Conversations
TURNING POINTS TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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Inside

Teachers Working Together to Improve Instruction

by Amy Mednick

At Burncoat Middle School in Worcester, Massachusetts, Steve Katz and his teaching team constitute the "youngest" cluster in the school. Three out of four of the team members started teaching three years ago when Principal Lisa Houlihan united the foursome. For these teachers in their professional infancy—observing, reflecting on, and even poaching strategies and techniques from their colleagues' classrooms has inspired the team to make slow, but steady improvements in their practice.

Last year, one of the teachers observed an eighth-grade math teacher who was keeping in mind a focusing question, "How do you get the kids engaged and on-task at the beginning of class?" The teacher gave students NOW work, several assignments to complete at their desks within the first five to seven minutes of class.

"We were all really intrigued by that concept. We stole it," says Katz, who teaches seventh-grade science. "What's great about peer observation is that, at no cost to anybody, you get all sorts of different ideas and you see how they fit for you. We have made it a practice to observe as many teachers as possible." The teachers cover classes for each other and after observing with a focusing question in mind, the team member sits down informally to debrief with that teacher. Finally, the team reflects on the observation together and discusses strategies they might use.

"Peer observation deprivatizes practice," says Sara Freedman, Turning Points coach for Burncoat and other New England schools. "It says, 'we are a community of learners'. Talking, discussing, and probing are very powerful. And it's fun."

A single observation might not make a profound difference for the observer or the observed. But teachers and coaches say that steady, seemingly inconsequential steps toward improvement over time make it possible to apply new learning to their own classrooms. Critical structures for this learning include peer observation, lab classrooms, teaching teams, in-house coaches, and inquiry groups coupled with time for reflection. Through ongoing collaboration with peers, each teacher has the opportunity to continuously improve instruction for

Observing, reflecting on, and even poaching strategies and techniques from their more experienced colleagues' classrooms has inspired the team to make slow, but steady improvements in their own practice.

Through ongoing collaboration with peers, each teacher has the opportunity to continuously improve instruction for all students.

all students. These teacher-to-teacher, day-to-day formats for improving instruction offer liberating, albeit challenging strategies for reducing the isolation that is such a part of traditional schooling.

The typical workshop format of professional development leaves teachers, at best, inspired intellectually and, at worst, overwhelmed and disillusioned about how far they need to go. Back in the classroom, without meaningful follow-up conversation, nothing changes. Educational research backs up this critique, and researchers say there is evidence that the best way to ensure ongoing, substantive improvement of classroom practice is by helping schools become professional learning communities. In his article "Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2004, pp. 424–432), Mike Schmoker cites evidence showing that schools should move away from the systemic reforms, stocked with too many workshops, programs, and initiatives and driven by unwieldy strategic plans. These attempts at school reform, he writes, are usually only " 'loosely coupled' to the core process of teaching and its improvement—to thoughtfully examining, testing, and fine-tuning the details of practice."

Often, he writes, the strategic plans are completed before the school year starts without the involvement of teachers. "This is a crippling confusion," he continues. "In fact, the most productive thinking is continuous and simultaneous with action—that is, with teaching—as practitioners collaboratively implement, assess, and adjust instruction as it happens."

With this in mind, Schmoker quotes numerous researchers who advocate replacing complex, long-term plans with shorter-term, revisable, team-based cycles that concentrate on actual teaching and learning. He cites Michael Fullan who states that well-executed learning communities can attain the goal

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Turning Points is a design for comprehensive middle school reform, coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in Boston, Massachusetts, with regional centers across the country. Turning Points seeks to create high-performing schools, especially those serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color. The design is driven by one over-arching goal — ensuring success for every student.

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of teaching for deep understanding. "Effective teachers must see themselves as not passive, dependent implementers of someone else's script, but as active members of research teams—as 'scientists who continuously develop their intellectual and investigative effectiveness.'"

> *"…the most productive thinking is continuous and simultaneous with action—that is, with teaching—as practitioners collaboratively implement, assess, and adjust instruction as it happens."*

Turning Points emphasizes this kind of focused, school-based professional development that fosters continuous improvement of instruction. As the following stories from Turning Points schools illustrate, teacher collaboration does have the power to strengthen and change practice.

