

LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SUSTAINED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Student achievement across 44 schools improved when an instructional framework was developed and implemented.

Educators and researchers, having long sought the key to raising student achievement, recognize that there is no single answer. Factors outside of the classroom, such as student poverty, health, and parent education levels, require societal shifts and are not easily influenced by teachers and administrators (Barone, 2003; Flood & Anders, 2005). There are, however, factors that can be controlled inside the classroom. These factors center on the curricular materials and instructional practices that constitute school as well as the teacher

expertise to leverage both to the best advantage of the learners (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2011). But a narrowing

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of that focus to just one element can undermine the effectiveness of the others.

Perhaps nowhere has this been more evident than in reading instruction. Decades of query culminated in the seminal first-grade studies, conducted by a team of investigators across the country who examined the effectiveness of programs and approaches for teaching beginning reading. Bond and Dykstra's (1967) findings resulted in a profound shift in our profession, as they noted that in order "to improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of methods and materials" (p. 416).

Furthermore, the influence of elementary reading instruction permeates other content areas. Elementary students are typically taught all subjects by a single teacher who brings his or her pedagogy forward throughout the day. Thus a teacher who invests in guided instruction, for example, is likely to use similar

small-group, teacher-led instruction in math, science, and social studies.

As researchers working in Southern California, we are committed to the investment in teacher expertise as a primary means for addressing the literacy needs of students. We recognize the value of well-designed curricular materials, which serve as a foundational element of schooling. But we were alarmed when we witnessed a turning away from the lessons learned from the first-grade studies in the early part of the last decade. There was a renewed belief that finding the "right" reading

curriculum could do the heavy lifting to raise student achievement. Instructional practices and the necessary ongoing professional development to continually refine these took a backseat for a period of time in many districts in our community.

One elementary district that had invested extensive fiscal and human resources in a reading curriculum experienced initial growth followed by a plateau. When we were invited to partner with them to jumpstart their stalled growth, we embraced the challenge. Our initial observations suggested that the leaders of this school system had neglected the importance of an instructional framework and the professional development needed to ensure that teachers, coaches,

and administrators had a common vocabulary to discuss and implement their literacy practices. With all the metaphorical weight shifted to one element, the instructional materials, imbalance was inevitable.

We, the authors of this article, include two consultants who provided hundreds of hours of professional development and coaching for teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators, as well as a senior district administrator tasked with improving achievement across schools. Over the years of implementation, we interviewed



administrators monthly, conducted teacher focus groups quarterly, and participated in weekly schoolwide walk-throughs. These walk-throughs involved mixed groups of teachers and administrators, along with one of the authors of this article, visiting every classroom at a given school on a specific day.

By looking for patterns across classrooms using a constant-comparative method, we identified when an instructional practice was becoming widespread or when a common set of implementation challenges suggested further attention. Our definition of widespread included evidence of implementation in at least 75% of the classrooms observed. Our data analysis focused on trends across

Pause and Ponder

- How might having a consistent professional development focus improve student achievement in your school or district?
- Which aspects of the instructional framework implemented in Chula Vista is already in place in your school or district? Which aspects might deserve increased attention?
- What is the role of an instructional leadership team in creating change in these schools? What role can they play in professional development and support for teachers?

schools as well as in-depth progress monitoring of individual schools. In this article, we focus our discussion on the major themes that emerged related to the implementation of an instructional framework and the professional development provided to create and sustain change.

When Curriculum Was Expected to Do the Heavy Lifting

Districts in California commonly educate a specific grade band of students (e.g., K–6, K–8, 6–12, or 9–12) rather than all students (i.e., K–12). Chula Vista (all teacher and student names are pseudonyms) is an elementary-only district, providing services for 27,400 students in grades K–6. The majority of students (68%) identify as Latino/Hispanic, whereas 14% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 13% are Caucasian, and 4% are African American. In addition, 11% are students with disabilities, and 45% meet the qualifications for free or reduced-price lunch, an indicator for poverty.

In 2002, the district scored 689 on the Academic Performance Index (API). The API is an achievement growth measure used in California. The score ranges between 200 and 1000, with the expectation that schools and districts perform at the level of 800 or above. Over the years, the assessments included in the API have changed, and it is somewhat difficult to compare year-to-year growth trajectories using this tool. Having said that, the majority of API for elementary schools has always been the California Standards Tests in English Language Arts and Mathematics, with a small percentage of the score coming from norm-referenced tests until 2008.

