Mentoring. Coaching. These two words are being used often in our profession, and AASCD just completed our winter conference devoted to this topic. But, mentoring and coaching goes beyond the formal relationship established during these activities. The sharing of professional knowledge is also involved, and we all have a professional responsibility to share our knowledge.

Some veteran educators do not attend conferences or other activities and have stated their reason as, “I have heard all of that before” or “it just doesn’t apply to me now”. That is unfortunate. Professional development activities are not just about learning. They are also about giving – giving your input; giving your expertise; giving your guidance. We all know that knowledge cannot take the place of experience. Entwined together, knowledge and experience are powerful.

Professional learning opportunities provide us with the resources to stay current in our field (knowledge), and the opportunity to learn from others (experience). I am continually amazed that even after a long career in education, I continue to learn something every time I attend a learning event. At a time when systems are experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators, it is increasingly important to “pass on” what we know and have learned.
These are the benefits that I have found in being a member of AASCD and in attending professional learning sessions:

1. Networking – My career has been shaped by the people I have worked with and the people whom I have met and associated with through professional organizations. Not only have I made some life long friends, I have colleagues all over the state that I can call to get advice, suggestions and new ideas.

2. Knowledge – The only way I stay current on SDE expectations, research, programs, etc., is to attend professional learning offerings. Being able to attend multiple breakout sessions and hear a well-known authority provides me a summary of what would take hours to read in periodicals and journals. These keep me “up to date”. Even so, often times I will hear ideas that I felt would not work for me in my situation the way it was presented. But, the beauty of the learning is being able to take the idea and look for ways to implement it in your situation. Look for how it will work. I encourage you to do that when you hear ideas that are working in other places. Take the idea, and then allow the leadership team to look for ways to incorporate it into your environment.

3. Sharing – While we all have different experiences, we all tackle many of the same problems. When listening to my colleagues, I have heard so many great ideas that I was able to put into practice. Ideas from how to best organize a bus dismissal, to conducting classroom walk-throughs, to organizing district committees and everything in between. And, I hope that I have been able to pass them along to others.

The year is more than half over. As administrators, the spring brings with it the preparing for the end of one year and the planning for the next year. So, as you begin to make your summer and “next year” plans, remember to include learning opportunities for you – not just your staff and team. Your knowledge and experience is what each child is counting on and what each one deserves.

Join AASCD today. If you are already a member, tell your colleagues how AASCD can make a difference for them and their instructional leadership.

For more information, contact Vicky Ozment, Vice-President of Membership, at vozment@tcboe.org.
Executive Director’s Report

How to Connect Sound Teaching with Assessment is Often Confusing

What is assessment really?? We know it is important to assess or evaluate or reflect on the outcome, but do we truly understand the foundation for assessment? And, then are we able as teachers and leaders to develop sound and helpful assessments?

In Jim Popham’s book, Everything School Leaders Need to Know About Assessment, he identifies 5 properties that undergird sound assessment and encourages us to remember:

- Validity, reliability, and assessment bias
- Importance of formative assessment
- Students with disabilities and ELL students
- Interpretation results of large-scale assessments
- Instructional sensitivity of accountability tests

The true value of a test is to capture effects of instruction and not to be something that is intended to “get you” to prove there is no learning taking place in the school. The intention is to show mastery of content and to guide teachers and leaders in constructing learning environments that enhance learning. Here are 4 big ideas when using assessments to capture the effects of instruction:

- Test should not attempt to measure too many different standards
- Test based on clearly defined “learning targets”
- Reports for instructionally sensitive tests show exactly how each of the students performed on each standard
- Test ensures that cultural and socioeconomic background do not give advantage

Tests like National Assessment of Educational (NAEP) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are recognized for comparing overall trends in student learning across time periods and across countries. This does give us a measure as to how students compare to others on the very same test. However, standardized tests cannot assess important student skills such as critical thinking and creativity. According to Charlotte Danielson “not a single one of the 21st Century Skills can be assessed on a multiple choice test”. She added the standardized test scores “give you a number” but that teaching is too complex to be captured and evaluated in that way.

I recommend these recent books as good reading on the topic and perhaps will guide you as you connect sound teaching with true assessment:

Assessment Literacy for Educators in a Hurry (2018). W. James Popham


Fast and Effective Assessment: How to Reduce Your workload and Improve Student learning (2018). Glen Pearsall

How to Use Grading to Improve Learning (2017). Susan M. Brookhart

Watch for opportunities for learning sponsored by Alabama ASCD in the upcoming months and join us as we offer meaningful professional experiences for instructional leaders.
The Power of Connection theme of the AASCD Annual Winter Conference held at the end of January of 2019 in Birmingham, AL brought together instructional leaders, district teams, reading coaches, instructional partners, university leaders, and non-profit representatives from across Alabama. The two-day conference focused on exploring instructional coaching and mentoring as important roles in all facets of education and provided effective strategies and networking opportunities for supporting teachers and instructional staff involved in improving Alabama schools.

