READINGS:

MAKING EACH SCHOOL A RELIABLE ENGINE FOR
CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT OF
HIGH-EXPERTISE TEACHING

Learning Forward
Washington D.C.
December 5, 2015

Dr. Jon Saphier
Founder and President
Research for Better Teaching
Saphier@RBTeach.com
How Coaches Can Maximize Student Learning

Heeding the roles and relationships of coaches enhances the likelihood that they will be able to influence school culture, professional learning, and, ultimately, student achievement.

By Jon Saphier and Lucy West

Schools throughout the nation are hiring “coaches” and deploying them in schools in a multitude of ways that may not improve instruction and that rarely affect student learning.

Regardless of the title given to the coach — instructional support specialist, mathematics or literacy resource teachers, curriculum specialists, etc. — this person performs many duties in the school, ranging from presenting demonstration lessons, distributing test prep and other materials, handling lunch and bus duty, assisting the principal, entering data from test scores and analyzing these scores, working with small groups of students who are failing, and buoying up the practice of ineffective teachers by teaching for them regularly or occasionally.

So, exactly what is the role of a coach? What, if any, of these activities will actually affect student learning and improve teaching practices?

The strategy of employing coaches to upgrade teaching and learning can be a powerful one when the purpose and role of the coach have been carefully defined and systematically implemented. But this is a rare occurrence in the hectic world of districts and schools. We propose a definition for a school-based instructional coach who can be key to improving instruction, which is the critical lever for improving student learning.

The job of a school-based instructional coach is to raise the quality of the teaching and learning in every classroom in the school by building a culture in which:

• Teaching is public and itself the focus of study among professionals;
• Planning for instruction is thorough and collaborative and digs deeply into the content; and
• Conversation and questions about improving student results among teachers are constant, evidence-based, and nondefensive.

When building a dynamic learning culture is the focus, schools get better achievement for students (Hall and Hord 2006).

This outcome can’t be accomplished by one-on-one coaching alone, though that is a part of it, and not by the coach as a solo agent. But the coach is in the pivotal position to build the norms above be-
cause the coach holds the only position designed to have constant contact and classroom access to every teacher in the building and to have a primary focus on improving instruction to improve learning.

Although the principal’s role as instructional leader also carries this mandate, the principal also wears other hats and is responsible for formally evaluating teacher performance. The evaluative role can sometimes short-circuit the learning aspect of observation and feedback. Therefore, the coach is the primary (and only) role in the present system designed specifically to improve instruction by working side by side with teachers on all aspects of the instructional core.

Building-based coaches and other teacher leaders working in skillful and negotiated relationship with principals are the fulcrum for building this culture. The culture, in turn, is the soil in which seeds are planted in order to improve teaching and learning for both adults and students.

DEFINING COACHING

Coaching is more than just a role with a job description that one person carries out in a school. Coaching is a strategic, systemic approach to improving student learning that has these purposes and practices:

- Coaches and teachers engage in public teaching in front of one another, with the expectation and practice of giving and receiving rigorous feedback aimed at improving student learning.
- Staff members regularly consult and ask each other for help.
- Staff meet in regular groups to discuss how to improve instruction of specific concepts and skills in their curriculum as evidenced in student learning. They do so with honesty and nondefensive self-examination, inquiring into their practices and preferences to study the effect they have on students.
- Questions related to practice permeate adult discourse, and they are authentic questions centering on the most tenacious and ubiquitous issues of teaching and learning. Thus the culture is characterized by inquiry and dialogue (for example, how do we improve student learning while focusing on improving test scores and implementing pacing calendars and other policies that seem out of alignment?).
- Staff members use daily and weekly formative data about student learning (as well as larger interim assessments) to do error analysis, design reteaching, and focus instruction on student needs.

The “coach” is not the only person working to make all this a reality, though the primary purpose of the coach’s role is to focus on creating that reality. The whole role — its activities, the coach’s schedule, the connections, and the working relationship with other adults (especially the principal) — are all aimed at cultivating these elements of adult culture and instructional practice.

BUILD FROM STRENGTH

The instructional experts/coaches should build from strength, starting with the strongest teachers in their assigned buildings and using their rooms as sites for building the culture of public teaching and joint inquiry into teaching practices. These lead teachers are also a tacit farm team for future coaches. They are the next tier of capacity builders in the system. If the coach focuses on teachers whose practice is close to where the district is heading and brings these teachers into collaboration, as well as deepens their capacity to articulate their pedagogical moves and strengthens their lesson designing habits, then this first round of lead teachers can be partnered with other faculty members, and the coaching strategy becomes one of “peer coaching.” The instructional coach can work with a new crop of teachers in year two, and the teacher leaders can continue their work and double its impact by sharing their practice with one other teacher. This is a capacity-building process that grows exponentially, requiring about three or four years to get every teacher fully engaged with new instructional practices. Three or four years may sound like an eternity, but in fact, most districts begin new programs every couple of years with little or no success from the previous programs. When coupled with systems thinking, coaching is a strategy that can lead to sustainable improvement across a school or district.