In addition, the API is the measure used to indicate whether schools are making progress and annual targets are

identified, which results in comparisons over time. In 2002, only 2 schools of the 44 in Chula Vista scored above 800 on the API. Although the API is based on test scores, and there are a number of problems with relying on tests to determine student success (e.g., Popham, 1999), it is the measure used to determine whether schools need improvement or will be targeted for eventual closure or restructuring. Even though we can debate the merits of testing and accountability, the reality is that educators live under the pressures of state testing and want to show that their students can perform at high levels.

In 2002, Chula Vista School District purchased a new reading basal program with the hope that this would improve achievement. Most teachers in Chula Vista were provided with 120 hours of professional development on how to use the instructional materials. These sessions focused on implementation of the adopted core reading program, approved by the State Department of Education. As part of the effort to implement the core reading program, teachers were observed nearly daily and were provided feedback about fidelity to the teacher's manual.

By 2004, the district API increased from 689 to 722, still short of the state expectation of 800. At that point, only nine schools exceeded 800 on the API. Although progress had been made, the pace concerned the superintendent, as increasing numbers of schools were being identified as in need of

improvement. More specifically, 32 of the 44 schools had failed to meet their growth targets, even though there were overall increases in student achievement.

Understanding that the exclusive focus on the use of reading curriculum was limiting their success, the leadership within the district began to investigate alternatives. They invited various professional development providers to present ideas for taking the district to the next level. Following a review of different initiatives by teacher-leaders and site administrators, the district leadership decided to develop their own model rather than purchase a professional development program from a vendor. This represented a significant turn of events for the district, as it had never had a system-wide professional development focus, other than the state-approved 120 hours of basal program implementation for Reading First schools. Before that, each campus developed their own professional development plans and focused on their own individual achievement.

In announcing the new initiative in spring 2005, the superintendent made a public commitment to the school board that the district would reach 800 on the API by 2010. As part of this announcement, the superintendent focused on creating a system-wide structure for literacy instruction that would improve students' competence, noting that principals and peer coaches would take the lead in developing and implementing this model. This

“The superintendent focused on creating a system-wide structure for literacy instruction that would improve students' competence.”



was significant for several reasons. First, there is evidence that developing and implementing an instructional framework can have an impact on student achievement (e.g., Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, & Rinehart, 1999). Second, there is evidence that site leaders should lead school improvement efforts (e.g., Heck & Hallinger, 2010). And third, there is evidence that districts should establish expectations and provide support for schools to improve (e.g., Gallucci, 2008).

Building an Instructional Framework

Much of the dissatisfaction with the core reading program was not with the curriculum itself, but in the inability to act on informed teacher judgments to meet the needs of learners. Although the basal program offered many sound practices, teachers felt pressured to keep up with the pacing guides, at the expense of individual student needs. The hope was that adopting an instructional framework could build capacity for teachers to make instructional decisions

and increase responsiveness when students had difficulty.

This framework is, first and foremost, predicated on a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The following example comes from a fourth-grade classroom. Note that the order of the components is less important than the fact that they are each present:

1. *Establishing purpose* is an essential element for all students, as it alerts them to what will be taught and what they will do with it. Purpose is established by discussing the content ("Today we will focus on supplying evidence for our opinions using the text") and the written and oral language skills students will be using ("You can use the sentence frames on the board to share the evidence you find").
2. *Teacher modeling* is time when the teacher displays the cognitive and metacognitive skills needed to perform a task, skill, strategy, or function. These are often

accompanied by a think-aloud (Davey, 1983) so that the teacher can make his or her thinking transparent to the learners. For example, as part of a lesson on supplying evidence for opinions, the teacher reads a passage, provides an opinion, and then supports it with textual evidence. While reading *Baseball in April* (Soto, 1990), the teacher says,

I think that Michael and Jesse might not be very good at baseball. I think that because the author says that they were going to try out for the team "for the third year in a row" [p. 13], which sounds to me like they didn't make it the year before.

3. The *guided instruction* phase of learning happens as the cognitive responsibility shifts to the student, with teacher support and scaffolding. From the standpoint of the teacher, the purpose of guided instruction is to determine what students gained from the initial instruction and what needs to be clarified or re-taught. For the student, this is time when she is applying what she has just learned, with the teacher providing scaffolds as needed to extend the cognitive reach of the student. These scaffolds are in the form of questions, prompts, and cues and are strategically used when the student stalls. During the lesson on providing evidence, the teacher

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checks for understanding by asking a question, then continues to scaffold the student's understanding:

Teacher: I'm thinking of the reaction of the coach during tryouts.

