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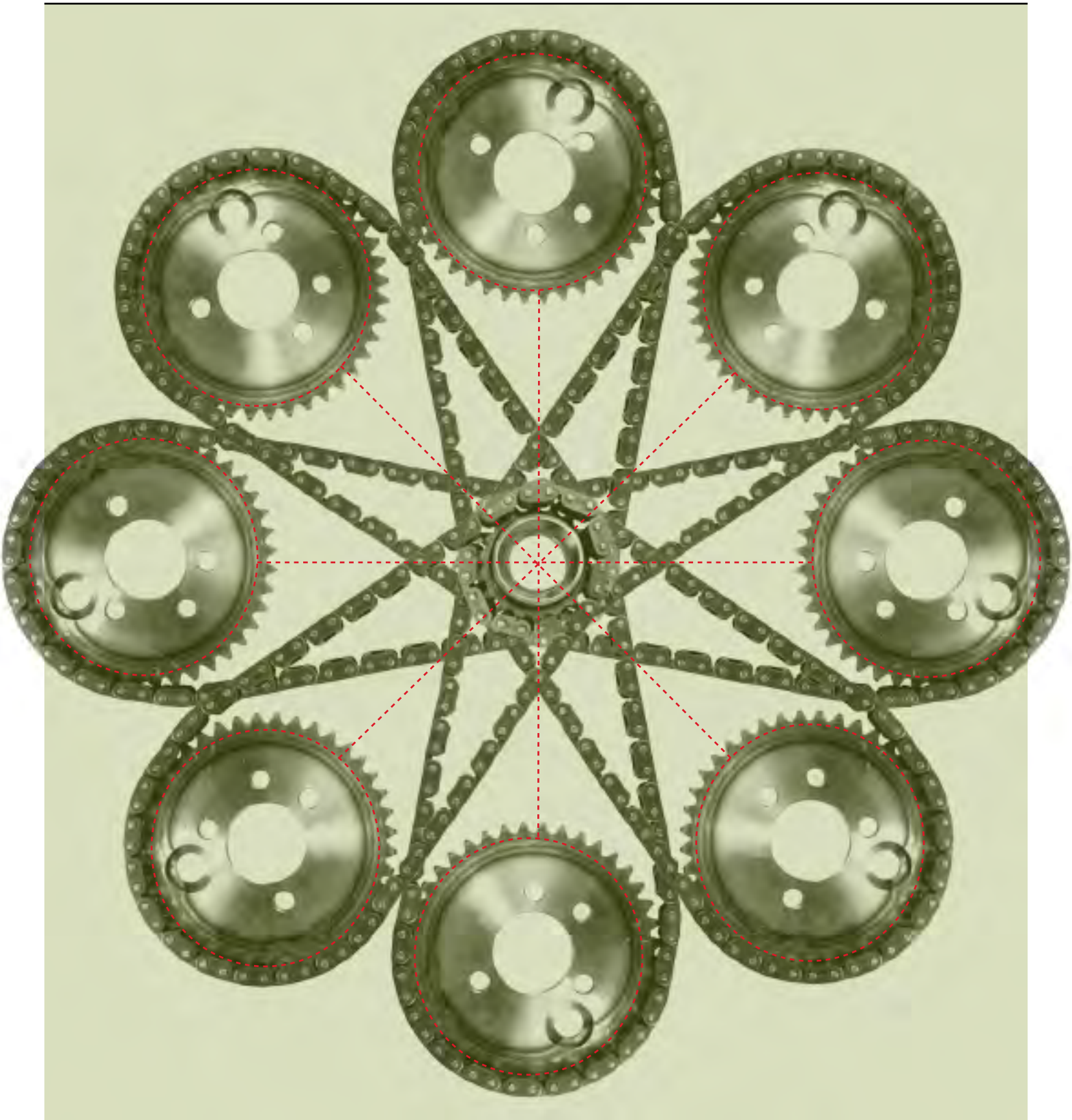

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# Growing Teacher Leaders for the Classroom

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How do we grow teacher leaders? In what ways can we increase the capacity of teachers to lead from within the classroom? These questions are foundational if we truly wish to leave no child behind. It is the teacher through whom all efforts expended on education, from the district to the building level, filter to the child. How can we provide an environment that is conducive to teacher growth and that encourages them to use their leadership skills in the classroom, rather than leave the classroom to accept leadership opportunities elsewhere?