Time to Create a Strong Culture of Professional Learning

Before initiating such practices as inquiry groups or peer observation, it is critical for a school to cultivate a community of learners where risks can be taken. Rather than view the school as an "ill patient in need of healing," a community of learners allows everyone to get smarter and more reflective together, says Brooke O'Drobinak, a coach for Colorado Turning Points. Coaches help teachers to reflect on their practice—on what is going well and on what changes they should make. And, before such reflection, teams practice asking questions and critiquing in a positive way.

Working as a team does not always come easily. Sometimes teams must strive to get to the point where they can feel secure examining student work, discussing curriculum, or practicing teaching strategies. At Vikan Middle School in Brighton, Colorado, Maria Benavides leads the sixth-grade team (which is composed of three sub-teams). From the beginning, teachers resisted meeting on Wednesdays as a whole team. They would often grade papers during the meeting. Their coach, Janet Stanton came in to help Benavides facilitate. "She would write notes, or get people talking, and she would also coach me (in facilitation)," Benavides says. Finally, team members took time to express their feelings and thoughts and this helped them get to know each other better. "Then, we were able to talk about what we do in the classroom," she says.

Now the team sticks to an agenda, talks about expectations for student work, curriculum, and other sixth-grade issues. The team has actually become quite close and even has its own team fleece vest, but it took time to create that community. "It's not just business. It's everything. We call it our dream team."

As teachers feel less threatened and more comfortable with sharing their work, they gradually become willing to try new strategies and reflect on how it went. And, ideally, a coach or even a colleague is there to help in the revision process. "It is truly in the day-to-day decisions where the real change happens," says O'Drobinak. "It's when teachers are able to take a theory or

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idea and get adequate support to implement it."

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But all this takes time. And, unfortunately, that is the biggest obstacle to the success of school-based professional development. "It seems obvious or mundane, but [finding time] is the hardest thing," says Kathy Greeley, who is the middle school program developer at the Cambridge Public Schools in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "I think it has to do with having the time to help teachers step back and be more self-reflective on what they're doing. If we built that kind of practice into the schools, with someone really thoughtful in asking the questions, that would be profound change."

Other Turning Points schools, for example in Colorado and Illinois, have introduced internal lab classrooms. Substitutes are hired and time is set aside for several teachers to participate in observations at the same time.

Learning from Peers

Recently, Burncoat's Katz observed Katie Starczewski, an eighth-grade social studies teacher, giving a lecture on a somewhat dry topic. He came to the class with the question, "How do you keep students engaged throughout class?" He noticed a couple of Starczewski's techniques. First, every time she spoke, a student's name was attached to the question or statement. Then, rather than lecture and have the students take notes throughout the period, Starczewski switched formats every seven to ten minutes. While it was not an elaborate hands-on class, Katz says the observation and informal debrief that followed allowed him to pick up a couple of new strategies for his own class.

Starczewski and her team have also made peer observation a priority. They have been observing other teachers twice a month, following up with the teachers, and then taking time to debrief as a team. "That's been really beneficial to my team. [It gave us] more strategies, more ideas, more opportunities to talk about teaching and learning. There is some accountability for peer observation because the group is expecting you to come back with something."

The next step, Starczewski says, will be to have a discussion about which practices they have used in their classrooms. "This isn't a quick fix at all. It is a process and sometimes it's very slow, and that can be okay. Working through it as a team is important."

Taking the time to reflect on how the observations have helped teachers think about their practice and how they might improve learning for all students is the most important part of any professional development, Freedman says. Protocols help keep the conversation focused and reflective. For example, using a double-entry journal while observing a peer, teachers record observations on the left side of the page and reflections and questions on the right side. This helps teachers to focus on the clarifying question and to stay mentally active during the observations, she says.

One stumbling block is finding time in teachers' schedules to visit other teachers' classes. At Burncoat, for example, the visits happens only when

teachers cover classes for each other. Then, the debrief is squeezed in just after class or over coffee in the teachers' lounge. Other Turning Points schools, for example in Colorado and Illinois, have introduced internal lab classrooms. Substitutes are hired and time is set aside for several teachers to participate in observations at the same time.

The Lab Classroom

The Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) in Denver, Colorado, a Turning Points regional center, has several different lab programs, including coaching labs, inter-school labs, and national labs, designed to give teachers a first-hand look at best practices. Turning Points coach Brooke O'Drobinak is helping Overland Trail Middle School in Brighton, Colorado set up an internal lab system where teachers volunteer to open their classrooms to groups of colleagues from the school. Using a protocol, O'Drobinak and in-house coach Susan Herll meet with the teachers in a "prebrief" to frame the observation, then the teachers observe a lesson, which is followed by a debrief.