Martin: He laughs.

Amber: So maybe it was funny to watch him.

Teacher: Good point. I'm thinking about other things that the coach did.

Amber: Oh yeah, when he wasn't interested in watching Michael.

Teacher: So do you have evidence that you'd like to use?

4. Students engage in *productive group work* when they work in small groups of their peers. The purpose of productive group work is for students to clarify their understanding. These groups vary from two to five in size and can be short in duration, as when students work briefly with a partner during a think-pair-share activity, or for longer periods of time, such as during centers or in projects that may extend over multiple class meetings. It is not uncommon for students to overestimate their understanding of concepts and skills. Productive group learning tasks provide students with time to notice what they know, and do not know, about a topic. This further directs their attention to aspects they may have initially overlooked, a condition known as *productive failure* (Kapur, 2008).

When the students work in small groups, they engage in discussions that allow them to practice their ability to provide evidence. For example, while creating a collaborative poster in which each member of the group had to contribute to the poster in an assigned color marker, the group

discussed their thinking that the baseball team was falling apart. They wanted to include evidence for their idea that the team was falling apart on their collaborative poster. Part of their discussion included the following:

Micah: Yeah, like it says that they were arguing with each other.

Brandon: I know how that is, when your team starts making lots of mistakes, and then everyone is mad.

Tiffany: Yeah, the author even says that. "Fly balls to the outfield dropped at the feet of open-mouthed players" [p. 20]

Micah: And, "Grounders rolled slowly between their legs" [p. 20]

Tiffany: "Even the pitching stank" [p. 20] but I still think that they're having a good time because at least they get to play.

Justin: Why do you say that? Do you have evidence?

5. The goal of any instructional framework is to move students to an *independent* level of mastery of the concept or skill being taught. This really consists of two aspects: in-class independence and out-of-class independence, more commonly known as homework. In-class

independent work includes solo work by students as they read and write. Out-of-class independent work (homework) mirrors the learning experience students have during the school day.

This instructional framework provided teachers with a structure from which to plan their lessons as well as a way to address individual student needs. The instructional leadership team was pleased with their version of the gradual release of responsibility model and wanted to focus on helping teachers internalize this framework such that instructional decisions and the use of curriculum were based on student needs.

Strategic Implementation of an Instructional Framework

The district initiative was welcomed by many within the system who understood the flexibility it provided. The central office leadership team was careful to solicit feedback from teachers and coaches in the planning and delivery of professional development. In a series of overview presentations to all Chula Vista teachers in the 2005–2006 school year, the entire framework was described, and teachers were encouraged to use this as a guide to plan lessons. This overview year was an important time in which teachers were given permission to modify lessons and ask questions about the entire instructional model. When asked if they could deviate from the core reading

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program, central office administrators responded, "Provided that lessons have this structure, the curriculum is a guide and resource."

The district leveraged building-level instructional leadership teams (ILT) consisting of six to eight teachers, coaches, and the principal as its primary mechanism for professional development. These groups were invited to attend four full-day sessions over the remainder of the 2005–2006 year. In addition, the principals participated in four two-hour sessions that focused on identifying quality indicators for establishing purpose and teacher modeling. The expectation was that the ILT, in conjunction with the principal, would take the information back to their school sites, modifying it to fit the local context. Thus each school could customize the information they received to fit the needs of their site.

Although the entire district was focused on establishing purpose and modeling, the principal and ILTs guided these efforts at their school sites. For example, at one school, the focus was on creating both content and language objectives as part of the purpose, whereas at another school the focus was on ensuring relevance and rigor for the established purpose.

Toward the end of the 2005–2006 school year, ILT members were asked about their successes and needs. Many had begun informally walking their own buildings together

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in order to gain a sense of what was working and what warranted further attention. Although they generally felt successful in guiding their colleagues to understanding the value of a clear purpose and how to develop it, they were concerned about the lack of discussion they were witnessing in many of their classrooms.

One member noted, "There's a purpose in every classroom at my school, but they don't do much with that purpose other than worksheets and meet with the teacher." This was evident in walk-throughs as well. For example, upon entering a first-grade classroom, we noted the purpose on the wall and students working individually. Some of the students were reading, whereas others completed worksheets and others sat at computers practicing skills. Although most students could relate the purpose of the classroom, they were not interacting with others to consolidate their understanding.