The coach needs a few teachers who can be allies to orchestrate these activities. When we start from strength, we find teachers who are open and willing to have others view and critique their teaching and walk the talk of learners. These pioneers will be demonstration teachers not necessarily of exemplary teaching, but they will be exemplars of nondefensive self-examination of their practice in relation to evidence of student learning. Once a few people begin to take a risk and find it valuable, then teachers who are hesitant about all of this “professional culture stuff” will be more likely to participate in a productive planning and debriefing cycle hosted in the room of a lead teacher.

Schools err when they focus coaching on the weakest teachers and ask coaches to “fix” these teachers’ practice. Schools should not ignore teachers with
Coaches should start their work with the strongest teachers in the school, not the weakest.

**INDIVIDUAL PLANNING CONFERENCES**

Coaches should spend a good deal of their time in planning conferences with teachers as a priority over observation and feedback conferences. Especially during the early days of building a coaching relationship, planning conferences offer more potential for improving instruction. Many teaching problems begin when teachers don’t anticipate student confusions, can’t figure out how to scaffold needed prior knowledge, and don’t carefully think out experiences that would allow students to access new knowledge. In other words, many teaching problems begin with inadequate and unskilled planning (Saphier, Haley, and Gower 2008).

Collaborative planning sessions are more likely to ensure that lessons presented to students will center on important concepts related to the academic area. In these planning conferences, the coach encourages the teacher to take an analytical stance toward the written curriculum and empowers the teacher to actively engage with the curriculum — from teaching as mechanically implementing curriculum to teaching as mindfully using curriculum (West and Staub 2003: 5).

**GROUP PLANNING MEETINGS**

Teachers must have substantial time for collaborative planning at least every week. This means the school needs to provide common preparation periods of at least one hour for teachers in one content area or one grade. This time allows teachers to meet with the coach and dive into mindful planning of lessons that can be worked on across the grade. The planning needs to address issues mentioned above in the individual planning sessions and differences in beliefs and practices among teachers. The coach leads the planning and debating of lesson designs and instructional strategies by groups of teachers and weighs in when differences arise. These discussions should be guided by some tool or set of tools that encourage people to stay focused on the important variables that must be considered to ensure robust lesson design.

In order for all of these activities to occur regularly and professionally, the coach must rely on and assist the principal and her designees in creating a schedule that provides the necessary talk times. The coach also needs a principal who gives the clear message that she values this work.

**PUBLIC TEACHING**

Coaches should start their work with the strongest teachers in the school, not the weakest. The coach organizes public teaching and critiques for the improvement of teaching and learning by identifying “lead teachers” for the content area. These lead teachers host collaboration classrooms — not “model” classrooms — in which they nondefensively demonstrate risk taking, public teaching, and self-examination of their own practice. These events can happen a couple of times a year in small groups, or the coach and lead teachers can include individual teachers as needed in a planning, teaching, reflection cycle throughout the year. Eventually, all classes should be open to adult visitation and reflection. Getting to this point depends on the culture of the school when the coaching strategy was implemented. It may take three to five years before all teachers are fully participating in all aspects of professional learning in this public way, but getting there is vital.

The practice of “public teaching” combined with common planning includes two of the threads of what is commonly referred to as lesson study. The coach organizes study lesson cycles for groups of teachers as soon as possible; sometimes, the coach teaches a co-created lesson (a good way to break the ice and gain credibility) with everyone watching. Then everyone examines evidence of student learning. Finally, together they decide what and how to reteach which students and perhaps which pedagogical practices they want to try in their own classes.

**COACH AND THE PRINCIPAL**

The principal and the coach together in each building and the relationship they have with one another are the main catalysts for improving teaching in the building. We make this claim because they are the people who have the most interaction directly with the teachers — all the teachers. The coach should have a partner relationship with the principal in which they:

- Observe classes together often so as to build a common image of good teaching and learning and share both their process and evolving vision with the whole staff.
• Observe classes together so the coach can teach the principal explicitly what good instruction looks and sounds like in the coach’s specialty area if the principal is less familiar with that content.
• Make an initial plan for where to begin, with which teachers, and in what formats, giving thought to how the principal will introduce the coach to the staff and how teachers might be engaged in the work.
• Meet weekly to compare notes on individual teachers and on instructional improvement efforts in the building.

COACH AND THE DISTRICT

The coach should report to a district curriculum director, not the building principal, and be assigned to one large school or two to three small schools. Coaching is a strategy to improve schools across the district, not just to develop a few model classrooms or a lighthouse school. While lab classrooms or schools might be an initial strategy for deploying coaches, developing model classrooms should not be an end in itself. Systems often get stuck at this plateau of improvement. When district leaders understand that the long-term goal is coherence and sustainable improvement across the district, then they will engage coaches and principals in dialogue about the big picture.

District leadership can provide time and resources for coaches to become a high-powered team with one another, sharing a common vision and mutual purpose. Simultaneously, the district leadership needs to engage principals in the same dialogue and then set the stage for coaches to interact with principals in new and powerful ways that blur the lines of authority and put the focus on teaching and learning.