While national labs feature a master teacher in a model classroom, any teacher in the building could host an internal lab because the idea is for the observers and the observed to learn from the experience. The lab host is not expected to have everything figured out, and, in fact, the host usually picks something specific for the visitors to observe and reflect on. It is an opportunity, O'Drobinak says, to push yourself and receive feedback from colleagues in a structured format. "It's been so successful in a couple of Denver Public Schools because it's for teachers by teachers. We are digging deep into the teaching and learning process. It's making a difference in the way we look at ourselves as teachers and as a building," she says.

The staff at Overland Trail began by participating in those labs already

A Structure For Peer Observation

Steps: *(Times are flexible and can be adjusted according to needs.)*

1. Pre-Observation Conference (approx. 20 min): Teacher gives context for the visit and frames the issue or question s/he wants considered.

2. Classroom Visit (30–60 minutes): Visitors observe and take notes related to teacher's question.

3. Debriefing Conference (45–60 minutes): Visitors share observations, questions, and constructive suggestions.

Debrief guidelines and protocol:

Guidelines:

- **Begin with positive impressions that are specific and concrete.**
- **Focus (as much as possible) on the teacher's identified issue.**
- **Frame critical observations constructively. Avoid language that is judgmental or overly negative.**
- **If suggestions are appropriate, consider making them in the form of questions.**
- **Involve the teacher in creating solutions and determining what kinds of suggestions would be most helpful.**

Protocol:

- **The teacher speaks first and gives a brief account of how she felt about the class, and invites the team's feedback on specific issues or questions. (5–10 min)**
- **The visitors discuss their impressions, following the guidelines above, and the teacher listens without speaking and takes notes. (15–20 min)**
- **The teacher responds to as many of the observations and questions as s/he chooses, and the visitors listen. (15–20 min)**
- **There is an open discussion, which includes identifying strategies and next steps for the teacher. (15–20 min)**

underway in the Denver Public Schools, and several saw the benefits of opening up their classrooms to colleagues. Teachers began asking Herll if Overland Trail could set up its own lab. But, Herll says, the staff would not have been able to conduct an in-house lab when they first started working with Turning Points two and a half years ago. The staff needed to get used to the coaches coming into their classrooms and then doing a debrief; they also needed to see that the purpose was not evaluative, but to learn and develop their practice.

"We worked up to this point," Herll says. "The staff needed to begin by building community, working together in teams, content areas, and grade levels and openly talking to each other. Now we are comfortable [with that] and okay with going into each other's classes with the purpose of learning, and not critiquing, in mind."

In response to a letter requesting volunteers, eight teachers signed up to host labs. At the first lab, Herll observed O'Drobinak facilitate the debrief and noticed how well she asked questions that prompted reflection. In planning the second lab, Herll has made changes to the PEBC protocol to better fit Overland Trail's goals, and she will facilitate the group herself. "I'm just constantly watching (Brooke) and trying to get better myself, to get deeper into teachers' thinking, and not try to rush through things."

The lab host does not have to have everything figured out, and, in fact, the host usually picks something specific for the visitors to observe and reflect on.

Marty Spritzer, who opened his seventh-grade language arts classroom to the first observers, says the experience forced him to think about the "whys" of what he was doing in his classroom and that he felt very comfortable talking to his peers about his practice. But he wished he had more time for post-lab reflection. "I believe that these labs, to be truly valuable, should be done more than once a year, and that I would benefit more over time if I could be observed more often and have more time to discuss what was seen."

For Norma Coronado, a seventh-grade math teacher, the structure of the observation protocol helped because she understood the context of the classroom and was able to ask questions at the debrief. Talking about practice does not have the same impact as actually taking the time to observe it in action, she says. "In the past I have been able to tell other teachers what I do in my classroom, but actually seeing the practice in place is what's made the difference."

"The staff needed to begin by building community, working together in teams, content areas, and grade levels and openly talking to each other. Now we are comfortable [with that] and okay with going into each other's classes with the purpose of learning in mind."

Illinois coach Gena Bramlett, inspired by the Colorado model, has facilitated a lab at East Middle School in Alton for teachers from East and North Middle Schools in Godfrey. The literacy coaches from both buildings have been collaborating to put a balanced literacy program in place at both schools, but some teachers have been struggling with it.