Understanding that this lack of discussion made it difficult for students, especially English learners, to use academic language, there

was widespread agreement that the next area of focus should be productive group work, with specific attention to increasing student-to-student interaction and collaboration. In this way, students would have more opportunity to use academic language through meaningful small-group tasks.

Shifting the Weight: Productive Group Work

Over the 2006–2007 school year, principals and instructional leadership teams were provided professional development and coaching on productive group work and the instructional routines that support it. Using the same system of providing content knowledge to the ILTs and principals, with the expectation that these groups would return to their respective campuses to implement the model, the district staff proceeded. However, after several months of training, walk-through data suggested that there was limited implementation of productive group work. In 6 of the 44 schools observed, productive group work was occurring

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in more than 75% of the classrooms, whereas in 38 of the 44 schools, productive group work was observed in fewer than 25% of the classrooms.

Instead of productive group work, observational data suggested that teachers were relying on whole-class instruction. There were purpose statements in nearly every classroom and teachers modeled their thinking. However, they did not regularly release responsibility to students, but rather provide explanations and directions. One principal said, “It’s not a training issue. Everyone has been provided with great information about group work and making it productive. It’s just not getting implemented.” When asked why, this leader said, “I think it might be a control thing. Maybe they don’t want to lose control of the classroom.”

To figure out the roadblocks, the district leadership scheduled a focus group of teachers. As with other interviews, field notes were collected and later analyzed for themes. These teachers were invited to a conversation at the district office about implementation of productive group work. From this nearly two-hour discussion, several themes emerged that needed attention if the school system was to ensure that group work became the norm in classrooms:

- Expectations of quiet classrooms—The group speculated that this was likely based on feedback teachers had previously received during the years focused on implementation of the reading curriculum. This was shared at the next principals meeting, where

they agreed to spend time at their staff meetings clarifying their expectation for student interaction and the associated noise. The principals asked for several example videos they could show to demonstrate their support for student talk.

- Perceived fairness to high-achieving students—A number of teachers said they did not use group work because they did not see it as fair to students. When asked what they meant, one said, “They just divide up the work and usually one student does most of it.” In response, subsequent ILT sessions focused on individual accountability in reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), jigsaw (Aronson, Bridgeman, & Geffner, 1978), and “numbered heads together,” a routine in which students do not know who will be called on from their group, so they have to make sure every member of the group understands the content.
- Use of instructional time—As a group, these teachers talked about the tension between covering the curriculum and ensuring students understood and could think critically. One teacher offered, “You know, I wanted this freedom, and now that I have it I’m not using it. I’m going to get my students talking and interacting, starting tomorrow.”

In reflecting on this process, the director later said, “I think we need to let teachers talk about these issues. We need some professional development sessions that just allow people to talk like these teachers did. We might get more

implementation from these conversations than we did for all of the other [professional development] we did.”

The renewed commitment to productive group work led another year of attention on this element of the framework. In addition to the ILT and principal professional development sessions, the district arranged several after-school and Saturday sessions during the 2007–2008 school year that were open to teachers from all over the district. So many teachers attended the first of these events that enrollment was limited and participants had to be turned away. The district scheduled several additional sessions, and each filled quickly. Over the year, the district provided more than 50 such events, with an average of 35 people attending each event.

Together with the literacy coaches, we identified a number of instructional routines that allowed students to interact with one another and with the content (see Figure 1). For example, in a fifth-grade classroom, we observed a group of students reading a primary source document. They each had a piece of paper folded into quadrants and were taking notes as they read in the upper left-hand quadrant. As they finished reading, they started talking about the text.

As the first student began speaking, the other members of the group put her name in one of the quadrants and took notes as she spoke. They continued this until each person in the group had the opportunity to share, at which time they turned their papers over and summarized the text individually. In this case, one student did not complete the work for the rest of the group, and each member of the group was accountable for the content. The teacher could assess each student’s initial understanding, their participation in the process, and their overall understanding of the text from the summary.

