The Kentucky Content Literacy Consortium: A Striving Readers Project
LESSONS LEARNED

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March 2012

Introduction

The Kentucky Content Literacy Consortium was formed in response to a five-year Striving Readers grant from the United Stated Department of Education awarded in 2006. The Consortium is made up of Danville Public Schools, the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Center for Collaboration in Literacy Development at the University of Kentucky (CCLD), and the University of Louisville (U of L). In partnership, these organizations conducted a five-year Striving Readers project with 21 middle and high schools in seven districts across Kentucky. For this research project: 57,892 students learned content literacy strategies from the school wide literacy model; 1707 students participated in the targeted intervention model; and 3918 certified teachers engaged in professional development in the school wide content literacy model, with 24 teachers trained in the targeted intervention model.

The five-year project was managed by Danville Public Schools. The literacy program was comprehensive, in that it addressed core literacy instruction in the English/Language Arts classrooms, literacy integration in the content classrooms, and literacy intervention for struggling readers. In addition, it included an extensive set of professional development for school faculty, provided by CTL; literacy coach training provided by CTL and U of L; a master's degree program at U of L that lead to state endorsement in Reading & Writing; and administrative leadership training at CTL. CCLD conducted an extensive quantitative and qualitative research study of all aspects of the program; with annual and summative reporting, available through the US DOE.

In this paper, we summarize program implementation, lessons learned, and links to existing tools and resources that can support others in learning from and applying our experience in adolescent literacy reform. Information and lessons learned are organized by critical categories for school improvement:

- Aligned Curriculum
- Multiple Assessments
- Instruction and Intervention
- Literate Environment

- Professional Development
- Leadership
- Partnerships

We hope that the experiences, pathways and lessons from the Kentucky Striving Readers project will serve well to guide others in their efforts to continually improve literacy instruction for adolescents across the country.

Program Definitions and Lessons Learned

The following categories of description derive from the Kentucky Literacy Plan. Each category is defined, followed by highlights of lessons learned during project implementation, and with links to other state efforts to strengthen student literacy development.

DEFINITION

Aligned Curriculum is the consistent set of processes and shared documents to ensure that 1) teachers know the content that students must learn, 2) understand the ongoing necessary skills development that must be integrated to support that learning, and 3) effective, consistent, and common strategies are used to support both skills development and content mastery.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, curriculum alignment was addressed through multiple levels of program and instructional planning.

- Schools completed and implemented annual long-range plans to ensure that teacher training was based on students' curricular needs, consistent with state and national curriculum guidelines.
- Literacy coaches completed and implemented literacy coaching plans that were based on International Reading Association (IRA) curriculum standards for effective literacy coaching.
- Teacher training included study of common curriculum standards and frameworks documents.
- Teacher planning was required, integrating curriculum frameworks requirements and core curriculum standards with effective literacy-based strategies and resources.
- Formative assessment processes and protocols were provided and supported, focused on common curriculum standards as the primary assessment goal.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Literacy program leaders cannot assume all teachers understand their content standards.

In Year 1 of the KCLC project, teacher training focused primarily on the sub-domains of literacy (vocabulary, comprehension, writing to learn and demonstrate learning, and academic dialogue), assuming that once teachers had learned simple strategies, they would be able to appropriately integrate them as tools to teach their specific content. Instead, mentoring and coaching in the field demonstrated that teachers were 'mismatching' strategies and content – using strategies to try and address content inefficiently, or, for example, applying synthesis strategies when students were first accessing new content. Questioning, examination of lesson plans when available, and professional discussion with school literacy coaches demonstrated that many teachers did not know their content well enough to 1) recognize the natural fit between literacy strategies and the content they needed to teach, and 2) understand what strategies to use at what point during content instruction.

While accountability measures are in place in Kentucky, and elsewhere, to try and ensure that all teachers are addressing critical core content through curriculum alignment frameworks and aligned high-stakes assessment, KCLC found that many teachers are unfamiliar with the core content frameworks and program of studies that they are required to teach. Because of this evidence, it is critical that any professional development effort integrate both core content study and pedagogy development. Pedagogical training, in a content vacuum, will not support teachers in truly understanding how the pedagogy will be useful in their instruction. When the two are married and modeled, teachers are better able to see the usefulness of learning strategies, at the same time that they are encouraged to bring more rigor to the curriculum they address during instruction.

Links:

- http://tdcms.ket.org/literacycentral/int/literacycentralflash.html
- Kentucky is a participating state in two consortia designing new assessments to determine student progress in meeting the Common Core State Standards, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (www.parcconline.org)
- KDE has engaged teachers in several rounds of refining performance standards and indicators tied to core content for assessment.
- Scholastic audits and reviews examine extent to which teachers address core content for assessment.

Lesson #2: Any effective literacy initiative must include targeted strategies for instructional planning, and for monitoring that instructional plans are consistent with curriculum standards/goals.

Instructional planning is the bridge that successfully connects curriculum to the actual instruction that is provided in the classroom. While most of us would agree with that statement, systematic and required instructional planning was not the norm at most of the KCLC middle and high schools when the project began. Throughout the first two years of the project, trainers and mentors sought and tested different planning depths, requirements, and tools. While several solutions/tools were found,

and provided to schools as options for planning, systematic and regular planning of lessons was only present in some schools and in some classrooms at the end of the project.

In observing those teachers who did take advantage of the planning tools, we found that when teachers use a standards-based instructional planning method, their understanding of their own content increases, they are more likely to use a variety of high quality instructional strategies, and the results of their instruction become clearer to them on a daily basis. In addition, the use of teacher lesson plans, in combination with resulting student products, forms a powerful set of evidence that can be used for ongoing formal and informal professional learning. When teachers come together to plan, reflect on those plans, and examine the results of their work, they are able to improve and refine their practice over time.

DEFINITION

Multiple Assessments of literacy development include assessments of basic literacy skills and the ability to apply those skills in literary and informational settings. Strategies include formative and summative assessment; assessment of reading, writing and speaking; formal and informal assessment; and individual and group assessment opportunities.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, literacy assessment was approached in a variety of ways, both formal and informal, to support the quality of teacher response to student learning needs.

