collaborative analysis of student learning accomplishes these outcomes through structured transformative learning — the "process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8). These shifts in perspective allow teachers to discover culturally responsive instruction for those students they have struggled to reach and teach.

Here's an example of how a study group using collaborative analysis of student learning helps Sue Baker, a middle school social studies teacher, transform her beliefs about her Native American student, Nika, and ultimately her practice.

Baker: "Nika's writing was improving, but now it is so sloppy."

Group member: "You seem frustrated with Nika's lack of progress."

Baker: "Yes, I am. I don't think he cares anymore about what he turns in. I'm kind of at my wit's end."

Facilitator: "Sue is wondering if Nika just doesn't care. What other explanations might explain why his writing is getting worse?"

[Group members respond. Each idea is explored before going on to the next one.]

Group member: "Here's a thought: Could Nika's sloppy paper reflect his anger about how the Native Americans were treated by the pioneers?"

This new interpretation leads Baker to ask Nika about his family and heritage. Nika describes some of his grandfather's stories about his ancestors' suffering during the westward expansion. Baker realizes she has only presented this time in history from her own white middle-class perspective. These insights prompt her to present a variety of perspectives of historical events.

At the end of a year of studying Nika and the students of her colleagues, Baker reflected: "I learned that I should not assume anything. All students are different, and, as their teacher, I'm responsible for tapping into their lives. … I am now more mindful of my own philosophy, theories, and beliefs because I had to verbalize and reflect on them — and hear the perspectives of my colleagues" (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2015, p. 289).

A STRUCTURE FOR CHANGE

As Baker's example illustrates, transformative professional learning is particularly critical in contexts in which

teachers' cultural values and beliefs vary from those of their students. Many teachers unconsciously assume their own perspectives are the norm and, therefore, privilege students with similar cultural backgrounds while disadvantaging those whose life experiences are different. Permanent changes in one's thinking and behavior are unlikely to happen unless the deep structures guiding one's behavior are raised to a conscious level and scrutinized for their fit to the present situation (Katz & Dack, 2013; Yero, 2002; Bocchino, 1993).

The collaborative analysis of student learning professional learning design includes two primary features to prompt teachers' examination of their cultural perspectives as they seek responsive approaches for their students: facilitated and structured analysis of student work and communication skills for dialogue.

Here are the features and how they look in action with a study group that is analyzing a work sample from a 1st grader. Through structured inquiry, the group discovers new perspectives that lead to more responsive approaches for both this child and other students who share some of the same learning needs.

FACILITATED STRUCTURES FOR STUDENT WORK ANALYSIS

Groups using collaborative analysis of student learning may consist of same-grade teachers or same-content teachers at any grade level. Teachers meet every other week with a facilitator to learn what helps or hinders individual students' learning and how to respond appropriately. Two primary structures — the inquiry cycle and the five phases of collaborative analysis of student learning — ensure that the months of analyzing student work yield shifts in teachers' cultural views and practices.

THE INQUIRY CYCLE

The inquiry cycle leads teachers to consider multiple explanations for what they observe before deciding how to respond to a student. At every work analysis session, a protocol guides group members to look at student work from various perspectives. Each protocol includes:
- Gathering background information about the student and work sample;
- Sharing observations of what is seen in the work;
- Analyzing from various perspectives possible reasons for the performance; and
- Planning responsive approaches.

After this deep analysis, teachers select the most appropriate plans and put them into action. Then they return to the next study group with a new work sample — evidence of how well the new ideas worked.

The third step, analyzing, is central to transformational professional learning. Typically, teachers identify a problem and then immediately share strategies for fixing it. But this approach misses an important piece of the puzzle: the cause of the specific problem. Without knowing why the student is performing as

> **THE 5 PHASES OF COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING**
>
> 1. **Establish a focus for collaborative inquiry.** What area of the curriculum is most challenging for our students?
>
> 2. **Define teachers' professional learning goals.** Which students would be most fruitful to study over time so that we may discover equitable responses?
>
> 3. **Inquire into teaching for learning** (three to five months). Which approaches are most responsive to our students' specific strengths and needs?
>
> 4. **Assess learning progress.** What progress have our students made? Who needs further assistance?
>
> 5. **Integrate learning into teachers' professional practice.** What have we learned about ourselves and our teaching, and what might we need to learn more about?

he or she is, teachers cannot devise the strategies that will be culturally responsive to those causes.

Imagine that a group observes that a student's writing lacks expressive language. If, before sharing strategies, the teachers pause to analyze multiple reasons for the observed performance, they might discover two very different reasons: The student lacks a wide vocabulary, or the student doesn't understand the concept of supporting detail. Note how each explanation calls for a very different teaching strategy.

After Sue Baker's study group engaged in the analyzing step of the inquiry cycle, Baker transformed her perspective. She moved from seeing Nika's "sloppy work" as evidence that he didn't care to realizing that his cultural background was influencing his performance.

THE FIVE PHASES

Groups using collaborative analysis of student learning engage in five phases (see box above). A facilitator guides teachers through each phase.

The firsts two phases occur in the fall (or early in the semester) and set the stage for the third phase, which is the heart of collaborative analysis of student learning — the analysis of each teacher's focus student's work over time. For this phase to reap the greatest benefits, both the content and the characteristics of the specific students studied must be selected mindfully.

To illustrate the phases in action, consider a group that is investigating 1st graders' reading fluency. In phase one, teachers design and administer an initial assessment — a modified running record — to determine their students' current performance. At the next session (phase two), each teacher records

next to each student's name detailed information about the performance and what is known about each student.

Lila Green, a study group member, first notices a cluster of students who all share a similar content challenge: They don't use word attack strategies when faced with unknown words. They either skip the word or substitute ones that don't make sense. She has seen this challenge before and is curious to find ways to improve this skill.

Green looks for common characteristics of students who are not reaching proficiency. She notes that several of them appear to have little economic or parental support at home. Because Green grew up with a mother who regularly volunteered in her school, Green finds herself often frustrated with students whose skills are low and whose parents don't support their learning.

At the end of this phase, each teacher has used the observed patterns and knowledge of herself to select a professional learning goal and focus student. Green wrote, "I selected Dana to help improve my ability to reach low-income 1st graders who have little support at home and who use few word attack skills when they are stumped by a word."

In phase three, teachers spend three to five months studying each focus student's consecutive work samples. The next section includes an example of how Green's group considered Dana's culture, family, strengths, and needs along with Green's own cultural background and actions. The group refers to these understandings as they design the approaches Green will use before bringing the next work sample to the group.

The study group members complete the last two phases in the spring or at the end of the semester. They assess and analyze their whole class's learning progress and make a plan for students not reaching proficiency. In the last phase, teachers reflect on what they have learned about themselves and their teaching and set their professional learning goals.

We're often asked how spending so much time on a small number of focus students can benefit other students. Because each focus student is selected from a group of students who share common content challenges and whose backgrounds are puzzling to teachers, the insights gained usually can be transferred to other, similar students. Further, since every group member selects a different focus student, the teachers learn about those students' needs and strengths.

If teachers are to share their less successful work samples, a culture of trust and openness is crucial. The group learns specific communication skills to maintain safety and engage in the deep analysis of student learning.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Productive dialogue slows the decision-making process so teachers can "expand their thinking by suspending judgment and by taking time to inquire into their own perspectives and those of their colleagues" (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2015, p. 56).

Since this type of dialogue doesn't necessarily come natu-

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Engage in committed listening.

- *Attend fully:* Suspend judgment, note verbal and nonverbal cues.
- *Pause:* Understand what was said, resist interrupting, allow speaker to elaborate.

Communicate interest and understanding.

- *Paraphrase:* Value and clarify what was said.

Encourage deeper levels of analysis and reflection.

- *Probe for clarity:* Gain information unintentionally left out.
- *Empowering probe:* Assume that speaker has already considered the question or issue being raised.
- *Probe for beliefs and feelings:* Reflect on and examine accuracy of beliefs that may limit ability to reach a student.

Put ideas on the table.

- Offer ideas in an inviting way, using tentative language. Refrain from trying to persuade or convince others.

rally, a facilitator — a person from outside the group who is more skilled than any of the group members — teaches, models, and coaches teachers' use of the skills (see box above). As teachers demonstrate their fluency with these skills, the facilitator intervenes only when the group might be overlooking an important learning opportunity.

Here is a glimpse into Green's study group's interactions as they examine Dana's successive work samples. Note how the following dialogue transforms Green's perspective and guides her to discover responsive approaches to Dana's needs. (The communication skills used are indicated in parentheses.)

When the group analyzed Dana's first reading sample (running record), they observed many miscues. Green also shared

that Dana demonstrated high levels of discomfort when she read. As the group entertained multiple explanations for those observations, they theorized that Dana's anxiety was interfering with her ability to catch her errors. So they identified several word attack strategies (e.g. use picture clues, sound out the word) that they believed might help build her confidence.

Three weeks later, Green brought Dana's next running record to the group. Green reported, "I can't believe I've seen very little improvement. I thought her anxiety was the issue. She still seems really uncomfortable reading aloud."

As the group proceeded to the analyzing step, one teacher prompted Green to consider how she thinks about Dana's mother.

Group member: "I'm looking at Dana's biography for clues to this mystery. You mentioned that you selected Dana partly because she has little economic or parental support at home. What impact might that have on Dana's lack of progress in reading?" *(Empowering probe)*

Green: "I really don't think the mother has much interest in helping Dana. She didn't even come to parent conferences. I called her to reschedule, and she didn't return my call. How can I do anything when the mother doesn't even care?"

Facilitator: "So you think Dana's lack of progress is because her mother isn't helping her at home, and, without her support, Dana's reading won't improve *(Paraphrase)*. What leads you to that assumption?" *(Probe for beliefs)*

Green: "The research is quite clear. Students need to read at home if they are to be successful. Her mother isn't spending any time with her, so what can I do?"

