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Teachers Attend Leadership Program

Teacher leaders and principals from 21 SIG schools attended the Teacher Leaders program in December.



The three-day program, Focusing on Assessment for Learning (AfL) led by Ian Smith, introduced practical ways to implement assessment for learning in the classroom. The training focused on four modules: sharing learning outcomes or expectations so that students know what they must do in order to be successful, asking better questions of students to promote higher order thinking skills, making feedback count, and creating opportunities for assessment by the students themselves. Smith is the founder of Learning Unlimited, a teacher development agency in Scotland (<http://www.learningunlimited.co.uk/>).

The first two days of the training focused primarily on asking better questions and making feedback count. Smith emphasized that setting up a non-judgmental classroom was key to getting student participation. "It's their classroom," he said. "You're not teaching, you're helping students learn."

Making feedback count and avoiding "feedback bottleneck" (one teacher per 30+ students) involves pairing students as learning partners, offering advance examples of what good work will look like, holding debriefing sessions, and allowing students to reflect on their own work.

Smith says that teachers form assessments every three seconds, but that formative assessment must be based on more than eye contact and changing the teaching if students seem lost. Part of opening the "black box" of assessment depends on teachers and school leaders identifying if

they are using assessment to support progress or to identify failure. (See poster #39, “If you want students to be responsible learners, let them in on your big box of secrets” and #40 which outlines the four crucial elements of formative assessment.)

A goal of the training was to take a look at how to support all teachers using assessments for learning techniques in their classrooms. A key technique is for teachers to explain to their students the specific strategies that will be needed for success in meeting ongoing classroom expectations. To illustrate the emotions evoked when trying to meet expectations without knowing specific strategies, Smith challenged training participants to juggle three scarves and offered no expert tips. “We ask our students every day to do this not knowing how to juggle.” As it turns out, there are quite a variety of strategies used to juggle scarves, some of which can be seen on the video on the SIG group’s LinkedIn Web site.

COMING UP NEXT: TRAINING IN THE LEAS

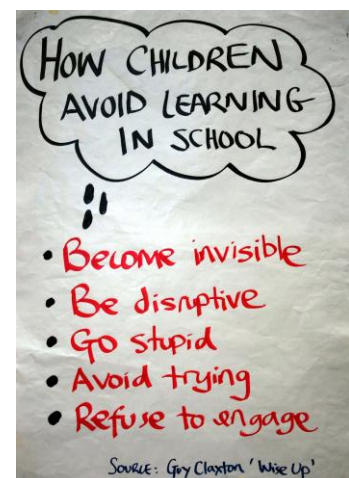
Teacher leaders and their assigned Cambridge mentors will lead sessions on each of the four AfL modules January-March 2011. (The Cambridge Education group has been contracted to work with North Carolina’s SIG schools.) LEAs may select a group of 20-25 participants. Teachers, principals and staff from the SIG schools must be among those trained. AfL training is designed to improve instructional practices through ongoing, job-embedded, professional development.

Teacher leaders and their assigned Cambridge mentors are, in that order: Heather Campbell, Cheryl Baker, Anson Academy; Kristi Swain, Terri Singleton, Brunswick County Academy; Erica Battle, Richard Greene, Community High School; Brenda Arney, Richard Greene, Hallyburton Academy; Debbie Brooks, Cheryl Baker, West Mecklenburg High School; Evelyn Moore, Terri Singleton, Walker-Spivey School; Samantha Murchison, Cheryl Baker, Davidson County Extended Day School; Lisa Bair, Sarah Armstrong, Durham Performance Learning Center; Gayla Bucher, Sarah Armstrong, Kennedy Learning Center; Deborah Hartman, Sarah Armstrong, Petree Elementary School; Shannon Hullett, Richard Greene, Warlick School; Jennifer McClinton, Sarah Armstrong, Oak Hill Elementary School; Mary Lee Tosky, Richard Greene, Hickory Career and Arts Magnet; Larae Butcher, Ian Nelson, W.L. Greene Alternative School; Phyllis McCoy, Ian Nelson, Farmville Central High School; Mabel Perry, Ian Nelson, North Pitt High School; Elizabeth Martin, Ian Nelson, South Central High School; Travis Kemp, Terri Singleton, Fairmont High School; Stephen Gaskins, Terri Singleton, Lumberton High School; Jerri Hunt, Cheryl Baker, Henderson Independent High School; and Maguy Yancey, Ian Nelson, Goldsboro High School.

Southeast Halifax High School and Enfield Middle School are being served by mentors through the District and School Transformation program.

The Wall

Ian Smith’s posters are a good way to keep team discussions of best teaching practices alive. Here is the most popular poster (#1 poster online) as voted on by participants in the December training. Participants cited the last item, “refuse to engage” as characteristic of many students at their schools. The second place poster was #39 online and the third place poster was #19 online. All 41 posters are available on the SIG LinkedIn group site.



SIG School Facts

Twenty-four School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools in North Carolina are receiving between \$980,896 and \$6 million each for a total of \$63.4 million through September 30, 2013. The 24 SIG schools, which must implement one of three federally-defined models or close, serve about 12,808 students ranging from 68 to 2,052 per school. Economically disadvantaged students represent about 70 percent of the students overall. A second cohort of SIG schools will be announced soon. Here are some basics about the 24 SIG schools in 18 LEAs:

- 10 schools are alternative schools serving middle and high school students; three of these have a career academy
- 9 schools are traditional high schools
- 2 schools are alternative high schools
- 2 schools are traditional PK-5 elementary schools
- 1 school is a traditional middle school
- 8 schools are Title I schools; the other 16 schools are eligible for school-wide Title I service, but are not served
- 16 schools are implementing the transformation model; 6 schools are implementing the turnaround model; 1 school is implementing the restart model; 1 school is closing
- The 24 SIG schools are spread among each of the eight Regional Service Areas as follows: Region 1, three schools; Region 2, two schools; Region 3, four schools; Region 4, three schools; Region 5, four schools; Region 6, five schools; Region 7, two schools; and Region 8, one school.