- Use of the Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory (4th Edition) to assess and respond to the literacy needs of students in the targeted intervention.
- Use of both Sorting and Tuning protocols (CTL tools) for assessment of student strategy use, teacher planning quality, and instructional response needs in both the English/Language Arts and content classrooms.
- Use of small-group Academic Dialogue assessment tools (Score Discussion Sheet, and Discussion Tally Sheet) for assessment and response to learning process needs in an a dialogue setting.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Middle school and high school interventionists need strategies for diagnosing gaps in student literacy development.

Literacy coaches acted as interventionists in the KCLC grant. In the first year of the grant, faculty from the University of Louisville shared a variety of intervention strategies as part of the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* from the University of Kansas. However, many of the teachers began their work as interventionists without the background knowledge or skill set to actually diagnose the problems of struggling readers. Because of this lack of professional knowledge, these teachers also had difficulty choosing the most effective strategies to meet the needs of their particular students. At the beginning of year 2, U of L faculty introduced the *Ekwall-Shanker Reading Inventory* (4th Edition) and provided professional development in how to use this diagnostic assessment. The ability to administer and analyze diagnostic assessments to target gaps in individual student literacy development seemed to be a breakthrough for many coaches in the intervention classroom.

Teachers of secondary striving readers need a variety of assessment strategies at their disposal, including assessment that helps them understand the needs of intervention students.

Links:

- http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/curriculum+documents+and+resources/kentucky+leadership+networks.htm
- The KDE through the content area Leadership Networks and other initiatives has made available formative assessment professional development for teachers and administrators, using Rick Stiggins Formative Assessment framework to advance understanding of this practice.

Lesson #2: Formative assessment results are valuable to instructional planning and decision making.

Linked to the lessons learned about instructional planning is developing the teacher's habit of mind to seek out various sources of evidence to determine student mastery and next instructional steps. In early KCLC training efforts, time was spent discussing the distinctions between evidence, assessment, and reporting. In many cases, teachers were unable to identify the differences, and had relied heavily on summative quantitative measures to determine student readiness for the next set of content or text. They were able to answer the question: Who passed? But they were less able to answer the question: Why or why not?

While integration of a student work protocol – designed to review student work for evidence of quality planning and instruction – was built into the training model, it was not scheduled for delivery until Year 2, in literacy coach training. Instead, direct evidence of instruction that did not respond to student needs required that the protocol and use of the protocol in coaching be integrated into the first year of the project. Results from early introduction of the protocol were not visible in Year 1, but coaching plans and artifacts revealed that the student work review protocol was used often at the beginning of Year 2, as a regular local coaching and staff meeting process – and responsive instruction increased (visible in informal teacher responses and coaching reflections).

When teachers learn to reflect on ongoing evidence of student learning and student need – the content curriculum comes alive in the classroom and engages students more actively in important

learning. Teachers are then better able to teach efficiently and effectively for long-term retention and deep mastery, and accountability for instructional quality increases.

Lesson #3: Greater diversity in instructional strategies provides greater wealth of information about student learning needs.

In the KCLC, strategies were provided in five literacy sub-domains, between 3 and 5 strategies in each sub-domain. By providing a variety of learning strategies and tasks for demonstrating learning, teachers also provide greater opportunity for diverse learners to show what they know. Multiple modes of communication and multiple products focused on the same critical content standards better ensure that all students will have the opportunity to show what they know in the way that works best for them. The only way to ensure this is to provide great diversity in the learning process, in the strategies used to teach and learn, and in student products used to assess progress in skills development and mastery of content.

If schools accept 1) that daily evidence of classroom learning is the primary indicator of student learning, and 2) that teachers must have the most accurate understanding of student learning needs, then it is a given that what happens in the classroom each day will provide a wealth of information to guide instruction.

Lesson #4: Progress monitoring is a critical routine needed to evaluate whether a strategy is aligned to the needs of the student and to evaluating gains.

In the KCLC, ongoing progress monitoring of student learning was critical to determine gains, and to highlight the increasing strengths of the student within the targeted intervention classroom. Initially, intervention teachers were not used to adapting instruction to meet individual student needs, or to continually collecting data to inform decision making on a daily or weekly basis. As a result of the training, intervention teachers were able to use newly-acquired skills for data collection and instructional decision-making to better match intervention strategies to student needs. They also focused efforts on supporting students' independent use of learning strategies in their classroom and students transferring those strategies into other academic settings. The intervention data, plotted on a graph, revealed both strengths and needs from pre-assessments as well as from ongoing formative assessments.

DEFINITION

Instruction is any literacy-based classroom activity that either promotes development of reading, writing and speaking skills, or integrates literacy in service of content learning. **Intervention** is the targeted small group or individual instruction, based on direct evidence of need, to support development of literacy skills, usually for students who are 2 or more years below grade level on a battery of formal literacy assessments.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, instruction and intervention were both supported through specific professional development approaches.

- Skills instruction for all students, in the English/Language Arts classroom, was supported through the Foundational Literacy training program within CTL's Adolescent Literacy Model.
- Content integration of literacy skills to support learning was supported through the Content Integration training program within CTL's Adolescent Literacy Model.
- Literacy intervention was supported through training and implementation of the Learning Strategies Curriculum from the University of Kansas through the University of Louisville.
- Additional professional development in the foundations of literacy development for school literacy coaches was provided by faculty from the University of Louisville.
- Quality of instruction in all areas was supported by on-site literacy coaches and CTL mentoring staff throughout the project.

Link:

- Link to KSI: http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/kentucky+system+of+interventions/

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Direct instruction for all students in literacy skills development should continue throughout middle and high school.

In the KCLC project, we observed reluctance on the part of teachers to recognize that adolescents should continue to receive skills instruction. They believed, as many teachers do, that students should have 'gotten it' before they come to middle and high school. The continuum of skills development that is necessary for adolescents was not seen as a priority. In addition, the lack of skills focus within local curriculum documents only served to reinforce this misunderstanding, and support teacher reluctance.