One teacher, Amy Hart at East, read *In the Middle*, by Nancy Atwell over the

summer and decided to begin a reader's and writer's workshop in her classroom. She and her co-teacher, Kelly Shortal, have had some success and volunteered their classroom for the first lab. Bramlett developed guidelines for observation which included a checklist of the different components of balanced literacy. From that checklist each observer selected three areas of focus, and wrote observations and reflections in a double-entry journal. Afterwards, the observers shared their reflections and the presenting teachers had the opportunity to comment on the experience. The eventual goal, Bramlett says, is to have all teachers observe another teacher at least once.

Learning For *Every* Teacher—Experienced and Novice

While the lab series has just started, Bramlett says she is beginning to see how it will affect practice. Nancy Coalson, a sixth-grade language arts teacher and literacy coach at North Middle School in Godfrey, came to the lab with a wealth of experience and knowledge on teaching reading and writing and admitted that she was skeptical about peer observation.

> *"In the past I have been able to tell other teachers what I do in my classroom, but actually seeing the practice in place is what's made the difference."*

But when she walked into Hart and Shortal's class, she realized how much she had to learn. "I became aware of the fact that students need to take ownership of their own learning," Coalson says. "Telling them what to read and how to react to it wasn't working; they needed the freedom to choose their own books and write their own feelings about what they are reading."

Since the observation, Coalson's students have been selecting their own books every day, rather than three days a week. She has already noticed a difference in their eagerness to share stories about books with the class and during conferences. The students have

Peer Observation Debriefing

Illinois Turning Points Coach Gena Bramlett developed this protocol to facilitate classroom observations in the Alton middle schools. A complete set of her peer observation tools, including the double-sided journal form, can be found at www.turningpts.org/conversations_tools_spring04.

1. Quietly, observers should review the double-sided journal, and circle the most significant aspect of the observations/reflections. Then, observers should reflect upon the focus of the visit from the prebriefing session. (2 minutes)

2. Observers write down the "take away" from today's observation. (3–5 minutes)

3. The facilitator will ask a series of open-ended questions. Participants will respond one at a time. At this time only the facilitator and observers will speak. Meanwhile, the presenting teacher(s) will record the statements and remain silent. (5 minutes)

- **What were the strengths of this lesson?**
- **What questions still remain?**
- **What did you circle in your journal?**

4. Participants will state their "take away" statements. (5 minutes)

5. Presenting teacher answers questions and provides information and feedback in response to the observers' discussion. (5 minutes)

6. Presenting teacher summarizes comments. What am I hearing? What surprised me? What answers do I find for my focus? (5 minutes)

7. Presenting teacher shares "take away." (3 minutes)

8. Facilitator summarizes and closes. (2 minutes)

also started a reading journal. Coalson says the first set of reflections showed that her students were better able to think and express their feelings about their reading.

> *"Since my peer observation of Amy and Kelly's class, I have had interactions with my students that I am amazed at."*

"Since my peer observation of Amy and Kelly's class, I have had interactions with my students that I am amazed at," Coalson says. "They relish the freedom and I am impressed with their ability to set their own pace for learning."

Using Inquiry or Study Groups

A Schoolwide Approach

At Amherst Regional Middle School in Amherst, Massachusetts, in-house coaches work systematically to reach all teachers, and therefore all students. This means re-evaluating and revising their plans several times over the course of years, says Kathy Reckendorf, a seventh-grade coach and reading teacher.

Several years ago, a team (Team G) at the school effectively piloted the reading comprehension strategies described in *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Olliver Keene and Susan Zimmerman (Heinneman, 1997). The team used the strategies in all subject areas for student exhibitions, which they were piloting at the same time. Students in Team G began using the terms from *Mosaic of Thought* so fluidly that they actually pushed the science and math teachers to use the strategies more extensively.

At the same time, the faculty was beginning to establish inquiry groups based on the results of their Self-Study Survey. A literacy group was created, and it recommended that the staff read *Mosaic of Thought* and use the strategies in their classrooms. At the end of the year, according to Reckendorf, despite some staff development on the comprehension strategies, the staff reported mixed success in implementing them. "Our inference was that some people just didn't feel comfortable enough with it and didn't know how to apply it. It was happening in some places, but not in other places."