SIG on LinkedIn



The School Improvement Grant (SIG) LinkedIn group is designed for SIG participants to collaborate across schools and school districts regarding the implementation of their grants and use of best practices. SIG school teachers, curriculum coordinators, instructional coaches, principals, coordinators or facilitators, professional development leaders, teacher assistants, tutors, guidance counselors, social workers, translators, and others are invited to participate. By sharing information and partnering across schools and districts, all SIG school teams will benefit. Members can post questions, make observations, share strategies and results in this forum.

Photos from the December training, a whimsical juggling video, 41 SIG posters and a link to editions of *SIGNificant Points* are posted on the site. More items will be added weekly. Please accept LinkedIn invitations from site owner Charlotte Duren or request to join by joining LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) and typing "school improvement grant" in the "Search Groups" box.

Possibilities for subgroups within the SIG LinkedIn group are: elementary schools, middle/high schools, transformation model schools, turnaround model schools, schools according to geographic regions, and subgroups for teacher leaders, principals and coordinators. LinkedIn is an online professional networking group.

TECH TIP

SIG's LinkedIn logo was designed with a free online logomaker that students can use to brand their club names or that teachers can use in the classroom. It's on the Web at <http://www.logosnap.com>.

Best Practices

A common thread throughout the training by Ian Smith was the need for teachers and other school leaders to reflect on best practices in a very practical way such as looking at patterns in the classroom. Some of those classroom patterns include questions that teachers ask of their students, pauses between teachers' questions and students' answers, and the traffic patterns of teachers as they move through the classroom in the course of a lesson.

Smith urged teachers and students to reflect on their work each day and to use a small whiteboard to write the answer to, "What will I do differently tomorrow?"

Oak Hill Elementary Principal Patrice Faison's reflections on these matters led her to study teachers' use of questioning students in the classroom as part of an initial walk-through in each class over a two-week period this fall. Her goal was to see if teachers were asking quality questions that required students to think, reflected challenging work, and prompted student interaction. It's easy for teachers to fall into a default mode of asking simple "knowing" questions, allowing little time for student answers, and remaining addicted to the right answer.



Faison

Faison and her staff looked at the gathered data in light of *Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* which focuses on six levels of questioning:

1. Knowledge – Recalling information, labeling, defining
2. Comprehension – Giving meaning to the information at a basic level; being able to organize the information
3. Application – Using the knowledge in a new situation
4. Analysis – Relating pieces of information to the whole; understanding relationships between and among information parts
5. Synthesis – Connecting and combining existing elements to create something new
6. Evaluation – Assessing quality or reasonableness; making an objective judgment based on a recognized standard

She plans to do a follow-up study in February 2011 when she hopes to see progress on the following goals:

- Ask students more open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer.
- Deliberately ask questions on a higher level, such as bumping "knowing" questions up to "comprehension" questions.
- Plan your questions.
- Reference the basal which gives different types of questions that are also higher level thinking questions.
- Scaffold questions depending on the group.
- It is okay to have lower level questions; just don't stay at the lower level questions.
- Teach and model for students how to answer certain types of questions.
- Teach students how to write higher level questions and to evaluate questions.

Practical ideas for asking better questions are included in the *Asking Better Questions* booklet by Ian Smith that was part of the training packet. For instance, he offers a simple way of

ramping up “knowing” questions to “comprehension” questions: Don’t ask a question, but give the answer and ask why it’s correct as shown below.

INSTEAD OF ASKING	ASK
Is this a complex sentence?	Why is this a complex sentence?
Is this a polygon?	What are the properties of polygons?

For more information on how Faison set up the study and how you might do a similar study in your school, contact her at faison@gcsnc.com, 336-819-2925, or start a LinkedIn discussion.

Trivial Pursuit

Which of the following is considered to be the preferable sport according to the AfL training when Ian Smith referred to Magdaline Lampert’s work?

- a) Golf b) Volleyball c) Ping Pong d) Karate

Answer: b) Volleyball is a sport more indicative of a classroom climate where students feel free to question, discuss and explore their half-formed understandings. In volleyball, students lob the ball to each other as opposed to a ping pong-style discussion flow between those considered to be the best students and the teacher. (See poster #15 .jpg entitled “Safe to Discuss.”)

Monitoring SIG Schools

All SIG schools have been visited by a member of the monitoring team (George Hancock, Elsie Leak and Bill McGrady) and second visits are planned for February 2011. Monitoring visits will include a status report review with the principal or designee, a documentation review, stakeholder interviews with three to five teachers, an interview with the principal, school improvement team chairperson, and the SIG coordinator, and a quarterly report review.

Monitoring will focus on fidelity of implementation relative to the model selected (transformation, turnaround or restart), progress toward measurable objectives identified in the grant application (Reading/Math), and indicators noted in SIG “Final Requirements.”

Web Resources for SIG Schools

Program Monitoring at NCDPI: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/program-monitoring/grants>

U.S. Department of Education: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/index.html>

SIG LinkedIn group for North Carolina: <http://www.linkedin.com>

PIRC: [http:// www.ecac-parentcenter.org](http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org)

For additional information regarding SIG implementation, please contact George Hancock at 910-783-5921 or Donna Brown at 919-807-3959.

School Improvement Grants are authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA).

