

13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS



BY KELLY LOCK

School coaches can help alleviate the isolation teachers often feel, differentiate professional development for teachers, and bring about changes that enhance student learning by engaging teachers in collegial visits.

A collegial visit that becomes an

Dear colleague, please come for a visit

THE COLLEGIAL VISIT PROVIDES
A STRUCTURED OPPORTUNITY
TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

opportunity for professional learning is much more than walking across the hall to watch another teacher's classroom. Though such visits can be beneficial, and I encourage them, quality collegial visits that transfer to meaningful and long-lasting job-embedded professional development are carefully planned classroom visits that have a clear focus, administrative participation, and an opportunity for reflection and application of newfound learning.

Why visit?

There are many reasons that a teacher may want or need to visit another classroom: garner teaching strategies, learn a new teaching model, understand expecta-

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Diana Lee pioneered the



school-based coach position at her school.

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tions across curricular areas and/or across grade levels, or analyze classroom procedures. The reason for the visit is established based on the observing teacher's needs. Because these visits cost money and time, it is critical for the visit facilitator — principal, coordinator, or instructional coach — to analyze the motivation for these requests. There may be reasons for discouraging such visits — because of a teacher's inability to understand the importance of confidentiality, an unwillingness to try new things, and/or because it will make the observing teacher feel inadequate. But if we hold to the belief that teachers, like our students, have the capacity for growth, then as long as the collegial visit is well organized, professional learning will occur.

Inviting teachers to observe

If collegial visits are new in your district, the first step will be inviting teachers to consider the opportunity. This can be broached in a number of ways. First, during a coaching situation, when a teacher seems at a loss or unsure of strategies, ask if she would like to see another teacher using strategies that might be helpful. Second, a teacher might comment that she knows she should be using a particular strategy as another colleague does, but doesn't know how to begin. In this situation, ask the teacher if she wants to see this or another colleague in action and volunteer to set up the visit. The third way the invitation might be presented is through the principal. However, this must not be a way for the principal to remediate teachers. It must come about from an authentic discussion that shows the principal wants to support the teacher by differentiating her staff's professional development, and it should be an opportunity offered to all teachers who want to take advantage of it.

Planning the purpose of the visit

Once a teacher expresses an interest in observing, the next step is identifying the purpose of the visit.

The observation must focus on one or two specific things. For example, if a teacher is struggling with how to teach reading strategies in her class, then as she observes, she should focus solely on what strategies the other teacher is

using, how the strategies are taught and how students apply the strategies. Everything else should be filtered out, which is difficult, but discussion during the pre-visit planning can ensure this happens.

To determine the focus, the visit facilitator should ask a teacher:

- What is your specific need?
- What do you need to see happening?
- How will you know when something is working?
- How will you know that students are learning and applying what they learn?
- Why is observing another teacher more helpful than reading about it in a journal or book?
- How will you use the information garnered?
- What do you do that already works?
- What is your timeline for implementing any new information gathered?

Once the focus is determined, it needs to be written on the observation sheet as a constant reminder of the visit's purpose. This will prove helpful later during the actual visit should other factors begin to interfere. This focus should be shared with the teacher to be observed so that she knows exactly what the focus is as well. It can be unsettling to a teacher to have visitors furiously taking notes and not know what is being analyzed.

In addition, several other considerations should be made. First, since time constraints are an issue and money for substitutes may be at a premium, the length of the observation is important to establish. In some cases, it may be important for a teacher to spend a half or full day observing other classrooms and schools, which gives a teacher a chance to see multiple teachers and students and/or grade levels. A substitute may not be an option, and in some situations, it may prove necessary that a teacher visit during her planning period over several days or only visit once while another teacher or administrator covers her class.

Second, though the focus may center on content strategies, observing teachers outside one's own content area is helpful. A math teacher who wants to do more group activities can find great benefit in watching a science teacher's class-

THREE WAYS TO GET STARTED

1. During a coaching situation, ask if the teacher would like to see another teacher using strategies that might be helpful.



2. If a teacher comments that she knows she should be using a particular strategy, ask the teacher if she wants to see a colleague in action and volunteer to set up the visit.