What we’ve done in some larger districts is to form a team of all of the coaches from the different geographic zones, sometimes in just one content area and sometimes across content areas. The coaching team then works together to strengthen the skills of all coaches, to build coherent images of effective instruction, and to collaboratively determine what constitutes evidence of student learning. When a coaching team has consistent leadership, a coherent definition and role can evolve that benefits the whole system. Principals must be part of the conversation about the role of coaches and the most productive relationship between principals and coaches. This can be accomplished by having principals and coaches meet during regularly scheduled principal meetings to ensure that there are feedback loops that allow the
emerging promising practices of coaches in one building to spread to other schools.

The job description, hiring criteria, and hiring process for the coach should emphasize the partnership described above and these values:

- Inquiry;
- Deep collaboration;
- Collective responsibility for student learning;
- Teacher as decision maker;
- Curriculum as a tool for good instruction, not as a prescription for instruction;
- Continual adult learning; and
- Adult norms of dialogue and debate at the same time as sharing and mutual support.

When coaches report to the district, the district can also specify what coaches cannot do. For example, principals often want assistance and are generally short staffed. When the role of the coach is evolving in a district, and when the coach reports to the principal, the principal has a great deal of latitude in how to employ the coach. In many instances, coaches can be found doing lunch or bus duty, working with only the most unskilled teachers, and doing administrative tasks, and they are often given virtually no time to plan with teachers and prepare for working with teachers. Often, principals are unclear how to best use a coach’s services and end up using this precious and expensive resource in ways that don’t yield much gain. Sometimes, principals need assistance as instructional leaders in determining what effective instruction and evidence of significant learning in a particular content area (for example, mathematics) might entail. Most principals will probably find it easier to seek that help from educators who don’t report directly to them, another reason why coaches should report to the district.

Coach selection and deployment is a perfect opportunity for the district to encourage the coach and principal to partner in their quest to improve teaching and learning across a school by recommending specific activities and careful sequencing of entry steps in the building. This role translates into very specific activities and careful sequencing of entry steps for the coach.

For the coach to operate successfully in that role, the coach and the principal must be in true partnership and focused on the learning environment for adults, with clear ideas of how each plays a part in improving just on increasing test scores or implementing pedagogy without content or just on content without pedagogy is insufficient. Focusing just on pedagogy without content or just on content without pedagogy is insufficient. Focusing just on increasing test scores or implementing new materials is not only insufficient, but can actually undermine the long-term vision of increased and informed professional instructional capacity to improve student achievement.

**CONCLUSION**

For a corps of coaches in a school district to significantly influence student achievement, the role of the coach must be construed as a change agent and culture builder for professional learning of all adults in the building. This role translates into very specific activities and careful sequencing of entry steps for the coach.

For the coach to operate successfully in that role, the coach and the principal must be in true partnership and focused on the learning environment for adults, with clear ideas of how each plays a part in building the practices of such a culture and how they support one another.

For the two operating principles above to be actualized, the highest levels of district leadership need to think systemically about their interactions with one another and about their supervision of principals.

The coach needs to focus on improved instruction and evidence of student learning of important ideas and rigorous content — the instructional core. Focusing just on pedagogy without content or just on content without pedagogy is insufficient. Focusing just on increasing test scores or implementing new materials is not only insufficient, but can actually undermine the long-term vision of increased and informed professional instructional capacity to improve student achievement.

**REFERENCES**

Hall, Gene E., and Shirley M. Hord.  

Saphier, Jon, MaryAnn Haley, and Robert Fritz Staub.  
*The Skillful Teacher*, 6th ed.  

West, Lucy, and Jon Heinemann.  
*Content-Focused Coaching*.  

Copyright of Phi Delta Kappan is the property of Phi Delta Kappa International and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.
How School Leaders Create High-Functioning Teams
That Use Data To Do Error Analysis And Plan Reteaching:
Redefining Instructional Leadership
By Jon Saphier

There are two big ideas in this article, and they are interdependent.

First: Error analysis and then planning for reteaching in a different way the content that the students are struggling with is a critical act if we want to improve student achievement. Group error analysis and planning for re-teaching by teachers who teach the same content is a high-leverage (if not the highest leverage) activity to spend time on during team meetings.

Second: The leader’s job is to ensure that more teams do more error analysis more of the time, and that teams translate that error analysis into revised and better teaching of that content to students who need it. Without the principal making these practices a priority, they do not happen. But the principal alone cannot ensure this productive use of team time. The principal needs to make this job part of the shared vision and shared daily practice of everyone on the school leadership team.

So to summarize,

1) Error analysis, and then planning and delivering reteaching, are key practices in schools that get extraordinary results for students. Individual teachers should learn to do this in the flow of making daily lesson plans.

High-impact Teams that share content should do error analysis and design of reteaching as a regular practice together. They should use interim test results but also daily student work as the subject of their analysis.

2) The job of school leaders is to get all teams to function this way. The school leader can accomplish this goal better and faster with the explicit help of a group of leaders from the school leadership team who are enculturated to see this as part of their charter as members of that school leadership team.

The first part of this article will make the case for error analysis and explain what it means. The second part will take on how leaders lead to make it happen.