In response, KCLC trainers and mentors began conversations to ask a simple question: Which is more important, content or pedagogy? The debate pitted content specialists against those who advocated for responsive pedagogy that engages and advances the learning of all students. While an interesting question, it is clear that both are equally important and two sides of the same coin. The professional discussion provided the opportunity to come to a consensus with most teachers, about the differing and complementary nature of skills and content – the circular relationship between increasingly difficult content and increasingly sophisticated strategies and skills.

As students progress through the grades, content becomes more complex. A quick perusal of a chemistry textbook, for example, will support the view that students need learning skill development including advanced literacy skills to comprehend chemistry vocabulary and concepts. This is also true in other content areas like geometry or economics, for example. Not only are the concepts challenging but the vocabulary grows increasingly technical and subject-specific. Therefore, it is critical that – within all disciplines – curriculum alignment be reconsidered to ensure that a balance is achieved between simple content memory, deep conceptual understanding, and the inclusion of ongoing skills development that makes full mastery of a discipline possible.

Lesson #2: Do not underestimate the need for English/Language Arts teachers to learn more about literacy instruction.

At the beginning of the KCLC project, there was a high training emphasis on working with content area teachers to help them understand the process and value of literacy strategy integration. Since training was provided to full faculties, we expected that English/Language Arts teachers would be stand-outs in the training and could serve as models and peer-experts for others. In fact, early surveying of principals demonstrated that they believed the highest program implementers in their schools were English/Language Arts teachers. Local literacy coaches, however, reported in a similar survey that English/Language Arts teachers were among the least likely to use active literacy strategies to support learning in their classrooms.

As a combined group of literacy and English specialists, the KCLC team and mentor coaches considered why English teachers appeared to not see a need for literacy strategies in their classrooms. Several potential issues came to the forefront: 1) the highly experienced middle or high school English/Language Arts teacher has usually been well-trained in the use of literature to engage students in reading, and then writing and speaking about the literature they have read. This is literature experience rather than literacy instruction. When the focus is literature, not literacy, standards play a secondary or even minimal role in the classroom; and 2) while the balance of what is read in middle and high school has shifted toward a bulk of informational text, many English/Language Arts teachers are unprepared to engage in direct skills instruction, and even less prepared to teach the specific and distinct informational literacy skills students need to independently master read content, a critical middle and high school skill set.

In response to low levels of implementation in the English/Language Arts classroom, CTL developed a specific set of training and coaching processes for local implementation by CTL English/Language Arts trainers. These included deep analysis of state and national standards for the ELA classroom – demonstrating the common acceptance that skills and strategies development are a necessary part of ELA instruction; examination of state and national performance assessment structures to point out the expanding use of informational text on assessments at middle and high school; modeling of strategies in the context of literature instruction to assure teachers that they would not be abandoning their well-known materials; and planning for seamless integration of literary text, informational text, and literacy strategies to develop a more balanced approach.

Lesson #3: Content area teachers are not, and should not be teachers of literacy – they should be users of literacy strategies.

Many high profile educators and professional development providers are fond of saying "we are all teachers of literacy." In the KCLC project, we met an early and underground hostility from content teachers – assuming that we were asking them to abandon their content in service of reading instruction. Instead, our approach was consistently to argue that content teachers are not and should not be teachers of literacy. Instead, we encouraged the content teachers to view themselves as users of literacy strategies- strategies that will work in service of content learning.

Learning to read, write, and speak fluently – for both literary and informational purposes – has little value in middle and high school if students are not asked to apply those skills in service of learning something new. This is where the content area teacher comes in. Not only does the integration of literacy strategies into content learning offer students the opportunity to continually practice the skills they are building in the ELA classroom, those same strategies and developing skills provide access to informational content with which many students struggle. When content area teachers adopt the use of reading strategies to provide access to informational text, and writing and speaking strategies to support student communication about important content, they not only ensure that students have opportunity to practice their skills, they increase student learning in their own discipline.

Lesson #4: Literacy interventionists must be highly trained and supported through job-embedded mentoring processes.

The KCLC project employed the use of one core intervention program, the *Learning Strategies Curriculum* from the University of Kansas. KCLC partner, the University of Louisville, provided a certified trainer to train, support and monitor intervention instruction provided by the local literacy coaches, who were designated for half-time intervention instruction and half-time literacy coaching in their schools.

The University of Louisville was the institution of higher education responsible for foundational knowledge, intervention training, and state endorsement for the Striving Readers literacy coaches. In this role, professors at U of L provided continuous professional development in foundational knowledge of literacy processes and methods, and intervention training so that literacy coaches could be teachers of struggling readers. Faculty at U of L also facilitated the endorsement process for literacy coaches to earn a master's degree (M.Ed.) in Reading.

Training was accomplished during the ongoing literacy coaching professional development coursework provided at the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning, and supported by field observations and feedback from U of L trainers, distance mentoring, and implementation of specific classroom implementation tasks designed to support ongoing interventionist skills development. By providing not only training and materials for intervention, but also by extending that training over four years, and supporting it through mentoring, distance strategies, and classroom implementation follow-up tasks, interventionists were able to receive feedback and refine their practices over time, with external support from the University of Louisville and the Collaborative for Teaching and Learning.

These classroom implementation tasks were used as the basis of Hallmark Assessment Tasks (HATS) completed by the interventionists, serving as culminating course performance tasks for the M.Ed. coursework provided by the University of Louisville (see Professional Learning below for more information about Literacy Coach coursework and state endorsement).

Lesson # 5: Professional development for intervention teachers is complex and needs to focus on supporting fidelity of implementation for the research-based intervention.

