Reflections on the Creation of
Professional Learning Communities

Multiple Mirrors

SEDL
Southwest Educational
Development Laboratory

Ricki Chapman
Ruth G. Hinson
Kristine A. Hipp
C.L. Jacoby
Jane B. Huffman
Anita M. Pankake
Beth Sattes
Jane Jeffress Thomas
Jody Westbrook

Table of Contents

School improvement has been widely promoted and mandated in nearly every state in the Union. All too often, approaches to school change have most closely resembled the use of a microwave oven—put a program into a school, heat for four minutes, and voila', call it school change. It comes as no surprise that school change efforts implemented in this fashion are short-lived, with disappointing results.

As a result of these failures, and the continuous research and study of school change, new understandings are guiding current efforts to make educational reform and improvement more meaningful and more enduring. These new understandings focus on the capacity of the school staff to reflect on its work, assess its effectiveness in terms of student gains, determine areas in need of improvement, and identify the staff learning that is needed for the school to increase its effectiveness in delivering high quality learning opportunities for students.

The professional learning community (PLC) is one model of this new understanding that school capacities must be grounded in the culture of the school and the normative behaviors of its staff. The PLC model for education reform evolved from Peter Senge's (1990) model of corporate "learning organizations," and from Susan Rosenholtz' (1989) writing about teachers' workplace environments. These authors postulated that when all the personnel of a work unit are involved in setting the vision and determining what the staff need to do to accomplish the vision, there would be continuous learning of the staff, and thereby continuous benefits to clients and constituents.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) learned about professional learning communities through the experience of a staff member who had been involved in such a workplace, and through a SEDL research study of a school that had operated as a community of professional learners. This school evidenced the attributes or characteristics that would be defined in a SEDL literature review as the five dimensions of a professional learning community: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and the application of that learning, supportive conditions (both structural and relational), and shared personal practice (see Hord, 1997).

Through its Strategies for Increasing School Success (SISS) Program, SEDL staff—affectionately called SISSters—solicited colleagues from across SEDL's five-state service region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas) and beyond to come along on a project named Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement (CCCII), aimed at creating new PLCs in schools across the country. These individuals had earlier been associated with SEDL and its staff, and eagerly embraced the opportunity to become Co-Developers, partnered with schools in creating professional learning communities. Co-Developers included individuals from higher education, state departments of education, intermediate service agencies, superintendents and other central office personnel, and campus-based individuals.

Creating a professional learning community in a school is no easy task, as the reader will learn from the accounts of the Co-Developers in this book. Any school change requires abundant time, energy, and resourcefulness, along with large quantities of school leadership. The stories of the Co-Developers who share their reflections teach us a great deal about success in such a venture, as well as about failure. Jody Westbrook, who became our "resident expert" at project beginnings, three times began a school partnership for PLC, only to experience three times the partnership's dissolution when the participating superintendent resigned. Her substantial experience in making these first steps toward PLC implementation, as well as the experiences she shared with her Co-Developer colleagues at trainings and confer-

ences and through conversation, consultation, and consolation sharpened her eye for discerning significant foundational factors—the presence of which contributed to PLC success, and the absence of which often presaged difficulty or failure in PLC implementation. These factors include:

Trust—This element is a requirement among teachers, between teachers and administrators, between campus and district-level personnel, and between school personnel and Co-Developers. High levels of trust promoted risk-taking, honest communication, and deep commitments to school initiatives, including the PLC project. The absence of trust distracted personnel from issues of instruction to conflicts of personality and practice. Conscious efforts to build trust characterize many efforts to create professional learning communities.

Teachers are heard—Schools in which the insight and input of teachers is solicited and utilized tended to move more easily into—or increase their practice of—the PLC dimensions of shared leadership and collective learning. Administrators who acted without the input of teachers tended toward autocratic styles of leadership; teachers who felt their knowledge was not honored, and their suggestions not welcomed tended to resist "top-down" directives of all ilks, including PLC.

Student centered—Although one might expect a focus on students to characterize *any* school, visits to a cross-section of the nation's schools will quickly reveal the many ways teachers and administrators can be distracted from their students' learning and well-being. The attention of administrators and teachers alike can be consumed by any number of issues, including: test scores, and their implications for funding, status, and consequences within a district; administrative turnover and political concerns; personality clashes; and issues of equity within and between schools. Schools where personnel asked aloud and frequently of programs, practices, and initiatives: "Is it better for kids?" tended to more easily and deeply take on PLC dimensions, and could more easily tailor the expression of those dimensions to the particular needs and culture of their school.

Concerns about "add-on" programs—The plethora of new initiatives, innovations, projects and reform efforts, combined with the

hefty demands of teaching, have led many school personnel to a sense of "so much to do, so little time." Rather than being a sign of resistance, questions about the additional responsibilities and time required of a PLC effort revealed a healthy skepticism about poorly planned or implemented efforts at reform. When these concerns could be addressed openly and completely, teachers and administrators were able to more fully commit to creating a professional learning community at their school.

In addition to these factors, the presence and practice of any of the five PLC dimensions—but perhaps most especially shared and supportive leadership—tended to bode well for the full development and complete implementation of the PLC model. The authors also feel a need to acknowledge and point out for readers the commitment to service that characterized so many of the schools and individuals highlighted in the volume. The education of our nation's youth is truly a national service, which most of our educators take to heart.

The reflections and insights of eight Co-Developers follow—one in poem form, the others in stories. Co-Developers represented a wide range of educational professionals, with differing styles and interests that fueled their shared dedication to school improvement. The range of these stories—in both area of focus and style of presentation—represents the human diversity of our Co-Developer community, and, we believe will thus speak to a wide variety of readers.

We have designed this book with the intention of involving the reader deeply in these stories, through invitations to reflection that precede and follow each selection. We believe your efforts to answer these invitations will invest your reading with more meaning and increase your insight and understanding into the process of school change. It is our hope that you will be informed and illuminated, provoked and touched by the accounts of these individuals who invested abundant courage and personal resources in this effort. Their work to create communities of continuously learning professionals is intended to provide our school's students with increased success in and enthusiasm for learning.

JODY WESTBROOK
SHIRLEY HORD

Come on a journey
With me,
To learn with your eyes and heart
What it is to celebrate
A beginning, middle, and end,
To creating and sustaining
P L Cs.

Hmmm!!! They want a school
That wants to improve —
How hard will that be to find?

And they said for it to succeed
Almost ALL need to participate!!!
Where will we find
So many places of this kind?

Each Co-Developer went back
To their domain
Seeking the perfect place.
Each came back with the one they chose,
Leader and teacher in tow.

Work was begun
At each site to
Serve the children within the walls:
Create positive change,
Grow professionally,
Tear data apart,
Learn together as a team,
Network,
Collaborate.

Several trips to the SISSters,
Learning more each time;
Building our own PLC,
Going it alone at times.
Bringing our leaders
To learn what we learned;
They in turn
Go back and teach.
Prodding and pushing
Along the way
All eyes on those they serve.

Some have gone the extra mile,
Some have lagged behind,
Some even changed their course,
And others said, "Good bye".

The road isn't finished;
There is more to pave.
The way isn't straight and clear.
So much to learn,
So much to change,
But our goal is clear.

Keep focused,
Keep trying,
Keep pushing,
Keep going,
And in the end
Children and teachers are helped
Where the course is stayed.

We are stronger
And wiser,
The number has grown, and
We are ready to go some more.

JANE JEFFRESS THOMAS
NOVEMBER, 2000

Story 1

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The Dance of Foxdale

The "dance of Foxdale" consists of clear movements toward school change counterbalanced by resistance or impediments to that change. The rhythm of that dance is determined both by structures external to the school, and by resistance to change on the part of school personnel.

• • •

author ~ Kristine A. Hipp

Close your eyes and picture the perfect organization. A mental walk-through offers a feeling of positive energy, experimentation, collaboration, and common purpose. There is a certain rhythm here—a spirit of compassion, respect, and commitment—a strong sense of collective efficacy that conserves and sustains personal and organizational energy. These individuals face the same complex challenges as individuals in other organizations, yet somehow, here, they continue to move forward, undaunted by setbacks.

What is this extraordinary quality? Kevin and I often reflect on our experience with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL's) Professional Learning Community (PLC) project—and on his early, prescient words: "Nothing will change without trust. Trust is everything."

Nothing will change without trust. Trust is everything.

At Foxdale School, the ebb and flow of trust established the rhythm of our progress in creating a PLC—two steps forward, and one step back.

Foxdale Middle School

Three years ago, Mill Street School District engaged in significant restructuring due to declining enrollment and financial woes. Pockets of suspicion and distrust existed throughout the entire district—the result of two failed referendums, low teacher morale, and new ways of doing business. Adding to the pressure was the fact that the new configuration of schools (K, 1-4, 5-8) fed into the most competitive high school in the state. At Foxdale Middle School, a new principal was also stirred into the mix.

Rebecca Johnston had served Mill Street School District as a member of the school board, and had experienced the district as the

mother of students before being named principal of Foxdale Middle School. She took charge of a 51-person faculty created through transfers—of 5th and 6th grade teachers from the dismantled elementary school and 7th and 8th grade teachers who had previously served the high school. These two groups of teachers had very different images of what a middle school could and should be. Though inexperienced with one another, the staff consisted of experienced and committed teachers, 82% of whom had masters' degrees. Only three teachers had less than five years' teaching experience, and 37 had more than 15.

These two groups of teachers had very different images of what a middle school could and should be.

This new principal and divided faculty were charged with the education of 550 African American (19%), Asian (5%), Hispanic (1%), Native American (<1%), and European American (75.5%) students in grades 5-8. Twelve percent of these students were defined as economically disadvantaged based on free and reduced lunch. Ten percent of the students were bused from outside the school attendance area. Further, 10% of the students were enrolled in special education programs for the physically, mentally, emotionally, and learning disabled. The dominant home language was English; three students' families spoke another language at home. Approximately 40% of Foxdale parents were professionals; 20% held technical positions, and 40% held skilled or semi-skilled labor jobs. The attendance rate for students was approximately 95%. No student dropouts were documented, yet a significant number of behavioral referrals occurred each year.

Two Steps Forward: Entry

In the fall of 1997, I had just transferred to a private Franciscan university in the Midwest and had been invited to become a part of SEDL's PLC study. I was the only Co-developer, or external change agent, associated with this project from the Midwest. I was in the midst of selecting another school for the study when Principal Rebecca Johnston actively pursued the opportunity of working with me to create a professional learning community at Foxdale Middle School. Rebecca was persistent in convincing me that, because Foxdale served a socio-economically mixed student population, outcomes from an effort at Foxdale would be transferable to other schools across the country.

Rebecca wasted no time in meeting with the superintendent to share information and gather his impressions. He considered the opportunity intriguing and congruent with the school district's vision. He wholeheartedly supported the effort despite two potential barriers that could hinder participation. First, the significant educational experience of Foxdale's faculty might translate into skepticism about school reform efforts. These teachers had already experienced a number of failed initiatives. Second, a majority of teachers would be retiring within the next five years. In the meantime, these teachers continued to face major challenges in the district including failed referendums, steadily decreasing test scores, declining enrollment, and morale issues resulting from lack of public support. How open would they be to change at this time in their careers?

Rebecca scheduled a meeting with the school's leadership team to allow me to share the project. After a perfunctory meeting which the entire leadership team could not attend, a dinner meeting was scheduled at the principal's home to further discuss the PLC project with all members of the team. The full overview of the SEDL project stimulated enthusiasm and hope for change—despite a climate of distrust nurtured by the failing confidence of parents and community members. By meeting's end, the team generated a strategy to introduce the project at the next staff meeting.

Kevin Charles, the head union negotiator and an influential member of the leadership team, assisted me in presenting the project at an all-school faculty meeting. Before they broke into small groups to discuss potential participation in the project, Kevin asked the staff to reflect on the following question, "Are you satisfied with the way things are in the school and district, and if not, are you open to try something new?" The staff discussed issues of morale and raised two major concerns. Would the project add one more thing to their already full agenda? Could time be restructured for the dialogue necessary to learn and share collectively?

I addressed the concern about overload by maintaining that the project would not be an add-on, but would be integrated into current school initiatives. I utilized Senge's models of alignment (1990, pp. 234-5) to help the staff see the benefits of participating in a project that would promote a shared vision and more effective use of time. Senge offers three models of common organizations: empowered indi-

He wholeheartedly supported the effort despite two potential barriers that could hinder participation.

9

viduals who share no alignment, individuals with a clear purpose but no alignment, and a staff empowered and aligned. The Foxdale staff recognized themselves in the second model: a clear purpose, but little alignment. They were convinced by Senge's ideal model of empowerment and alignment, and shared their desire to reach that goal.

They were convinced by Senge's ideal model of empowerment and alignment, and shared their desire to reach that goal.

In order to assure the faculty would have the time necessary to achieve success, Kevin and Rebecca developed a plan of adding time to the school day in order to garner two "banking" days that could be devoted to the effort. They proposed adjusting the teacher contract by adding five minutes to each school day to garner four half-days for professional development spread throughout the year. This adjustment would not serve as a final solution to the problem of time for teachers to work together, but as Kevin and Rebecca's plan gained the support of teachers, administrators, and the school board, a beginning of trust and progress became evident.

Prior to the start of the school year, the leadership team met at a member's lake cottage to delve deeper into the concept of a learning community—the culture they had agreed to develop. The team members used metaphor to create unique images of organizations that met the needs of their staff and focused on student learning. They established a common purpose as they constructed meaning for themselves, engaged in collective inquiry, and openly shared ideas. Moved by the impact of this experience, they expressed a desire to somehow replicate the day's activities with all staff to generate the enthusiasm and commitment that they all shared.

One Step Back: Negotiating the Hierarchy In Order to Gain Time

Success was not possible under the current structure—there was simply not enough time available to meet, plan, and implement significant changes. Making that time available would require significant trust and belief on the part of those advocating for change. Ultimately, it would affect busing, students, parents, and teachers at three schools.

Foxdale's teachers submitted a formal proposal to the district's teachers union, in which they advocated adding five minutes to the start of each school day in order to "bank" time to engage in meaningful activities and dialogue around issues related to student learn-

ing. Teachers understood that some restructuring of time was essential to be successful in demonstrating the five dimensions of a PLC: shared leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, and shared practice.

The district teachers sensed the commitment of their colleagues and voted in favor of the "banked time" proposal. The next and possibly greatest challenge was in the area of transportation. The principal rode every bus route and met with every bus driver to assure the feasibility of the plan. In turn, the teachers and School Board approved the proposal. This response was viewed by Kevin, SEDL's teacher representative as "the most important step forward in showing the trust building that we really needed to get going for the staff, because trust is the first level at getting to a professional learning community."

The district teachers sensed the commitment of their colleagues and voted in favor of the "banked time" proposal.

Two Steps Forward: The Banked Day and the Grant

Just before Thanksgiving, 1998, Foxdale faculty enjoyed their first "banked day"—actually an evening social followed by a day-long retreat. Faculty team leaders planned the event, and Rebecca attributed much of the enthusiasm for and success of this banked time to this level of faculty participation. On that first evening, I provided the community center where I live, a comfortable rustic setting away from distraction. The evening deepened relationships as staff members took risks, shared talents, and enjoyed great fun engaging in a variety of creative activities. The evening ended in more serious dialogue around the fire, planning our approach with those few who did not attend.

The next morning, Kevin and a group of male staff members took over the kitchen at Foxdale and displayed their culinary skills at a "Pancake Breakfast." Staff joined me in facilitating teambuilding exercises, which allowed faculty members to better understand themselves, and better appreciate others. Staff also designed time to meet on team issues. The written evaluation of the retreat indicated success, as teachers found themselves empowered with the planning and execution of the day.

The first year of the project was focused on creating readiness for building a community of learners through building trust among staff and between staff and administration. However, the end of the

first year brought more change than many of the staff had predicted. Previous to the PLC initiative, an Alternative Program for at-risk students in Grades 7 and 8 had been proposed. This program was designed to meet the needs of specific students who were "falling through the cracks," and to respond to the high number of student behavioral problems that were having a negative impact on the student learning, the learning environment, and teacher morale. At the end of the first year, Foxdale received a $92,000 grant to implement the program.

The Alternative Program would establish an additional "house" or team in the school.

The Alternative Program would establish an additional "house" or team in the school. It was hoped that the teachers on this program team would utilized their expertise and on-the-job insights to assist their peers in behavior management. Students would be integrated into the mix as deemed possible. Foxdale personnel recognized that this program would support the PLC concept, particularly in the areas of supportive conditions, shared practice, and shared vision and values.