Figure 1 Instructional Routines Identified

Routine	Procedures
Barrier Games	One partner has a picture or information that the other partner does not have. Students sit back-to-back or have a visual obstruction to block their view (barrier). Using oral language only, students communicate to complete the task. Tasks may require partners to draw a picture, place objects in specific positions, find the difference in two pictures, and so forth. Students in small groups might each have one picture in a sequence. Without looking at the other pictures, they must put them all in the correct order.
Busy Bees	Students mimic the buzzing sound and slow movement of bumblebees as they buzz around the room to find a partner. Teacher says "Busy bees, fly!" Students move around room and buzz until they hear, "Busy bees, land!" The "bee" they are standing next to becomes their partner for a brief learning activity such as giving an opinion or answering a question.
Collaborative Dialogue	In groups, students write a dialogue pertaining to the topic. Characters may be human or not (e.g., positive and negative numbers discussing why they can't get along). The focus of the dialogue should highlight and extend understanding of the main idea of the topic. Students must use the assigned vocabulary. All students participate in an oral presentation of the dialogue, regardless of the number of characters or students in the group. They may read chorally or take turns playing a role, or find another way for all to participate. It is best to assign different "characters," parts or prompts to different groups to divide the text or concept and maintain student interest in the presentations.
Collaborative Poster	In groups students create a poster representing the main ideas of the concept. Students are given a rubric that describes what must be included in the poster. After thinking individually about how to represent their ideas, each student selects one color of pen and uses only that color on the chart. All students must contribute to both writing and drawing on the poster and sign it. Posters are displayed in the room. Students evaluate their own poster and at least one other according to the rubric.
Conversation Roundtable	Each student folds a piece of paper into four quadrants. As they read a piece of text, they take notes in the first quadrant under the heading of their name. When the group members have completed their notes, they each share their thinking. As they do so, the other members of the group take notes in an empty quadrant of the paper, including listing the speaker's name.
Explorers and Settlers	Assign half the students to be explorers and half to be settlers. Explorers seek out a settler to discuss a question. Each partner shares his or her thinking and can take notes as appropriate. Repeat process one or two times to discuss the same question or a new, related question.
Find Someone Who... or Walking Review	Students must find a classmate who can answer a question on a handout. They ask the student the question and write down the response they are given and the name of the student who answered. This can be done as a review of learning, or in anticipation of learning. It can also be done in the form of a game of bingo.
Find Your Partner	Each student is given a card that matches another student's card in some way. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vocabulary + definition ■ Question + answer ■ First half of a sentence + second half ■ Sentence with missing word ■ Math problem with steps to solution ■ Concept + example <p>Variations can be made that require more than two students to form a group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Steps in a sequence ■ Items in a category ■ Sequence of events
Fishbowl	A group of students models a strategy or task. They sit in the middle of the room (in a "fishbowl") with remaining students seated around them. Students in the fishbowl engage in the task, with the teacher guiding as needed. Give students outside the fishbowl a purpose for listening. They may complete a graphic organizer, write down a quote or two, listen for specific examples, and so forth.
Four Corners	Assign each corner of the room a category related to the topic. Tell the students the four categories and ask them to write down which category they are most interested in, along with two to three reasons for their choice. They then form groups by going to the corner of the room with the category they selected. In groups of three or four students, they share their reasons for their selection. This is also another way to form groups to complete an assigned task.
Inside/Outside Circles	Two concentric circles of students stand or sit and face one another. The teacher poses a question to the class, and the partners respond briefly. At the signal, the outer circle rotates one position to the left to face a new partner. The conversation continues for several rotations. For each rotation, students may respond to the same prompt or to a different but related one.

Figure 1 Instructional Routines Identified (*continued*)

