**Documentation of the South Carolina Learning Network**

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Adult Learning in the New Tech Network’s SCLN Project

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**Introduction**

*[This] grant was designed to partner across the different parts of your system -- teachers, instructional coaches, school leaders, district leaders – in service of creating deeper learning experiences for each student in a safe, inclusive, emotionally supportive culture.* – NTN Staff

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST)[[1]](#footnote-1), a research center associated with Teachers College, Columbia University, collaborated with the New Tech Network[[2]](#footnote-2) (NTN) to research and document the South Carolina Learning Network(SCLN) from 2017 to 2020. In this report, we seek to illuminate ways that adult learning provided by the SCLN led to professional growth—especially highlighting ways that transformation occurred among the adult learners.

The purpose of the SCLN is to introduce and support implementation of the New Tech model in a cohort of three high poverty school districts in South Carolina. This ambitious project promotes collaboration among three districts as they put systems in place to better support innovative approaches to teaching and learning and increase college and career readiness. The SCLN is based on the NTN’s traditional services to schools in service of deeper learning based on project based learning. In addition, the SCLN has emphasized the role of districts in advancing school learning as well as support for local coaching. In the third and final year of this research partnership, at the request of NTN, NCREST has developed and implemented a study of adult learning in the SCLN as well as a case study of the implementation of the SCLN at Bells Elementary School. Both studies resulted in reports that are intended to be of use to both the New Tech Network (NTN) and the field.

In this report on adult learning, we draw on Duke’s (1993) definition of professional growth: “While learning may represent the acquisition of new knowledge, growth implies the transformation of knowledge into the development of the individual. Growth is qualitative change, movement to a new level of understanding, the realization of a sense of efficacy not previously enjoyed”(p.703). NTN aspires to create this deeper, qualitative change through it’s adult learning offerings.

Our study was based on the following logic model. The yellow boxes were the focus of this research; the topics in the green box were included selectively and as possible.

**SCLN Adult Learning Logic Model**

NTN supports district leader, school leader and local coach learning with a focus on deeper learning.

Their approach to adult learning incorporates research based effective practices: (e.g., Aguilar, 2014)

* -emotions
* -history
* -self direction
* -problem-centered
* -knowing why
* -internalizing

(Darling Hammond, 2009): PD should be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice

OTHER

Adults experience professional growth

-Intrapersonally

- manifested in practice

Districts support schools.

Schools implement the four NTN pillars at a high level.

Teachers implement NTN practices with high quality and fidelity.

Student outcomes improve: NTN outcomes, on-time graduation and progression into college.

**Foundational Ideas**

The need for 21st century skills has driven rethinking about how students learn best and ways that “deeper learning” can contribute to better student experiences and outcomes. A 2016 report entitled “Does Deeper Learning Improve Student Outcomes?” from the American Institutes for Research states:

*Students must be able to communicate their ideas effectively, think creatively, work collaboratively to solve problems, and manage their own learning. They need to develop dispositions – or mindsets – that empower them to confront new challenges, take initiative, and persevere through difficulties and setbacks (p.1).*

Attaining these kinds of competencies is the goal of “deeper learning” practices, defined as “a set of competencies students must master in order to develop a keen understanding of academic content and apply their knowledge to problems in the classroom and on the job (Hewlett Foundation, 2013, p. 1). However, most teachers are underprepared to implement deeper learning practices (Hernandez, Darling-Hammond, Adams, & Bradley, 2019). Deeper learning involves reimagining the classroom. Deeper learning requires deeper teaching. And deeper teaching requires deeper learning for teachers - in effect *deeper* professional development – that takes into account what is known about how adults learn.

Elena Aguilar, an instructional and leadership coach in the Oakland Unified School District and frequent contributor to *Education Week* and *Edutopia,* created a tool to guide coaches and others involved in professional development. In her *Six Principles of Adult Learning* Aguilar (2014) draws upon the work of Malcolm Knowles (1973), (1973, 1993)Jane Vella (2002), Paolo Freire (1970) and others to summarize what is known about adult learning and illustrate its application to the unique challenges confronted by educators who design and implement professional development for adults.

The principles include: 1) **Emotions**: Adults’ emotional states are inextricably tied to their ability to learn; 2) **History**: Adults come to the learning process with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies; 3) **Self-direction**: Adults want to be in charge of their own learning and should therefore have some control over how learning is structured and conducted; 4) **Problem-centered learning**: Based on their life experience, adults have a task-centered or problem-centered orientation to learning; 5) **Knowing why**: Adults will commit to learning when they believe that the objectives are realistic and important for their personal and professional needs; 6) **Internalizing learning**: Adults need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply what they have learned to their work.

The Six Principles developed by Aguilar will serve as the organizing framework for the literature reviewed here. Each section of the review will examine one principle in greater detail and highlight literature that supports that principle, furthers its understanding, and illustrates its application.

*Principle One: Emotions (safety, trust, collaborative atmosphere)*

*Adults’ emotional states are inextricably tied to their abilities to learn. To learn, an adult must be emotionally comfortable with the learning situation. When we feel afraid, our brains shut down to learning and new information can’t be absorbed. (Aguila*r, 2014).

Evidence from neuroscience and cognitive psychology suggests that emotional safety mediates the capacity to learn. Vella (2002) outlines five elements that contribute to a feeling of safety for adult learners. They include learning activities designed to increase in complexity, and respect for diverse opinions. “Teachers do not empower adult learners, they encourage use of the power that learners were born with,” Vella contends (2002). Aguilar (2014) concurs and states, “Use a facilitation style that communicates acceptance for learners wherever they’re at in their learning, that invites feedback, that acknowledges the emotional risks inherent in learning. Normalize emotional discomfort in learning,” (p.1) she suggests.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (1996) underscore the emotional demands of teaching, “There are always things to be done, decisions to be made, children’s needs to be met, not just every day, but every minute, every second” (p.65). Jim Knight (2007) cites teachers’ need for emotional fortitude.

A foundation of trust in one’s colleagues is crucial to whole-school improvement efforts. John Hattie (2015) asserts that collaboration, or the ability to work together as a team, is key to improving student achievement, “The onus [on improving achievement] needs to be on everyone working collectively to improve student achievement: the teachers, the school leaders, the other adults in the schools, the parent, the policy-makers, and the students” (p.5). Allensworth (2012) examined 31 chronically low-performing schools in Chicago as part of a study conducted by the Consortium of Chicago School Research and concluded that collegial collaboration was critical, “One key element in teacher retention is teachers’ perceptions of their colleagues as collaborators. Teachers are more likely to stay in a school if they see themselves as part of a team that is working together toward making their school better, supported by school leadership”(p.30).

*Principle Two: History (prior experiences, prior knowledge, orientation to learning)*

*Adults come to the learning process with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies. The more explicit these relationships (between the new and the old) are made through discussion and reflection, the deeper and more permanent the learning will be.* (Aguilar, 2014)

Opfer and Pedder (2011) employ a complexity theory framework to examine three subsystems (the teacher, the school, and the learning activity) that interact in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity to influence teacher learning. They explore under what conditions, why, and how teachers learn. The individual teacher subsystem encompasses prior experiences and knowledge, orientation to and beliefs about learning, and how these are enacted in classroom practice. These prior experiences, in turn, influence decisions about professional learning and the effects of that learning on both practices and beliefs. Duke points out the possibility that experience can assert a negative impact on adult learning. As new knowledge is filtered through well-established cognitive structures, dissonant information might be excluded or discredited, an illustration of confirmation bias at work.

