

How Teachers Make Restructuring Happen

In Brookline, Massachusetts, two classroom teachers learned that, for them at least, restructuring the profession had to begin with restructuring the school.

KATHERINE BOLES AND VIVIAN TROEN



Collaborating teacher Jack DeLong models how to run a group meeting for Wheelock intern Abbey Koplovitz at the Edward Devotion School in Brookline, Massachusetts, as part of the Learning/Teaching Collaborative.

Five years ago we — two classroom teachers — were dismayed by the one-stage nature of teaching, where career advancement equals leaving the classroom. We were discouraged to see some of our best colleagues leaving teaching to enter fields as disparate as school administration, psychology, and real estate. We were disappointed about the deteriorating quality of the student teachers who came our way. And we were dismayed by the low self-esteem of our special needs students and the fragmentation they experienced alternating between pull-out programs and the mainstream classroom.

How could the profession attract and keep the best and the brightest in teaching? How could we change teaching from a one-stage career to an evolving and challenging one? How could special needs students be better served? And how could we, two teachers, make all this happen? Ultimately, we knew that to improve the learning opportunities for all students, we had to improve the teaching occupation.

Nothing to Lose

What we discovered through three years of laying the foundation for an

entire program was that we could have nearly everything we wanted: all we had to do was restructure our school.

We began with a clean slate. Two tenured teachers, with no power, beholden to no one, and with nothing to lose. We wrote articles for journals and shared our ideas for school restructuring at conferences around the country. We ran hither and yon looking for money, trying to form a collaborative with a college, getting permission from our district, convincing our superintendent, and playing telephone-tag with funders, potential supporters, anyone who could help us. The increasing credibility we gained in the process enabled us to form new coalitions. Our first supporter was our principal, Jerry Kaplan, followed by Wheelock College's Karen Worth and Dan Cheever, Massachusetts Commissioner of Education Harold Raynolds, and American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker.

After many rejections and setbacks the first collaborative team linking the Edward Devotion School in Brookline and Wheelock College was initiated in September 1987. The project started with one team of 3rd and 4th grade teachers and an equal number of full-time graduate student interns. Strong support from parents and a positive first-year evaluation by an outside consultant propelled the project's expansion.

In the second year another team was added. The superintendent's office became interested in providing similar team experiences for teachers in other Brookline schools. And, thus, in the

third year a new team was started in each of two district schools.

In the third year Wheelock faculty member Karen Worth facilitated the addition of the first Boston team. Increasing the number of teams necessitated a larger pool of interns than Wheelock College could provide. So, when in the spring of the second year, Simmons College approached the Brookline Public Schools with a request to join the collaboration, it was a perfect match. In year five an additional two schools joined the project.

Today four Brookline schools and three Boston schools are involved in the collaboration. Eight teaching teams and two colleges have joined together in what has become known as the Learning/Teaching Collaborative (LTC).

Four objectives provide the framework for this collaborative:

- *restructure the school's learning environment* to provide increased educational opportunities for students;
- *collaborate with preservice training programs* to improve the quality and coordination of teacher education curriculums and to lower the teacher-student ratio;
- *improve the school's capacity to serve special needs children* by eliminating pull-out programs, which fragment children's school experiences;
- *provide teachers with opportunities for career advancement within teaching* to improve their professional status.

Each team of teachers in the project implements the four strategies in a way that addresses its particular needs. The following example illustrates how one team integrates the project's theory with daily classroom practice.

A Typical Team in Action

The team we'll look at is made up of five 3rd and 4th grade teachers (four

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classroom teachers and one remediation specialist) and four graduate student interns. They begin a week before the opening day of school in September and continue working as a team until the last book is packed away in June. The classroom teachers serve as mentors of interns and are equal partners with college supervisors in teacher preparation. One of the teachers is an adjunct faculty member at Wheelock College, and the others in the team present their particular areas of expertise to the interns through the graduate seminar held throughout the year.