For the past two years, Tami Matsumoto and I have formed a team I have been part of a team that has worked closely with teachers to provide professional development in math and technology through a Title II grant called NO LIMIT. While leaders of the grant provided some leadership strategies for professional growth for teachers in Paterson, WA, there were qualities of leadership that already existed in the school to create an inviting environment for teachers to reflect, study, and risk growth. This article will mine the qualities of leadership in the environment at Paterson School that cultivated the potential for the personal and professional growth of the teachers toward becoming classroom leaders. M. Fullan's book, *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001) helped to organize the data and my thoughts.

Fullan (2001) identified five qualities of leaders that are essential for the complex world in which we work. These qualities are equally important for administrators in education and for teachers who lead from the classroom. Leaders should lead:

1. from a "moral purpose" or a passion about one's purpose for work;
2. by understanding the change process thoroughly;
3. by emphasizing the key role of constant learning;
4. by building relationships within the organization;
5. by making coherence from confusion.

I will show how the administrative and teacher leaders in Paterson School District exemplified these qualities as they developed into a community of learners.

## Moral Purpose: Administrator

Peggy Douglas, the Superintendent/Principal of Paterson School District, loves her job and the students and teachers she works with. She has worked for Paterson for 13 years: as the part-time business manager for nine years and as the Superintendent/Principal since 2001.

In the application for the NO LIMIT Grant she describes the school district.

> The Paterson School District serves a small, rural, unincorporated community located on the banks of the Columbia River in south-central Washington. The economy of the area is determined by the health of the local agricultural industry—unstable at best. Many of our families must travel at least 30 miles to the nearest city to take advantage of recreational and shopping activities. Time and money prohibit this for most. Because of the isolation of our community, and the socio-economic situation that many of our families struggle with on a daily basis, the district has had to find creative ways to provide educational and enriching opportunities for our children.

Peggy believes that many of her students need early childhood education; some of them need extra time in class during the school year; and others need extra time in class during the summer. To provide these opportunities for the students, she has written and received grants that supplement

district funds. Paterson School District now has a pre-school within the newly renovated school building. This year Paterson offered one additional day of kindergarten for students whom the teacher identified as needing extra class time. The district provides summer school in August, rather than June, to give students a jump start before the new school year begins.

Peggy has also written and received grants to improve the curriculum for students in both reading and math over the last three years. Her commitment to the students leads her to provide an environment in which the teachers are supported to do their jobs well and to embrace their own learning on a continuous basis.

## Moral Purpose: Teachers

Though an isolated community, Paterson is widely recognized in the region for educating and caring for its students, as indicated by a waiting list of students who wish to transfer to the K-8 school. All the teachers must drive at least 25 miles from their home to school. They also bring their own children with them to attend Paterson School; and some teachers bring children other than their own.

The teachers' sense of passion and purpose is expressed individually and collectively, as evidenced in this example. The school was invited to tell the story of work with the NO LIMIT Grant at the Washington State Superintendent's January 2005 Conference in Seattle—a 200 mile drive one way from Paterson. A team comprising all but one teacher traveled to make the presentation, while Peggy and the remaining teacher, along with a group of substitute teachers, made sure there was continuity in classroom instruction. I noted that one of the teachers drove alone to Seattle for the hour-long presentation so he could drove directly back to cover his after school activities. To me, it was apparent that the teachers took seriously their responsibility both for professional sharing at the conference and to their work in their classrooms.