When intervention teachers were first trained in multiple strategies, they felt overwhelmed by the intensive amount information. This was complicated by turnover among the intervention teachers/literacy coaches. In response, professional development was individualized and focused on one strategy at a time, allowing for mentoring, modeling, and implementation, and adding to teachers' strategy knowledge once mastery was evident. The teachers needed to experience effective modeling of the strategies to see and hear what the Intervention classroom should look like in middle and high school settings. When working with adolescent striving readers it is critical to engage teachers, who will then engage their students in *Highly Effective Teaching and Learning Common Characteristics* (see link above).

Link:

- http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/kentucky+system+of+interventions/
- http://www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/highly+effective+teaching+and+learning/hetl+common+characteristics.htm

Because the knowledge base needed to work with struggling readers is complex, intervention professional developers need to maintain ongoing coaching support for the *Learning Strategies Curriculum (LSC*), one component of the SIM™ (Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996). In addition, it is important for professional developers to mentor school literacy coaches responsible for the intervention in these ways:

- Model and describe literacy diagnostics to prepare an intervention long-range plan.
- Support analysis of intervention assessment and monitoring the progress of literacy skills and comprehension.
- Conduct comprehensive assessments.

- Develop the capacities of school literacy teachers in formative assessment and instructional support for struggling readers.
- Provide ongoing support to clinical sites implementing the targeted intervention and its components: LSC in pre-assessment, ongoing assessment monitoring of progress, and post-assessment.

DEFINITION

Development of a **Literate Environment** is not simply using a set of tools, strategies or resources for implementation. A literate environment is simply a result of a comprehensive and effective approach to literacy implementation. The goal is to have a literate environment exist in all classrooms, not just English/Language Arts. Characteristics of a literate environment include active engagement of students as seekers of knowledge, who use reading, writing, and speaking as both formative learning strategies and formal demonstrations of learning; a physical environment that promotes student-to-student engagement in learning, with open opportunities for variety in strategy use; a supported learning process structure, where learned strategies, specifically selected to support necessary content, are well-known and actively used by learners; and where the value of discussion, exploration through text, and communication of individual ideas is clear to all classroom participants.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, development of a literate environment was the primary long-term program goal, and supported through intentional and specific targeted training.

- Intervention training for teachers was provided to develop effective resources, routines, and physical spaces that would support the struggling learner in development of compensation strategies for learning.
- Professional development providers modeled effective environmental structures and processes to promote ongoing development of the classroom learning culture.
- Teachers learned effective use of the physical classroom space for sharing of engaging information and celebration of the efforts of learners.
- There was ongoing macro and micro-evaluation of the continuous development of the overall learning environment, as it increasingly relied on literacy as a core cultural element of practice.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: School staff members need to be taught how to recognize a literate environment.

One of the key elements for school-level performance review in the KCLC project was the presence of an overall culture of literacy, a pervasive literacy environment. As a part of the formative program review and response, several tools were made available for school use – to determine and reflect on the literacy environment present in the schools. These tools included a classroom observation tool, a building walk-through tool, and a global school performance guide (on which environment was a key indicator of success).

In early implementation, we observed that schools did not have a natural understanding of the value of formative assessment tools targeting analysis of the literacy environment. Instead, they gravitated toward the tools that were quantitative and discreet in nature – those tools that could easily be completed, with 'hard evidence' to show that their analysis was accurate. The qualitative tools were viewed as less useful to them – particularly those criteria that focused on the somewhat intangible nature of environmental indicators.

In an effort to increase understanding of the overall nature of literacy in schools, we chose to emphasize the use of the qualitative tools during mentoring and coaching – conducting building walk-throughs with principals, co-observing with local literacy coaches. We debriefed both the process and artifacts that were observed, to model identification of key qualitative indicator and the value of those qualities to help determine overall progress, and to probe barriers to implementation. By using a professional learning process and breaking down what happened in school into observable components, schools were better able to recognize key elements of a literate environment, which increased the opportunity to build upon growing strengths and identify pressing programmatic needs.

Lesson #2: Students can recognize distinctions in the learning environment, and respond accordingly.

In the KCLC project, changes in the classroom environment and literacy-integrated approach produced early observable response from students. Principals and teachers reported several changes they observed at the local level – particularly at the high school level, school-level data demonstrated reduced student disruptions in classrooms during instruction; reduced tardiness to class; and fewer discipline referrals in the school. In addition, many teachers noted higher levels of interest in learning topics among students, and an increased evidence of student groups self-monitoring their own engagement during learning activities.

From the types of materials available, to the strategies students are asked to use, to the presence of informal and formal student-to-student discussion, the adolescent learners in the KCLC project seemed aware of the increasing changes in the instructional approach – and in many cases increased their own participation and investment in learning accordingly.

These early and continuing observations led us to confirm our belief that when the classroom is oriented to the nature and needs of the student, the students will respond in a positive manner. While it may never be easy to combat stereotypical adolescent behavior, teachers who work to make a welcoming, respectful, and interesting environment for their learners see students who respond in kind. Learners are more likely to engage in activities that they may otherwise resist, will seek assistance when they struggle with learning, and self-monitor the normal disruptions that can occur in the adolescent classroom.

Link:

- Literacy PERKS PD Modules, including Literate Environment: http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Literacy+PERKS+Professional+Development.htm

Lesson #3: Students need access to a range of materials that reflect their interests, are grade and level appropriate, and support independent use.

In the KCLC, we found that struggling readers needed to build motivation to read. It was important in intervention and regular classrooms to take into consideration students' interests, needs, and abilities. This happened in several ways. First, materials of different genres and both text and digital formats were made available to students. Additionally, teachers modeled those behaviors that characterize good readers. They used strategies like "think aloud" to read and demonstrate the interior monologue that reflective readers engage in. Finally, teachers provided dedicated time for reading, writing, observing, speaking and listening around text to support a literate environment.