One Step Back: Delaying Consensus

Enrollment continued to decline and two teachers moved into the Alternative Program; ripples from these changes moved throughout the organization. Previously there had been two 3-person teams per grade level; now there was only one 5-member team per grade. New subject areas were assigned and trusted teams were reconfigured. Apprehension and self-doubt rose among the faculty, especially as the program came to be seen by some as an unstoppable juggernaut: programming for at-risk students was an identified priority, the grant money had been accepted, and the program would require staff support.

Feeling disempowered, some staff resorted to indirect communication strategies: some "parking lot" conversations took place, and concerns were shared with the School Board, which trickled back to teachers and Rebecca. The leadership team met to discuss the concerns that are typical when change begins among people at varying degrees of readiness. The team established means by which faculty could express their concerns openly and be heard respectfully. By learning about the nature of change, dealing with opposition compassionately, and involving all staff in additional dialogue, the leadership

team helped to assure the program could begin with the next fall with a working—if not perfect—sense of consensus. This episode turned the tide on trust, created a sense of unity, and strengthened the staff's commitment to the district mission—a focus on the needs of all students, regardless of the inconvenience or challenges to teachers.

Two Steps Forward: Implementing the Alternative Program and a Return to the Standards Project

The 1999-2000 school year began with the Alternative Program and new team configurations in place. The Alternative Program opened with approximately 30 students, one instructional director, and two teachers. Their challenges were significant, yet they were fueled by the prospects of success, and the knowledge that they would have to demonstrate that success to other faculty, the school board, and the grant maker. Teachers across the school took note of the significant change in the climate and the lessening of behavioral problems. The new focus on learning was evident to both teachers and students—as faculty discovered when they met daily with students in STAR groups, the school's Advisor/Advisee program. A midyear survey of students provided helpful information and validated staff perceptions.

The 1999-2000 school year began with the Alternative Program and new team configurations in place.

Year two of the PLC project also began with a stronger focus on student learning through the Standards project. A study of the fragmentation of numerous current efforts showed that these approaches did not seem to promote students learning to the degree intended. In response, the district developed a long-range plan requiring core subject area teachers to align their instructional practices and units with locally established teaching standards and benchmarks. The district had been working with MCREL, a sister laboratory to SEDL, in order to establish standards and benchmarks that were aligned with those at the state level.

By committing one of two monthly staff meetings and every banked day to the project, Rebecca provided time for teams to develop instructional units connected to the teaching standards and benchmarks. In addition, the school's curriculum specialist, John White, conducted a series of optional workshops on staff in-service days throughout the year. Called the Standards Academy, these

13

workshops were designed to strengthen teacher applications of *critical reasoning skills* and *knowledge construction strategies*. Rebecca and John also engaged teams in face-to-face conversations around the writing of instructional units and monitored progress.

The Standards Academy was an attempt to prepare and allow staff at varying skill levels to create successful inter-disciplinary units informed with best practices in instruction. A significant amount of support was given to teachers in the core areas of reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies, as they were being held most accountable. It quickly became evident that teachers outside these areas of focus were, to some degree, also applying these skills in the curriculum units they developed in alignment with the standards and benchmarks at their grade level.

As the year progressed, the dimensions of a professional learning community were becoming more evident in everyday language and experiences. For instance, *shared leadership* increased as Rebecca took a back seat to John and the pioneer (mentor) teachers who had been involved since the beginning of this effort. Moreover, the Co-developer also played a less overt role, and served more as a sounding board to John. The principal learned as much as the teachers through *collective learning* and *shared practice*. Rebecca's presence at team meetings provided support, signaled the importance of accountability, and increased her personal knowledge and skills in the process—a process that will be assumed by another staff member next year upon John's retirement.

The *shared vision* of student learning and well being was evident through the *supportive conditions* of monthly meetings committed to unit writing and skill building, teams helping teams through completed written units, coaching on the side, the development of collaborative relationships, and of course, the Alternative Program.

Assessment: The Dance Continues

Two assessments were conducted that assisted in measuring the results of year two: the second administration of Hord's 17-item *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* questionnaire and 12 on-site interviews (conducted by the Co-developer and SEDL representative) of 25% of the teaching staff. The 12 interviews provided rich data from six females and six males representing the following

The shared vision of student learning and well being was evident through the supportive conditions of monthly meetings committed to unit writing and . . .

areas: grades 5-8, special education, foreign language, music, physical education, and allied arts. Results from the PLC instrument were impressive and appeared to reflect the focus and gains made throughout the second year. Ratings increased in 16 of the 17 items, which assessed progress in Hord's five dimensions of a PLC.

When asked, "What percent of staff do you feel are perceived as leaders?" comments ranged from 10-90%. Although leaders appeared in many roles beyond the leadership team, the 80% spread illustrated that some respondents felt some were more privy to leadership opportunities than others. Some teachers shared that release time, financial support, and professional development opportunities were available to some more than others. For instance, financial compensation was provided to the core area teachers for unit writing in the summer—areas that were targeted within the Standards plan. This begged the question, "Are some subject areas valued more than others?" and the response that it would probably never be any different.

In addition, the sharing of practice among colleagues remained low. Some teachers saw the benefits of sharing practice, and did so readily. Others revealed less interest and reported that time constraints significantly limited this practice, perhaps in light of discomfort and a lack of trust among colleagues. Further, interviews suggested that a small minority of teachers preferred to work alone and were resistant to change.

Some teachers saw the benefits of sharing practice, and did so readily.

Supportive structures were increased in terms of the physical structure of the facility, banked days, meetings, technology partners, and e-mail. However, needs continue: more time for meaningful dialogue, structures for inclusion of all staff, resources, and planning time with other grades. In terms of supportive relationships, the Foxdale staff truly cares for one another. This mutual regard is apparent in frequent and regular team interactions focused on teaching and learning, and perhaps even more so, in the scheduled socials, such as: monthly Eddy Awards for staff accomplishments, pancake breakfasts (cooked and served by members of the male staff), chili lunches, and time for the human-side on banked/in-service days. Again and again, it was apparent that staff hungered for these occasions and wanted more—a greater balance between task- and people-centered activities.

Needs in the areas of collective learning and supportive conditions were expressed as areas on which to focus: the ebb and flow of trust, greater involvement of more staff, and time for collaboration with staff in other grades and subject areas.

Teachers in non-core areas, such as physical education, music and foreign language tend to have greater opportunities to share and learn from one another because of their structural arrangements. Some team-teach or teach in close proximity to one another at some distance from other teachers in the school. As performing artists they are comfortable being "on stage" and invite feedback. Throughout Foxdale, pockets of trust exist, yet there is a desire to learn strategies from one another that affect student learning and increase their sense of efficacy as teachers. Nonetheless, resistance and mistrust among a few continues to hinder widespread trust. It also hinders the realization of what most respondents expressed as the need for more time: time to dialogue and share, to learn from diverse perspectives, to observe, to analyze student work, to assess results, and for whole school learning. One teacher emphasized the value of each person's contributions: "Each person is an integral part of the team, and we can't get along without each and every one."

One Step Back: Personnel Changes

The 2000-2001 school year will not only focus on sustaining our efforts, but paying closer attention to areas of need.

The 2000-2001 school year will not only focus on sustaining our efforts, but paying closer attention to areas of need. Trust is growing, yet past patterns of distrust occasionally re-emerge, where some things are found to be difficult to forget and forgive. John—a professional deeply loved and respected by his staff—has retired, and Rebecca shocked the district by turning in her resignation and accepting a position in a neighboring suburb. The overall effects of these transitions will only become apparent through time.

Two Steps Forward: New Leadership, Strong Focus

I have been a part of the beginning-of-the-year activities and have met with the new principal, Leo Dunn, often. The entire school community has warmly received Leo. They perceive him to be a leader with that rare mix of hands, heart and mind. His strong people-side will

promote the balance of task- and people-focus that most of the teachers have missed over the past year.

I have asked Leo to meet with the leadership team to determine their continued interest in the SEDL project and they, in turn, have met with their respective departments. The response has been very positive as long as we continue to use the PLC model to work smarter and support student learning. The Standards project continues to be Foxdale's priority, as accountability at both local and state levels loom overhead. A focused attention to the teamwork required will continue to challenge solutions to issues of inclusion and value of all staff as well as trust.

John, Adrienne (the new curriculum specialist) and I have discussed revisiting and perhaps redesigning the current approach to the Standards project. It seems teachers have been frustrated that so much time has been devoted to aligning instruction to the standards and benchmarks—they feel their creativity, energy, and passion for teaching has been lost. Staff will be asked to explore how the effort can be designed at Foxdale that would re-ignite the spirit, expertise and talents of each teacher. Leo is a firm believer that all successful efforts are built on trust and uses trust as a filter for all purposeful actions.

We have already planned an all-staff lunch on the first banked day in October, and a return of involving staff in the planning and facilitation of activities throughout the school year. My involvement will be to support this effort and assist as a guide during in-services that will allow staff to work in smaller groups according to their progress. Plans involve working with at least some staff in the area of assessment, helping teachers to examine how they can show that what they are teaching is making a difference. We also plan to involve the special educators in teams with regular educators. My background as a special educator and special education district support teacher will serve me well as I hope to contribute ideas and promote collective learning and shared practice.

These new partnerships will require risk and trust. I realize that regular visits and active participation will be necessary to expand what we have created. On the surface the transition of principal and curriculum specialist appears smooth. We have a common purpose in establishing trust and broadening the concept of community. We

These new partnerships will require risk and trust.

realize that teachers alone cannot affect student learning without support from the greater community. The PLC dimensions provide an organizational schema that can facilitate thinking about change, becoming open to other points of view, taking risks and interpreting progress. We hope that trust and an understood value of each person will remain in the forefront of these efforts. We are still committed to our children, the SEDL project, and ourselves as learners.

•   •   •

In some stages of Foxdale's "dance" of change, obstacles toward change led to improvements with the same regularity that improvement seemed to inevitably lead toward obstacles or evoke resistance. When Foxdale personnel had to negotiate with the district to develop time in their schedules for meeting, one result was a significant improvement in understanding, trust, relationships, and the school's overall sense of efficacy. If one acknowledges that this interplay is the "rhythm" of any change process, can we still differentiate between "positive" and "negative" events? Why would it be helpful to continue to make these distinctions?

~

Co-Developers Kris Hipp and Ruth Hinson (Story 3, p. 40) both acknowledge the critical role that trust plays in developing the will-

ingness for school personnel to pursue and advance school change, particularly shared leadership and shared personal practice. What strategies for building trust are suggested by these stories?

~

Kris Hipp's story explicitly explores the role of resistance in any school change. Beth Sattes (Story 2, p. 22) tells her readers that she and Principal Henrietta Atkinson talked openly about the danger of faculty resistance, couched as a sense that some teachers were becoming "favorites" within the school. Consider the benefits of acknowledging resistance to change openly. Should Co-Developers seek to prevent resistance wherever possible, or should they, in partnership with principals and teacher leaders, anticipate and accept resistance to change?

Story 2

Professional Learning Community: Off the Beaten Path

Teachers and parents are often seen as blaming one another for students' lack of success in learning. At Deerfield Elementary, significant energy and effort was expended to fully involve parents in the life of the school. As a result, parents become an important school resource, helping to nurture the developing PLC through supervising classes, supporting instruction, and underscoring the importance of education to students.

•   •   •

author ~ Beth Sattes

On a fine fall day in Deerfield, the noises of children playing at recess waft through the windows, providing a cheerful background to the conversation of their teachers. Eight teachers, representing grades three through six at Deerfield Elementary School, are sharing their strategies for boosting the language skills of students. They are learning a special process—Structured Reflection Protocol—which is designed to facilitate their collective learning.

Half of the group discusses the samples of student work they have brought to the session. The other half, supplied with copies of these samples, listen intently as their colleagues discuss the strategies they've used. One teacher describes the way her "vocabulary bingo" strategy seems to keep her students interested and energized in learning. A second teacher shares how his students, after working math problems, are asked to write about their approach to solving the problems, using what he calls the "language of mathematics." Yet a third teacher offers examples of "questions of the day," written on the board at the beginning of class as a prompt for student writing.

When the facilitator calls time, the listening group gives feedback. They reflect to their colleagues the positive things they've heard, providing reasons why these strategies are likely to build language skills. Says one: "I really like bingo as a way to review vocabulary words. I think I could use this strategy in sixth grade as well; it would make it more interesting than the same old flashcards."

After this "warm" feedback, the "listeners" offer suggestions in the form of questions. One queries, "In the bingo game, have you considered letting the students choose the vocabulary words, find the definitions in the dictionary, and teach each other?" Another wonders aloud, "What would happen if the students were to talk in small

When the facilitator calls time, the listening group gives feedback.

23

groups after they write their response to the question of the day? I think the opportunity to discuss in small groups makes it more likely that everyone will talk...and how better to develop language than to use it in speech?" The dialogue continues, in this structured way, until the students return and classes resume.

Twice a month, teachers in this small school use Structured Reflection Protocol to reflect upon the lessons they teach; their students' performance on assigned work; and ways to make that work more meaningful, engaging, and targeted to the objectives identified by the State Board of Education. They have found a way to share ideas with one another—to keep their teaching fresh. Unfortunately, this is not the norm throughout their school district.

Indeed, in May 2000, the county school system was found to be out of compliance by the State Board of Education.

Indeed, in May 2000, the county school system was found to be out of compliance by the State Board of Education. Despite concerted efforts to bring about change, the school system had been unable to correct a satisfactory number of the more than 200 violations found throughout the county's schools. The visiting state-appointed personnel ultimately recommended what has come to be called a "take-over" of the district by the state. Such take-overs had occurred previously in two neighboring counties in the southern part of the state, an area rife with political corruption and poverty.

This grim picture—of hopelessly poor physical facilities; of disheartened teachers with few expectations for low-achieving students who live up the "hollers," far from paved roads—and farther still from productive, positive role models; and of students who, to be financially successful, aspire to a college education which will inevitably take them away from their home community, which grows steadily older, poorer, and less skilled in their absence—can be found in many poor rural school districts throughout Appalachia, where schools offer the best-paying jobs in the community and consequently attract political patronage throughout the system.

In the context of such a culture, Deerfield Elementary School stands out as a clear exception to the expected and seemingly accepted poor performance of schools in this part of Appalachia. What has made the difference? What has prompted this little school to be noticeably different and notably intolerant of low standards? How have they come to develop the characteristics defined by Hord (1997) as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) in a school dis-

trict where schools lack a focus on continuous improvement and tend to stay with the status quo?

Over the last nine years, Deerfield has benefited from the strong leadership of Henrietta Atkinson, a determined principal with a clear and unwavering vision that precludes her students' falling into hopelessness and unemployment—an experience which is all too common in this community. Henrietta has found ways to bring time, training, and program resources to Deerfield Elementary through partnerships with outside agencies and the writing of several successful grants. Finally, through the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) project of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), Deerfield has focused on helping all teachers share practice.

The School: Basic Demographics

219 students attend Deerfield, in preschool through grade 6; 83% of them qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The attendance rate was 94% during the 97-98 school year; few children move in and out of the school district. Twelve percent of students qualify for special education services, excluding communication disorders—a primary deficit of this population; an additional 15% qualify for speech and communication-related services. Compared to other schools in the district, Deerfield scores relatively high on Stanford 9, the state's standardized test. Only nine percent of the students at Deerfield scored in the bottom quartile of the Stanford 9 at the conclusion of the 97-98 school year; an additional 20% scored in the second quartile.

	Total Basic Skills (%ile)			Reading (%ile)			Math (%ile)		
	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
3rd grade	47	67	70	42	65	58	46	67	74
4th grade	35	63	59	27	60	51	38	67	64
5th grade	58	56	70	48	54	53	66	59	83
6th grade	45	81	53	37	75	46	52	90	60

Deerfield is a typical Appalachian community: small and rural, with coal figuring prominently in its past and present. The nearest four-lane highway is about 10 miles and 30 minutes away; one two-lane road leads into and out of the town, curving over and around

hills. The entire population in this area of the county is white; many residents are unemployed or working in low-paying service industry jobs. Nearly one-third (28.2%) of the families in this county are on welfare. It is estimated that nearly half (45%) of the children in this county live in poverty. Of the adults living in Deerfield and its county, only 49 percent have high school diplomas; an estimated five percent have completed a college education.

