

**The Heart of the Matter:
Professional Development in
New York Community
School District #2**

Kate Maloy

University of Pittsburgh

November, 1998

This text was prepared under the sponsorship of the High Performance Learning Communities Project at the Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, under research contract #RC-96-137002 with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education. It is the text accompanying the video [part of deliverable # 0004(4.6.a)].

**THE HEART OF THE MATTER:
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEW YORK
COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #2**

(NOTE: The following text and a videotape called *Building a Learning Community: Professional Development* comprise the second in a series of five video-and-text packages on the unfolding story of district-wide education reform. The first video in the series is a broad portrait of a district undergoing deep, systematic change; the accompanying text elaborates on the ideas and strategies behind the reform process. The packages are meant to be studied in sequence; thus, many ideas referred to here are spelled out more fully in the earlier set.)

WHAT IS A TEACHER?

“What’s wrong with American education, and in some ways its dirty little secret, is that we don’t know about teaching and learning. It’s as if a law firm said, ‘We don’t know about the law.’” —Anthony Alvarado, District #2 Superintendent (1987-1998)

Alvarado’s statement has shock value, but it is not so surprising in light of certain stereotypes that suggest teaching has always been something of a poor relation among the professions. Remember the saying, *Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach?* Remember the prim “schoolmarm” of a century ago, portrayed in films and fiction as poor relations themselves, driven by loss or poverty into earning a living that few men would undertake?

Teaching Then

For generations, popular opinion saw primary school teaching as little more than an extension of nannying or mothering. Teaching offered few real challenges until later grades or university. It wasn’t difficult to learn the three Rs. Knowledge could be passed from teacher to student as if from a full vessel into an empty one. Learning was mainly a passive, imitative process, so how much skill could it take to teach a classroom full of first- or third- or even sixth-graders?

This thinking kept education’s “dirty little secret” very well. When a challenging task is widely thought to be simple, those who do it seldom have the chance to learn how to do it well. When they confront its everyday realities, they wonder why it is so hard, what they are doing wrong. Their difficulties are deepened by the misperceptions of others, especially those who influence the resources, policies and expectations related to the task. And when they are isolated from colleagues, as teachers traditionally have been, they will not even have peers with whom to commiserate or take action.

Teaching Now

“You need to know your students; you need to know their background; you need to know what they’re coming in with; you need to know their dislikes and likes; you need to know their abilities; and you need to know your expectations for your students.” —District #2 Teacher

Teaching has come a long way since the stereotypes were in force; it still has a long way to go. To meet current demands, a teacher needs skills and knowledge that would have overwhelmed her earlier counterparts—and she needs to *keep* learning all the time. She must not only possess the insights listed above, she must also understand her subject matter well and deeply. She

must know how to model the learning skills she wants her students to acquire, how to assess her students' progress, how to ask questions that stretch their understanding, how to select materials geared to their individual strengths and weaknesses, how to group and regroup her students according to the tasks they are ready for, and how to manage a classroom in which several groups may be working on different tasks.

The changing demands on teachers reflect an ever-growing awareness of how learning takes place in the mind. Research has turned old stereotypes on their heads. It has shown that learning requires energetic activity, intense engagement, and a great deal of conversation and demonstration. Instruction needs to nurture and reflect those qualities. It cannot do so when teachers do all the talking, when students seldom work together or exchange ideas and strategies, when classrooms are filled with straight ranks and rows of separate desks, or when children are segregated according to their perceived intelligence—as if intelligence did not come in many forms and could not be shaped, enhanced, and even taught.

Nevertheless, this is the arrangement that still prevails in many American schools. It may deliver factual knowledge, a degree of thinking skill, and the ability to follow directions and prescribed procedures. It succeeds best with children whose families offer the greatest encouragement and attention. But *all* children today need more. They need habits of thought and inquiry that become a permanent part of them, not the kind of learning that disappears after an exam or over a summer. As adults, they will meet rapid advances in the world of work and technology. They will have to be lifelong, independent learners, people who can assess their own performance and figure out where to go for skills and knowledge that will help them adapt to changing demands.