DEFINITION

Professional Learning is the formal and informal, facilitated and self-initiated ongoing learning done by teachers to support them in providing the most current research-based and effective instruction possible. Focused on content, pedagogy or both, it is the process by which all teachers continue their education beyond formal pre-service.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, professional learning was provided in a variety of settings and through a variety of modes:

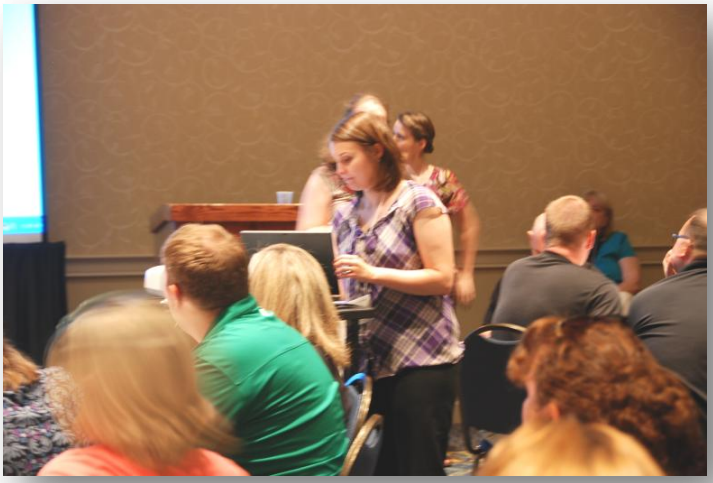
- Formal training on the foundational and integrated literacy model components, for all teachers;
- Ongoing job-embedded coaching for all teachers to support implementation quality, provided by on-site literacy coaches, and CTL mentor coaches;
- Formal professional development and coursework requirements for local literacy coaches, focused on mastery of the IRA *Standards for Reading Professionals* and IRA *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*, which was ongoing and job-embedded;
- Formal training for principals and local literacy leadership teams, to support gradual release of the program into local hands; and,
- Ongoing, job-embedded mentoring for principals, to provide guidance for accountable program implementation.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Professional development must be a sustained and multi-dimensional effort.

The Collaborative for Teaching and Learning (CTL) designed and led the school-wide professional development implementation, with their Adolescent Literacy Model (ALM), provided all coaching training to the literacy coaches as they worked toward their coaching certification, provided regular leadership training for school and district administrators, and implemented the U of L Hallmark Tasks for Long-Range Literacy Planning, Literacy Technologies, and Content-Specific Coaching.

In their role as lead professional development provider, CTL provided all implementing teachers and literacy coaches with five days of initial training in the ALM, which combines foundational literacy pedagogy with specific classroom strategies for Vocabulary Development, Reading Comprehension, Academic Dialogue, Writing to Learn, and Writing to Demonstrate Learning. As each year began, CTL returned to work with local schools, providing 2-day training sessions each summer in Years 2 and 3, and leading the implementation of the annual literacy conference in Years 4 and 5, where implementing schools attended a full-day central conference to learn from experts and from other implementing schools.



In addition to teacher training in the school-wide model, CTL designed and implemented literacy coaching training throughout the project, basing the scope and sequence of the coaching curriculum on the IRA Standards for Secondary Literacy Coaches, and providing training on a monthly basis. These coaching training sessions offered the content necessary for literacy coaches to complete the HAT tasks designed and facilitated by the University of Louisville. Through the coaching training process, CTL supplied the background knowledge, tools, and strategies for coaching at all levels in implementing schools; including long-, mid-, and short-range planning, small-group and individual coaching strategies, planning and data collection tools and processes, and application of literacy technologies. In addition, CTL's content specialists designed and led discipline-specific training for literacy coaches, focused on state and national content standards for all core disciplines, and literacy strategies customized to meet the needs of different disciplines.

Along with the Project Manager from the lead district, Danville Independent Schools, CTL provided ongoing leadership training for school and district administrators, to ensure that 1) all school leaders understood the content of the coaching model and school-wide literacy program, 2) school and

district administrators were able to use the literacy data collection tools to monitor the quality of implementation in their schools, and 3) to build a system of partnership between administrators and literacy coaches for accountable implementation.

CTL also initiated a program of shared and distributed leadership in implementing schools, through the development of Literacy Leadership Teams in each school. Teams were made up of administrators, coaches, and lead teachers from each discipline. The teams were trained in effective literacy leadership strategies and team-building processes. As the project progressed, teams were also assisted with building a peer coaching process into content departments, supporting the long-term distribution of coaching and leadership in the schools.

In the final year of the project, CTL developed and implemented a Clinical Site program, where Year 5 schools completed a performance-based program to become certified as Clinical Model Sites for the Adolescent Literacy Model (classroom model, coaching model, and leadership model). This process for Clinical Site certification ensured that Year 5 schools were prepared to serve as state, regional and national models for other middle and high schools.

To support these program components, CTL provided Mentor Coaches, who provided on-site, distance, and training support for local literacy coaches and school administrators. Mentor Coaches were drawn from CTL staff with expertise across the content disciplines. CTL Mentor Coaches provided both small-group and individual mentoring for literacy coaches, modeled coaching at local school sites, co-planning ongoing coaching activities, provided Leadership Team training, and reported on the ongoing implementation progress and issues in schools.

Links:

- The IRA *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* (http://www.reading.org/General/CurrentResearch/Standards/CoachingStandards.aspx) is the standard set that was developed collaboratively by several professional organizations to guide literacy coaching in content areas.
- The IRA *Standards for Reading Professionals* (http://www.reading.org/General/CurrentResearch/Standards/ProfessionalStandards2010.aspx) is the standard set that many institutions of higher education use for accreditation of their M.Ed. in Reading.
- *The U.S. Department of Educati*on Smaller Learning Communities Initiative has published a paper entitled *Meeting the Gold Standard: Preparation of Middle and High School Literacy Coaches in the Field*, (http://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/finalmeeting.pdf) which was written by the University of Louisville faculty partners. This paper describes the M.Ed. program for the Kentucky Striving Readers literacy coaches, and the lessons learned.

Throughout the project, several key leverage points for professional development engagement were observed: 1) When school administrators are actively engaged in teacher training, teachers attend and follow-through on implementation at a higher level; 2) when professional development structures provide for variety in grouping, formality/informality,

and approach, more teachers are reached in ways that are viewed as meaningful to them; and 3) when multiple groupings are used for formal and informal professional development, teachers who may rarely interact with one another engage more actively and find deeper connections across classrooms and content areas, thus providing a pathway for more comprehensive understanding of individual student needs and a greater willingness to respond to those needs as a teaching community.

