

Curriculum in / Context

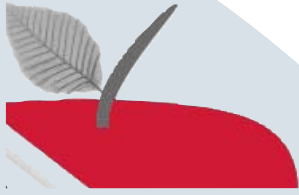
Spring/Summer 2009
Vol. 36, No. 1

Journal of the
WASHINGTON STATE
Association for Supervision and
Curriculum Development



Educators as Learners

**Inquiry, collaboration, and scholarship
to improve learning for ALL students**



WSASCD Officers

President

Mike Dunn, Superintendent
Educational Service District 101

President-elect

Josh Garcia
Executive Director of Learning
Federal Way School District

Executive Director

Kathy Clayton

Board of Directors

Dave Colombini, Peninsula School District
Missy Hallead, Vancouver School District
Barry Hoonan, Bainbridge Island School District
Joan Kingrey, WSU Spokane
Gayle Mar-Chun, Olympia School District
Gary Plano, Mercer Island School District
Susana Reyes, Pullman School District
Gene Schmidt, Bridgeport School District
Patricia Shanander, Mt. Vernon School District

ASCD Board Member

Tim Nootenboom, Snoqualmie Valley School District

Higher Education Representative

Andrew Lumpe, Seattle Pacific University

OSPI Representative

Lexie Domaradzki, Assistant Superintendent for
Teaching and Learning, OSPI

Past Editors

Greg Fritzberg & Deborah Gonzalez, 2003-2006
Greg Fritzberg, 2001-2003
Dan Mahoney, 1999-2001
Richard Wolfe, 1998-1999
Walter Gmelch, 1992-1998
Richard Wolfe, 1986-1992
John Armenia, 1980-1986
Joe Fleming, 1978-1980
Connie Kravas, 1976-1980
Bob Williams, 1972-1976

WSASCD Membership Information

Washington State Association for Supervision and
Curriculum Development
825 Fifth Ave. SE
Olympia, WA 98501
(360) 353-6873 (phone)
(360) 357-9535 (fax)
www.wsascd.org

Curriculum in Context

Educators as Learners Inquiry, collaboration, and scholarship to improve learning for ALL students

A message from the editor3
Joan Kingrey

My way, our way, or a new pathway?
The place of autonomy in learning communities4
Millie Watkins

School-university partnerships:
Varying roles, contexts, and outcomes9
Tariq Akmal, Janet Hart Frost, and Donald Larsen

Rethinking support for school principals13
Chad Lochmiller

Listening to students:
The missing component in school reform18
Tammy Campbell

National board certification
The continuation of the professional learning journey22
Rena Mincks

Trust Works24
Cathy Fromme

Teaching as reflective practice:
The lessons of professional certification29
Luke Thomas

A message from the president31
Mike Dunn

Publisher

Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
825 Fifth Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501

Editor

Joan Kingrey, Ph.D., Washington State University

WSASCD publications do not necessarily reflect ASCD views and are not official publications of ASCD.

Curriculum in Context is published twice a year. Manuscripts should be addressed to Joan Kingrey, Washington State University Spokane, PO Box 1495 Spokane, WA 99210-1495 • Telephone: (509) 358-7939; Fax: (509) 359-7933, E-mail: kingrey@wsu.edu. The editorial committee seeks articles that provide perspectives, research and practical information about the issues of and ways to improve learning and teaching in Washington State.

A message from the editor

By Joan Kingrey



What distinguishes our profession is its spirit of curiosity and the yearning to understand how best to improve learning for each and every student.

It is not enough to describe educators as life-long learners; it's more than that. As a profession, we actively engage as learners ourselves in order to improve our profession, to transform our schools, and to solve the problems of practice that we encounter. There is a growing culture of inquiry that is evidenced in professional learning communities, university and school collaborations, and the legions of teachers and administrators who return to school to learn more, to reflect on their practice, and to complete their own investigations into the complexities of school reform. Our work is about children and their learning, and our promise is about access for every child to a responsible and productive lifetime as a citizen. When it comes to accomplishing authentic school reform to transform our schools and improve learning for ALL children, the expertise rests within our profession.

Our professional expertise has been commonly overlooked in the continuing journey toward improving our schools, as if reform can be done to education. School reform initiatives are often shaped by business, political, or philanthropic agendas. Piecemeal legislation addresses single issues while ignoring the contextual consequences. Funding comes with strings, and seldom addresses the costs of implementation and professional development. Accountability measures are narrow, and the expectations for results are high. There is a public demand for highly qualified teachers, higher accountability standards for the schools and colleges of education that prepare them, and a simultaneous push to make it easier to become a teacher. Teaching is too often noted for its three months of summer vacation, while little attention is given

to what it means to construct a learning environment for classrooms of children who are actively engaged as learners throughout a school day. In short, most people think they know all about education because they've been there as students themselves along the way. Education exists in the contradictory environment of simple solutions versus complex problems, and treating educators as technicians versus engaging them as professionals.

I suspect that we must own part of this dilemma as a profession. We're not very good at explaining our work to others, nor do we publicize our successes and insights with much regularity to those outside our field. While it is a noble purpose to be dedicated to serving the greater good of educating all children well, we also need to become as adept at engaging our larger constituency in developing an understanding of the profound undertaking of educating children. We have been too busy to do this well, and we would rather work on what matters to us – our craft knowledge, collaborating with our colleagues, and inquiring into the bridges and barriers to learning in our schools.

The articles that follow will highlight this work, and will showcase the continuous learning journey that is embraced within our profession. It will also provide the narrative context to understanding why educators themselves will unlock the puzzles of closing the achievement gap, creating environments where all children and adults thrive, and establishing conditions where achievement gains are accomplished by all students. The authors in this issue represent very well the spirit of curiosity that encompasses our profession. Each sought to understand some element of practice or to pursue their passion

for improving learning. They sought to explore areas that are not understood, and as one author described it - "...out of this void emerged my inquiry" (Campbell, 2009). The authors in this issue include teachers who have completed professional or National Board certification, administrators returning to school to complete dissertations, and professors working with schools to build collaborative school/university partnerships toward improving instructional practice. Their topics of inquiry will advance our thinking, and their scholarship will soundly inform our practice. It is apparent throughout the articles that we are a K-20 community of practice in reforming our schools.

This issue marks my last as editor of *Curriculum in Context*. I accepted the editorship as a continuation of my learning journey, and have been enriched because of it. From my interactions with the WSASCD Board, their thoughtful contemplation about timely themes for the journal, and the assembling of articles and authors to represent the issues, the ideas, and the research, it has been a wonderful opportunity to interact with some of the best thinkers in our state, and nation. It has been my goal to sustain this journal and its contents as a thoughtful, informed resource for educators in our state, and that it represents the same spirit of inquiry, collaboration, and scholarship that this issue highlights. *Curriculum in Context* has a distinguished history of giving voice to the K-12 practitioners and university scholars in our state.

I extend my thanks to the WSASCD Board for their continuing support of *Curriculum in Context*. And, I'm pleased to submit this issue, focused on Educators as Learners, in dedication to the profession that I so deeply respect and love.

My way, our way, or a new pathway?

The place of autonomy in learning communities

By Millie Watkins

The first day of high school French class, my teacher asked why we wanted to learn another language. She discussed the practical value of the class, then

shifted her focus, “I hope you decided to take this class because you were curious about some writing on a label or you wondered what people were saying when you heard a language you didn’t know. I hope your curiosity brought you here.”

Indeed, my curiosity had done just that. I was eager to learn. High school was hardly the last time my desire to learn took me into new territory. Recently, it led me to enroll in WSU’s Doctor of Education program. Given my career and professional goals, the Ed.D. degree wasn’t a practical consideration – it could only marginally improve my compensation or status. But what it could do was connect me to outstanding educators, expand my perspective, and equip me with tools to tackle the challenge of improving schools.

I wanted to learn more. Now, with the program behind me, I can say the decision to enroll was the right choice. My professors and fellow graduate students in the Education Leadership Program challenged me to delve into the best scholarship in our field. The experience has left me with an understanding of the principles that shape schools and their application to school improvement.

Federal and state requirements to measure student performance against standards (Elmore, 2000) have contributed to a blurring of the traditional lines between teachers and administrators (Ingersoll, 1994). Day to day decisions regarding instruction are increasingly made at the district, state, or even national level (Hoyle et al., 2005). This

shift increases the interdependence of teachers, administrators, parents and community members, frequently leading to conflicts as stakeholders jockey for position and authority (Scribner, et al., 2002; Westheimer, 1999; & Grossman et al., 2001).

As a school and district administrator, I have encountered occasions when the needs or preferences of individual staff conflict with the collective work of a school community focused on student achievement. To better understand this, I decided to focus my graduate study on the relationship between individual and community interests.

How should educators build professional communities focused on student achievement? Scribner et al. (2002) concluded a study of two schools with the recommendation that principals seek ways to incorporate teacher autonomy into the decision making process so long as the community’s goals and values are maintained. Their recommendation conforms to Etzioni’s (1996) call for equilibrium between community and individual interests.

A hypothetical example of a curriculum committee’s work can help to explain this concept. If the various members of a committee disagree about which textbook to adopt, in seeking balance, the tension might be resolved with a democratic vote. This gives weight to the majority opinion while ensuring an autonomous vote for each individual. Alternatively, a compromise might result in adoption of a text favored by most while allowing individuals to supplement with preferred materials. Another option would set aside conflict-

ing texts in favor of a compromise text acceptable to most members.

Each of these potential solutions focuses on who holds the authority to decide. In a democratic vote, the majority carries authority. If supplemental materials may be added, the majority shares limited power with individuals. If subgroups set aside preferences in favor of an alternative, the individual members have sublimated their autonomy for the whole. In seeking equilibrium, “my way”, “our way”, or combinations of the two become the focus of the decision making process.

The difficulty with focusing on balance is its emphasis on the question of authority without attention to purpose. That is, it fails to address the critical question, “What learning will be the focus of our work together?” Palmer (1998) offers an alternative. Describing what he calls a community of truth, he recommends that the emphasis in a learning community be focused on the “great thing” that the group seeks to understand. In the example of our curriculum committee, improved achievement in mathematics is such a “great thing.” Rather than seek a balance between members’ competing interests, this community commits to an improved understanding of mathematics achievement.

Teachers, administrators, and stakeholders bring a variety of backgrounds and knowledge to the committee’s work. Composed of educators with expertise in mathematics, in instruction, and in facilitation skills to nurture collaborative dialog, the team draws out the talents of its members. Thus the team functions interdependently, with multiple and diverse members depending on each other and simultaneously moving forward as an independent team.

With an emphasis on either equilibrium or interdependence, disagreements surface. What’s agreeable to the community is not always agreeable to individuals. The model of equilibrium

handles tensions between the rule of self (autonomy) and the rule of the other (heteronomy) as questions of authority such as “Who has the right or responsibility to decide?” The interdependent nature of inquiry in the community of truth (Palmer, 1998) shifts the understanding and action in a different direction.

The guiding principle of interdependence is “What great thing do we wish to know and understand?” The subject itself is placed at the center of the decision making model. Teachers, administrators, students, and stakeholders become members of a learning community gathered around the subject of their mutual interest. Members will view the subject differently and prioritize conflicting aspects. They will, however, begin to dialog with the desire to increase their knowledge of the subject rather than to compete for finite authority. Palmer (1998) describes this process:

“As we try to understand the subject in the community of truth we enter into complex patterns of communication – sharing observations and interpretations, correcting and complementing each other, torn by conflict in this moment and joined by consensus in the next. The community of truth, far from being linear and static and hierarchical, is circular, interactive, and dynamic.” (p. 103)

To summarize the distinction between balancing individual/community interests and building interdependence, the primary difference is that in the former, the community seeks equilibrium in authority and in the latter the community shares a mutual commitment to truth seeking. The outcome of interdependent work broadens perspectives, nurtures relationships, and provides opportunities to refine practice. In our example, the byproduct of this work may be a textbook adoption, but the process takes the members to a new place with regard to the subject of

inquiry. This new place will ensure that the next decision process begins from a new and more comprehensive point of departure. The transformative work of an interdependent community greatly enhances not only the specific work of a particular time, but strengthens the community toward improvement of practice.

To study this kind of interdependence, I designed, with the guidance of my major professor, Dr. Gordon Gates, a qualitative case study of two high performing elementary schools in Washington that had been recognized for their successful work with tradition-

between 45-78% Latino students, many of whom were English language learners. Free and reduced lunch rates for the two schools ranged between 60% - 80%. Each school had been recognized as having a strong collaborative focus on student achievement. Data were gathered at the two sites through formal interviews, classroom observations, attendance at collaborative meetings and training events, and through review of relevant documents.