High Expectations for Every Child

At the heart of the changes taking place in schools are two ideas that would never have occurred to the founders of our public education system. The first is that children need a lot of skill even to master the so-called three Rs; the second is that every child who receives good instruction can develop the necessary skill and build on it for a lifetime.

When a child is learning to read, for instance, it is not enough for her to recognize and pronounce the words on a page. She needs to understand what they mean and how they work together to express the ideas in a text. To become a fluent, independent reader, she needs to know how words are structured. She needs to recognize their sounds, their endings, the spelling variations that signify number, tense or comparisons. She needs strategies, too. If, for instance, she encounters the word “strap” and doesn't recognize it, she needs to know how to figure it out. Perhaps she knows “rap” or “trap” and can use those as a base for getting the new word. Once she thinks she has the word, she needs to test it in the context of her reading: Does it make sense? Does it fit?

In mathematics, too, children need to be taught to reason well, even in kindergarten or first grade. They need the opportunity to build on the knowledge they bring with them on their first day of school. Most will already understand some early numerical concepts—notions of bigger and smaller, more and less, parts and wholes. But integrating that kind of real-world understanding with a symbolic system of numerals and operation signs requires a huge cognitive effort, one that traditional instruction sells short.

It is almost never the child's fault if he puts in the effort but still has trouble reading, writing, understanding, reasoning or calculating. It is the teacher's complex task to address each child's strengths and weaknesses and to provide exactly the materials and instruction that will take the child's learning to the next level.

The Heart of the Matter

“They need to have that indefinable teacherness.” —District #2 Staff Developer

Some people may be born to teach; others acquire the indefinable gift through experience. But every teacher, no matter how talented, needs resources, colleagues, and substantial, varied opportunities to discuss and improve her craft.

Every teacher who reaches children at the levels we have described has not only a store of knowledge and know-how but also an ability to draw upon them in a rapid, unerring process that *looks* effortless. Her performance in a classroom has the instinctive, fluid quality that is the hallmark of all expertise, whether in a musical performance, a chess match or a surgical procedure. A teacher develops this by doing what her students must do—learning actively and continuously, seeking not only techniques but a grasp of why they work or fail and how to adjust them to reach every child.

The heart of the matter—the source of true expertise—always lies more in the *why* than the *how-to*. The *how-to* provides the experiences that help teachers grasp the *why*—that is, the nature of the learning process and the kind of instruction that supports it—but it is a big stretch, getting from the *how-to* to the *why*. How can any teacher, whether veteran or newcomer, actually span that distance? In District #2, the answer lies in professional development of a kind that influences every person, every day, in every role.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DISTRICT #2: ERASING THE “DIRTY LITTLE SECRET”

“The best way to learn something is to actually do it and get feedback.” —District #2 Teacher

All serious professions are built on experience and feedback. Medicine, law, architecture, journalism—they all support continuous learning and reward the constant improvement of practice. Professionals in every field routinely consult with colleagues, attend conferences, read journals, undergo review and carry with them the expectation that they will never stop learning their art or trade. This is why it would indeed be shocking for lawyers not to know the law.

Until recently, however, teachers have not been held to high expectations like these; nor have school principals or central administrators. And that is why it is *not* shocking if they don't know about educating. District #2 is perhaps the first in this country to make both sweeping and detailed changes in the expectations and opportunities for educators, and in the process it has built a completely new culture of learning.

District #2 Then and Now

In the mid-1980s, teachers in District #2 were teaching as best they could, but they were not getting substantive feedback. Like most teachers in our public schools, they were isolated—and learning does not take place in isolation. They were carrying on their work behind closed doors. They occasionally stepped out of their classrooms for in-service training, but they seldom forged collegial relationships or made lasting, principled, systematic improvements in instruction. Sometimes, teachers attended workshops or seminars, but most of these were pull-out sessions from which teachers were supposed to glean new techniques and apply them without follow-up, refinement, discussion or evaluation.