In order to reach the entire staff, the literacy inquiry group proposed concentrating on one strategy a month and using it during advisory every Wednesday. They designed 20-minute activities using a particular strategy, which the teachers would conduct with their students. The inquiry group recommended that teachers discuss how it went and its application to the classroom in team meetings. Mid-year feedback from the eighth-grade teams said that they wanted their students' activities to be more connected to their classes and teachers wanted to begin planning their own activities. As a result, for eighth-grade teams the inquiry group supplies the activity one of three times and different members of the team create them the rest of the time. "Where it's working, it's working because people are feeling comfortable with it. Some people are still uncomfortable with the strategies."

The initiative will be considered a work-in-progress until it has reached all teachers. "If you don't stop to think

about what's working and what's not, what good does it do you? If you're not getting the desired result, it's back to the drawing board."

Promoting Reflection and Revision

At a literacy strategies study group that meets twice a month at a school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Greeley asks the participants to develop and try out a lesson plan based on the discussion. Participants then write a reflection explaining, "What did you do?," "How did it go?," and "What did you think?" The first time, Greeley says, she asked if questions came up during the process and some people answered, "No, no questions." That concerned Greeley. In order to promote more dialogue, Greeley wrote back to them with prompts such as "Have you thought about the next step? Have you tried it again?" The goal, she says, is for people to ask themselves those questions, and think deeply about their practice.

At another point, Greeley brought the study group a difficult text and asked them to observe themselves as they read and tried to make sense of the selection. Then, they drew parallels to how students feel when they are struggling with something. "Any time we put ourselves in that place of being in a stretch, it opens us up to learning and seeing things differently. At the very least, they have more compassion with kids, and it becomes a lot clearer to know how to help kids."

Kathleen Murphy, a coach at Rogers Middle School in Boston, Massachusetts, agrees. She analyzed a complicated poem with teachers so they would experience their students' struggle with a difficult concept. Often, she says, teachers will say to students who are stumped, "Oh, you can do that." But once they understand the students' point of view, they are more likely to adjust their instruction.

Hoover History Teachers Ask: "Are You Ready to Collaborate?"

Hoover Middle School (Long Beach, CA) history department chair Mary Massich and Cal State University, Long Beach professor and coach Linda Whitney offer a few tips for teachers who are thinking about looking at student work:

- **You must commit time and energy to do this work—Our team spends about two hours a week discussing teacher lessons and the products of our lessons. We find food is a good energizer during these afternoon sessions!**
- **We all improve with reflection—We seldom give ourselves the luxury of time to reflect. But when we do, the insights can be startling. Yes, they sometimes mean we have to work a little harder, but more often reflection helps us see how we can [get] better results for our kids for the same investment of time.**
- **You must be open to critical feedback—You will want to start slow; it takes time to learn to put your ego on hold. But remember, everybody must give and everybody must take some criticism. It helps to have a coach…to keep us focused on the work and not on ourselves.**
- **You will have to change your teaching— Maybe we think we've developed a good lesson, but the review of student work tells us that it's just not helping enough kids meet standards. So we have to change, to experiment, to try something else.**
- **You will need to develop some structure—With the help of our coach, we identified some model instruments that teachers can use to guide their discussions.**
- **Team spirit can carry you through tough times—When you dig deeply into your teaching, you begin to see so much more that you could be doing, and that can be frustrating. But a strong team that believes in and supports every member will see you through.**

Excerpted from an article on MiddleWeb.com (http://www.middleweb.com/CSLB3Hoovertips.html).

Inquiry groups at Rogers focus on reading, writing, mathematics, and metacognition. Using research on the subject, Murphy says, stimulates discussion. Teachers process the information by applying their learning to the classroom. "People aren't comfortable with it in the beginning, but now they are getting used to it and they like it better than sitting and listening to someone give a lecture."

Sue Haugen, who teaches sixth-grade math and one reading class at Lewis and Clark Middle School in Jefferson City, Missouri, participates in a professional development strand on differentiated instruction. The strand functions like an inquiry group in that they meet to study research and figure out ways to implement what they are learning.

Often, she says, teachers will say to students who are stumped, "Oh, you can do that." But once they understand the students' point of view, then they are more likely to adjust their instruction.

The 15-member strand meets on early release days three times a year. Between these meetings, Haugen collaborates with another math teacher in the strand to try the new strategies they have learned. With so many differentiated instruction strategies, she says, it would be overwhelming to try it on her own. "I've tried strategies I wouldn't have tried without the support of a colleague."