Routine	Procedures
Jigsaw	Each student in the class has two memberships: a home group and an expert group. Each home group of four members meets to discuss the task and divide the work according to the teacher's directions. After each home group member has their task, they move to expert groups comprising members with the same task. The expert groups meet to read and discuss their portion of the assignment and practice how they will teach it when they return to their home groups. Students teach their expert portion to home group members and learn about the other sections of the reading.
Novel Ideas Only	Individually, students write down as many items related to the prompt as they can think of. In groups they take turns sharing one item at a time from their list. Each student must repeat the item mentioned by the previous student before they add a new one. Groups create a list that includes all the items. Each student writes the same list. They draw a line under the last item on the list. Groups stand up; one group reads their list and sits down. All students in the group should participate in reading the list to the class. Other groups add to their list any new items they hear. The next group reads only items that have not been mentioned. Continue in this manner until no group has new items to contribute.
Numbered Heads Together	Each group is assigned a number. Each student within the group is assigned (or selects) a number 1 through 4 (or 5 if numbers necessitate). The teacher asks a question. The teacher tells students to make sure every student in the group can answer. After students have time to discuss, teacher spins overhead spinner and announces the number of the student. Groups have one more minute to make sure that number student in their group knows the answer. The teacher spins again and announces the number of the group that must respond.
Reciprocal Teaching	Students work in groups with a common piece of text. Each member has a role: summarizer, questioner, clarifier, or predictor. These roles closely mirror the kinds of reading comprehension strategies necessary for understanding expository text. The reading is chunked into shorter passages so that the group can stop to discuss periodically.
Think-Write-Pair-Share	Give students a minute to <i>think</i> about a prompt. Give them a few minutes to <i>write</i> down their ideas (typically in bullet or note form without focus on spelling or grammar). Have students share their ideas in <i>pairs</i> . Tell students to listen carefully because they may be asked to share what their partner said. Ask a few pairs to <i>share</i> with the whole class.
Three-Step Interview	Students work first with a partner, then in groups of four to respond to a question. Questions may relate to opinions or be at any level of Bloom's Taxonomy. It is helpful to have each pair respond to a different question so that the sharing does not become repetitive and boring. Partner A interviews Partner B while Partner C interviews Partner D. Partner B interviews Partner A while Partner D interviews Partner C. Partners A and B tell Partners C and D what their partner said and Partners C and D tell Partners A and B what their partners said.

By the end of the second year of focus on productive group work, the ILTs' walk-through data suggested that this practice was taking hold. When asked at a principal training session, there

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was widespread agreement that the sites could assume responsibility for the continued professional development related to productive group work. They were ready to move on and wanted to focus on guided instruction.

Shifting the Weight: Guided Instruction

During the 2008–2009 school year, the district turned its attention to guided instruction. As was done in previous years, ILT members and principals were provided professional development and supported to take this information back to their school sites. For example, participants were provided with detailed information

about quality questioning that could be used to check for understanding (Walsh & Sattes, 2005). In the session that followed, participants were provided with information about responding to student misconceptions and errors.

As with previous sessions, participants were provided with videos and presentation materials and were encouraged to adapt them for use in their own schools. One of the learning tasks required that teachers review transcripts of guided instruction and code them for teacher moves, including questions, prompts, cues, and explanations. This task was reported to be one of the more powerful ones. One teacher reported:

I used to listen to my students read during guided instruction, and then make corrections for them. Now I get it. I have to guide them to increased learning and not do all of the work for them. That means I have to think of prompts and cues for them to do the work.

In another focus group session, a teacher said,

It's so much easier to do this [guided instruction] with small groups of students. I never knew why my administrator was pushing for small group instruction until I started watching the videos and reading those transcripts. That's when I really ramped up my guided instruction groups.

Walk-through data confirmed what teacher focus groups and principal interviews suggested: Teachers were regularly meeting with small groups of students while the rest of the class worked either productively or independently. Guided instruction was reported to be "the hardest part of the framework" and one that required "a lot more planning to do well." Walk-through data also revealed that in many classrooms (37% of those observed), students were completing independent tasks while the teacher met with small groups.

For example, in a third-grade classroom, the teacher was observed working with a small group of students while the rest of the class silently completed a photocopied page from a purchased workbook. Productive group work, which had been a strength, was being sacrificed as teachers focused on guided instruction. It seemed that their attention had shifted from engaging all

of the students to focusing on the needs of small groups.

Unfortunately, because of budget cuts across the school system, there were no funds for ILTs to receive trainings during the 2009–2010 school year. The professional development plans had to be changed such that the principals were provided with information about maintaining productive group work while providing guided instruction. In addition, the number of coaches was reduced by more than 75%, and those who remained had several schools to support. The district did support the remaining coaches with professional development on quality instruction so that they would be a resource to the principals in the delivery of professional development for teachers.

When these changes to the professional development efforts were announced to the principals, they scrambled for support. In nearly three fourths of the schools, the principals found funds for teacher professional development related to productive group work and guided instruction. They used a variety of sources, from their fund-raising efforts to grants to Title I, to ensure that their teachers had the most current information available. However, walk-through data suggested that approximately 35% of the teachers were returning to whole-class instruction and were no longer implementing the instructional framework. In retrospect, this proved to be a maintenance year as schools and the district struggled

to continue, or even sustain, the momentum.