If you visited the Devotion team, you would see children involved in a variety of learning configurations made possible by team teaching and full-time interns in the classroom. Children, interns, and teachers move from room to room depending on the activities scheduled by the team members. Things move easily, yet there is a certain intensity as teachers and children go about the business of school. Like most things that seem to be free and easy, there's an enormous amount of structure that supports the seamless interaction between teachers and learners.

The success is due in no small part to the intensive planning that occurs at the team's weekly two-hour meeting during the school day (thanks to the

principal's reorganization of the school's master schedule) and at the team's monthly five-hour Saturday workshop. Meeting time is used to plan new curriculum, set common rules and procedures, meet with specialists, prepare for parent conferences, and for other varied activities.

During the course of a day, children participate in cross-graded team reading and science lessons developed and co-taught by pairs of teachers and interns. One teacher uses school time to conduct classroom-based action research about the effect of storytelling on children's creative writing. While his intern has full responsibility for a writing lesson, he interviews children or observes them and takes copious notes. He is in the process of preparing a research paper for presentation at a professional conference.

In this team you would *not* see children leaving the classroom for remedial services. Identified children receive math and reading help in the classroom. The half-time remediation specialist, a full partner in the team, moves from class to class assisting individuals and working with small groups of students on skills within the classroom context. Pull-out has been eliminated.

Alternative Professional Teaching Time

Team teaching, remediation in the classroom, and full-time interns in the classroom are the more obvious strategies that enhance children's learning. An equally important strategy, though one often overlooked in reform efforts, is improving opportunities for teachers' professional development.

Alternative Professional Teaching (APT) Time is our answer to staff development that has not adequately served teachers' needs. The strategy

emerged from our assumptions about the nature of teaching. For teachers to remain vital, engaged, and committed to teaching, they must have time for dialogue and reflection away from the daily demands of the classroom. Rather than developing curriculum in the school's silent halls during

summer recess, we use the school as a learning laboratory while it is in session, testing ideas in an ongoing fashion. And what better way to conduct school-based research than in a functioning classroom?

Teachers in the L/TC have assumed three alternative roles for their own

staff development: teacher/researcher, teacher/trainer, and teacher/curriculum writer.

The Teacher/Researcher

A teacher on the team who decided to assume the role of teacher/researcher began by studying the writing of

REVIEW

The Loneliness of the Teacher Leader

MARGE SCHERER

Ted, nationally renowned for his project-based teaching and the director of his own teacher network, is rarely emulated by teachers in his home district.

Gwen, an Instructional Support Teacher (IST) who counsels coworkers in the Madeline Hunter approach to teaching, suspects her efforts are merely tolerated.

Mary, who models numerous innovative strategies in her demonstration classroom, is applauded by university colleagues, but rarely visited by those in her own building.

Although to a person they acknowledge that their roles as leaders have helped them grow professionally and personally, these nonfictional teacher/leaders (pseudonymous to protect the integrity of the research) have serious doubts about their influence on the teachers in the classrooms down the hall — the ones they are supposed to be leading.

Author Patricia A. Wasley documents these case histories in her

excellent *Teachers Who Lead: The Rhetoric of Reform and the Realities of Practice* (Teachers College Press, 1991). Well-versed in the literature proposing new kinds of leadership, she poses the reformer's question: Are the leadership positions that actually exist in schools today so problematic that they should be dismantled? In other words, should we start over from scratch? A realist, she answers no. Not only does she see the rich possibilities of these paradoxical situations, but she also thinks that "their wholesale dismissal would only result in recreation of similar positions with similar problems."

Wasley concludes her examination of the effectiveness of leadership positions with a better question: Should not teachers be included in discussions about teacher leadership? When she examines how these positions originated, she finds that Ted's entrepreneurial teacher's role has been largely created by Ted, that Gwen's administrative liaison position has been ordained by administration, and that Mary's model teacher role, origi-

nally designed by superiors, has evolved to accommodate her own growing knowledge about how children learn.

Left out of the conversation are the teachers next door — not learning from colleagues and not sharing what they know. Because "a critical factor in the improvement of instructional practice is the sharing of actual practice by adults," fewer students benefit.