My study found that teachers in both schools worked together to improve student achievement as they shared leadership and decision making.

Table 1

WASL percent meeting standard in reading and math – fourth grade

	Reading		Math	
	2000	2007	2000	2007
West Bend	30%	65%	<10%	40%
Discovery	45%	70%	20%	53%

Table 2

Teacher Practices in School Community

	Focus	Expertise	Structure	Process
Emergent	Following	Directed by protocols	Elemental	Palpitated
Congruent	Inquiring	Discussion with experts	Interrelated	Arrhythmic
Aligned	Researching	Dialog within community	Circular	Continuous

ally underserved student populations. These schools, given the pseudonyms West Bend and Discovery Schools, had dramatically improved scores on the WASL over an eight year period as described in Table 1. The schools served

I identified three kinds of collaborative practices: emergent, congruent, and aligned. These practices are described in Table 2.

Emergent practice

Emergent practices demonstrated movement toward collective action while preserving individual expression. At both West Bend and Discovery, faculty used common curriculum in many subjects and met at least weekly to pace instruction and focus on district protocols:

“There are new things that the district is asking us to do and sometimes we don’t understand exactly what they want but when we work together... we clarify and we try the things they are asking us to do in the classroom.” (Discovery Teacher)

This common focus sometimes came in conflict with individual preferences as seen in these notes from a teacher collaboration meeting at Discovery:

“At one point Diana hesitates to bring it up, Helen encourages her... Diana says she wants to use her own idea for a center in math class....Helen remarks...” Sometimes you really want to practice the concept in a way different from the book.”

While the focus and expertise of emergent practice largely centered on district curriculum in core subjects, teachers described individual choices they made when district protocols were undeveloped:

“We have some philosophies that are different...Kim...does a read aloud...but I’m not finding time for it. And I do spelling but she doesn’t do spelling.” (West Bend teacher)

Thus emergent practice was characterized by collective action with regard to some elements of the curriculum while other actions were determined by individuals. Time spent in collaboration resulted in adherence to district form. This process can be described as palpitated, given that its collective focus was frequent and tenuous, resulting in starts and stops.

Congruent practice

Teachers engaged in congruent prac-

tices approached their work more from professional curiosity than from district mandates. While district curriculum guides were in place, teachers were engaged in a quest for increased student achievement that drew from the district, outside experts, and individual interests. The focus of this work was inquiry:

“We’ve all jumped on board and said, “OK, if this is best for kids.... This is how we operate. This is our business.” (West Bend teacher)

“We really laid the ground work about when we’re in the committee it’s OK to disagree. Disagreement does not equal disloyalty.... What we have to focus on is what is best for kids.... We felt as a staff that we all wanted to be on the same page.” (West Bend teacher)

Teachers engaged in congruent practices sought out experts to support their inquiry. “That’s a big part of school improvement, is having outside people coming in that really know their stuff,” (West Bend teacher). Teachers synthesized expert’s perspectives with their classroom experiences. At times they adopted experts’ recommendations, at other times they used the experts’ advice as a springboard for discussion with colleagues. These practices were labeled congruent because the individual teachers’ inquiry often mirrored the inquiry of the school district as part of the school improvement process. Although differences were evident between the individual and collaborative perspectives, each was focused on the desire to improve classroom practice.

These congruent practices were interrelated with teachers learning from one another and drawing on each other’s strengths. ... “with collaborating...we’ve adopted some really well aligned curriculum...it also makes your job more fun....You don’t feel so alone,” (West Bend teacher). However, this interrelated structure was manifested in an arrhythmic process with a common focus of inquiry giving way to fragmented individualism or mandated

community from time to time. When difficulties arose, these teachers refocused on mutual inquiry and redoubled their efforts:

“Almost all of the staff really gets along....And there were some struggles probably with me as much as anything with [another teacher],....obviously you collaborate and stuff, you do it....The intent is to make things easier for the kids.” (West Bend teacher)

Aligned practice

The collaborative work of the fifth grade team at Discovery distinguished itself from the work of others in the study. These teachers exhibited emergent and congruent practices as described above, however, they were often observed engaging in what could be described as congruent practice plus. This difference was primarily one of degree and continuity. Discovery’s fifth grade team had taken the guiding question of congruent practice, “What’s best for kids?” and tightened and refined it. Moving beyond inquiry and reliance on outside experts, they engaged in almost continual research and development:

“We want to see every one of [our students] grow and when you’re determined and work really hard in trying to find that key to their learning and then it happens, it’s like the most motivating thing you can imagine....because when you have success it kind of breeds success. It pushes you harder because you know it’s possible.” (Discovery fifth grade teacher)

The team’s collaboration depended on an expertise arising from reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and mutual inquiry (Palmer, 1998). This inquiry occurred in a circular structure, engaging both the teachers and the district. At times the district or state influenced these teachers’ decisions. At other times, the teachers themselves were the catalyst for change. “We get a lot of district administrators asking our opinion or looking at what we’re do-

ing.” (Fifth grade teacher). The teachers even included students in the development of aligned practice. “I’ll tell the kids, ‘We’re going to have a group of kids that are going to be working on [a specific math concept]. Is there anyone who would like to be in the group? And there will be five or six hands will go up. They know what they will need to work on’” (Fifth grade teacher).

This focus on research and reflective dialog led to a continuous process of coordination. An instructional coach described the ongoing nature of the fifth grade team’s interaction: “They work together constantly....They are in each other’s rooms after school...before school. They are planning together aside from the [scheduled] collaboration time.” These teachers were making innovation and improvement through sharing responsibilities, developing strategies, and deepening their understanding about their skills and students.

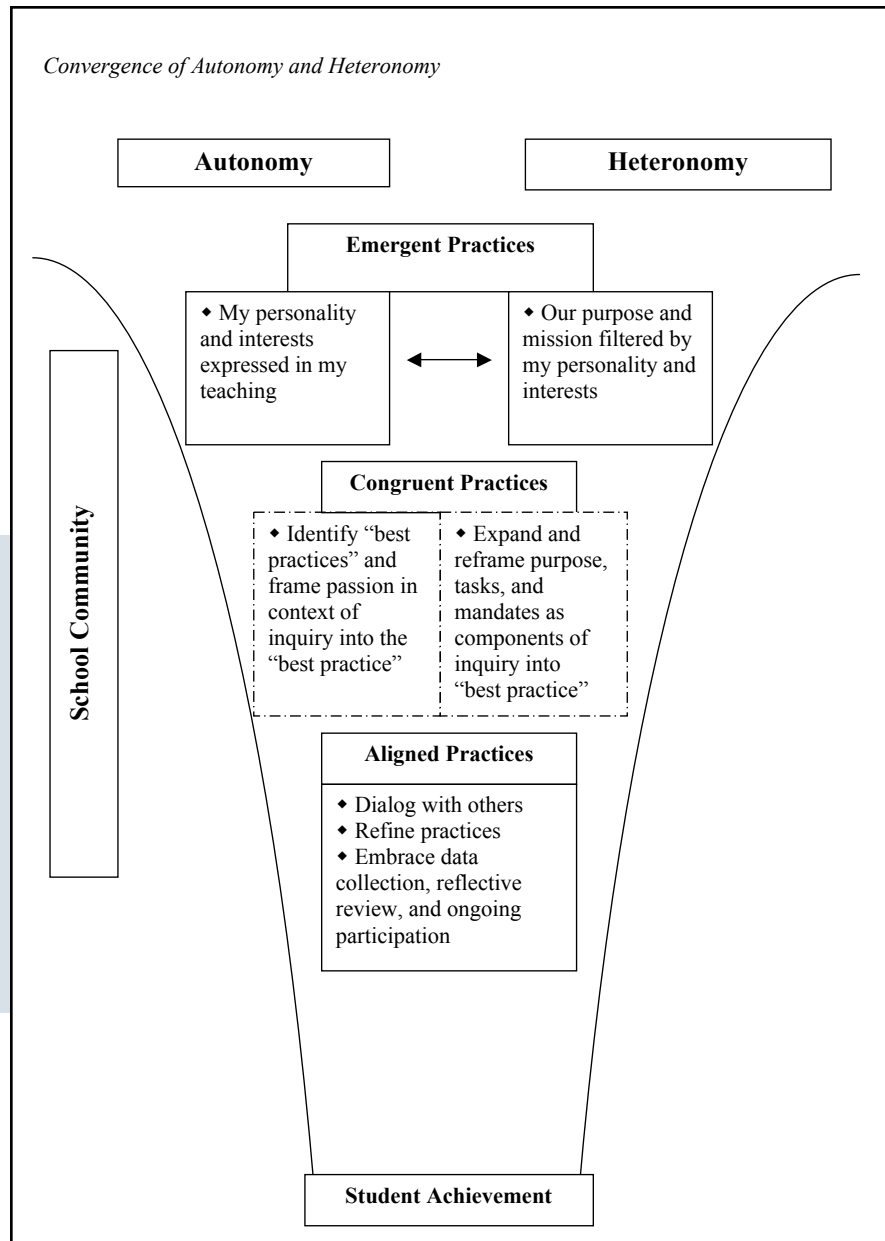
Autonomy and heteronomy in school community: an interpretation

In an age of school reform, teachers and administrators too often vie for authority over curriculum, instruction and assessment (Scribner, et al. 2002). The educators observed in this study employed a variety of practices to address this tension as described above. Figure 1 displays the converging nature of these practices with regard to the autonomy/heteronomy continuum. Emergent practices can be described as seeking an equilibrium between the autonomy of the individual and the heteronomy of the school community:

“I sometimes think that the overall fluency goal is...too high....I sometimes think they’re only looking at only that one component when there’s really a lot of other things they could be looking at.” (West Bend teacher)

Teachers found ways to balance district demands with their own preferences. While adhering to district

Figure 1



curriculum they supplemented lessons with favorite materials, used humor and creativity to enhance instruction, and modified lesson pacing.

This search for equilibrium was less evident in congruent practices where both teachers and the district were engaged in active inquiry focused on “What’s best for kids?” Tensions between autonomy and heteronomy were overshadowed by a mutual commitment

to learning, even when there were differences of opinion.

For example, in West Bend, a group of teachers began leveling math groups. “That’s not consistent with Math Destinations and the philosophy of having rich discussions between high, low, and medium kids” (West Bend teacher). Given the tensions, the principal “called the [publisher] and they chewed it around and they said they

thought it was an interesting experiment” (West Bend principal). Awaiting the results, a teacher who opposed the design said, “I’m anxious to see what comes out. If something works out, fine.”

The process of inquiry challenges, channels and connects personal passion with collective purpose. Adopted curriculum and mandated practice become the laboratory where collaborative investigation yields ongoing improvements. Through this work the congruent practices of the individual and the community move toward convergence.

Aligned practice, while present in both West Bend and Discovery, was most evident in Discovery’s fifth grade team. An example of this was seen in the team’s interdependence with the district in the development of writing curriculum:

“Although it is not [measured for adequate yearly progress] we do get tested on it. Regardless of that, we don’t feel like we have been doing a good enough job in our writing....So for our fifth grade training across the district we’ve just been working on understanding the needs of the students for the WASL.” (Discovery fifth grade teacher)

To improve the team’s expertise, one teacher sought out state training in writing. By connecting with the building and district leadership, the team was able to “influence [how the district decides]...what we’re getting trained in for literacy at the school.” This is an ongoing process as one team member describes:

“One of the things we’ve really continued to struggle in is writing and we chose to have our principal stay focused on writing and our instructional coach has been taking us through a book study of *Journals and Journeys*, and we did *Write On* last year. It’s kind of our weak point right now and so we’re trying to use the resources we have available to focus into that.” (Discovery fifth grade teacher)

In aligned practice ideas, knowledge and skills flow continuously from the teacher to the district and back again. This interdependence brings about a convergence of autonomy and heteronomy as the team focuses on a shared vision and seeks the key to unlock student achievement.

Conclusion

School improvement is the catalyst for the development of communities that support standards and eliminate the achievement gap between students. This process requires changes in teaching practices and inevitably leads to anxiety, confusion and sometimes resistance. Too often teachers and administrators engage in a competitive struggle for the authority to make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The model presented here provides an alternative to this struggle. The teachers and administrators at West Bend and Discovery Schools are learning to move away from the question of “Who will decide?” toward the question of “What shall we learn?” By refocusing differences on inquiry, these educators are developing communities committed to learning at the classroom, building and district levels. Certainly, the simple act of inquiry does not eliminate the tensions that can arise. However, a focus on inquiry facilitates transformative dialog that moves beyond debate and creates opportunity for participants to discover as yet uncharted pathways to the achievement of their students.