Group member: "I'd like to offer a different perspective *(Put ideas on the table)*. I believe you said earlier that Dana's mother is single. Perhaps she works and doesn't have time to read to Dana."

Green: "Yes, Dana has talked about going to her aunt's house after school because her mother works long hours. Now that you mention it, I believe the father is not providing any support. Wow. I must admit that I had assumed that the mother doesn't care about reading. But now I wonder if the mother is just too stressed or tired to sit and read with Dana. I guess I assumed that every parent should and could support their child's learning at home. Now I can't even imagine how hard it must be for Dana's mother to come home and try to read with Dana. I may have to create other means for Dana to practice reading aloud."

Another group member: "Here's another possible explanation. Perhaps the mom reads with Dana but doesn't know how to help Dana when she struggles." *(Put ideas on the table)*

> **"I really don't think the mother has much interest in helping Dana. She didn't even come to parent conferences. I called her to reschedule, and she didn't return my call. How can I do anything when the mother doesn't even care?"**
>
> — *Group member*

Green: "You know, I never considered that. I really need to find a way to meet with the mother so I can check out these different possibilities. I'm going to find out more before I decide how to help Dana in class."

The use of the communication skills helped these teachers dig deeply into various explanations for the performance they saw. Green left with more questions to be pursued before she could design the most responsive approaches for Dana.

When Green met with the mother, the mother told Green, "Even after my long day at work, I take time to read with Dana. But she struggles so much that we both get frustrated. I just don't know what to do." Green asked the mother about Dana's play partners and learned that she has a good friend around 11 years old. As Green reflected on this conversation, she recalled that one group member had used reading buddies to help students improve their reading aloud. Green sought out the 5th-grade teacher and asked if Dana's friend could be her reading buddy. Soon Green noted that Dana was making steady progress in her word attack skills. Even the mother noticed less frustration and more enjoyment when reading at home with Dana.

Given adequate time, space, and support, teachers like Green can transform their understanding of their students, their teaching, and themselves. After her months of collaboratively analyzing Dana's work, Green said, "I learned to always check my cultural lenses before making assumptions about others who are living a very different life from my own" (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2015, p. 242). Doing so makes a world of difference when pursuing responsive equitable approaches to promote students' learning excellence.

REFERENCES

Bocchino, R. (1993). Are you planning the future or fixing the past? *Journal of Staff Development, 14*, 48-52.

Colton, A., Langer, G., & Goff, L. (2015). *The collaborative analysis of student learning: Professional learning that promotes success for all.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Katz, S. & Dack, L.A. (2013). *Intentional interruptions: Breaking down learning barriers to transform professional practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Yero, J.L. (2002). *Teaching in mind: How teacher thinking shapes education.* Hamilton, MT: MindFlight Publishing.

•

Amy B. Colton (acolton2@gmail.com) is the executive director of Learning Forward Michigan and a senior consultant at Learning Forward. Georgea M. Langer (glanger1@att.net) is professor emeritus of teacher education at Eastern Michigan University. ■

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP TRANSFORM AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

By Michelle Pinchot and Chris Weber

Like many schools across the country, Peters K-3 Elementary School in Garden Grove, California, is committed to equity, social justice, and eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps. To achieve these critical goals, Peters' teachers embraced leadership positions to transform teaching and learning across the school, supported by professional learning from the district. This combination transformed an entire community.

The school serves 770 students in pre-K through 3rd grade. More than three-fourths of students are English learners, three-fourths are Hispanic, one-fourth Vietnamese, and more than 80% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school is one of 47 elementary schools in the Garden Grove Unified School District in Southern California, a winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education.

Peters' commitment to equity of access for students inspired the creation of a system of supports based on the principles and practices of response to intervention. All students receive targeted supports by all staff based on diagnosed needs.

The school quickly realized that its system of supports could be enhanced and sustained by empowering and involving all teachers on campus. Staff recognized that student needs required changes in teacher practice. Changes in teacher practice necessitated professional learning.

Staff embraced the notion that professional learning and changes in teacher practice would have the greatest impact when all teachers assumed an active role in the improvement process. This teacher leadership and empowerment led to increases in student outcomes and in parent and student satisfaction with the culture and climate of the school community.

A TWO-PART PLAN

Two factors led to the school's achievements and recognition: focused and intensive professional learning plans and teachers' sense of empowerment in taking on leadership roles. Peters is in its seventh year of this two-part plan. Each year, professional learning has taken on a new focus. (See box at right.)

These questions have guided teachers' engagement:

1. What are the district's areas of focus, and how will the school align its yearly goal to district priorities?
2. Do classroom cultures encourage and support students throughout the day?
3. What does student talk look and sound like in the classroom?
4. Is there an appropriate amount of teacher talk to support student talk and task completion?
5. Do physical classroom environments support student learning?
6. Are pedagogies, practices, and strategies aligned to high levels of learning for all students? What strategies are used to check for understanding? Are students engaged? What is the evidence?
7. How is staff collaboration contributing to improved student achievement? What does the evidence indicate?
8. Are predictable procedures, structures, and routines in place to support student learning and the annual goal?

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

The school started by building on existing grade-level lead

FOCUS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Year 1: Classroom environment.

Year 2: Effective instruction, interactive structures, and checking for understanding in mathematics.

Year 3: Differentiation, foundational skills, and response to intervention.

Year 4: Student dialogue and discourse.

Year 5: Close reading.

Year 6: Writing and number talks.

Year 7: Discourse and math.

teacher positions. For the past seven years, these lead teachers have assumed roles beyond the traditional. They facilitate biweekly collaboration meetings with their teams, addressing grade-level needs and priorities. They analyze evidence of student learning and use this evidence to plan intervention or enrichment supports.

The student study team, which includes administrators, clinicians, and general and special education teachers, also plays an important role. Immediately upon identifying a student in need, the team meets to determine interventions that will take place within core instruction and supplemental intervention sessions.

In addition to contributing to schoolwide logistical and procedural decisions such as the schoolwide behavioral plan, character strengths incentives, and daily scheduling, lead teachers organize grade-level events such as literacy night, math and science night, growth mindset parent support, parent education, and curricular pacing. The team meets monthly with the principal to determine student and community needs, scheduling, and staffing to support the events.

A critical and significant factor in lead teachers' success is the support they receive through monthly district-led professional learning designed to build teachers' instructional and leadership capacities. Teachers then share and implement district recommendations at their schools in coordination with the schoolwide focus.

While investigating areas of study, teachers take on leadership roles and work with teams to implement their vision. Although the administration also supports the work, these teacher leaders take the lead on planning, implementation, and reflection of the practice.

The school designates an instructional lead teacher for each grade level who facilitates biweekly meetings with teams of six to eight colleagues. These instructional lead teachers complement the work of the grade-level lead teacher, guiding the team on a biweekly basis through the deconstruction of standards and curriculum and instruction planning sessions as they prepare for the coming weeks' teaching and learning.

Instructional lead teachers serve as coaches, providing in-class collegial support and guiding colleagues through a process the schools have named Plan, Do, Analyze, Reflect, a practice that combines lesson studies with systematic reflection to improve instructional delivery. The use of substitute teachers allows the two instructional lead teachers per grade level to learn and plan with the principal and district-assigned teacher on special assignment one-half day per month.

Instructional lead teachers also participate in and benefit from monthly district-led professional learning. As the school

> **Instructional lead teachers serve as coaches, providing in-class collegial support and guiding colleagues through a process the schools have named Plan, Do, Analyze, Reflect.**

transitioned into Common Core standards, teachers engaged in rigorous analysis of the standards with critical explanations and rationales behind the reforms. After deconstructing the standards, they examined instructional practices. Lead teachers facilitated collaborations that focused on analyses of the standards as well as studies of instructional practices and deliveries that would ensure students mastered the standards.

At the same time that the school formed the instructional lead teacher team, it also selected staff from each grade level to serve as demonstration teachers. Demonstration teachers provide a model lesson for their colleagues within a lesson study-like environment up to three times a year. The topics of these demonstrations are connected to the annual professional learning areas of focus. The use of substitutes allows the school's teacher on special assignment to collaborate with demonstration teachers once a week.

For the past three years, the special education coordinator has facilitated biweekly problem-solving meetings with teachers and the principal to examine the needs of all vulnerable students on campus, including those with an Individualized Education Program plan. The special education coordinator participates in schoolwide meetings and professional learning to provide support for teachers in serving students' social and behavioral needs.

The special education teacher also works with the school psychologist to conduct functional behavioral analyses and design behavioral intervention plans for students most in need and leads monthly meetings with the principal and general education teachers to examine evidence and make adjustments if students are not adequately responding to special education services.

To support the special education coordinator, the district provides monthly professional learning that focuses on instructional and behavioral strategies, intervention options, and collaboration between schools. The special education coordinator takes the information back to the team to analyze what will best meet the needs of students on an intervention plan.

The student study team coordinator, a full-time classroom teacher assuming additional responsibilities, takes the lead on managing and organizing all things related to response to intervention. The coordinator schedules and facilitates all problem-solving meetings and works with the school psychologist to determine how to support specific student needs.

To determine students' specific and most immediate areas of need, a team member administers diagnostic quizzes that the school has developed. For example, if a student is suspected of having difficulties with phonics, the student is asked to decode a series of words of increasing complexity to confirm the need and identify where to initiate supports. Problem-solving meetings held twice weekly ensure that students get support in a timely manner.

LOOKING AHEAD

While Peters' teachers have taken the lead in the school, the 50,000-student district provides the vision. Garden Grove's goal is that all students will grow at least one proficiency level each year. The district's strategic plan encompasses academic content, academic English, scholarly habits, motivation, social-emotional well-being, climate and culture, college and career readiness, and college and career success.