The first day of the conference started with a powerful keynote speaker, Ann G. Hoffman who is a Professional Development Leader for the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KU-CRL) and a consultant with Dr. Jim Knight's ICG (Instructional Coaching Group) with more than 30 years of experience. As one of the first professional developers for the Center as well as one of the first consultants with ICG, Ann Hoffman has worked with thousands of teachers and administrators in the U.S. and internationally.

Ann Hoffman made a case for better conversation being one of the key factors to success. Her argument was supported by characteristics of success defined by some of the most well-known companies, such as Google. Among six characteristics of success, Google listed being a good coach, having strong communication skills, having empathy, being a good critical thinker, and being able to make complex connections. Better communication skills and better conversations are crucial in any field and make one a successful individual in personal and professional life.

The day structure rotated around six beliefs presented by Better Conversations:

1. See others as equal partners.
2. People should have a lot of autonomy.
3. Hear what others have to say.
4. Don’t judge conversation partners.
5. Conversations should be back and forth.
6. Conversations should be life giving.

According to Ann Hoffman, these beliefs coupled with habits of better conversationalists and daily practice would lay a solid foundation for any instructional improvement effort in education. Conference participants had the opportunity to practice better conversations, better questioning, and better listening to experience instructional coaching first hand. These conference activities resulted in a powerful dialogue, networking opportunities, and professional connections among instructional leaders from all across the state. The day closure guided the participants to understand that effective instructional coaching and improvement happens when a leader says less, listens intently, asks better questions, and changes the way
he or she leads to make empathetic connections. To learn more and access Better Conversations resources shared during conference, please visit https://resources.corwin.com/knightbetterconversations or https://www.instructionalcoaching.com/downloads/pdfs/Better-Conversations-TLC.pdf.

You can follow Ann G. Hoffman on Twitter at @annghoffman.

Due to the threat of inclement weather, AASCD cancelled the second day of the conference. Day two of the conference had a practical networking focus offering participants breakout session with practitioners and instructional leaders who planned to share their strategies and models for instructional coaching, mentoring, crucial conversations, and transformational leadership. For those of you who plan to use this conference as an activity for a PLU (PLUACLD651, PLUACLD653, or PLUACLD656), your attendance in the Better Conversations general session by Ann G. Hoffman will count toward the AASCD Winter Conference requirement. Attendance will be verified using the scan data from the conference. Links to handouts and materials from both day of the conference can be found 2019AASCDhandouts.

Upcoming Professional Growth Opportunities

Information and registration is located at www.clasleaders.org/PD/events

- Leadership Institute: Improving Parental Involvement in Schools
  - Mobile, AL
  - 12 March 2019
- Leadership Institute: Improving Parental Involvement in Schools
  - Prattville, AL
  - 13 March 2019
- Leadership Institute: Improving Parental Involvement in Schools
  - Huntsville
  - 14 March 2019
- Law Conference
  - Prattville, AL
  - 27 March 2019
- Lunch & Learn
  - Cyber Security in Education Webinar
  - 6 May 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Mental Health in Schools: The Hidden Crisis
  - Mobile, AL
  - 12 May 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Mental Health in Schools: The Hidden Crisis
  - Auburn, AL
  - 13 May 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Mental Health in Schools: The Hidden Crisis
  - Birmingham, AL
  - 14 May 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Mental Health in Schools: The Hidden Crisis
  - Huntsville, AL
  - 15 May 2019
- Lunch & Learn
  - Understanding Dyslexia: Signs and Treatment Webinar
  - 4 April 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Poverty: The Effects on Student Engagement
  - Mobile, AL
  - 16 April 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Poverty: The Effects on Student Engagement
  - Prattville, AL
  - 17 April 2019
- Leadership Institute
  - Poverty: The Effects on Student Engagement
  - Huntsville, AL
  - 16 April 2019
- Lunch & Learn
  - Solutions for Summer Learning Loss Webinar
  - 7 May 2019
- CLAS Annual Summer Convention
  - Montgomery, AL
  - 9-12 June 2019
Hello, Alabama curriculum leaders!! I am humbled and thrilled to share updates from the Alabama State Department of Education’s (ALSDE) Office of Student Learning. Our office has been extremely busy revising the mathematics, health, and PE courses of study in Instructional Services; planning for systematic dyslexia support and other summer learning opportunities in ARI; planning for professional learning on the proposed mathematics course of study with A+ College Ready; and preparing for MEGA Conference, providing technical assistance, and monitoring state and federal plans in Federal Programs and Special Education Services. In addition to this, we are also working collaboratively with other ALSDE sections such as Assessment, Accountability, CTE, and Education Technology to continuously align our work to more effectively support LEAs.