Opfer and Pedder’s (2011) complexity theory also supports Aguilar’s (2014) contention that teachers’ professional development experiences and their individual orientation to learning are interdependent. Though teachers tend to seek out activities that are consistent with their orientation to learning, if those activities lead to changes in knowledge, practice, or belief, the orientation to learning system will change, which, in turn, may change the nature of the learning activities that teachers seek.

*Principle Three: Self-Direction (choice, respect for learners)*

*Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and should therefore have some control over the what, who, how, why, when and where of their learning. Adults must see a need for the learning they’re engaging in before the learning can take place.* (Aguilar, 2014)

In explaining the *Partnership Philosophy* that underpins his coaching method, Knight (2007) supports Aguilar’s principle of *Self Direction* by highlighting equality, choice, and voice among the guiding principles that frame his philosophy. An equal partnership between those teaching and those learning requires all opinions to be equally valued and an atmosphere of respect for participants. Teachers who work with instructional coaches should walk away from all interactions feeling like they are valued and their opinions matter, Knight asserts.

According to Aguilar (2019), choice involves the ability of individual teachers to decide the extent to which they will participate in professional development. Even when the work is mandated, choice can be incorporated in terms of the structure of the work, choice of partner, even the timing of the breaks. Violating the principle of choice often increases the likelihood that teachers will resist change initiatives.

Weiner and Pimentel (2017) assert that professional learning will typically include both compulsory and optional elements. They note that there is a down-side to offering extensive choice, stating that “There are trade-offs between a ‘push’ strategy mandating specific activities, which can get to scale quickly but runs the risk of a compliance approach, vs a ‘pull’ strategy that allows for more organic uptake and ownership but may extend the timeline for full implementation” (p. 14).

*Principle Four: Problem-Centered Learning (active learning, inquiry)*

*Because of their lives and work experience, adults have a task-centered or problem-centered orientation to learning. When trainings are developed around problem solving, then adults will learn the content with the intention of using it.* (Aguilar, 2014)

Many of Aguilar’s principles reflect the ideas of early educational theorists. The notion that learning is an active process is fundamental to Freire’s (1993) conception of popular education. He contrasts “banking” education – in which learners receive and teachers deposit knowledge – with “problem-posing” education in which knowledge emerges “only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world and with each other” (p. 53).

Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1990) points out that the learning and teaching process was once considered the domain of adults. Freire’s ideas, in fact, derive from those of the ancients - Confucius and Lao Tse of China, and Aristotle, Plato and Socrates of Greece. Socratic dialogue, like Freire’s problem-posing, involves the posing of a question to a group, which then pools its collective thoughts to propose resolutions. Knowles (1993) explains,

*Because adults comprised their students, they [the ancients] came to have a very different concept of the learning/teaching process from the one that later came to dominate formal education. They perceived learning to be a process of active inquiry, not passive reception of transmitted content.* (p. 27)*.*

Linda Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) argue that It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do—continually, collaboratively, and on the job—to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

*Principal Five: Knowing Why (applicability of learning, usefulness)*

*Adults need to know why they need to learn something…. Adults will commit to learning when they believe that the objectives are realistic and important for their personal and professional needs. They need to see that what they learn through professional development is applicable to their day-to-day activities and problems*. (Aguilar, 2014)

Adults want to invest time in learning when they can visualize applying what they learn. Victor Vroom proposed his expectancy-value theory of motivation in 1964 to explain that individuals choose behaviors based on their understanding about how those behaviors will affect them personally and professionally. *Expectancy* is an individual’s level of certainty that certain actions will result in specific outcomes. *Value* is the value placed on that goal by the individual (Vroom, 1964). Sleegers and colleagues (2014) place the burden of responsibility on school leadership for instilling in teachers and staff a goal of equity for all students. With equity as the goal, professional learning becomes a moral imperative; motivation to learn becomes part of the culture of the institution – its reason for being.

Jim Knight (2011) incorporates the concept of adults “needing to know why” among his principles for effective partnerships. Coaches who take a partnership approach are guided by specific goals that teachers hold for their students. They begin with gathering data with the teacher, then collaborate to identify specific goals for their students. The impetus for the partnership work is the teacher’s goals.

*Principle Six: Internalizing Learning (application and practice)*

*Adult learners do not automatically transfer learning into daily practice. Adults need direct, concrete experiences for applying what they have learned to their work. Adult learners need a lot of practice including guided practice that incorporates receiving feedback.* (Aguilar, 2014)

An empirical study conducted by Garet and colleagues (2001) using a national probability sample of 1,027 math and science teachers compared the effects of several characteristics of professional development on self-reported change in teacher learning, knowledge, skills, and classroom teaching practices. The results of the study suggest several elements for effective learning design. First, as Aguilar (2014) suggests, duration is important. Extended activities provide opportunities for teachers to try out new practices and receive feedback on their teaching. The study also concluded that coherence – that is, learning connected to other professional development experiences, aligned with standards and assessments and which fosters professional communication – was associated with change in teacher practice.

*Systems that Lead to Classroom Level Change*

The big question remains: How does school change ultimately manifest in individual classrooms. *Empowered Educators (*Darling-Hammond, 2017*)* describes the outcome of an international comparative study of teacher and teaching quality commissioned by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) that outlined specific conditions that ensure that teachers are well-prepared for the classroom and engage in ongoing professional learning:

1. Teacher professional learning is continual and developmental.
2. Professional learning is collaborative.
3. Teachers are researchers.
4. Teachers lead learning for their colleagues.

The NCEE report underscores the conclusion reached in the Aspen Institute’s 2018 report: that deep, effective professional learning requires a well-coordinated system.

*For students to become powerful learners, their teachers must engage in powerful learning themselves… What is needed is a tightly-connected systems focus on continually increasing the knowledge and skills of teachers in their context, with their colleagues, as central to improving student learning. At its heart this is an equity issue, ensuring that all students in a system have equal access to rich, high-quality learning.* (Aspen Institute, 2018, p. 1)

A focus on the system places responsibility for improving opportunities for all students on everyone who is part of that system – from government leaders to district and school leaders to classroom teachers. In his book, *Schools that Change* (2008),Lew Smith recalls the words of Edward Everett Hale, an American author and Unitarian minister:

*I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do. (p. 211)*

**NCREST’s Study of SCLN Adult Learning**

Our study, conducted between October 2019 and June 2020, sought to address the following research questions:

1)     How do adult learning experiences in the SCLN provide opportunities for professional growth among participants?

2)     To what extent do the SCLN adult learners experience professional growth during their NTN-provided learning opportunities? When it occurs, to what do they attribute this growth?

3)     How does the NTN approach to adult learning align with the research literature on this topic, especially as relates to opportunities for professional growth?

*Methods*

Our study began with an extensive review of literature that would highlight key aspects of adult learning environments and structures likely to lead to professional growth. While much has been written on this subject, we ultimately decided to draw primarily on the work of Elena Aguilar’s (2014) six principles of adult learning as a guide in developing our research sub-questions and methods.

The following data collection activities were undertaken:

*Documentation of adult learning events:* NCREST researchers attended and documented the two SCLN convenings that were held during the 2019-20 academic year.

