

An Efficient and Effective Model for School Wide Improvement

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The Challenge

If you are (or know) a homeowner, you have probably heard some version of the observation/warning that home improvement will take a third more time and money than estimated. That is a difficult “reality” to accept, especially when time and money are precious resources. Imagine if, instead of a third *more* time, the improvement was accomplished in a third *less* time, and that, as part of the work, selected family members were trained to complete future improvements, so there would be less need for the contractor.

Now, imagine a school, with fixed (or diminishing) resources and time that is taxed by a variety of internal and external requirements, activities and expectations. Add to this a principal with a vision and a sense of urgency that establishes a three-year timeframe for school wide change.

This is the story of such a school, and of a professional development model that achieved the three-year goal for school wide change in two years’ time, and developed the capacity of four coaches to help meet future school needs related to that goal.

The Beginning

In the first year, I facilitated components of LCI’s Quality Curriculum Design process with two, small focus groups of teachers and a third group of those whose roles in the school included supporting teachers. We reviewed different assessment moments and types of assessment, examined issues of relevance and meaningfulness, sketched standards-based checklists and rubrics, and delved into reflection. The work was well received, but the small groups limited its effect on the school as a whole, even with participants’ willingness to share what they were learning and thinking about.

The Acceleration Model

In September of 2009, the beginning of LCI’s second year working with PS 85, my planning meetings and email exchanges with the principal and lead curriculum coach resulted in a radical shift - the conceptualization of a whole-school approach to professional development in quality curriculum design - one that, in the next year, would both accelerate the work and develop the capacity of the school to continue the work, independent of direct LCI facilitation.

In this second year, instead of a professional development program that relied on the LCI consultant to design and lead sessions, the model that was implemented in PS 85 focused on developing capacity, and revolved around a training of trainers model, with the school’s five coaches as program co-designers and facilitator trainees. The content was “Quality Curriculum Design,” and sessions were created to address components of quality curriculum that connected to priority needs of the school as determined by a **baseline assessment** (see page 4) designed, administered and evaluated by the coaches and the principal with the support of LCI.

The idea was to use the LCI curriculum design model in two ways, to both design and deliver professional development. Design sessions with the coaches resulted in the creation of a professional development unit in Quality Curriculum Design for adult learners, customized to the specific strengths and needs of PS 85's teaching staff and informed by the learning needs of its students. This professional development unit included the same components as the classroom units that it would lead teachers in developing and provided the twofold benefit of being both a parallel design experience for those who would lead and support the work in the school, as well as a concrete, adult "curriculum" that could be replicated with new staff members in the future. The responsibility for delivering the professional development was shared by LCI and PS 85's coach-facilitators.

The Process

LCI's direct support for this program incorporated the training and mentoring of school coaches as both curriculum designers and facilitators of the process through a combination of direct instruction, modeling, shadowing, debriefing and feedback. LCI days included the guided design of the professional development unit itself as well as its facilitation with a group of 18-24 teachers, assistant principals and support staff. The workshops that were directly facilitated by LCI served a dual purpose, functioning both as professional development for participants and as models of facilitation process and content for trainers.

A typical LCI schedule at PS 85 during the 2008-2009 school year:

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| 8:00 | meet with principal and coaches to review input (session's content and process) and respond to questions or design suggestions |
| 9:00 | Joanne models input session with; coaches participate as learners, strategic observers and table moderators as needed. |
| 12:00 | debrief input session with coaches - respond to questions, revise/redesign segments to fit their participants' needs (see page 6). |
| 1:00 | define and support role of coaches in supporting the quality curriculum design professional development through opportunities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shadowing • co-facilitation • troubleshooting specific issues or concerns • modeling feedback to teachers (written and conferences). |
| 2:30 | debriefing with principal and lead coach |

While one group did receive direct LCI facilitation of the Quality Curriculum Design content, the key to this approach lay in the fact that the focus of any given LCI consulting day was the support of the coaches - preparing, debriefing and troubleshooting the content and processes of the input sessions. It was this level of support that allowed the coaches to successfully facilitate the work with the rest of the school.



The Results

At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, the coach-facilitators and I were able to co-facilitate a design week (see page 8) in which nearly the entire teaching staff participated, and which all were equally well-prepared for, no matter who they had worked with during the year. Each participant produced the draft of a classroom unit and committed to implementing it the following year.

“Quality Curriculum” was not yet an automatic or easy school-wide practice, but it was a school wide language and a school wide shared learning experience whose learning resonated long after the last session was complete. Simultaneously, PS 85 had developed its own cadre of trained facilitators who could continue to support the process.

Using the LCI facilitator training model had compressed what was originally thought of as three years of goals into two years of work, and added the development of the school’s capacity to continue to lead its own work in the area of Quality Curriculum Design.

Year Three and Beyond

In light of the two year completion of his three-year plan, Ted Husted reconsidered what could be achieved in 2009-2010. Revisions of the goals for year three added direct LCI work with the school administrators aimed at enabling them to support the quality curriculum focus from a supervisory role. In addition, a school wide focus on engagement (see pages 9-15) provided an additional layer of rigor to the work that had been designed.

Support for on the coach-facilitators as they stepped into their role as leaders of the development of Quality Curriculum also continued, providing them with opportunities for debriefing facilitation experiences, analyzing teacher and student work and engaging in trouble shooting questions. LCI consultant time was made available to PS 85 teachers through one-to-one conferences, scheduled during an hour of each LCI day.

In 2009-2010, the Quality Curriculum Design professional development work was not as regularly scheduled as it had been the year before, allowing the faculty time and space to implement what had been designed the previous summer, as well as to incorporate aspects of what they had learned into other units and lessons that they taught during the year.

In the spring of 2010, coaches engaged in another LCI professional development experience of their own, analyzing and assessing existing social studies units and receiving feedback as they structured a summer week for “Quality Curriculum Design in Social Studies” (see page 16) which they facilitated, on their own, in August, 2010.

With this successfully facilitated experience, PS 85 demonstrated its capacity to promote its own continued growth and development, without the need for further outside professional development support in the area of Quality Curriculum Design.