3. The principal can offer collegial visit opportunities to all teachers who want to take advantage of them.

room. The same is true for grade levels. In one of the most successful observations I conducted, a middle school teacher who was struggling with the implementation of a writer's workshop in a classroom where the students were functioning at 2nd and 3rd grade levels found that visiting students in several kindergarten through 3rd-grade classrooms was critical to revamping what she was doing so she could meet her students where they were. Similarly, another middle school teacher realized that she needed to make adjustments to her classroom to better prepare her student after observing honors and non-honors classes at a local high school.

If a teacher is taken out of her subject matter and/or grade level, the visit facilitator should discuss what differences might be seen and how that might affect the visit. Good teaching is universal, but discussions about how to adapt something learned from a 6th- to 9th-grade classroom or science to math classroom may be necessary.

Selecting the teacher to observe

Although it is helpful to visit teachers in one's own building, I believe it is more conducive to professional development to visit a classroom in another school. Teachers have relationships with teachers they work with daily. These relationships can interfere with authentic evaluation of instruction and can make the observed teacher especially unnerved by the process.

In addition, teachers often know the students in their own building. During collegial visits, the focus should not be based on pre-existing relationships and/or conceptions about students but, rather, instructional practices and how they affect students.

I also believe that removing a teacher from her environmental comfort zone makes it easier to concentrate on the predetermined focus, which is established in advance by the observing teacher and the visit facilitator.

In our school district, secondary instructional coaches teach at least one course in their content area. As a result, teachers can observe coaches in their teaching roles. However time constraints sometimes interfere. Because of relationships the coaches have built with teachers in their build-

ings, we use one another to connect throughout the district, and in some cases, the coach from the host building also participates in the observation.

Most importantly, teachers must agree to be observed. Though most are open to sharing ideas, it is critical to ask a teacher's permission to visit her room, the purpose must be clearly explained, and the teacher must have the option to say no, especially when this is a new process in your building. Despite the desire to share ideas, there is often fear and anxiety involved in opening one's classroom for scrutiny. If teachers say no to a visit, value their decision, but don't remove them from the list of potential classrooms to visit. Ultimately, the teachers you choose to approach for such visits are those who exhibit strengths in teaching strategies and building relationships with students, and they have valuable information about the profession to share with others. After they realize you aren't spying on them and/or the other teacher isn't there to criticize but learn, teachers may change their minds. This, in itself, can be valuable professional development.

The visit

By the time the visit takes place, the focus and length of stay should have been shared with all parties involved and e-mails sent as reminders. The visit facilitator should have an idea of what is happening in the class before the visit and he or she should know the expectations of the teacher to be observed. For instance, a teacher may be conducting writing conferences, which allows for more freedom in the class, and, as a result, will have prepped her class before the visit, telling students that visitors will be asking them questions. Another teacher may want visitors to sit quietly at a space she has for visitors while she conducts an experiment that demands the class's full attention.

The issue of confidentiality may be a concern for some teachers. It must be discussed thoroughly with all involved. Obviously, teachers know that the confidentiality of our students should never be compromised. As professionals, we must also honor the confidentiality of our colleagues. When an observing teacher returns to



Teachers to approach for collegial visits

- **Have strengths in teaching strategies.**
- **Are skilled in relationships with students.**
- **Have valuable information about the profession to share.**

her own building, it must be clear that she cannot complain about or criticize the observed teacher. The observing teacher should focus on her learning experiences and what she can use in her own classroom — not her colleague’s teaching. After all, the observed teacher deserves respect for opening her classroom. Criticism could cause other teachers to keep their doors closed.

The administrator needs to understand this is not time for an evaluation. Though an administrator might be present, she must take the role of supporter, showing all teachers involved appreciation for their willingness to share ideas to further student learning.

Arriving early at the school to stop by the office, sign in, receive visitor passes and conduct any other security process is critical so that all visitors are in the classroom before the start of class. Arriving after class has begun should not be an option unless the observed teacher has specifically asked that you arrive at that time so that they could tend to her students before visitors arrive.

The observing teacher should record her observations on the note-taking guide that’s been provided. (See tool on p. 6.) I also encourage the coach or visit facilitator to do the same.