*Conduct interviews:* NCREST conducted interviews with the three NTN staff most closely involved with the SCLN project, as well as district and school leaders, local coaches, and selected teachers who participated in SCLN adult learning activities. Due to the overlap with the COVID19 crisis, some interviews could not be completed. However, we were pleased to be able to talk with a good selection of participants in SCLN adult learning (see Appendix A for details).

*Analyze the results of the Post-Convening Surveys:* The results of this survey included data that helped us to address research question 1 and 2.

*Analyze the results of the Educator Culture Surveys:* Since the survey could not be administered in the 2019-20 year, we drew on the results of surveys administered in the spring of 2019.

*Document reviews:* NCREST analyzed materials used by NTN in adult learning and coded them for their contributions to adult engagement, collaboration, and deeper learning.

The work was also informed by conversations with the SCLN project lead and NTN research director throughout the life of the project.

**Study Findings**

In the following sections, we address our findings on each of the three research questions.

**RQ1. How do adult learning experiences in the SCLN** **provide opportunities for professional growth among participants?**

From 2016 to 2020, the New Tech Network provided a range of learning opportunities through the SCLN, immersing district and school personnel in ways of thinking and learning that were intended to lead to professional growth. Some of these were drawn from the menu of options offered to all schools that join NTN, specifically participation in the New Tech Annual Conference (NTAC) and individual school coaching. Others were developed specifically for the SCLN in order to deepen the work in these districts and schools that operate in especially challenging environments. These included the Coach Development Community (CDC) and the SCLN’s twice annual convenings.

We describe each of the learning opportunities provided by NTN, along with the features of each that were key contributors to professional growth according to SCLN participants.

***SCLN Convenings***

The SCLN Convenings, held twice a year, were intense two-day professional development gatherings that brought together NTN leaders, district and school leaders, and instructional coaches across all the SCLN sites. These gatherings served as important adult learning opportunities and were the only times that all the SCLN leadership came together. They were packed with activities aimed to instill an understanding of – and personal experience with – deeper learning from a leadership perspective. As two SCLN participants stated,

*It was an opportunity to dive into things that are in my control and create a plan of action to improve those things.*

*It pushed me to be more reflective about what I need to do as a leader to ensure clear direction and expectations.*

In the 2019-20 academic year, the final year of the project, the fall SCLN convening was held in October 2019 and the spring convening occurred in February 2020, both in downtown Columbia, South Carolina.

*Fall convening*

*The driving question that will focus our learning is: How do we shape our systems and structures to better support and position our teachers to create and implement deeper learning experiences for all students? (NTN email sent to participants)[[3]](#footnote-3)*

The fall 2019 convening began with the reflection prompt: *Tell me a story about a specific moment in your school or district journey toward deeper learning that crystallized a key insight for you.* This was followed by accountable talk time using an excerpt from the reading, *Culturally Response Teaching and the Brain,* which surfaced participants’ shared purpose and highlighted the differences between independent and dependent learners. During the latter part of the day, NTN staff presented a math lesson designed to achieve deeper learning and participants took on the role of students while working in groups to complete and then reflect on an assignment. Next, there was a presentation on ‘Systems Thinking’ in which participants engaged in a school case study exercise focused on posing questions to better understand features of a system, how these impacted teacher practice, and how the system could be changed to support instructional coherence.

The second day began with a focus on the teacher experience. Through an empathy map exercise, participants were asked to take on the perspective of a teacher and explore what they could be hearing, saying, or feeling. Afterward, participants spent time reviewing and analyzing their own staff culture survey data, using the results of the NTN Educator Culture Survey. School teams were asked to work in groups again and practice systems thinking by taking into account the empathy map, survey analysis, and other topics they examined.

The convening closed with a gallery walk and a community circle. Participants reflected on the questions, answers and analyses they had discussed during the convening as shown on posters; they were asked to look for evidence of the larger system at play, and how to get “upstream” of a presenting challenge. During the circle, participants were asked to comment on the following question: *What is a shift in your lens, thinking or practice that will position you to better support teacher performance in a more systemic way?*

*Spring convening*

*We will continue to grapple with the driving question that focused our learning in the Fall: How do we shape our systems and structures to better support and position our teachers to create and implement deeper learning experiences for all students? (NTN email sent to participants).*

In the spring SCLN convening, the NTN leadership team emphasized the importance of making connections and reconnecting to the original purpose of the SCLN. Participants revisited the concept of “getting upstream” and were guided through a text discussion protocol to delve into people’s inclination to attribute people’s behavior to “the way they are” versus “the situation they are in.” This then led to a series of discussion and reflection activities on how to move from a discourse of complaint and blame to a one of commitment and personal responsibility. Participants were next asked to write a journal entry reflecting on changing the discourse so that inequitable outcomes could be disrupted.

During the latter part of the day, school and district teams constructed storyboards illustrating how they could better situate teachers to design and implement deeper learning experiences for students and how changing the discourse could help with this.

The next morning, the NTN leadership team guided the participants to further develop their storyboards to ensure systems change that could enhance deeper learning. The session ended with a gallery walk of the storyboards. Teams were asked to briefly present their stories, and other participants followed a simple protocol in which they offered “praise, clarifying or probing questions, and suggestions.” The presenting group wrapped up with reflection statements.

The spring convening concluded with a community circle that asked participants to comment on the following: *I am leaving with…* The following responses from the spring 2020 closing circle highlight the value placed on the learning and thinking opportunities that were provided:

*[I am leaving with…] a connection with people who can empathize and can help with the refinement process of accelerating the learning process. And I also leave with a sense of the collective.* – School Leader/Principal

*[I am leaving with…] appreciation for the opportunity to have my thinking pushed upon and to push others in their thinking. Sense of determination to see this thing we started come to full fruition.* – District Leader/Administrator

*[I am leaving with…] I was new coming in, so it’s been a pleasure to hear from across the state…. And this all gives me hope for the state of South Carolina and our common purpose of creating deeper learning for our kids.* – Instructional Coach

*About adult learning in the convenings*

Three themes stood out in participant interviews about the SCLN convenings that surface ways in which these contributed to participant learning and professional growth: feeling valued, buttressing provided by peers, and a focus on learning for action. The following quotes highlight these dimensions of the SCLN convenings:

*FEELING VALUED: [The SCLN convening] was comfortable to me, which is important to me to be able to work and think. I felt accepted, my ideas were valued; and those aspects are important to me to be able to function well.* – School Leader/Principal

*BUTTRESSING FROM PEERS: It was wonderful to connect with other schools in the state, for the same reason I value NTAC, but this is local and we stay in touch. I leaned on [another school] heavily for questions and they were super helpful. And I’ve strived to provide that for other South Carolina schools as they’ve come through, and the convenings have been a vehicle for that. I connected with [another SCLN district school leader] a year ago since she and I both do schools within schools, and I talk to [another SCLN district leader] a few times a year, and there are other schools in the SCLN that I’ve connected with too.* – School Leader/Principal

*LEARNING FOR ACTION: Convenings were essential to providing us with some awareness of what we needed and things we didn’t know we needed as well. Leaders, principals are responsible for so many things so I think it’s easy to be consumed with managerial things of the school that sometimes we don’t realize our role as the coach to other administrators and teachers. All leaders should see themselves as coaches and the convenings really helped to put this into perspective and kind of changed our lens on how we see things. And realize ultimately that good teaching is good teaching. Teaching that is evidence based is good for everybody.* – District Leader/Administrator