For example, they have created curriculum compacts in which students are pre-tested to find out what they already know about a particular topic. Then, teachers find ways to challenge students in a particular skill so that they have a deeper understanding of it. It means thinking about how to keep all the students on task while they are doing different assignments. Collaborating with a colleague has helped Haugen more easily reflect on that process.

Coaching: Fostering Schoolwide and Individual Goals

Sometimes a schoolwide approach to reaching a goal helps get the whole staff on board with a particular goal. Northeast Middle School in Reading, Pennsylvania, picked improving reading comprehension as its top academic goal this year, and as a faculty they have been working on reading strategies on several levels. For example, each morning every teacher spends 20 minutes reading aloud during homeroom period. The school's literacy lead teacher Debbie Stairiker says they picked three middle school literature titles to read aloud to the students during four to six week blocks. The rest of the time students read their own books independently. Author Laurie Halse Anderson visited the school in January, just after the sixth- and seventh-grade teachers had read aloud her books to students during homeroom. "The result was a very involved and interested student body and a very happy author."

To give teachers a framework for designing a goal-oriented lesson, Patricia Spicer, a Turning Points coach in North Carolina, uses a model called learning-focused instruction. The lessons are broken down into an acquisition lesson, designed to help students acquire new information, and lessons that extend and refine the original information. Teachers come up with essential questions and use graphic organizers. In one element of this approach, teachers learn to open the lesson in a way that gets students engaged and grabs their attention, for example dressing in character or playing a game with the students. An important

element is follow up and reflection. By helping teachers structure their lessons toward specific learning objectives, Spicer says, they can become much stronger in their practice. (See resource list–http://www.learningconcepts.org)

Teams: Teachers Helping Teachers

The foundation for continuously improving teacher practice is an effective teacher team. In the Kappan article, Schmoker writes that carefully structured and facilitated teaching teams improve instruction because they give teachers the opportunity to engage in tangible, detailed, and goal-oriented discussions about their practice on an ongoing basis. Working in teams has allowed teachers in the Turning Points network to spend more focused time talking about curriculum, student work, and how to improve instruction.

Fran Starks, a Turning Points coach at Hale and Kerr middle schools in Blue Island, Illinois, says she began working with teams by using a protocol to ask questions and give information without being judgmental. The first time the team looked at student work, questions emerged about instructions the teacher gave the students before the assignment. After a few sessions, the teachers realized that to better reach all the students they needed to be more consistent as a team. Now, the expectations for quality are becoming more explicit. The payoff has been a critical change in expectations for students. "After we started looking at the work and being positive, teachers took more risks." Next, Starks says, they are hoping to share work with another Turning Points school in the district to help generate uniform products across the district.

Conclusion

Teachers need time and support to talk about teaching, reflect, and observe one another's classrooms on a weekly, if not daily, basis if they are to make lasting changes in their classroom practice. Teachers learn best from each other—from trial and error in the classroom, from talking to colleagues, from instructional coaches and leaders, and from doing this over the course of their careers. This kind of rich, school-based learning requires a profound shift in a school's culture. It also requires the resources of time and skilled coaching from internal and external leaders. The results are worth it. Marcia Aden, a seventh-grade science teacher at Overland Trail in Colorado, found this out first-hand. Attending their first lab classroom, she comments by e-mail, was minute-for-minute one of the most productive pieces of staff development she has ever experienced. She writes, "The teachers in our building have been an untapped natural resource for too long!" ■

Carefully structured and facilitated teaching teams improve instruction because they allow teachers the opportunity to engage in tangible, detailed, and goal-oriented discussions about their practice on an ongoing basis.

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Resources and Readings

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Websites:

http://www.learningconcepts.org/overview.htm This website describes the Learning-Focused Schools Project.

http://www.middleweb.com/CSLB3Hooverpg1.html This MiddleWeb article reveals how a teaching team at Hoover Middle School in Long Beach, California collaboratively analyzes student work and it traces the professional growth of the members of the team.

http://www.middleweb.com/CSLB3Hoovertips.html A Hoover Middle School teacher and their team coach offer tips for teachers thinking about looking at student work together.

http://www.pebc.org/ourwork/schools/pdev/labs.html This page outlines the various lab programs developed by the Public Education & Business Coalition in Denver, Colorado.

For more tools related to this issue go to www.turningpts.org/conversations_tools_spring04