Dr. Millie Watkins is superintendent of Orondo School District.



References

- Elmore, R.F. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Paper prepared for the Albert Shanker Institute. Consortium for Policy in Education.
- Etzioni, A. (1996). *The new golden rule*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a theory of teacher community. *Teachers College Record*, 103, 942-1012.
- Hoyle, J. R., Bjork, L. G., Collier, V., & Glass, T. (2005). *The superintendent as CEO*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Ingersoll, R. (1994). Organizational control in secondary schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64, 150-172.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Scribner, J.P., Hager, D. R., &Warne, T. R. (2002).The paradox of professional community: Tales from two high schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38, 45-76.
- Westheimer, J. (1999). Communities and consequences: An inquiry into ideology and practice in teacher's professional work. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35, 71-105.

School-university partnerships:

Varying roles, contexts, and outcomes Janet Hart Frost, and Donald Larsen

By Tariq Akmal,

Over the last 40 years, education has seen the development of numerous partnerships between universities and schools—and, if one revisits Dewey’s

laboratory schools, an even longer tradition of partnership is evident. Whether these partnerships are referred to as *clinical schools* (Carnegie, 1986) *professional development schools* (Holmes Group, 1986), *professional practice schools* (Levine, 1992), *communities of practice* (Cobb, McClain, de Silva Lamberg, & Dean, 2003), or *professional learning communities* (Hord & Sommers, 2004), they all hold at their core goals of reformed and improved schools, teacher education, learning, and teaching. Despite research findings that illustrate varying degrees of effectiveness (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Dufour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris, & Watson, 1998; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Norman, 2006; Teitel, 2001), both schools and universities continue to work within these frameworks. Moreover, emergent research emphasizes developing school university partnerships, claiming that the benefits outweigh reverting to separate camps and efforts (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Burton & Greher, 2007; Nelson & Slavit, 2008).

The last 15 years have seen an increased focus on student achievement. In response, administrators and teachers, under the more recent pressures of meeting “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act, study and apply books on school improvement or pay for consultants. Schools are working at a frenetic pace to meet state and federal accountability demands and, while teachers are capable of initiating change and improvement, few have the time or supports necessary to do so (Nelson

& Slavit, 2008). Districts mandate professional development, but teachers often have little choice in the focus. As a result, teachers view professional development not as an “opportunity to learn” (Lambert, 2003) but as just one more job requirement.

All of these partnerships hold in common the notion of teacher leadership and inquiry, with a focus on teachers doing inquiry rather than having it done on them or with them (Nelson & Slavit, 2008). But are schools structured to do this on their own? Do higher education partners fit within these relationships? In response to these questions, this article has two purposes: (1) demonstration of the tremendous variation in the types of relationships universities and schools may have, particularly as demonstrated by the roles taken by university faculty in working with the schools; and (2) discussion of the slim likelihood that change or improvement can occur unless both partners work synergistically on “reculturing the school to develop learning communities (Fullan, 2001), even in a climate when it is fashionable to talk about “fixing” schools and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Schools and universities, working in concert, can be of mutual benefit and the nature of the relationship can have a strong influence on the effectiveness and learning of all partners (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Burton & Greher, 2007; Cobb, McClain, de Silva Lamberg, & Dean, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, anyone who has worked in these partnerships recognizes that they may take any one of a wide range of

forms and that a particular model that does not consider the contextual needs of all partners, but is instead forced onto a school, will almost certainly fail. In this article, we describe three cases that illustrate this range. Although they do not capture the full complexity of work in the schools, the cases of Skyline, Explorer, and Columbia schools (pseudonyms) illustrate the range of roles and effectiveness of the partnerships.

Three partnerships, three contexts, three outcomes

Skyline Elementary

At Skyline Elementary, a rural school with almost 50% of its students living at or below the poverty level, the desire for improvement led to its foray into professional learning communities four years ago. Although the principal was relatively new to her position, she recognized that she would need additional support to help her teachers achieve the goal of *all* students learning. She welcomed a university collaborator (UC) whose interests and expertise coincided with the school’s needs and who was able to serve as a member of the development team and guide in their improvement efforts. The UC was not only able to aid in developing teachers’ knowledge of mathematics, but also to support their inquiry into their own practice.

Over the course of the next two years, teacher teams intensively utilized time they carved out of the schedule as they examined their students’ needs, their teaching, and their own understanding of their mathematical content. Because the UC spent a great deal of time on site attending team meetings and working in classrooms alongside teachers and students, she not only had strong credibility and trust with the staff, but also an understanding of their needs. As teachers worked and struggled, developed trust in each other

and the process of learning how to help their students learn, the UC provided team-specific workshops on mathematical concepts and additional readings to help develop their knowledge. She studied and questioned data with teams, pondered how to overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers, and helped recognize and celebrate successes—however small they might have been.

For the project's three years, the school met AYP each year and earned statewide recognition, but more importantly, teachers moved beyond the AYP-only focus to recognize that, together, they could help simultaneously each other and their students learn—and learn well. The UC credited the principal and teachers for their efforts and willingness to deeply examine student data and the way these reflected their own beliefs about children and learning, their conceptual understanding of math, and their own selection of content, instruction, and assessment. The principal and teachers, likewise, averred that the guidance, knowledge, and close support of the UC “made all the difference.” Teachers reported they felt more confident in their knowledge and ability to meet students’ learning needs. As the principal added, “If I could have wished for a perfect learning experience for my teachers, this [partnership] was it.”

Explorer Middle School

At Explorer Middle School, educators grappled with serious urban-school challenges: student turnover ranged from a high of 60% to a low of 30% from year to year; 90-95% of their students were provided free and reduced price lunch; and slightly over 50% of students spoke English as their second language. In 1999, only 12% of students met the reading standard on the statewide assessment. The principal at Explorer recognized that without help, the school was destined for district and NCLB sanctions. She acknowledged

they would “welcome all the help they could get.” The university partnership offered one avenue for her to prepare and groom her own new hires, target staff development to assessed needs, and help teachers understand student data. After a “readiness-to-benefit” audit by the state-assigned “improvement coach” showed that faculty held a key core value that students’ ability to learn was not delimited by wealth, family stability, ethnicity, or primary language, the work began (Larsen & Akmal, 2005).

The principal, school leadership team, state-assigned coach, and UC worked to align curriculum, ensure that assessments and instruction were matched, examine student performance and behavior data, and procure consultants for teacher content knowledge development. Through self-study, the leadership team concluded that the inability to read and comprehend text was adversely affecting all students’ learning. A building-wide reading program was adopted and an intentional narrowing of the curriculum was employed. Although some teachers did not initially support the approach, all teachers participated and began noticing a slight change within a semester and greater changes the next year. “If the kids can read, their opportunity to learn is enhanced,” the principal surmised. Explorer’s needs were so numerous and diverse that the UC member took more of an advisory role than a content-focused one with the leadership team and principal, providing research articles and summaries on needed topics, examining student survey data for trends, observing classroom instruction to help the principal pinpoint teacher strengths and needs, and noting cultural misconceptions in observed teaching.

Though state assessment scores were very low, Explorer’s educators believed they were gradually making a difference. NCLB sanctions were unavoidable, but when the school was required to send letters to parents allowing them

to opt for another school, only 6 of the 750 students did so. Teachers were also given that choice but none took it. As the school’s teachers and students toiled, achievement scores slowly increased until, in 2005, 42% of students met the state reading standard and, in 2007, 61% met it. Most importantly, teachers now believed that, through an intentional teaching and learning process that involved both students and teachers, they could make a difference. Because of so many contributing factors entwined with increased scores, the UC’s impact was unclear, but the principal insisted it could not have been done without the partnership.

Columbia Middle School

“Columbia” Middle School, a suburban school with a quarter of its population on free and reduced price lunch, is a school with sufficient resources and a long history of academic success. However, the disaggregation of student achievement data required by *NCLB*, led teachers to the discovery that there was a strong correlation between students low-SES backgrounds, diverse ethnicity, and low academic achievement. After a self-study, the instructional leadership team identified a need for developing their students’ content reading skills and, commensurately, the teachers’ abilities to teach it. As part of a partnership grant with a university, the school asked for and received a UC partner who had a strong background in this area. Grade level teams were encouraged to consider how to best utilize the content reading text they had purchased as part of a book study; the UC member, however, was not part of this organizational structure.

Professional learning half days were scheduled in conjunction with other district learning improvement days in order to have full days of teacher development. During these times, teachers met to teach each other about the book, discuss content reading, and

consider specific strategies for implementation. The principal asked the UC to put on two separate workshops with “research- or evidence-based” teaching strategies for improving student content area reading in non-fiction texts in the fall and fiction books in the spring. As the UC later observed, “There was no follow up to those workshops. I didn’t do anything else with them relating to content reading.” The principal, observing faculty were not connecting what they were reading with the students’ learning needs, used the second year of the project to target areas surrounding content reading and diverse learners and

The role of the university collaborator

Though each school avowed the goal of school-university partnerships (e.g., working with the university to mentor and prepare pre-service teachers), within that goal each school’s contexts and outcomes varied sharply. As Fullan (2001) has indicated, making change is about “unlocking the mysteries of living organizations” (p.46), a process which is complex and time-consuming. From these three cases, it is evident that a “cookbook approach” to school-university partnerships and improved teaching and learning is ineffectual—a more con-

inquiry *process*; and (2) support for the inquiry *environment* (emphasis added, p.104).

With an integrated and trusting learning community, a willingness to examine their own beliefs and perceptions, and a strong commitment to the inquiry model, Skyline Elementary offered the most clear manifestation of Nelson and Slavit’s framework. Support for the inquiry process came from the joint efforts of the UC and teachers; support for the environment came from the principal and teachers. The elements for reculturing were clearly in place and the UC was an essential part of the process. At the other end of the spectrum, Columbia Middle was bound neither to focused inquiry processes nor to examination of their own beliefs. Collaborative emphasis on school concerns (with or without the UC) did not exist and neither the inquiry process nor the environment was supported. Although the UC provided needed workshops, the distance between workshops as well as between the UC and grade level teams, diminished their capacity for collaborative learning. Between these two extremes was Explorer Middle School, where high functioning collaboration and trust were developing, self-examination and reflection ongoing, a commitment to high quality learning and teaching growing, and the inquiry process moving from infancy to adolescence. The role of the UC here was clearly a supportive one, but less tangibly felt. In all three partnerships, the UC also benefited (with varying degrees) from new or improved relationships and proximity to and engagement in the professional development process. On a less positive note, each of these partnerships was funded by separate grants of varied duration and monies and, as is often the case when funding ends, new district priorities or structural changes quickly shifted teachers’ attention to other concerns.



requested a new UC partner for this purpose. The new UC met regularly with the principal, but never worked directly with teacher teams. Student data had been utilized as an entry into improving learning, but systematic connections to the long-term examination of classroom data beyond required state assessments did not occur. Overall, teachers reported the workshops as “useful” and “insightful” but evidence of application was limited. Columbia teachers noted a necessity for more coherent and long-term professional development. Though AYP requirements were met each year, teachers did not feel as if they had strongly benefited from either the partnership or the staff development.

textualized, nuanced, and inquiry-based approach must be utilized.

In their theoretical framework for “supported collaborative inquiry,” Nelson and Slavit (2008) point out that support for collaborative inquiry will vary based on site-specific contexts. They note three pillars to effecting change: a high-functioning, collaborative teacher community; examination of personal beliefs and perspectives in relation to high quality learning and teaching; and the ability to understand and move through an inquiry process around a common goal (p.103). Furthermore, they observe two types of support are necessary to reculturing a school into a learning community: (1) support for the teacher collaborative

Closing thoughts

Given the pressing demands of today's accountability-driven climate and the fact that most schools do not have the structures in place to provide opportunities for learning communities to develop, convening teachers to talk about their practice *may* result in benefit. The opportunity to successfully develop structures and attitudes of collaboration and inquiry, however, *will be* of benefit. Add in a university partner (or several) who can advocate for and assist in providing the supports discussed by Nelson and Slavit (2008), and everyone, from students to teachers to university collaborators, benefits. If, however, the opportunity to go further than just talk is not seized, if the partners do not actually study and learn together, thereby building capacity to improve and change (Fullan, 2005), it is an opportunity missed. Indeed, as Fullan (2001) observed, "...you can't learn this from a workshop or course. You need to learn it by doing it and getting better at it on purpose" (p.69). Within a culture of inquiry and a community commitment to learn and grow, university collaborators can support impressive change, but without that culture and commitment, little can be achieved, regardless of the role of the university partner.