The district administration, in reflecting on the success of their initiative and the concern about slippage caused by a lack of system-wide attention, announced that there would be funds to support ILTs for the 2010–2011 school year. This was met with criticism by some and celebration by others. The union leadership expressed concerns about the use of funds for professional development rather than continued focused on reduced class size and preventing reductions in the workforce. Over several meetings, agreement was reached to continue the professional development focus, including the release time for ILTs.

For the first of the newly funded ILT release days, time was devoted to reviewing the instructional framework and how each of the parts was necessary for students' success. The focus was on the recursive nature of the instructional framework rather than a linear process. Examples of different starting points were provided, such as beginning with an independent learning task and then moving to productive group work or starting with productive group work and then moving to modeling. Over the year, additional sessions focused on linking assessment with instruction and making instructional decisions based on student performance data.

Outcomes When Professional Development Does the Heavy Lifting

By 2011, Chula Vista scored 861 on the API, and 41 of the 44 schools performed above 800 on the API. In terms of the percentage of students who performed at the proficient or advanced level of reading, the district increased from 29.5% in 2002 to 42.3% in 2005, and then 72.3% in 2011. These increases

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Table Academic Achievement Scores by Year

Year	District API
2002	689
2003	722
2004	722
2005	745
2006	767
2007	782
2008	811
2009	833
2010	848
2011	861

hold for the significant subpopulations within the district, including African Americans, Latino/Hispanic, and students living in poverty.

Important to note is that the percentage of students within those subpopulations is increasing at the same time that their achievement is increasing. The implementation of the district literacy framework began as a literacy initiative and a response to the exclusive focus on reading curriculum and instructional materials. However, the district wanted to ensure that math achievement did not suffer while they focused on professional development and coaching on literacy. As noted in the Table, mathematics achievement increased from 37.4% proficient in 2002 to 52.5% in 2005, and then to 72.1% in 2010. A summary of API scores for each year are included in the Table.

Discussion

Similar to Peck's (2010) findings, when schools move from textbook-led instruction to responsive teaching, achievement improves. There are an increasing number of studies that

suggest that schools can improve student achievement through the use of structured approaches to teaching (e.g., Moore & Whitfield, 2009). Although there are examples of individual "turnaround" schools, this is an example of significant change that occurred at the district level. The district leadership took a chance, invested in teacher knowledge, sustained its effort despite setbacks, and as a result demonstrated significant achievement changes. Learning from Chula Vista School District suggests several implications, including those for teachers, schools, and districts.

Implications for Teachers

The experience in Chula Vista suggests that teachers need continued professional development in instructional planning. This is a departure from many current professional development efforts focused on "yet another strategy," as one teacher reported, or an exclusive focus on instructional materials and their use. Although teachers in Chula Vista continued to use curricular materials developed by commercial publishers, they did not use them in isolation. Instead, teachers planned lessons based on an instructional framework that ensured that students developed increased competence and responsibility over time.

In addition, teachers need time to talk with their peers and develop their expertise in decision making. Curriculum materials alone will not develop this expertise. Instead, teachers need opportunities to participate in professional learning communities focused on quality instruction and responding to struggling learners. The teachers in this system recognized the importance of professional development as much as the district leadership did. When there were conflicts between the union and the

"When schools move from textbook-led instruction to responsive teaching, achievement improves."

administration, teachers focused on the needs of their students and their own professional growth, while also organizing and making their needs and wants known in ways that did not have an impact on instruction.

Implications for Schools

Schools and their principals are under tremendous pressure to perform on a variety of assessment measures. Unfortunately, this pressure has been translated into an expectation that teachers follow a rigid pacing guide and that classrooms are quiet places where students work independently. At the school level, teachers have to hear that their students should be interacting, with each other and with their teacher, and that these interactions should involve academic language. In addition, schools should provide teachers with professional development and time to focus on analyzing student work and planning lessons based on that work.

Further, we cannot understate the value of maintaining focus. Implementation of the instructional framework did not occur after one year. It took several years of professional development on a sustained topic, with follow-up coaching and team planning, to realize increasing success. Although Chula Vista chose to implement an instructional framework,

that is not the most important lesson here. Rather, sustained focus, with quality professional development, clear expectations for implementation, and support for change, are important. Figure 2 contains a summary of topics provided each year. This level of commitment from schools and their leaders, as well as from district-level administration, is required if systems are to move beyond quick fixes.