***SCLN Coaching Development Community***

The Coaching Development Community (CDC) was created to prepare and support SCLN local coaches, based on the core NTN principles. The ultimate goal was to guide the instructional coaches to apply NTN strategies and approaches with the teachers they support. The CDC is primarily structured and delivered by NTN’s CDC facilitator. During the 2019-20 academic year, the CDC professional development offerings consisted of two face-to-face convenings during the fall and spring terms, monthly one and a half hour virtual group meetings, two-day site visits by the NTN leadership to each of the three SCLN districts, and four windows of virtual one-on-one coaching conversation opportunities with the facilitator. Approximately 14 individuals from SCLN schools and districts participated in the 2019-20 year.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For most CDC participants, the CDC experience was described as the most powerful learning opportunity of the SCLN and, in some cases, of their careers. Three school leaders stated,

*The CDC has played a huge role. [My instructional coach] said that this has been the most powerful NTN experience, that the hands on approach was really helpful and applicable.* – School Leader/Principal

*[The CDC facilitator] and the CDC has been huge. It has been excellent.* – School Leader/Principal

*The power of a community; being in a room with people fighting for the same cause. It’s powerful!* – Instructional Coach

The CDC Toolkit / Coach Development Program, the central driver for all CDC conversations, is rooted in the facilitation of problems – and project-based learning and coaching for deeper learning. (See Appendix B for the Coach Development Program model). Through the CDC, participants learn how to support teachers through understanding existing school conditions and structures, listening and dialogical coaching, the use of NTN protocols, and engagement in learn – experiment – reflect processes. The NTN accomplishes this by coaching the CDC participants as they learn and enact these approaches with help from the CDC facilitator and other participants.

According to the NTN leadership, the evolution of the CDC as employed in the SCLN initiative was heavily influenced by having attended a Jim Knight conference. One leader commented, “We realized we didn’t have the nuts and bolts like identification of goal elements, so it allowed us to get more tangible.” The structure of the CDC is closely aligned to the SCLN convenings in goals, topics, structure, and activities, but is much more intensive. It is also explicitly structured to prepare coaches for the task of guiding teachers in their practice.

It should be noted that local coaching is structured very differently across the SCLN schools and districts, which affects coaching practice for the instructional coaches. For example, at Bells Elementary School in Colleton County Schools District, two full-time coaches work with 14 teachers, a ratio that permits ongoing interactions and easy accessibility. While at the other schools in Colleton County Schools District, coaches are regular classroom teachers who have a slightly reduced load; they fit coaching into their schedule, as possible.

*About adult learning in the CDC*

According to the CDC participants and other administrators who may not have been involved in the CDC, the participants’ connection to and relationship with the CDC facilitator was key to the learning opportunities afforded through the CDC. Their comments highlighted the importance of establishing trust and safety as well as facilitator responsiveness.

*TRUST AND SAFETY: Trust and vulnerability is important. [CDC] is the community where I felt most open, and I felt out of the gate that it was very open-minded and there was the potential to air your failures and not feel criticized by others because they’ve all been there and vulnerable. I’ve always felt very calm and chill around [the CDC facilitator]. He’s always a good listener and I never feel judged by him. Having [the CDC facilitator] lead the CDC lent this air of security and safety that I felt.* – Instructional Coach

TRUST AND SAFETY: *There’s always an affective aspect to the circles. The warm up circles may start out light; then the closing circles are a little heavier. [The CDC facilitator] asks how we are feeling; whether we want to voice an appreciation of someone; what you’re feeling grateful for; affirmations. Just invitations to share; there’s never pressure. There have been tears, you know things get kind of personal and emotional because people feel passionately about education and the state of things, and how far away the system can be from what we know is best for kids.* – Instructional Coach

*RESPONSIVENESS: [The CDC facilitator] is really flexible in that whatever you’re needing in the work, he’s willing to go that way. He keeps a learning journal for each of us to document the questions that come up so we can follow up on these for the next time we meet. And we can add to these. So he’s really modeling coaching conversations. [The CDC facilitator] has been a great thought partner in helping to bounce off ideas and brainstorming questions that I might want to explore further.* – Instructional Coach

*RESPONSIVENESS: We meet face-to-face and virtually. [The CDC facilitator] is very responsive on text and email, and sends resources at a moment’s notice.* – Instructional Coach

In terms of the professional development provided, participants were especially appreciative of the less authoritarian (more collaborative) approach to coaching as well as the modeling of good coaching practice that occurred. As with the SCLN convenings, participants greatly valued getting the perspective of people from other schools.

*LESS AUTHORITARIAN (MORE COLLABORATIVE) COACHING: [My instructional coach] has told me that the CDC has shifted his/her way of thinking about coaching, so s/he and I approached this brand new, just like the six teachers we had the first year. We had to change the way we thought about our separate roles, and CDC furthered that for him/her. For example, s/he said: “In the beginning during the first few years, I’d go and observe teachers and tell them things like, “You don’t have your essential questions on the board.” But I’m realizing now that’s not what I’m supposed to do.* – Principal

*MODELING: Every time [the instructional coach]…shows us, while s/he’s leading us in some way, s/he’s also doing exactly what s/he’s trying to teach us about.* – Teacher

*CONNECTION TO OTHER SCHOOLS: Connecting with other schools like ours has been powerful. It takes time to develop a sense of connectedness. We can now reach out to others and interact with them. It’s nice to have that time scheduled in through this; otherwise it will always be on the back burner.* – Instructional Coach

Ultimately, the goal of the CDC has been to effectively equip the instructional coaches with key NTN strategies and practices that the coaches would then deliver, hopefully equally as effectively, to teachers at their school sites. Therefore, the application of the coaching practices taught was emphasized. Application capacity was strengthened through modeling as well as opportunities to reflect with others after new approaches were tried. Two of the teachers who were coached by CDC members had the following thoughts:

*APPLICATION/ MODELING: [The instructional coach] does a very good job of showing us how to implement the strategies by making us do it, which sometimes can be tedious as a teacher but I’ve been to a lot of PDs where they say, ‘here’s the strategy… now use it. And you think—I kind of get it but I’m not really sure how to use it in the classroom or what it’s actually going to look like. Some of the PDs we have, I can actually see how it would play out in the classroom, which has been very helpful.* – Teacher

*APPLICATION/REFLECTION: S/he models for us whatever professional development that we’re doing. We have time to discuss feelings and thoughts with a partner, and then s/he shares more info, we ask questions and then s/he gives us some ways to apply it to our class. For example, apathy and systems – s/he had us look at, “What are the current systems in place in our classrooms and how can we make that more student centered?” So, we actually had to stop and think and write down what was happening in our classroom and how we could apply what we just learned.* – Teacher

***Coaching Provided by New Tech Staff***

SCLN participants also received adult learning opportunities through district- and school-level coaching provided by the NTN staff. This activity was less pronounced during the 2019-20 school year since it was the last year of the SCLN initiative. However, in past years, NTN leaders regularly met with SCLN leaders and teachers to coach them through a set of analysis and decision-making processes that led to the creation and implementation of district and school plans for the SCLN.

Early in the SCLN initiative, NTN coaches worked with district and school leaders to understand and assess local needs. Over time, through engagement and relationship building, the coaches provided opportunities for SCLN participants to fully understand SCLN’s approach to deeper learning and figure out how to best enable it. During the past year, NTN coaching has been provided at three districts (Colleton, Greenville, and Charleston) and four schools.