The extensive time spent in the KCLC project for professional development also enhanced the process and results for teacher practice. In early project years, we found that participating schools were likely to provide short-range professional development, focused on too many divergent topics and/or initiatives. Teachers and administrators were unaccustomed to sustaining a single effort for more than 1-2 years. In KCLC, schools committed to five years, with a gradually shifting and diminishing formal professional development structure, but a strong continuing job-embedded professional development structure. By using this approach, and observing the rising and falling levels of active engagement, we found that by sustaining the effort for a five-year period, we were able to better institutionalize the initiative; e.g. though staff changes occurred each year, and need for teacher retraining was critical, the initiative itself became a part of the larger school culture, necessary for sustainability beyond the scope of any external funding or support.

Link:

- Professional Learning Plan for Literacy: http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Professional+Learning+Plan.htm

The Project Director collected data annually related to the level of commitment from schools to the professional development attendance. Over the span of the five years of the project an average of 82% of total certified staff participated annually in Professional Development with the highest percentage of 92% in the first year. Attendance data on literacy coaches, administrators and partners was compared annually and results were utilized to determine where additional assistance needed to be focused for the following year. In addition, attendance data on each literacy coach assigned to the intervention classroom was monitored to ensure provision of consistent teaching of the intervention model by a trained literacy coach.

Lesson #2: Professional development that integrates conceptual knowledge, practical strategies, and models of effective implementation.

Professional development experiences many times can focus on one of two sets of content; either changing the conceptual pedagogy knowledge of teachers or providing them with practical materials and/or strategies for instruction. Neither of these is sufficient. The KCLC professional development program was designed to continuously integrate concepts, strategies, models, and content. Understanding that many middle and high school teacher pre-service programs focus almost exclusively on content knowledge, we started implementation understanding that any effort to side-step content in favor of global concepts and strategies may be so unfamiliar that teachers would be unable to meaningfully integrate new learning. As a result of this multi-faceted approach, we were

able to honor teachers' commitment to their content and bring new concepts and strategies to the forefront throughout the project.

Lesson #3: Skilled coaching at the local level is as important as teacher training.

In the KCLC design, local coaching, and the development of local coaches was a critical lynch pin in the project. In order to plan for gradual release of the full model, from the beginning of the project, the training and development of school-based literacy coaches was a primary and ongoing activity. This was accomplished through multiple means and in partnership between CTL and the University of Louisville.

Training of Literacy Coaches was accomplished through an ongoing formal training system provided by CTL and the University of Louisville. Using the *Standards for Reading Professionals* and *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*, both developed by the International Reading Association, the partners designed a standards-based scope and sequence for a four-year training course of study. Course content was provided in a monthly professional development setting, and enhanced by field assignments to support new coaches in developing and applying their skills.

Moreover, each local Literacy Coach was mentored in the development of coaching strategies by an external Mentor Coach who worked at the school level on a regular basis, in tandem with the local coach - first as a model, then as a peer coach, then as a mentor – while local coaches' skills increased over time. Local literacy coaches developed and shared coaching plans, implemented coaching strategies with individuals and groups of teachers, gathered evidence of their coaching work and resulting teacher practices, and designed customized local professional development approaches, within the framework of the literacy model.

In order to ensure that all local coaches ended the project with a full skill set for ongoing literacy coaching, the University of Louisville also aligned its M.Ed. in Reading program to meet the IRA standards. Each of the classes in the 36-hour program required on campus was also required for the Literacy Coaches with one exception: the KCLC literacy coaches completed course requirements through their ongoing face-to-face professional development sessions, school-based mentoring activities, distance learning methods, and research-based field activities with accountability instead of campus-based classes. That accountability came in the form of the same signature assessments, or "Hallmark Assessment Tasks" (HATS) as campus-based graduate students for each course, with adaptations to accommodate field-based learning. Course work processes and HATS were also

aligned to the Kentucky Literacy Plan (the same structure within which this paper is organized) to ensure that graduating literacy coaches would have and be able to use a comprehensive set of skills for local literacy coaching.

In addition to coursework and HATS in literacy coaching standards, coaches also engaged in required coursework as interventionists (see Intervention above for more information). Through this combined series of professional development coursework, mentoring, distance support, and Hallmark production, KCLC literacy coaches were able to effectively support teacher training, ongoing mentoring, and to lead intervention efforts in their schools.

Lesson #4: When literacy coaches participate in graduate coursework, external accountability for developing literacy expertise is established.

Literacy coaches who earned the M.Ed. in Reading participated in outside professional reading and completed a series of Hallmark assessments for the university coursework. The course Hallmark assessments were designed to help coaches learn concepts, collect authentic data in the field, reflect on learning, and internalize literacy knowledge. Coaches completed the Hallmarks while teaching intervention classes and coaching their colleagues.

Coaches completed Hallmark case studies that included evidence of student learning, and documented tasks in coaching content area teachers and providing school-wide literacy leadership. Because each Hallmark was a required, graded course assignment, coaches had a reason to demonstrate that they had actually implemented the literacy concepts presented in professional development. We observed that sometimes coaches did not apply knowledge from coursework professional development until they were required to complete the Hallmark assignment. Completing the Hallmark ensured they had contemplated and applied the course content.

DEFINITION

Leadership is the ability to create a shared vision for the work of the school with improved student literacy as the goal.