The district in those days ranked sixteenth out of 32 in standardized test scores in New York. The schools had a dispirited feeling that sometimes edged into chaos. Graffiti blossomed everywhere, and the institutional chill of the aging buildings was rarely warmed by colorful displays or by minds catching fire. Discipline was a time-consuming problem.

Today, District #2 ranks second among the 32. The hallways in its schools are papered with colorful student work. Classrooms are festooned with papers and drawings strung from lines that crisscross the airspace. Children sit together at tables or on the floor, intently involved in discussion, reading, or small-group problem solving. The teacher cruises the room. She pauses at each table, observing and then asking questions that draw out the thinking behind students' strategies and gauge their understanding. Or she leads a discussion about a book, guiding the talk so that one child's comment can elaborate on another's or differing interpretations can illuminate complications in a story. Children identify themes and "big ideas" in the text, anticipate an author's next step, describe their reactions and track the development of the narrative. They perform at levels unheard of just a few years ago. They may move at different paces, but they all "get it" and they all contribute.

All the while, a staff developer may be observing the teacher's practice, measuring her degree of success with a given lesson. Or the principal may come in, alone or with central administrators, to evaluate the teacher's work with her students. Other teachers might also observe, singly or in small clusters.

The differences between then and now in District #2, both in actual teaching and in the openness of classroom performance, comes from a combination of research and professional development. Research, as we have mentioned, has found out much about learning that explains some shortcomings in traditional instruction. Professional development, at its best, devises, demonstrates and continuously disseminates new forms of instruction that work with, not against, the active nature of the learning process. Bringing research and practice together successfully is itself an ongoing learning experience. And because learning takes place best through human interaction, the process involves everyone in the district, dismantling barriers among teachers and administrators and forging relationships where none existed before.

The Learning Community

"What I like about this district is that it's always in a state of flux. We're always learning, we're always moving, we're always wanting to get better at what we do. . . . I can't wait for the next thing that could make me a better teacher, and I have found we're blessed with this diet of knowledge here—that we can eat and eat and never get enough of it." —District #2 Teacher

Notice this teacher's use of "we." In District #2, a powerful sense of community has grown up around the single goal of improving instruction so that every child can meet high expectations. Most teachers have long felt the hunger to improve their practice, but now they know their hunger can be satisfied, because the district devotes its resources and its full attention to that effort above all others.

In earlier times, any witness to a teacher's practice might have made her intensely anxious or defensive. Today, most teachers in District #2 welcome visitors, recognizing that frequent, detailed evaluations of their work, conducted in a supportive and equitable atmosphere, are an effective means of growth. Teachers also seek opportunities to work with staff developers, to mentor or be mentored by other teachers, to participate in workshops, and to meet in small groups to talk about student work, instructional strategies, lesson planning and problem solving.

From the district's first steps toward a professional development plan, taken more than a decade ago, the *focus* of professional development has been tight, aiming always to improve instruction in each subject area. The emphasis on content has helped the district develop instructional strategies that deal in a highly detailed, closely attentive way with every child and with the specific topics and skills that they need to acquire.

Attention, meanwhile, has been broad, making sure that every adult in the system, from central administrators to the greenest teachers, shares and sustains the focus on high-quality teaching. The district has encouraged study groups, monthly principals' conferences, and frequent visits between and among schools in order to build a systemwide sense of purpose that supports its tighter, content-specific strategies.

Over time, learning has become a cultural ethic, a way of life in District #2. Today, it is *who* the people in the district are, not just what they do.