Dr. Tariq T. Akmal is associate professor for the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University.



Dr. Janet Hart Frost is assistant professor for the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University.



Dr. Donald E. Larsen is assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Western Washington University.

References

- Abdal-Haqq, I. (1998). *Professional development schools: Weighing the evidence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Burton, S.L. & Greher, G.R. (2007, September/October). School-university partnerships: What do we know and why do they matter? *Arts Education Policy Review*, 109(1), 13-22.
- Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Cobb, P., McClain, K., de Silva Lamberg, T., & Dean, C. (2003). Situating teachers' instructional practices in the institutional setting of the school and district. *Educational Researcher*, 32(6), 13-24.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Dufour, R. (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: Systems thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M., Galluzzo, F., Morris, P., & Watson, N. (1998). *The rise and stall of teacher education reform*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Holmes Group. (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers*. East Lansing, MI: Author.
- Hord, S.M. & Sommers, W.A. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities: Voices from research and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Larsen, D.E. & Akmal, T.T. (2005). Intentional planning in the age of accountability: Explorer Middle School's approach. In Parkay, F.W. Ancil, E., & Hass (Eds.), *Curriculum planning: A contemporary approach*, (8th Ed.). (pp. 403-409). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Levine, M. (1992). Introduction. In Levine, M. (Ed.), *Professional practice schools: Linking teacher education and school reform* (pp. 1-7). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nelson, T. & Slavit, D. (2008, Winter). Supported teacher collaborative inquiry. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(1), 99-116.
- Norman, P.J. (2006, Winter). What to do when a PDS isn't working: Confronting the question of pulling out. *Action in Teacher Education* 27(4), 35-44.
- Teitel, L. (2001). *How professional development schools make a difference: A review of the research*. Washington, DC: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Rethinking support for school principals

By Chad Lochmiller

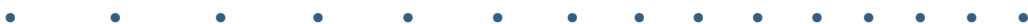
As instructional leaders, principals are essential to the success of education reform. Districts expect principals to provide support to their schools on

instructional matters, work closely with classroom teachers, monitor individual student achievement, and coordinate support and direction from central departments. At the same time, districts expect principals to attend to a host of activities related to the operation of the school system but largely unrelated to the work of teaching and learning. These activities consume principals' time, take them away from classrooms, and have been cited as a source of stress for principals (Farkas, et al., 2001). A few districts have recognized that the latter of these expectations undermines the principal's role as an instructional leader. In response, the districts have sought to increase support for principals and have started rethinking the way that principals access support from the district. Additionally, a few districts have complimented changes at the district level by also increasing support staff in schools. In theory, these individuals assume the principal's administrative responsibilities thereby freeing them to spend more time on instructional matters. Admittedly, discussing how districts provide support to principals to free them from the demands of school administration is less appealing than discussing reforms related to instruction. However, if principals are to be successful in their work as instructional leaders then understanding how districts provide support to principals on a host of issues and by what means they do so is an important consideration.

Much of the existing research on the support districts provide to principals has focused on support as it relates to instruction. This research tends to

frame other district-level expenditures as administrative waste or part of the administrative infrastructure. The investments that research views productively include: deploying of coaches or teachers on special assignment to work with schools, transforming the role of the principal's supervisor to focus more explicitly on instructional matters, or investing in robust data systems which monitor student achievement. Clearly, this support is critical and my discussion in this article should not suggest that this support is unimportant. Rather, the purpose of this discussion is to suggest that the instructional support districts provide to principals represents a fraction of the total support principals need to be successful. In reality, support for principals is a complex activity that has administrative, instructional, and supervisory dimensions. Consequently, some expenditures for administrative or supervisory support for principals may be productive as they may free principals to spend more time on instructional matters.

This article represents a modest



attempt to contribute to this discussion using the illustrative case of Centennial Public Schools. Centennial Public Schools is an urban school district that could be located in any state. I will refer to this case to frame my discussion. The discussion I present reflects research that I am conducting as part of my dissertation. This research focuses on the totality of investments that districts make in support for principals. Moreover, my analysis is considering how districts are reinventing these investments to support principals as instructional leaders. In the next section, I briefly review the existing literature. Next, I present the case of Centennial Public Schools. Finally, I describe the analytic approach that I am taking in my dissertation and the contributions that I hope it will make to the field.

Existing literature

Existing research that has looked at how districts provide support to school principals in their role as instructional leaders has framed district support as a function of instructional reform. This support is often driven by changes in the role or orientation of central office staff, which has been broadly described as central office transformation (Honig & Copland, 2008) or district-wide reform. The two most widely discussed cases of district-wide reform, New York City Community School District #2 (Elmore & Burney, 1997) and San Diego City Schools (Hightower, 2002), have fueled the perception that principals only require instructional support for education reforms to succeed. In fact, discussions related to both districts primarily focused on the support the district's provided to help principals change instructional practice in their schools. While this research reveals how important district support can be for instructional reform, it does little to describe how districts reallocate resources in order to provide administrative or supervisory support that may help principals focus on instructional issues.



The existing research on how districts use resources to support their staff has largely been confined to discussions related to district expenditures on professional development and, more specifically, spending on teacher professional development. For example, Killeen, et al. (2002) conducted a national analysis of spending on teacher professional development and found that districts spend between one and four percent of their entire budget on professional development. A limitation of this research, however, is that it is not clear how much (if any) of this spending may relate to support for school leaders. Other analyses have focused on total administrative expenditures in districts but not distinguished between productive administrative expenses (i.e., those

that support principals) and administrative expenses that are not directly related to schools or school-level activities. One notable exception is a recent discussion of administrative spending in New Jersey, which found that administrative expenditures were often productively related to improvements in teaching and learning and student achievement, a conclusion which runs counter to the prevailing view held by many in the profession (Mensah, Schoderbek, & Werner, 2006).

Within schools, the literature has explored how principals may allocate resources to support classroom teachers or to provide specific instructional opportunities for students. The research on school-level resource use generally holds that the way that resources are used ul-

timately influences student achievement more than the amount of resources available (Ladd & Hansen, 1999). Research on the ways that resources are configured within schools has affirmed that resources can be reallocated to support education reform strategies (Odden & Archibald, 2000) and that resources can often be redeployed to support reforms more productively (Miles & Frank, 2008). Concerning how districts or schools might reallocate resources to assumed administrative or supervisory responsibilities, the literature is less well populated with examples. One recent exception is the discussion of school administrative managers (or, SAMs) in Louisville, Kentucky (Holland, 2008). The district created school-based business staff with grant support to free principals to spend more time in classrooms. However, much as research on district-level expenditures has not expressly considered how districts use resources to support leaders, the school-level research has not specifically considered how principals might use resources within their buildings to support their leadership efforts, extend their leadership activities in classrooms, or redistribute administrative responsibilities to other staff.

In part, the absence of research on investments in leadership support may be explained by several factors. First, districts have historically assumed that principals have the capacity to implement reforms without additional or increased support (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2006). This has been especially true of instructional reforms and, until recently, this assumption has gone unchallenged in education practice and in the research literature. Second, districts have been primarily concerned with support for classroom teachers and thus not as concerned with increased in-service and professional support for school principals (Neville & Robinson, 2003). Third, based on the way that districts fund support for staff, school finance researchers have struggled to

identify how support activities are funded, which activities are directed for classroom teachers, and which are separately funded for school principals. In fact, school finance researchers have often referred to professional development spending as the “black box” because of the complexity associated with district approaches to funding (Miles, et al., 2004). Determining how much districts spend is complicated by the fact that districts frequently use “multiple pockets” of funding from external sources, such as Title I or Title II-A (Elmore & Burney, 1997). Finally, professional development often has hidden costs, such as collaboration time that is built into the master schedule. This support is valuable but not easily accounted for using existing data sources (Knapp, et al., 2003).

Having described the existing literature, I now discuss the illustrative case of Centennial Public Schools. Centennial is a case of a district that has intentionally reinvented how it invests in leadership support. The case accentuates how the district has shifted resources to provide greater administrative support for school principals. Following this discussion, I will then describe how I am approaching the task of analyzing investments in leadership support in my dissertation following which I will describe the contribution that I hope my research will make to the field and practice.

An illustrative case: Centennial public schools

Centennial Public Schools is located in a western state and is a large urban school district with an enrollment of approximately 24,000 students. Approximately 50 percent of the district’s students are students of color and nearly 65 percent of the district’s students qualify for Free-or-Reduced Price Lunch. On the most recent state assessment, approximately 74 percent of the district’s students met state standard in reading while 51 percent met state

standard in math. The district’s superintendent and senior administration have been in place for three years. In that time, they have embarked on a district-wide reform effort designed to bring coherence to its instructional program and address lack-luster student achievement.

The district’s reform effort is driven by a clear theory of action, which is predicated on the belief that principals are first-and-foremost instructional leaders. The theory of action states that the district will provide sufficient support to all students, teachers, principals, and schools in order to consistently meet adequately yearly progress and ensure that 85 percent of students meet state benchmarks in reading, writing, and math. The district has pursued its reform effort in phases; the first phase was focused on the support provided to school principals by the central office. The second phase predominately focused on curriculum alignment at the elementary level. The third phase will be focused on aligning instruction at the middle and high school level with state standards and newly adopted graduation requirements.

Even before the first phase of the reform began, the superintendent recognized that principals were spending far too much time on administrative matters. As one principal suggested:

I don’t think they [staff in the central office] are trying to be unhelpful, I think they are just busy... I think they have so much going on that it’s difficult to get them to focus on the things that I need for my building. For example, I was working on my staffing plan for the next school year – I’ve got a lot of teachers leaving, most are retiring – and I wanted to see who might be a fit for my building. That was three weeks ago and I still haven’t heard

1 Quotation was taken from an unpublished monograph titled, *Principals Relationships with Central Office Administrators*, prepared for a qualitative research methods course at the University of Washington in Spring 2007.

back from them. I've had similar experiences with the accountants and budget folks... they always say that they will get right back to me, but it usually takes them quite a while.¹

The superintendent recognized that the time the principals were investing in tracking down people in the central office or working on administrative projects, took time away from classroom instruction. This represented a major challenge to getting principals focused on classroom instruction and in helping the district implement its reforms.

In response, the superintendent decided to reallocate a portion of the district's budget in new services specifically designed to empower school principals as instructional leaders by centralizing administrative support. Most of these resources were acquired without additional revenue and were primarily generated by asking central office departments to cede positions to help create a centralized office to support principals. The office is led by the deputy superintendents and is staffed by support managers, who serve as the primary liaisons between school principals and other central office staff. The support managers have a host of expertise but are largely generalists. They have experience in teaching and learning, school support services, and human resources, as well as other departments such as finance, budget, and maintenance. To assume these roles, the staff redistributed their work within their departments and assumed new responsibilities, which put support for schools and principals at the heart of their daily work.

Principals access the support through the support manager. The support manager responds to specific requests from principals as well as to direct requests from the deputy superintendents. For example, a principal could contact the manager to request assistance from accounting, budget, facilities, human resources, maintenance, or transportation. The manager, if unable

to meet the request directly, would route their request to the appropriate person in the correct department who would then carry out the principal's request. In short, by creating the new office, the district has created a convenient "one-stop-shop" for principals seeking district support thus reducing the legwork that has typically been needed to access district supports.

Exploring investments in leadership support

The case of Centennial Public Schools is illustrative for two reasons. First, it illustrates how districts can rethink their current investments to provide greater support to school principals. The district increased leadership support for principals by reallocating resources within the central office and redesigning roles of staff. This approach created the resources the district needed to address one of the many challenges confronting principals and which prevented them from fully engaging in their role as instructional leaders. Second, the case reveals several of the difficulties in conducting research on leadership support. These difficulties range from establishing the definition of leadership support adopted by the district, identifying and delineating the types of support that they consider part of their leadership support efforts, as well as the complexity associated with tracking various sources of staff and resources. These challenges are magnified in my dissertation, as it focuses on the ways in which two, comparably sized urban districts (re)allocate resources to support principals.