Twenty-seven adults are employed at the school. One principal, 15 teachers (including one speech therapist, two special education teachers, and one Title I teacher), five service personnel and three cooks comprise the faculty and staff. Deerfield's teachers were already experienced when the PLC project began in 1998: all had taught for more than six years and nearly half for more than 15 years. Slightly over half of the professional staff had a masters degree. Most of the Deerfield staff had worked for their entire professional lives at this school, so they and their families are well known to one another. Because of the community's small size, many are related. For example, two pairs of sisters and one husband and wife were on the faculty in 1998; others are cousins or good friends.

School Improvement: A Brief History

Bringing Parents into Partnership

In 1990, Henrietta Atkinson read the discouraging statistic that 45 percent of children in her rural county lived in poverty—an increase of 56 percent over the preceding 10 years. The probability was very high that these children would live in poverty as adults, and would raise their own children in poverty as well. One year later, Henrietta became principal of Deerfield Elementary School.

Henrietta committed herself to doing everything she could to help break this damaging cycle that claimed the lives of so many young people in her community. She understood that improved instruction was an important tool to give children an achievement boost, and she introduced rigorous and challenging staff development to all professionals in the school. But she also understood the importance of involving the families and the greater community in creating hopeful futures for her students.

She understood that improved instruction was an important tool to give children an achievement boost . . .

26

In some respects, school reform at Deerfield began with a paradigm shift about parents and their involvement. Henrietta discovered the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE); Deerfield became a partner school. IRE encouraged parental involvement; they introduced the school to action research as a way to conduct staff development; they sponsored professional development for some of the staff to travel to Boston. (This experience of travel, in and of itself, broadened teachers' vision for their students!) The results of the IRE partnership can still be seen.

On any given day at Deerfield, parents and grandparents gather in the welcoming Family Center—a converted classroom that doubles as a teachers' lunchroom so that parents and teachers are in constant proximity. These family members contributed more than 12,000 volunteer hours in the school last year. In this rural, economically-disadvantaged community, a parent or family member of 98% of the students was in the school building sometime during the year—primarily because of intentional efforts to hold inviting events, such as talent shows, after-school fishing, dinners, and square dances. Home visits are made to hard-to-reach parents.

Teachers at Deerfield have telephones in their classrooms to enable two-way communication with parents. An innovative "telephone tree" ensures that every family receives a monthly call or visit from a parent volunteer to advise them of upcoming events and to solicit their suggestions. Parents serve on the Local School Improvement Council and on every school committee; their voice is heard before decisions are made. A U. S. Office of Education-sponsored website features Deerfield and focuses on its innovative and successful efforts at involving families in their children's education.

Teachers at Deerfield have telephones in their classrooms to enable two-way communication with parents.

Whatever it Takes

Monies from a variety of sources allow a preschool program to serve three- and four-year-olds in the community; home visits to be made during and after pregnancy to targeted families; a local dentist to provide dental screenings at the school. A partnership with a Minnesota-based religious organization provides youth volunteers to help residents with house cleaning and repairs. Through the adoption of MicroSociety, children in this K-6 school are learning how to

function as entrepreneurs, employees, legislators, law-enforcement officials, judges, and other productive members of this school's functioning society. The recent funding of a 21st Century Community Learning Center provides an after-school and summer program that keeps children engaged in academic enrichment and remediation—including basic reading and math, hands-on science, and creative writing—as well as courses in recreation and arts that include traditional sports (basketball, baseball, and football), karate, gymnastics, piano, arts and crafts, etc.

The school works with other community agencies and has partnerships with a local lumber company, a regional health systems provider, and a community outreach program. One particularly successful partnership has been with a nonprofit organization in the community funded by the Kellogg Foundation. With assistance from one of the organization's staff, Henrietta has written several grants that have been funded to allow the school to offer services and programs, including those mentioned above. Through the regional educational laboratory, AEL, in Charleston, WV, Deerfield is a part of the Quest project for continuous school improvement; with Co-Developer Sattes of AEL, Deerfield is part of SEDL's project for PLC.

Deerfield's Professional Learning Community

Shared and Supportive Leadership

As part of the PLC project, four Deerfield teachers were interviewed about each of the five components of a professional learning community. These teachers were quick to acknowledge their principal as a dynamic leader. "The key to a good school is the leadership" and "the principal is the key" were two of their statements. Two teachers reported that Henrietta is good at "delegating duties," sharing leadership. But clearly, this is a principal who acknowledges the expertise of the teaching staff and develops leadership among her teaching staff. "All of us are leaders in our own right," said one of the interviewees.

Important school decisions are made by Deerfield's faculty senate. Faculty senates at many schools meet solely because of state mandates to do so. In contrast, the Deerfield faculty senate is a strong and functional decision-making group. "She's just one of the

"The key to a good school is the leadership" and "the principal is the key" were two of their statements.

28

team when we're making decisions." Said one teacher of their princi-
pal. "She gets just one vote." One teacher shared that at faculty
senate, everybody is free to give his or her opinion. "We talk things
out." Interestingly, in their examples, it was clear that data drive
their decisions: "We look at test scores" to make decisions.

Henrietta draws on her teachers to be leaders in creating
change. Two teachers shared the story of how MicroSociety, a main-
stay at the school today, came to be introduced to Deerfield. They
recalled that two of their staff had attended a workshop and had
come back to school filled with enthusiasm for the power of this new
program. Henrietta was initially reluctant to try something so differ-
ent. But, this teacher reported, "Henrietta always asks, 'Is this
what's best for kids?' The more we researched the program, the more
we decided it would help the students and so Henrietta agreed to
give it a try." A third teacher cited the example of the new grade card
to illustrate Henrietta's willingness to allow teachers to lead. "We
decided to change things three to four years ago," the teacher
reported. The new grade card—developed by the faculty—is skill-
based. With Henrietta's support, the faculty senate applied for—and
received—a waiver from the state for this new way of reporting
progress to parents.

As a school leader, Henrietta shares decision-making through
several formal and informal strategies. The Local School Improvement
Council (LSIC) is established by state law to include the principal,
two elected teacher representatives, an elected parent, an elected
support staff member, and one invited community representative.
The council is active in helping to plan school improvement efforts at
the school. At a retreat in the spring of 1999—partially funded by a
grant from community partners and partially from the central
office—the LSIC joined with the Quest team and students repre-
senting the student body to review achievement test data; surveys
of teachers and parents; and the results of focus groups with par-
ents, students, and community members. They utilized processes
learned from AEL to engage all members of the school community. To
hear them tell it, data were disaggregated and posted all over the
walls of their retreat setting; they took their task seriously and
accomplished a great deal. With these data on hand, they estab-

*As a school leader,
Henrietta shares
decision-making
through several for-
mal and informal
strategies.*

lished goals and developed a school improvement plan to help them achieve those goals.

The Faculty Senate meets for a half-day every month. Agendas are established by the faculty senate chair, in collaboration with other members. Additionally, Deerfield has an active Curriculum Team, Technology Team, MicroSociety Advisory Committee, and other committees that are established as needed.

Shared Values and Vision

The staff at Deerfield know what's important and can talk about their shared vision. "Teaching isn't a profession for us; it's our *life.*" "We're educating the future of the world"—and that's important. In response to the question, "What's important around here?" one teacher said unhesitatingly, "the children."

"We ask ourselves, 'Have we tried everything we can to teach in the most modern and most effective ways possible?'" Staff look at test data, disaggregating scores and focusing on the bottom quartile of students. There is a "lot of reflecting here. We ask 'why?' if students don't achieve." As an example of the results of these kinds of discussions, Deerfield staff have divided the students into skill groups so that, for example, the math teacher can work intensively with the six or seven students with the greatest needs in math two days a week in a small group setting.

The culture of the school seems to be that failure is not an option.

The culture of the school seems to be that failure is not an option. Every child is expected to succeed and the staff does everything in their power to ensure success. One teacher described the school's vision as having evolved beyond students—to now include the parents and community of Deerfield. All four teachers that were interviewed mentioned the school's partnership with parents in discussing the school's vision. They seem to understand that the school can't "do it alone" and they have focused their efforts on engaging the home, providing preschool enrichment activities for children, and changing the way the community views academic success.

"Parents are more confident; you can see it in them." One teacher described their community of parents as "somewhat backward" but "now many have jobs and are willing to get out in the world of work, with self-confidence." Parents serve on every committee and help make decisions; they are "an integral part of our school." "If

you're really going to effect children, you have to start in the home...helping parents become life-long learners."

This focus on "life-long learning" was expressed by two of the four teachers. One told a poignant story that the students, as a part of MicroSociety, had to decide whether or not there would be a welfare system in their school's society. Students resoundingly voted "no," which seemed to validate movement beyond the historic and economic limits of their community.

When asked, "What is the vision for improvement?" one teacher responded, "Change is constant. It's almost addictive." Teachers are working to make learning relevant and meaningful: to help students learn. They will never "be there." They'll always be learning how to do it better. Clearly, Deerfield is a school where teachers know that change is a way of life. "We have taken on so much for the last five or six years. But there is so much to do; we need to keep working," shared one teacher.

Henrietta recognizes that "you can't force people to do what you want them to do" but she knows that you have to be willing to try new things to make progress. She hopes that, through teachers' leadership, other teachers will see the value and the power of innovations. Two of the teachers talked about "risk-taking" as the norm at Deerfield as they said the following: "We have the freedom to take risks;" "we have learned being a risk-taker is important;" and risk-taking is "the same philosophy we try to get over to our kids." It's continuous improvement as a mind-set. "We're still making changes and we'll continue to do that," was the way one teacher summed up life at Deerfield.

When asked, "What is the vision for improvement?" one teacher responded, "Change is constant. It's almost addictive."

Collective Learning and Application

When asked to "tell about how the staff comes together to learn," one teacher said, "we are in a *constant state of learning*—after school, during faculty senate and staff development days, wherever necessary." The teachers clearly believe that this is a community where "learning" is valued. "We learn together every month at the faculty senate and professional development day."

Many opportunities exist for teachers to attend workshops. One teacher talked about the experience of another teacher bringing back what they had learned to the rest of the staff. "It's an expecta-

tion. You share and show them what you've learned." Last year, a group of 21 teachers and parents went to San Francisco to attend a conference on MicroSociety. This feat is amazing for a small, rural school in Appalachia. "Traveling gives us the opportunity to socialize with one another" and to learn more from one another.

All four teachers that were interviewed mentioned the many different venues for learning together, and all four made specific mention of the protocol process, a new practice introduced to the school in the fall of 1999. Structured Reflection Protocol is done in team meeting once or twice every month. "Protocol is very useful in reflecting on student work and techniques. We bring in examples of student work and give warm and cool feedback." Teachers believe that protocol gives teachers an opportunity to learn from one another. There is also evidence that teachers are using what they learn—in the next meeting, a teacher gives an example of something learned in the last protocol session.

Another common denominator among all four teachers was a reference to the QUILT program.[1]

Another common denominator among all four teachers was a reference to the QUILT program.[1] "The QUILT program was different for us. We sent a team of three people, three of whom had never had a leadership position in the school. They came back and led the training for the whole faculty. And they did a great job." We're "now taping each teacher in their classroom, so they can review what they've done, set goals and tape another time to compare their progress."

One teacher acknowledged the value of a connection to an outside agency. The Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) helped them focus on parent involvement and action research. AEL's Quest network puts them in touch with other schools—they share information and visit with one another. Through AEL they also learned about the QUILT staff development program. Their involvement with SEDL

---

[1] QUILT (which stands for Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Thinking) is an AEL-developed professional development program, approved by the Program Effectiveness Panel, U. S. Department of Education, in 1995. QUILT focuses on effective classroom questioning and increased student thinking at higher levels. The process of the staff development program encourages collegiality through a highly interactive three-day training experience, monthly sharing opportunities and classroom application, followed up by peer observations and feedback throughout the school year. SEDL Co-Developer Sattes initially recommended QUILT to the Deerfield faculty as a structure to help staff (1) begin to "share practice" and (2) meet their school improvement goal of increasing student thinking.

stretches staff development even further, into the Professional Learning Community.

When asked how staff determined what they wanted to learn, one teacher responded, "Writing skills were down. We decided to work on that area through protocol." Another teacher shared that they compile surveys to decide what to study. "The state came up with a list of 'good strategies' and we asked teachers to rank how comfortable they were with each. We geared our staff development to those areas. For example, cooperative learning was one that people were not comfortable with. We formed a study group, read a book, had a one-day in-service on the topic, and observed one another."

One teacher specifically mentioned the value of learning together through team meetings. "We decided to target the fourth grade group and give them consistency for three years." Students have the same teacher for three years (fourth through sixth grades.) This team approach to instruction has paid off in higher achievement test scores.

One teacher specifically mentioned the value of learning together through team meetings.

At the beginning of their involvement with AEL and SEDL, the staff were somewhat divided. A core group of five or six teachers (who might be called "innovators") were Henrietta's strong supporters and willing to continuously improve their practice for the benefit of kids. Then there was a small group of "resistors." This small group (one of whom filed several grievances and wrote anonymous letters to the state board of education complaining about the principal) actively resisted any attempts to change the school or do things differently from what they had known for 40 years as "good schooling." The rest of the staff were "in the middle." They were active supporters of the principal but less interested and engaged in changing their practice.

Because the "core supporters" were also very good friends of or relatives of the principal, these divisions had the potential to cause a serious rift among school staff. In this poor, rural county—where "politics" is commonplace—this grouping was especially troublesome. In leadership meetings with Henrietta and the SEDL Co-Developer, we talked openly about this problem. Identifying it seemed to help address it.

Henrietta worked diligently to make sure that not just the "innovators" were using new and effective teaching strategies—but that *all* teachers had the opportunity to learn together, and under-

33

stood the expectations for high performance and continuous improvement. Henrietta believes in meeting folks where they are, in holding high expectations for performance, in pushing when necessary; but she also understands that change can't be "forced" on teachers. Many of the desired changes in teaching must come from a personal commitment on the part of individual teachers.

Supportive Conditions

It is clear that the principal understands her responsibility to support her faculty by finding adequate resources.

It is clear that the principal understands her responsibility to support her faculty by finding adequate resources. Grant-writing has yielded additional financial resources for after-school help for students, supplies, training, and travel. The faculty appear to have sufficient time available to them for collective learning. Once a month, they have a half-day for state-required faculty senate meetings. All members of the faculty participate in this decision-making body. The chair of this group, by state law, is selected by the faculty. Examples of new business under discussion at one faculty senate meeting included: plans for Family Learning Night, to which all parents are invited and at which dinner and child care is provided; Life Skills Training, for which two volunteers were recruited to attend and report back to the faculty; plans to submit a waiver to the state board of education related to a new grade card they have developed to more clearly communicate with parents about student progress; and update about the protocol process and how it is to be implemented by grade level teams.

To the observer, a pleasant atmosphere exists during meetings; it was casual, with some joking, but clearly the business was serious. At one point, someone asked for the "talking stick" so it seems they have procedures to allow talking without interruption; these procedures are not needed or used consistently, but are available and used "as needed."

The second half-day of that monthly time is for professional development. The staff at Deerfield use that time for a variety of purposes. Teachers have input into the content, although often at least part of the agenda is required by the central office administration.

In addition, the principal has arranged for time to be available to two sub-groups within the school. The nine teachers in the lower grades (preschool through third) have opportunity to meet for an

hour before lunch and the six teachers in the upper grades (fourth through sixth) have a similar time immediately after. These "planning teams" are required to meet for 30 minutes twice a week.

Whole school meeting time can be arranged periodically by utilizing the parent volunteers. If more time is required, Henrietta arranges for parents (and often herself) to cover the students. In the search for more time as an entire faculty, the faculty senate approved a plan for an hour every week. Henrietta has requested early dismissal of the students every Friday for 30 minutes. Teachers would "donate" an additional 30 minutes, giving one full hour of whole-staff time to work together. When asked what structures support collective learning, teachers mentioned the protocol process, leadership, and time to meet. "Henrietta frees us up to meet during the day." Sometimes Henrietta takes the whole school, with help from parent volunteers, so that teachers can meet and learn together. "Not many principals would do that."

Clearly relationships are important in this school. One teacher acknowledged that the close-knit community was a structure that supported learning together. "We went to school together and have taught together all these years. We live together in the community. We have a common bond—wanting to do what's best for the kids." Staff are comfortable speaking their minds because they know one another so well. This teacher described his colleagues as having "open minds" to try new things, and he identified this trait as a supportive condition. "I'll try it; if it doesn't work, I'll try it again; you never know, it might work well."