Professional Development Strategies in District #2

"A teacher may think she really has it. She has her small group of six to eight children, ready for a certain text. . . . She's chosen something of the appropriate length, so she can guide them through their reading in about eight minutes. She has all that. But does she have a strategy or a skill that she wants them to learn? How did she give them practice? How did she question them afterwards to assess whether or not they got it? What are they going to take away from that lesson?" —District #2 Principal

Every feature of professional development in District #2 is characterized by the effort to give teachers effective instructional methods *and* a knowledge of principles and theory—the *how-to* and the *why*. The *how-to* is complex; it covers an array of techniques that help teachers choose materials well, select class problems that are appropriate for a given lesson, juggle several activities for several groups of children, ask questions that guide learning and spur thinking, and master countless managerial strategies.

The *why* is even more difficult, but it is crucial if teachers are to avoid getting stuck in procedures, even sophisticated ones. It is not uncommon for teachers trained in traditional methods to want a script to follow. They sometimes feel they could never understand the processes of learning well enough to design their own instructional strategies or to improvise knowingly when a student gets stuck. But understanding *why* that student flounders, *why* a certain approach might solve the problem, *why* a particular question can move that child along—this is what gives teachers the fluid, confident air of experts.

The strategies highlighted below serve District #2's vision of professional development as the indispensable means of creating community and carrying out a shared purpose. They indicate the constant learning that takes place throughout the district and the way that each new question moves the district forward. New strategies continually evolve to meet new needs—issues that keep coming into focus as teachers, principals and staff developers get to know each other, their schools and their students more thoroughly.

Original Strategies

Professional Development Laboratory (PDL.) Three kinds of teacher participate in every PDL: one Resident Teacher and a small number of Visiting Teachers and Adjunct Teachers. Principals and administrators select, as Residents, teachers who can demonstrate expert practice for Visiting Teachers. The Visiting Teachers observe a Resident in her classroom for three weeks and then, under the Resident's close supervision, return to their own students and apply the new thinking and new methods they have learned. During the three-week lab, the Visiting

Teachers' classrooms are taken over by highly qualified Adjunct Teachers who have already worked with the Resident and therefore can help each Visiting Teacher prepare for the PDL and can follow up with her afterward.

Teachers in District #2 are eager to participate in PDLs. Before they even meet with their Adjunct, they spend considerable time with their principal, specifying the instructional issues they want to address through the PDL and planning how best to learn what they need. These preliminary sessions ensure that the PDL experience will be focused and productive for each teacher. They also represent one of many ways in which principals stay closely in touch with teachers in their schools.

The PDL forges collegial relationships, as well, bringing Visiting Teachers from different schools together for a common purpose. Like the Intervisitation strategy (below), this one puts groups of teachers in a stimulating situation, one that is likely to spark greater confidence as well as better practice. It is a chance for ongoing professional relationships to develop among teachers who might otherwise never meet.

Intervisitation. Teachers in District #2 visit each other's classrooms to observe their colleagues' teaching or a staff developer's demonstrations, or they travel in groups to other schools before preparing and implementing new practices themselves. Principals also conduct intervisitations with their peers. New principals, in particular, may pair up with a more experienced "buddy," whose school they visit for a day or two a month during their first two years of administrative service. Groups of teachers and principals also travel to districts in and beyond New York City to observe instructional practices relating to specific district initiatives. And District #2 holds monthly principals' conferences that routinely bring school leaders into each other's schools and classrooms.

Important peer relationships arise from intervisitations, creating both structured and informal networks for the exchange of advice, new practices, and problem-solving on thorny instructional issues.

Principals' Professional Development. All of District #2's forms of professional development are open to principals, not just the monthly conferences they attend. Until principals become thoroughly steeped in the same professional development strategies that their teaching staffs undergo, they take part in or observe each strategy themselves, so that they can assess teaching performance, motivate teachers, and knowledgeably discuss the details of instructional problems that might arise. Principals also work tightly with district administrators during regular *Walkthroughs* of their schools, intensive tours that go into every classroom, monitor the progress of every teacher, and measure the school's overall functioning against the principal's written objectives for the year. The *Walkthroughs*, and the hour-long discussions that precede and follow them, focus more on the professional development of principals than on a strict evaluation of their performance, because performance improves only through constant learning. Finally, principals who have come to know each other through intervisitations or other means often organize study groups together or find mentors among their colleagues; and the district sponsors support groups for acting, interim and nontenured principals.

