



professional LEARNING

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School Leaders Develop PLCs Through Adaptive Schools Training

By Dr. Georgea Langer

"Go Slow to Go Fast"

"Advocacy vs. Inquiry"

"Dialogue vs. Discussion"

"Intention, intention, intention"

"Mediating Thinking"

These are a few of the ideas school principals and district administrators considered and practiced on November 25 and 26, 2007, days 3 and 4 of the 6-day series, "Adaptive Schools: Developing Collaborative Groups." More than 65 participants came to the Washtenaw Intermediate School District from as far away as Marquette to study with facilitators Carolyn McKanders and Mark Ravlin.

The series develops in leaders ways to cultivate professional learning cultures in schools. A key aspect of Adaptive Schools seminar is modeling, practicing, reflecting, and planning for application of these ways. In this spirit, the day began with a review of how the participants had applied in their work settings some of the ideas from the first two days. These might be the Seven Norms of Collaboration, structures for successful meetings, or productive ways of listening.

One central tenet of Adaptive Schools is to consciously choose one's intentions when planning and communicating. The "Pyramid of Influence" was invoked to show that our intentions drive what we pay atten-

tion to. This focused attention leads to the actions we take. The distinction between advocating for an idea and inquiring into the meaning of an idea was one example of choosing an intention. Participants clarified how they would advocate for an idea, and learned how to inquire into others' ideas. After they listened and inquired, they practiced signaling their intention to move from inquiring to advocating for a related idea that was important to them.

A key collaborative skill leaders might choose in a variety of situations is listening by using "pause, paraphrase, and probe." This signals not only an intention to understand the speaker; it also allows the speaker to explore, and perhaps shift their own thinking. When the intention is to open the thinking to new possibilities, a "mediational question" might be used. For example, if a teacher says a particular parent won't support her child's learning, a principal might ask, "Given your concerns about this parent's support, what are some ways you have addressed this?" In the presence of productive, non-judgmental listening, a teacher may discover insights into the parent's situation, and a willingness to experiment with other ways to involve the parent.

As always, the facilitators modeled and explained their own intentions--why they used specific facilitation strategies to accomplish their goals. Periodically during the

two days, participants scanned the list of strategies and planned how and why they might apply them in their own work. This is especially important since the skills and ideas can be used in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes. For example, the "paraphrase passport" strategy provides a structured way to practice pausing and paraphrasing as participants listen productively.

The day ended with a discussion of how to use conflict productively, a topic dear to every leader's heart! Carolyn started with a quote: "Conflict is just energy in the system, nothing more, nothing less." One key to dealing productively with conflict is to presume positive intentions on the part of a person or group. When seen this way, the leader can change the approach to address the needs of the person or group. As the change is made, the intention can be stated, for example, "Because I know adults can get frustrated with processing, I will make sure to clarify the 'what, why, and how' for each activity." Such a move can shift the energy to stay with the meeting's goals.

The series will resume in March with the last two days of the 6-day seminar. More information about Adaptive Schools may be found in the November issue of this newsletter or at adaptiveschools.com.

Getting to Quality: The Cedar Springs Story

By Ron McDermed, Associate Superintendent

Mission Statement:

"MSDC advocates for quality research-based professional development policies and practices to increase the capacity of those who work to improve student learning."

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Cedar Springs began their journey toward common, collaborative professional learning with an auditorium full of staff members – 250 or so – for an "inservice" on differentiated instruction. Central staff realized something was amiss.

So six years ago, prior to a district launch of the PLC efforts, they sent teachers to DuFour's Stevenson HS in Illinois. With union support, the first year they worked with a cadre of teacher leaders for 32 hours, learning how to set and adopt group norms, how to make participatory decision-making a reality, and a host of other practices under the DuFour/NSDC framework.

The work continued to evolve under a district-wide climate which set high goals but provided high levels of resources and "time to grow". It was soon discovered that there existed an uneven understanding about PLCs so a lot of learning was needed in order to bring teachers to deeper levels of meaning.

What evolved subsequently was a three-level structure, with the Professional Learning Community consisting of the larger group of 15 or 16 teachers, and the Community of Practice, a three to five person group and one on one cognitive coaching.

A Community of Learners has one or two teacher leaders, and an administrator for support. This group will study, for example, literacy – but on the "bigger picture" scale.

The current work, as an example, involves writing needs growing out of MEAP analysis. The PLC work resulted in the establishment of goals in science writing – more

detail is needed in student work in this area. So a focus (SMART goal) is established.

The Community of Practice (COP) consists of small groups of teachers. This group will translate the discussion from the community of learner level into "how this works in my classroom". This group uses dialogue and data around an action research model. The Communities of Practice then meet to determine how, in fact, this goal will be addressed. It's collegial and public, insofar as the COP pair share throughout the school year. And as a culminating activity, there's a showcase for sharing tips, tricks, and stories of implementation.

Finally, the cognitive coaching model is used for one on one reflection with staff about their own classroom practice. Coaches provide a non judgmental place for teachers to scaffold their daily practice into the larger goals shared in the PLCs and COPs groups.



Language Leads

by Bill Sommers, Board Member of *Coaching for Results, Inc.*

"Listen, do you want to know a secret." Beatles Song Lyric

As I reflect over the past 25 years of coaching there are some themes emerging for me. One of the themes is that if I listen to the language people use, they will tell me exactly what they are thinking and how they view the world. Many of us have used style delineators (e.g. MBTI, Cognitive Style, etc.) to help understand others' thinking.