Coaching takes place on a variety of platforms: face-to-face, by email, or by phone or video conferencing. An NTN coach is assigned to each participating district and differentiates his/her services according to the needs of the individual district or school; those needs can vary considerably. A coach working with schools new to the initiative primarily focuses on helping coaches and teachers gain a working knowledge of project- and problem-based learning. The NTN coach might help plan weekly professional development, facilitate book studies, examine and provide feedback on teacher practices in Echo, or work with teacher teams to help design effective projects. More experienced schools receive more differentiated support, depending on their needs.

Each NTN leader we interviewed agreed that buy-in from district leaders undergirds the successes and/or challenges at the school level. Therefore, much of the SCLN work focuses on increasing the capacity of district leaders to support the work at the schools. The goal is to help district leaders recognize what constitutes effective school-level coaching and support, and to help them develop the conditions and structures that enable that. One district leader expressed to us her sense that the knowledge base of her district was increasing and believed that their “growing capacity was giving more and more credibility to the district office as a place to go for support.”

NTN coaches are in close contact with their schools and districts. District and school leaders interviewed appreciate the commitment of the NTN staff and coaches:

*This is the most support I’ve ever gotten.*

*Everyone at NTN is so amazing. There’s a belief in the work that they’re doing – knowing it makes a difference.*

Interview responses on how NTN coaching supports professional growth emphasized the following themes: establishing trust, serving as a thought partner, and providing useful tools. In particular, having a thought partner was especially important in helping to reduce school leaders’ sense of isolation in the face of heavy responsibilities.

*ESTABLISHING TRUST: Elena Aguilar, I think I read this in her book: “You can’t coach anyone who you think sucks.” And if they think I suck, I don’t think they’re going to learn from me. So the emotional part is building a relationship so they feel some connection to you and what you’re trying to help them grow with. And for that, you have to build some kind of emotional, relational connection. I do think that those that feel overall more connected to the work tend to stick with it through the ups and downs.* – NTN Staff/Coach

*ESTABLISHING TRUST: The vulnerability of the school leaders and the trust they show is really special. Because you go through things together. You’re like their confidante and you’re not about accountability so to speak.* – NTN Staff/Coach

*COACH AS THOUGHT PARTNER: [The NTN Coach’s] visits are very important. He points out things and asks what I’m noticing. For example, I might be too harsh or not harsh enough based on a relationship with a teacher, so [the NTN Coach] gives me a sounding board. I meet with [the NTN Coach] almost weekly; he reminds me of what I need to focus on. He always asked, “what do you need me to do this year.” I said, “Help me be more aware of reality – keep me grounded.”* – School Leader/Principal

*COACH AS THOUGHT PARTNER: The greatest benefit of NTN was the support, the presence of a thought partner who’s not in the building, and having someone with whom to go through the learning phase. It binds you in a certain way.* – Local Instructional Coach

*OBTAINING USEFUL TOOLS: You have to come to the table with tools; you’re adding more tools to the toolbox. Getting a chance to apply what they learned, that’s just icing on the cake. If people see a practice in theory but they never get to apply or experience what it feels or looks like, then you never have growth.* – NTN Staff/Coach

*OBTAINING USEFUL TOOLS: [I help with] organizing the teachers/administrators around their learning. For example, how you structure instructional rounds, you’re looking at student work together and making informed decisions that’s going to improve student learning. And you’re doing peer interactions like giving feedback to people before they actually process their work. When you’re helping to develop a system with all those three things, then they’re on the road to learning themselves out of their own problems. It’s like a learning organization framework.* – NTN Staff/Coach

***New Tech Annual Conference***

The New Tech Annual Conference (NTAC) is held annually and convenes NTN schools and partners from around the country for a five-day “opportunity to sharpen skills, practices, and network with like-minded professionals across the country” (NTAC, 2019). It was especially valued by SCLN leaders and teachers as an orientation to the New Tech Network culture and framework in an immersive environment.

*NTAC is a wonderful opportunity for the entire team to get away together and be immersed in New Tech culture. There are no distractions. The focus being on NTN, deeper learning, problem-based learning. It tells you what New Tech is all about – for example, what does PBL look like? What does Echo look like? Also, it’s about building a sense of community.* – School Leader/Principal

*When I went to NTAC, it wasn’t like I had any real classroom experience since this is my first job as a teacher so it was a big paradigm shift. But it was also information overload, like an information dump and then I had to slowly process it all. A lot of info overload. And great sharing ideas with teachers around the country.* – Teacher

The opportunity to learn key skills was also valued, especially as related to problem- and project-based learning and the use of technology. One teacher commented on the importance of NTAC in helping to prepare him/her for problem-based learning, especially as a teacher with alternative route certification:

*ADVANCED CONTENT: NTAC was so much that when I got back and was doing the work for the alternative certification, the stuff from the state department of education was almost kind of elementary to me.* – Teacher

Another participant appreciated the range of choices available at NTAC and having the chance to choose the sessions that most advanced her learning.

*CHOICE: They had a section for first year, PBL, so we were supposed to go to that session. I left and went to the session for more experienced teachers and they were far more helpful than the first year thing. They were actually running projects, and explaining how to set them up.* – Teacher

According to interviewees, even though the deeper learning and problem-based learning were highlighted at NTAC, this event stood in contrast to the more nuanced and personalized adult learning experiences emphasized in the other SCLN gatherings. However, in many cases they were able to personalize the experience with the help of NTN coaches. For example, during their first year, the Bells instructional coaches and the teachers selected to attend the conference brought with them a curriculum map for a project they had developed collaboratively with their coach. The map, though incomplete, provided valuable context for the conference, which many still found “overwhelming.” However, according to one teacher, the curriculum map they had worked on together put them “ahead of the game.”

**RQ2. To what extent do the SCLN adult learners experience professional growth during their NTN-provided learning opportunities? When it occurs, to what do they attribute this growth?**

In discussing the four types of adult learning opportunities offered through the SCLN, participants highlighted certain features of each that they appreciated. SCLN participants described ways in which they grew through their adult learning experiences and how this growth manifested in personal changes and changes in practice. They also discussed ways that their schools changed that they attributed to the NTN adult learning opportunities.

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| --- |
| Definitions of Professional Growth |
| It is important to distinguish between “professional growth” and “professional learning.” The two terms that are often used interchangeably but differ in key ways. As Duke ((1993) suggests, “Learning is acquisition of new knowledge; growth implies the transformation of knowledge into the development of the individual. Growth is qualitative change, movement to a new level of understanding, the realization of a sense of efficacy not previously enjoyed” (p. 703). |

***Intrapersonal professional growth***

In this section, we discuss the types of growth that SCLN participants felt they and others had experienced intrapersonally, specifically changes in knowledge; in passion, energy and commitment; and, in worldview.

*Changes in knowledge*: Over time, interviewees observed that SCLN participants gained expertise with NTN instructional strategies such as project-based learning as well as NTN tools such as the project planner, protocols, and the rubrics used to assess the five learning outcomes. Many became excited at being able to deploy strategies that they had not previously used and came to understand the impact they could have on students.

*This to me is the way to go if we want our students to be globally ready for the real world. Giving kids real world experiences where their work ethics can be infused into that experience… I really think we need to continue spreading those practices because this is the way for the 21st century.* – District Leader

As noted in the previous sections, participants in SCLN learning events gained knowledge of deeper learning, project-based-learning, the use of tools such as protocols and ECHO templates, and ways to enhance school culture. In addition, as SCLN members gained facility at using the NTN instructional strategies and tools, they came to own them and became comfortable adapting them to meet the needs of their schools and students.

