

Learning consulting: Translating research into practice

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"... the literary translator is necessarily engaged with far more than words, far more than techniques, far more than stories or characters or scenes. [She/he] is ... engaged with worldviews and the passionately held inner convictions of men and women ... A large part of [his/her] task, and perhaps the most interesting ..., is the mining out and reconstruction of those world views, those passionately held and beautifully embodied inner convictions."

—Burton Raffel, (1989). Translating Medieval European poetry.
In J. Biguenet & R. Schulte Eds., *The craft of translation*.
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 53.

Calendar

Feb. 5-6, 1999
Far West/Midwest
Regional Update Meeting
Las Vegas, NV

March 4-6, 1999
Southeast Regional
Update Meeting

March 26-27, 1999
Northeast Regional
Update Meeting
Marriott Hotel,
Charleston, West Virginia

April 21-23, 1999
Update Meeting
St. Johns Island

July 8-10, 1999
National SIM Trainers'
Conference

When talking about staff development, we commonly describe the activity as "translating" research into practice. However, we seldom reflect on what it means, precisely, to translate. As Burton Raffel suggests in the above quotation, translation involves "mining out" and "reconstructing" "passionately held ... inner convictions." In other words, a translator identifies the essence of a work created in one culture or worldview and then reconstructs the work so that it can be appreciated by people living in another culture or worldview.

Burton's description of translation provides another way of understanding school improvement. Staff developers understood as translators are people who need to know a great deal. First, they must fully understand the essence of the content they want to make available to teachers. Second, they must understand the culture or worldview of the teachers with whom they are working. Third, they must be able to transform the content they are making available so that it can be understood within a teacher's particular worldview.

In the past year, the Center for Research on Learning has experimented with a new approach to staff development that explicitly positions the staff developer as a translator. In this new change model, Learning Consulting, staff developers focus their efforts on reframing research so teachers can see how it is relevant to their most immediate concerns. ►

Award opportunity

The National Center for Learning Disabilities offers a wonderful opportunity to recognize general education teachers who incorporate strategic instruction and content enhancement routines in their classrooms.

The Bill Ellis Teacher Preparation Award is given to general educators who would otherwise not be able to participate in professional meetings that focus on the needs of individuals with learning disabilities. The award honors the memory of Bill Ellis and his work at the National Center for Learning Disabilities, the Orton Dyslexia Society (now the International Dyslexia Association), and other organizations.

The award includes reimbursement of conference-related expenses to the 49th Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference in San Francisco in November.

The application for the award must be completed and returned to NCLD no later than October 18, 1998. For a copy of the application, call David Fleishman, assistant director of professional services, at (212) 545-7510.

STRATENOTES is published eight times from September through May and once every summer as part of Strateworks of the International Training Network by the Center for Research on Learning, 1998-99, cost \$35.00. Permission to reproduce any or all parts of *Stratenotes* to support training activities is hereby given.

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Learning Consulting

The learning consultant's main task is to help teachers see how research-validated practices offer useful solutions to the problems they face, thereby making it easier for teachers to add such practices to their repertoire of teaching skills, strategies, structures, and beliefs.

A learning consultant is more than an expert in instructional practices. She or he is part coach and part anthropologist, offering advice to teachers about how to contend with the challenges and opportunities they face while recognizing each school's unique culture. A learning consultant's job is to make it easy for teachers to find solutions to their problems.

While each consultant approaches his or her work uniquely, researchers at the Center for Research on Learning have identified a generic model for Learning Consulting. The model involves the following eight components:

1. Meet with departments or teams

The learning consultant begins the change process by holding a short meeting with each school department or team. During the meeting, the consultant explains that teachers have an opportunity to learn about new research-validated teaching practices if they are interested. The consultant also explains how Learning Consulting works, that the focus is on real classroom practice, that research should be tried out only if it responds to real, pressing concerns, and that teachers will be paid an appropriate fee for the additional time they spend learning. At the end of the meeting, the consultant asks for volunteers and leaves a telephone number teachers can call if they're interested in being involved in the project either now or at a later date.

2. Meet one-on-one with interested teachers

Once teachers express interest in the project, the learning consultant schedules a series of one-on-one or small group meetings to identify what research the teacher is interested in learning about and to discuss how that research can be translated into practice. Meetings are short, sometimes less than 20 minutes, and always scheduled for the time that is least inconvenient for

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teachers. In schools, time is the most important currency, and any change effort taking too much teacher time will have difficulty succeeding, no matter how powerful it might be.

3. Immediately work on real content

Each meeting focuses on real applications for research, and theoretical discussion should be kept to a minimum. For example, a consultant and teacher discussing Concept Mastery should quickly move to developing a Concept Diagram that the teacher can use right away.