Error Analysis and Teams that Do So
One of the highest leverage activities found in schools that raise student achievement is the following: lay out student work—either the results of yesterday’s class work or the item analysis of an interim assessment. Then identify where students are struggling, and which students did the
struggling. Then try to figure out what the students might have been thinking to make the errors. Then use those insights to design reteaching lessons for those who need it. The sequence is this:

1. What might the students have been thinking to make this error? What are our hypotheses?
2. How can we find out which of these hypotheses is true?
3. What different teaching strategies could we use to “fix” or undo whatever led to this error and help students solidify their skills and concepts?
4. How are each of us going to plan and manage time and tasks in class so that we’ll get fifteen minutes (or whatever it takes) to re-teach the skills and concepts. [Target: at least twotimes a week for groups of students who don’t have it.]
5. How can the team help? Determine whether there is a way to share knowledge, skill, or students to benefit both students and colleagues.

Imagine the following: During their Common Planning Time at 11:10 AM, four fourth-grade teachers are looking at the item analysis below from an interim assessment. It shows the test item and the data on how 99 students responded. Thirty-nine students had the correct answer (B) and 60 didn’t. The tally was generated by Kim Marshall, at the time, principal of the Mather Elementary School in Boston.

Teacher A: Twenty-seven students incorrectly chose answer C. What might they have been thinking to pick that one?

Teacher B: Perhaps they did not know that they need to “zero” a linear object on a ruler when measuring its length. I find this is quite common in elementary kids. And rulers don’t help, since many of them place the first hash marks a quarter inch inward from the physical edge of the ruler.

Teacher A: …or maybe it’s about creating an imaginary zero at any point on the ruler, but then counting up in inch units to the end of the object.

Teacher C: So maybe the problem is the children don’t know they have to put the beginning of the object at the exact zero point on the ruler and that zero point might not be the physical left end-point of the ruler.

Teacher A: Oh, I don’t know. I think maybe they were just careless and didn’t look carefully enough to notice that the truck in the picture was placed at 3 inches instead of 0.

Teacher B: Or maybe some children are making both of these errors.

Teacher C: So for reteaching we will need to think about what fix-it strategies we could use for tomorrow …

Teacher B: And they should be quite different depending on which error the student was making.

Teacher A: Let’s work out what to do for the children who don’t know or don’t remember to zero the object on the ruler.
Teacher C: So for re-teaching we will need to think about what fix-it strategies we could use for tomorrow …

Teacher B: And they should be quite different depending on which error the student was making.

Teacher A: Let’s work out what to do for the children who don’t know or don’t remember to zero the object on the ruler.

Teacher C: We could make up some pretend rulers on oak tag where the first hash mark was at different distances in from the edge. We could cue the kids that they had to zero the object (say, we will have different size blocks for them to measure) and tell them that it won’t be easy to do because these are “trick” rulers.

Teacher B: We could say you have to measure each object with a different one of the trick rulers and have the kids pass the rulers and the objects around the circle.

Teacher A: Maybe put kids in groups of five.

The scenario continues while these teachers analyze the thinking of children who answered C and D. (D is the “best” error. Can you tell why?) And the conversation moves to how to gather data about who made which types of error and how to manage the re-teaching. That can be done in minutes later in the afternoon by simply asking a few children to think out loud about how they did the problem. This is also a golden opportunity for the teacher to share with students how s/he went about doing error analysis in preparation for teaching students, and how students can do the same with their own work.

This thinking could also be a teacher looking at her own data and planning by herself. But imagine the power if teachers had regular collaborative opportunities with dialogue like this to examine data and plan how to reteach a concept! Embedded in the practice above are essential beliefs about how to do school:

“If some of the students aren’t getting it, it is my responsibility to do something different for them.”

“I have to get assessment information frequently [daily] to see when re-teaching is necessary.”

“If I take the trouble to do this assessment and to design reteaching, the students who don’t get it now probably will get it.”
These beliefs about student capacity show up in interactive teaching in very concrete and observable ways. They influence the spirit, the fibre, the character and commitment of the staff in the school to be persistent when the going gets tough with discouraged students or youngsters who are way behind. And they are evident in team meetings where they show up in dialogue and statements one can hear. This is particularly true of the belief that all the students have capacity to do rigorous material at high standards, even if they are currently way behind.

High-functioning teams spend much of their time on concrete issues of teaching and learning like the scenario above and like the items listed in the diagram below under the title “Team Time Spent On:”

**Figure 2: High-Functioning PLCs/Teams**

**Team of the Principal**

It takes good leadership for a team to function like the three teachers described above:

- **Skills at Data Analysis**
  …especially item analysis from common assessments and interim assessments

- **Concept-Analysis and Task-Analysis Skills**
  Knowing how to dig deeply into the content with the teachers around the table so you can all surface the concepts and subconcepts under the task/item the students are struggling with

- **Generic Meeting Facilitation Skills**
  Keeping to the agenda, getting all voices in the room, etc.
• **Skills to Make it Safe**
  …safe for faculty members to be vulnerable in front of peers… safe to invent new pedagogical representations…safe to disagree and debate…

• **Skills and Courage to Face the Data and Push for Constant Measurable Improvement of Student Results**
  Setting SMART Goals for percentage of students proficient; also setting more narrow goals with commitment to try certain reteaching approaches for particular skills/concepts and comparing results afterwards…

• **Skills to Build Group Norms of**
  1) Trust, 2) Productive Conflict, 3) Commitment to Decisions, 4) Accountability for Interpersonal Behavior, and 5) Collective Results Orientation.