*We thought we had to use that project planner, and we’ve found now that we’ve made various iterations of it throughout the building; it’s just what works best for the teachers and how they plan together. –* Instructional Coach

*I’m going to talk in country ways: I’ve learned there’s more than one way to skin a cat. I used to set the problem statements at the beginning. Now the kids help come up with the problem statements, so from one year to the next, it might be a totally different product because they came up with a new idea.* – Instructional Coach

*Changes in passion, energy, and commitment.* The SCLN districts and schools faced many obstacles in the effort to introduce teaching practices that entailed extensive changes. The teachers interviewed – like teachers everywhere – were most familiar with traditional teacher-directed practices. Most of them had learned this way when they were students and then taught this way when they became teachers. As the implementation of the SCLN progressed and teachers saw concrete gains in student engagement and learning, many observed that major gains for students were occurring. That recognition, in turn, generated momentum to persist through the growing pains that inevitably accompany changes of this magnitude.

*The more engaged we are, the more engaged [students] are; the more excited we are overall the kids mirror that or put more into it so it’s contagious. When we’re excited about what we’re doing they catch onto that. ­*- Teacher

*There are so many benefits of being part of NTN beyond project-based learning…. Hopefully [the SCLN] will help us not to accept things as is – to not be comfortable. Any time something stops growing, it’s dead. –* District Leader

However, teachers were the least likely to express full commitment to the changes associated with the SCLN. A number had struggled with meeting the expectations associated with project-based learning, the five NTN outcomes, and the use of ECHO. For example, one stated:

*I’ve always struggled with giving up control of classroom of the classroom as I have in the last couple years; I always want to, I always intend to, I have the best intentions, but I usually find by a certain point in the year, I’m back to default lecture, “here’s what we have to get through.”* – Teacher

*Changes in worldview:*In some cases, interviewees described changes in their personal view of the world that they attributed to SCLN learning. A school director was inspired at the spring 2020 convening by discussion of an article entitled *Changing the Discourse in Schools* (Eubanks, Parish, & Smith, 1997). She described how she carries a chart based on the article with her each day as a reminder to search for causes rather than assign blame and to work to understand the issues that underlie external behaviors.

***Professional growth manifested in changes in practice***

Interviewees pointed to a number of ways that districts and schools had changed, indicating professional growth of teachers and leaders, as a result of participating in the SCLN. These changes were at the district, school, and classroom levels.

*District level changes*: Some interviewees spoke about ways that the district leaders had gained a better understanding of how to more effectively support schools due to participation in SCLN convenings and coaching.

*The convening induced a level of thinking that you weren’t accustomed to if you did not work in New Tech. It made you really think about things at a different level.* – District Leader

*The SCLN PD gives the leaders the opportunity to experience what the children are experiencing in the classroom. And they get to see what deeper learning is.* – District Leader

Participation in the SCLN, especially the SCLN convenings, also opened channels of communication between the districts and schools. At one convening, we observed district leaders engaged in conversation with school leaders about how mandated district PLCs (professional learning communities) cut into needed time for teacher planning. The district leaders had no idea prior to that conversation, they said, that one activity presented an obstacle to the other.

In addition, in the face of leadership changes in some schools and districts, one district in particular was better able to provide the support needed to sustain the work toward building NTN principles and practices:

*In [District], the NTN worked in the overall district strategy. The superintendent said, “we want these outcomes for all kids”’ and Included NTN practices among the factors resulting in those outcomes.…When the elementary school principal changed, the district was clear about keeping the implementation going. Then the assistant superintendent left, and the district assigned the next one to be a champion for the model. This feels hopeful.* – NTN Staff

*School level changes*: Interviewees identified a variety of important changes to their schools that they attributed to their learning as part of the SCLN. They highlighted three types of change as most important: to school culture, to the schools’ physical layout, and to support for teachers.

Culture change: A teacher described ways in which the culture at his school had changed since initiating NTN implementation, especially in terms of increased collaboration.

*The way we talk about things has become much more unified; the language has become more unified. We’ve gotten away from having a new system every couple of years. We had three or four new initiatives during my first five years. Now we’ve coalesced around this central idea – even before we were fully implementing things. We’re more focused – more together than we used to be.*- Teacher

In another case, problem solving techniques shared in a convening were used by school leaders to more effectively engage teachers in addressing the issue of student apathy. These interviewees stated that they used a systems approach, discussed at the fall 2019 convening, as a guide.

*That’s been huge shift that SCLN has provided and helped us to drill down and figure out and get teachers involved rather than just sitting around pow- wowing. And me crafting a lens with them and talking systems with them at the classroom level.* – School Leader

*We looked at systems and changing our system in our classrooms, and giving more effective feedback – and structure and allow students to be more successful and if they feel like they can be more successful then they’re more likely to do what you’re asking them to*. – Teacher

Physical changes: Some SCLN schools literally moved walls to accommodate co-taught classrooms, a practice encouraged by NTN, which resulted in double-sized classrooms with two teachers. At Colleton Middle School, a class of 56 students in a co-taught humanities (social studies/ELA) class met in a large room with moveable furniture, though plans to create additional large classrooms were reversed before the start of school in the school’s first year of implementation.

New Tech Mann High School essentially operated as a school within a school. Co-taught classes were held in a modern building separate from the main campus; the separate campus also fosters a family-type feeling amongst the students and faculty since they interact in the halls, at lunch, and before and after school each day. Classrooms are constructed with sliding walls to accommodate either co-taught or singleton classes. Mann teachers claimed to benefit from the building design, which features pods rather than offices so teachers from similar content areas share a common space. This design encourages collegial interaction. A Mann teacher said, “We’re always bouncing ideas off of each other; it’s not formal but it happens every single day at some point.”

Teacher support: There is clear movement toward providing more intentional coaching and support for teachers in many schools. For example, after an SCLN convening, a school director restructured her weekly schedule to spend one day each week in the classrooms, reducing the time she devoted to discipline. The change exemplified her determination to present herself to the faculty as a “team player,” she said.

An instructional leader explained how this year’s CDC events had helped her learn to use coaching conversations to promote growth in teachers. She particularly valued the specific questions provided by the Jim Knight model to be asked during a coaching cycle. A local coach explained how participation in the CDC has shifted her way of thinking about coaching. Rather than giving administrative directives, such as, ‘You don’t have your essential questions,’ she’s leading teachers to reach their own conclusions; the coach refers to this as the “bread crumb approach.”

In some cases, teachers appeared to feel more able to advance their own ideas about how to improve their teaching. One teacher described the tone of the coaching conversations at his middle school as respectful and mutually supportive.

*[Leadership does] a good job of making sure we understand that our decisions will be given respect as much as possible; if you want to try something new, you say, “Here’s what I’m trying, here’s why I’m trying it, here’s how I think it will work.” They’re good about saying “If you think that’ll work for the kids you have this year, then go for it.*” - Teacher

*Classroom level changes*: In the six schools where the Educator Culture Survey was administered in the spring of 2019, there was some diversity of views on how well the NTN model fit their school. Between half and all respondents thought the NTN model was a good fit. However, much larger proportions believed that their teaching had been influenced by the NTN: between 2/3 and all respondents thought that this was the case. And the majority of respondents agreed that, “PBL is the primary mode of instruction in my classroom.”