The work of Peters K-3 Elementary School recently caught the attention of Michael Fullan, who showcased the school in his writing and videos. Fullan recognized the impact of teacher-led and teacher-owned professional learning on the Peters community and student achievement and motivated the principal and staff to continue to strive for success. The school developed these questions to follow through on Fullan's recommendations:

- What work can be done so that the significantly positive achievements of the school would be sustained even if the principal and other staff members were to depart?
- Will decisions that we make as a professional community of educators significantly impact student achievement over time, and can it be sustained by the team?
- Will a new initiative be supported, informed, and contributed to by all stakeholders — not just the administration, but by all teachers, students, parents, and the community? How can we achieve this degree of ownership?
- Who can be the leaders in striving to meet important goals, and how do we develop and support these team members?

The climate and beliefs at Peters support the notion that nurturing positive and respectful relationships between stakeholders is foundational and fundamental to make equity a reality. Trust and transparent feedback among all members of the school community will occur when positive relationships exist and all members of the community feel valued and involved.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Professional learning and teacher empowerment have directly led to improved student experiences and learning. In the past seven years, the percentage of students who met reading readiness benchmarks as measured by DIBELS has increased from 18% to 82%, referrals to the student study team have decreased from 45 to five per year, and the number of suspensions has decreased from 15 days per year to one day per year.

In district surveys, 99.6% of Peters parents report that their children's backgrounds and cultures are respected at school; that the staff does a good job communicating about academic progress, attendance, and discipline; that parents enjoy opportunities to be involved at school; and that Peters proactively offers translation and interpretation to parents who need it. Parents also rate the school high in these areas of school culture: scholarly habits, student motivation, social-emotional well-being, and school climate.

The impact on teachers is also significant. The district conducts a staff survey each year in collaboration with the teachers association. For the past three years, the staff has rated the role of the school and administration as "very positive" in six categories: support, professional respect, manageable workload, collegial interactions, cohesive relationships, and staff engagement.

Students have also responded positively in surveys about their social-emotional well-being, connectedness to school, academic supports, self-regulation and behaviors, and future readiness. One-half of students report that they plan to earn a graduate degree. Nearly 100% of students reported that they can get smarter by working hard in school.

Peters demonstrates the impact that empowering staffs and communities can have in the service of high levels of learning for all students, no matter the odds. When schools view leadership and power as infinite, and when leadership is as much as a disposition as a position, staff and students can achieve any goal.

•

Michelle Pinchot (mpinchot@ggusd.us) is principal of Peters K-3 Elementary School in Garden Grove, California. Chris Weber (chris@chriswebereducation.com) is a senior fellow at the International Center for Leadership in Education and former director of K-6 instruction in the Garden Grove Unified School District. ∎

> **In the past seven years, the percentage of students who met reading readiness benchmarks as measured by DIBELS has increased from 18% to 82%, referrals to the student study team have decreased from 45 to five per year, and the number of suspensions has decreased from 15 days per year to one day per year.**

STRIKE THE RIGHT
BALANCE

Photo by GRETCHEN ECKROAT / Pittsburgh Public Schools

Teacher Marcy Grollman is using the Writer's Workshop model to provide feedback to Richard Johns, a 3rd-grade student at Concord Elementary School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

By Donna Micheaux

HOW DO SCHOOL LEADERS BALANCE DISTRICT PRIORITIES WITH SCHOOL AND STAFF LEARNING NEEDS?

W hat drives professional learning — personalized individual staff and school needs or districtwide goals? This is the question that educators in Pittsburgh Public Schools and other districts across the country are grappling with as we redesign professional learning.

Striking the right balance between overarching, district-led professional learning initiatives and allowing

schools the flexibility to work on issues that are unique to the needs of their staff members and students is a common problem of practice.

As part of the Redesign PD Community of Practice, which includes 22 school systems across the country, Pittsburgh Public Schools is working to build greater alignment and coherence into its professional learning efforts. That means creating a districtwide professional learning system that helps us grow collectively, while at the same time allowing for differentiated and personalized learning to meet the individual needs of our teachers and unique schools. How do schools find the right balance?

In our district, we have begun to strike a better balance by providing a range of professional learning experiences that include districtwide initiatives for teachers and school leaders, individualized coaching, professional learning for small networks of schools and staff members, and school-based efforts.

This past year, the district provided seven full-day Leading and Learning Institutes for principals and other school leaders and three districtwide professional development days for teachers. These sessions help principals, teachers, and coaches build content knowledge in English language arts, mathematics, and science and develop a shared vision of quality teaching and learning.

In short, the goal was to build the instructional capacity of principals and teachers by helping them to learn, recognize, and implement specific, content-based instructional strategies. We also want to create a common set of instructional expectations across our classrooms to ensure equitable access to rigorous learning experiences for all students, regardless of where they attend school in the district.

While we will continue to provide districtwide professional learning for school staff, we fully expect principals, teachers, and other district leaders to regularly examine their own data and engage in professional learning that addresses their specific

needs. In other words, districtwide efforts should not replace school-based professional learning, nor should it be viewed as an excuse for not working on areas in which individual teachers and schools need to grow.

So, how do school leaders balance district-driven priorities with staff and school-specific learning needs? We set out to answer that question.

During the 2015-16 school year, I, along with a team of central office staff, conducted learning school visits at several schools to learn more about promising practices that show how school leaders and their staff members successfully balance district-driven professional learning priorities with school-based efforts. Here are examples of school leaders who are able to find the right balance.

CONCORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Concord Elementary School, in southeast Pittsburgh, has a growing English as a second language population, and Principal Michael Perella and his staff treat all students as language learners.

After Perella's first year, it became clear that students were struggling with writing. An analysis of state assessment data showed students' scores in writing had dropped. This finding was supported by classroom observations and work samples showing that some students could not write complete sentences.

The Pennsylvania Core Standards in English language arts expect students to write well at every grade level. Perella and his staff knew they had to take action.

"We feel it's important for a student to develop skills in writing," Perella says in a video created about the school's progress. "It's one of those skills that is essential in just about every profession."

So, while Perella and his staff fully participated in the districtwide professional learning on phonics and text-dependent

analysis, they launched an intensive school-based instructional focus on the Writer's Workshop. He and his staff engaged in intensive school-based professional learning to build their capacity to implement the writing process.

The school's instructional coach and assistant principal led staff members in school-based professional learning designed to equip them with the skills needed to help students become better writers.

Using a phased-in approach, they decided to allow K-1 classrooms to continue focusing on the phonics strategies emphasized districtwide while implementing an intensive launch of Writer's Workshop in a few 2nd- through 5th-grade classrooms. They drew on the expertise of teachers in those grades who already had experience with the model.

By using this approach, they were able to build the skills of a few teachers and students who could then serve as a resource to others — a benefit that is often lost in the midst of districtwide professional learning. Job-embedded professional learning allows teachers to improve their practice in an authentic setting and promotes buy-in at a faster pace.

The teachers used author's studies, mentor texts, and mini-lessons and provided students with feedback based on the core standards. In addition, staff members learned how to teach students peer editing skills and how to give feedback on their classmates' writing.

This broader emphasis on the Writer's Workshop model, with a specific focus on getting students to learn to write and write to learn, has helped both teachers and students at Concord Elementary become stronger writers. This year's state assessment data shows growth in English language arts as well as in math and science.

"When we started this process, I did not consider myself an expert at writing," says Christy Baraff, a 3rd-grade teacher at Concord. "I certainly have grown in terms of my ability to deliver quality instruction and releasing control to the students to explore their own writing abilities."

Teachers are not only seeing themselves as better writers, they are seeing growth in their students that far exceed their expectations. "Students are willing to take risks and have gone places they would not have gone without the space and freedom to write," one teacher reports. "Some students have gone from barely writing a sentence to writing five-paragraph essays."

Students have embraced the Writer's Workshop model and share similar excitement and enthusiasm about the writing process. "It feels great to read my stories and have others tell me how my writing can improve," one student says.

SEE THE VIDEOS

Concord Elementary School: https://vimeo.com/178650944, password PPS.

Carrick High School: https://vimeo.com/182006283, password PPS.

CARRICK HIGH SCHOOL

Following districtwide professional learning on algebra and biology, Carrick High School felt the need to go further into helping students monitor their own progress by better understanding their data. Reviewing districtwide assessment results can only tell part of the story. To Principal Angel Washington, it was important for staff members and students to review their own data in order to differentiate instruction to meet students' needs.

Washington began this approach by conducting classroom walk-throughs with her administrative team. She then turned over implementation of the work to the teachers, who grouped students based on their academic needs and assigned them to teachers with the most expertise in the content areas where the students needed extra support.

The students use data binders to monitor their own progress and set personal goals. In another video, math teacher Julie Bramer describes how students are learning to make the connection between their attendance and their grades. If their attendance needs to improve, they set a goal and make a plan for how to achieve it.

"When our students look at their data, they start to own it," Washington says. "They understand a little bit more why they are being taught what they're being taught."

Using specific data points allows the teachers to identify students' strengths and target the areas where students most need to improve. Dustin Smith, a learning support teacher at Carrick, describes data as an "iceberg." "You always see what's on the surface," he says, "but when you dive down underneath, you kind of get a bigger picture of what's going on."

BALANCED APPROACH WORKS

Clearly, teachers and students at both of these schools are benefiting from the focus on school-based needs while still addressing districtwide instructional priorities. Recent student achievement results improved at both schools, proving that a balanced approach can work.

"The district-level professional learning did not detract from our school efforts," Perella says about finding the right balance. "Rather, we were able to integrate and connect those parts that were relevant."

