

REVIEW THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR ADULT LEARNING

During holidays, my family gathers for fun, food, and fellowship. Each time, certain family members are asked to bring particular dishes. I always bring the sweet potato casserole. However, the last time we got together, I had a problem. After making the same recipe for many years, I relied on my memory and neglected an essential ingredient. My family noticed. The casserole was edible, but certainly not a stellar effort. Because I created the dish out of habit, instead of with grounded intention, the results were less than my best. Those of us in the field of professional learning might find ourselves doing the same with our work.

When NSDC's Standards for Staff Development came across my desk some years ago, I was a member of a team that devoted time to studying the standards. Since then, I have changed jobs several times and relied on my memory of the standards as I went about my work to improve schools through professional development. But is my memory good enough? Do we stop to review the standards and the Innovation Configurations as our roles change, making sure we are not neglecting an essential ingredient in our work?

Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations, Volume I considers a variety of roles and how each supports the standards. ICs "add clarity to the standards by providing descriptive actions as practiced by five role groups" (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 3). Roles include: teacher, principal, central office, superintendent, and school board. Begin by asking yourself if the people in these roles even know that the standards exist. Do you want to be better grounded in the standards to be more comfortable talking with other stakeholder groups about how they are used in practice? Self-study will give you what you need to approach stakeholders.

Sharing the standards with your school board and superintendent is a good place to begin. If your system or school has access to the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI), share early results, showing a baseline measure for the quality of staff development in your district or

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province. (Information about the SAI is available at www.nsd.org/standards/about/sai.cfm.) Research indicates that high-scoring schools have higher student achievement than low-scoring schools. Having data to reference is important in our schools and districts, particularly when addressing school boards and superintendents about the importance of professional learning.

Giving principals and assistant principals an overview of the standards and the opportunity to review the Innovation Configurations that particularly address their work is an appropriate topic for a leadership meeting. If a principal is concerned about reading comprehension, for example, help him explore how improved performance with NSDC's standards can be connected to improved student reading comprehension. If his school is weak on the Learning Communities standard, he can review the Innovation Configurations for principals on the Learning Communities standard. That will help him develop his school's professional learning on reading comprehension around outcomes that address the standard and, in turn, improve reading comprehension instruction and performance in the school.

In large systems, content-area staff development is often driven by the person in charge of that curriculum area. District- or province-level staff development directors might consider spending learning time with these curriculum directors to review the standards. Sharing your vision of high-quality professional development that is results-driven, job-embedded, and standards-based will inform those who think of curriculum content first rather than planning, design, or evaluation.

Many content areas have the support of instructional coaches in schools. These school-based staff developers are working to improve student learning but might not be aware of NSDC's standards and how they support these efforts. Innovation Configurations for coaches are included in the book *Taking the Lead* (Killion & Harrison, 2006), giving these school-based staff developers guidelines for working to improve the quality of professional development in their schools. The role of a coach is intentional work toward improving adult learning so that student achievement increases.

I once worked in a very large district. Because our schools were so large, the district decided that one principal or assistant principal per school would be the liaison to the central office regarding professional learning at the



Lea Arnau's columns on NSDC's standards are available at www.nsd.org.

school level. Entrenched in the daily work of schools and always trying to work smarter, these liaisons are the main force for moving the standards forward in the district. One goal is to move staff development away from the central level and into schools, into teams of teachers working around student learning data.

Each year, these liaisons are trained in NSDC's standards and the ICs. Though meeting time was limited, we focused on learning, not announcements. We became a community of learners. Providing professional learning around the data-determined needs of students, liaisons paired NSDC's standards on which the school needed to improve (usually Learning Communities and Evaluation, according to SAI results) with the student learning areas. The outcomes from the Innovation Configurations give school leaders a job description of sorts regarding professional learning in the schools.

Spending learning time on NSDC's standards and Innovation Configurations with the school board, superintendent, central office, school administrators, and coaches allows the educational community to share a common vision and a common vocabulary about high-quality staff development. In our district, the Standards Assessment Inventory was crucial to our learning. These sweeping changes in how to measure and facilitate professional learning are a big part of the work for school leaders. But how do the standards impact teachers in their daily work with students?

By modeling practices we expect teachers to implement in their classrooms, we can impact teachers' daily work and demonstrate the kind of teaching we expect them to provide for students. Meetings filled with announcements and little time centered on adult learning model the opposite of what we ask teachers do to in classrooms with student learning. Seize this shared adult learning time to model instructional strategies, collaboration, and problem solving. Allow teachers to see that leaders are willing to offer a different, standards-based model of adult learning that is directly connected to improving student learning.

One principal I work with determined that he would

challenge himself. His district emphasizes teachers using a variety of effective instructional strategies in their classrooms. Juan realizes he is not modeling these strategies in his group learning time with teachers. His personal challenge is to ask teachers to observe him and give feedback publically. At the monthly staff meeting, he asks for a teacher to volunteer as his coach for the session. At first, teachers did not know whether they could trust this activity.

Over time, they have become believers. Juan and the teacher have a pre-session conversation at the front of the room, and Juan shares a couple of things he would like the teacher to watch for during the learning session — for example, student engagement or using compare/contrast. Then, as the instructional leader of the school, Juan goes about leading these adult learners. At the end of the hour, Juan asks his coach for public feedback. He challenges his volunteer coach to look past the easier list of things done well. He always asks the coach to suggest ways to improve. This gives the teacher permission to look for something that would work even better for students. Talk about high trust! Juan wants to model for his teachers that the real work is about getting better so that all students will learn and achieve.

Revisiting NSDC's standards and the Innovation Configurations allows us an opportunity to review the recipe for providing high-quality staff development that is results-driven, job-embedded, and standards-based. Are you leaving out an essential ingredient? Take time during these winter months of school to think forward to what your teachers will be doing next year. What's on your list of personal challenges?

REFERENCES

Killion, J. & Harrison, C. (2006). *Taking the lead: New roles for teachers and school-based coaches.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

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