First, teachers are asked to watch what students are doing. If possible, the observing teacher should sit or talk with students about the focus of the observation. This can be just as valuable as watching the teacher. For instance, when the middle school teacher mentioned earlier, observed a high school classroom, she had this experience, “The conversation with former students and even students from other middle schools has proven to be one of the most valuable PD experiences I have ever had. This experience gave me insight from the students’ point of view.”

The second column on the observation form focuses on what the observed teacher is doing. How is she interacting with the students? What questions is she asking?

Finally, the observing teacher is asked to note questions that emerge from the observation, and, again, all of these things are tracked in accordance with the predetermined focus. The rest, as difficult as it may be, must be ignored.

When an unfocused observation takes place,

it is easy to get hung up on details that can detract from instructional practices. For example, on one visit that didn’t include pre-visit planning, the observing teacher was bothered by the fact that students were chewing gum, which she did not allow in her classroom. At first, she couldn’t get beyond this, and as a result, the purpose of the visit was in jeopardy. Thankfully, the observing teacher was able to refocus with the help of the visit facilitator and glean instructional practices that were being used to help boost student achievement rather than obsessing over students chewing gum.

Such things may seem trivial, but without a clear focus it is easy to become distracted, causing the collegial visit to become a waste of resources. This brings about another important point — one that cannot always be addressed in large group situations.

Role of the visit facilitator

The visit facilitator should also attend the observation and take notes alongside the observing teacher, so that a comparison of the notes can be used to guide the reflection. In large groups, unfortunately, like our students, teachers can appear focused and engaged, but behind the glazed-over look, they are creating their shopping lists, processing an argument with a student, or simply dreaming of when the clock will show the magic time when everyone gets to go home.

A collegial visit allows for more one-on-one attention. Besides helping the observing teacher remain focused, the visit facilitator can also provide another view on what was observed in the classroom, which proves helpful when the observing teacher later reflects on and implements what was observed.

The visit facilitator probably cannot participate in all collegial visits. If the principal, for example, is the sole facilitator of such visits, she clearly cannot leave the building each time a teacher participates in a collegial visit. Even so, clear expectations should be established for the process of reflecting on the collegial visit. When the teacher visits alone, pre-visit planning to establish the focus is critical. A meaningful conversation about what could and should happen must take place. Stressing that notes should be

ADMINISTRATOR POINTS:

- It’s not an evaluation.
- Your presence is optional.
- Be supportive.
- Show appreciation for teachers’ willingness to share ideas to further student learning.



taken is not enough. The visit facilitator must make it clear that each notation must be related to the observation focus.

After the visit

After returning to her building, the observing teacher should visit with the administrator to debrief and reflect on the experience of watching another teacher and what she has learned. In larger schools, debriefing with an administrator may not be possible.

But, in all cases, the observing and the observed teacher should write a reflection paper that they submit to the administrator and share with one another. With a reflection, the professional development is two-fold. One, the observing teacher discusses what teaching and learning she saw that could be implemented in her classroom. Two, the observing teacher reflects on what it was like to see another person teaching. If the observed teacher is brought into the reflection process, then she also is able to benefit, which allows another layer of learning to take place.

Again, because of time constraints, the reflection will have to be individually planned. If possible, it is most beneficial to have everyone involved discuss the observation immediately following the closing. In other situations, it may take place after school, or if a teacher observes several teachers within a building, during the department's planning time. Because some school districts are quite large, these reflections might need to be shared via e-mail, allowing for ongoing communication about the observation to take place.

Create next steps

Watching another teacher practice the craft of teaching is tremendous. It can reaffirm what we are already doing, and it can help us continue to learn and grow. Guiding the observing teacher through the reflection of her experience and asking her to create the next steps is critical whether she attends with someone or alone.

But, as one principal told me, "Changes in practice should be evident following a visit; otherwise, a collegial visit is no more than an experience."

Teachers cannot change everything in one

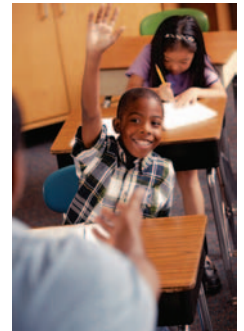
fell swoop, and expecting a teacher to change more than one thing at a time is unreasonable. However, if the observation focus was based on reading strategies, then what one strategy could the observing teacher apply in her room? Once that one thing is chosen, the visit facilitator needs to help the teacher create a timeline for implementation which should take place no later than seven days after the initial observation because the likelihood of implementation decreases with each passing day.