Similarly, Washington says, "We make districtwide professional development fit. If it doesn't make sense, we don't do it, and we take what makes sense and make it work for us."

Perella and Washington, and the teachers at their schools, demonstrate the ability to find balance between district-driven instructional practices and the needs of individual staff members and students. This is a balancing act that all school leaders face — and one that effective school leaders do well.

•

Donna Micheaux (dmicheaux1@pghboe.net) is former deputy superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools and CEO of Micheaux Educational Consulting. ∎

The following is original research that practitioners may find useful in exploring coach-teacher relationships.

THE VALUE *of* COACHING

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS SPUR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

By Grace Y. Kang

Claire Gibbons and Noelle Taylor are friends. They meet regularly, share common interests, work on projects together, and hold similar goals. Not only are they friends, they are also colleagues who teach together: Gibbons is a literacy coach, and Taylor is a 3rd-grade teacher. Usually they collaborate on literacy once a week, often meeting in Gibbons' office, but, at times, these

collaborative sessions take place in the school hallways or even on a Saturday over lunch at a local restaurant.

Teachers don't simply want resources given to them. They often seek out relationships from more knowledgeable or experienced colleagues to ask advice, model lessons, or start an inquiry group. Establishing relationships within collaboration is essential for learning and knowledge development (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

METHODS

This study's goal was to unpack the nature of collaboration that took place between a literacy coach and teachers. The research questions revolved around the notion of collaboration and how it was enacted in teacher practice and instruction. To examine the coach's collaboration with teachers, the research questions were:

- How were partnerships in collaboration created?
- How was the collaboration with teachers enacted?

The study site is an elementary school in a small, urban community in the Midwest with a diverse student population. The participants were the literacy coach (Gibbons) and two teachers (Tamara Jones and Taylor).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This was a two-month qualitative study of the collaboration that took place. The primary form of data collection was observation of collaborative sessions (e.g. conversations with Gibbons, co-planning lessons with teachers, grade-level collaboration meeting, and small-group instruction). Semistructured interviews were also conducted with the participants.

I read and analyzed the data inductively through a sociocultural perspective, emphasizing teachers' collaboration as a social activity (Vygotsky, 1978).

During analysis, I observed consistent valued tenets of open collaboration (many of which were recurrent themes) among all participants in the study, which was meaningful specifically to the nature of collaboration (see box at right).
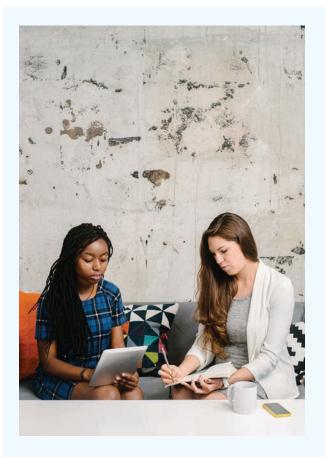
FINDINGS

VALUED TENETS IN OPEN COLLABORATION

The valued tenets in collaboration were recurrent ideas and topics that were consistent in study participants.

Relationship capital. Putnam and Borko (2000) highlight that teachers developing relationships with a literacy coach is an integral component for learning and knowledge development. Gibbons' relationships with the teachers were integral to the collaboration that took place.

Reciprocal/co-planned. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) reveal that, when asked about their beliefs and practices, teachers did not focus on a list of particular practices, instead focusing on how they re-envisioned themselves as teachers. Gibbons

VALUED TENETS IN OPEN COLLABORATION

Relationship capital: The quality of interpersonal connections and relationships is integral to the collaboration.

Reciprocal/co-planned: All participants create goals and content of sessions.

Constructed/organic: Authentic meaning making occurs when participants create appropriate lessons, sessions, and units for the situation.

Job-embedded/sustained: On-the-job learning opportunities are contextualized and apply throughout the school day.

did not lead the sessions with teachers. Instead, she waited to see what interested teachers. During the collaborative sessions, Gibbons and the teachers co-planned, and teaching and learning were reciprocal.

Constructed/organic. This tenet talks back to traditional models of professional development, including one-size-fits-all presentations to teacher audiences in one-shot workshops with no follow-up support, which have been shown to be ineffective

(Hawley & Valli, 1999). In contrast, the collaborative sessions in this study provided an opportunity for tailor-made professional learning that was constructed and organic for specific and individualized contexts.

Job-embedded/sustained. Job-embedded professional learning is becoming more prevalent as criticism of traditional forms of professional development emerges (Parise & Spillane, 2010). Gibbons and the teachers engaged in job-embedded and sustained professional learning in the unplanned nature of collaboration.

COACH'S COLLABORATION WITH TEACHERS

"An extra set of eyes." Across varied collaborative situations in which the coach worked with teachers, these valued tenets were also infused in their sessions. Whether Gibbons modeled a lesson, observed a classroom's structure, or was in a grade-level collaboration meeting, the elements of what was meaningful and valuable in collaboration stayed consistent among participants.

Jones initiated a relationship with Gibbons a year after Gibbons began teaching students who qualified for additional reading support. This was a common mode of entry for Gibbons: As she worked with students in different teachers' classrooms, she slowly started collaboration sessions with the teachers. The development of **relationship capital** was salient, and, once she established that relationship, teachers were open to collaboration.

Jones also noticed that other teachers who had worked with Gibbons demonstrated a distinct difference in their practice and classroom routines. Gibbons began the collaboration with Jones by observing her in the classroom.

In an interview with Jones, she said that Gibbons' observation of her classroom set-up, routines, order, and student engagement was invaluable because it offered her "an extra set of eyes."

"It's valuable to just have … feedback, even when she just comes in to sort of observe what's happening," Jones said. "… She can see things that are working that I may not necessarily see. I may be focusing on my group or on other things at the time."

These observations allowed Gibbons to offer individualized advice to teachers, taking literacy support from a text and refining it to meet each teacher's specific needs. Moreover, these observations were **organic** and **constructed** specifically for Jones' classroom setting.

After the two initial observations, Gibbons brainstormed some ideas and thoughts for Jones to implement and experiment with. In the next few weeks, they discussed next steps and determined what was most essential and where to start.

Within a week of the second observation, Jones had made dramatic changes in her classroom. She implemented a writing station with all the necessary materials (i.e. pencil, lined paper,

St. Patrick's Day themed paper, prompts, and pictures to spark writing). She also made a handwriting corner, where only one student could work with a white board, and cursive charts that students made that were posted along the corner walls.

We walked past the book boxes on top of their cubbies, which Gibbons had suggested as usable spaces that were at students' fingertips. In the reading corner, she divided her books by genre into separate baskets in a bookcase that showcased current and themed March books. As we observed the change in structures, we noticed that students had already made use of this corner and searched for books in the genre baskets.

These changes were made in the span of a week, and it all began with Gibbons' willingness to meet Jones in her classroom to make sense of students' meaning making throughout the day. Jones said that she found Gibbons' observations helpful and the most meaningful form of collaboration: "The first time she came to observe what I was doing and took notes on the physical aspects of the class, how the kids were moving about, where the materials were. … I thought that was helpful. … When she pointed it out and I moved stuff around, that really made sense."

This notion of **job-embedded** literacy support was monumental for this change to take place because these structural and routine changes would not be possible without on-the-job professional learning.

"It's developed into a friendship." Taylor initially started collaborating with Gibbons because when Gibbons was hired, she didn't have an office and her temporary location was a makeshift corner of the hallway near Taylor's classroom. Although not ideal, the proximity presented many advantages, including literally having an open-door — actually, no-door — quality, where teachers could approach her freely.

Taylor had always struggled with writing and saw it as an area of weakness, so she approached Gibbons for assistance. After two years of collaboration, Taylor felt stronger in teaching writing and attributed this change in comfort level to collaboration with Gibbons.

Taylor and Gibbons continued to collaborate almost weekly because Taylor set up the meetings and was proactive in the relationship. In these sessions, Taylor had autonomy and agency to guide the meetings. Gibbons followed her lead and didn't come with an agenda, but wanted to accomplish whatever it was that Taylor needed help or guidance with. Often, Taylor came with a stack of books, papers, and materials that she wanted to use to **co-plan organic** lessons with Gibbons.

> **Teachers don't simply want resources given to them. They often seek out relationships from more knowledgeable or experienced colleagues to ask advice, model lessons, or start an inquiry group. Establishing relationships within collaboration is essential for learning and knowledge development.**

These sessions expanded on the idea that when there is openness and willingness to invest in a collaborative relationship, teachers tend to have more depth in the collaboration sessions and more time spent in the classrooms for co-teaching and modeling by the coach. Taylor emphasized **relationship capital** and the importance of friendship: "I think being able to have a friendship helps because we always make sure we're on the same track," Taylor said.

The data revealed that it takes time and effort to build rapport and trust in collaborative relationships. Additionally, although collaboration involved a lot of work from both parties, in the end it was well worth it.

"Revolving door." Borko (2004) describes various contexts for learning that can take place in a hallway conversation or classroom. In the same vein, Gibbons said that collaboration didn't necessarily take place in a standard meeting. Instead, teachers would often drop by her office, stop her in the hallway, or pull her aside before or after a meeting. She referred to these unexpected moments of being ready to collaborate with a teacher as a "revolving door."

For example, Molly Carleton, a teacher with whom Gibbons had worked, walked into Gibbons' office unplanned to show Gibbons a paper. Carleton said she was surprised that a student scored highly on a spelling inventory because it didn't match his performance in the classroom. Although Gibbons was working at her computer when Carleton walked in and told Carleton that she was about to meet with another teacher, Gibbons did not appear rushed or agitated and, as Carleton left, Gibbons said, "I'm glad you stopped in."

> The data revealed that it takes time and effort to build rapport and trust in collaborative relationships. Additionally, although collaboration involved a lot of work from both parties, in the end it was well worth it.

