

# S<sup>t</sup>rat<sup>e</sup>gram

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## Lessons in School Change

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KU-CRL

Changing the way schools work is a complex business, requiring flexibility, collaboration, and effective instructional programs. As KU-CRL tackles more projects with the goal of schoolwide improvement in mind, we are learning much about what schoolwide improvement is and one thing it is not: A one-size-fits-all approach to school improvement will not meet the needs of every school and ultimately will not bring about the kind of changes needed to improve learning experiences for students. Here, three KU-CRL researchers share lessons they have learned as they explore what it takes to be successful in schoolwide change.

- Keith Lenz talks about the Content Literacy Continuum as a framework for school improvement. Several schools across the country have adopted CLC.
- Jim Knight discusses aspects of his widely used instructional coaching model, which he has used successfully across all middle schools in the Topeka, Kan., school district. The model has been replicated in Maryland, as well.
- Barbara Ehren describes the collaborative coaching model that is evolving as Virginia's State Improvement Grant moves toward statewide CLC implementation.

Each of these projects plays out a little differently, but all contain common elements and address common concerns.

### **CLC: LITERACY-CENTERED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

Many schools and school systems are adopting KU-CRL's Content Literacy Continuum as a framework for school improvement. The continuum encompasses five levels of literacy support that should be in place in every school. The levels describe increasingly intensive instruction and services to support student learning.

For schools, the process of adopting CLC begins with an exploring phase during which CLC teams help schools understand what it means to be ready for the significant changes required of schoolwide improvement. The teams begin to look at what services, instruction, and programs are already in place in a school, identifying holes that need to be filled.

Questions at each level guide these discussions. Knowing that background knowledge and vocabulary are critical to learning at Level 1, for example, what is the school doing to make sure students who don't have adequate reading skills are still able to acquire that knowledge?

The continuum emphasizes coor-

dinated, coherent services and programs cutting across levels and content areas.

“Coming up with a thousand and one literacy activities is not addressing literacy,” Keith says. “What it’s doing is giving lots of activities without reinforcing a way of attacking specific learning challenges.”

Likewise, the CLC philosophy is that designing one or two courses focused on improving literacy skills does not constitute a literacy program.

“Kids who participate in those classes don’t get sufficient practice to build on those strategies. They need it reinforced across the curriculum,” he says.

**INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING: ON-SITE PARTNERS**

The instructional coaching model that Jim has studied and developed over the past decade defines an instructional coach as an on-site professional developer who partners with educators to identify and assist with implementation of proven teaching methods.

Jim’s work as a professional developer greatly influenced his interest in instructional coaching as a means of increasing teachers’ use of effective instructional practices, such as SIM.

“My life’s work really has been about how do you get teachers to use this. I could see results and wanted to get it in people’s hands,” Jim says. “What I found was the more forceful I was in working with teachers, really the less effective I was.”

The instructional coaching approach, rather than mandat-



Barbara Ehren

ing teacher use of new materials, focuses on building relationships with teachers. The model is based on the partnership principles identified in Jim’s Partnership Learning work: Teachers are equals and have a voice in professional development and adopting new instructional methods.

(Learn more about Partnership Learning and download the Partnership Learning Fieldbook at [www.kucri.org/partnership](http://www.kucri.org/partnership))

Instructional coaches on Jim’s projects work with teachers within a framework they refer to as the Big 4: Behavior, content, instruction, and formative assessment. Addressing behavior is key, they find, to the success of the three other components.

“Our thinking is if you get those four things in place, you’ve probably got a good classroom,” says Jim.

**VIRGINIA STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANT: A DISTRIBUTED APPROACH TO COACHING**  
In Virginia, two demonstration sites consisting of two schools each are implementing CLC. At

the same time, the project team is preparing to take CLC statewide, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all solution is impossible.

The team uses the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM), a powerful set of tools to manage the process of change facilitation and promote systematic decision making.

Building on Jim’s work, the team uses a modified approach to instructional coaching to help educators throughout the participating schools learn and use new instructional methods.

“We really like to think about it as differentiated coaching in the same way we talk about differentiated instruction for



Jim Knight

kids,” Barbara says. “We talk about different models for different schools with different resources.”