• **Skills and Courage to Stand for Effort-Based Ability at Every Turn**
  Confronting peers appropriately for negative comments about children’s ability

How can we develop the leadership and the habits of practice in enough faculty members so teams of teachers who share content perform this way? Not by bringing in a consultant to teach them a “course.” (This is not to dump on consultants. After all, I am one.)

**The principal and the other members of the leadership team of the building are the only people who can accomplish this transformation; and transformation it is, because very few teams in any school function as described above, nor are there forces or supports in place to get them to do so.**

So let us start by redefining the building of a Leadership Team in a school:

1. The charter of your leadership team (that is, its purpose, its mission, its main reason for being) is to improve the teaching and learning in every classroom in the building. Its primary purpose is not management of everyday business. (The paradox, of course, is that school business does not disappear just because you have redefined the leadership team, and so has to be handled anyway. Thus, alternative times and formats for necessary communication around business need to be chosen.)

2. The Leadership Team is colleagues, under the leadership of the principal, who have a common vision of what good teaching and learning look like. You make a plan of action to achieve that vision in increments, and you implement that plan together.

3. This team, working under the leadership of a clear and mission-driven principal, is the necessary condition for large-scale improvement of teaching and learning. Principals can’t do it alone, however. Principals, as the instructional leaders of the building, need multiple allies, many teacher-leaders to improve teaching and learning.

4. The leadership team should consist of those who have maximum access and influence over the teacher corps in the building. There are many different people who may, by virtue of their role, position, and status with their colleagues, fill this bill.

(cont. next page)
One can compose a team of four to ten people from amongst:

- Assistant Principals
- Instructional Specialists
- Team Leaders
- Resource/SPED teachers
- Union Leaders
- Others

- Department Chairs
- Coaches
- Counselors
- Lead Teachers
- ELL Co-ordinators

Get the “right people on the bus.”

5. The Principal’s first and central job is to build the Leadership Team (LT) – its charter, the skills, the cohesion, and the commitment of his/her leadership team members. It may be the main focus of the first year in a building. By the second year, the leadership team meetings should evolve to a stage where the leaders are comparing notes on their leadership efforts just like we want teachers to share stories on their teaching efforts. Members are doing round-table case reviews of supervision and coaching of individual teachers, problem-solving with and for each other, and functioning as a study group where they all learn new things about good teaching and learning and leadership together. The principal as the leader of this leadership team thinks of him/herself as the teacher to the group (and learner with them, of course). Thus, the principal plans these meetings just like planning a good lesson.

The principal and the LT members need to have a clear image of what error-analysis and re-teaching meetings look like and sound like. Thus, principals working together in a training session should be the kick-off for this work. Principals might, indeed, benefit from a formal PD course on the scenarios described above. They themselves, however, should be the “course leader” and facilitator in the ensuing stages for their own building. This is principal as “teacher” among colleagues, or principal teacher, which is the origin of the title “principal” to begin with.

Each member of the Leadership Team should see, participate in, and practice leading error analysis and re-teaching meetings of teachers. At the outset, the principal should have each member of the leadership team bring a packet of recent student work from a classroom (one can invite the teacher too, as an observer or a participant). The principal leads the error analysis and re-teaching meeting just as if it were a grade level or common-subject group. Note: the principal is modeling risk-taking, not being expert at doing this, and commitment to find a way for the student(s) to learn the item. Other early-stage actions are for the principal to lead an actual grade or subject meeting into error analysis and re-teaching and have leadership team members observe and debrief with the principal, always modeling and being explicit that “we’re trying to learn how to do this important thing.” Then other LT members get into the cycle with other members of the Leadership Team observing.

---

Leadership team members then move into a role of being present at all team meetings of teachers who share content. They decide differentially how strong a role to play at these meetings, depending on the level of development of that teacher team. Presence as well as intervention, guidance, and modeling productive team meetings for error analysis and reteaching is not the only lever, but it is a most important one for influencing teaching and learning in any school.

It would accelerate school improvement and good work all over the country at closing the achievement gap if the focus described here were incorporated in programs for the training and certification of school leaders.

LEVEL 0

- CPT meetings are scheduled, but teachers do not always show up or show up on time.
- There are no written agendas, established group norms, or student work on the table for examination.
- Conversation is about children, upcoming events like field trips, testing, etc., but rarely about the specifics of how to teach something or teach it better.
- There is occasional sharing of worksheets and activity ideas.

LEVEL 1

- Teachers meet consistently 1-3 times a week.
- There is a written agenda and next steps recorded after each CPT meeting.
- There are established CPT norms, but not necessarily close facilitation to ensure they are followed.
- Student work is sometimes on the table at meetings.
- There is discussion about student difficulties and what to do about them.
- There is sharing of activities, strategies, worksheets.

LEVEL 2

- There is a written agenda, facilitator, and next steps identified and recorded at each meeting.
- Group norms are honored and practiced.
- The team has created common assessments for major benchmarks, and agrees on implementation and scoring processes. (These could be end-of-course tests, quarterly assessment, interim assessments.)
- The CPT team establishes SMART\(^1\) goals for their students.
- Administrators occasionally attend.