In the interview, Gibbons validated this notion of the "revolving door" and said she was glad that teachers were interested in collaborating with her, but, at times, she had to negotiate her response to unexpected visits. She had to follow her schedule for the day, yet she also had to be sensitive to a teacher's needs.

Gibbons said the "revolving door" often provided spontaneous connections and unplanned sessions that led to meaningful collaboration. However, it came at the cost of Gibbons' flexibility and the time necessary for these unplanned sessions. This illustrates how Gibbons' collaboration was a means to **job-embedded** professional learning: Throughout the school day, and even before and after school, teachers were able to receive help and seek assistance.

IMPLICATIONS

Literacy coaches serve teachers through ongoing, comprehensive professional learning consistent with a system of the-ory, demonstration, practice, and feedback (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Literacy coaches offer a form of job-embedded, ongoing, and contextualized professional learning. This study focused on how collaborative relationships between participants were created and enacted.

This study reveals that a literacy coach's collaboration with teachers can result in professional growth and collaborative relationships. One of Vygotsky's (1978) key components of social constructivism is scaffolding, where a more able peer provides assistance throughout learning in order to advance learning. Scaffolding played an important role as Gibbons interacted with teachers to build independence for new teaching practices and ideas.

Gibbons' relationships with teachers embodied strong relationship capital, reciprocal learning, organic construction, and job-embedded work to create a strong culture of collaboration in this building. The valued tenets in the nature of open collaboration across the sessions among study participants were consistent. Furthermore, this study suggests that a literacy coach can be a means for more job-embedded professional learning, and it is worth allocating time and opportunities for teachers to collaborate.

REFERENCES

Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3-15.

Hawley, D.W. & Valli, L. (1999). The essentials of effective professional development. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 127-150). San Franciso, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Parise, L.M. & Spillane J.P. (2010). Teacher learning and instructional change: How formal and on-the-job learning opportunities predict change in elementary school teachers' practice. *The Elementary School Journal, 110*(3), 323-346.

Putnam, R.T. & Borko, H. (2000). What do new views of knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher, 29*(1), 4-15.

Vanderburg, M. & Stephens, D. (2010). The impact of literacy coaches: What teachers value and how teachers change. *Elementary School Journal, 111*(1), 141-163.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

•

Grace Y. Kang (gykang@ilstu.edu) is an assistant professor in literacy at Illinois State University, Bloomington-Normal. ■

ACTION RESEARCH:
A POWERFUL DESIGN

In their chapter on action research in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Easton, 2015), Cathy Caro-Bruce and Mary Klehr describe a challenging issue that a teacher bravely takes on as an action research project. Using the classic steps for action research, she discovers what needs to be done, does it, and then reflects on and shares the results. The authors share strategies and techniques for making action research productive in today's schools.
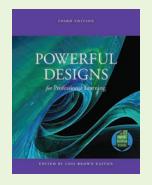
Picture a spiral going around and around. Or a long mobile, spinning slowly in the breeze. Or a rare shell whose design conveys circular motions evolving over time. Or even a Möbius strip. These are all images of action research. Action research is an iterative form of inquiry through which participants actively engage in examining their own educational practice, systematically and carefully, using research techniques to impact teacher and student learning (Watts, 1985). Action research affects the researchers, the contexts in which they work, and the children they teach.

Action researchers follow steps based on good research techniques, but the process invites researchers to cycle continuously through earlier phases as they construct new meaning and discover new questions based on what they find in their data and as their instructional practice evolves. Action research is far from a linear, lockstep, formulaic process. While traditional researchers sometimes criticize the openness and flexibility of action research, its cyclical and responsive nature is what makes the process so valuable to teachers.

The tools on the following pages are resources available to supplement the chapter on action research in *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning.* For each learning design featured in the book, exclusive online resources help educators

implement the learning design or explore the topic further.

REFERENCES

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

Watts, H. (1985, Spring). When teachers are researchers, teaching improves. *Journal of Staff Development, 6*(2), 118-127.

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

Starting points

Name: _____

I would really like to improve: _____

_____

I am perplexed by: _____

_____

Some people are unhappy about: _____

_____

I'm really curious about: _____

_____

I want to learn more about: _____

_____

An idea I would like to try in my class is: _____

_____

Something I think would really make a difference is: _____

_____

Something I would like to change is: _____

_____

Right now, some areas I'm particularly interested in are: _____

_____

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

Process for analyzing data

In using qualitative research, you will collect and analyze data at the same time. These processes inform each other. Be open to new ways of thinking as you learn more from your data.

- **Go through all data you have collected.** Make notes as you go.

- **Look for themes, patterns, big ideas.** Key words and phrases can trigger themes. Determine these themes by your scan of the data, not your preconceived ideas of what you think the categories are.

- **Narrow down the themes to something manageable.** Choose three to five of your most compelling and interesting themes.

- **Go back through all of your data.** Code or label information according to the themes in order to organize your ideas. Some ideas may fit into more than one theme. Create subgroups under each theme.

- **Write continuously.** Jot down what you are seeing, what questions are emerging, and what you are learning. Keep notes on new ideas or findings that are unanticipated.

- **Review your information after it is coded/labeled.** Look to see if there is a frequency of certain items and/or powerful, interesting, unusual comments or behaviors that are of particular interest to you. This may be an incident that gives you a new insight, and it may be one of the most important to hold on to.

- **Identify the main points that appear most frequently and are the most powerful.** It will be hard to let go of some of your information, but it is important to sift through it.

- **Write down your major points.** You can write them by theme, chronologically, or according to the different modes you used for collecting information.

- **Draw the information together to include some of the evidence that supports each of your themes.** The reader should be able to draw conclusions based on the evidence you have presented.

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

Action plan

I. Action research topic: _____

_____

II. Question I am pursuing: _____

_____

III. Steps that need to be taken:	By when	Person(s) responsible	Resources/ Support
A.			
B.			
C.			
D.			
E.			

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

Analysis leading to action

Now that you have analyzed your data . . .

❑   What have you learned? _____
  _____
  _____

❑   How do you feel about what you have learned? _____
  _____
  _____

❑   How do your conclusions differ from what you thought you would learn?_____
  _____
  _____

❑   Do the conclusions seem believable? _____
  _____
  _____

❑   What actions might you take based on your conclusions?_____
  _____
  _____

❑   What new questions emerge for you from the data? _____
  _____
  _____

❑   Who else might be interested in these conclusions? _____
  _____
  _____

❑   What strategies can you use to share your conclusions with others?_____
  _____
  _____

5th-grade science intervention focuses on English language learners

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

At the end of the first of three years, a curriculum and professional development intervention for 5th-grade students with a focus on English language learners had a positive, significant effect on student achievement in science for all student groups on the researcher-designed assessment and positive, significant effects on the state science assessment for non-ELLs and former ELLs. With continued positive results over the remaining two years of the intervention, student performance in science has the potential to improve 38% over the annual expected gain.

Study description

Researchers developed a three-year intervention called Promoting Science Among English Language Learners (P-SELL) to address science achievement, particularly for 5th-grade English language learners. Sixty-six schools in three diverse districts in a

•

Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@ learningforward.org) is senior advisor to Learning Forward. In each issue of *JSD*, Killion explores a recent research study to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.

single state in the Southeastern U.S. were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group. Over 250 teachers and more than 6,000 students participated in the study.

This research report measures the effects of the intervention on both researcher-specific and high-stakes state assessments for current, former, and non-ELL 5th-grade students. Positive effects were evident for all groups on both assessments ($d = 0.25$ on researcher-developer assessment and $d = 0.15$ on state science assessment).

Questions

Researchers sought to answer an overarching question and two

subquestions.
- What was the effect of the intervention on 5th-grade students' science achievement compared to current practice?
    - Was the intervention beneficial, on average, for students?
    - Was the intervention beneficial for ELLs, recently reclassified ELLs, former ELLs, and non-ELLs?

Methodology

To address the gap in science achievement among elementary students, researchers designed a randomized control study to examine the effects of

At a glance

In a randomized control study, researchers examined the impact of an inquiry-based science curriculum for 5th-grade English language learners (ELLs), recently reclassified ELL students, and non-ELL students coupled with teacher professional learning in science content, content-specific pedagogy, and language acquisition on two distinct measures of science achievement. The intervention had a positive and significant effect for all students at the end of the first year of the three-year intervention.

THE STUDY

Llosa, L., Lee, O., Jiang, F., Haas, A., O'Connor, C., Van Booven, C., & Kieffer, M. (2016). Impact of a large-scale science intervention focused on English language learners. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(2), 395-424.

P-SELL, a curriculum and professional development intervention, to improve the science achievement of 5th-grade students, particularly English language learners. The study's design addressed numerous limitations in previous studies by expanding the number of subjects and implementation sites, including current, recently reclassified, and past ELL students, and assessing achievement on both a study-specific and high-stakes state assessment.

P-SELL included a yearlong standards-based, inquiry-oriented science curriculum for 5th-grade students along with consumable student materials, science supplies, and additional student materials online that aligned with the state science standards.

The curriculum scaffolded its

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

This study confirms that well-designed curriculum, especially focused on addressing the specific language learning needs of ELL students, coupled with effective professional development that supports implementation of the curriculum improves student academic success for all students.

For practitioners of professional learning, the incorporation of research-based principles of professional development illuminates the significance of applying Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) in the design and implementation of learning experiences for teachers.