Different teachers were mentioned as being inspirations to other teachers. No single teacher stands out; evidently all have a role in leadership in this school. In one interview, a teacher identified a specific teacher who had helped her "grow and evolve." She was able to take more chances because the two are friends outside of school. The principal was identified as key to promoting this "being together" attitude. She communicates well and clearly. "You're just as good as your leader," said one teacher, and "she's very good!"

No single teacher stands out; evidently all have a role in leadership in this school.

Shared Personal Practice

This area is the one in which Deerfield was the weakest on their first administration of the PLC instrument. It may also be the area in

which there has been the most growth and development. When asked if staff shares their practice (through classroom observations, for example) one teacher responded, "I do it all the time." She related that a new teacher in the school had brought in lots of new ideas. "When I was assigned to teach at a different grade level, I wanted to observe, so Henrietta arranged for a substitute for me."

All four teachers who were interviewed mentioned that the structured reflection protocol process was a way for them to talk about what they did—all the while, looking at student work. "I've seen some attitude changes since we started it." Evidently the most reluctant teacher has even begun to feel comfortable with the proto-col process. "We have a wealth of knowledge. If we can share that knowledge, we'll all be enriched." QUILT was also mentioned as an important way for them to get into one another's classrooms on a regular basis.

Deerfield faculty seem to be aware that observation is a good thing, but they still don't do it regularly or systematically. "We need to do it more." They are taping their own classrooms to watch and give themselves feedback. This is a first step toward having a partner come into their class to observe. Teachers also recognized that lots of informal sharing occurs regularly. "Little things happen all over the school" as there is sharing during committee meetings.

This is the an area of the five PLC areas in which Deerfield teachers talked about things being different now—an area in which they can identify change. "This is different definitely. It's a good change." They saw value, but they also recognized that they don't yet share and observe as much as they have the opportunity to—or as much as they believe would be good. "Teachers have good things to share and problems that stump them." Sharing personal practice has been an intentional difference at the school; teachers are aware of the effort to make this change. "We've always done that, but it's dif-ferent now. It used to be more individualized. It has changed dramati-cally. We come together as a whole staff. That's the big difference."

•   •   •

Story 2

Schools must acknowledge contextual influences as they develop school improvement initiatives. Co-Developer Beth Sattes is painfully aware of the social, cultural, and economic context in which this Appalachian school struggles. What factors help Deerfield Elementary to acknowledge this context, without making contextual factors into excuses for students' lack of success? What lessons can be drawn from the work of Co-Developer Beth Sattes, Principal Henrietta Atkinson, and the Deerfield story? What other school districts and regions might benefit most from these lessons?

~

Ricki Chapman sees her Co-Developer role as providing the external resources to facilitate growth and improvement at her partner school (Story 7, p. 86). At Deerfield Elementary, Principal Henrietta Atkinson plays a similar role—establishing business partnerships, writing grant proposals, etc. In Ruth Hinson's story (p. 40), the

development of a grant proposal helps to instigate school change, and is an important experience of collective learning for the leadership team. As schools struggle to find resources, should more attention be given to bringing these kinds of activities into individual schools? Do teachers have a role to play in developing resources for their school?

~

Leadership Teams are critical to PLC development in several of the stories found here, including Ruth Hinson's (p. 40), Kris Hipp's (p. 6), and Janie Huffman's (p. 52). Should leadership teams be mandated, as they are in some states? Are leadership teams the best—or the first—embodiment of shared leadership within a fledgling professional learning community?

Story 3

Shoreline Elementary

Co-Developer Ruth Hinson shares the story of "good school" in a "good community" that undertakes significant school-wide improvement efforts. Although the school does not face a "crisis," significant changes in school structure and state mandates help to instigate the process of reflection and improvement.

• • •

*author ~ **Ruth Hinson***

The story of Shoreline Elementary is not one of "at-risk to riches." The title doesn't read "School In Big Trouble Makes Good!" On the contrary, the Shoreline story represents the plight of the American public school stuck in the middle. Shoreline is a school that serves the middle ground population. It's not wealthy. It's not poor. In the middle, Shoreline qualifies for the basic public school resources available in its school district, with little leverage for increase. Shoreline is a "good school" in a "good community." So what *is* the story? The real story is about a faculty who have taken responsibility for their own success. This faculty became unwilling to accept "good enough." So they have created within themselves an unquenchable appetite for learning and growth that focuses on their crystal clear vision: Every single child *will* reach his learning potential. "We are responsible for our students' success."

. . . Every single child will reach his learning potential.

Context

A quick glance around the classrooms and twenty-acre campus tells the newcomer that order and cleanliness are important values at Shoreline. In fact, the school is a "looks-like-new" facility that was built in 1986. Designated as Shoreline Primary at its opening, the original faculty served grades K-4. A decade later, the fifth grade class from a nearby middle school moved to Shoreline, where the growing faculty inaugurated the newly built fifth grade wing. But it was in August 1998 that the big jolt hit: Grades 6-8 were added, to make Shoreline a pre-kindergarten through eighth grade school. To house the new grades, a third wing was completed. The faculty doubled in size. The lower and upper grades were set on different time

schedules. Shoreline Primary became Shoreline Elementary and a new era began for the faculty, administrators, parents, and students.

The ever-increasing population in this section of state, just south of the state's capitol, prompted the sudden growth of the school. The local economy is flourishing and residents are moving in from the metropolitan area in order to enjoy the pleasant, rural aspects of this community, yet still have the convenience of the city nearby. The demand for increasing academic quality from the petro-chemical based economy has been an outside influence helping the school recognize that it must work more diligently to prepare Shoreline students to compete with students from area private and parochial schools.

The local community considers Shoreline Elementary a source of pride.

The local community considers Shoreline Elementary a source of pride. The population is non-transient, parents are positive and lend cooperation to teachers, students are generally motivated to learn, and as a result, there are few discipline referrals—about 30 in a student body of 1,000. Shoreline enjoys a 96% attendance rate, and a slim 1% grade retention rate. Nearly one-fifth of all parents are college educated, and 64% graduated from high school. Forty percent of parents are in professional careers, 41% are employed in technical fields, and 19% work in skilled trades. Seventeen percent of parents did not graduate from high school; 27 percent of students are economically disadvantaged.

In a state with a 30% minority population, the ethnicity of the school student community is somewhat unusual: 98% of students are white, .5% are African American, and 1.5% represent other ethnic identities. The faculty are somewhat more representative, at 82% white and 18% African American. The 61-person faculty is predominantly (94%) female, and almost half (47%) have masters degrees. The staff is professionally young—45 teachers have five years or less of teaching experience. Surprisingly, all 16 other teachers have more than 15 years of teaching experience.

Background

Learning to Collaborate

Peter Senge (1990) defines learning communities as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results

they truly desire, where new expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (3). Long before the faculty or the administration at Shoreline set out to develop a professional learning community, they had made great progress toward becoming one.

Through a series of community meetings, faculty, community members, parents and administrators generated a collective vision of what they wanted for *their students'* future. These meetings were facilitated in 1993 teachers at Shoreline Primary. This vision was a critical first step in Shoreline's membership in the Alliance for Education Reform (AER), a non-profit organization at a nearby university.

As a member of the university's resource team, my role was to serve as external change facilitator, coach and mentor to the school. I worked with a team of teachers, administrators, and community representatives as they trained to facilitate strategic planning at the school site. Each leadership team hosted and facilitated public planning forums that were collaborative in nature and focused specifically on school improvement. Parents, community members, faculty, and administrators developed *consensus* on the key elements of context or history of the school, the vision for the future, barriers to the vision and new directions to achieve the vision. With the new directions serving as their goals, the schools then developed an action plan for one semester at a time, in large and small groups.

The non-traditional approach of the Alliance is designed specifically to establish teachers as the front line leaders of school improvement, not front line followers. The purpose is to cultivate a core of teachers in each school who are trained as a team with the principal in the leadership skills necessary to lead innovation, plan strategically, redesign schools, work productively in teams, and change belief systems across the school and school district. These competencies enable schools to stay the course of change and improvement over the long term—even when there are significant changes at the school.

The non-traditional approach of the Alliance is designed specifically to establish teachers as the front line leaders of school improvement, not front line followers.

Testing Shared Leadership

In August 1998, both the strength and quality of shared leadership at Shoreline were put to the test. Three new grades were added and

two schools were essentially established beneath one roof. All faculty and staff were challenged to accomplish the transition with a maximum benefit to students. Primary teachers may have been under particular pressure to communicate the procedures and practices of shared leadership to their new 6th, 7th, and 8th grade colleagues. In this process, the school's approach to continuous school improvement has been honored, translated, challenged, and reinvented in the "new" Shoreline School. The old has not been lost, but rather joined with the new to become a dynamic force for refreshed commitment, renewed energy, and the re-evaluation of who and what the school is and can be for all those who are a part of it.

In September 1998, the PLC project hosted by Southwest Educational Development Laboratories provided an opportunity for members of the leadership team to travel to Austin and meet with other teachers and Co-Developers. This meeting helped Shoreline personnel focus their attention from all of the possible problems of the change they were undergoing to two significant issues that they could address: raising the bar on Shoreline achievement, and finding support for professional development.

The experience of meeting colleagues from across the country prompted Shoreline faculty to commit to addressing an issue they had known about for some time. Compared to other schools in the district, Shoreline had very high student achievement levels. But when they compared Shoreline students' achievement to that of students in similar schools on a national level, they did not fare so well. The faculty chose the wider, more challenging view and committed themselves to an effort to bring Shoreline up to national standards.

In order to achieve this goal, Shoreline faculty would need ongoing staff development—another longstanding concern at the school. In the past, professional development had been targeted to the needs of individual teachers, to address both grade and subject level concerns. The current need was for whole faculty staff development, especially in light of the school's expansion, the different operating schedules of primary and middle grade teachers, and the difficulty of bringing the faculty together to learn, grow, and build community. Although the student body, curriculum design, and social milieu of the school had been profoundly altered, financial resources barely

44

increased. Finding the funds to provide faculty development would be the team's first challenge.

Through the State Department of Education (SDE), the leadership team heard about funds available through Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grants. Officials at SDE encouraged Shoreline to apply for funding, explaining that the process of writing the grant would help the faculty to clarify the school's needs and strategies for meeting those needs. This clarification process, they assured, would be both beneficial in its own right and would increase Shoreline's chances for receiving funding elsewhere, if the CSRD proposal was unsuccessful.

The leadership team decided to follow the advice of SDE, and took up the responsibility of writing the CSRD grant. CSRD called for proposals that would allow schools to choose and implement a school improvement model that fit, or could be adapted to, the grantee's needs. Shoreline chose the Coalition of Essential Schools model because they recognized a high level of congruence between this program and the progress they had made through their work with AER. As they gathered to write their proposal, the predictions for clarification made by SDE and a clear benefit of the new PK-8 structure became apparent.

The leadership team decided to follow the advice of SDE, and took up the responsibility of writing the CSRD grant.

Prior to the addition of grades 6, 7, and 8, scores of Shoreline's fifth grade students on standardized tests were sent on to area middle schools. Now that these students—and their scores—stayed at Shoreline, a troubling pattern became apparent. After fifth grade, girls from Shoreline scored significantly lower in math and science than did boys. This discovery led the leadership team to further broaden their arena of research. They met with faculty from the local university, and looked critically at their community culture. They found that the strong family structure of the area furthered the reluctance of women to pursue the many professional position available in the local petro-chemical industry. As a result, those positions went disproportionately to men and to non-natives.

The evidence that they were somehow discouraging girls from success in the very fields that would provide them stable, high-paying, and local employment helped galvanize interest in staff development among Shoreline faculty. With funding from CSRD, six teachers

and one administrator from Shoreline attended Critical Friends training during the summer.

The Ebb and Flow of Goals and Improvement

The decline of girls' scores in math and science during adolescence is an issue that has received national attention, and which has resisted many efforts at redress. Shoreline Elementary could not solve this problem overnight—but convincing proof that this dynamic was negatively affecting *their* students helped to convince faculty of the need for Critical Friends work, and provided a specific focus for sharing personal practice.

Once the faculty were committed, the leadership team set goals for implementation of the Critical Friends program.

Once the faculty were committed, the leadership team set goals for implementation of the Critical Friends program. One goal was to have every teacher videotape themselves in their classroom and share that videotape with a critical friend during the first year. CSRD's focus on matching school improvement models with school needs and culture was recalled, as the leadership team discovered that goal was too ambitious. Before faculty could face the perceived vulnerability of videotape and peer critique, they needed to meet with one another, discuss their practice, and build trust.

Vertical teams were developed. These meetings opened many eyes among the faculty, as they discovered the wisdom in their peers and acknowledged their responsibilities to one another.

A new staff development focus emerged as 4th and 8th grade faculty expressed their sense of being under particular pressure from state mandated tests. These discussions led to the review of learning goals in each grade level, and the practice of writing the curriculum on large pieces of paper that were posted in the meeting rooms to clearly show the relationship between the grades. As a result of seeing the way learning in each grade relied upon prior learning in earlier grades, the entire faculty took greater responsibility for state test scores in 4th and 8th grades, and helped to ease the pressure on those teachers.

Experiences like this one raise the level of enthusiasm and trust among the faculty, and increase the likelihood that all Shoreline faculty can come together and achieve success on their other goals,

including video-critiques, and improving the math and science scores of adolescent girls. Based upon their earlier experience with AER, Shoreline staff are already quite sophisticated in their planning for change. They know to expect resistance, and acknowledge resistance as a product of the change process—not of individual personalities. They also know the benefit of concentrating on the positive, focusing efforts and sharing leadership roles with those teachers who show themselves to be enthusiastic, willing to take risks, and eager to improve.

Leading Is Trusting At Shoreline

When asked to characterize leadership at Shoreline Elementary, one teacher put it this way: "Leadership is shared by teachers across all grade levels. We have different people heading up different areas and new faces are taking on leadership roles in different areas all of the time. For instance, we have a faculty council that is lead by teachers. We have people writing grants who are taking the lead in that way so that the same people are not doing the work all of the time." As she was pressed to answer why, she relied, "Teachers take on leadership roles because everybody's ideas are listened to. I think everybody feels that they have a right to have input. It lets everybody take ownership and I don't think that anybody is afraid of the administration stepping on their feet and saying 'No you can't do that,' because they're open to anything that's going to benefit the kids."

Shoreline Elementary has consistently developed teachers into both formal and informal leaders. Positions such as Grade Level Chairperson, Task Force Coordinator, Facilitators and School Leadership Team members all represent formal opportunities for leading school improvement work. In addition, informal leadership has developed at every opportunity. For example, the strategic planning facilitators who were trained by the Alliance for Education Reform have mentored other teachers to be facilitators. This work increases the number of facilitators at the school, reduces resistance to change as more individuals are involved in it, helps to reduce burnout of teacher leaders, and increases trust among all faculty.

Shoreline Elementary has consistently developed teachers into both formal and informal leaders.

Professional learning communities breathe and survive on the oxygen of trust and openness. These qualities are not developed

overnight. They are initiated, nurtured, cajoled, fostered, pushed, then finally they become routine—as they have at Shoreline. Another faculty member describes the way shared leadership is routinized at Shoreline in this way, "When new teachers come into the Shoreline faculty, they are kind of 'gun shy.' They'll say, 'I can't believe they let you do that here' and all of that kind of stuff. But it doesn't take them long to jump right in—and they like it. I think the administration here has a lot of faith in their faculty, that we're going to do what's best for kids. We live up to what's expected of us!"

•   •   •

Story 3

Shoreline Elementary managed to take advantage of significant restructuring to instigate research, reflection, and collaborative learning for staff development. State mandated testing of 4th and 8th graders created tension among the teachers that ultimately led to a greater school-wide awareness of the interplay of grade-level curricula. Based upon your reading of the Shoreline story, and your own knowledge of school systems and school change, do you think schools require external impetus to take on the challenge of school change and improvement? How likely does it seem that a school might instigate comprehensive school improvement without an external "push?" What qualities and resources would a school require to do so?

~

At Foxdale School (Story 1, p. 6), substantial funds were made available to address a "high number of student behavioral problems;" Beth Sattes (Story 2, p. 22) provides a detailed description of the Appalachian environment in Deerfield Elementary school students struggle—and the numerous partnerships and supports the school receives to address these issues. The Shoreline Story, on the other hand, is described as representing the "plight of the American public school stuck in the middle." To what extent are schools "in the middle" neglected by institutions that could provide support for improvement? To what extent does the self-definition of being "in the middle" prevent pressure for improvement from building within a school?