My research utilizes a comparative case study design. The bulk of my analysis is based on financial information collected from the district's human resource and finance departments. This information illustrates how much the districts spend on leadership support and provides a mechanism for classifying the support into one of three dimensions: administrative, instruc-

tional, or supervisory. To elaborate on this data, I also draw from qualitative evidence collected through interviews with participants in each of the districts. The interviews provide a richness that quantitative data cannot provide and that is necessary for understanding the rationale that guides the district's investments. Finally, I triangulate findings from interviews and the financial information using documents generated by the districts as well as observation notes written while completing research on-site.

My analysis conceives of support as a complex activity that has dimensions related to the work of school principals. I characterize the totality of support districts provide to principals in terms of leadership support, which Knapp, et al., (2006) uses to generically describe any activity that seeks to direct, support, improve, or assess leadership practice. In addition to this generic conception, my analysis will suggest that there are different dimensions of leadership support, which can be broadly described as:

Administrative – represents support provided to principals that assists them with the operation of their schools as well as enables them to create conditions within their schools that support powerful, equitable teaching and learning. This support may be provided from the district's facilities, finance, human resources, or transportation departments. Broadly speaking, administrative support represents the "business side" of schools.

Instructional – represents support provided to principals that assists them with their work as instructional leaders. This support equips principals with information, skills, or strategies to work with classroom teachers and instructional staff to change instructional practice. This support is typically provided by the district's "teaching & learning department" and may include assistance with: assessment, curriculum, discipline, instructional technology, professional

development, or specialized programs for students.

Supervisory – represents both the direction and support the district provides to principals through their immediate supervisor. This support is less focused on classroom teachers and other staff within the school, but instead focuses explicitly on the principal's own practice. This support may include a conversation between the principal and her supervisor concerning her performance evaluation, efforts to collaboratively plan and present professional development for the staff in their school, helping the principal secure additional support from central departments by advocating on their behalf, supporting principals during conversations with the teacher's union or in difficult conversations with a parent or guardian.

Put together, these dimensions represent a constellation of staff, programs, and services dedicated to improving, directing, supporting, or assessing leadership practice within the school district which can be thought of as a leadership support system. I will use these concepts to inform my analysis of the support (and the related investments) provided to principals in the two districts I have selected for my study.

Potential contributions

Understanding how districts provide support to school principals is an important area that the field must understand if education reform is to succeed. This, it seems, is the most important contribution that my research can make - helping districts see alternative support strategies that are not readily apparent or seem impossible given existing resource constraints. Further, it is my hope that this research will show that some investments in central administrative support can be used productively to help principals be more effective instructional leaders. While this article barely scratches the surface of the important questions facing districts, it

should provide a glimpse into the type of research that I am conducting in my dissertation to provide insight into the complex understanding of the investments that districts make in leadership.

Chad Lochmiller is a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies.



References

- Elmore, R. F., & Burney, D. (1997). *School variation and systemic instructional improvement in Community School District #2, New York City*. Pittsburgh, PA: Learning Research Development Center.
- Farkas, S., Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2003). *Rolling up their sleeves: Superintendents and principals talk about what's needed to fix public schools*. New York, NY: Public Agenda.
- Hightower, A. M. (2002). *San Diego's big boom: District bureaucracy supports a culture of learning*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Holland, H. (2008). *Out of the office and into the classroom: An initiative to help principals focus on instruction*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Honig, M. I., & Copland, M. A. (2008). *Reinventing district central offices to expand student learning*. (Issue Brief). Washington, D.C.: The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement.
- Killeen, K., Monk, D., & Plecki, M. (2002). School district spending on professional development: Insights available from national data (1992-1998). *Journal of Education Finance*, 28(10), pgs. 25-49.
- Knapp, M. K., McCaffrey, T., & Swanson, J. (2003). *District support for professional learning: What research says and has yet to establish*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Knapp, M. K., Copland, M. A., Plecki, M. L., & Portin, B. P. (2006). Leadership, learning, and leadership support. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Ladd, H. F., & Hansen, J. S. (1999). *Making money matter*. Washington, D.C.: National Research Council.
- Mensah, Y. M., Schoderbek, M. P., and Werner, R. H. (2006). Estimating the value added by spending on the administrative function in public education: Evidence from New Jersey public schools. *Social Science Research Network*. Retrieved December 1, 2008 from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=899400>.
- Miles, K. H., & Frank, S. L. (2008). *The strategic school: Making the most of people, time, and money*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Miles, K. H., Odden, A., & Fermanich, M. (2004). Inside the black box of school district spending on professional development: Lessons from five urban school districts. *Journal of Education Finance*, 30(1), pgs. 1-26.
- Neville, K. S., & Robinson, C. J. (2003). *The delivery, financing, and assessment of professional development in education: Pre-service preparation and in-service training*. Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project.
- Odden, A. R., & Archibald, S. (2001). *Reallocating resources: How to boost student achievement without asking for more*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Listening to students:

The missing component in school reform

By Tammy Campbell

“Unless they [students] have some meaningful role in the enterprise, most educational change, indeed most education, will fail.” Michael Fullan (2007)

I have always wanted to earn my doctorate, but I knew I could not engage in this rigorous work until a relevant topic really spoke to me. In the district in which I work, and in districts across the nation, educators are grappling with how to increase achievement for all students and how to eliminate the achievement gap. Nowhere is this question more urgent than in our high schools. In an effort to better understand the nature of this problem from the student perspective, our building and district administrators engaged in concentrated efforts to facilitate student focus groups across the district. They inquired, from our high school students, what had worked and what had not worked

while they were learners in our schools. In the spring of 2006, after listening to a focus group of high school students from across the district share their educational experiences, I came face-to-face with the compelling and pertinent question that would drive my doctoral research—why aren't school leaders listening to students more intentionally for school improvement?

Armed with my question, I sought out research on this topic and found that the term most closely associated with my question was “student voice” and that the research in this area was fairly new and emergent. What was immediately clear in the literature was the evidence detailing the benefits to students when schools engaged the student voices for real change in teaching and learning and social justice.

Literature on student voice

What is student voice? In the literature, the meaning of student voice has shifted over time from token participation to true partnerships with educators so that students can influence what happens to them at school (Manefield et al., 2007). Student voice no longer focuses solely on student rights and empowerment, as was the case in the past, but rather focuses on the idea that “student outcomes will improve and will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping school reform” (Mitra, 2004 p.2). Consider the definitions provided by experts in the field. Cook-Sather (2002) describes student voice as authorizing the ideas and insights of young people. Fletcher (2004) defines it as the unique perspectives of

young people in schools working in partnerships with adults to plan, teach, evaluate, and lead schools. Holdsworth (2000) elaborates further that student voice “signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having a role in decisions about and implementation of educational policies and practices” (p. 355). Synthesizing the thinking of several prominent scholars in the field, for my study student voice is defined as promoting (Mitra, 2004), authorizing (Cook-Sather, 2002) and validating (Fletcher, 2004) the unique ideas and perspectives of students in order to improve schools and student learning.

Examples of efforts to promote student voice that align with this definition include student focus groups with feedback on instructional issues, students as researchers, students on school improvement teams, students attending professional development with teachers, personal expression in classroom assignments, teacher questioning that elicits voice, student-led conferencing, and student-led forums on topics that are centered directly on issues of teaching and learning.

So why would schools want to listen to students? What are the benefits to intentionally using student voice initiatives? Experts in the field have found that students who participate in meaningful voice efforts have increased motivation, leadership skills, and greater engagement in learning. According to Rudduck (2004), a leading expert on student voice, “Asking students what they think about school, and acting on their insights, is one of the most effective ways of improving education” (p. 1). Rudduck goes on to assert that when students are able to talk about teaching and learning, they develop a stronger sense of self-worth and they feel more included in the school's purpose, while teachers benefit by being able to use student insights to improve learning in the classroom. Teachers and

school leaders who engage students in student voice have access to the thinking and ideas of those most likely to know what is working and not working in terms of teaching and learning—the students. From a standpoint of best practices in teaching and learning, Delpit (1995) tells us that listening to students allows them to teach us how to teach them. What is most troubling is that those students who struggle academically or socially-emotionally all too often are students of color, second language learners, or students of poverty; the voices of these students and their communities are often muted or even silenced in most schools. Many prominent scholars identify the absence of the voices of these students in matters of schooling, particularly teaching and learning, as one of the primary contributors to the achievement gap (Noguera, 2003; Shields, 2000; & Delpit, 1995).

There is not a more common question in education than: “How do we motivate our students so they are engaged in their learning?” But what if the real question is: “How can we listen to our students to learn how to motivate and engage them in their learning?” What if, by not consulting with students and engaging them in all aspects of school improvement, we are creating disengaged students who are not achieving? It is ironic that the bottom line for schools is STUDENT PERFORMANCE, and yet students themselves have had little voice in educational practice and reform. Consider the thinking of Schor (1986, as cited in Johnston and Nicolls, 1995), “Students will resist any process that disempowers them . . . incessant teacher talk, passive instruction, mechanical drills and the denial of the subject’s importance to them.” Schor goes on to say, “Students yearn to have a voice in their own schooling (p.94).” According to Cook-Sather (2002), “Perhaps the most essential concept in education that supports the use of the student voice is the pedagogical practice

of constructivism in which students are positioned as active creators of their knowledge rather than recipients of other’s knowledge” (p. 2). Inevitably, we must listen to students because students are why schools exist (Fletcher, 2004). Cushman (2003) challenges us to listen to students because they are informants and advocates to educators on what works and what does not work in schools. Students are the producers of school outcomes; it stands to reason they would have to be involved at fundamental levels of improvement efforts (Levin, 1994). In reflecting on the ideas of researchers in the field, it is hard to understand why more schools are not elevating student voice as a strategy of best practice to improve achievement.

In the literature on voice, the most prevalent foci have been on defining student voice in terms of authentic partnerships with adults in schools and on the benefits to students. The question that persisted for me was, how do leaders implement and sustain student voice? What is the role of leaders in building a climate for student voice in schools and what are the actions of leaders who engage in this work? After searching for answers, it became evident that little research had been done on how school leaders foster a climate for voice, and out of this void emerged my inquiry.

Methods

My research involved two studies. The first and smaller study took place in the spring and early fall of 2007 when I interviewed building principals to gain a sense of how and if student voice was expressed at the high schools across our district. Based on the data from this initial study, a particular high school was identified as having a strong culture of student voice as a result of the work of the principal. Data from the study indicated that student participation at this high school included students participating in professional development

with teachers and the use of student focus groups to inform school practice. In addition, the earlier district focus group data included compelling testimonials from several students attending this high school describing their success at this particular school.

The second, larger study took place during the 2007 and 2008 school years and used action research methods. Both the principal and his administrative team were actively learning about student voice and working on how to implement initiatives at the school. As a result, instead of using a more traditional form of research, I chose action research as a methodology. According to Stringer (2007), action research is “Inquiry that is done by or with insiders in a school, but never to or on them” (p. 3). The use of action research was also a natural fit because of the transformational possibilities it offered in building the capacity of school leaders by “generating local knowledge back into the setting” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. xv) about how to enhance student voice at the school. Also, action research is based on principles of collaboration, democratic participation, and social justice and empowerment. These are the same principles that undergird meaningful student voice efforts.

The purpose of the second study was to explore how student voice was expressed at the school and to identify the role the principal played in fostering a culture of meaningful student voice. In short, did the school promote, authorize and validate the ideas and insights of young people to improve the school and student learning? Because of the collaborative nature of action research, I met frequently with the principal and administrative team to plan the design of the study, collect data, and analyze the results. Students, teachers, and administrators were interviewed for the study. In collecting data from the students at the school, I interviewed students in focus groups of no

more than three students. Because we wanted students to have an active role in the study, students were recruited from the focus groups to participate as student researchers. I trained the students on interviewing techniques and collaborated with them in revising the interview questions so they were more “student friendly.” The use of student researchers also ensured we had broad representation of student participants in the study while creating an environment where students might be more open to sharing their insights with their peers. The student researchers selected any two students of their choosing to interview, using the same questions that were asked of the focus groups. I interviewed administrators and teachers individually.

Findings

After analyzing the data from the students, teachers and administrators, it became clear that the school had a culture rich with student voice. The students in the study describe a culture wherein student voice is promoted by staff who: (a) signal they are listening to students, (b) know and care about students, (c) act on student insights with real changes in school practices and policy, and (d) ensure those changes improve the school and improve student learning. When listening to students, teachers and school administrators, their perceptions paint a picture of a principal who plays a significant role in shaping the school culture for voice at the school. Students, teachers and administrators portray a school culture where the principal and the administrative team have a vision for student voice. Acting on this vision, the principal and his team promote a personalized environment, an informal culture, teacher use of student-centered instructional strategies, shared decision-making, and a climate of respect and kindness where there is a “firstness” to students.