## Understand the Change Process: Administrator and Grant Leaders

The NO LIMIT grant nurtured the development of a learning community among the teachers, and learning about change was one focus of that community, particularly as it pertained to curriculum adoption. Paterson School District had recently adopted standards-based instructional materials in mathematics for all grades. The teachers needed outside support to work with the new materials together. Peggy recognized that the new materials meant changing teaching pedagogy and beliefs and she provided time, money through the grant and from district funds, and creative scheduling for the teachers to do this work as a community.

As math leaders we were also aware that changes would need to happen because the new instructional materials were based on national and state standards in mathematics that were new to the teachers. We were aware that change happens on three dimensions: 1. the possible use of new materials; 2. the possible use of new teaching approaches; 3. the possible alteration of beliefs based upon shared meaning (Fullan, 1991, p. 37). The first dimension changes only the materials or schedule or classroom routine without understanding the change in terms of new teaching approaches or the basic beliefs underlying the change. Such change is often superficial or faddish (p. 4). While the three dimensions of change are interrelated, it is when new meaning is given by the teachers to their pedagogical assumptions, i.e. when change happens at the second dimension, that a change is more likely to be continued. To press further, when the innovation alters the teacher's beliefs and understanding about education, change has the greatest chance of being continued (Anderson, 1992). We were looking for changes in the teachers' pedagogy and in their beliefs about mathematics.

Leaders who truly understand change have the tools with which to provide an environment for teachers to grow. Peggy knew that it would pay dividends to provide her teachers with time and opportunity to make the changes that are necessary, especially with new curriculum.

## Understand the Change Process: Teachers

While administrators may need to be reminded that change takes time, teachers know it deeply. Often they are not given the time they need to make the changes others require of them.

During the initial math meetings we held with the teachers in the fall of 2003, they raised several concerns. They talked about:

- Wanting to see lessons modeled for them, using pedagogy inherent in the new materials

- Knowing that it would take a considerable amount of time to learn to teach from the materials
- Recognizing that, while they were adapting to the materials, they were barely keeping ahead of their students
- Being aware that some strategies and ideas embedded in the materials did not mesh with their existing belief systems,
- Being aware also that there was a conflict between these strategies and ideas, and some of their established ways of teaching.

As the teachers at Paterson struggled with all of these issues inherent in learning to teach the new instructional materials, they recorded goals for their transition. One teacher wrote that she wanted to "use more partner and whole group sharing" and help her students, "effectively and confidently share strategies with me and the class." Another wrote that she aimed to "allow time for better summary—more meaningful summary."

Because making real change is such a slow and difficult process, evidence of progress was clear and often startling. The growth we saw in these teachers stood out like shining gems. One such gem is the way in which we began a modified lesson study, described in the next session.

Leadership in a classroom may look different from administrative leadership, but as teachers began to group their students for peer discussions, as they began to ask open-ended questions and expect students to listen to each other's responses, as they practice "think time"—teachers were leading their students toward new ways of learning. Teachers do this best once they embrace the advantages such strategies provide to learners. One teacher wrote as a goal for the 2004-2005 academic year, I intend to, "not interrupt student thinking" and "journal everyday after math to assess myself." The teachers accepted the challenge to make the changes inherent in new teaching materials.

## Knowledge Building: Administrator

Fullan writes that leaders need to create new settings conducive to learning and build each other's knowledge about the craft of teaching. When we learn from each other, the information we share becomes useful in a specific, social context and it becomes possible to make contextual change that is conducive to learning and sharing our knowledge (Fullan, 2001, p. 92).

Both the reading and the math grants at Paterson offer professional development for the teachers, particularly regular, weekly time for learning together during early release days. During the first year of the grant, teachers met once a month to study mathematics. During the second year of the grant they met during early release days twice a month to work on reading and twice a month to work on math. In addition to early release days, the administration provides time for the teachers to learn together during school hours. Peggy hired teacher aides, who have emergency teaching certificates, for all classrooms. The aides have also been given opportunities to learn. For example, the district paid for them to attend a full week of math training during the summer of 2004. Therefore, when teachers need to be gone for professional activities, student work continues under the direction of the teacher aides.