Reflection after the next step

The final step of the collegial visit is to reflect on the implementation of the new idea or strategy. If it failed, that's okay. Analyze why it failed. Analyze what could be done differently. Examine the student work. It could be that the teacher feels it was a failure because of her level of comfort with the strategy. It could be that the students really did poorly, but they did so because it was a new strategy for them, too. They need time to practice just as the teacher needs time to practice. If it worked, examine why and prepare to try it again. If possible, include the observed teacher in this process. Then the two teachers can compare notes and discuss the teaching of the strategy together.

About the author

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The final step of the collegial visit is to reflect on the implementation of the new idea or strategy.

The collegial visit

Teacher's name _____

Date of visit _____

What is the focus of your visit?

<p>What are students doing?</p>	<p>What is the teacher doing?</p>
---------------------------------	-----------------------------------

What questions do you have as a result of this visit?

What are your next steps?



The observing teacher should record her observations on the note-taking guide. The coach or visit facilitator is encouraged to do the same.

All aspects of the observation tool are tracked in accordance with the predetermined focus. The rest must be ignored.

When an unfocused observation takes place, it is easy to get hung up on details that can detract from instructional practices.



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Join the conversation with Bill by logging into the NSDC members-only area and selecting the Blog link on the front page.

Group grows when the fringes mingle

Work on an amazing professional learning team. The six language arts teachers on my grade level are intelligent, dedicated, and committed to the idea that every child can learn. We regularly challenge one another to think in new ways and introduce one another to instructional practices that work. Our meetings are dynamic and our results are nothing short of extraordinary.

Yet not everyone in our building sees us in the same light. In fact, many openly wonder whether some of our decisions are hurting — rather than helping — students. Because we've adopted many non-traditional practices, we're doubted. There is often a palpable tension when we meet with "outsiders."

What adds to this tension is that we are equally skeptical of many of the instructional decisions made by those who doubt us! Through second-hand conversations or passing comments made in workrooms, we've developed strong opinions about what happens beyond our hallway, unsure of whether those actions match our school's mission to ensure student achievement.

Now, don't get me wrong. My school is a wonderful place where teachers truly care for one another.

We just don't completely trust one another!

And I would argue that this lack of trust is not unusual. With limited time to meet across departments and grade levels, teachers have few opportunities to share experiences with anyone other than their core learning teams. The frequent interactions necessary for building professional trust with individuals past our hallways are fleeting at best — and non-existent at worst.

When areas of contention arise, our judgments of one another's actions and intentions are based on little more than preconceived notions and assumptions. These assumptions cause hurt feelings that hinder our building. The productive

conflict that Patrick M. Lencioni speaks about in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Jossey-Bass, 2002) rarely happens.

To move our building forward, it is time for teachers to start thriving on the edges. We must reach out to partners in other grade levels and departments, strengthening relationships with learning teams on our boundaries. We must recognize, value, and celebrate our interconnectedness. With dedicated effort by "connectors" on our staff, trust levels will grow.

While every teacher can work in informal ways to develop relationships with teams on the fringes, the most important connectors in any building are those working in roles outside of the classroom. These teachers — regardless of their official title or role — have the time to develop positive working relationships with individuals across an entire building. With effort, they can identify and advertise common ground between teams.

In many ways, this is an overlooked — yet essential — role of school-based teacher leaders. Organizational capacity in any human endeavor depends on trust that can only be built on the foundation of shared experience. Until all teachers have significant planning time to collaborate across teams, building consensus and facilitating understanding between disparate groups will fall on the shoulders of those who are already influential throughout a building.

What opportunities do you have to serve as a connector in your school? ♦



Disparate groups within a school can work to understand each other.

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

Train to get the most out of data from standardized tests

BY CARLA THOMAS McCLURE

A descriptive study from the University of Northern Iowa demonstrates that various approaches to analyzing standardized test data yield insights that can lead to improved learning. To maximize the potential benefits of such analysis, however, teachers may need help gaining basic hands-on data analysis skills not commonly taught in university-based research courses.