Specifically, researchers identify:
- Content and language development and content-specific, reform-oriented pedagogy as primary focus for teacher professional learning **(Outcomes)**;
- Active engagement of teachers within the workshops **(Learning Designs)**;
- Collective participation of the entire 5th-grade teaching team at each school to build coherence within instruction and content **(Learning Communities** and **Outcomes)**;
- Duration over a school year **(Implementation)**;
- Extended time for planning, exchanging ideas, and sharing resources and stipends for teacher participation **(Resources)**;
- Teacher reflection related to implementation within and across schools **(Learning Designs)**; and
- The engagement of district science curriculum leaders in designing and implementing the professional learning **(Leadership)**.

What is unclear regarding the professional development is how data about teachers, students, and schools were used in the design and implementation of the professional learning **(Data)**, how leaders at the school level were engaged in and supportive of the intervention **(Leadership)**, and how teacher implementation was supported **(Implementation)**.

Focusing teacher professional learning on developing content knowledge, language acquisition, and application of content-specific, reform-oriented pedagogical practices aligned with district curriculum and state standards increases student academic achievement on both the high-stakes state and researcher-developed assessments in diverse schools and school systems. Professional learning specifically designed and implemented for defined purposes, as demonstrated in this study, has positive effects on student learning.

Reference

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

approach using a gradual release model to move students from a structured to an open-ended approach to science and encouraged students to design applications of their learning and further investigations in everyday situations.

Teachers received extensive curriculum materials that included information to support content knowledge, content-specific pedagogy, curriculum implementation, differentiation, and supplemental online resources focused on mastery of the science standards.

All 5th-grade teachers and their students in the treatment schools participated in a total of five days of professional development over a year in both summer and school-year workshops. The professional

development focused on developing teachers' content knowledge, content-specific pedagogy, language acquisition knowledge and skills, and capacity to implement the curriculum.

In each of three districts, researchers randomly selected 22 schools — 12 with ELL populations exceeding the district mean and 10 with ELL populations below the mean to ensure that the student population within the study represented the participating districts.

Schools were then randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, and no significant difference between the two groups of schools was evident at the beginning of the school year. Control schools continued their current approach to science instruction, and treatment schools implemented P-SELL. One district was classified as urban and two were urban/suburban. Student populations in each district were demographically, linguistically, and economically diverse.

Analysis

Researchers applied a sequence of multilevel models to answer the research questions. They nested data into three levels — students nested in teachers, and teachers into schools. They examined outcome variables for the two assessments to answer the overall question and used subgroup analyses to measure the effects for each language-proficiency group.

Researchers classified students into four language groups: currently classified as ELL and receiving services (7.8% of students); recently reclassified students who have exited the English as a Second Language program and are being monitored for two years (3.7%); former ELL students who have exited the program and are no longer being monitored (11.6%); and non-ELL students, those who have never received English as a Second Language services (76.9%).

Students completed two measures of science achievement: the high-stakes state science assessment that accounted for a portion of each school's overall grade for the state accountability program and a researcher-developed assessment using released items from NAEP and TIMSS assessments.

The latter, a 25-item assessment including both multiple choice and short-response items, was briefer than the multiple-choice item state science assessment and aligned strongly with the P-SELL curriculum. Students completed one form of the researcher-developed assessment as a pretest and the state assessment and another form of the researcher-developed assessment as a post-test.

Results

At the end of the first year of the intervention, students in the treatment group performed better than students in the control group on the researcher-developed assessment of science achievement. Results of both measures were statistically significant (state science assessment $d = 0.15$; researcher-developed assessment ($d = 0.25$).

Subgroup analyses indicated that P-SELL has a positive and significant effect for ELLs ($d = 0.35$, $p < .001$), recently reclassified ELLs ($d = 0.41$, $p = .020$), former ELLs ($d = 0.28$, $p < .001$), and non-ELLs ($d = 0.24$, $p < .001$) on the researcher-developed assessment. An effect size of 0.13 is considered a mean effect size for interventions that focus on curriculum or instruction, and 0.08 is the median effect size.

As a result, this study provides strong experimental evidence that an intervention focusing on inquiry-based science curriculum and language development coupled with professional development can be implemented successfully in a variety of settings and positively and significantly affect student science achievement.

On the state science assessment, P-SELL produced significant effects for non-ELLs ($d = 0.16$, $p < .001$) and former ELLs ($d = 0.18$, $p < .015$), and positive, yet not statistically significant effects for recently reclassified ($d = 0.13$, $p < .58$) and ELL students ($d = 0.12$, $p < .247$). These results may be explained, according to the researchers, based on the proximal versus distal relationship of the assessments to the intervention or the different nature of the assessments.

Overall, given the positive effects in the first year for all subgroups, extrapolated data for the full three years of the intervention suggest that, after three years, students participating in P-SELL may outscore nonparticipating peers by as much as 38% when normative gains on state assessments are considered.

Limitations

Researchers reported no limitations within this article, primarily because the design of this intervention and its study specifically addressed limitations in previous, similar studies.

One evident limitation is an absence of information on degree of implementation of the curriculum and pedagogical practices. While it is possible to assume that implementation of the curriculum and new instructional practices was high, researchers provide no evidence regarding implementation, challenges teachers and school leaders experienced with implementation, and strategies for addressing the challenges. Information regarding implementation as the study continues will strengthen the usefulness and generalizability of the intervention.

Understanding the interaction effects among curriculum design and implementation, professional development to strengthen teacher content knowledge, instructional practices, and student academic success will further extend the applicability of the intervention so that it can be implemented at scale. In addition, as the intervention continues into subsequent years, implementation with fidelity has the potential to extend and expand positive effects. ■

learning forward.org

The Principal Story Learning Guide

Learning Forward has developed a web-based professional learning guide using excerpts from the award-winning PBS documentary film, *The Principal Story,* to illustrate five key practices of effective principals identified in research by The Wallace Foundation. The guide is intended to help those who prepare and support aspiring and current principals probe these essential practices. A facilitator guide explores options for using these tools.
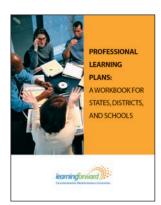
www.learningforward.org/publications/the-principal-story-learning-guide

LEAP program at DC Public Schools assures coherence and relevance in teacher growth

District of Columbia Public Schools has received national attention for its human capital policies, and the results have been impressive. The district's LEAP program (LEarning together to Advance our Practice) promises to continue the progress of the teacher growth. In this blog post, Learning Forward Senior Consultant Nick Morgan explores the big ideas behind the LEAP program.

www.learningforward.org/publications/blog/learning-forward-blog/2016/09/12/ leap-program-at-dc-public-schools-assures-coherence-and-relevance-in-teacher- growth

Professional Learning Plans: A Workbook for States, Districts, and Schools

Professional learning plans establish short- and long-term guidance for professional learning and its implementation. This workbook offers information and tools to walk educators through seven planning steps, from data analysis to setting goals to identifying learning designs to monitoring impact. Effective plans help individuals, schools, districts, and states to coordinate learning experiences designed to achieve outcomes for educators and students.

www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/ commoncore/professional-learning-plans.pdf

Leverage ESSA to improve professional learning in your district

In a recent blog post, Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh says, "Lately when I talk to district leaders about professional learning, our conversation often turns to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Given the influence that the federal education law has on how districts plan and allocate resources, they are interested in Learning Forward's view on implications for professional learning."

Hirsh offers a number of questions for district leaders to consider, including:

- How does our district's vision for professional learning align with and support our vision for student learning?

- What resources and structures do we have in place to ensure that our teachers and school leaders have daily opportunities to learn?

- How do the leadership practices of our district and school leaders sustain and support a learning culture?

"In my view, district leaders who prioritize building systems for professional learning will be best positioned to leverage ESSA to achieve excellence and equity in every school," Hirsh says.

http://blogs.edweek.org/ edweek/learning_forwards_ pd_watch/2016/09/leverage_ essa_to_improve_professional_ learning_in_your_district.html

@ **learning forward**

2 DISTRICTS JOIN REDESIGN PD COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Two school districts have joined the Redesign PD Community of Practice, bringing to 22 the number of school systems collaborating to improve professional learning systems and share their progress with districts across the country.

Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee and Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, North Carolina, will participate in the remaining in-person and virtual gatherings of the district teams until the community finishes its work next year.

The two districts have completed the vision and goal-setting phases of addressing their critical professional learning priorities during initial site visits with Learning Forward staff members. Both Metro Nashville and Guilford County have selected the coherence and relevance problem of practice: "How do we ensure that decisions made at central office, school, and teacher levels ensure both coherent and relevant learning experiences for teachers that improve their practices?"

"Professional development is on the radar of any large school district," says Nakia Hardy, chief academic officer for Guilford County, a 72,000-student district with 127 schools. "We want to focus on leveraging resources to reach each and every teacher with the support they need."

Learning Forward coordinates and facilitates the work of the community for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Facing common challenges, teams from each district are working to create more coherent professional learning systems and measure how learning for teachers impacts their practice and leads to better outcomes for students.

> **"Professional development is on the radar of any large school district."**
>
> — *Nakia Hardy,*
> *chief academic officer,*
> *Guilford County Schools*

The teams will continue to work together and share their progress through the middle of 2017. Learning Forward is capturing stories on the work of the districts and sharing lessons learned with members and the education field more broadly.

CONNECTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Both Guilford County and Metro Nashville leaders say it's important that professional learning opportunities are not disjointed. Tonisha Walden, Guilford County's director of professional development, says leaders have worked hard to expand professional learning opportunities, but adds, "One of the pieces we've struggled with is how those offerings connect with one another and how we monitor and sustain that down to the school level."

Hardy adds that professional learning should also be connected to "some improvement outcomes," whether related to academics or school climate, such as better attendance.

In the 88,000-student Metro Nashville district, Monique T. Felder, chief academic officer, said leaders were drawn to join the community because, while professional learning is offered, "it isn't always relevant, executed well, aligned, coherent, or assessed."