***Change Leadership, A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools* provides a framework based on the belief that, "…the ongoing improvement of instruction must be the central aim of any education improvement effort." It offers seven disciplines for strengthening instruction that get to the core of any successful literacy initiative. (**Wagner, Tony, and Robert Kegan, et al. *Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. © 2006 ISBN: 9780787977559)

1. Urgency for instructional improvement using real data
2. Shared vision of good teaching
3. Meetings about the work
4. Shared vision of student results
5. Effective supervision
6. Professional development

7. Diagnostic data with accountable collaboration

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, leadership strategies were embedded into program implementation at all levels, including:

- Implementing partner leadership for complementary and shared leadership of specific project components.
- District leadership to enhance engagement and accountability of schools at the local level.
- School administrative leadership to support development of instructional leadership for school principals/assistant principals.
- Literacy Coach leadership to build capacity for ongoing professional learning at school sites
- Teacher leadership teams to distribute and sustain instructional and literacy leadership beyond school administrators and literacy coaches.

Links:

- Literacy Leadership: http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Reading+First+in+Kentucky/Professional+Development/For+Principals/Literacy+Leadership+-+Stories+of+Schoolwide+Success.htm
- Literacy PERKS document: www.education.ky.gov/kde/instructional+resources/literacy/

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Participation of district and school administrators in leadership and instructional professional development is critical to teacher engagement and classroom implementation.

The KCLC project began with a clear delineation of administrator responsibilities for implementation. This included the required participation of school administrators during teacher training, and required participation for school and district administrators in administrative leadership training.

Administrative leadership training began with a focus on clarifying the overall processes and structures of the five-year initiative, and quickly led to 1) processes for accountable implementation, 2) tools and processes for monitoring the level and quality of classroom implementation, and 3) strategies for collaborating with the local literacy coach to support and enhance professional development efforts. Over time, as teacher training and coaching progressed, administrative leadership training proceeded to emphasize deepening understanding of 1) what effective literacy practices look like in the classroom, 2) the use of quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools to monitor practice, and 3) eventual distribution of leadership to a representative faculty approach (see distributed leadership discussion below).

Though the requirement for administrator participation was made clear, not all districts and schools were consistent in their response. Over time, schools/districts began to sort themselves into two categories; those that had active administrative participation and those that had less active administrative participation. When linking administrative participation and leadership to school engagement and changes in teacher practice, observable results showed clearly that when

administrators are actively engaged and genuinely knowledgeable about the content of the program, positive results follow in schools. School Literacy Coaches provided more assertive, frequent, and collaborative coaching to teachers, teacher and coach attendance at required trainings was more consistent, and Literacy Leadership Teams were more active in sharing leadership responsibilities in implementing schools.

Lesson #2: In schools where leadership is effectively distributed among staff, there is a higher level of internal accountability for quality instruction.

In addition to the active and intentional engagement of school and district administrators in training and mentoring, the KCLC project included the development of local Literacy Leadership Teams, made up of school administrators, literacy coaches, and a team of teachers (one representing each content area). The leadership team development began in Year 2, and included external training for team structures, processes, and tools to support school management and implementation of the literacy program. In addition, Mentor Coaches provided support for the administrator and literacy coach to conduct team meetings and follow up on identified team activities in the school.

While the Literacy Leadership Team began as a project-specific structure and process, over time, KCLC partners observed that team activities began to expand into school activities and initiatives that were not directly required in the project – for example, working within the team to develop the state-required long-range plan for school improvement. In addition, on successful teams, the content area representatives began to engage actively in mentoring their colleagues (distribution of coaching) and holding their departments accountable for implementation and project response. In those schools most successful in teaming processes, local literacy coaches also were able to engage content team members in providing collaborative professional development for their peers (formal and informal).

The KCLC schools that developed the strongest distributed leadership structure, through the use of the Literacy Leadership Team, were among those that continued into the extension year, and completed the process to become model sites for adolescent literacy.

Links:

- For the Kentucky Content Literacy Consortium, the fifth year of the Striving Readers project supported model sites whose focus was to internalize changes in practice and prepare for explaining and demonstrating those practices with visiting school teams. The project developed a Clinical Site Guide, authored by CTL, to outline for model schools how to prepare for and organize visits from other schools to maximize their learning and provide insights on high quality implementation.
- The Kentucky Department of Education and local co-ops have supported participation in PEBC's Thinking Strategies training which over time establishes lab or model classrooms in schools, and at full implementation, model sites.

Lesson #3: Leadership in schools where there is a culture of collaboration and learning impacts instructional practices, and eventually, student learning.

Central to the KCLC model was sustained, on-going, job-embedded professional learning. Teachers attended trainings together, developed professional learning communities based on common interests and needs, met as departments, in cross-curricular work groups, and with school literacy coaches. As these practices became a regular part of the culture of the school, the expectations for teacher and student learning alike changed. Teachers and students both took ownership for learning and meeting improvement goals.

DEFINITION

Partnerships in literacy program implementation are critical to the success of any program effort. These partnerships include all school personnel, district support staff and leaders, parents, and other community stakeholders who have direct skills to support program implementation and a direct stake in the results from program efforts. In addition, there is benefit to schools seeking out other partnering schools that are engaged in similar efforts and network their efforts to learn from one another. Finally, when large-scale programs are initiated, it is important to seek outside expertise and assistance for both teacher training and program management and monitoring efforts.

Program Summary: In the KCLC Striving Readers Project, an extensive partnership structure provided effective support for school program implementation.

- The 21 school program was managed by an experienced program manager from a single lead district: Danville Independent Schools.
- School districts were engaged actively as partners for their specific participating schools.
- The professional development and coaching program was provided by an experienced professional development provider: CTL.
- Targeted intervention training was provided and supported by a certified intervention trainer from the University of Louisville.
- The university M.Ed. in Reading and state endorsement program was provided and supported by a well-respected leading teacher education institution, the University of Louisville.
- Evaluation of the program was conducted by the lead literacy program organization in the area: Collaborative Center for Literacy Development based at the University of Kentucky.
- The full partnership team was supported by the Kentucky Department of Education, making the link between program-specific implementation and the larger efforts of the state to develop adolescent literacy approaches.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: External program implementation efforts require genuine commitment, accountability, and partnership from schools and districts.