~

Shoreline Elementary's experience with the Alliance for Education Reform laid significant groundwork for PLC development by providing Shoreline faculty with structures for shared leadership, prior experience in collective learning, etc. At Deerfield Elementary (Story 2, p. 22) experience gained through work with the regional education laboratory also paved the way for PLC delvelopment. Should this kind of previous experience with school-wide change be considered in assessing a school's "readiness for change?" How might Co-Developers and school leadership best introduce PLC concepts and practices, when PLC represents a school's first step toward continuous change and improvement?

Story 4

Northland Elementary:
A Learning Experience for All

Shared leadership is one of five defining characteristics of professional learning communities. At Northland Elementary, support for shared leadership allowed for individual growth and professional development of the principal and a teacher-leader, and expanded responsibilities for the Campus Leadership Team.

•   •   •

*author ~ **Jane B. Huffman***

When Northland Elementary's students and patrons walk in the front door, they read a banner proclaiming, "Northland Elementary—A Great Place to Grow." This slogan promises the opportunity for all participants—students, staff, faculty, and patrons—to learn and grow. Northland has worked to make good on this promise for some time now. The opportunity provided by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), for Northland staff to work toward developing a professional learning community (PLC) in their school, instigated further growth and change among school leaders at every level. This story recounts the journeys taken by principal Grayson Dawson, the Campus Leadership Team (CLT), and PLC project teacher-leader Heather Holton during their involvement in the PLC project.

The School

Northland Elementary, a K- 5 school located in a city with a population of 90,000, is located within 30 miles of two major southern cities. The city has two large universities and serves as a central service center for the northern part of the state. The school was built in 1973 and operates with an alternative calendar that serves students year round. The student community is 50% Hispanic, 38% white, 11% African-American, and 2% other. Students' families are mostly low-income semiskilled and unskilled laborers. Most of the parents have acquired a high school diploma. In the school, there are 42 certified staff, 10 paraprofessionals, and 10 support personnel. Sixteen percent of the staff is male, and 84% are female. In the ethnicity category, 61% of the staff are white, 30% are Hispanic, and 9%

are African-American. Twenty-one percent of the staff have master's degrees. Twenty-two staff members have 0-10 years teaching experience. Twelve teachers have taught at Northland more than 11 years, and fifteen teachers are in their first or second year of teaching.

Principal Leadership

Grayson Dawson had worked at Northland Elementary for fourteen years when the PLC project began in 1998. He had served as assistant principal for several years before being selected for the principalship. He characterizes his early leadership style as control-oriented and rigid in regard to rules and regulations. While district and state standards categorized him as an effective principal, Grayson sought to gain additional leadership knowledge, and in so doing, more successfully address the complex problems and situations he and the school were facing during the early and mid-1990's. Also, as the state mandated site-based decision making for each school, his leadership style changed to reflect these new behaviors and expectations. He began to view his role as that of a facilitator of organizational development and effective decision-making.

Grayson's interest in personal growth and flexibility in leadership style paved the way for a Campus Leadership Team able and willing to consider progressive and collaborative educational initiatives. Their growth and learning activities were made possible and enhanced by the forward-looking attitudes and skills of Grayson. While the overall direction and final responsibility for the school accountability measures rested with the principal, important operational, financial, and curricular decisions were made by the CLT, which was chaired and facilitated by Grayson.

In 1998, even though his initial response to the PLC project was positive, Grayson's attitude was guarded and somewhat hesitant. He respected the faculty and regarded their opinions highly—his concerns about PLC centered on the faculty's need to be included in and consulted about major school initiatives. As the PLC project proved to be an effective vehicle for facilitating input from the CLT and the faculty as a whole, the initiative gained Grayson's unmitigated support.

Throughout the PLC project, Grayson provided focused direction and consistent messages for his faculty. In the fall of 1999, he

Throughout the PLC project, Grayson provided focused direction and consistent messages for his faculty.

offered the faculty this challenge: "We [faculty] should be concerned about speaking the same language and having the same focus. We should continually be recharging a sense of community. We must remind ourselves what our focus is. We should provide support and staff development."

Faculty Leadership

Northland's journey toward school improvement began in the early 1990's, when the CLT initiated a discussion to determine a unifying instructional focus for the school. During the deliberations, the team considered a variety of concepts and plans, finally adopting learning styles as the instructional focus for the school. As a result of this research and decision-making process, Northland faculty and staff developed clear communication procedures and organizational practices that allowed for participative decision-making during the early 1990s. These steps formed a strong foundation for the PLC project.

During the 1992-93 school year the faculty studied the possibility of a "Year Round School." A task force was formed and study groups explored the research. The district approved a pilot for implementation of an extended calendar. A proposal was developed in 1993 by the CLT and meetings were held with faculty and parents to get feedback and suggestions. In July of 1994 the school started its first year on the new "Alternative Calendar," and during the following years there have been several reviews of the program. Recognizing the benefits of the pilot program, in 1997 the school board voted to establish the calendar as a regular program for Northland. This initiative contributed to the development of a feeling of empowerment for faculty and staff.

The SEDL PLC project thus fit easily into an existing structure of review and reform. In 1998, the first year of the SEDL project, the Northland staff re-considered their focus and strategies by responding to Hord's (1997) PLC questionnaire. This questionnaire posed questions organized around the five PLC dimensions: shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. The results confirmed the strengths of Northland's professional community, especially in the areas of shared leadership and collective learning. The results also

The SEDL project thus fit easily into an existing structure of review and reform.

55

helped the faculty decide on two dimensions—shared personal practice and shared values and vision—for more focused efforts.

As a means of strengthening shared personal practice, the staff requested more time to observe each other's classes in order to increase individual and organizational capacity. They also wanted to visit other schools as needed. Grayson offered support and substitutes to cover their classes. While these visits provided some experience of shared practice, faculty quickly realized the limitations they faced without a systematic way to share the information gained in one another's classrooms. They have had the opportunity to visit about student work in the tutoring time after school, but again, there was no formalized method to accomplish this. Staff realized they needed to discover alternative ways to share practice and personal relevant knowledge.

Faculty have recently requested more time and opportunities during the school day to meet in grade level teams for long-range planning.

Faculty have recently requested more time and opportunities during the school day to meet in grade level teams for long-range planning. A proposal for three early release days for common planning has been discussed. If this is accomplished, it will certainly provide time for Northland faculty to continue their efforts in strengthening communication and curriculum alignment.

The other identified focus area was shared values and vision. The staff felt they needed to revisit the existing vision to identify what was needed to achieve high quality learning experiences for all students. This exploration of vision developed quickly into action. The faculty instigated a Saturday School to address students' need for more study time, and to assist students in developing knowledge and skills for the state test. A committee of teachers developed a structure, curriculum and instructional strategies for a four-week program that would assist student who volunteered to attend. These teachers also staffed the four Saturday mornings. In the second year, this program resulted in student improvement on the state test. Perhaps more importantly, teachers felt empowered by their experience of making a clear difference in student achievement.

Individual Leadership

Heather Holton, the PLC teacher-leader, had seven years' experience teaching fifth grade science and math when the PLC initiative began. Heather was also completing her masters and certification in

Educational Administration, and was interested in the PLC project as a means of gaining experience in administration and school reform efforts. An important learning opportunity for Heather occurred during the 1999 summer SEDL meeting. After journeying with me to the SEDL conference, Heather returned to Northland and proposed to Grayson and the CLT a more formal induction and mentoring program for the new teachers. Heather saw this program as an effective means of communicating and reinforcing school vision. When the proposal was accepted, Heather took responsibility for program development.

This program has provided new teachers a clearer understanding of Northland's vision, policies, and procedures. In the same spirit as Heather's orientation program, a faculty retreat was held at the beginning of the school year to increase teacher collaboration and support. Also during the year, Heather organized and began a faculty study of Parker Palmer's book *The Courage to Teach*. These efforts marked a shift in Heather's leadership role from an involved classroom teacher to an organizer and initiator. For her, it seemed the possibilities presented by the PLC project finally became realities.

To clarify school needs in order to develop the 1999-2000 Campus Plan, Heather again took the lead, administering the PLC questionnaire to the entire staff. The teachers identified three major areas of concern. First, they wanted early release days so they could conduct long-range planning. Second, they wanted more time to plan and learn in teams on a weekly basis. Third, they again wanted to visit each other's classes and provide one another feedback. These areas defined the focus for the year. They were placed on the agenda for the CLT and implementation plans were begun. A healthy and effective flow of leadership has characterized Northland Elementary, and helped guarantee the success of the PLC initiative. PLC structures and concepts, in turn, supported the initiative and action of an individual teacher leader, who helped to clarify the needs of the whole school, contributing to an improvement agenda for faculty and principal leadership.

This program has provided new teachers a clearer understanding of Northland's vision, policies, and procedures.

Conclusion

Northland's progress over the past two years has been highly encouraging. The dynamic and flexible leadership structure at Northland has

facilitated a schoolwide understanding of the PLC concept and how that relates to the school culture. Northland's faculty now seem to fully understand the professional learning community concepts, and are energetically adapting and refocusing the dimensions for their use to best serve students.

There were many factors important to this effort.

There were many factors important to this effort. A historical organizational trust in leadership provided a firm foundation for PLC growth. Through their commitment to provide strong leadership, and their own willingness to grow, Northland's leaders made progress seem natural to the school. Grayson, a strong organizational leader, provided the consistency and direction for the faculty to be responsible decision-makers in relation to school programs and strategies that would benefit students. The CLT membership felt confident their role was critical to the governance of the school, and they worked diligently to define issues and make representative decisions about important school issues. Heather gained confidence through the two years as she stepped up to the plate and clearly assumed a needed leadership role. As a result, the faculty became even more committed to providing the best program for their students as they work to achieve their motto "Northland School—A Great Place to Grow." The faculty moves surely toward that end.

•　　•　　•

The PLC project at Northland Elementary truly provided an opportunity for Northland faculty to grow and learn together. Northland's principal, and teacher-leader Heather Holton were also able to advance their individual and professional goals and interests through the PLC initiative. Leadership development at Northland took many forms—not everyone would want to pursue the administrative track that interested Heather. Identify those factors that seem to contribute to the graceful sharing of leadership that Northland experienced. In what ways do broader definitions of leadership and leadership development aid in the sharing of school leadership?

~

Fortunately, many of the PLC partner schools seem to have experienced success in developing shared leadership. Consider this story, as well as the stories of Ruth Hinson (p. 40) and Beth Sattes (p. 22). Do these schools share structures or practices in common, which might support developing leadership, or contribute to an "atmosphere" of leadership within the school community?

~

At Shoreline Elementary (Story 3, p. 40), the staff researched and adopted a school improvement model (the Coalition of Essential Schools) that matched their own identified areas of need. At Northland, PLC efforts matched the ambitions and interests of Principal Grayson Dawson and teacher Heather Holton. To what extent should this element of "match" be built into the planning process, and to what extent can it be left to chance?

Story 5

Teacher Leadership:
A Story of Hope

In this "story of hope," an individual teacher leader makes remarkable contributions to her school's improvement efforts. These contributions come outside of, and in addition to, her contracted job description. Should teacher leadership be more fully institutionalized, to avoid taking advantage of—or losing—committed teachers?

• • •

author ~ Anita Pankake

This is a story of Hope, a bright young educator whose influence was strongly felt in a school working hard to create a professional learning community. This story is about Hope's contribution to that school-wide effort. Hope's story may help others interested in creating professional learning communities or implementing other school improvement efforts become aware of how an individual educator—someone not necessarily occupying a formal leadership position—can play a key role in school change.

This is also a story of hope beyond the individual—the hope that is in every school. That is, this story is also intended to help others see the untapped possibilities for leadership and influence that exist in every school, embodied in the teaching professionals who walk its halls. This story is about the optimism and expectation that teachers have about their work as individuals and their work as members of a team.

This is also a story of hope beyond the individual—the hope that is in every school.

Background

Hope Tchrnowski was born and raised in Loston, a community of about 3,000 people. Southern Edge Independent School District (SEISD) includes this rural community and some of the areas extending into the county surrounding it. SEISD has one elementary school, a middle school, and a high school.

Hope graduated from Southern Edge High School about a decade ago. She left Loston after high school to attend a nearby college, where she earned an undergraduate degree in education with majors in journalism and English. After completing her degree, she returned to SEHS to begin her teaching career. She taught English

at the high school for five years. During that time she also took grad-uate courses in library science and instructional technology to become certified as a school librarian.

In her sixth year of work at SESH, Hope became the school librarian. While her official job description did not require it, her knowl-edge of instructional technology and her placement in the position of librarian allowed her opportunity to work with the staff and students on the acquisition and use of a variety of technology, both hardware and software. Much of the limited equipment that the school owned was housed in the library. Almost by default, the library came to be viewed as the school's technology center, and Hope came to be viewed by the administration and staff as the technology coordinator for the building.

I first met Hope when she was admitted to the doctoral pro-gram at the university where I work. She had decided to pursue a doctoral degree in school administration with the accompanying administrative courses for the principalship and superintendency cer-tifications. I was a member of the university committee that inter-viewed and recommended her admission to the program. While I am sure I noticed that she worked at SEHS and lived in Loston, at that time I had no idea that we would soon be working together, trying to create a professional learning community in her school.

My work with Southern Edge High School came about because of my acquaintance with the principal at the school, Natalie (Nattie) Stewart. Nattie had also been a student in our principal's certifica-tion program several years earlier, when she was in another district. Nattie had been hired as the principal at SEHS a year prior to my work on the campus. In fact, one of the reasons I approached SEHS as a Professional Learning Communities Project site was because of my established relationship with Nattie. It was after I initiated my work with SEHS that I discovered I would also be working with Hope.

Hope as Teacher Leader

As the PLC Project got underway, I quickly came to respect Hope as a teaching profession-al and campus leader.

As the PLC Project got underway, I quickly came to respect Hope as a teaching professional and campus leader. Her enthusiasm for and loyalty to the staff and students of SEHS was demonstrated repeatedly in formal meetings regarding the PLC Project and in her

daily work activities with her colleagues and the SEHS students. She received requests for assistance with pleasure. In fact, she often went beyond the request to offer additional services and materials. She appeared regularly to be a master at "multi-tasking." The SEHS library was a hub of activity for both students and faculty. Hope moved smoothly and efficiently from assisting a student with locating a website on one of the computers, to setting her library assistant on the task of getting materials for a faculty member, to being on her way out the door of the library pushing a cart of equipment to set up in a classroom somewhere in the building. Even if she was stopped in the hall with yet another question or request, she always seemed to remember to address the issues at the next available "free moment."

Characteristics that I appreciated in our specific work on the PLC Project were her penchant for inclusion of colleagues and her efficient dissemination of information. A particularly stark example of this occurred very early in the PLC Project initiation. Nattie had given me a written list of the people she had asked to serve on the PLC Project Steering Committee. Being unfamiliar with the staff at that time, I accepted the list with no question. Hope didn't! When she saw the list, she scheduled a meeting with Nattie to discuss the possibility of including some other people—specifically classroom faculty. Hope was genuinely concerned that if the project was to be a school-wide effort, it was essential to include more teachers. Fortunately Nattie listened and responded positively to Hope's concerns. The committee membership was expanded.

Characteristics that I appreciated in our specific work on the PLC Project were her penchant for inclusion of colleagues and her efficient dissemination of information.

I discovered I could count on Hope to gather and collect information I needed, distribute reminders of meetings, and generally keep the PLC Project on the agenda at the school. Hope also served as a source of information regarding faculty feelings. SEHS faculty had great trust in Hope; they often shared frustrations, concerns, questions and celebrations with her knowing that she had the ears of both Nattie and myself. Hope became a conduit for sharing information between and among the faculty, the school administration and myself as the Co-Developer of the PLC Project. Hope truly became a key influence in the human aspects as well as the technology aspects of the PLC Project.

I saw how much the administrators and staff at SESH relied upon Hope to guide them in their work with technology. Hope's advocacy for using technology in the school even surpassed the available technology. When I first started working with SEHS, "technology" meant the VCRs, the one or two desktop computers per classroom, and the computer lab, used for business courses. Throw in a little software, the small bank of computers in the library linked to the internet, and various and sundry office equipment that was regularly on "the blink," and you have a pretty comprehensive inventory of technology at SEHS. The SEDL Professional Learning Communities Project was a catalyst at the school for focusing more time, attention, energy, and resources on all kinds of technology, especially for classroom instructional use.