The Metro Nashville team will focus on coherence and also hopes to tackle the challenges of sustaining the learning teachers receive and moving away from an "overreliance on the training-the-trainer model," Felder says.

The two new districts are also looking forward to sharing their strategies with other districts in the community. For example, Metro Nashville Public Schools has worked to give school teams a time to plan as part of their regular professional learning agenda.

The community did not expect to add more districts, but Metro Nashville and Guilford County expressed interest in joining because their superintendents have worked in districts that were already involved. Guilford County Superintendent Sharon L. Contreras previously served as superintendent for the Syracuse (New York) City School District, and Shawn Joseph, Metro Nashville's new director of schools, worked as the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning in the Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland.

Both Syracuse and Prince George's County have been part of the community since it began last year, so Contreras and Joseph were already familiar with the goals and the commitment involved.

"I'm really excited about both systems joining the community," says Michelle King, who facilitates the community for Learning Forward. "In Metro Nashville, the common theme was a passion and commitment to develop 'clarity and coherence in the system.' Similarly, in Guilford County, there is an intention to focus on coherence in order to create and sustain a learning organization."

English learners need high-quality grade-level experiences

on board

JOHN EYOLFSON

One of the big equity lessons our district has learned is that we can't deny students access to grade-level content. When we insisted that English learners learn English first, we positioned them to be behind in grade-level content — sometimes for the rest of their school career.

Traditional English language learner (ELL) pullout programs often do not let students learn English through cohesive learning experiences. Since language is not learned absent content, and content is not learned absent language, our district realized that students could not afford to be pulled out of the classroom to focus on English. As educators, we are obligated to provide access to grade-level content. For English learners, this must happen at the same time they learn English.

To understand how this approach works, our district looked at student science achievement and experiences. We found three components that are necessary for any child to have a quality science experience.

First, teachers have to teach science with the fidelity of time and resources. This means providing teachers access to high-quality materials and dedicated time for teaching science.

The second component is to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to experience hands-on

•

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

investigations. The hands-on experiences help students become more scientifically literate and construct understandings through investigations. Investigations generally begin with a focus question and result in the development of a scientific concept and explanation.

The third component is to connect the experience with grade-level informational text and opportunities for students to write in science notebooks.

In many situations, especially for English language learners, access to grade-level content is difficult to accomplish. In schools across the country, these students are being pulled out of classrooms, meaning they have a different educational experience. The question is: How can we provide high-quality grade-level experiences and still have explicit instruction of English? The solution our district has chosen is to move from addressing a deficit through a pullout process to working cooperatively in a co-teaching model.

Moving to this model requires leaders to take a bold step: Instead of pulling students out of the classroom, have the classroom teacher and English specialist collaborate. This is vital to create the space for the change. However, without support, this first step will most likely lead to a difficult

transition and, in many cases, teachers' practices will slide back to the old method of educating English learners.

Our district found that, to make co-teaching work, teachers need:
- Time to plan and reflect;
- Ongoing professional learning;
- Collaboration skills;
- Opportunities for coaching conversations;
- A variety of instructional delivery models aligned to student learning (supportive, parallel, complementary, team teaching);
- Assessment tools for content and language; and
- Various sheltering techniques, which integrate language and content instruction to promote comprehensible input.

We began to see a change in achievement in the acquisition of English and the formation of scientific concepts almost immediately. Students were no longer missing grade-level concepts. Over a five-year period, English language learners' performance on the 5th-grade Colorado state assessment increased 25%. Scores for English learners classified as fluent English proficient increased 29%, and we eliminated the achievement gap between fluent English proficient and non-ELL students.

What steps has your school or district taken to ensure that English learners have access to high-quality grade-level experiences? We'd like to hear from you. ■

Survey evaluates Learning Forward services and resources

Findings from surveys of Learning Forward members and subscribers show which of Learning Forward's services and resources are most useful to respondents and point to ways the organization can more effectively serve its stakeholders.

The surveys, conducted by Resources for Learning earlier this year, asked 22 questions related to several categories of information, including:

- Familiarity with, and perception of, the Standards for Professional Learning;
- Perception of the utility of new research in general as well as new research provided by Learning Forward specifically;
- Use of available resources, publications, and opportunities for involvement;
- Perceived impact of these resources on responders' practice; and
- Level of advocacy.

In all, 1,682 people responded to the member survey and 508 people responded to the subscriber survey, which included former members and those who subscribe to Learning Forward's free resources. Here is an overview of survey results.

A majority of respondents have read the Standards for Professional Learning. The professional role group district — teacher/teacher leader appeared least likely to have read the standards. Respondents within the technical assistance provider/ organization/government role were most likely to have read the standards.

A majority of respondents find the standards either moderately or extremely useful. Respondents within the teacher/teacher leader and principal/ assistant principal category were most likely to state that the standards were

> **The Standards for Professional Learning are the most frequently used Learning Forward resource. Those in the technical assistance provider/ organization/government role were most likely to have read the standards.**

"not at all useful." Respondents most frequently reported using the standards "to plan professional learning," "to help my colleagues understand effective professional learning," and "to implement professional learning." Respondents reported using the standards "to advocate for effective professional learning" the least often.

The Standards for Professional Learning are the most frequently used Learning Forward resource. Innovation Configuration Maps and the Standards Assessment Inventory were the least frequently used resources among respondents.

Members are more likely than subscribers to take advantage of the majority of Learning Forward's opportunities, with the exception of the Institutes, online courses, and webinars. Overall, respondents were most likely to use the Annual Conference often or to a great extent.

Members often take advantage of the Learning Forward Affiliates. This proved true more so than other opportunities. Over twice as many members as subscribers reported being highly involved in both of these opportunities.

***JSD* is the most frequently used publication, though more by members than subscribers.** Members reported using bookstore items and *JSD*

at double the rate that subscribers did, but there were no striking differences in use of other resources.

Respondents within the central office professional role category advocate for effective professional learning daily more often than other survey respondents. Over 60% of the member survey respondents stated that they advocate for effective professional learning daily or weekly. Within districts, members with high levels of decision power (superintendent/assistant superintendent and central office) reported being more likely to advocate for effective professional learning regularly than others within the districts.

Respondents who did advocate reported advocating primarily to their school system or extended professional networks. Respondents in the central office and superintendent/ assistant superintendent roles advocate more to their school system than respondents in other roles. Respondents within the principal/assistant principal and teacher/teacher leader roles advocate to their school system, but tended also to advocate to their schools more often, probably because central office staff tend not to be located within one school. Respondents within the technical assistance provider/organization/ government role were most likely to advocate to extended professional networks and policymakers.

Learning Forward resources help survey respondents in their advocacy efforts. In fact, 85% of member survey respondents and 78% of subscriber survey respondents stated that Learning Forward resources are either essential or sometimes helpful in aiding advocacy efforts. However, some respondents indicated a lack of awareness of Learning Forward's resources.

book club

HIGH EXPECTATIONS TEACHING:
How We Persuade Students to Believe and Act on
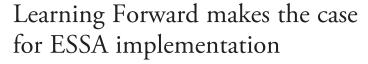"Smart is Something You Can Get"
By Jon Saphier

High Expectations Teaching is an assets-based approach to advancing student achievement by helping students believe that "smart is something you can get" and that one's ability to do something is based on the effort extended to build it.

Author Jon Saphier debunks the myth of fixed intelligence by presenting evidence that effort creates ability. He emphasizes the critical importance of teacher language in building student self-confidence, promoting healthy risk tasking, and perseverance.

High Expectations Teaching can serve as a catalyst for educational equity by helping teachers uncover biases that hamper their effectiveness with struggling students. Case studies highlight experiences of teachers and administrators who worked to implement high expectations practices in their work with students and teachers. A series of original video clips provide depictions of strategies in action.

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

Learning Forward makes the case for ESSA implementation

Learning Forward and partners have submitted a letter to the U.S. Department of Education recommending changes in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) regulations and guidelines that would help states and districts implement effective professional learning.

Recommendations include:

1. Expressly ensure that states (and districts) align their strategies for professional development to the definition in ESSA, and focus on building systems of professional learning.

2. Ask states to establish guardrails for local consolidated planning requirements.

3. Support states and districts in building educators' capacity and skill to effectively implement evidence-based strategies in school improvement.

4. Provide adequate time for states to comprehensively define their approach to professional learning through their consolidated plan application.

"Professional learning is critical to achieving ESSA's goals of equity and excellence," the letter states. "As a result, we ask that further attention be directed to the elements of effective professional learning systems including the new definition of professional learning in ESSA."

For more information: **www.learningforward.org/get-involved/essa**

abstracts

What we mean when we say 'equity.'

By Eric Celeste

Equity is discussed with such regularity in education that it's shocking to discover many of us probably aren't sure how to define the term. To be more specific: When two people talk about equity, it's very possible they're assuming agreement but really talking about different things. Learning Forward believes that equity in teacher development means that all students have a right and a need to be exposed to excellent teaching. This is dependent on ensuring that all teachers have access to high-quality professional learning.

How we can bridge the culture gap:

Stages of change outline a path toward equity.

By Gregory Peters

As the cultural and experience gap between students and educators widens, schools continue to rely on practices that more effectively served a homogeneous group of educators than they do a heterogeneous student population. The Conceptual Framework for Teacher Transformation outlines four stages of work necessary for educators and schools to shift beliefs and practices and maintain a commitment to interrupting and transforming inequities within individual and collective practices.

An equal chance at success:

Culturally responsive teaching practices address students' differing needs.

By Vicki Vescio

If educators are to support the learning of students who have traditionally struggled for success in school, administrators and teachers must understand the difference between equity and equality and engage in classroom practices that support the former. The most effective way to promote equity for students is through enacting culturally responsive practices that focus on relationships, relevance, and responsibility.

How do I teach English learners?