Many program implementation and professional learning efforts are externally initiated and funded. It is important to build into these funding arrangements school and district commitment to the intended change. In the KCLC project, commitment of schools was paramount in the original design. In fact, all schools were required to achieve an 80% written commitment from the entire school teaching staff, and signed off by the school site based council, district superintendent and Board of Education before being considered for project participation. After funding was received, each partner, school and school district signed a Memorandum of Agreement annually to ensure proper implementation in order to protect the validity of the research. For each district, even though the superintendents were involved in the project, a district contact was designated to become the liaison between the schools and the project director and partners.

In addition, school administrators were provided with annual sets of implementation expectations, and were required to share these with teachers and to sign off on the school's commitment to ongoing work. The Project Director from Danville Independent and Professional Development Director from CTL met with school districts annually to go over these expectations as a way to ensure proper communication and effective implementation of the project. The partnership tiers can be described as:

- Partners (Danville Schools Project Director, CTL, U of L, and CCLD at UK).
- District Superintendents and District Contacts.
- School Principals.
- Literacy Coaches.

To keep the administrators and partners abreast of the expectations of the project, all partners attended trainings. The Project Director, CTL PD Director, U of L and CCLD attended monthly partnership meetings, coaches training and administrator trainings. Superintendents were invited to attend all trainings, but were required to attend at least one per year. Principals and district contacts were required to attend at least three per year. It is interesting to note that there was a clear correlation between those schools which had a high percentage of administrators attending training and the level of implementation at the school.

Lesson #2: Program partners know their strengths and willingly count on one another to fill program gaps.

When implementing a large and sustained initiative, shared and distributed leadership among all partners is critical to ensuring that the program vision and goals are achieved. In the KCLC project, the partners had clearly defined roles: Danville Public Schools as the lead project manager; CTL as the professional development provider for the school-wide model; University of Louisville as the intervention trainer and institution responsible for the M.Ed. in Reading and state endorsement; and CCLD as the external evaluator.

Even though those roles were clearly defined, partners worked at making connections between all roles clear. In the KCLC partnership, partners met on a monthly basis, shared information about prior activities and upcoming processes, engaged in collaborative trouble-shooting when barriers arose, and reviewed and supported one another's work. Through close collaboration and application of a continuous program assessment approach, the implementing partners were able to 1) maintain the original program design, 2) enhance the design over time, and 3) successfully manage implementation barriers.

A notable strength was the stability of the partners throughout the entirety of the project. All partners, including the Danville Schools Project Director, CTL PD Director, U of L certification and intervention instructors, CCLD evaluators and the district level contact people, remained the same throughout the five-year grant period. Even though there was teacher, principal and even superintendent turnover each year, having the stability of these partners helped to maintain consistency and support throughout the project duration. In order for a project this large to be successful, it is essential to conduct regular meetings, communicate frequently and create opportunities for administrators and teachers to share input. This was accomplished successfully through providing and revising the Management Plans and Timelines as needed to ensure implementation is successful.

Lesson #3: Program partnerships should plan up front to successfully release schools to fully independent implementation within a clearly defined period.

External literacy program support can either increase dependence of schools on external training, support and funding; or instead encourage schools to adopt new and sustainable habits of practice that can outlast externally supported efforts. In the KCLC, the teacher training model, intervention training approach, leadership model, and M.Ed. in Reading and state endorsement program were all designed for eventual independent use and sustainability, using a backward mapping process. Curricula for all program components were standards-based, and constructed to intentionally prepare all stakeholders for independent implementation beyond the scope of the project.

An example of this gradual release can be found in the teacher training model. Training began with extended five-day institutes in Year 1 – common across schools. In Year 2, schools were engaged in both common training and training that was customized based on evidence available about each individual school. In Year 3, training was conducted at the regional level, bringing schools together to

increase the power of the larger adult learning community. In Year 4, the full project community participated in a one-day, state-wide conference where partners, trainers, and local literacy coaches collaborated to provide teacher sessions. In Year 5, the literacy conference was held again, with teachers and administrators providing professional development sessions for one another.

By intentionally designing the multi-year process with capacity and sustainability in mind, the implementing partners were able to fulfill the goal of self-sustaining programs in many KCLC schools. An informal survey, extended to all original 21 schools, was conducted by the Project Director at the conclusion of the fifth year. All school districts were still implementing content literacy strategies in some capacity within their Striving Readers schools as well as branching out to non-Striving Readers schools within their districts. Many of the districts due to limited budgets could not continue the full-time literacy coach but at least 15 continued the role in some capacity. In terms of the intervention model and based on an informal survey, all schools reported they were providing an intervention program through RTI with 5 schools continuing to fully implement the SIM model.

Lesson #4: Networking of schools - as partners engaged in similar change efforts - provides the greatest opportunity to sustain program practices independently over time.

Actively networking schools engaged in similar efforts using both face-to-face and virtual means supports the fully independent and sustained implementation described above. In the KCLC project, this networking was gradually scaled-up and a critical part of the gradual release model. It was accomplished by building in four key components: 1) online networking of teachers in common content areas, 2) virtual and actual clustering of literacy coaches into mentoring teams, 3) site visits for literacy coaches and administrators, and 4) use of the Clinical Site process in the final year.

The clinical site process was the culminating set of processes, artifacts, and performances that schools were required to achieve in Year 5 in order to be determined as model sites for adolescent literacy. In the clinical site process, schools were networked into 3-school clusters, visiting each other, learning from one another's differing program strengths, and demonstrating their practice performance as a model site for one another. By networking schools and teachers from the beginning of the program to the end, the KCLC process helped schools achieve an open understanding of their own strengths and needs, and supported them in looking to their peer community for ongoing professional networking and sustainability after the project period concluded.

Contributing KCLC Partner Organizations/Personnel

- Danville Independent Schools – Lead District: Project Manager, Kathy Belcher
- Collaborative for Teaching and Learning (CTL) – Professional Development Provider: Program Coordinator, Amy Pallangyo
- University of Louisville (U of L) – M.Ed. Certification and Literacy Intervention: Certification, Dr. Brenda Overturf, and Targeted Intervention, Latricia Bronger
- Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) – Advisory Partnership: Project Advisor, Cindy Parker