\(^1\)Specific: Who? What? Where? \textbf{M}easurable: How will the goal be measure? \textbf{A}ttainable: Is the goal realistic, yet challenging? \textbf{R}esults-oriented: Is the goal consistent with other goals established and fits with your immediate and long-range plans? \textbf{T}ime-bound: Is it trackable and allows for monitoring of progress?
LEVEL 3

- Team members establish reliability on scoring common assessments, at what to call a 1, 2, 3, or 4.
- Team members make up common quizzes or formative assessments to find out how students are doing and identify problems and gaps in student understanding. They bring these back, analyze results and do error analysis together.
- The team revisits and decides to reteach key concepts, inventing new reteaching strategies developed in detail for concepts or skills students are struggling with.
- Team members disaggregate data on an assessment they gave in common and pool data on which students did well and which didn’t. Then the team regroups students across our sections to reteach.
- Discourse is focused on evidence and teachers are beginning to question one another’s ideas and practices.
- Team members practice actually doing the reteaching strategies with one another.
- Team members decide in common which reteaching strategies to try and compare results at the next meeting.
- Administrators attend on occasion and participate as peers.

LEVEL 4

- Team members dig into concepts and sub-concepts of what they are teaching to get clearer on the relationships of concepts and sub-concepts and on what student confusions, misconceptions and necessary prior knowledge might be.
- The group plans lessons together in depth and detail, including doing the activity they are asking students to do. All materials are brought to the meeting.
- Administrators attend regularly and assist in arranging inter-visitations among teachers in the CPT group.

LEVEL 5

- Team members visit others’ classrooms regularly to do focused peer observation for one another. They collect data in service of a question one of us wants answered (evidence of student learning...etc.) There is skillful debriefing of the observation and planning of next steps.
- Teaching becomes public with teachers visiting each others’ classrooms regularly and providing critical feedback and suggestions.
- Teachers work collaboratively with administrators to develop individual and collective professional learning goals and design support for achieving them.
Building Instructional Leadership Team
By Jon Saphier

A New Charter with New Functions

A high-functioning school Building Instructional Leadership Team has a particular and different charter from most such teams found in schools today. Their reason for being, their overall purpose, becomes to improve the teaching and learning in every classroom in the school. The other things they do (and must do) are necessary but secondary.

Thus the people on the school leadership team must be:

- those who have maximum access to teachers
- those who accept improving teaching and learning school-wide and thus student achievement as their mission and commitment
- those who are willing to make decisions for the good of the school rather than as representatives of a constituency (the 3rd grade; the English Department)
- those who are willing to take initiative to advance ideas to colleagues

Each member of the leadership team can influence the quality of teaching and learning through their individual conversations with teachers and through their participation in meetings of teachers who teach the same content (Common Planning Time Teams.) LT members will go out and participate in these teacher team meetings at a level of involvement necessary to bring the meeting to a high-functioning level. This can be anything from being an equal participant to guide-on-the-side to taking over the leadership because the team is dysfunctional. LT members understand that this is their role, and they divide up which team meetings to attend so they are all covered.

If the Instructional Leadership Team is leading for the improvement of teaching and learning, ILT members spend their time:

TOGETHER

- Learning how to do data analysis and the design of re-teaching themselves, which is a skill they will be responsible for developing in content teams.
- Forming a common image of what High-Expertise teaching looks and sounds like
- Planning professional development
- Ensuring a strong coaching structure with powerful expectations, interactions, and relationships
- Sharing and supporting each other with round-table critiques of projects they’re working on.

And INDIVIDUALLY:

- Doing planning conferences with teachers.
- Participating in or intervening in CPT teams

(cont. next page)
To do this job well, Leadership Team members need training and practice. And it is the principal’s job to ensure it. This is a significant shift in the traditional view of the principal’s role in a school.

In a large high school, everything we will say below about the high-skill principal pertains to the Department Chair, who functions as the equivalent of a principal. High school chairs often supervise more teachers than an elementary or middle school principal.

**Principal as Developer of the Leadership Team Capacity**

It is the principal’s job to create a leadership team that has the capacity to grow high-functioning teams in the building as described above. The principal can’t grow high functioning teams alone. He/she needs a group of able allies. Thus the principal first “gets the right people on the bus” on the leadership team.

The principal develops a common image of what good teaching and learning looks and sounds like in all members of the leadership team.

The principal develops his/her and all the LT members’ ability to analyze student work or evidence of student learning, to identify students who need re-teaching, to design the re-teaching, and plan the management of the other students in constructive learning activities. They have to know how to do these things themselves if they are to coach and press the rest of the staff to do so.

The principal ensures all content-teams are visited by Leadership Team members who can advance the content team’s functioning.

The Professional Development Office of the district (or the Leadership Academy) supports the principal in carrying out this job. The Regional Superintendents also provide support, as well as supervising and evaluating the principal in doing this work.

The considerable interpersonal and organizational skills a principal needs to shepherd all these tasks is too much for this introductory piece, but are described in some detail in “Developing Skillful Leadership Widely Distributed Throughout the System.”

The following summarizes the principal’s diverse levers of influence on improving teaching and learning.