Why examine the use of standardized achievement data to improve instruction?

Researcher John E. Henning points out that 50 years ago “standardized achievement test scores were primarily used for (a) informing teachers and parents about students’ achievement relative to their peers, (b) helping place students in appropriate programs, and (c) justifying the allocation of supplemental resources.” The developers of standardized tests did not originally intend that test results would be analyzed for the purpose of informing curriculum and instruction. In fact, James Popham, a former president of the American Educational Research Association, argues that “classroom assessments are the best source of data for informing instruction.”

In practice, however, analysis of standardized test data has increased in recent years as schools have come under increasing pressure to improve student achievement. Upon reviewing the literature, Henning identified three school-based approaches to data analysis: (1) analysis of trends to see how an intervention has influenced achievement over time; (2) disaggregation of data to separate and compare student data by ethnici-



ty, gender, socioeconomic status, or performance; and (3) examination of the relationship between test scores and other indicators of student performance, such as grades or attendance. Henning’s study documented the efforts of 24 educators to use standardized test data to improve learning.

How was the University of Northern Iowa study done?

Henning examined data analysis reports written by 24 veteran elementary and middle school teachers participating in a graduate program for teacher leaders. The teacher leaders had worked in teams, by building, to analyze Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores. The teams examined building-wide scores, compared student subgroups, and analyzed a particular subject area. For each analysis, the team wrote a brief report that described the data source, purpose for ana-

John E. Henning’s study documented the efforts of 24 educators to use standardized test data to improve learning.

EDVANTIA™

Carla Thomas McClure is a staff writer at Edvantia (www.edvantia.org), a nonprofit research and development organization that works with federal, state, and local education agencies to improve student achievement.

lyzing the data, procedures used, recommendations, and questions for further research. Each team was also required to include visual displays of their data. Henning examined the 24 reports and categorized them by type.

What were the findings of the study?

Henning observed that six of the 24 reports included data from a single school year; the others used two to four years of data. “The limited number of years in these trend lines may indicate that student achievement data is not yet accessible enough for teachers, an explanation informally confirmed by the teacher leaders,” he writes.

Henning also found that “the insights provided by school achievement data are often revealed through visual display of data” and noted that a basic understanding of statistical concepts was essential to teachers’ drawing conclusions consistent with the data.

His findings indicate that “school data can

be analyzed in a wide variety of ways,” although he notes that several possible approaches were not seen in his study.

What are the implications for district leaders?

Schools that are attempting to use standardized test data to improve learning can improve the likelihood of making principled data-based decisions by (1) improving the storage and organization of school data, (2) providing professional development in the application of statistical concepts and the use of visual displays to understand data, and (3) enriching the culture for school data analysis through the sharing of professional literature.

Reference

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Professional development in statistical concepts is key to using standardized test data to improve learning.

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When there's equity, needs are met

Teachers acknowledge that one of the greatest challenges they face each day is meeting the needs of all of their students. They also express disappointment that their knowledge and skills are insufficient to reach all students. When teachers' efficacy is threatened by the complexity of addressing the needs of all students as it is in issues related to equity, school-based staff developers have a doubly difficult task. They assist teachers to learn how to build relationships with students, create productive learning environments, and design differentiated instruction for students with various learning needs. And they also assist teachers in counteracting an eroding sense of efficacy among their colleagues.

Many interactions school-based staff developers have with the teachers they support are related to the Equity standard that includes three dimensions.

1. School-based staff developers provide opportunities for teachers to develop their understanding of and appreciation for all students.

To do this, school-based staff developers may offer training, articles, protocols for conversations, interactions with families and students, or other means for teachers to learn about students' backgrounds, cultures, families, and perspectives so they can respect and appreciate them as individuals. As teachers gain a deeper understanding of students' interests and backgrounds,

they can more easily integrate examples, materials, resources, and instructional strategies that will engage their students and value them.

School-based staff developers help teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners including students with special needs, English language learners, gifted students, or struggling students. School-based staff developers adapt the support they give teachers by recognizing their individual needs and exploring how teachers' background and experiences shape their instructional practices. By modeling the behaviors they want teachers to



EQUITY

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.

demonstrate within their classrooms in interactions with teachers, school-based staff developers reinforce the importance of understanding and appreciating uniqueness. In providing support, school-based staff developers recognize the individual needs of teachers, explore how teachers' backgrounds and experiences shape their instructional practices, and design classroom instruction that honors students.

