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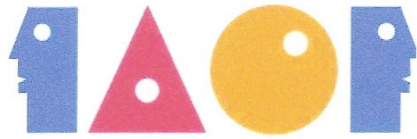
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THE COACHING PRINCIPAL: BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY
THROUGH THE TEXAS TEACHER EVALUATION AND
SUPPORT SYSTEM (T-TESS)

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Abstract

In response to mandates from the United State Department of Education, Texas revamped its educator evaluation systems to better support teacher professional growth. This best practice research informs practitioners of strategies to build teacher capacity through the leadership coaching attributes necessary for effective implementation of the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS).

Key words: Coaching, mentoring, professional development, goal setting, observation, capacity building

Introduction

Texas is slated to fully launch the new Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), which is designed to sup-

port teachers in professional development and growth beginning with the 2016-17 school years. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), T-TESS uses three measures to gauge teacher effectiveness:

observation, goal setting and professional development, and student growth (TEA, 2015). Historically, teacher effectiveness has been determined by the educator's ability to impact gains in student achievement scores. While student achievement remains at the forefront of the national discourse on school accountability, improving student learning as evidenced by gains on standardized tests is but one measure of teacher effectiveness (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). The author's further postulated how crafting a well-designed teacher evaluation system must collectively engage the synergy of administrators and teachers in order to create a system that not only evaluates, but also enhances professional practice through individualized support.

Individualized support must begin with an understanding that changes in behavior are in response to an individual's response to events (Wong, 2006). In a related study, Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2007) discussed building behavior by shaping. Shaping refers to reinforcing small steps in the direction of the ultimately desired behavior. In most teaching situations, shaping is combined with modeling and coaching to produce collaborative inquiry (Cooper, et al., 2007). Therefore, principals must support teacher learning by inspiring and sustaining a school culture that functions as a reflective learning system. Learning systems are not independent communal organizations. By contrast, they are systems of interconnected components with entrenched structures involved in common problem solving to achieve joint objectives (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Hammond, 2010).

In a similar study, Fullan (2014) argued that collaborative inquiry tasks the campus principal to become a systems leader who fosters leadership in others as a means of sustaining organizational change.

With intentionality, principals should define the teachers' role as one of learner and teacher, while redefining their own role as the architect of learner centered capacity building. Cooperatively, teachers and principals share what they know, identify challenges in need of further investigation, and connect newly acquired concepts and strategies to allow for significant growth and development. Fullan (2014) suggested five qualities that leaders must possess:

- The strong intellect of moral drive with consideration of the underlying forces of change
- Sensitive intelligence as they build connections
- Commitment to increasing and sharing fresh knowledge
- Ability for coherence building

Jaquith, et al. (2010) further suggested that teachers need time to integrate theory with classroom practice. Principals must provide this time, while coaching the educator toward exploration of knowledge about the nature of new learning and how it might be implemented in different domains.

Principals should also provide:

- Opportunities for teacher enquiry and collaboration
- Strategies to reflect teachers' questions and concerns
- Access to successful models of new practice

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to inform practitioners of strategies to build teacher capacity through the leadership coaching attributes necessary for effective implementation the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System with fidelity.

Teacher Effectiveness

The manner in which teacher effectiveness is defined impacts how it is to be evaluated. T-Tess measures teacher effectiveness in four domains: Planning, Instruc-

tion, Learning Environment, and Professional Practice & Responsibilities (TEA, 2015).

Table 1: T-TESS Evaluation Domains

Domain 1 Planning	Domain 2 Instruction	Domain 3 Learning Environ- ment	Domain 4 Professional Practice & Responsibilities
<i>1.1 Standards & Alignment</i>	<i>2.1 Achieving Expectations</i>	<i>3.1 Classroom Environment, Routines, & Procedures</i>	<i>4.1 Professional Demeanor & Ethics</i>
<i>1.2 Data & Assessment</i>	<i>2.2 Content Knowledge Expectations</i>	<i>3.2 Managing Student Behavior</i>	<i>4.2 Goal Setting</i>
<i>1.3 Knowledge of Students</i>	<i>2.3 Communication</i>	<i>3.3 Classroom Culture</i>	<i>4.3 Professional Development</i>
<i>1.4 Activities</i>	<i>2.4 Differentiation</i>		<i>4.4 School Community Involvement</i>
	<i>2.5 Monitor & Adjust</i>		

While teacher effectiveness is often difficult to define, measurement can be influenced by the development of new instruments and technologies (Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012). “The five-point definition of teacher effectiveness consists of the following:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and helps students learn, as measured by value-added or other test-based growth measures, or by alternative measures.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade, on-time graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behavior.
- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.

- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diversity and civic-mindedness.
- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at high risk for failure” (Goe, et al., 2008, p.8).

Specifically, T-TESS undergirds teacher effectiveness by ensuring that teaching extends beyond achievement gains toward a deeper understanding of how the educator impacts learning through improving student attitudes, motivation, and confidence.

Observation

Classroom observations continue to be the most common platform for evaluating teachers and are considered the most direct

manner to measure teaching practice because the evaluator can see the full dynamic of the classroom. However, the frequency and method of evaluating teacher performance should depend on what administrators want to learn from the process (Heneman, Milanowski, Kimball, & Odden, 2006). Perhaps the most notable difference between T-TESS and recent teacher evaluation instruments (PDAS) is the requirement for principals and other evaluators to provide factual evidence to support the evaluation through scripting. Scripting is not new in formal evaluations; however, the value of scripting in T-TESS is to support how a teacher contributes to student learning while lessening subjective judgments from the evaluator. Secondly, by using direct statements and reflections from the observation allows for conversation starters between the evaluator and educator. Often, educators view the evaluation cycle as a power struggle. What did I do, versus what did my principal (or other evaluator) witness during instruction? Scripting evidence compels principals to be aware of the power structures that control their ability to act on behalf of the organization, while ensuring that observations provide useful and significant tools for improving teacher practice (Moore, Gallagher, and Bagin, 2014).

Goal Setting

To implement T-Tess with fidelity, perhaps the most crucial knowledge that principals must acquire is to understand the inductive relationship between goal setting and improved teacher performance (Locke & Latham, 2006). Goal setting bridges the gap between task perception and actual performance. More importantly, goal setting contributes to increased teacher motivation and workplace satisfaction. With regard to T-TESS, goal setting is cyclical and not only requires that the educator reflect on current

practice, but also to establish a professional development plan to achieve stated goals. As hypothesized by Locke and Latham (2006), goals must be inclusive of the following dimensions: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback and complexity. Goals need to be clear and measurable; but more importantly, subordinates must share an integral part in the goal-setting process in order to be committed to goal attainment. Most notably, principals must provide frequent feedback through multiple checkpoints, recognize opportunities to celebrate growth, and commit time and resources to assist educators in the realization of their goals.

Implications for Practice

Leadership should be geared towards fostering change; unlike management that tends to preserve or manage a certain state of order. Change is one of the main aspects of leadership but change that is focused towards achievement of a certain goal while promulgating growth in all parties is value adding (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008). Principals should view T-TESS as the opportunity for value-added leadership by embracing the notion of truly becoming the instructional leader...or even better – leadership coach of the campus. Leadership coaching is targeted coaching that builds stronger organizations by developing capacity in others (Bolman & Deal, 2011). Coaching others to success also triggers psycho-physiological effects in the body that facilitates healing and sustainability (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Hargreaves, 2007).

With certainty, principals must embrace the coaching of teachers as the focal point of retaining educators and reducing the attrition rate for early career professionals in the school setting (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015). Moreover, through the richness of

collective inquiry, coaching establishes an environment of trust. Through collaboration, principals and teachers begin to focus on the “why” and “how” aspects of learning. Principals must become intentional about reducing teacher isolation by encouraging educators to assume the role of learner. In keeping with the continuous improvement mindset of T-TESS, the principal should allow for self-report of practice. Self-report measures ask teachers to report on what they are doing in the classroom by collecting and assembling artifacts, such as portfolios and examples of student learning. Artifacts provide a glimpse into actual classroom practice (Borko, Stecher, & Kuffner, 2007). Likewise, portfolios not only exhibit evidence of teaching practices and student progress; portfolios also require teachers to reflect on the inclusion of certain materials and how they relate to particular standards. Both are excellent tools to consider for the end of year conferences.

Admittedly, higher education must do a better job, as well. Dodson (2015) acknowledged that the field experience component of school principal preparation pro-

grams must be strengthened. Specifically, four key areas are illuminated as critical: (1) budget and finance training, (2) teacher observation and evaluation training, (3) curriculum training and (4) student discipline. Each of the areas mentioned represents major functions that can have an effect on school climate and culture and may even hinder student learning and achievement. However, specific to this research is the need for improved training and support for school principals in the areas of instructional observation and evaluation training. For too many years policy makers have focused on doing what is best for children without assuming how the improvement of professional practice for teachers accomplishes the same. T-TESS is new. T-TESS is different. In education, change is often viewed as a novelty. T-TESS is only a novelty if it’s allowed to be.

Intentional coaching that should frame *every* effective school will challenge the process, model the way, inspire a shared vision, and enable others to act, and encourage the heart. (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

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