The challenges content teachers face — and what school leaders can do to support them.

By Felice Atesoglu Russell

A year of research at an urban high school in the Pacific Northwest reveals the instructional challenges content teachers face in working with English learners: meeting disparate individual needs; insufficient preparation for working with English learner students; insufficient information about English learner students' knowledge, backgrounds, and abilities; and assessment demands and accountability. School leaders can play a pivotal role in supporting and mitigating these challenges.

Questions that lead to action:

Equity audits motivate teachers to focus on English learners' needs.

By Luis R. Soria and Margery B. Ginsberg

A Chicago Public Schools leader sought to enlist a team to explore the correlation between high attendance and consistently low grades for English learners at a pre-K-8 school. In addition to examining data for student learning trends, the school needed a way to surface some of the less-transparent causes of educational inequity. Drawing on two resources, he created an equity audit — an approach to inquiry that examines aspects of a learning environment related to opportunity gaps in public education.

A process of discovery:

Teachers examine cultural perspectives through collaborative analysis of student learning.

By Amy B. Colton and Georgea M. Langer

The collaborative analysis of student learning is a professional learning design that uses structured transformative learning, a process that allows teachers to discover culturally responsive instruction for students they have struggled to reach. This is particularly critical in contexts in which teachers' cultural values and beliefs vary from those of their students. The learning design includes two primary features: facilitated and structured analysis of student work and communication skills for dialogue.

We're all in this together:

Teacher empowerment and leadership transform an elementary school community.

By Michelle Pinchot and Chris Weber

Like many schools across the country, Peters K-3 Elementary School in Garden Grove, California, is committed to equity, social justice, and eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps. To achieve these goals, Peters' teachers embraced leadership positions to transform teaching and learning across the school, supported by professional learning from the district. This teacher leadership and empowerment led to increases in student outcomes and in parent and student satisfaction with the culture and climate of the school community.

features

Strike the right balance:

How do school leaders balance district priorities with school and staff learning needs?

By Donna Micheaux

Striking the right balance between overarching, district-led professional learning initiatives and allowing schools the flexibility to work on issues unique to the needs of their staff members and students is a common problem of practice. As part of the Redesign PD Community of Practice, Pittsburgh Public Schools is creating a districtwide professional learning system that helps educators grow collectively, while at the same time allowing for differentiated and personalized learning to meet the individual needs of teachers and schools.

The value of coaching:

Collaborative relationships spur professional growth.

By Grace Y. Kang

A two-month qualitative study of a literacy coach's relationships with two elementary teachers looks at the nature of collaboration and how it is enacted in teacher practice and instruction. Literacy coaches offer a form of job-embedded, ongoing, and contextualized professional learning. The study reveals that a literacy coach's collaboration with teachers can result in professional growth and collaborative relationships.

Share your story

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

JSD publishes a range of types of articles, including:

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

To learn more about key topics and what reviewers look for in article submissions, visit **www.learningforward.com/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

columns

Lessons from research:

5th-grade science intervention focuses on English language learners.

By Joellen Killion

A curriculum and professional development intervention for 5th-grade students with a focus on English language learners had a positive, significant effect on student achievement in science for all student groups.

From the director:

Where did the Equity standard go?

By Stephanie Hirsh

There is no Equity standard in the updated Standards for Professional Learning because addressing equity is integrated into all of the standards.

Write for JSD

* Themes are posted at **www. learningforward.org/ publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

* Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (**christy.colclasure@ learningforward.org**).

* Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at **www.learningforward.org/ publications/jsd/writers-guidelines.**

Where did the Equity standard go?

When Learning Forward released the updated Standards for Professional Learning five years ago, we frequently heard this question: Where did the Equity standard go?

The version of the standards published in 2001 included an Equity standard, which stated:

"Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students; create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments; and hold high expectations for their academic achievement" (NSDC, 2001).

We believed then, and we believe now, that it is essential that all educators experience professional learning to develop the knowledge, skills, and beliefs to teach and support every child they serve.

We also know that specific equity topics are often ones educators name in surveys about their professional learning. We appreciate that when educators focus on developing more knowledge, skills, and practices around specific instructional challenges, they will look at the data that indicate whether all of their students are responding or whether some — for example, the boys, or the English learners, or the students labeled as gifted — aren't responding as other

•

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

demographic groups are.

Why then, would we remove a standard that calls out equity as a critical professional learning element?

We made this choice because we believe addressing equity is not something that can be separate from any other element of professional learning. It is integrated into any effective approach to any of Learning Forward's standards. We believe the same is true for subject matter. If professional learning isn't focused on who our students are and how and what they need to learn, it is missing its mark.

The Outcomes standard is the place where we most fully and explicitly address equity in the current standards. The Outcomes standard states:

"Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards" (Learning Forward, 2011).

The rationale for the standard notes that educator and student standards typically address the need for educators to understand, for example, how to engage students from diverse cultures or respond to the diverse needs of communities. This standard is where we make the most explicit link between student learning and educator learning, and, in continually emphasizing that link, the many specific aspects of reaching any given student are critical.

The Outcomes standard isn't the only place our standards stress the

importance of equity. While I could examine the equity embedded in all of Learning Forward's standards, I'll highlight just two more.

The Data standard outlines how the analysis of data clarifies who needs to learn what and in service to which students. Data show where achievement gaps lie among students as well as among educators, who have their own individual needs for specialized attention. The Resources standard also offers an opportunity to address equity when educators allocate professional learning money, people, time, and resources where they are most needed.
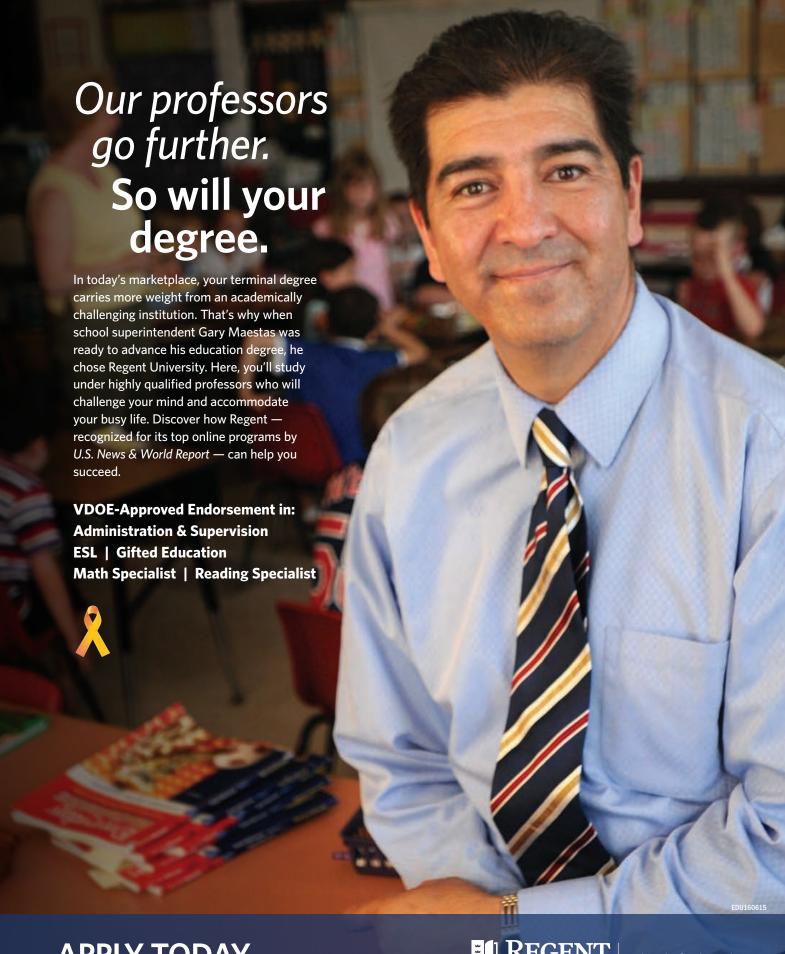
Finally, the stem for each standard — as you can see from the two examples above — includes the phrase "results for all students." We don't take that phrase lightly. It demonstrates our belief that professional learning isn't effective unless increasing "results for all students" is the goal as well as the outcome.

I'd love to hear your perspectives on this. Does the lack of an Equity standard undermine the intent of the standards? How do the current standards support you in creating equitable learning environments?

REFERENCES

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

National Staff Development Council. (2001). *NSDC's Standards for Staff Development.* Oxford, OH: Author. ■
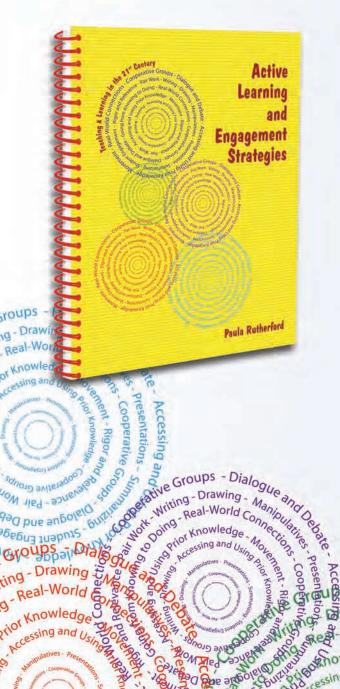
Our professors go further.
So will your degree.

In today's marketplace, your terminal degree carries more weight from an academically challenging institution. That's why when school superintendent Gary Maestas was ready to advance his education degree, he chose Regent University. Here, you'll study under highly qualified professors who will challenge your mind and accommodate your busy life. Discover how Regent — recognized for its top online programs by *U.S. News & World Report* — can help you succeed.

VDOE-Approved Endorsement in:
Administration & Supervision
ESL | Gifted Education
Math Specialist | Reading Specialist

EDU160615