There are, however, some “non-negotiables,” components that the team agrees are important and should be in place—pro-

viding consistency and coherence from school to school:

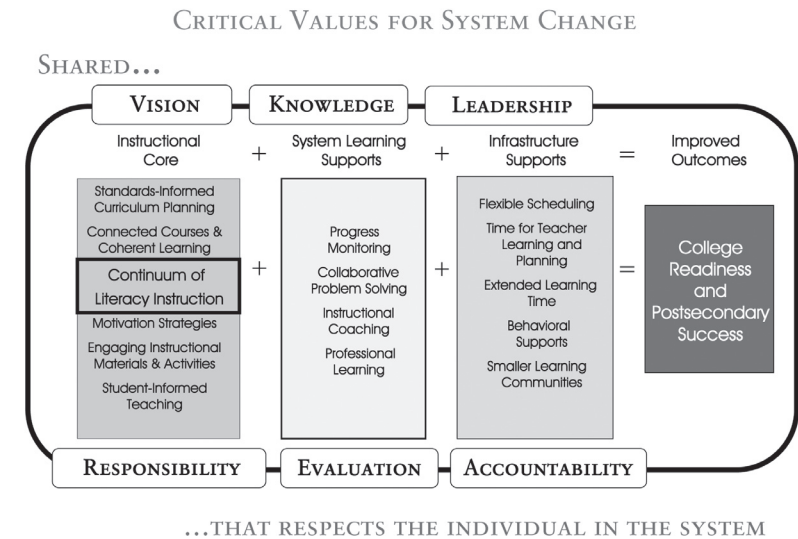
1. Coaching is a component in high-quality professional development, not a separate entity.
2. Professional development occurs in phases. Coaching occurs during the phases of professional development referred to as Do It, Refine It, and Use It. The team does not think about coaching as a replacement for the initial pedagogy of learning a new instructional method.
3. Coaching in some form is for everyone, including administrators and change facilitators. It is not a remedial endeavor.
4. Teachers may need different things at different times from different people with varied expertise.

#### COMMON COMPONENTS

Despite differences in the three school improvement approaches described above, they all contain elements that KU-CRL has found to be essential to the success of school change. Among these are effective instruction, choice, values, and communication.

*Effective instruction.* A strong focus on effective instruction—from instructional coaching’s Big 4 to Virginia’s differentiated instructional protocols—is a common emphasis among KU-CRL’s school improvement projects. KU-CRL’s recent research suggests that building a strong instructional “core” yields greater positive results

Figure 1



for students.

The instructional core (shown in Figure 1) encompasses such components as motivation/behavior supports, aligned instruction, connected courses and coherent learning, student-

we can put in all the systems for learning, but unless we focus on the quality of instruction in the classroom, we’re probably not going to see the kind of academic changes that we want to see.”

Secondary to the instructional core but still important to school improvement success are infrastructure changes (flexible scheduling, planning and professional development time, extended learning opportunities, for example) and system learning supports (data-based decision making, collaborative problem solving, instructional coaching, and other systems that allow a school to learn). These components are necessary to create the context and support system for change.

Foundational to the success of instructional core change is the support of an instructional leader. That role, says Jim,



Keith Lenz

informed teaching, and a continuum of literacy instruction.

“We begin to really see the effects of the changes when we get to the instructional core,” Keith says. “We can put in all the infrastructure changes we want,

belongs to the school principal.

“If the principal is not the instructional leader, it’s going to be tougher to make it happen. You really need that principal,” he says.

*Choice.* Choice is another common concept embraced by all three researchers. Schools and educators in these project choose professional development and improvement goals matched to their own needs.

“You have to give schools choice...based on their unique characteristics, their culture, the centers of expertise within a building. Maybe it’s the science department that takes leadership; maybe it’s language arts,” says Keith.

Working with schools in this way promotes the cultural shifts needed for successful change in secondary schools, in contrast to a top-down mandate for change.

In Virginia, project staff acknowledge that a single professional development or instructional coaching model likely will not meet the diverse needs of participating schools. Thus, active involvement of schools helps shape the look of professional development opportunities, including how instructional coaching is carried out, selected to meet project goals.

“We’re going to take our lead from the school to design instructional coaching protocols,” says Barb. “We have some opportunities in Virginia that are perhaps different than in other states as well as different challenges.”

The emphasis, she says, is on

Keith Lenz, Jim Knight, and Barbara Ehren shared lessons they have learned about school improvement during a session at the 2006 International SIM Conference. You may purchase a DVD of their presentation, *Moving Schools Forward with CLC and Instructional Coaching*. Complete this form and send it with your payment information to KU-CRL, 1122 West Campus Rd, Room 517, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045-3101.

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- Moving Schools Forward DVD \$10 (includes shipping & handling)

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making use of existing resources within a school, then refining, shaping, and negotiating changes to develop protocols that make sense to all those involved.

*Values.* Shared values can help smooth the path as schools embark on large-scale change initiatives. In the CLC projects, a set of values topped by respect for teachers and their experience defines the relationship between teachers and the system.

CLC projects promote a shared vision, shared knowl-

edge that leads to individual learning, shared leadership, shared responsibility that shapes individual planning and action, shared evaluation, and shared accountability that motivates individual action.