School-based Budget Decisions. Fiscal management may seem to have little to do with professional development, but, in District #2, budgets and learning are closely entwined. Both the means and motivation for professional development interlock in each principal's responsibility for negotiating her budget with the central office and then disbursing it in the manner that best meets her school's needs and priorities. The more professional development the principal already has—that is, the more she knows about instruction, staff motivation, materials, scheduling, classroom management, and so on—the better she will be at deciding

how her budget can cover these concerns. And the better she is at weighing and balancing her budget decisions, the better her school's professional development will be.

School-based budgets reflect the spirit of the District #2 enterprise. They support a strong sense of community by giving the power of decision to the people who actually lead the schools and by keeping the distribution of funds completely open. Every principal knows every other principal's budget, and they all undertake the negotiation process with an eye on the district's common purpose, which they all must advance.

Professional Development Consultants. Staff developers, or consultants, are contract employees from District #2's own ranks and from outside; they work intensively for extended periods of time with individual teachers and small groups to study and address specific instructional problems in a given subject area. Usually, they work one-on-one with eight to ten teachers for a block of three to four months each in specific content areas. They also work with grade-level teams and larger groups of teachers during planning time, lunch time, and after school.

Each school pays for its consultant's services out of its professional development budget. Dedicating such expensive resources to an intensive and tightly focused effort makes sense only in a system with a long-term commitment to improving instruction in each classroom and in each subject. Because District #2 has a single goal that depends on a community-wide commitment, it has found the use of consultants not only worth the cost but indispensable. Administrators in the district believe there is no other pathway to high-level learning for every child except intensive, ongoing, on-the-job professional development for their teachers. They work with the staff developers to make sure they provide the most effective and transforming kind of professional development—the kind that comes from personal feedback, attention, encouragement and detail.

As teachers benefit from working closely with a staff developer, their commitment to the district's overarching goal becomes unshakable. Often, they develop a contagious enthusiasm that in turn helps spread the district's cultural values—its emphasis on continuous inquiry and learning, on a willingness to change, on the open sharing of ideas and struggles.

Newer Strategies and Refinements

“As the district learns more, and more closely assesses the progress of every school, principal, teacher and child, it is able to modify and adapt its strategies to suit their specific needs. This gives everyone an increasingly equal chance to perform at high levels.” —District #2 Central Administrator

Distinguished Teacher Model. This strategy has evolved from the Professional Development Laboratory, refining that model to give even more intensive help to struggling schools. Instead of holding a PDL in the Resident Teacher's own classroom, the Distinguished Teacher goes directly into an at-risk school to work one-on-one with a teacher there for six weeks. This way, the “visited teacher”—counterpart to the Visiting Teacher in the standard PDL—receives rigorous, individual professional development every day, as she is teaching her lessons. The distinguished teacher is held responsible for the progress and performance of the visited teacher's students, ensuring that their learning does not suffer during the weeks of professional development.

Grade Conferences. At these semi-monthly or weekly meetings, teachers who work at or near the same grade level at a school share information and student work. These sessions are similar to teacher study groups held at many District #2 schools, but instead of tackling a single topic over several meetings, the grade conferences focus on something different each time—a piece of

student work, a strategy for conveying a single concept or lesson, an insight gained from participation in a PDL or other form of professional development.

School Mentoring. This strategy shares features with both Intervisitations and the Distinguished Teacher Model. In this case, the mentoring school, which excels in a given area of practice—such as writing strategies or the development of responsible classroom talk—is matched with a school that is studying that topic. Two teachers from the mentoring school are visited for four or five weeks by teachers from the other school, usually teachers who work at or near the same grade levels and seek to improve their practice on the same issues. In the mornings, these teachers visit the mentors' classrooms, observe their practice, and then meet with them in the afternoons to talk about what they saw and explore ways of introducing new techniques with their own students. With follow-up after these in-school meetings, School Mentoring efforts usually last from six to eight weeks, providing plenty of opportunity for substantive and focused relationships to develop between the teachers from the participating schools.