Implications for Districts

For the most part, districts have been absent in the discussion about school improvement efforts. The discussion that has existed focuses on the role of the district as either bottom-up or top-down (e.g., Hess, 2005). The role of the district does not have to be a dichotomy. Rather, the role of the district, as demonstrated in Chula Vista, can be to set expectations and to support

schools and their staff to reach those expectations.

Although Chula Vista's leadership had a vision for instruction, schools were encouraged to focus on different aspects of the model and to "make it their own." In this case, the district provided extensive professional development aligned with a system-wide focus, and the results were exceptionally positive. In other words,

Figure 2 District Professional Development Timeline

Year	Focus	Participants	Formats
Spring 2005	Decision making on initiative	Central office administrators and Advisory committee Superintendent's office	Series of meetings on areas of need and possible solutions School board meeting
2005–2006	Overview of instructional framework, with emphasis on establishing purpose, modeling, and think-alouds	All teachers in the district Site-based instructional leadership teams (ILTs) Principals	Professional development (PD) sessions on overview at school sites Four PD sessions with ILTs on content, including planning time for taking it back to the school Monthly principals meetings
2006–2007	Productive group work and routines that support student interaction and discussion	ILTs Principals Teachers	Four PD sessions with ILTs on content, including planning time for taking it back to the school Monthly principals meetings Monthly PD sessions facilitated by ILT/principal
2007–2008	Accountable talk and academic language in productive group work	ILTs Principals Teachers All teachers in district (optional)	Four PD sessions with ILTs on content, including planning time for taking it back to the school Monthly principals meetings Monthly PD sessions facilitated by ILT/principal After-school and Saturday morning workshops
2008–2009	Guided instruction	ILTs Principals Teachers	Four PD sessions with ILTs on content, including planning time for taking it back to the school Monthly principals meetings Monthly PD sessions facilitated by ILT/Principal
2009–2010	Deepening guided instruction and revisiting establishing purpose	Principals only Teachers	Monthly principals meetings, with planning time for taking it back to schools Monthly PD sessions facilitated by ILT/principal
2010–2011	Using the framework to plan and deliver cohesive instruction	ILTs Principals Teachers	Four PD sessions with ILTs on content, including planning time for taking it back to the school Monthly principals meetings Monthly PD sessions facilitated by ILT/principal

the district aligned its resources with the priority on student achievement. Even when resources were reduced and tensions existed between the leadership and the union, the district staff focused on support for teachers in quality instruction.

The Framework Worked

For this school district, the emphasis on implementation of curriculum materials yielded modest student achievement growth, but a disturbing lack of advancement in teacher expertise. The introduction of an instructional framework for teaching and learning has served to highlight the instructional moves of effective teachers that are dependent on the interactions between students, between students and the teacher, and between students and the curriculum. It also introduced a level of consistency that is desired by many building and district administrators, while developing students' cognitive and metacognitive skills as they took a more active stance to their learning. A structure that increases interaction, consistency, and the metacognition of learners has the potential to increase student achievement and improve teacher knowledge.

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TAKE ACTION!

The first step to take action is to conduct a needs assessment. Ideally, this can be done as a walk-through. This requires a great deal of trust, but can have tremendous, positive benefits for professional development efforts. After the needs assessment, a team can analyze the information and identify areas of future growth. As was done in Chula Vista, agreeing on an instructional framework allowed teachers at different grade levels and schools to interactive with each other. Then, teachers can meet in their professional learning communities and develop lessons based on the instructional framework and observe each other teaching those lessons to get ideas.

MORE TO EXPLORE

IRA Books

- *After Early Intervention, Then What? Teaching Struggling Readers in Grades 3 and Beyond* (2nd ed.) edited by Jeanne R. Paratore and Rachel L. McCormack
- *Preparing Reading Professionals* (2nd ed.) edited by Rita M. Bean, Natalie Heisey, and Cathy M. Roller

IRA Journal Articles

- “Developing the IRIS: Toward Situated and Valid Assessment Measures in Collaborative Professional Development and School Reform in Literacy” by Theresa Rogers, Kari Lynn Winters, Gregory Bryan, John Price, Frank McCormick, Liisa House, Dianna Mezzarobba, and Carollyne Sinclair, *The Reading Teacher*, March 2006
- “Professional Development for Literacy—Who's in Charge?” by Charlene Cobb, *The Reading Teacher*, December 2005
- “Raising Literacy Levels With Collaborative On-Site Professional Development in an Urban Disadvantaged School” by Eithne Kennedy and Gerry Shiel, *The Reading Teacher*, February 2010