4. Establish a partnership

Learning consultants need to build a relationship, and research at the Center for Research on Learning suggests that Partnership Learning is an effective way they can achieve that goal. (See "Open conversations: The art and practice of Partnership Learning" by Jim Knight in *Stratenotes* volume 6, number 3.) Thus, learning consultants adopt a partnership posture, built upon principles of equality, dialogue, choice, praxis, voice, and symbiosis. They use learning structures that embody those principles: thinking devices, question

recipes, experiential learning, cooperative learning, reflection learning, and stories.

5. Pay for teachers' time

If teachers are going to commit extra time to any change effort, they will naturally be much more enthusiastic if they are paid fairly for their time. Payment can be cash, professional development points, or release time.

6. Make it as easy as possible

A learning consultant serves, primarily, as a steward and thus goes to great lengths to facilitate teachers' transferring research into practice. To make things easier for teachers, learning consultants might write lesson plans, help with evaluation, create overheads, or co-teach so as to provide additional time. The learning consultant's goal, always, is to remove barriers that might interfere with teachers implementing new ideas.

7. Respond quickly to teacher requests

Since teachers are constantly pressed to organize classes, evaluate students, and keep on top of their content for instruction, they often require material quickly. For that reason, learning consultants must reply immediately when teachers request new materials. If consultants take more than a few days to give teachers what they need, the opportunity for implementation may disappear.

8. Provide support

Many teachers, facing a variety of challenges in the classroom, may be worried about experimenting with new ideas simply because they are already dealing with several challenges. Learning consultants can ease teacher concerns by providing support through modeling teaching practices, providing peer coaching, or offering resources that help teachers become proficient at new teaching practices. Resources might include videotapes of model teachers, detailed lesson guides, checklists of effective teaching practices, and so on.

Conclusion

Learning Consulting involves the three tasks that Burton Raffel identifies in translation. First, learning consultants need to have a deep understanding of the materials they are making available to teachers; second, they must understand their teachers' cultures; and third, they must transform and explain content in a way that makes perfect sense in each teacher's unique culture. A staff developer who fails to successfully perform any of these tasks may be in for trouble. In contrast, since each school has its own culture and its own language, a learning consultant who learns to speak a school's language has a much greater chance of being heard.

As staff developers, as translators, we need to keep striving to learn to speak our teachers' language, to speak to our teachers' "passionately held and beautifully embodied inner convictions."

Conference notes

Kansas ranked No. 1 as the state with the largest number of SIM Trainers (45) attending the 1998 National SIM Trainers' Conference in July in Kansas City. Other top states were Florida (17), Minnesota (16), Iowa (14), Texas (11), California (10), Missouri (9), and Virginia (8). The special 20th anniversary conference drew a total of 190 registered participants from 31 states.

A number of past and present KU-

CRL doctoral students attended the conference: Gwen Berry, Dan Boudah, Jan Bulgren, Steve Carlson, Fran Clark, Sid Cooley, Ed Ellis, Joe Fisher, Christie Forester, Pat Gildroy, Barbara Glaeser, Mike Hock, Cathy Kea, Frank Kline, Ann Knackendoffel, Jim Knight, Paula Lancaster, Keith Lenz, Daryl Mellard, Ed Pieper, Joyce Rademacher, John Schmidt, Tony Van Reusen, Sue Vernon, Mike Warner, and Ron Wolf.

Conference attendees recognized

Every year, the Center for Research on Learning recognizes SIM Trainers who are attending their fifth or tenth national conference. During the 1998 National SIM Trainers' Conference, the following people were honored:

Five-year pin recipients:

Dan Boudah, Michael Brown, Victoria Cotsworth, Cathleen Duncan, LuAnn Glaeser, Suzanne Hays, Alice Henley, Martha Hougren, Susan Howell, Emi Johnson, Diane Larson, Brenda Lazarus, Judy O'Malley, Ruth Ann Rankin-Meleen, David Scanlon, and Mary Wiesen.

Ten-year pin recipients:

Janet Jones, Ann Knackendoffel, Carl Skordahl, and Jane Stevenson.

CRL news

- **Barbara Glaeser, Jim Knight, and Mike Hock** all received their doctoral degrees in special education from the University of Kansas in May. Barbara has accepted a position at California State University at Fullerton. Mike and Jim remain on staff at CRL.
- **Julie Tollefson**, CRL managing editor, and her husband, John, welcomed the birth of their first child shortly after the national conference. Jacob Martin Mangan Tollefson (so many names, poor kid!) was born July 24, 1998.