



## GROWTH & CHANGE

Jennifer Abrams

# ARE YOU MODELING THE COLLABORATION SKILLS NEW TEACHERS NEED?

**The best way for veteran educators to help new teachers develop collaboration skills is to model, model, model.**

**N**ew teacher support is a common part of professional learning, but it varies across states, provinces, and regions. When I was a new teacher coach in California for 16 years, I followed the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, which were applied across my district and the state.

As I travel across the country and the world, I see approaches to content and structure that diverge from the ones I followed. But wherever I go, I see a common thread: New teacher support typically focuses on classroom management, curriculum and assessment design, and instructional strategies. These classroom-level supports are essential for new teachers — but they're not enough.

We also need to support new teachers in their work outside the classroom, especially in learning how to work effectively with other adults. Research shows that when adults collaborate effectively and trust in one another, productivity and student learning increase (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). New teacher induction programs should help a novice teacher — who may well be overwhelmed — learn the importance of becoming an emotionally self-regulated, mature, and respectful colleague.

Whether in a new teacher induction program, a formal mentoring role, or more informal interactions with our junior colleagues, the best way for veteran educators to help develop those skills is to model, model, model. Here are a few ways we can do so and prompts we can use to reflect on whether and how we are engaging in them.

**Maintain a commitment to inquiry and reflection.** Sharing your continual journey to become a developed human being and educator is a gift to any new teacher who is feeling vulnerable or experiencing imposter syndrome. As you aim to navigate uncertainty and new challenges with greater awareness, compassion, and self-management, articulating that you, too, are a work in progress and demonstrating that we are all stretching and growing is key.

Ask yourself: Am I showing my newer colleagues that part of my work is developing myself so that I can have a greater impact on my school, community, and field?

**Work with others to improve your practice.** Taking a learning stance while participating in professional learning, attending team meetings, and seeking out collaboration opportunities shows new teachers that we are part of a profession that cares about the collective. We demonstrate this when we willingly participate in experiences that support the group and the development of staff and students.

Ask yourself: Am I collaborating with others, getting input on my work, welcoming observations, extending myself, and maintaining a positive attitude while doing so?

**Self-regulate, especially amidst challenges.** New teachers need to know that the work is hard and emotions can overwhelm us if we don't learn how to manage our energy. We can model building strength and stamina to manage volatility that comes with our work. We can demonstrate ways to manage anxiety and release grief and disappointment in appropriate ways.



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We can show new teachers that life is full of falling and recovering.

Ask yourself: Am I open to feedback? Have I built the skills to manage myself when challenging experiences happen? Do I have strategies for keeping myself emotionally and psychologically healthy, and am I open about using

those strategies?

New teachers are watching us to see what it means to be an educator. While we are providing lesson plan support and little pick-me-ups like a latte cart on Fridays, it is just as important to demonstrate vulnerability, model positive strategies for dealing with challenges, and communicate

transparently about our struggles and recovery from them. Those actions should become an ongoing part of new teacher support, too.

#### REFERENCE

**Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (2004).** *Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform.* Russell Sage Foundation. ■

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#### LEARNING LEADERS

 / Baruti K. Kafele

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how many students had ever thought of becoming teachers. I got on the PA system, begged my staff to forgive the interruption, and asked any students who were interested in a career in teaching to report to the cafeteria. I could not believe the large number of students who reported, many of whom were Black boys.

As a result, I created a club called the Newark Tech Future Teachers. We met twice monthly for two years and delved into many education topics. We also attended conferences for future teachers in New Jersey. I loved being part of developing the next generation of Black male educators and seeing the impact this could make on those young men and their future students. My biggest regret about my early retirement was missing the opportunity to one day hire my former students. At least 10 of the students from our club are now elementary and high school teachers.

I'm proud of this outcome and these young men. But I also know that a systemic, district-level approach to cultivating future educators would make a bigger impact, especially if conducted in partnership with local universities with incentives for enrollment in teacher education, such as scholarship and loan forgiveness programs for those who commit to teaching after college. Principals can play an important role in these

programs, but we can't do it at scale by ourselves.

Retention and empowerment are as important as recruitment and hiring. As Black men are hired to teach in America's classrooms, they must be respected and appreciated as educators from the outset. They cannot be seen as the answer to the school's behavioral challenges. They must feel empowered in their teaching positions. That means administrators must welcome their input about the academic program. Their peers must respect their leadership. Support staff must recognize their nurturing for children. The whole community must show them that they are needed and appreciated.

Teaching is the most important and influential profession on the planet. Black men should and must be part of it. When Black men are appreciated, respected, and given the opportunity to be more than just disciplinarians, they can make a significant difference in the lives of children, especially Black children. They can be positive role models for Black children, serving as examples of manhood and teachers of manhood for Black boys. They can demonstrate leadership and mentorship for Black children so they can grow up to be Black educators themselves. They can be an alternative to the negative and destructive Black male images that so many Black children see portrayed in the media and, in some cases, their own

communities.

Empowering Black male educators also brings a vital perspective into schools that serve Black children. When Black male teachers are seen and respected, they can monitor and help address the problems, issues, and concerns that exist within the schools, especially around the teaching of Black children. They bring a personal and professional perspective that can be beneficial for the entire school community. They can also be champions of culturally responsive teaching — for example, by infusing Black history and social justice throughout the curriculum in meaningful ways. And as their careers develop, they can advance into leadership or administrative positions and spread their talents and skills even farther.

I know what it's like to not feel welcomed or respected, and I understand deeply, viscerally, why that drives Black male educators to leave. We have to change that pattern, and we start by changing the environment.

#### REFERENCE

**Borowski, J. & Will, M. (2021, May 4).** What Black men need from schools to stay in the teaching profession. *Education Week*. [www.edweek.org/leadership/what-black-men-need-from-schools-to-stay-in-the-teaching-profession/2021/05](http://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-black-men-need-from-schools-to-stay-in-the-teaching-profession/2021/05) ■