(cont. next page)
Have frequent, high leverage contacts with individuals
• Short classroom visits & follow-up conversations within 24 hours of visits
• Walkthroughs and Learning Walks
• Planning conferences
• Formal observations and summative evaluations

Design and implement a teacher-coaching position as a partnership to strengthen adult professional culture
• Coaching structure to build from strength
  Considering coach’s daily schedule, expectations, greasing the skids, and active principal partnership with coach

Fashion Strong School Leadership teams that focus on Instruction
• Instructional Leadership Team whose charter in improving teaching and learning in every classroom (the charter, time use, fanning out to content teams, round-table case reviews)
  Ensure teams that share content do error-analysis and re-teaching
  And follow Lencioni’s norms¹

Break down the walls of privacy and isolation between teachers.
• Arrange public teaching and peer observation

Make the analysis of data about student learning a regular feature of teacher teams that leads to re-teaching for those students who need it
• Ensure High-Functioning PLC’s

Plan Faculty Meetings like lessons
• Something instructional on each faculty meeting agenda

Make the Common Core of Professional Knowledge accessible, inviting, and required
• Encourage and Support Study Groups
• Plan building based Professional Development

Do quarterly student reviews with each teacher (or in large schools ensure someone does,) student by student, of how each student is doing and what the plan is for their next step in growth.
• Student by student Accountability Talks

Courage can be learned. There are case studies available all over the country that show that individual schools and occasionally whole districts with many children in poverty get very good achievement results – in some cases as good as or better than nearby affluent suburbs.

This news is inspiring and gives hope; it is also discomfiting, because we quietly wonder if we know enough or are good enough to get the same results. And reading about what they did (e.g., Michael Schmoker’s The Results Fieldbook) somehow doesn’t give us the tools to work the miracle. How can we think about this conundrum?

It takes courage and skill to move a school forward because people are accustomed to being left alone; and progress means getting people to change their practices and behaviors. Thus when one begins the improvement process, some staff will experience the changes that we bring forward as strange, or unnecessary, or disruptive, or even ill-conceived. (And occasionally they will be right!)

Another reality that demands courage is facing the fact that we will make mistakes along the way. We will experience confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety from time to time. And all of that could be avoided if we just went on with business as usual: managing the building, doing discipline, and handling daily problems or if as a central staff person we went on handling crises, doing our reports, and keeping up with staffing issues!

And our students who are losing out would continue losing. So just go on managing?... Can’t do it.

In addition, “leadership for improvement” can be lonely and make us unpopular with a segment of our own folks. The results seem uncertain and we will be risking failure on a regular basis. People who like the changes may be silent, letting us know in indirect ways that they are depending on us to keep going anyway and carry the ball against the opposition!

So will the children.

Why would anybody want to experience all that if such is the cost of courage? Because it can give meaning to our lives and work beyond what we may have known before...and a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment that’s better than any high.

PROPOSITION 1

Despite all our good work in recent years, there is a large gap between what our students are achieving and what they need to achieve and could achieve.

There are others schools and districts that have significantly elevated student
achievement in similar conditions. It can be done.

Raising student achievement significantly means large-scale changes in teaching practice at the classroom level and high-level teamwork at grade levels. Almost every improvement initiative (including common assessments, Beginning Teacher Academy, PD workshops, position of Instructional Specialist/Coach) aims directly or indirectly to improve classroom instruction.

**PROPOSITION 2**

Virtually all of the reform initiatives of the late 20th and early 21st century (like teachers doing data analysis of student results, like the DuFours’ “Pyramid of Interventions” for low-performing students, like the teacher coaching structures appearing in so many of our schools) are grounded in a few beliefs. These beliefs, however, are rarely an explicit part of dialogue – dialogue among leaders, dialogue among staff, or especially dialogue between leaders and staff – yet it is important that they be made explicit. As we lead for specific changes in practice, we must at the same time surface the beliefs from which they stem.

These Beliefs are:

1. **Academic ability is malleable.** All the children have enough ability to master our curriculum objectives, even if at the moment some of them are way behind. It’s not innate intelligence that is holding them back.

2. We are individually responsible for seeing to it that each and every one of our students masters the objectives of our lessons and units. That is part of the job definition of “teaching.”

3. We are collectively (not individually) responsible and collectively able to get all our students to proficiency. That means our work has to be interdependent. We have to plan together our interventions and acceleration strategies.

4. There is a common core of knowledge for high-efficacy teaching and learning. It is sophisticated, extensive, and complex. Furthermore, much of it has not been part of our professional education. Therefore we must be constantly learning from it and adding to it, and teaching one another about it.

5. For many children of poverty, part of our job is to plant motivation and grow it where it had not been before.

6. We use evidence of student learning on a daily basis to reteach what students didn’t get the first time around and to intervene to ensure student success.

7. We practice public teaching and nondefensive self-examination of our practice in groups.

Almost all significant reform initiatives are grounded in these beliefs.
PROPOSITION 3

Without leadership to change (read as to improve) classroom instruction and school practices, leadership that calls for more, summons, encourages, supports, and with perseverance **pushes** for key changes in practice – improvement of results for students will not happen. The inertia and comfort of conventional teaching practices are too strong.