Because Peggy attended the cluster meetings and the classroom visits, she saw the students and teachers use the document camera, which had been purchased by the three NO LIMIT teachers through grant funds. She was so impressed by seeing students share their thinking about mathematics with their classmates, that she purchased a document camera for the other two classrooms in the building from district funds. Her intention is to provide the best available tools for teaching and learning to all her staff.

The NO LIMIT grant was awarded to three of the five K-8 teachers at Paterson. After we met several times, Peggy asked if we could invite the other two teachers to our meetings so the staff could work as a group on mathematics. This was an insightful request that led to the powerful learning community they formed. During the 2005-2006 academic year, Peggy's plan is to form a learning community for the teacher aides as well, and thus build capacity within her school district.

## Knowledge Building: Teachers

As we gradually came to understand, not all of the teachers liked the new standards-based math materials. Also, not all of them were teaching exclusively from the new materials. Our early cluster meeting discussions often included topics such as the need for students to learn basic math facts and how to get students to ask their own questions about math and to listen to each other. Often during our meetings issues were raised related to "how we were taught math" and how the teachers are now expected to teach math. These monthly meetings were invaluable to

allow the teachers' time to speak and listen concerning their deeply held beliefs about teaching and learning math.

These issues surfaced in unplanned fashion as we did and discussed mathematical activities. When we began with these teachers, we offered them several, different opportunities for activities around professional development, and we showed them the TIMMS video of the Japanese classroom. We offered lesson study as one option, but we knew that trust needs to be built for lesson study to be successful and building trust usually takes time. We were also aware that "lesson study must meet the needs of the teachers. . . once it is started, they must find it relevant and useful to the problems they face each day in the classroom." (Stigler & Hiebert, p. 151). To our surprise, the teacher leaders at Paterson quickly embraced the use of a modified lesson study that eventually included their entire faculty. It happened in the following way.

At one of the first fall cluster meetings in 2003, Monica, the new 7-8th grade teacher, shared concern that her students did not understand positive and negative numbers when they needed to use them for their science lessons. After much discussion about when and how positive and negative numbers are introduced in elementary school before the students reach seventh grade, the group decided they would like to look at a lesson on positive and negative numbers together. After the teachers thought about the mathematics that students need to know to understand the concept, Monica offered to teach a lesson to her class so we could observe the class for student understanding of the concept of negative and positive numbers.

Building on this experience, the teachers chose the topic for the next series of cluster meetings: to work on the mathematics of the lesson together and then plan each step of a lesson for the 7-8th graders. During the lesson planning time, we predicted possible areas of student misunderstanding and suggested ways to build understanding for different learners in the class. We had rich discussions about phrasing a question to be sure we knew if the students understood the concept. The questions that survived this discussion were included in the lesson plan.

Next we worked with a different lesson for Bob's class and then for Kerry's class. By early winter we decided we would like to include the 1-2nd grade class and the kindergarten class in our classroom visits. Therefore, we invited both teachers to join our math meetings.

One of the benefits of observing in different grade levels is that it gives teachers a close up view of what the younger students don't know and are learning in the previous grades. All of the teachers were astonished to realize just how important this knowledge was for them. It gave them more appreciation for the work that each other does. The Paterson teachers felt lesson study is much richer for them as they move from grade to grade.

After they completed their experience with lesson study during the first year of the grant, they decided to select one math strand on which to focus all community lessons during the next year of the grant. They wanted to see how one strand developed from kindergarten through 8th grade. They chose geometric sense because the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores were low in that area and because they often do not teach that material until the very end of the year.

When teachers take charge of building their own knowledge they demonstrate leadership skills. These teachers were offered many ways in which they could learn together such as book study, case study, a study of the Washington State Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). It is remarkable that they were drawn so quickly to such a risk-taking venture as lesson study. Although some of these teachers were hesitant at first, all were drawn to the benefits of opening their classroom to each other. After each lesson, we held a discussion about the student learning that we observed. Through this process, we attained a cross-school view of learning.