Those interviewed talked about classroom changes that they attribute to learning through the SCLN: instruction based on problem- and project-based learning, student centered learning, and handling the discomfort that comes with growth.

Problem and project based learning: The most conspicuous and salient change in classroom practice entailed the shift from traditional teaching practices to project- and problem-based learning (PBL/PrBL). Traditional teaching typically requires students to acquire knowledge in various content areas from textbooks and teacher lecture and subsequently demonstrate that learning in summative assessment measures. Most schools offer instruction in discrete content areas: math, English, science, social studies, etc. Standardized assessments administered yearly match that design.

Instruction as conceived and enacted in the NTN model is based on embedding the content learning in project work as students engage in the process of finding solutions to authentic questions and problems that affect their lives. Sixth grade humanities teachers at Colleton middle school designed a project to engage students in generating much-needed tourism to the area. Their students studied daily life in ancient civilizations and designed theme parks consisting of sections devoted to each civilization. Groups created power point presentations to highlight each civilization’s foods, activities, and other cultural elements. They planned to present their ideas to a county planning group in the nearby Edisto River region.

An interviewee teaching at Mann reported that students were excited to study linear equations to predict the length of time it would take their hair to grow long enough to donate to an organization that makes wigs for cancer patients. The students’ teacher designed the project when a close friend being treated for cancer lost her hair. The teacher commented that, due to this project, students “realized we can actually do something that’s going to have a meaningful impact on the life of someone else.”

Teachers also commented on community interaction as an important dimension of PBL. A teacher at Greenville Early College reflected that she had never before connected students to adults outside the school building nor considered the potential impact of student learning on the community outside the school and “liked that change very much.”

Student centered learning: Teachers in the SCLN were moving toward more student-directed instruction in their classrooms, allowing students to take greater control over their own learning. Further, teachers were gaining confidence in their own skills - and in student ability. These teachers commented,

*I always used to try to give kids everything they need – here’s this and this and this and this and now use it – like they need all these things before they can do this but they don’t. When I give them a problem, they already know so much more than I was giving them credit for. It still blows my mind that they can come up with these things.* - Teacher

*I used to say, “Here, let me give you all these things first and then show me what you know” instead of saying, “Let me see what you know first and then we can build on it,” which is much more meaningful.* - Teacher

Engagement in student centered learning can result in situations where teachers feel less in control of their classrooms. The support from the SCLN coaching allowed one middle school teacher to become a better classroom manager:

*Even with simple stuff like getting students to work on a group contract; a lot of things that would’ve been bigger problems are not so big, or not so big for me to manage.* - Teacher

Handling the discomfort that comes with growth: The shift from traditional, teacher-directed instruction to the project-based learning model was not always comfortable and involved more than technical changes in practice. Lew Smith (2001) describes the nature of the changes of this type as “second order changes” and considers this necessary for professional growth. He asks, “Does the change challenge the actual rhythm of a school; something that asks people to seriously look at what they believe, what they value, what they hold dear – and in the end, what they do?” (p. 32).

An instructional coach talked about the reactions of different groups when the school introduced project-based learning: “*It’s different; it’s uncomfortable at first. When we started this, [students] would ask us all the time – when are you going to teach us? Same with adults – teachers were thinking, ‘I thought you were going to tell us what we’re going to do.’”* However, the coach was clear that this kind of change was ultimately worthwhile: *“But we want them to discover it. It stays with you much longer and more deeply when you discover it for yourself than when someone just tells you.”*

**RQ3. How does the NTN approach to adult learning align with the research literature on this topic, especially as relates to opportunities for professional growth?**

Through the SCLN initiative – one year of planning followed by three years of implementation – NTN provided ongoing opportunities for participants to learn, practice, then apply the multiple concrete mechanisms that comprise the NTN model. Many aspects of their approach were aligned with the research literature on adult learning.

***SCLN Learning Opportunities: Alignment with the Aguilar Principles***

The six principles of adult learning developed by Elena Aguilar (2014) frame the literature review that underpins this study. Our data suggests those principles are embedded, both explicitly and implicitly in NTN’s professional learning opportunities. They include attention to the key role played by **emotions** in an adult’s receptivity to learning; the acknowledgement that each learner possesses a unique **history** encompassing a range of previous interests and experiences; the knowledge that adults learn best when professional development includes elements of **self-direction and agency;** recognition that adults possess a **problem-centered** orientation – making it crucial that the learning is purposeful; knowledge that adults will commit to learning when they **know why** they are learning something and believe the objectives are realistic and important; and finally recognition that **internalizing** new learning is facilitated by opportunities to apply that learning in concrete ways.

In our interviews with SCLN participants about features of the professional development that they had experienced, they identified the following themes as advancing their professional growth. We note where these are aligned with Aguilar’s principles.

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| --- | --- |
| Aguilar principle | Themes – NTN adult learning |
| Emotions | * Feeling valued * Buttressing from peers * Connections to other schools * Trust and safely * Responsiveness of facilitators * Coaches serving as thought partners |
| Knowing why/problem centered learning | * Learning for action * Obtaining useful tools * Advanced content |
| Self-direction | * Less authoritarian, more collaborative, coaching * Choice (of conference sessions) |
| Internalizing/application | * Modeling (as an instructional strategy) * Reflection (as an instructional strategy) |

Interviewees often mentioned aspects of their learning associated with emotions. These were split into emotions related to feelings about the NTN providers of adult learning (trust, safety, feeling valued, responsiveness) and those related to peers (buttressing, connection to other schools). In addition, interviewees mentioned appreciation for instructors/coaches who served as thought-partners. This role was associated with problem-centered learning as well as addressing the need for personal support, especially important to principals who said they can feel isolated.

Interviewees also valued learning that would be readily applicable to their professional lives (advanced content, tools) as well as instructional strategies that worked well for them and could be used when teaching/coaching others (modeling, reflection). In these cases, it was clear that they had a sense of knowing why the adult learning was structured as it was.

Factors related to history did not emerge as important in our interviews and are not included in the list above.

***SCLN Learning Opportunities: Alignment with Other Research***

While there is much in the literature that could be discussed related to adult learning, we offer a few observations on research that could inform (or has informed) NTN’s thinking.

*Gradual release of responsibility*: NTN learning opportunities are characterized by the gradual release of responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2008): *I do* –assembled learners *learn* *of* the information from a facilitator who models the content and establishes purpose; *We do* –facilitators of the learning guide learners to *enact* the strategy under supervision, providing additional modeling if necessary; *You do with support* – learners collaboratively *address* an authentic task as facilitators move among groups to provide support and clarify confusion. The final phase – *You do independently* – entails both independent practice on the part of individuals and collaboration as school and district leaders return to their sites, school leaders and coaches return to their schools, and teachers return to their classrooms to apply the learning. NTN employed the gradual release of responsibility model to help SCLN schools engage with PBL, develop proficiency with Echo, utilize the project planner, practice protocols, and promote a partnership mindset for coaches.

