MADE FOR TRANSFER:
THE COLLABORATION TEACHER MODEL

BY JONATHON SAPHIER

"How can I spread this rapidly at scale?" We hear that question often these days. The question is understandable, but the "rapidly" part can be naive. Most worthwhile improvements in teaching practice are not simple, and the change process is complicated. It can also take a long time if it involves breaking long-established habits and modifying belief systems.

Not only is adoption at scale difficult, but transfer into practice *at all* is often tricky, even with the best professional development. Transfer can be obstructed because other projects take priority and because we lack the mechanisms to keep a new practice on people's plates, maintain focus, and provide adequate coaching and feedback. The Collaboration Teacher Model addresses these issues.

We have had an experience in the past few years at Research for Better Teaching with an improvement in teaching practice that is both complicated and requires changing long-established habits. While not exactly rapid, we stumbled upon the Collaboration Teacher approach that, nevertheless, accomplished in two years what we would not have thought possible before — the adoption with skill and enthusiasm of a complex constellation of skills called Making Student Thinking Visible by a majority of the staff of an urban high school in Revere, Massachusetts, a highly diverse, high-poverty, blue-collar district. And the key was teacher leadership.

Making Student Thinking Visible is not a single skill; it is a constellation of skills that produce robust student dialogue at high levels of thinking with engagement of all the students in a class. When practiced skillfully, one sees and hears at one time or another all 24 of the behaviors in the tool on p. 68. Streamlined versions of this skill set have been called "accountable talk" in the past (Resnick, Asterhan, & Clark, 2015; West & Staub, 2001).

Making Student Thinking Visible happens to be the content we used, but any addition to one's teaching repertoire, whether it is a generic pedagogical skill or a content-specific pedagogical practice, could be the content. The point is to generate teacher champions for the new practice and get lots of peer observations going across the faculty along with productive peer analysis and conversations. The steps have to be understood, the administration has to clear the path, and the champions have to be teacher leaders.

Here's how we do it.

A cohort of about 30 to 40 teachers takes a course either online or face-to-face where a case is convincingly made for the new practice. Ideally, an entire faculty would be studying something in common. The practice is demonstrated through modeling or video analysis, and participants practice interactively. A good initial professional development experience is needed as the foundation of the Collaboration Teacher Model.

This year, year three of the work at Revere High School, over 80% of

TOOL 1: COLLABORATION TEACHER MODEL

Use the following tool to guide your use and critique of the Collaboration Teacher Model. It helps a great deal if the administrator takes the course and practices the skills as a learner. This empowers any professional development a faculty takes on.

1. Administrators, with participation by the course instructor, select 10 people who took the course, show proficiency with the skills, have credibility with their peers, and are willing to open their classrooms to colleagues who want to see what these skills look like in action.

2. These 10 teachers are called collaboration teachers. They are willing to share their ongoing process of learning. They are not claiming to be experts in the practice, although they are probably pretty good.

3. Give collaboration teachers an extra full day of professional development face-to-face to increase their expertise. They practice the skills in small groups, facilitated by the original instructor of the professional development course.

4. In addition, the collaboration teachers receive a half-day of coaching in their own classroom by the instructor or other qualified expert. This coaching includes the expert coach videoing the teacher and analyzing the video that day with the teacher for presence, absence, or missed opportunities for the 24 Making Student Thinking Visible elements on p. 68. This is nonjudgmental, objective feedback based on evidence. Some sort of objective instrument needs to be created for whatever the content of the professional development was that can be used in this way as a checklist.

5. The collaboration teachers (or a few of them) present their learning about the new skills at a faculty meeting and give testimony to the positive effects on their students.

6. The administrator endorses their work and describes the visits to the collaboration teachers that will be made available to all staff members.

7. The administrator sets up a visitation and coverage routine so any teacher who wishes can visit a collaboration teacher when the skills can be viewed.

8. During visits, the visiting teacher uses the list of 24 behaviors as a checklist to record evidence of which behaviors occurred during the visit. Such a visit would include shadowing the collaboration teacher when she is in motion interacting with individuals or small groups.

9. The visiting teacher and the collaboration teacher have lunch together (or meet at some other chosen time) to review the evidence collected.

10. Administrators spread the word and ask if other teachers who took the course would like to visit the collaboration teachers. Administrators facilitate the scheduling and coverage, sometimes providing the coverage themselves.

Source: Making Student Thinking Visible, Research for Better Teaching online course, RBTeach.com.

TOOL 2: MAKING STUDENT THINKING VISIBLE ELEMENTS

1. Engage student thinking with planned questions.

Teacher-student interaction:

2. Call on all.
3. Pause … use wait time.
4. Avoid judgment.
5. Validate confusion.

Reflection question: Are students doing the majority of the talking?

Have students:

6. Explain.
7. Restate.
8. Turn and talk.

Reflection question: Are students elaborating their answers with explanations?

Source: Making Student Thinking Visible, Research for Better Teaching online course, RBTeach.com.

Teacher, be sure to:

9. Establish norms, teach prompts.
10. Actively listen.
11. Revoice.
12. Scaffold.
13. Persevere and return.

Reflection questions: Are students showing they they are listening to one another? Are they willing to admit confusion or not knowing? Are they challenging each other's thinking nonjudgmentally?

During lessons:

14. Slow down.
15. Allow struggle.
16. Don't answer yourself.
17. Leave with clues to puzzle over.

Reflection question: Where can I as the instructor improve?

In class discussions, don't give or confirm answers. Ask students to:

18. Agree/disagree.
19. Add on.
20. Compare thinking.
21. Surface discrepancies.
22. Revisit previous thinking.

Reflection question: Are the students taking initiative to explain another student's thinking, including how they might have made an error?

Look for opportunities to:

23. Infuse academic vocabulary.
24. Record academic vocabulary.

Reflection question: How will I measure outcomes so I can continuously improve this model and its content?

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the staff have taken the course and are using the skills with gusto. Increases in student achievement will validate the effectiveness of the new practices in future years, but already adoption at scale has happened. The model has spread to the middle and elementary schools for pilot implementation — pilot because a $2 million district budget cut slowed down the work for the current year.

We urge readers to modify this approach and share their adaptions with us. Whatever the permutations that are created, getting teacher champions of a practice to open their doors for something that is new and ongoing learning for them and for which they are energetic advocates can transform adult professional culture dramatically. Next we look forward to getting data on its positive effect on student achievement.

REFERENCES

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