As a longtime member of AASCD, I am honored to not only serve as the ALSDE Representative on the AASCD Board but also to have opportunities to collaborate and partner to support curriculum leaders throughout Alabama. The ALSDE Division of Instruction is excited to have the opportunity to co-host an upcoming Curriculum Boot Camp with AASCD and CLAS on February 19, 2019, at the Shelby County Instructional Services Center in Alabaster, Alabama, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Through collaborative efforts, we are planning a day filled with learning opportunities for curriculum leaders to not only learn more about current Alabama curriculum initiatives but also facilitate a time to hear from AASCD Board Members who can expand on practical applications in their LEAs. There will be 6 session options including the following:

1) The Nuts and Bolts of the Alabama Administrative Code (AAC);

2) The Alabama Reading Initiative Restored to Fidelity: What Does that Mean?;

3) The Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP): Updates and Future Implications;

4) Career and Technical Education (CTE): How Does it Align with Other Instructional Options?;

5) The Proposed Mathematics, Health, and Physical Education Courses of Study: How Do LEAs Prepare for the Transition?; and

6) STEM or STEAM: What Does Impactful Classroom Instruction Look Like?

To allow everyone to have an opportunity to attend the session(s) of his or her choice, all sessions will be repeated during each session timeslot. The schedule begins with registration from 8:30 – 9:00, followed by Session #1 from 9:00 – 10:30, Session #2 from 10:45 – 12:15, lunch from 12:15 – 1:00 onsite, and Session #3 from 1:00 – 2:30. Our goal is to allow for time during the sessions to not only provide information/updates but also allow for time to dive “deep” into the content, to participate in meaningful discussion with colleagues from across the state, and to leave with resources and plans to prepare school leaders and teachers with information needed for implementation. AASCD Board Members will be co-facilitating the sessions with ALSDE staff, so please join us for a day that will be beneficial, informational, collaborative, and fun. Registration information for this event can be found on the following link:


The cost is $25.00 per person or $20.00 a person for a team of 5 or more, which includes lunch onsite.

Contact Demica Sanders at demica@clasleaders.org to obtain a discount code to be utilized on the registration event link for teams of 5 or more. We hope you can join AASCD, ALSDE, and CLAS for this collaborative learning opportunity!
In one of my favorite movies, Morgan Freeman portrays Joe Clark, a principal who is willing to do almost anything to help make his school safe and create an environment conducive to learning for all students. Joe Clark is placed in the school because of its declining test scores which has resulted in East Side High becoming the lowest ranked school in the state. Unfortunately, before Mr. Clark can focus on the school’s academic problems, he must focus on gang and narcotics problems as well as teacher apathy. Even though Mr. Clark set high expectations for everyone in the school, in the beginning he alienated and ridiculed his faculty and staff. In the end, he was able to turn the school around, but it almost did not happen because of his dictatorial leadership style and the way it all began!

Getting off on the right foot isn’t just important with relationships; within the educational arena it is important with the start of all professional learning experiences. We should engage in professional learning experiences with purpose and intent. Research indicates that professional learning is most effective when educators have the option to personalize the experience and communicate meaningfully with other educators who share their focus.

This holds true not only for traditional forms of professional learning—seminars, workshops, conferences, and so on, but also for forms that include face to face or online professional learning, coaching, data team meeting and other professional learning that does not take place in a conference format. The effectiveness of any professional learning activity, regardless of its content, structure, or format depends mainly on a leader’s approach during the development.

Leadership of and for learning is recognized as an essential factor to ensure professional learning is well planned, supported, promoted and sustained. It is the role of CLAS to ensure that our professional learning opportunities do just that! Our professional learning department, under the direction of the Executive Director, has a goal to ensure the professional learning that you participate in is not only impactful for you, but has the ultimate impact on those who you lead and teach. If you don’t leave a professional learning event with new tools and resources to use when you return to your perspective locations, then we have not done our job!
Recently, a colleague shared a meme with me entitled “The 16 Types of Teachers You Can Spot at Every Faculty Meeting”. We had a good laugh picking ourselves out of the self-deprecating list! She was the “timely teacher” who goes nuts if the meeting goes off track. I self-identified as the “joyful teacher” who sits on the front row and is way too excited to be there. Of course, there were many other types who were not very happy to be in the meeting and very disengaged.