Principals may also participate in School Mentoring. Those with long experience are paired with those who are newer at their job, with the mentors offering help in instructional improvement, resource management, staff motivation—any issue where support and insight might be needed. Formal mentoring sometimes lasts a period of weeks, sometimes an entire year. In either case, it, too, can generate long-term connections—more and more of them as the program continues year to year.

Leadership Development Strategy. As professional development has deeply infused District #2, administrators have found it vitally important to identify teachers who have taken leadership roles and shown an energetic commitment to improving not only their own instruction but instruction throughout the system. Those who show an interest in becoming administrators are encouraged to participate in degree programs that District #2 designs in collaboration with faculty and administrators at nearby colleges or universities. This is an effort that closely unites theory and practice through rigorous applications.

The courses that result are open only to teachers from District #2 and occasionally to teachers from another district with whom they have a mentoring relationship. The teachers' internships take place in District #2 schools, and participating District #2 principals become adjunct faculty at the university. District personnel also sit on panels to whom teachers in the degree programs present their studies and findings. In these forums, the panel members pose questions that push the teachers' grasp of the research and the practices that the district has refined so intensively over the years. As the programs evolve, relationships between district practitioners and university personnel become fluid and supportive, with each participant learning from the others. The district is able to create leaders in this way, and the university benefits from its first-hand, substantive contact with a system that has changed the culture of its schools and its practice. The connection is one in which theory comes to live and breathe in effective educational reforms.

BALANCED LITERACY

"Pick a text. Make sure it's something that really grabs them and makes them want to come back for more. You have to leave them hanging, so they can't wait for you to read to them again. And that makes them understand what a book can do." —District #2 Principal

Because District #2 serves several immigrant neighborhoods and many families below the poverty line, some children enter kindergarten and first grade without even knowing what a book looks like, let alone what it can do. Many youngsters have never been read to, seldom see even magazines or newspapers at home, or speak little English. But every one of them needs a strong literacy foundation in order to succeed in other subjects.

This was the compelling reason behind District #2's decision to focus its first, intensive professional development programs on reading and writing. Administrators and consultants read everything they could find on the subject and searched for best practices and an understanding of why those practices succeeded. They brought knowledgeable people in from outside the district. They worked with a nearby university and with education researchers. Through their investigations, they gradually devised early versions of the professional development strategies that they use today. And because professional development must lead teachers to new forms of teaching, the district began devising new instructional strategies, too, discovering that effective instruction must *understand* every child in order to *succeed* with every child.

This is how District #2 came to the unshakable conviction that professional development must *always* be based in academic content, and must *always* be driven by student assessment. The result has been a rich set of instructional strategies called Balanced Literacy, a program designed to give students a full range of literacy skills: the ability to read independently and with understanding; to write, revise and polish many kinds of text; to appreciate features of good literature; and to speak and listen responsibly.

Although the Balanced Literacy strategies support and reinforce each other in fairly self-evident ways, their interactions are no accident; they have been refined with great care over the years as the district has applied its increasing expertise in literacy instruction. This is why district leaders make strong, detailed recommendations about how the components should be scheduled and ordered each day. The amount of flexibility permitted by the guidelines corresponds to a school's or a teacher's success with the overall literacy goals. Those who show strong results and grasp the "heart of the matter" have more leeway regarding the order of their schedule, the materials they use, and the ways in which they coordinate components.

Obviously, the following brief descriptions of the Balanced Literacy components cannot be read as a manual for literacy instruction. Implementing the components is less like following a recipe than creating one through an understanding of the ingredients' interactive chemistry. For a teacher to apply this range of instructional strategies successfully, she needs nothing less than the total immersion in literacy issues that this district offers.