Among the many changes in practice that are called for, here are a few examples:

- Nightly error analysis and inventive planning for reteaching material to those students who didn’t understand the first time around
- Constant and broad checking for understanding during instruction
- Frequent, detailed, nonjudgmental feedback to students that helps them identify and improve performance
- Teaching students to believe in their own capacity to grow ability
- Teaching students how to exert effective effort when learning doesn’t come easily
- Frequent analysis of student results from common assessments by teams who actively help each other design teaching and reteaching approaches
- Using a variety of cognitive tools to make ideas more clear and vivid

The improvements in instructional practice that are needed challenge the very job definition of teaching carried by millions of practitioners. This is a double whammy:

1. Changing deep and previously unchallenged beliefs, and
2. Undertaking the massive change of teaching practices that proceeds from the new beliefs

The scale of this change and the very large inertia of sticking with the status quo combine with the identity threat to millions of teachers whose self-esteem is invested in continuing to do business as they always have. School principals who rise to this challenge require a high level of stamina, since resistance will surely come from some quarters in the staff, and this inevitably raises normal human fears about the consequences to the leader as he/she pushes for change.

The good news, however, is that we have a great mass of committed teachers who already operate from the seven beliefs above, and they are seeking the leadership that will give them the challenge and the resources to bring children to new levels of achievement. Indeed, they will respond with commitment and inventiveness when we give them both the support and the time that are required.

PROPOSITION 4

“We can act our way into new beliefs,” says Michael Fullan. Indeed we can. It’s hard to tell which comes first, the chicken or the egg. They do, indeed, go hand in hand. Nevertheless, some of these important changes in teaching practice **have to be**
started for the beliefs to begin changing. Beliefs change when teachers start to see results. So there is a certain forcefulness required from leaders to accelerate the pace of adopting these new practices.

PROPOSITION 5

Large-scale improvement of instruction also calls for explicit discussion of the key beliefs. The chicken and the egg sit together in the barn. We lead for specific changes in practice, and at the same time surface the beliefs from which they stem.

When we contemplate leading for significant instructional improvements and talking about the associated beliefs, every one of us inevitably faces certain fears:

1. Fear of being disliked, being discounted, or losing relationships:
   a. Version A – “If I bring this belief up, it will be taken as an accusation that people are not doing their job, are not good enough. I can’t face that. I want to be perceived as supportive, not blaming. A leader is supposed to be supportive and positive.”
   b. Version B – “I want to be one of the crowd, included; not an outlier, out-of-step, somebody who ‘makes our lives harder.’”
   c. Version C – “She’s too idealistic, too young.”

2. Fear of conflict: “If I bring this belief up, it will start polarizing debates that will be divisive. In fact, it may provoke a firestorm that will consume a lot of energy, mine as well as others’. I don’t like conflict like this, nor know how to handle it.”

3. Fear of failure: “If I bring this belief up, it won’t do any good. Changing attitudes is hopeless. I will fail and feel horrible.”

4. Fear of being fired: “If I bring this belief up, it will lead to forces being mustered against me and I will lose my job...like ‘he’s making us look bad.’”

There is a certain forcefulness required from leaders to accelerate the pace of adopting these new practices.

This forcefulness must be balanced with:

- Acknowledgement that the changes are difficult
- Humility about not knowing how to do them all
- Planning together for how to move
- Support for learning how to do the new practices
- And especially listening to the views and worries of the staff members we are working with

Forcefulness in leading for new instructional practices means moving FROM

The language of suggestions:
“‘I wonder if it would make any sense to…”
“Do you think it would be a good idea if…”
“Have you thought about trying…”

TO

The language of urgency and expectations:
“‘We’ve got to figure out more ways to…”
“We have to get more…”
“What the kids need from us is…”
5. **Fear of being seen as incompetent:** “If I bring this belief up, I’ll be shown as the emperor with no clothes…because I don’t really know exactly what to do to make this belief come true.”

6. **Fear of being shallow:** “If I bring this belief up, I will be inauthentic because I’m not sure I believe it enough myself!”

7. **Fear of hard work or running out of gas:** “If I bring this belief up, I’ll have to work harder than I want to. It will exhaust me.”

It takes courage to push through these fears…courage to face resistance and to cause the inevitable discomfort. But courage can be grown; it’s not inborn. Courage can be developed. Courage can be learned. If we want to be thought of as courageous leaders who get results for children, we can “make it so,” as Captain Kirk used to say. Courage is not being fearless; it is recognizing one’s fears, pushing through them, and acting anyway.

None of us yet has all the skills one would want to lead for a “breakthrough” school or district. But we have enough. We’re ready to push to the next level.

**PROPOSITION 6**

What does it take to grow courage?

- Get clear on what your deepest and most strongly held beliefs are, and how strongly you hold them.

- Name your fears and stand in the middle of them.
  - Decide what you’ll hold yourself accountable for and what you won’t hold yourself accountable for (in your behavior, not the outcomes of the process).
  - Develop your self-awareness and capacity to be mindful in the middle of stressful moments.
  - Learn central skills about communication and about change.
  - Work the network of your contacts and your supervisors to communicate your plan.
  - Have a professional support group for yourself for practice and feedback.