Upon closer examination of the culture depicted by students, it became



clear that students felt that the school staff were receptive to voice, and once the students’ insights were shared, they were taken seriously and changes ensued that improved student learning. Every student interviewed, either individually or in the focus groups, mentioned the importance of one signal in particular, “eye contact.” Students describe receiving eye contact as a critical indicator that adults were interested in hearing their voice. Other signals that adults send out to students that say they are receptive to voice are providing immediate and descriptive feedback, asking clarifying questions, and answering student questions. From the standpoint of the students, they reported they were more likely to share their insights at the school because staff interacted with them by sending out these signals that they were receptive to student voice. Students also portray a school culture in which staff at the school know and care about each individual student, where they enact real changes based on listening to student voices, and where the students recognized the changes that were implemented as improving student learning. Based on classroom assessments and overall grades, all but one of the students in the study self-reported increased academic achievement since attending the school. What was most

compelling was that the students in the study genuinely liked their school, and many of them spoke with such pride about being in a community with adults who cared about them enough to continually elevate student voice and make school a place they wanted to come to every day.

A significant finding of the study was the role the principal played in having a vision for student voice and for acting on that vision. Probably the most significant action that principal engaged in was modeling a “firstness” to students. He relocated his office to an area central to student traffic so he and his administrative team could interact with students all throughout the day in the halls. Students would routinely walk into his office to have conversations with him and he scheduled his day so he did e-mails and paperwork after school. This meant that during the school day the principal was constantly interacting with students in classrooms, in the halls, at assemblies, or in his office. A striking feature of the culture in the school was in the degree of informality and the “narrowing” of the space between adults and students. Power dynamics that tilt toward adults were minimized so that students and adults had genuine rapport with one another. The principal said that he and his administrative team modeled and expected an environment of respect and kindness, where it is always more important to be kind than right with students. Along with modeling, the principal and his administrative team brought in staff developers who provided training on the use of student-centered instruction by school staff. This supported student voice in the classroom, which allowed students to see the relevance in their learning and increase engagement and motivation.

Along with these practices, the principal led staff in creating two structures at the school which also supported student voice. The first structure

developed was student advisories in which students meet with an adult for thirty minutes a day, and it was this time that many students and teachers described as being relationship and connection building. The second structure was Peer-to-Peer, a leadership group of about 25 students who meet with the principal assistant once a month. As an example of how this group provided voice, when the school launched a professional development training, students from Peer-to-Peer attended the all-day training with teachers so they could collaborate with the teachers on how to implement the training in the classroom in a way that would engage students.

Implications

What if critical answers as to how to reform schools and fundamentally improve them lie right within the walls of the schoolhouse, within the hearts and minds of our students? In considering the larger implications for this research, the words of Cook-Sather (2002) resonate when she asks, "How long will educators continue to build and rebuild entire systems with limited success without once consulting and authorizing the voices of the stakeholders schools are designed to serve...the student" (p. 2)? For schools this means a new model for an effective school that includes students as full participants in school improvement, whereby students are being engaged as members of the school improvement team, leading research on topics of instruction, attending professional development with teachers so implementation is tailored to the real needs of students, and sharing their insights in focus groups on issues like curriculum, social justice or grading. This also means that universities and colleges need to train teachers on the use of strategies that evoke voice in the classroom while principal preparation programs need to include the presence of meaningful student voice as an important indicator of school success

and effective leadership. Finally, policy makers need to consistently convene groups of students and engage in real dialogue on all major policy decisions. These discussions need to be framed without formality so students can speak freely and tell their stories in a manner in which they are truly heard. In this environment, policies will reflect the insights and ideas of the very people who have to face both the intended and unintended consequences—the students.

References

- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31, 3-14.
- Cushman, K. (2003). *Fires in the bathroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural Conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Fletcher, A. (2004). *Meaningful student involvement: Research guide*. Olympia, Washington: Sound Out!
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. Fourth Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Herr, K. & Anderson, G.L. (2005). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Holdsworth, R. (1996). What do we mean by student participation? *Youth Studies Australia*, 15(1), 1-3. Retrieved September 8, 2007, from Academic Search Premier Web Site: <http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu>.
- Levin, B. (1994). Educational reform and the treatment of students in school. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 28(1), 88-101.
- Johnston, P.H., & Nicholls, J.G. (1995). Learning from student voices. *Theory into Practice*, 34(2), 92-100.
- Manefield, J., Collins, R., Moore, J., Mahar, S., & Warne, C. (2007). *Student voice: A historical perspective and new directions* (Paper No. 10). East Melbourne, Victoria. Office of Learning & Teaching, Department of Education.
- Mitra, D. L. (2004). The significance of students: Can increasing "student voice" in schools lead to gains in youth development? *Teachers College Record*, 106(4), 651-688.
- Noguera, P. A. (2006). How listening to students can help school to improve. *Theory into Practice*, 46(3), 205-211.
- Ruddick, J. (2004). Consulting pupils can improve learning. Press release retrieved January 7, 2007 from <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>
- Shields, C. M. (1999). Learning from students about representation, identity, and community. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 35, 106-129.
- Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action research*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dr. Tammy Campbell is an executive director for Teaching and Learning Services at Spokane Public Schools. She completed her doctoral studies at Washington State University in spring 2009.



National board certification:

By Rena Mincks

The continuation of the professional learning journey

It all began with House Bill 1209. I had been teaching in Washington State for seven years and was very interested in what a statewide system would look like

How would the teachers of Washington determine the enduring learning for the benchmark grade levels and then how would there ever be a test designed to adequately measure how effective the system was on improving student learning? Through an “opportunity” provided by my district I found myself frequently visiting the West Side of the State for discussions, trainings, and workshops. I quickly realized that my undergraduate work in assessment was lacking. I had been required to take one entire class on the topic and the professor mentioned several times that he believed this might not be an important class, as once we had our teaching jobs, we would simply have to go to the tests at the end of the required text, have the students take them and assign a grade. In talking to a professor from another University, I was encouraged to apply to the Ph.D. program and began working on a doctorate in student assessment. Acquiring a deep understanding on what it is that students need to know and what it looks like when they have mastery of this knowledge became a large focus of my studies for several years. Understanding that educators need to clearly understand what evidence is required to determine when students have met the standards has been a huge topic of many of the trainings that I have been involved in. The opportunities for discussion among fellow educators have been a great reward. Learning of the strategies that others have used to accommodate or accelerate learning for their students enriched my repertoire of strategies to use with my own students.

As a result of my doctoral studies and involvement in school reform, I became a consultant for the Commission on Student Learning, a member of the Association Assessment Cadre, a consultant for the ESD Reading Leadership Team and a member of the State Science Assessment Leadership Team. I was traveling around the state doing a variety of trainings and presentations and learning a lot.

When a fellow teacher came to me to ask if I would join her on the National Board Certification Journey, I at first told her no. I was too busy, I didn't really need that as I had just renewed my teaching certificate and would not need to renew until 2011. Then I wondered, with all of this training and teaching experience, was I good enough to prove to people outside of my state that I was a quality teacher? Could I provide the evidence necessary to demonstrate that I know what improves student learning? That is the purpose of teaching. It doesn't really matter what kind of activities or strategies I use or how well I know the standards, but rather what the students learn as a result of all the efforts I put forth. So here was an excellent opportunity to prove to myself that what I believe and practice, as well as what I discuss in the courses I teach for WSU as an adjunct professor can really make a difference in student learning.

Thus my journey began. I received a notice about Washington Education Association's Jump Start program. I went to Spokane and was so very impressed with the organization and information. It would have taken me so much time to go through the core

propositions, standards, and expectations of the four entries necessary for my portfolio without this event. Upon completion of Jump Start, I was pretty much overwhelmed. What lessons would I use? Who would video tape? Distinguished Accomplishments with evidence - what might that entail? My mind whirled. Organization was going to have to be a priority for me.

Internalizing the standards was a must. Every lesson I reviewed needed to have as many components that could possibly fit in a fifteen minute video. Taping the lessons became a comedic adventure in itself. Just as had been advised, I had a camera set up in my classroom from the beginning. Students had seen it and seen themselves perform. No novelty here. However, when I decided this tape was going to be “the one”, strange occurrences emerged. A student took it upon himself to look directly into the camera and repeatedly asked, “Mrs. Mincks do you know that the camera is on?” The lunch aide brought in the students' reminder notices and bent over right in front of the camera to signal to me that she is quietly setting the notices on the table. The student teacher filming the event decided to conference with one student about his behavior by telling him that he needed to be quiet as I was taping this to become an accomplished teacher, to which the student replied: “She isn't really a teacher now?” Yes, the best laid plans...

I was fortunate enough to become part of a cohort group where four other candidates and I met twice a month, learning and working together. We were facilitated by a knowledgeable, kind, and honest person that gave us direction, inspiration, encouragement and authentic feedback. We were a professional learning community. We read each other's papers, viewed video tapes, and read the note taking guides and scoring guides for each other's entries. We discussed how everything we

Having said all this, it is important to also remember,

did needed to be a result of knowledge of students, content, teaching strategies, learning environment, family involvement, instruction, analysis, assessment and then reflection on all of this for improvement. Although it may sound exhausting, and at times it was, it has made me a stronger, more informed teacher and my students receive a richer, more rigorous and relevant education. This all leads to an increase in motivation as my students are more interested in what is being taught because it relates to their education

I continued my journey on proving that I was an accomplished teacher. I began by reading, understanding and embracing the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. These gave me a foundation and common goals to focus my teaching habits. Just as the State Standards had defined what well prepared students should know and be able to do, the NBPT Standards describe what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. I knew that I would need to have a deep understanding of the goals and what was expected of an educator in my certification area. I took to heart the five core propositions. For the most part, practicing these was already part of my teaching routine. I am committed to students and their learning. I continue to seek knowledge on the subjects I teach and ways to teach the subjects to students. I and I alone am responsible for managing and monitoring student learning. I think systematically about my practice and learn from experiences. I enjoy being a member of a learning community. So now my task was to provide clear, convincing and consistent evidence of such to people I didn't know and would never meet.

My initial concern that during my year of candidacy the time spent on portfolio work would detract from my normal teaching routine was quickly dissipated as my focus on student learning and the process enhanced rather than detracted from my teaching. I

students don't necessarily care how much you know, but how much you care.

was able to teach to familiar topics and used strategies proven effective with my students in the past. While my teaching wasn't much different, National Board requires that you write in such a way that your professional thinking processes are made evident to the reader/scorer. In past experiences, my evaluations were about how I demonstrated my teaching with students, a live demonstration when thinking on your feet is a necessary requirement as students respond in their own unique and wonderful ways. The National Board Process requires one to think more deeply and more detailed than ever before about what you do in your classroom and about how you enhance student learning through relationships with students, families and fellow professionals, making for a broad and complete community of learners. This mega-cognitive process was essential for decision making which always centered on improving student learning. Describing, analyzing and reflecting on my teaching practices have really made me a better teacher. While I had multiple opportunities to gather theories, strategies, activities and skills that could be useful in a classroom, my National Board Journey was the first time that I was required to implement these with a written rationale for doing such and then producing evidence regarding improvement on students' learning. If for some reason the lesson was not as successful as I had hoped, the opportunity during reflection for improvement was also required.

I more deeply scrutinized the successful lessons that I had taught in the past and pulled from them why they were successful and how I could use these lessons as models for future lessons to enhance success for each student. That is one of the many benefits of going through the National Board process. Yes, the sense of accomplishment is very satisfying, the monetary bonus in Washington State is quite nice, but knowing that you are truly involved in a commu-

Dr. Rena Mincks is a 1st grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary in Pullman.



nity of learners is deeply satisfying. You are always searching for ways to help those students that are in front of you right now. They need you to be knowledgeable, not only on the subjects you teach but on the best strategies to share this knowledge, using the best practices available so they can retain the enduring knowledge, and demonstrate the knowledge in new and different settings. In other words, students need opportunities to learn, time to practice, clear and measurable targets, authentic formative and summative assessments, and celebrations when goals are attained. Not all students can reach all goals/targets. For those students that struggle due to conditions beyond their control, you need to celebrate when they make the gains towards the standards. When they already are at standard, they need carefully designed instruction that gives them opportunities to use knowledge in a situation that is new and purposeful.