Components of Balanced Literacy

Guided Reading. This form of literacy instruction takes place with small groups in which each child is ready to learn a specific strategy that will move him to the next level of reading skill. The children are grouped according to their pace and progress in literacy, but the groupings are fluid, temporary, and designed to meet each child's need of the moment. They do not resemble "tracking," forms of segregation that impose low expectations on children. Rather, the key to Guided Reading is the teacher's awareness of individual children's needs and her ability to work with several children who are at the same level. Then, she can tailor her instruction to the needs of that group, providing just enough guidance to help them do the reading themselves.

Shared Reading. In Shared Reading, the teacher and the more fluent readers in her class demonstrate broad reading techniques for the class as a whole. She selects a fairly challenging

text, in a large-print format, which she holds up and reads out loud, with the strong readers joining in and helping her show how to read for meaning, how to predict the way a text will develop, how to pay attention to the text's layout and structure, and how to read out loud smoothly and expressively. The teacher offers more support in the Shared Reading sessions than in Guided Reading, both by reading every word aloud and by helping students decode words and grapple with the text's meaning. As a result, students who have trouble with reading actually master more difficult material in Shared Reading than they could on their own.

Read Aloud. This component of Balanced Literacy is similar to Shared Reading, except that the teacher alone reads a challenging text to the entire class, without showing it to them in the large-print format. The sessions allow children to hear the rhythms and phrasing of oral language, and they introduce varied forms of literature along with new ideas and a rich vocabulary.

Independent Reading. This form of literacy instruction is a time in which children are invited to read a book of their own choosing, as long as it is appropriate for their skill level. The advantage of these uninterrupted, read-for-pleasure sessions lies not only in the increased fluency that practice brings, but in the hope that independent reading will become a rewarding lifelong habit. Further, while children are engaged in Independent Reading, the teacher has an opportunity to assess them one at a time, listening to them read out loud, noting their struggles, and finding out how well they understand what they are reading. Her findings are invaluable when she needs to form Guided Reading groups of children with similar strengths and problems.

Word Study. This component emphasizes the phonetic structure of words. It is an essential complement to Guided Reading, Read Aloud and Shared Reading, which, through strategies aimed at fluency and meaning, emphasize the impact of literature and the qualities that "grab" a reader and keep her involved. The fluency that is so important to an enjoyment of reading depends on children's rapid recognition of letter-sound correspondences, and Word Study provides the daily phonics instruction and word-solving strategies that help them develop the necessary speed and accuracy.

Writing. When District #2 students read, they are often asked to consider the text from the author's perspective: How does the story's opening hook the reader? What might happen next in the story? What techniques make the characters' personalities clear to the reader? The students are also taught to consider what they themselves are thinking or feeling as they read a particular scene. Then, when they write, they draw upon their insights. Their writing ranges from personal notebooks, where they jot down ideas, experiences or interesting phrases, to more formal stories or observations that they draft, edit, revise and finally polish for "publication," which can consist of posting the work in the classroom or including it in a student portfolio.

CONCLUSION

The strategies and thinking outlined in this article can only hint at the full depth and variety of professional development opportunities in District #2. The administration, in partnership with school leaders and teachers, puts all its resources and energies into the single purpose of improving instruction and ensuring that each student achieves at a high level. The process creates and wholly relies upon communication, community and equity.

The statement that educators know too little about educating may still apply in too many schools and systems, but one has only to look closely at District #2 to see the effect of continuous learning-about-learning and teaching-about-teaching. Virtually all of the district's progress has come through one form of professional development or another, whether formal labs and

mentoring strategies, informal groups and relationships, or the cumulative experiences of the district as a whole and the individuals involved in it.

With its high expectations for teachers, administrators and students, District #2 has created a work environment that comes closer every day to matching the means and expectations of every other challenging profession. Everyone in the system seeks expertise; everyone is always questioning, always learning, always pushing beyond current boundaries. There is no more effective way to make every child a lifelong learner—for when students see their teachers and principals learning more all the time, and reaching higher and higher goals, it may never even occur to them that there is any other way to live and grow.