Identifying a school-wide issue on which the entire professional staff could focus was an important first step in facilitating the development of the school as a PLC.

Identifying a school-wide issue on which the entire professional staff could focus was an important first step in facilitating the development of the school as a PLC. Academically, SEHS performs well. The school has been identified as acceptable or exemplary on the state rating criteria for at least the past three years. Based on this high stakes state testing, faculty and administration had few academic concerns for student performance—that made identifying a schoolwide goal for PLC a unique challenge.

To help facilitate the identification of that goal, members of the PLC Steering Committee and I agreed that gathering additional input from all faculty might reveal one or more areas of concern that could serve as the rallying point for the initiation of this project. I spent a day at the school, meeting with each of the academic teams to discuss issues they saw as concerns or priorities in the school. I prompted each team's discussion with some general questions regarding the needs of the school. Then I listened and probed as the conversations got underway.

After visiting with the teams, I scanned my notes for common issues. Student attitudes and motivation, facilities construction, career development and technology use were the four most frequently mentioned areas from the interviews. Given this information, I wrote a memo to Nattie and the faculty recommending that technology be the school-wide focus for SEHS. I asserted that student attitudes and motivation would likely increase with increased use of technology in classroom instruction and that career development issues in the

66

21st Century were technology dependent. It seemed to me that a school-wide focus on technology use for both students and teachers could help address two of the other issues as well. I also noted that there wasn't much that could be done about the facilities issue; that was a district and community issue with which we could help when the time came, but it was not in our sphere of influence.

When the PLC Steering Committee, and then the SEHS faculty as a whole, adopted technology as the schoolwide focus for the PLC project, Hope's knowledge and skills with technology and her credibility and influence with the staff and administration fell directly into the spotlight. Hope was well respected among the staff, which encouraged the staff to look to her for leadership in this new venture. She had done a good job when she was a classroom teacher in the English Department and had taken her turns as yearbook and class sponsor. During her last two years in the department, she was invited by her peers to serve as the team leader. She assumed the library/technology coordinator position in her sixth year on staff and had been in this position two years prior to Nattie coming to SEHS as principal.

Now Hope became the resident expert on all technology issues. On the one hand, this was what Hope had wanted all along—a faculty showing heightened interest in what technology was available and how to use it. On the other hand, she became the depository for complaints about and work requests for equipment and training.

Now Hope became the resident expert on all technology issues.

As Southern Edge High School explored shared leadership as a component of PLC, it looked for a while like all the leadership was being shared with Hope. When things didn't work, the answer was, "Go get Hope." When equipment needed to be set up, the answer was, "Ask Hope to do it." And when technology supplies were needed to keep things going, the answer was, "I think Hope buys that out of her budget." The time and energy demands on Hope increased tremendously.

The Good Times

Hope's expertise, patience, and persistence were sorely tested when internet access was installed throughout the school. The project involved writing the bidding specifications for and ordering the equipment and software to be installed, supervising the installation of the

necessary wiring throughout the building, making sure that all equipment was compatible with existing systems, and setting up and implementing the staff development for faculty. Because nothing ever goes as planned, this installation project experienced a number of delays and construction difficulties. These resulted in Hope having to spend extended hours after school and on week-ends in order to have everything ready for operations when the second semester of the academic year began. She did what she had to do. By the time students and staff returned from semester break the equipment was in and operational. Additionally, Hope and one of her colleagues worked together in planning and delivering an interactive professional development session on using the internet.

This professional development session was one of the first real successes of the PLC Project at SEHS.

This professional development session was one of the first real successes of the PLC Project at SEHS. Hope's knowledge and skills had allowed her to take a leadership position in technology use. In designing the professional development activities she would share with her colleagues, Hope was careful to make the experience a collegial, enjoyable, and successful experience of shared learning. After Nattie and her assistant principal made their announcements, Hope used a Power Point presentation to review the new equipment, procedures for requesting equipment or operations assistance, and basic steps for accessing the internet. With these basics taught, Hope's colleague, Sunny Allen, distributed an internet scavenger hunt assignment to give all an opportunity to apply what had been taught.

SEHS faculty members (myself included) were divided into small groups and sent to various computers throughout the building. At the computers we were to log on to the internet and then locate websites that would give the answers to the questions on our scavenger hunt sheets. What fun we had! Most everyone on the faculty was new to internet use. Those of us who knew little or nothing called upon those few who did have some knowledge. As we novices achieved an item here or there, we were delighted to share our new knowledge with someone else. The faculty had the opportunity to discover and utilize the expertise of their colleagues, as they developed new expertise of their own. The training provided a time for the whole faculty to learn together, and help each other in the use of technology.

By the time year two of the PLC Project was underway, some real advances in addressing faculty technology needs had occurred

at SEHS. For example, a frequent faculty complaint regarding the use of technology was difficulty in using room computers for anymore than a small group of students at one time. Three or four students could gather around one computer and see what was happening, but an entire classroom could not participate in anything shown on screen.

Hope had a simple solution. For approximately, $150.00 per unit, an adapter could be purchased that would allow the classroom computer to be hooked up to larger screen televisions available through the library/media center. Even though money was tight, Nattie allocated the resources for the purchase of one of these adapters for every television in inventory. Now, staff could offer instruction via technology to the whole class and students could demonstrate their technology projects to all of their classmates at once. The really splendid outcome is—they did!

Another PLC Project idea came about through the Steering Committee. Everyone knew of someone else in the building who was doing "something interesting" with the technology; however, no one know "the whole story." To address this, the PLC Steering Committee planned a professional development day during which every operational and academic unit in the school would share some use they were making of technology. The scheduled day came in the spring of the second year of implementation of the PLC Project. Students attended classes until noon. Faculty were on their own for lunch and then reconvened at the school in the afternoon to share their technology stories.

Another PLC Project idea came about through the Steering Committee.

The initial gathering of faculty was in the library/technology center where a representative from special education demonstrated the use of a "smart pen." Except for the presenter, no one even knew such technology existed! A "smart pen" is a hand-held piece of equipment that a student can use when reading. If he or she encounters an unknown word, the student scans the word into the pen. Then, by pressing a button, the pen reads that scanned word aloud so that the student can hear its pronunciation.

Next, all moved to the computer lab, where the social studies department had us log on to the internet and check sites used with their students in classroom instruction. We examined a political cartoon website used by students to locate a cartoon that appeals to

them and then use their knowledge of history, economics, government, etc. to explain the meaning of the cartoon selected. The English department showed a test preparation practice they used with sophomores and several PowerPoint presentations created by students about poets and authors they study in class.

As the day progressed, we moved to the Band room to see the marching band formation software, to a math classroom to see graphing calculators, and to the vocational agriculture area to see the stock trailer that was built based on the work developed with Computer Assisted Design software. There were other places and other presentations—even the administrative staff showed a PowerPoint presentation they developed to help parents understand the new curriculum requirements for high school graduation. What a day of celebration of learning for the professionals in the school!

Sources of Frustration

As a "hometown girl" in Loston, Hope and her family were active in the community. Hope's father-in-law was a member of the SEISD Board of Education. Legitimately or not, the superintendent believed that his situation caused Hope to know more about district operations than she should, and perhaps even to exert unwanted influence on her father-in-law's performance as a BOE member. As a result of this suspicion, the superintendent distrusted Hope and questioned her motives when she asked questions or offered input on various issues related to her work.

Nevertheless, Hope's technology expertise was often used by the SEISD central administration . . .

Nevertheless, Hope's technology expertise was often used by the SEISD central administration (including the superintendent) in preparing bid specifications for purchasing equipment and software. These requests were not only for SEHS, but also for the other schools in the district as well. Hope also represented the district in a partnership with a local university in the installing, supervising, and then dismantling of a distance education classroom. These formal activities were in addition to the myriad informal training and trouble-shooting requests made by individual teachers and administrators throughout the district. Hope's leadership and expertise in technology was recognized district-wide.

Given this recognition and her excellent track-record, both Hope and Nattie were optimistic that Hope's efforts and talents would be recognized when the SEISD Board approved the creation of a technology coordinator's position for the district. Both were disappointed when Hope's appointment was not forthcoming. Nattie was one of several people on the interview committee for the position. According to Nattie, Hope's interview was excellent and she was, without a doubt, the most qualified for the position. But, rather than offer the position to Hope, the superintendent decided not to fill the position at all. Since he was retiring at the end of the year, he felt the new superintendent should be the one to select the candidate.

Reflections

The PLC Initiative provided Hope the opportunity to utilize her expertise in service to a community she cared about. Her sharp, quick intellect made itself apparent and was recognized as she led her colleagues, not only through technology, but also deep into the promise of a professional learning community. Hope was both a guide and an example of a professional who valued colleagues' knowledge and perspectives, was responsible for her own continuing competence and excellence, remained open to change and willing to serve.

It seems possible that Hope's experience within a professional learning community also contributed to her departure from that community. Hope's frustrations began to build about a year before the PLC Project was initiated. The PLC initiative may have provided an outlet for Hope's frustrations, and lengthened her time in SEISD. But it seems just as likely that the experience of having her expertise acknowledged, utilized, and expanded made Hope unwilling to labor in obscurity any longer. Soon after she was denied the opportunity to serve as the district's technology coordinator, Hope Tchrnowski submitted her resignation and left SEISD.

Hope's story may be unique in details but it is unfortunately all too common in its general tone and themes. Bright, willing, enthusiastic and committed teaching professionals, much like Hope, are in every school. They want to help and have much to offer. Professional learning communities, through shared leadership, shared learning, shared practice and the model's insistence on supportive conditions,

Soon after she was denied the opportunity to serve as the district's technology coordinator, Hope Tchrnowski submitted her resignation and left SEISD.

may provide some access to—and outlet for—the skills and talents of these individuals. But we must recognize that if professional learning communities do not extend beyond the borders of a single school, we will likely support professionals in outgrowing the very communities they help build.

Across the country, educational leaders lament the oversized agenda we expect administrators to complete. When communities complain that issues of teaching and learning get short shrift from school administrators, we hear again the familiar chorus: not enough time, not enough help, too many demands. And yet, like a starving man who refuses a meal because he doesn't care for the way it is cooked, we reject the talent, skills, and offers of help embodied in the many teacher leaders whose names are listed on staff rosters throughout the nation. They are our brightest hope, if we are ever to bring the highest quality schooling to all our children.

SEISD lost Hope. How many other districts, schools, departments, and programs are also losing their "hope?" Leaders will find an outlet for their leadership; teacher leaders will also find some way to lead. If we do not provide those outlets, others may instead. Communities, churches, professional associations, and other entities will claim the talents and energies of some of these teacher leaders. Can we be so bold as to ask for more resources when we make little or no use of these rich resources we already have in our teacher leaders? Can we have such an easy answer in front of us each day and still be unable to address the question? Can we afford to lose the "hope" that teacher leaders offer to our schools?

And yet, like a starving man who refuses a meal because he doesn't care for the way it is cooked, we reject the talent . . .

•　　•　　•

Story 5

Hope Tchrnowski brought many skills beyond her job description to Southern Edge High School. These skills—and her willingness to put them at the service of her school—allowed her to develop professionally and personally, and contributed significantly to the effective inclusion of technology in the school's curriculum. Ultimately, however, this "informal" arrangement did not lead to a formal acknowledgement of her abilities, or to her professional advancement on the basis of her skills and gifts. What responsibility do school personnel have to ensure that teacher leaders are recognized? In the absence of any guarantee of recognition, how can teacher leadership be ethically advanced?

~

Anita Pankake offers a poignant story of leadership lost to an entire school district, primarily as a result of superintendent action. In C.L.

Jacoby's story (p. 76), the superintendent plays another substantial—and disruptive—role in school improvement efforts. Are there ways that these kinds of administrative disruptions can be prevented? How can superintendents become as accountable to schools as they are to school boards?

~

Janie Huffman's story (p. 52) of school leadership includes a profile of another strong teacher leader. What attributes do these teachers seem to share? In what ways are they different? What factors—personal or organizational—contribute to their experience at their separate schools?

Story 6

Sunset Middle School

Administrative personnel changes at Sunset Middle School disrupt change efforts during the second year of the PLC project. A principal who also served as project Co-Developer finds that efforts to maintain her Co-Developer role after leaving the principalship are perceived as a threat to the new administration.

• • •

*author ~ **C.L. Jacoby***

During the first year of the professional learning communities (PLC) project hosted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, I was able to serve Sunset Middle School as both project Co-Developer and principal. Since I had been principal at Sunset for the previous eight years, and had been instrumental in the complete renovation of the school and the restructuring of the educational process, I had a strong vested interest in seeing this new improvement initiative take hold. That was not to be.

A year into the PLC project, I moved into a new position at the district level; this great opportunity for me turned out to be the practical end of PLC development at Sunset Middle School. A new principal came to Sunset—someone who was not a strong proponent of PLC, and who did not develop the necessary support and commitment to the program in her first year. Progress in PLC development came to a halt; the only PLC initiative that was fully and perhaps permanently integrated into the educational process at Sunset turned out to be the noon study hour—which had strong faculty support, as it provided a mechanism for increasing students' completion of homework.

The change of staff in any district is inevitable. The unfortunate truth is that one can also reliably predict a new administrator will feel some resistance to to embracing the projects of his or her predecessor—even it they could prove valuable to their new schools and students. The pressure for administrators to "make their mark" can put ego and ambition in the way of stability and improvement. In order to prevent personnel changes from disrupting education and improvement efforts, the good things that happen for children must be institutionalized, and teacher leaders must be developed—with

The change of staff in any district is inevitable.

77

the confidence and ability to continue positive change efforts, and to maintain and expand the pockets of excellence that develop through these efforts.

In Sunset District, the appointment of a new superintendent led to changes throughout the school administration: thehigh school assistant principal became the principal at Sunset Middle School, an athletic director became the new assistant principal, and I moved to the central office as the Associate Superintendent for Instruction. These reassignments led to many changes that could in no way be considered "improvements."

Sunset Middle School

Sunset Middle school is located in a small southwestern community with a large Hispanic population. In fact, 85% of the 650-member student body is Hispanic, 12% are Anglo, and 3% represent other ethnicities. The 60-member faculty mirror the student population—87% are Hispanic and 13% are Anglo. Sunset Middle School has the highest number of teachers with masters degrees in the district—but there is little ethnic or cultural diversity.

As principal, I sought to stay cognizant of our need to add diversity to our staff, in order to give our students a more global picture of the world—a glimpse outside their small community. Many times, school board members did not appreciate my hiring staff who were perceived to be "outsiders." However, parent groups later expressed their belief that looking for potential teachers outside of the small university town would be healthy. I felt it was essential to providing our students many new and different perspectives.

Our state is not immune to the nationwide sweep of the standards movements and its accompanying accountability.

Our state is not immune to the nationwide sweep of the standards movements and its accompanying accountability. The accountability model being implemented in our state is based on test scores. Teachers are being held accountable—primarily through performance standards testing—to ensure that the state standards and benchmarks are being addressed. Teachers are pressured to ensure their students do well on the state-mandated tests, in order to prevent their school from being placed on school improvement or probationary status. As a result of these changes and pressures, many teachers are retiring or leaving the profession. One Sunset teacher voiced the

frustrations of many of her colleagues when she exclaimed: "This is the worst year I've ever had!"

Prior Change Efforts Pave the Way For Continuing Improvement Efforts at Sunset

When I first looked for teacher leaders to assist in the development of a professional learning community at Sunset Middle School, I sought teachers that were well respected by their peers, had the best interests of students at heart, and demonstrated the desire to improve education for all students. Two teachers immediately came to the fore.

The two PLC teacher leaders were sixth grade teachers; their colleagues, who worked with them on two separate sixth grade teams, knew and trusted these teacher leaders and were flexible and amenable to change. We carved time out of a previously scheduled professional development day and used that time to introduce the concept of PLC to the sixth grade teaching teams.

These five-member teams were themselves a product of a restructuring program designed to improve the educational experience for adolescents. Using the 1989 research tenets of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, each of the grade levels were divided into two teams, which each took responsibility for the education of approximately 100 students. Team leaders were elected by their teammates, and represented the team at monthly meetings of the school advisory council. The teaming approach to dealing with pre-adolescent students encompassed a "school within a school" concept. It provided teachers the experience of teaming, interdisciplinary instruction, shared decision-making and shared celebrations.