Now that I am a National Board Certified Teacher, my journey doesn't end. I learned from this process that as students learn and grow, so must I and along with me, my teaching practices. I must forever look forward and anticipate the needs of the students for the next group of standards, or new discovery in brain research, or pedagogy of instruction. Having said all this, it is important to also remember, students don't necessarily care how much you know, but how much you care. I show I care, by trying to know all that I can to help them become successful citizens in today's world. I show them I care by continuing to be a life-long learner.

Trust works

By Cathy Fromme

“We will see that moral purpose, relationships, and organizational success are closely related.” (Fullan, 2001, p. 51)

Some years ago, a colleague’s phone message was: “What have you learned since last we met?” As I reflect back on that question I believe it really meant – “Have you been open to new learning opportunities?” More importantly, “Have you recognized them as opportunities?” Great leaders know the key to sustainability is learning. Whether individual, or system learning - when we stop learning – we stop growing. As this issue of *Curriculum in Context* is concerned with educators as learners, let me take this opportunity to share my learnings over the last 30 years. More specifically, what I’ve learned about trust, relationships, and being a leader.

Some 22 years ago I read William Bridges, *Making Sense of Life’s Changes: Transitions* (1980). That read marked the beginning of a long journey. For years after I continued to study organizational change and what that meant for organizations in transition; believing all along, if leaders understood the change process, they would be better equipped to facilitate the change process – when it occurred in their organizations. Over the last 22 years, I applied this change process research in opportunities to assist non-profit entities, state agencies, schools and districts in improvement. Though, after some years, it became apparent, it wasn’t just about the change process. So what was it?

Curious about the “random acts of greatness” in schools, I informally asked educators, parents and school system leaders at the building, district, regional, state and the national levels, “When you walk into a successful, high performing school what do you observe that causes

you to believe, they really get it? When you walk into a school – how do you know that a rich, strong, professional learning community exists and, that there are high expectations for both students and teachers? Or, that excellent instruction is being offered to every student, every day and in every classroom? When you walk into a school or classroom – what do you see, hear, or feel that causes you to believe that the needs of all students are being met? Likewise, when you visit a school district how do you know that they get it?”

The answer, time and time again, was that they (educators, parents and students) just know “it” when they see “it”. Responders said things like, “There are some teachers that just know how to engage their students.” “There are some principals who just know what to do and how to excite and motivate their teachers.” “You see and feel their passion and commitment right when you first step foot into the classroom.”

So, I’d ask, “What is the ‘it’?” Why do some schools have it and others don’t? What are the principal and the staff doing or saying? Can you replicate what these educators are doing? Most folks take a moment and then respond with statements such as, “They have great respect for each other and students. It’s mutual.” “They just have it.” “They care about their kids.” “It’s innate. They are excellent, competent teachers”. “They know what to do and do it. They don’t make excuses.” “They have a passion for what they do.” I was always left these conversations with the nagging question, “Can we replicate, or re-create this it, whatever it is, so that all students receive the benefits of caring relationships, safe environments and

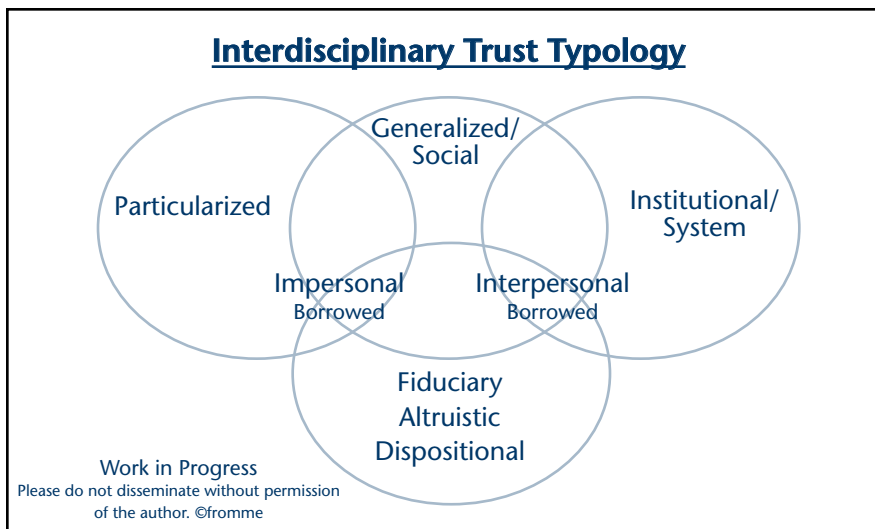
excellent instruction?”

In Summer 2002 I entered the doctoral program at the University of Washington. That Fall I read Bryk and Schneider’s (2002) *Trust in Schools*. These researchers examined the role of social relationships in schools and its impact on student achievement. They found that schools with strong levels of trust at the outset of reforms had a 1 in 2 chance of making significant improvements in math and reading while those with weak relationships had a 1 in 7 chance of making gains. My learning journey had just taken a sharp turn.

Based on Bryk and Schneider’s (2002) study, and similar research by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) and Tschannen-Moran (2004), as well as other research and scholarly writings on trust and social capital, I engaged in a conceptual study of trust. A basic premise of the research was, and still remains to this day: trust in schools - matters (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004) just as is the case for trust in society (Barber, 1983; 2000; Fukuyama, 1995; Gambetta, 1988; Locke, 1954; Luhmann, 1979; McKnight & Chervany, 1996; Scott, 2001; Warren 2001). Trust in schools, like trust in society, is, “a kind of all purpose social glue” (Scott, 2001) and “as fundamental as getting up in the morning” (Locke, 1954; Luhmann, 1979). Trust is the underlying feature, although not articulated as such, that my informal conversations with parents, students and educators, were suggesting when they said, “They just have it.”

The focus of my research was to examine various ways to conceive of and understand trust in organizational settings (more specifically in schools). I posed an argument for the types of trust most productive to create a positive environment. I asked back then, and continue to ask:

Figure 1



- What are the conditions for establishing trust in schools? (Though, I no longer limit the research to schools.)
- What are the implications of this conceptual understanding of trust for educators and school system leaders?
- What is the nature of trust and how can it be developed?

Trust, like love – is an abstract, multifaceted construct. It is situation and person specific. Yet, at the same time there are some defining consistencies in the research. Trust involves some risk and vulnerability. It is relationship based and each party has beliefs or expectations that each will act in certain ways. As well, each party maintains an understanding of his or her role(s) in that relationship.

There is a never ending well of organizational, philosophical and social literature on trust. To narrow the work, I focused on:

- Organizational literature: relating trust to cost controls and profit maximization.
- Trust in society: examining trust as a social base with social consequences.
- Democracy and trust: for representation, resistance and alternative forms of government.

After two years of being deeply immersed in the literature, the Interdisciplinary Trust Typology (Fromme, 2005) was born. A typology allows for a number of different ways to look at the same concept as well as ways to interrelate the different meanings of that concept. The Interdisciplinary Trust Typology describes trust as a multidimensional construct. The Typology provides educators and leaders a framework to determine which trust types they might initiate efforts in to rebuild trust in their schools and organizations.

While this article does not include a full discussion of the trust types, it is my contention that each of these trust types are necessary to sustaining trust in schools and organizations. They overlap in practice and relate in nature to each other, thus the Venn diagram. Figure 2 provides a short description of the trust types in the Typology.

Figure 2

Trust type	Description
Particularized	Group bonds that are exclusive of others (Uslaner, 2001,); one identifies with and trusts <i>particular</i> individuals
Institutional	Believing the needed conditions (rules, regulations, contracts, licensure, etc) are in place to enable one to anticipate a successful outcome in an endeavor or aspect of one’s life... (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 4).
Fiduciary	The expectation that some others in our social relationships have moral obligations and responsibility to demonstrate a special concern for other’s interests above their own. (Barber, 1983, p. 14).
Altruistic	One trusts the other <u>more than is warranted</u> by the available evidence, <i>as a gift, for the good of both</i> [italics added] the other and the community. (Mansbridge, 2001, p. 290).
Dispositional	“ A person has Dispositional Trust to the extent that s/he has a consistent tendency to trust across a broad spectrum of situations and persons” (McKnight and Chervany 1996, p. 28).
Generalized	“A general sense of trust in the other members of one’s society. ...Its most important features are that it is interpersonal in nature, generalized across members of a group, and not tied to the reputation of particular individuals” (Knight, 2001, p. 354).

About a year and a half into the research, a colleague suggested that I share the typology at conferences. To my great amazement, my sessions were packed with educators who actively dialogued around the Trust Typology. They had lots to say about trust, and they wanted to know “how”.

During this time, I was also consulting with schools, districts and organizations on “trust”. Parallel to my conceptual, literature-based journey on the nature of trust, I had the great opportunity to be in schools and organizations applying and making real the research. As it turns out, the questions and dialogue from the numerous presentations as well as my work with various organizations, schools and districts that year and a half, turned a conceptual study into applied research. It was a fascinating journey!

As has oftentimes been the experience with qualitative inquiry, the question with which the researchers started out may prove not quite the right direction to have been heading, given what is inductively learned about the phenomenon as it is explored (Swanson-Kauffman, 1986b; Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988). In other words, where qualitative inquiry often takes investigators is not where they thought they were heading – rather, it is where the phenomenon examined takes them. Hence realizing the findings takes pragmatic precedence over questions (Swanson 1999, pp. 32-33).

Sometimes in the process of research, we find more than we bargained for. Such was the case in my research. Almost every school, district and organization I worked in, shared one of the following: “We have no trust.” “We need to build trust.” People wanted to know how to build or repair trust. The applied nature of the research forced me to take note of Swanson’s “pragmatic precedence.” The challenge then, and today still is, how to make concrete an abstract construct for individuals and

organizations that want to improve relationships. In theory, the trust work seems so simple and understandable. Yet, in practice trust has proven to be difficult to build and sustain. The notion of trust attributes (i.e. dimensions, facets, etc.) became a necessary addition to my discussion of trust in schools. While the Interdisciplinary Trust Typology provides a framework to examine the trust types, the trust “attributes” speak to the how of it all.

Mishra (1996) seems to have initiated this concept of trust attributes (he

Figure 3 illustrates the consistency of the notion of trust attributes across the literature, with the most extensive work completed by McKnight and Chervany (1996, 2001).

From the organizational and trust literature, I defined and provided actions that are demonstrative (Fromme, 2005) of the five most common trust dimensions identified by McKnight and Chervany, (1996, 2001).

While this article does not provide an in-depth discussion of the attributes, in a nutshell, here is the big aha: “The

Figure 3: Trust Attributes

Mishra (1992, 1996)	McKnight & Chervany (1996, 2001)	Hoy & Tschannen – Moran (1999, 2003)	Bryk & Schneider (2002)	Tschannen – Moran (2003, 2004)
Competent	Competence	Competence	Competence	Competence
Open		Openness	Respect	Openness
Concerned	Benevolence/ Caring	Benevolence	Personal Regard	Benevolence
Reliable	Predictability	Reliability		Reliability
	Honesty/ Integrity	Honesty	Personal Integrity	Honesty

refers to them as “dimensions”). Other examinations of the trust attributes used Mishra’s original trust dimensions by the same or different labels. McKnight and Chervany (1996), referred to them as attributes and then, in 2001, as characteristics. As well, they confirmed Mishra’s trust dimensions with their extensive literature and rater review. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (1999, 2003) and Tschannen-Moran (2004) refer to them as facets. Tschannen-Moran (2004, p.17) used these facets to define trust as, “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent” (Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2000).

Power of Context says that what really matters is the little things” (Gladwell, 2000, p. 150). And, the little things you do to demonstrate these attributes on a daily basis are the key to building trust.

Make no mistake, while these attributes are manifested by simple, concrete actions, (the little things), implementation and sustainability require commitment, vulnerability, and a willingness to change behavior and demonstrate genuine, trustworthy actions and words consistently over time. The learning is not in the understanding of these attributes (knowing). The real learning is in changing old behaviors and learning new behaviors (doing) and then, dem-

onstrating them on a daily basis (being).

Fullan (2001) notes that change is a “sociopolitical process” and that:

It is possible to be crystal clear about what one wants and be totally inept at achieving it. Or to be skilled at managing change but empty-headed about which changes are most needed. To make matters more difficult, we often do not know what we want, or do not know the actual consequences of a particular direction, until we try to get there. (p. 8)

What was apparent in my research, work with schools, and my own daily work, was that Fullan’s observations

conferences and keynote presentations as the “expert on trust”. That would imply to me that I am expert at demonstrating trust. The truth of the matter is that in spite of an immense knowledge about trust, and being intentional about my behavior on a daily basis - some days, I go home feeling like I have totally missed the boat.