Although it sometimes seems that the egalitarian nature of teaching — and the traditional hierarchical nature of leadership — war against learning from colleagues, Wasley doesn't think it has to be that way. She outlines a proposal by which teachers and administrators could work collaboratively over the course of a school year to generate proposals for instructional improvement. Teachers would recommend leadership positions for themselves as they plan how to implement the proposed programs.

Teacher leaders wouldn't be so lonely if there were only more of them. By examining the conditions of actual practice, Wasley points the way toward creating the conditions for more participation in spirited teacher leadership. □

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Marge Scherer is Managing Editor of *Educational Leadership*.

fiction and nonfiction in his classroom. He looked particularly at strategies used by excellent writers as they pursue their writing. Here he describes how he felt about the research he conducted during his APT Time:

It allows me to pursue something that is interesting and invigorating and professionally enhancing for me. The research has given me more insight into why children are doing what they're doing, what they're thinking about their writing, what their world view is on writing. It forces me to respect their logic.

Evaluating the effect of classroom-based research on teachers, he adds:

I find myself being much more reflective about my role in the classroom, my role as a researcher. I think that the tipoff is that I'm tremendously worried—I can't imagine not doing this . . . not everyone's going to allow this kind of thing to happen in schools.

The Teacher/Trainer

One of our teacher/trainers supervises interns in the team and also co-teaches a graduate student teaching seminar with a college instructor. She describes her satisfaction with her role:

My APT Time has changed how I see myself as a teacher. I'm viewed differently by both my 4th graders and their parents. You become how other people view you. In fact, I am viewed by them as having new status. I teach in a college, and I'm not in the classroom all the time. So when I'm in the classroom, I'm more valued by the children.

An unanticipated advantage to this teacher/trainer's job is that she has the opportunity to speak to other teachers about how they think student teaching should be structured. She is now able to discuss topics that had been taboo

with her colleagues. She states:

Teachers rarely talk about their philosophy of education. But when you talk about how you want to educate people coming into the profession, that has to be one of the first things you discuss.

The Teacher/Curriculum Writer

One of the teacher/curriculum writers works with other members of his team to integrate the arts into the team's classrooms. As a result of his work with the team members and their students in graphic arts techniques, the children's reports and projects are measurably improved.

A curriculum on oceans written by another teacher/curriculum writer has provided team members with a fascinating and comprehensive unit, developmentally appropriate and more relevant to the students than much of the curriculum that comes from textbooks.

School principals and the Brookline school superintendent consider APT Time one of the most innovative and exciting components of the Learning/Teaching Collaborative. They sense that children benefit from the stimulation and growth that teachers experience when they assume these new roles.

Restructuring—The Means, Not the End

Our goal five years ago was to support student learning by revitalizing the teaching profession. We didn't set out to restructure schools. Along the way, though, it became crystal clear that we had to restructure.

We found that *team teaching* eliminated the isolation that had been such a serious issue. Talking about teaching was energizing. Teachers took risks with curriculum and felt accountable to other team members.

Lessons were livelier; teachers' excitement was contagious; parents and their children were more enthusiastic about school. *Full-time interns* not only lowered the teacher-student ratio but also brought new ideas to the classroom. *In-class remediation and bilingual education* better integrated and served special needs students. New APT Time roles in mentoring, curriculum writing, research, and teacher training successfully altered the one-step nature of the teaching career, resulting in some very sophisticated, high-level staff development.

Substantial restructuring, we discovered, was essential if we were to professionalize teaching and support student learning. Tinkering around the edges just didn't work. The Carnegie Report says it well when it warns that:¹

... policymakers will be tempted to implement only those features . . . that cost little in organizational trauma or dollars. That would inevitably defeat the purpose. . . . It is the entire structure that needs an overhaul, not just a few components.

¹Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, (1986). *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy).

Editor's note: In August 1991, the project described here was one of eight school-level projects in the nation to receive a three-year Department of Education FIRST (Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching) Grant.

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