The sixth grade staff met and brainstormed in order to develop a focus for improvement. We asked each teacher to write down five things they felt needed improvement in our sixth grade program. These items were grouped by categories—and the lack of homework turned in by students was quickly acknowledged as a concern shared by most of the staff. Teachers discussed the causes of this problem. Many felt that students were being pulled in too many directions outside of school. Many teachers reiterated that homework was a priority that needed to be addressed.

These five-member teams were themselves a product of a restructuring program designed to improve the educational experience for adolescents.

During the same discussion, concerns about the lack of time for all faculty to meet together were shared. The staff decided to meet at 7:OO a.m. once a month. In order to facilitate this commitment, I provided coffee, juice, and burritos—that was one small way of rewarding staff for their willingness to go the extra mile for this important work. We decided during our first meeting that bringing students in during lunch might help make them more responsible. That move required me to arrange sack lunches for students eligible for free or reduced cost lunches through the cafeteria manager. We also had to rearrange the daily lunch count, to assure that every student had his or her lunch. I was able to relieve a cafeteria duty person in order to provide supervision for the study hour—and to provide compensation for that supervising teacher.

The first day of noon study hour was "standing room only"—and quite overwhelming to the teacher who volunteered for the duty.

The first day of noon study hour was "standing room only"—and quite overwhelming to the teacher who volunteered for the duty. But as the year progressed, we saw a dramatic decrease in the number of students referred—from a high of 63 students in January to a low of six in May. Additional interventions, including parental contacts, conferences, and counselor referrals were attempted with these six students, with whom many teachers reported difficulties. The whole staff felt the noon study hour had proved itself to be an effective strategy for increasing student success at and involvement with their curricular assignments, and for identifying those students experiencing significant difficulties.

Improvement Efforts Derailed By Administrative Changes

The promise of our first year of PLC implementations was not fulfilled in the second year. Based upon the success experienced by the sixth grade teachers, the eighth grade staff decided to try a noon study hour. Perhaps because there was little perceived consequence to missing this study hour, or perhaps because eighth graders value the peer socialization that the lunch hour provides more than sixth graders do, students did not attend in numbers that could make a measurable difference. Unfortunately, time and attention to discover ways to meet the different needs of eighth graders were not available—the school focus changed with personnel reassignment.

Several attempts were made to schedule meetings to review PLC concepts with both the new principal and new superintendent. I sent a packet of information on professional learning communities to both the principal and superintendent. I then asked the teacher leaders to prepare a packet of information and visit with the principal about PLC, in order to develop administrative commitment to the project. But, given the demands placed on the principal by the new superintendent, these efforts were futile.

Furthermore, my appearance at the school was perceived as undermining the present administration. As I walked down the halls, I was warmly greeted by staff and students alike. I did not want to interfere with the operation of the school, nor did I want to hear concerns about the management style of the new administration from the staff or students at Sunset—all I could say was that they needed to visit with the new principal to voice their concerns directly. I did not want the new administration to feel I was undermining their authority in any manner; because I was perceived in that way, my visits to the school decreased. During the third year of the PLC project, I heard that the seventh grade teachers at Sunset were experimenting with noon study hour, and experiencing some success. I was too far removed from the life of the school at that time to confirm these reports.

Reflections

The State Department of Education is moving into a standards-based model with accountability at every turn. Clearly, every school is right to prioritize efforts to avoid being placed on school improvement or probationary status. In addition, any new superintendent will bring to his or her work a list of priorities designed to accommodate the school board. These new priorities will filter down through the schools, requiring time from school principals as they learn about new procedures and take on new responsibilities.

In the training I received as a PLC Co-Developer, I heard a great deal about the need to build trust among teachers before undertaking comprehensive school change. Ironically, administrators seem to require deep trust in one another in order to continue school change efforts that may "carry the mark" of their predecessor. Even if such

In the training I received as a PLC Co-Developer, I heard a great deal about the need to build trust among teachers before undertaking comprehensive school change.

initiatives are still in the early stages of development, attention to their growth provides stability for teachers, and honors the invest-ment teachers have already made to the project. Administrators should be supported in trusting that the individuals they follow or replace were also committed to high quality education for all stu-dents. New relationships between administrators should be allowed time to develop, without undue pressure to demonstrate unrealistic levels of abject loyalty or independent initiative. In a professional learning community, these professionals need more time to learn—about their new staff, their new positions, and the best ways to make progress for the new students they serve.

Despite the difficulties inherent in changing school structures, despite the foibles of all the human personalities involved, I continue to be optimistic. We must forge ahead in our efforts to serve all stu-dents in the best ways we can—someday soon, we'll learn how to put it all together for the sake of those children.

•   •   •

Story 6

The slow decline of Sunset's PLC initiative represents both a loss to the school and a personal loss to former principal and Co-Developer C.L. Jacoby. Successful Co-Developers have strong relationships with their partner schools and the staff in them. Is principalship a relationship that is too close to effectively pair with being a Co-Developer? Weigh the strengths Jacoby brought to her Co-Developer relationship against the difficulties she faced when one of her joint roles was ended.

~

C.L. Jacoby attributes the decline of the PLC initiative at Sunset Middle School, at least in part, to the pressure on administrators to "make their mark" quickly and clearly. In Story 5, (p. 62), district level personnel seem unwilling to recognize the significant contributions to school improvement made by teacher-leader Hope Tchrnowski. In what ways does the pressure on administrators to stand out translate into pressure on teachers to conform? How might those pressures be more successfully utilized and aligned to support cooperative and collaborative leadership roles throughout school and district hierarchies?

~

84

State mandated testing placed additional, debilitating pressure on faculty at Sunset Middle School. But at Foxdale Middle School (Story 1, p. 6) and Shoreline Elementary (Story 3, p. 40), state mandates helped to fuel efforts to align curriculum and share responsibility across the faculty. What factors helped these schools manage the pressure, and prevented Sunset from doing the same?

Facilitating School Change
From the Outside In

In this story of successful PLC implementation, Co-Developer Ricki Chapman perceives her responsibilities to include: putting the resources to which she has access at the disposal of her partner school, "shouldering the burden" of PLC planning and implementation in order to avoid overloading faculty, and "getting out of the way" of school-instigated change.

•   •   •

author ~ Ricki Chapman

Prior to joining SEDL's Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement (CCCII) or Professional Learning Communities (PLC) project, I had served as an external facilitator in the Partnership School Initiative and had enjoyed the privilege of participating in SEDL's "Leadership for Change" Initiative. Change is my passion! Self-improvement and growth is my life! As far as I'm concerned, what could be more exciting than supporting a school in creating a community of learners?

An external change facilitator plays a unique role in school change. This story describes how an external facilitator can support a school's change efforts by supporting principal leadership, influencing district decision-making, accessing resources, and building teacher capacity. First, I'll describe my role, then, the strategies I used to facilitate the school's development into a professional learning community. It is my hope that through this story, other change facilitators will gain insight in how to create and enable professional learning communities that support school improvement. After all, we're all in it for the learners—Learning For All.

As Title I Specialist at a Regional Education Service Center, I serve thirteen school districts in the extreme northern area of the state. It is my job to plan with district personnel to determine their needs for federal funds, write the federal program application, and negotiate the application for funding. I monitor expenditures and amend applications as needed. In a way, I act as a Federal Program Director for schools too small to support this position locally.

My role was well established with the districts I serve prior to my invitation to participate as a Co-Developer in SEDL's PLC project.

An external change facilitator plays a unique role in school change.

The trust I had built with the superintendent was of great benefit to me as I began to work with my selected site.

As a Title I Specialist at the Education Service Center, I had many advantages.

As a Title I Specialist at the Education Service Center, I had many advantages. These included a flexible schedule that could be arranged to accommodate the school's needs; my expertise in district/campus planning, site-based decision-making, curriculum and instruction, staff development, and budgeting; and access to personnel and resources housed at the Education Service Center. My plan was to use the vehicle of professional learning communities to move the school toward improved student performance. I wanted to embed the dimensions of a professional learning community into the school's agenda.

Site selection

From my work with the Partnership Schools Initiative, I learned how a school's culture influences change and school improvement efforts. I learned that the best way to gain access to a school was to provide a service to meet a real or perceived need. As I began contemplating the choice of a school to engage in our PLC project, I began to ask myself some questions. "What schools am I working with now that might be ready to move forward? What schools exhibit instructional leadership at the campus? Am I serving any superintendents who are strong instructional leaders? Are any schools in close proximity to the Education Service Center ready for change? Do I serve any schools ripe for an opportunity? Do I know of a school facing a crisis?"

After asking these questions and mentally scanning the districts I served, I began the process of elimination. I weeded out those whom I did not feel were "ready" or did not have strong leadership in place. I reflected about the schools I served and my criteria for selecting a school site to develop into a learning community. I was looking for a school ready for change. I was looking for a school that put children first. I was looking for a school that would welcome me as a partner in the school improvement process.

Rising Star Elementary, in the sleepy little town of Farmville, seemed to fit these criteria. A new instructional leader had been hired for the campus in 1997. Though I had not met her, I had "heard

on the grapevine" that she was a dynamic leader. In her first year, she had involved her staff in decision-making and planning for improvement—a novel idea at the campus. The campus served approximately 200 PK-3rd grade students. Ethnicity of the school community was 14% African American, 38% Hispanic, and 48% Anglo. With 63% low socioeconomic status, the school qualified for Title I funds.

The district was facing a District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) visit from the State Department of Education (SDE) in May 1998. During the visit, the SDE would scrutinize all federal programs for compliance as well as the district and campus improvement plans. This visit was perceived as a threat, thus creating a crisis. The four campuses in the district were hustling to prepare their campus plans and get their data organized prior to the visit.

As I reflected on the purpose of the project, to create a professional learning community, I determined that my services would need to be perceived as a support for the campus. I realized that I could not be viewed as someone with an agenda that would increase work for the principal or teachers. I would need to weave this project into their culture, the way they did things at the campus. I thought, "What could I bring to the school? How could I support what they wanted to accomplish? How would I gain access to the campus?" I decided to offer my assistance in whatever ways they wanted. My motto would be, "Do whatever it takes." I would be a guide on the side. I would find ways to access resources—from the Education Service Center, from the district, and from my own personal storehouse of expertise and experience. Though it was not my purposeful intention, my first year's work with the school would be behind the scenes.

Year 1: Gaining Access to the School & Supporting Principal Leadership

To gain access to the principal at Rising Star Elementary, I asked the district superintendent if he would like me to meet with all of his principals in preparation for the impending DEC visit. He agreed.

Gloria Hawkins had been principal at Rising Star Elementary School for one year. Formerly, she had been principal of an alternative education program in another region. Although her experience was in

Though it was not my purposeful intention, my first year's work with the school would be behind the scenes.

high school, she loved the "little ones." This was evidenced in my first meeting. As I entered her office, a child was sitting on her lap crying. She was patting him and whispering softly in his ear. He would respond by shaking his head up or down to indicate "yes" or "no." After about five minutes, she released him from her lap and turned her attention to me. In this first interaction it was easy to see that she put children first. This fit with my philosophy and I thought we might make a good team.

I offered to review the campus plan for compliance so that changes could be made prior to the SDE's visit. To my delight, Gloria's face lit up with surprise. She told me that she'd like me to review the plan and suggest improvements. She provided me with a copy of the campus improvement plan, which included a great deal of data about the school. The plan contained lists of activities addressing math, reading, and parental involvement. Student achievement data included in the plan showed me that the school needed to address these areas. The professional development piece was missing, as well as resources needed to support the plan. I jotted down my suggestions and made another appointment with Gloria. At that meeting, she seemed open to my suggestions. She made notes and said the corrections would be made to the plan.

Hoping to use my role as Title I Specialist to provide a service and gain access to the faculty, I offered to meet with the Title I teachers for the purpose of reviewing the DEC indicators and preparing for the SDE visit. Gloria was open to this idea and told me that she would arrange it. Here was a leader who was on top of things and would follow-through on her commitments. These were qualities I was looking for in a leader who would help to create a professional learning community.

In one of my first conversations with Gloria, I suggested that the school consider changing from a Title I Targeted Assistance school to a Title I Schoolwide program. The Targeted Assistance program served few students in a pullout setting, providing them with computer-assisted phonics instruction each day. A Schoolwide program would spread the Title I funds throughout the school to upgrade the entire educational program. When I first broached this subject with the principal, she told me that there was resistance among her staff.

Uh, oh—change is difficult. The phrase "that's the way we've always done it" popped into my head. To drive home my point, I asked if the students in the program were making academic progress. I asked, "Do the identified students ever get out of the program or are they permanently labeled as Title I students?" I asked if she had done a longitudinal study of their achievement. She hesitated a moment before saying, "No." From the thoughtful look on her face, I could tell I had piqued her curiosity.

By the time I visited with Gloria again, she had met with her staff and they had decided to go "Schoolwide." During a faculty meeting, she had presented the staff with her longitudinal study of student progress in the Title I program and supplied them with information on the costs of maintaining the targeted assistance program being conducted in the computer lab. She emphasized the point that changing from a Targeted Assisted Program to a Schoolwide Program would enable them to help more children.

After a lengthy discussion, the faculty had voted to dissolve the computer-assisted program and utilize the Title I teachers in regular classrooms. Becoming a Schoolwide program opened up many resources for the campus. After amending the District's Title I Application for Funding to reflect Schoolwide status, I was able to convince the superintendent to reallocate Title I funds based on the number of low-income children at the school. These additional monies enabled the school to lower student-teacher ratios and acquire an instructional aide at each grade level. Suddenly, the school had money to purchase much needed library books and teaching materials, and attend professional development that would enhance growth toward their academic goals.

After a lengthy discussion, the faculty had voted to dissolve the computer-assisted program and utilize the Title I teachers in regular classrooms.

Gloria certainly was a "mover and shaker" who acted quickly on information that would help the school better meet the needs of all their children. This reinforced my earlier sense that I wanted to work with Gloria on the PLC project. As we visited, I told her that I was working with the Southwest Educational Development Lab (SEDL) on a project to learn how to create a professional learning community, and that I was in the process of selecting a school site. She said, "Pick us! We want to!"

I explained that it would be a lot of work. If a professional learning community were to gain her teachers' support and take hold at

Rising Star Elementary, Gloria and I would have to shoulder the burden of planning and implementing program concepts. Gloria would need to travel to Austin several times. She would need to appoint a teacher-leader at the campus. She would need to collect data and act on the findings. She would need to let me be her partner in the process. She would need to provide me with access to the school. Our goal would be to imbed PLC structures into the ways the school functioned without adding more to the teacher's responsibilities. But change itself is difficult, and would not be welcome to all faculty members. I asked Gloria to think about their participation, suggesting that she visit with her faculty prior to committing to the two-year project. She said, "We want to! Pick us!"

I made an appointment with the superintendent to explain the scope of "Creating Communities of Continuous Improvement and Inquiry." I discussed my role and explained the district's responsibilities. He was supportive of the school's participation and said, "Whatever she wants to do."

Thus began my partnership with Rising Star Elementary and principal Gloria Hawkins.

Thus began my partnership with Rising Star Elementary and principal Gloria Hawkins. She appointed Teri Wilson, resource teacher, as our Teacher-Leader. It would be Teri's role to plan with all the teachers and provide support to teachers in meeting the needs of inclusion students. Teri would also keep a pulse on the school's climate.

Gloria and I met regularly. During our meetings we discussed many issues that concerned her. We discovered that we agreed on many issues and found common ground regarding school improvement. As the campus moved toward an inclusion model, the teachers wanted to provide more and more of the instruction for all the children in the regular classrooms. They did not want "pull-out" programs. Eliminating the Title I Targeted Assistance program was only one step toward ending pullout programs at the campus.

Due to the high numbers of Spanish speaking students attending the school, the teachers decided they needed to learn to apply more strategies to help these second language learners be successful. In order to provide appropriate instruction to all the students, the teachers decided to get their English as a Second Language (ESL) certification. By getting certified, they could eliminate the ESL pullout program and use these strategies in their classrooms. We

called on the Bilingual/ESL Specialist at the Education Service Center to provide this training for the teachers.