Often, I reflect back on the day and review the trust attributes. Could I have been more transparent in my communication (openness)? Did I make data driven (honesty) decisions? Did I complete the tasks at hand and follow-up on requests from my colleagues

about me” emotion out of decisions while at the same time acknowledging that education is a human endeavor that requires relationships and daily collaborative efforts. Education is a system, which has its best results (student learning) when relationships are healthy and strong. Let me be vulnerable again... I find it difficult at best to demonstrate altruistic trust- when, I’ve had a long day or week, am inundated with admin-istrivia, or, when my colleague(s) is still in the “all about me” mode. Sometimes getting beyond one’s self and putting the needs of those in your stead ahead of your own needs is the only way to get past – the past.

As leaders, our constituency (students, parents, teachers, our communities) trust us to focus on student learning, to be equitable and create systems that delineate clear and transparent decision-making processes, and to communicate openly about all decisions. Vulnerability, consistency, transparency, being true to what’s in the best interest of ALL students and the teachers we serve – are not always easy tasks. However, we have a moral, fiduciary obligation to trust, however fragile and tentative it may be, because the “absence of trust paralyzes collective action, democratic or otherwise” (Warren, 2001, p. 17).

What have I learned, and continue to learn over the years? Well, the learning never ends. Being a great instructional leader is more than knowing about good instruction. It is more than managing a budget and knowing about reform efforts, or the latest standards or content. It is about relationships. It is about being human. Every day is another great opportunity to be human and learn from our colleagues. The question is, are we open to the possibilities?



about change, held true for trust. “It is possible to be crystal clear about what one wants and be totally inept at achieving it.” Ouch, a brutal fact. Here’s the deal folks, we are all human. With that humanness – we bring to every relationship, among other things, emotion, ownership and life experiences, and a fear of what being vulnerable may bring our way. Trust requires vulnerability -another brutal fact.

Let me now demonstrate vulnerability. I trust you, the reader, to know that I’m not as expert at this trust stuff as I’d like to believe. Knowing, doing and being are all different points on the continuum. I have been humbled on numerous occasions when introduced at

(competence and reliability)? Could I have demonstrated more patience and caring (benevolence and caring) when “building capacity” with a less than competent staff person? Could I have been a better listener? Did I listen with curiosity? Did I honor staff time and efforts?

The best interests of ALL students are better served when we are vulnerable and demonstrate altruistic trust. Altruistic trust requires that we let go of any distrust of our colleague(s) and trust as a gift for the good of the whole. “Systems of trust work better when members in the system adopt a moral stance of trust (Mansbridge, 2001).

Leadership requires taking the “all

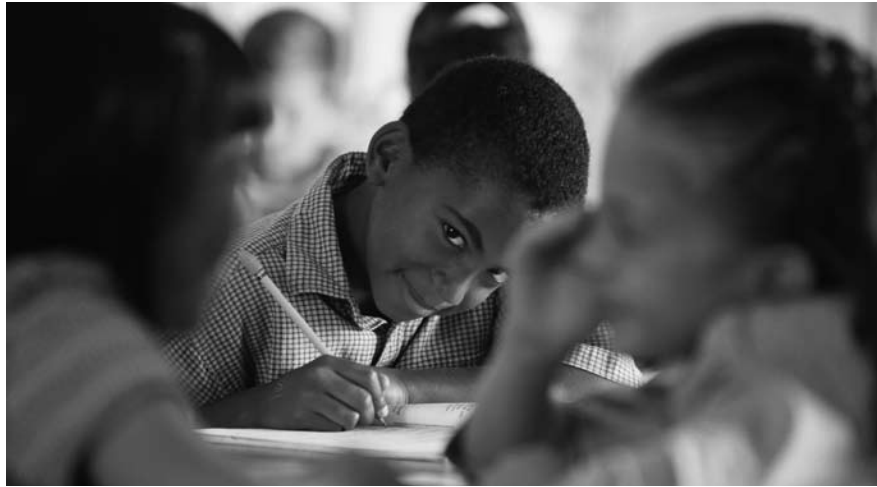
Make no mistake, while these [trust] attributes are manifested by simple, concrete actions (the little things), implementation and sustainability require commitment, vulnerability, and a willingness to change behavior and demonstrate genuine, trustworthy actions and words consistently over time.

Dr. Cathy Fromme is executive director of Teaching and Learning for the Yakima School District.

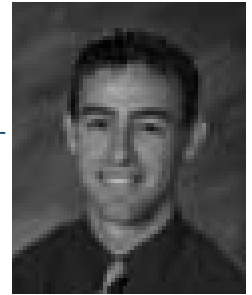


References

- Barber, B. (1983). *The logic and limits of trust*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bridges, W. (1980). *Making Sense of Life's Changes: Transitions*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Bryk, A., Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Sage.
- Fromme, C. (2005). An Examination of Various Types of Trust through an Interdisciplinary Trust Typology and the Implications of these Trust Types for Educators and School System Leaders. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gambetta, D. (1988). Can we trust trust? In D. Gambetta (Ed), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations* (pp. 49-72). New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. Boston: Back Bay Books.
- Hoy, W.K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five facets of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 9, 184-208.
- Hoy, W.K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of faculty trust in schools: The Omnibus T-Scale. In W.K. Hoy & C.G. Miskel (Eds.), *Studies in leading and organizing schools* (pp. 181-208). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Knight, J. (2001). Social norms and the rule of law: Fostering trust in a socially diverse society. In K. Cook (Ed.), *Trust in society* (pp. 354-373). New York: Sage.
- Locke, J. (1954). *Essays on the law of nature*. W. von Leyden (Ed.) Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1979). *Trust and power*. Chichester, England: New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Mansbridge, J. J. (2001). Altruistic trust. In M. Warren. (Ed.), *Democracy and trust* (pp. 290-309). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- McKnight, D.H. & Chervany, N. L. (1996). *The meaning of trust*. University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management.
- McKnight, D.H. & Chervany, N. L. (2001). *Conceptualizing trust: A typology and e-commerce customer relationship model*. Proceedings of the 34th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management.
- Mishra, A. K. (1996). Organizational responses to crisis: The centrality of trust. In R. Kramer & T. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in organizations* (pp. 261-287). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, J.C. (2001). In M. Warren. (Ed.), *Democracy and trust*. (pp. 273-283). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Swanson, K. M. (1999). What is known about caring in nursing science: A literary meta-analysis. In A. S. Hinshaw, S. L. Feetham & J. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of clinical nursing research* (pp. 31-60). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2004). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Uslaner, E. M. (2001). In M. Warren. (Ed.), *Democracy and trust* (pp. 121-150). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Warren, M. (2001). *Democracy and trust*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.



Luke Thomas is a teacher at Mt. Spokane High School in Mead, and interim co-director for professional certification at Whitworth University.



proach to the profession. More than five years removed from going through the process, I still look each day for evidence in student voice that each child understood the learning target for the day and can assess his/her ability to demonstrate the skill or an understanding of the particular content. The reticent learners are more actively involved in the discussion because they are familiar with the instructional practice and engagement structures and fully understand the purpose behind the activities for each class session. Student ownership in the learning remains extremely strong, which eliminates traditional impediments and barriers to academic and intellectual success. Furthermore, the students are engaging in meaningful reflection that promotes responsibility and models the skills they will need in the future. With practice, reflection no longer is a term used in the classroom discussion but a meaningful process in which students automatically engage to elevate understanding and articulate comprehension. This in no way minimizes the dissemination of content in my classroom. For example, my students still must articulate the factors that contributed to the formation of

the monolithic nation-states in Western Civilization. However, the students are regularly analyzing material and engaging in reflective practices that draw on information in a meaningful way that demonstrate significant learning for all individuals in my class.

Learning in my classroom occurs for all parties involved in education. I never adhered to the philosophy that I would be the “sage on the stage.” However, by modeling for my students reflective practice and encouraging its development each day in my class, I truly feel that my students are being actively prepared for their futures. In Friedman’s *Flat World*, our global economy and increasingly diverse society, where our students are challenged to compete with others from around the world while adapting to changing technologies, indeed lifelong learning is essential for everyone. Consequently, our class works diligently and intentionally, as a learning community functioning academically at a very high level and the teacher is as much a beneficiary of each day as are all of the students. Reflection enhances the experience for all of us!

References

- Hager, H., Burn, K., Mutton, T., & Brindley, S. (2008). Practice makes perfect? Learning to learn as a teacher. *Oxford Review of Education*, 34(2), 159.
- Kniffel, L. (2008). Vigilant lifelong learning. *American Libraries*, 39(9), 4.
- Leight, M. (2008). *Converge*, 3(12), 11.

A message from the president

It is with some chagrin that I reflect back to my undergraduate years and my naivety about my own education and career planning. While I have never

regretted a decision to pursue a political science degree and a teaching certificate so that I could follow my passion for teaching and working with young people, I do feel remorse that some of my thinking at that time was less than insightful about the significance of the profound choice I was making in choosing education as my profession. While it was with passion and commitment that I chose to become a teacher, at the time I remember thinking that once I became a teacher, I might then be “finished with my *own* education.” More than three decades hence, I am stunned as a lifelong educator that I could have imagined my learning might ever be “done.” By definition that could not have been, nor has it been, further from the truth.

Like many who begin as teachers at a ripe age of 22, I left the university with what I thought was sufficient content knowledge to teach social studies to high school students. In retrospect the stark truth was I still had much to learn about the content I wanted to help my students learn, and even more to learn about *how* people learn and about effective instructional strategies and practices which would help them do so. Assuredly, I did not see this reality as clearly in the late 1970’s as I do today. I was young enough then to think I knew it all, or could pretty easily learn anything I might be missing.

Along my journey I have benefited from opportunities to work with young people of varied backgrounds, abilities, and interests, and from working with a diversity of fellow educators. Among the latter, I have valued most those

who view their lives and career from the expanse of a large front windshield, and have tried to limit the impact of those whose view comes mostly from a rearview mirror. I have found that colleagues who continually look ahead deeply understand that learning *never* ends – and cannot and should not – because the world we share is ever changing. This isn’t to say that learning from the past is not valued, yet reminiscing about what was is not always helpful in affecting what can and should be.

I am awed and inspired by fellow educators and students alike who seek and pursue continued opportunities to learn with real enthusiasm. They model that one need never be too long in the tooth to learn new things and apply what is learned to improve their own knowledge and lives, those they serve, and the planet we inhabit. I have also greatly benefited from countless professional development opportunities and training, as well as from continuing my own graduate education throughout my career.

While I sometimes lament that I now carry an AARP card yet am still striving to finally finish a doctoral dissertation, I also see the advantages with which I have been blessed to remain active in graduate education throughout three decades as an educator. Such a reality has allowed me to remain connected with current research and ongoing learning that permeates the academic community, as well as to derive the advantage of learning alongside colleagues and with professors who embody a commitment to learning new or improved practices which impact all

Mike Dunn is superintendent at Educational Service District 101, president of WSASCD, and a doctoral candidate at Washington State University.



students and the tomorrows we all hope to share.

When I peek through my own rearview mirror I have fond memories of students and colleagues with whom I have worked, and of illuminating experiences I’ve had – and probably even a few “war stories” which could be told. Mostly, however, such a rearward glance demonstrates how significantly things have changed in education – and in the world – over the course of my career; and causes reflection about just how much I have had to learn, that I have still to learn, in order to maintain the focus on the changing panorama the front windshield provides.

Those of us affiliated with Washington State ASCD, and with International ASCD, acknowledge and embrace the importance of continuing our own learning, and are bolstered by the opportunity to walk side by side with like-minded colleagues. From them, and from the professional development providers and university professors through whom our content and pedagogical knowledge is constantly developed, we are reminded that while we have pursued careers as educators, we were first and must always be learners. Unlike the naïve, somewhat impatient, and falsely knowledgeable 22 year old I once was, I am old enough now to recognize just how much I don’t know; how very much I will *always* have to learn if I hope to be an *educated* educator and make a genuine difference in the lives of the young people I am privileged to serve.

Curriculum in Context

Joan Kingrey, Editor
Washington State University Spokane
PO Box 1495
Spokane, WA 99210-1495



ARE YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES serving K-12 students in creative ways? Can you shed light on legislative trends that might benefit educators across the state? Can you illustrate recent educational research claims through stories from schools and classrooms on the front lines? If so, consider taking some time to clearly and persuasively contribute to the intellectual life of the WSASCD community.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Fall/Winter 2009— May 1, 2009

Spring/Summer 2010 — December 1, 2009