Another way school-based staff developers develop understanding and appreciation is engaging teachers in courageous conversations about race and poverty. Conversations such as these encourage teachers to examine their own assumptions and beliefs about students and how those assumptions and beliefs influence their instructional decisions.

2. Creating safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments.

School-based staff developers can help teachers examine their classroom and school environments and assess the degree to which they make students feel safe, valued, and capable. Establishing classroom routines, creating constructive, respectful behavior systems, and engaging students in assessing and monitoring their own learning progress are just some ways school-based staff developers can help teachers.

School-based staff developers might also facilitate the development and implementation of schoolwide programs that develop character, celebrate student success and diversity, and support themes of respect, caring, and emotional and physical safety. Creating both a school and classroom environment that protects students' well-being allows students to feel safe both in their classrooms and throughout the school.

3. Holding high expectations for students' academic achievement.

School-based staff developers can support teachers in assessing how their instructional practices convey their expectations of students. The well-known Pygmalion study conducted by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in 1968 explored how teachers' expectations of students' ability to learn influenced student learning. Good and Brophy (1984) distinguished between self-fulfilling prophecies and sustaining expectations. "Self-fulfilling prophecies," they suggested, "are the most dramatic form of teacher expectation effects, they involve changes in student behavior" (p. 93). Self-fulfilling prophecies occur when an inaccurate or false definition of a situation contributes to new behaviors that make the false conception become true (Cotton, 1989). Sustaining expectations, on the other hand, occur when teachers fail to see a student's potential and therefore do not provide opportunities for students to realize their potential. Decades of research conclude that teachers' expectations impact students' academic success.

School-based staff developers can explore with teachers ways in which they convey expectations to students either within their classrooms or within the school. These behaviors are exhibit-

ed in differences in the way teachers interact with low-expectation and high-expectation students. Behaviors might include types of questions teachers ask, which students are called on to answer higher-order questions, teachers' proximity within the classroom, classroom seating charts, wait time, cuing students, and types and specificity of feedback. Often, teachers are unaware that they exhibit these subtle behaviors.

Observing teachers' behaviors toward low-expectation and high-expectation students, gathering data, and facilitating teacher analysis of the data are ways that school-based staff developers can help teachers become conscious about how their expectations impact their teaching practices.

School-based staff developers can contribute to developing teachers' ability to understand and appreciate differences in their students, to create safe learning environments, and to hold high expectations. Their efforts will positively impact teachers' behaviors, their interactions with their students, and their students' academic success. When teachers' actions create positive results for students, teachers have a stronger sense of efficacy, confidence in their ability to meet the needs of all students.

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For more information about NSDC's Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

From isolation to collaboration

“My favorite person in the group is the naysayer. They show me where the holes are in a new practice or idea. They keep me on my toes.”

BY TRACY CROW

Diana Lee, a school-based professional development specialist in Shelby County, Ala., isn't afraid to take on a new challenge if she thinks it will make a difference for the 52 teachers in her school.

Three years ago, Lee's district had no school-based coaches. With the No Child Left Behind Act, Lee's principal was struggling to help teachers cope with AYP and other provisions of the law.

When Lee brought her principal an article about the difference such professionals were making in a California district, he responded, “This is a great idea — why don't you write up a job description?”

Lee remembers that her job description was quite vague; she laughs that about the only real detail was “master's degree required.” Today, she would have a difficult time detailing everything her job demands of her. In any given day, she helps with literacy fluency testing, teaching demonstration lessons or co-teaching, helping teachers build their professional portfolios, coordinating new teacher mentors, tracking down grant funds, and leading study groups.

Before she became a school-based coach, Lee was a high school English teacher with some leadership experience. However, she knew few other teachers, certainly none in the middle grades. Vincent Middle/High School serves 530 students in grades 6-12 and employs 52 teachers. Now she knows all of the teachers — and they're getting to know each other in ways that they didn't before.