Another pullout program the faculty wanted to eliminate was the Gifted and Talented (G/T) Program. Gifted students are not just gifted three hours per week. The teachers felt that the children could best be served in the regular education classrooms. When the identified students left for G/T one afternoon per week, they not only missed instruction, but also were labeled and teased by the other students. Returning to their regular classrooms often meant making up the work they missed while attending G/T class. Eliminating the pullout program would require all teachers at the campus to receive 30 hours of training in G/T strategies, curriculum and assessment, and identification.

What a match of their needs with my expertise! My Master's degree was in Gifted/Talented Education and this was something that they wanted! I really could not believe my good fortune! It would be my way to get in the door with the faculty and develop trust. To sweeten the deal, Gloria negotiated with the superintendent and School Board to pay the teachers a stipend to attend G/T professional development during the summer.

I explained to Gloria that I would like to conduct a needs assessment with the teachers prior to conducting the G/T training. The assessment would inform me of their existing skills and knowledge regarding gifted learners. I would also use this opportunity to provide the teachers with information regarding requirements in the law. This meeting, in late spring, would be my first inroad with the teachers. Armed with chart paper, markers, and easel I met with the faculty after school. Gloria provided an enthusiastic welcome and eased my way into the school's culture.

Though I had been seen on the campus by staff every two to three weeks, I first realized that the faculty had accepted my presence on campus in May, during their DEC visit. When I arrived at the campus, I met briefly with Gloria, then made myself at home in the teacher workroom. Suddenly, I heard a commotion in the hall. As I listened, I heard someone say "They're here!" Someone else said, "Who?" "The SDE!" "Where?" "In the workroom!" "That's not the SDE. It's *only* Ricki."

During this first year, Gloria used me as a sounding board for her ideas. I truly worked "behind the scenes." Gloria and I visited on

Another pullout program the faculty wanted to eliminate was the Gifted and Talented (G/T) Program.

93

the phone often; she shared her "awesomes and awfuls" with me. I provided a listening ear, thought provoking questions, as well as information about and access to district resources. We were developing a strong partnership for the good of the entire learning community. Throughout the year, I shared research and articles with Gloria about professional learning communities.

In March, I had shared with Gloria a book that had been important to me in the study of school reform, *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools.* Gloria loved it! Each time I met with her to assess their progress she shared something else she had learned from reading this book. I listened. In August, Gloria said that she would like for each of her teachers to have a copy of this book.

Finding funds to support her decision was a wonderful opportunity for me to be of service to the school and help them improve!

Finding funds to support her decision was a wonderful opportunity for me to be of service to the school and help them improve! I suggested that Title I funds or a combination of Title I, Title VI, and State Compensatory Funds could be used for this purpose. Not having access to the district's budget, she asked me if there was money. I said, "There is money in the budget and we need to ask for it." We met with the superintendent. He was open to this acquisition. The books were ordered and arrived in November 1999. The study of this book by the faculty would serve as the beginning of collective learning at Rising Star Elementary.

Although I made an effort to be on the campus as often as my schedule permitted, I often felt guilty and wished I could be on campus more often. I met with the faculty only once to conduct the needs assessment for G/T. My only other direct interaction with faculty was to provide the 30 hours of training in gifted/talented education in June. This is when I really got to know the faculty and began to gain their trust both as a person and through sharing my expertise.

Year 2: Engaging the Faculty in Collective Learning

In September 1999, SEDL invited the Co-Developers, principals, and teacher-leaders to a meeting in Austin. After this meeting, Gloria, Teri, and I met to collaboratively plan an upcoming inservice day. We decided to include an introduction to PLC, address the concept of quality in student work, and engage the faculty in dialogue about

best practices—what to increase and decrease in their classroom instruction. We wanted a better campus improvement plan, one that would guide decision-making at the school. We wanted to focus the teachers on using student achievement data to drive school goals and objectives. We wanted to reinforce that learning together would improve student performance.

Gloria, Teri, and I felt prepared. We had carefully planned the October staff development day. I was excited and a little nervous, for on this day we would finally introduce the concept of Professional Learning Communities to the faculty. After explaining the project, there was only one question from the faculty. Would it add on any work for them? "No," I told them, "it is our intention to embed the concepts in whatever you want to improve." The teachers seemed to accept the idea.

In order to gain information regarding the school's current practices in relation to the practices of a professional learning community, a questionnaire was administered to the faculty called "School Professional Staff as Learning Community." This questionnaire is an Innovation Configuration Matrix designed to provide perceptual data about the five dimensions of a professional learning community: shared leadership, shared vision, collective learning, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions.

Next we addressed campus improvement planning. I explained how to interpret the student achievement data. The teachers examined student achievement data from last year's third graders through fifth grade. Even though fifth grade is not at the campus, we wanted the teachers to see how their students were progressing through the system.

Next we addressed campus improvement planning.

After examining the student achievement data, teachers decided to continue their focus on reading. They had the opportunity to visit other schools the previous year and had investigated reading programs being implemented. As a faculty, they decided to adopt the Accelerated Reader program. To encourage and support reading, they wanted to expand the library to include more student and professional books. Again, being a Title I Schoolwide program allowed them to invest in this program to meet the needs of all their students. Toward the end of the day Gloria conducted an informal needs assessment with the staff. She asked them to write down what

training they needed, and if they could observe another teacher in the school who would it be. I couldn't wait to see how this innovative leader would use these data later!

During the summer, Gloria had purchased a copy of *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools* for each of her teachers. The books arrived in November, and the teachers began reading and discussing it as a faculty. Teachers set the timeline for the discussion group. They decided to read one chapter per month and discuss it after school at their faculty meeting. Chapter 1: "Renewing Our Schools" was discussed in November; Chapter 2: "Best Practice in Reading" in December; etc. This book study was their embarkation into collective learning. They read, studied, discussed, and argued during these monthly meetings. They learned that they were doing many "good" things for students. They learned they could improve some of their practices. They got to know one another as professionals. They began to trust in one another's capabilities and ideas. They learned new strategies from one another. They began to get excited about learning together!

Gloria, Teri, and I continued to use the PLC questionnaire data to plan how to integrate the five dimensions of a professional learning community into the school's culture. Through the shared study of *Best Practice*, we were making progress in collective learning, but we really needed to work on shared personal practice. Using the observation list her teachers had given her in October, Gloria created a schedule that would facilitate teachers observing teachers. She thought that by observing each other, teachers would begin sharing strategies and talking about student work.

Using the observation list her teachers had given her in October, Gloria created a schedule that would facilitate teachers observing teachers.

At the next faculty meeting Gloria announced that each teacher would have an opportunity to observe another teacher—a teacher they wanted to observe. Then she distributed her observation schedule. There was an outcry as teachers exclaimed they wanted to observe, not be observed! She merely stated, "It's what you said you wanted." After all was said and done, the faculty complied and even enjoyed this opportunity to see a colleague in action.

The year was rolling right along. While attending a conference, Gloria had discovered training called "TRIBES." She was intrigued by the concepts presented. When she asked me about it, I loaned her my book to peruse. After reading it, Gloria decided that she wanted to

order a copy of the book for each teacher. She wanted this book to be their next collective learning experience. She had determined that it would build teamwork among the staff, decrease discipline referrals, and create a safer learning environment for children. She thought it just might be the glue that would bring the school together as a learning community.

The Education Service Center (ESC) was called upon to provide support. I spoke with our Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Specialist at the ESC. She thought that the study of this book could be considered professional development under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) guidelines and supported funding the purchase of a book for each teacher under the district's shared service arrangement.

By the time I got back to Gloria on purchasing the book, she had provided her teachers an overview of "TRIBES," and the faculty had decided they wanted the full training. However, the district was a member of our Title IV Shared Services Arrangement. This meant that earlier in the year the superintendent had signed over their entitlement to our ESC.

While I was pondering this dilemma, Gloria located a trainer at another Education Service Center. She talked the superintendent and School Board into supporting and requesting three waiver days for the training. Waivers can be submitted to the SDE for the purpose of adding professional development days to school calendars. The waivers reduce the required number of student attendance days so teachers have additional days during the year to attend professional development. When SDE approved the waiver, all that was needed was a way to pay for this training.

I met with the superintendent to discuss how we could fund the training. I suggested that since our Title IV Specialist at the ESC thought the content met the Safe & Drug Free Schools and Communities program goals, perhaps Rising Star's share of Title IV funds could be returned to Rising Star, in order to pay for the training. He seemed delighted with this idea and asked me to check on it for him. When we learned that Title IV monies could be used—but wouldn't cover the costs of providing this training—I suggested that he combine the Title IV money with Title VI professional development funds. He was very open and even appreciative of this idea. Due to

I met with the superintendent to discuss how we could fund the training.

the service center's flexibility and the district's support, we were able to schedule the training for Rising Star Elementary—and thanks to the waiver days, all Rising Star staff were able to attend.

The teachers really liked the concepts and strategies presented in "TRIBES." As a faculty, they decided that professional development would enable them to integrate these strategies into their classroom instruction and activities. Three professional development days were set. The entire faculty, teachers and instructional aides, met at another site to receive the training in September 1999. This training was instrumental in enabling the campus to become a more a cohesive team. The trust building experiences not only built the faculty as a team, but strategies presented are used in the classrooms to help create a safer learning environment for students.

Believing that what has been learned should be applied, Gloria asked each grade level team to use "TRIBES" strategies in their classrooms and at each faculty meeting to share instructional ideas. The grade level teams rotate the responsibility for the meeting. As each team conducts the meeting, they utilize the strategies to share instructional successes and challenges. This sharing reinforces growth in collective learning and provides an avenue for shared personal practice among the staff.

Gloria realizes that follow-up training in "TRIBES" is necessary to fully implement all the strategies and embed them in the school culture.

Gloria realizes that follow-up training in "TRIBES" is necessary to fully implement all the strategies and embed them in the school culture. In addition, new faculty needs training in these strategies. Providing this training for the school contributed powerfully to the development of the professional learning community. Teachers have become more comfortable with sharing personal practices by using the strategies to conduct faculty meetings. Conversation at the school is centered more on student work than ever before. Grade level teams are feeling so confident as teacher-leaders that the third grade team offered to provide training for the other teachers in State Assessment of Skills (SAS) strategies so that all students could be successful on the test.

Reflections

They say, "Time flies when you're having fun." It's *already* August 2000! As I began my third year as external change agent in the

school, I once again met with the teachers to revise and update the campus improvement plan. In examining student achievement data, the teachers quickly saw that scores in reading and math had not improved significantly. What's next? A new teacher suggested they look at student groups, not specific objectives. In examining the data, teachers saw that males were not performing at as high a level as females. To achieve more equity, teachers will participate in TESA (Teacher Expectations/Student Achievement) training in the fall.

Though school improvement never ends, the end of the two-year SEDL project leaves me with a feeling of "what's next?" I formed a strong partnership with the school. During the partnership, I kept an eye toward service to others and their growth. My attitude of "How can I help you?" helped me to support them—and then to get out of their way as they made changes and improvements to their school. I became a critical friend and resource, providing assistance in negotiating the district and educational service center resources in a way that was empowering to Gloria and other school personnel, and supportive of school initiatives. Even though the district had three superintendents during the first two years of the PLC project, our knowledge of resources and focus on student learning helped to keep funds flowing. Teachers were paid a stipend to attend the training on gifted/talented education. By having this training on site, the superintendent was able to attend one day and receive his required six hours of training. When the teachers felt they needed English as a Second Language (ESL) certifications, the district supported this decision fiscally by paying each teacher's certification fee.

The Educational Service Center also provided much appreciated support. Though the PLC project required me to work intensively with Rising Star Elementary and leave the region for several SEDL meetings, our Education Service Center was supportive of my participation. Prior to my acceptance into the project, SEDL required me to submit an agreement of participation signed by my supervisor. This signed commitment helped me to continue with the project, even when service center funds got tighter. The PLC project was even featured in HORIZON, the service center's quarterly publication, which is distributed throughout the region.

My commitment to the Rising Star Elementary's continued improvement and development is still strong. If they desire, I will pro-

Though school improvement never ends, the end of the two-year SEDL project leaves me with a feeling of "what's next?"

vide assistance to further develop their professional learning community. But I recognize that an external change facilitator is only one factor in helping a school become a professional learning community. There must be present in all stakeholders a commitment to children and to the school improvement process. Many resources must be garnered to accomplish the school's goals and objectives.

I cannot take credit for this school's growth in the dimensions of a professional learning community. Any other Co-Developer, willing to put herself and the resources at her hands to the service of the school, could have been as helpful to Rising Star Elementary. It was the dynamic principal, who mustered support and guided the school's vision, who was crucial to creating the learning community. Faculty who loved children and worked untiringly for their success were necessary. Superintendents who supported the school's initiatives fiscally and School Boards who supported time for professional development were needed. Together, all the players in the school improvement process make a difference for children. It takes all of us to create a community of learners.

•   •   •

Story 7

In her efforts to instigate, support, and "get out of the way" of change at Rising Star Elementary, Co-Developer Ricki Chapman played a number of different roles throughout her partnership. What are those various roles? In what ways do roles change as the relationships and project evolve? In what ways are various Co-Developer roles static and defined through the Co-Developer's relationship with various school populations (i.e, trainer to teachers, coach to principal, etc.)?

~

Co-Developer Ricki Chapman asserts that "any other Co-Developer, willing to put herself and the resources at her hands to the service of the school, could have been as helpful…" as she was. Substantial external resources play significant roles in other school stories. In Story 1 (p. 6), Foxdale School undertakes significant change, and addresses the challenges of change, after receiving an Alternative Program grant; in Story 2 (p. 22), external resources including grants and partnerships with local businesses play a critical role in the improvement and continued strength of Deerfield Elementary. Taken together, what do these stories suggest about the amounts and kinds of resources schools need? Does the responsibility for developing resources lie most appropriately with campus personnel, district personnel, or others?

~

Ricki Chapman warns principal Gloria Hawkins that she must be willing to "shoulder the burden" of beginning a PLC—and reassures Rising Star faculty that PLC initiatives will not significantly add to their work. Beth Sattes (Story 2, p. 22) also places much of the responsibility for PLC success at the hands of the principal. Compare these stories to Anita Pankake's story of teacher leadership (p. 62), and Janie Huffman's consideration of leadership throughout her partner school (Story 4, p. 52). Do any "truths" about the interplay of school leadership emerge?

Authors and Acknowledgements

About the Authors—The Community of Professional Learners

Ricki Chapman
Title I Specialist, Region XVI Education Service Center
1601 South Cleveland - P.O. Box 30600
Amarillo, Texas 79120

Ruth G. Hinson, Director
Louisiana Alliance for Education Reform
Tulane University
6901 Willow Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70118

Kristine A. Hipp
Associate Professor
Cardinal Stritch University
Graduate Education Department
6801 North Yates Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53217

C.L. Jacoby
Highly regarded educator and individual,
like Samuel E. Clements (Mark Twain)
Jacoby prefers to remain anonymous

Jane B. Huffman
Assistant Professor
University of North Texas
College of Education
1300 Highland #218A - P.O. Box 311337
Denton, Texas 65203

Anita M. Pankake
Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Texas A&M University - Commerce
Commerce, Texas 75429

Beth Sattes
Educational R&D Specialist
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, West Virginia 25325

Jane Jeffress Thomas
Consultant
P.O. Box 7
Pleasant Hill, Louisiana 71065

Jody Westbrook
Visiting Professor, Our Lady of the Lake University
Consultant - Westbrook Associates
P.O. Drawer 519
La Coste, Texas 78039

Acknowledgements

References and Resources

Boyd, V., & Hord, S.M. (1994). Schools as Learning Communities. *Issues…About Change, 4*(1). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Cowan, D., & Capers, M. (2000). Co-Developers: Partners in a study of Professional Learning Communities. *Issues…About Change, 8*(2). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Fleming, G. (1999). Principals and Teachers: Continuous Learners. *Issues…About Change, 7*(2). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S.M. (1997). Professional Learning Communities: What are they and why are they important? *Issues…About Change, 6*(1). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S.M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S.M., Meehan, M.L., Orletsky, S., & Sattes, B. (1999). Assessing a staff as a community of professional learners. *Issues…About Change, 7*(1). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S.M., & Rutherford, W.L. (1998). Creating a Professional Learning Community: Cottonwood Creek School. *Issues…About Change, 6*(2). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Leo, T., & Cowan, D. (2000). Launching Professional Learning Communities: Beginning Actions. *Issues…About Change, 8*(1). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Palmer, P.J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rosenholtz, S. (1989). *Teacher's workplace: The social organization of schools.* New York: Longman.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York: Currency Doubleday.

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (1998). Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.