Another strategy is to listen to people's metaphors. George Lakoff wrote *Metaphors We Live By*. A staff member talked about falling into mud puddles. What we were really talking about was his battle with alcoholism. Metaphors provide us ways to talk about issues we may not want to talk about. So, the first theme for me is to listen to people's language. 'Listening is different from waiting'. An activity I use with participants in workshops is to track the time you are listening and how much time you are waiting. Spending more time waiting means you are probably trying to advance your thoughts or tell someone else the answer. Spending time listening means you are learning more about the person you are coaching.

A second theme I have noticed is what I call the 'language of certainty'. Richard Pascale, in a book *Managing on the Edge* said, "Nothing fails like success." When people get successful, we tend to stop trying to find additional ways to solve problems. This becomes a problem when the environment changes. What worked in the

past might not work in new situations. So, I listen intently for people who are sure they know the answer. You can't tell them anything if they already know the answer. I believe that humility, the willingness to admit you don't know something, is required to learn anything. In areas of trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, etc., I want certainty. I also know there are usually many ways to solve an issue. If a person I am coaching gets locked into one way only, I know it will be very difficult for them to see other possibilities. Inviting people to be creative and look at multiple options can be difficult and very necessary. If what you are doing isn't working, try something else.

A third theme is 'language precedes action'. In my experience, if the person I am coaching cannot describe what they want, they cannot develop a pathway to get what they want. So, spend time helping to clarify the issue. What I have found is the more specific a person can describe the issue, the better able they are to create an action plan. The more detailed the action plan, the more you increase their ability to take action.

Remember Einstein said, "you can't solve problems with the same kind of thinking that got you into it." Coach On!

Coaching School Results is a non-profit organization with a mission to foster confident, competent, courageous school leaders who lead their schools to high performance. For further information go to: www.coachingschoolresults.com



EVIDENCED-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

MSDC and NSDC are looking for schools and school districts that can show evidence of how their professional learning activities are impacting teacher behaviors and student learning. If you have a story to share about how your professional learning has transferred into the classroom, we would like to hear from you. MSDC will work with you to write your story and share it, not only in Michigan, but on a national scale through NSDC. Please contact djonker@oaisd.org if you have an evidence-based professional learning story.

Data-Informed Decision Making Tools by Ben Boerkoel

In a project funded by the Wallace Foundation and in collaboration with the Governor's Office, the Michigan Department of Education, the Benton Harbor, Flint, Grand Rapids and Lansing school districts; and MASB, MASA, MASSP, MEMSPA, and MI-LIFE; three Michigan universities – Eastern, Central, and Western – recently spearheaded a project to develop a number of data-informed decision-making tools. Known as the Michigan Coalition of Educational Leadership, the project developed two documents: *A Measurement Tool for School Principals* as well as *A Guidebook for Data Points and Analyses* in the context of the Michigan School Improvement Framework.

According to the authors, “this project is not about fixing anyone. The role of the sixteen participating principals and selected principal mentors is to use their experiences and expertise to assist the implementation team and project consultants in examining the various data streams within K-12 schools and collaboratively develop a framework of protocols, processes, and systemic responses that make student data meaningful, useful, and powerful tools to improve student achievement. Principals are bombarded with data, and these data overflow results in frustration, fragmentation of effort, dissipation of time, and the inability to connect data with student achievement. We might think of this project as bringing order out of chaos through a systematic use of the data that actually makes a difference in student learning.”

The Michigan School Improvement Framework already suggests the type of data schools can collect as part of the school improvement process; however, the authors make a significant contribution to the field by proposing the type of analysis that can be done with these data. While the Guidebook addresses all five strands of the Framework, the focus of this article is on Strand III, Standard 2, Professional Development.

For Benchmark A on collaboration, the guidebook suggests that the school collect district professional development policies and records of professional development activities over the past year and examine (those) policies and resultant activities and products to determine the degree to which they demonstrate that teacher professional learning is conducted with colleagues across the school and district to improve staff practices and student achievement. Secondly, the school should collect professional development policies, sample records of professional development activities and sample teacher development plans over a three-year period with the intent of conducting a content analysis for evidence that policy and practice emphasize sustained approaches to teacher learning that impact instruction in relation to student performance results.

Benchmark B addresses content and pedagogy. The guide proposes that schools collect artifacts from formal professional development activities over one school year as well as participant evaluation summaries for each activity. In addition, data could include interviews with a sample of new teachers, supervising teachers and other mentors and administrators as well as survey feedback from teachers and supervisors in new teacher programs. Analyzing the data could take the form of coding each activity by topic to create a frequency distribution to show the degree to which deeper content understanding is a goal for professional learning in the school as well as analyzing teacher evaluations to assess perceptions regarding how learning actually deepens content understanding. In addition, the guide recommends conducting a qualitative analysis of interview data and an item analysis of survey results to learn the degree in which new teachers are supported in ways that help them succeed.

Benchmark C speaks to alignment. Data types for this benchmark include profes-

sional development needs assessment survey results, professional development sections from the building school improvement plan, and school improvement goals in addition to artifacts from professional development activities over one school year. Analysis in this benchmark could include creating a graphic representation to examine the relationships among school improvement goals, student learning needs, teacher learning needs and professional development plans and analyzing the graphic for alignment. Secondly, the school might analyze the activities to determine the degree to which they provide opportunities for professional learning embedded in daily work, encourage colleagues to observe one another and provide feedback, and provide for guided practice in the classroom setting.

While schools may have done some pieces of this analysis, this tool brings it altogether in a coherent and aligned picture. Both documents are available at www.wmich.edu/wallacegrant.

Shen, J., Berry, J., Cooley, V., Kirby, B., Marx, G. and Whale, D. (2007). *Data-informed decision-making: A foundation for data points and analyses in the context of Michigan School Improvement Framework*. Kalamazoo, MI: Michigan Coalition of Educational Leadership. p.6