She was surprised by how eager the teachers



were for assistance. Lee expected teachers to be reluctant to accept help, but once trust was established, “there were not enough hours in the day,” she said. “Because teachers have so few opportunities to work with other adults, the opportunity to collaborate met a real need.” She also believes that the teachers have embraced what she does because all of the professional development was “conducted on their home turf, in their classrooms, and it was planned to meet their particular needs.”

The first thing Lee learned on the job is that she needed a different set of skills to work effectively with adults. She started her learning-to-work-with-adults process by reading books like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *Dealing with Difficult People*. She is quick to note that even though it sounds like her teachers are tough to work with, “they aren't at all ... as a teacher, I was just so isolated from other teachers.”

As for developing trust, that was a matter of time. During her first year as a coach, Lee could

Diana Lee believes her work as a school-based coach has been successful because it has taken place in the classrooms and was tailored to meet individual needs.

The first thing Lee learned on the job is that she needed a different set of skills to work effectively with adults

tell that teachers were cautious about approaching her. By the second year, teachers realized that Lee could be a real resource and advocate in their quest to pull the school out of improvement status. These days, she has frequent unannounced visits from other teachers observing the two high school English classes that she still teaches and many requests from teachers for individual assistance, from preparing for evaluations to locating resources.

Lee also works with teachers to keep track of their students' progress by examining data about student learning. "Absolutely everything we do is data-driven," said Lee. "They call me the data queen. I went from being an English teacher to working with all of these statistics and spreadsheets." This year, Lee gave all teachers of grades 6-8 an indicator-by-indicator analysis for each student in their classes. "Teachers know what the students need the minute they walk in the door, she said."

Three years later, the culture of the school is changing and is reflected in the school's motto — Exponential Potential. The motto means that teachers "working together increases our potential exponentially," said Lee. For example, when all teachers work to incorporate writing assignments weekly, the school "reinforces those skills with a much stronger impact than one teacher doing the same thing in isolation."

Teachers now collaborate throughout the year. Teachers are organized into small professional learning communities that meet monthly. New teachers meet with Lee monthly to talk about their challenges and to participate in book discussions; Lee leads the new teacher mentors as well.

Lee said "teachers are more willing to try new things because they know they have support. They know that I'll be right there with them." Recent new initiatives have included a state math, science, and technology project that requires teachers to spend two weeks in intensive training in the summer. Three years ago, teachers wouldn't have been willing to invest their time this way, Lee said.

Lee is alert for opportunities for her teachers to receive the recognition they deserve. This year, a teacher at Vincent Middle/High won the

DIANA LEE

Position: Administrative assistant (formerly onsite professional development coach)

School: Vincent Middle/High School, Vincent, Ala.

District: Shelby County, Ala.

Professional history: Taught middle and high school English in Shelby County Schools from 1989 to 2004. Became professional development coach in 2004.

Education: Earned her bachelor's degree from Auburn University, master's degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and her Ed.D in a joint program from Universities of Alabama at Birmingham and Tuscaloosa.

Honors/accomplishments: Faculty service award, 2005 and 2006; Golden Apple award, 2006; 2005-06 grant received from Greater Shelby County Education Foundation, American Library Association, and Community Outreach Partnership Center.

Professional service: 21st Century Learning Schools committee chair, school improvement committee chair (2002-present); mentor coordinator; governing board member, University of Montevallo department of education inservice center (2004-present).

To continue this conversation, e-mail Lee at dlee@shelbyed.k12.al.us

American Star of Teaching Award from the U.S. Department of Education; one teacher in each state is selected for this honor. Lee has created a newsletter to keep teachers and central office staff informed about what other teachers are doing and she believes that contributes to the developing sense of community and collaboration. She notes that the recognition teachers receive for their accomplishments "really motivates them."

Today, the data show that Vincent Middle/High is improving. The school has moved from the bottom of the district in terms of test scores to the middle range. They have met AYP and are no longer in school improvement status. That achievement has been important to a school that Lee noted is less affluent than other schools in the county.

Lee can't stress enough that her favorite part of the job is seeing teachers be successful and to provide help when she can to get them there. She realizes why it is ultimately so valuable to see teachers reaching new heights. "I know that the direct benefits go to the students." ♦

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— Diana Lee