*"Change in instructional practice involves working through problems of practice with peers and experts, observation of practice, and steady accumulation over time of new practices anchored in one's own classroom setting"* (Fullan, 2001, p. 97). As the teachers planned lessons together, watched each other teach, focused on student understanding of the math of the lesson, and discussed the lesson after it was taught, they were increasing their own understanding about mathematics and how students learn math. During the process of building their own knowledge, they were also increasing their own self-confidence and thus, their willingness to accept leadership to further their own professional growth.

## Build Relationships: Administrator

Fullan believes it is not only the people that make an organization great—it is also the relationships among these people. Because most of the teachers' own children

attend school in Paterson, the teachers and their families have become a part of the culture of the school.

I believe it is evident that relationships are important to Peggy's work with children and teachers. Decision-making is collegial and completed as a team. Her leadership style is hands-on and inclusive. She attends math and reading meetings with her teachers and, in that way, she is available to help make decisions as suggestions and needs arise. She did this effectively during the discussion at one of the meetings about the math skills of the teacher aides. The teachers were making suggestions for ways in which their aides could be included in the monthly math meetings. After listening to their ideas, Peggy agreed to work on a way in which the aides can meet together next year around the instructional materials in math.

## Build Relationships: Teachers

Teacher relationships were forged as we worked together to turn information from the new math materials into knowledge and understanding about mathematics and pedagogy. Then the relationships were enriched and teachers began learning even more from each other during the lesson study and classroom visits. Their relationships have also grown stronger because of the regular meetings and the open discussions they have promoted. Absences at meetings were rare and unavoidable when they happened. Regular attendance gave credibility to the group and made it an interdependent community of learners. To cite one indicator of interdependence and trust: when setting their yearly goals for the grant, the teachers name each other as resources they can turn to.

## Making Coherence: Administrator and Teachers

The fifth quality necessary for a leader during complex times is to make coherence out of uncertainty and confusion. Educators have any number of tugs for their focus and time, and they must reconcile diverse interests across groups. Coherence must support moral purpose because there are too many "goods" in our complex society to do them all. Peggy chose to focus the efforts at Paterson on reading and mathematics, bringing in grants that complement each other. For example, the adopted math series relies heavily on reading to understand the problems the students are asked to solve.

Coherence efforts for the Paterson community means interweaving different initiatives. Recently Paterson received a grant from migrant education. Peggy and the teachers thought it was important to introduce the leaders of the migrant education grant to the work of the NO LIMIT Grant. To accomplish this, Peggy invited them to attend a lesson study observation in the first grade classroom. They observed the students with us and took part in the reflection session with all the teachers after the lesson. During the reflection session they were able to give us insight into ways that we could have planned the lesson to include elements that help second language learners learn English. They added a perspective to the discussion that was important. By inviting them to this event, Peggy and the teachers brought about coherence between the math grant, which has a history in the school, and the beginning of a new venture. The leaders of the migrant education grant saw what is already being done with students in Paterson and will be able to build their support for migrant students at Paterson from that experience.

Towards the end of the year, because we were aware that the grant was ending, the teachers were especially clear that they wanted to continue meeting next year. We also discussed the features of lesson study that we had used over the past two years, particularly those that we needed to learn from in order to become better in the future. To season this planning process, two teachers volunteered to attend a two-day workshop on professional learning communities, and brought back to the group several ideas they want to use next year in their work together. I have every confidence that they will continue meeting as a learning community around mathematics. In fact, they have requested central office services on a more limited basis for the next year.

In summary, leadership at the district level, from the superintendent/principal and the lead teacher, was supported by the opportunity to grow teacher leaders provided by the math/technology grant. The administrative leaders, teacher leaders, and grant leaders worked side-by-side. The uniting force, however, derived from the qualities of leadership that were present in the school: strong moral leadership, the realization of the complexities of change, provision of time for knowledge making, strong relationships, and coherence making. I am indebted to Michael Fullan's *Leading in a Culture of Change* for providing the framework through which to analyze and appreciate the leadership we intuitively knew existed at Paterson School.

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