I have often wondered about engagement levels in my own professional learning sessions as I read body-language around the room. I desperately want to meet the needs of every learner, knowing it is a nearly impossible task.

Sounds familiar, right? Teachers face the same dilemma every day as they strive to meet the diverse needs of 20-30 students. We call it differentiation and expect to see it in the classroom. But do we expect to see it in professional learning structures within our districts?

Sheffield City decided to tackle the differentiation of professional learning monster this year by instituting a PLC model which allowed teachers to choose from a menu of learning topics driven by our Advanc-ED review and data needs. All PLC sessions were held after school during the first semester and totaled 7.5 hours worth of face to face time.

Who led the sessions? Teacher leaders from our system led the majority of the PLCs. Google form applications were sent out system wide to solicit PLC topics and leaders in alignment with system goals. From these applications, we selected 10 sessions to present as differentiated topics from which teachers could choose to register. The teachers facilitating the PLCs were required to attend a “flipped PD” (via google classroom) to help equip and enhance their PLC facilitation skills.

The results...over 80% of our teachers participated in a PLC of their own choosing. The ones who did not participate were provided a full day of professional learning on an alternate inservice day. 91% of our participants rated their experience as positive or very positive.

Here are some quotes from our reflection survey of participants:

“*I liked the honest, real discussions we had in a small group setting.*”

“*I appreciated the fact that my PLC felt like a family and I was comfortable in talking about my concerns and sharing how I was feeling.*”

“The ‘why’ behind what we do with assessments.”

Our goal was to differentiate learning for our teachers. But we inadvertently achieved a few other thingstoo. We identified and groomed teacher leaders with our PLC facilitators. We built relationships between our buildings. And most importantly, gave teachers voice. I recently learned at ASCD’s Winter Conference that the majority of teachers feel they have no voice in their school. Hopefully efforts such as differentiating professional learning will restore their beautiful voices.

One last thing, I must give credit to my friends in Muscle Shoals City Schools. Thanks for sharing your knowledge, friends!
I often hear school employees speak about the lack of communication within their school district or how feedback from their peers can change the entire culture of a school. Mostly everyone would agree that communication is important and can determine the success or failure of a relationship or school. However, communication is one of the main ingredients that is often overlooked, especially during coaching and mentoring cycles. Good communication does not come naturally in any organization, whether it be at work or with family. Much time and effort is spent trying to get it right, but many times we fall short of the mark of clearly and effectively communicating our intentions to the people around us.

Communicating in a busy world is important. It is becoming more important in the diverse society we live and work in each day. We no longer can use a cookie cutter approach when communicating with our peers. Knowing what we believe about the people with which we work each day, especially in coaching relationships, can help us more effectively communicate with them. I was honored to attend AASCD’s Winter Conference which featured Ann Hoffman from Jim Knight’s coaching group. She shared an overview of the book Better Conversations by Jim Knight, which takes a deep dive into six beliefs about others and how they influence our communication.

Belief 1 is “I see others as equal partners.” In a coaching relationship, it can be detrimental to communication if one person sets themselves up to be the ultimate giver of knowledge without acknowledging the value of the other person. The communication can become very one-directional and advice oriented which tends to shut down the other person. Having expertise in a content area is great, but coaches become much more valuable when they have expertise in listening and treating others with respect.

Belief 2 is “I want to hear what others have to say.” Think about the last conversation you had with someone. What percent of the time did you spend talking versus listening? In a coaching conversation, the majority of the time needs to be listening. It is also very hard to shut down the voices in our head or the many distractions around us that may prevent us from being fully present with the person to which we should be listening. Avoid looking at your phone, watch, or other gadgets so your partner knows they have your full attention.

Belief 3 is “I believe people should have a lot of autonomy.” No one likes to be controlled. In a coaching relationship, the goal is not to control someone else. The goal is to open up new possibilities and new ways of thinking. The way a coach poses a question or provides choices can increase autonomy within a relationship. We diminish autonomy when we force our ideas upon people instead of prompting them to think of new ideas on their own.

Belief 4 is “I don’t judge others.” When we begin a conversation with pre-decided judgments of another person, communication will be hindered. Making a conscientious effort to listen without assumptions or pre-judgments is a great place to begin a coaching conversation.