Similarly, Jim’s instructional coaching model is founded on six principles of partnership:

- Equality, to promote relationships among coaches and teachers as equals
- Choice
- Voice, to provide opportuni-

(continued on page 7)

## WORD IDENTIFICATION TIC - TAC – TOE

SUBMITTED BY **KATHY BOYLE-GAST,**  
**SIM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPER,**  
**ATHENS, GEORGIA**

On the following pages are two sample Tic-Tac-Toe game boards. One (below) contains targeted words for students to dissect. The other (page 6) contains DISSECT steps for verbal practice.

### Procedure:

1. Make overheads of one of the game boards. Display the overheads on a screen or white board surface. (You also can print blank tic-tac-toe boards on card stock, laminate them, and use a wipe-off marker to write in specific items for partner practice.)
2. Divide the group into two teams (one student could be assigned as score keeper).
3. Assign one group to be the "X" team and the other to be the "O" team.
4. Determine which team will go first for game No. 1 (then the other team goes first in the second game, and so on.)
5. Call on the first team to decide as a group which space on the board they want to try to earn (for example, lower right, middle left, center.).
6. The team then must answer or respond to the information in the square. For example, if

the square contains a letter of the mnemonic DISSECT, the team must explain that step completely to get its "X" or "O" written on the game board (use a wipe-off marker). If the square contains a word, team members must "think out loud" and use DISSECT to determine the word. (See the example board below for ideas. Of course, you want

to provide words that your group of students cannot recall automatically so that they have to use DISSECT to accomplish this task).

7. Proceed taking turns until one team gets Tic-Tac-Toe (three Xs or Os in a row) and wins that round. If the responses result in a tie, begin another game round.

Sample Tic-Tac-Toe game board: Words to DISSECT

preconceive	inappropriate	alternator
recreation	disappointment	micromanage
paraprofessional	interaction	mistaken

Kathy Boyle-Gast, Athens, Georgia

# WORD ID TIC - TAC - TOE

KATHY BOYLE-GAST, ATHENS, GEORGIA

D	E	C
T	Rules of Twos and Threes	S
S	I	Say the 5 short vowel sounds

Continued from page 4

ties for participants to express their points of view

- Reflection, to allow participants to consider ideas before adopting them
- Dialogue, to arrive at mutually acceptable decisions
- Praxis, to enable individuals to have more meaningful experiences through practical application of learning.

Jim encourages those involved in school change projects to consider whether these principles reflect their own.

“Even if you don’t embrace the principles, work through what you do believe,” Jim says. “You need to know what your principles are.”

*Communication.* In many ways, the success of school improvement projects rests squarely on how well individuals and groups communicate. Coaches, Jim says, change the way teachers teach and change the culture of the school one conversation at a time.

“They have to have some pretty powerful communication skills to pull that off,” he says.

Coaches tread a delicate line between establishing close relationships with teachers and maintaining enough detachment to enable them to make solid professional development decisions.

One method they have used effectively is the “show, don’t tell” approach to professional development. Coaches often visit classrooms and present lessons—teaching students a lesson while showing teachers how to apply a new instructional method to their own material. In interviews with 13 teachers who had worked with coaches in this manner, Jim says their No. 1 observation was, “It wasn’t until she came in my classroom and showed me how that I realized I could do it. When she did it with my kids, I knew I could do it too.”

Part of the balance for instructional coaches means clearly separating the role of coaches from the role of administrators to supervise or evaluate.

“We have to keep principals informed, but we do so in a way that honors and respects the collegiality of the coaching relationship,” Barb says.

Consequently, project teams pay close attention to language choices used in describing coaching to teachers and administrators: Coaching is collegial, not supervisory. Coaches coach; administrators monitor and supervise. In Virginia, coaches make classroom “visitations,” not “observations.”

### STRATEREADERS

The StrateReaders book club is now reading *Data Wise, A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning* by Kathryn Parker Boudett, Elizabeth A. City, and Richard J. Murnane. The club’s final selection for May and June will be *Leadership and Sustainability* by Michael Fullan.

Join the discussion at <http://stratereaders.kucrl.org>

## KU-CRL CALENDAR

### June 19-22, 2007

SIM Reading and Writing Strategies  
Contact: Mona Katz or Kathy Schmidt  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

### June 19-22, 2007

More SIM Strategies  
Contact: Mona Katz or Kathy Schmidt  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

### August 6-8, 2007

Instructional Coaching Institute  
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

### August 9-11, 2007

Coaching Classroom Management  
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

### October 10-12, 2007

Instructional Coaching Institute  
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)

### October 14-17, 2007

Instructional Coaching Conference  
Contact: Kathy Schmidt or Mona Katz  
(crl@ku.edu | 785.864.0626)  
for the Alumni Association)

[www.kucrl.org/institutes](http://www.kucrl.org/institutes)

#### STRATEGRAM

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## NEW ONLINE

### LD Resources

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, a KU-CRL project, has just released its Learning Disabilities Resource Kit: Specific Learning Disabilities Determination Procedures and Responsiveness to Intervention.  
[www.nrclid.org](http://www.nrclid.org)

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