Belief 5 is “Conversations should be back and forth.” Having better dialogue and communication with people we coach involves more than top down directives. Our conversations must be mostly free of closed-ended questions or manipulative questions that lead to a pre-determined answer for which we are looking. We must be willing to see solutions from another perspective and truly hear what our partners are saying.

Belief 6 is “Conversation should be life-giving.” Good communication is the lifeline in any organization. Many times our conversations can be encouraging or detrimental to the person or group we are speaking. All conversations should be life-
giving and increase the energy to our audience and allow them to have a better understanding of the things that are important. As leaders and coaches, we are required to engage in tough conversations, but we can use these opportunities and make sure we both leave the conversation feeling encouraged and hopeful.

Being an effective communicator is important in building relationships and improving school culture. Great communication gives organizations the competitive edge in a world jammed full of many words that hold little meaning. If we truly hold to the six beliefs put forth by Jim Knight in his book, our actions will flow from them. The results we reap from better conversations will be higher levels of trust, new ideas emerging from unexpected places, and overall better morale in our organizations. If we truly want to change the world, it is imperative that we are effective in how we communicate with each other.

What interventions can we create to harness the powerful capacity of collective efficacy?

The Research

Rachel Eells’s (2011) meta-analysis of studies related to collective efficacy and achievement in education demonstrated that the beliefs teachers hold about the ability of the school as a whole are “strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations” (p. 110). On the basis of Eells’s research, John Hattie positioned collective efficacy at the top of a list of factors that influence student achievement (Hattie, 2016). According to his Visible Learning research, based on a synthesis of more than 1,500 meta-analyses, collective teacher efficacy is greater than three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than socioeconomic status, home environment or parent involvement.¹

Citing Dr. Eells’s own dissertation we read this: “Having a faculty that believes that it can accomplish great things is vital for the health of a school. Because of the dynamic nature of school functioning, wherein school achievement acts as both antecedent and consequence of collective teacher efficacy, interventions designed to improve the efficacy beliefs of teachers and a faculty as a whole can be a starting point for positive change within the school system.”

A question that begs to be asked when reading this powerful and profound finding, is “What interventions can we create to harness the powerful capacity of collective efficacy?” Over the last seven years, we have been working with teams of teachers, primarily in Texas, but also in Rochester, New York, to begin to answer that question. Beginning with small steps, we first had to determine if we could create personal efficacy for teachers who aren’t completely sure that they really can and do make a difference in student achievement. The teacher often measures her self-efficacy by end of year test scores or teacher observations, not the growth of individuals or classes of students as they improve day to day or week to week. Teachers have lost confidence in their own measurements that convince them that they have the skills and knowledge to change student achievement. Could we create a professional learning project that would spawn interventions that would lead to teacher self efficacy? If so, would these teachers share their experience with others outside of the cohort to begin to create a sense of collective efficacy through
What interventions can we create to harness the powerful capacity of collective efficacy?

social persuasion?

If seeing is believing, first we would have to change the experience from one of seeing failure to seeing success. What practices or interventions would be most likely to get higher success rates for students? Looking at more research, we knew that one way would be to engage teachers with rigorous learning of their own--learning the science of learning itself. We would also want to start with some small step--like looking at the learning curve and the forgetting curve and figuring out how to apply it to a common problem of practice. We picked teaching academic vocabulary. We also knew that they would have to collect their own data to measure growth, not grades, and then share their results.

We created a toolbox based on the research on durable, flexible, and sustainable learning. The toolbox would be a set of Principles of Practice, or POPs as we would come to call them. We also had to find a willing researcher who would conduct case studies with teachers in our learning cohorts. We found that person in Dr. Jennifer Jones, of UT Tyler in Texas. First, we exposed our teachers to research based practices in an experiential environment. We gave them time to design a job embedded project to measure the results of applying their own learning.

In the end, Dr. Jones reported that her study of the effects of training and implementation of the POPs with over 4,000 students resulted in an average of over a 10% improvement on multiple measures with 95% of teachers submitting evidence of increased student learning. Teachers in the cohort also reported sharing the results of using POPs with other teachers and seeing those teachers apply the best practices as well. As teachers measured the impact on student achievement as they made small changes, they started reporting out the results in PLC or grade level meetings. More teachers invested in the POPs interventions. Dr. Jones has convinced us that we should continue to explore how an Investment in building collective efficacy through the application of POPs as interventions and measuring growth could be an effective model for school improvement.

## AASCD Board of Directors

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