These learning opportunities were more successful in some schools/districts than others and raise questions about how much support is needed in settings with multiple challenges. Was the full NTN model too complex for this context? Less complex models may be needed in some places, a possibility that has been considered by the NTN. A relevant concept may be “Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)” which refers to the range of activities that a learner (or school) can perform with support before gaining independence.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Deeper learning in tension with entrenched patterns*: Deeper learning, at multiple levels, is at the heart of what the NTN sought to achieve through the SCLN. Through its professional development offerings, NTN sought to provide deeper learning opportunities to the SCLN administrators, coaches, and teacher-leader participants, who then in turn, would model these learned strategies and coach teachers at the school sites, ultimately resulting in the implementation of deeper learning practices in the classroom and among students. NTN’s deeper learning framework is based on research and describes how they believe that adults and students learn best (Williams, 2019). The key tenets of the NTN Deeper Learning framework were infused throughout the adult learning opportunities NTN provided through the SCLN initiative.

Mehta and Fine (2014) contend that deeper learning integrates the “cool cognitive dimensions” of analysis, synthesis, and creation with the warmer features of the affective domain, which tap the identities, passions, and motivations of the learner (p. 1). Yet transforming schools to become institutions of deeper learning entails overcoming obstacles created by entrenched traditions that privilege teacher-centered transmission of information and assessments that measure retention of that information. A consistent challenge in reforming education, therefore, is “developing and retaining ‘infinitely skilled teachers’ who can engage students in student-centered learning (Hernandez et al., 2019, p. 1).

According to Hernandez and Darling Hammond (2019), most teachers are underprepared to implement new instructional approaches. Teachers tend toward familiar teaching practices; they teach as they were taught, drawing on a teacher-centered framework and a prescribed curriculum and resources. Deeper learning involves reimagining the classroom and embracing new instructional approaches. In the SCLN, this was sometimes difficult to achieve, particularly in schools with multiple challenges. In these cases, teachers seemed to cling to traditional practices. Teacher turnover also made it difficult for NTN practices to gain traction in some cases.

*Aspiring to improve equity*: In addition, the NTN sought to address issues of equity, particularly because the SCLN schools are located in an area with high numbers of racially minoritized and poor students. This was addressed in three ways. First, NTN believes that their model offers a superior educational experience—one that is good for all students. Students should be offered high quality pedagogy as embodied in PBL. Second, NTN addressed ways to improve equity as part of the adult learning provided by asking participants to engage in activities based on readings such as the *Pedagogy of Poverty Versus Good Teaching (*Haberman, 1991)and *Changing the Discourse in School* (Eubanks et al., 1997). This was designed to address the stereotype threat that can occur when members of an underserved social group “deal with the possibility of being judged or treated stereotypically, or of doing something that would confirm existing negative images of their identity” (Steele & Aronson, 1998, p. 401). Teachers engaging in stereotyping, whether intentional or not, may treat learners inequitably. Finally, NTN employed approaches to adult learning associated with more equitable teaching including encouraging a sense of belonging and conveying their respect of participants. Walton and Cohen (2007) found that students who had doubts about their social belonging in college had lower achievement compared to those who received an intervention to mitigate that doubt. Knight (2007) asserts that teachers who work with instructional coaches should walk away from all interactions feeling like they are valued and their opinions matter.

*Creating systemic conditions*: NTN explicitly seeks to create conditions that will enable good teaching by offering adult learning opportunities at all levels of the education system—district, school, and classroom. Weiner and Pimentel (2017) contend that system leaders bear responsibility for supporting teachers. They submit that distinguishing professional learning as either top-down or bottom-up approaches fails to account for the fact that a system requires some of each. “There are trade-offs between a ‘push’ strategy mandating specific activities, which can get to scale quickly but runs the risk of a compliance approach, versus a ‘pull’ strategy that allows for more organic uptake and ownership but may extend the timeline for full implementation. NTN adult learning balances push strategies such as district policies that enable NTN to flourish with pull strategies that involve support for experiments by coaches and interesting projects by teachers.

**Conclusions and Reflections**

The SCLN has been a challenging project that involved introducing NTN principles and practices into multiple districts in a high poverty region. Much has been gained—in a relatively short period. A number of schools have embraced the NTN model and are well on their way to becoming strong implementers. Local instructional coaches have improved their skills and confidence in guiding teachers. Teachers are becoming proficient at creating and executing high quality projects. Most importantly, students are showing enthusiasm for learning in ways that are authentic and meaningful.

Those who participated in the adult learning offered have come away very appreciative of the opportunities offered to them. In interviews, they talked about the professional growth that has occurred as a result—intrapersonally as well as in their professional practice. This report has identified a number of ways that the adult learning experiences provided have enabled this professional growth. Not surprisingly, their design and enactment are well aligned with the research literature.

In the process of conducting this research a few questions arose that the SCLN might reflect on in future endeavors:

1. Are all schools ready for NTN? Does there need to be some level of leadership capacity and stability in place to take full advantage of the opportunity to become an NTN school?
   1. If schools are not ready, is there an on-ramp learning experience that could be offered?
   2. Are there less intensive ways, short of the full NTN model, to help students make progress toward the NTN outcomes?
2. Are teachers adequately exposed to NTN in a way that best advances their knowledge, skills and motivations in the context of a project like the SCLN?
   1. Could teachers be more involved during the planning year in developing an approach to transitioning to NTN instructional and assessment practices?
   2. Could there be convenings scheduled for teachers as well as school/district leaders and local coaches?
3. The equity agenda was explicitly addressed in convenings, but less so in other adult learning moments. Is there a way to broaden/deepen this aspect of NTN’s work?
   1. Might it be possible to provide more professional development on culturally relevant project development? Could more culturally relevant project examples be made available to teachers?
   2. With regard to school culture, could more be done to draw on the work of organizations that are focused on creating more inclusive environments such as [Teaching Tolerance](https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/school-climate), the [International Institute for Restorative Practices](https://www.iirp.edu/continuing-education/safer-saner-schools), and the [Center for Urban Education](https://cue.usc.edu/about/equity/equity-mindedness/)?

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Appendix A: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

**A. NTN Staff (n=3)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Interviewee** | **Role** |
| 1. Jude Garnier | Project Lead |
| 1. Matt Thompson | CDC Lead |
| 1. Dese Zuberi | Coach |

**B. District Leaders (n=3)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviewee** | **Role** | **District** |
| 1. Emily Elliott | District Coach & Digital Learning Specialist | Charleston |
| 1. Jessica Williams, | Assistant Superintendent | Colleton |
| 1. Jerrolyn Murray, | PBL District Leader | Colleton |

**Note: Emily Elliott is CDC + District interviewee**

**C. School Leaders (n=7)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviewee** | **Role** | **School/Site** |
| 1. Tiffany Pearson, | Program Director | Palmetto  (Colleton) |
| 1. Lauren Townsend | Program Director | HCA and Cougar Colleton HS  (Colleton) |
| 1. Amy Liebenrood | Principal | Bells Elementary  (Colleton) |
| 1. Michael Delaney | Principal | Carolina HS  (Greenville) |
| 1. Wanda Littlejohn, | Instructional leader  leads team of coaches at her campus | Carolina HS  (Greenville) |
| 1. Cindy Alsip | Principal, Program Director | NT @Mann  (Greenville) |
| 1. Marjon Ford, | Principal | Greenville EC  (Greenville) |

**Note: Wanda Littlejohn is CDC + School Leaders interviewee**

**D. CDC Participants (n=4)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviewee** | **Role** | **District/School** |
| 1. Jay Mobley, | Instructional Coach | NT @Mann  (Greenville) |
| 1. Emily Elliott, | District Coach & Digital Learning Specialist | Charleston |
| 1. Wanda Littlejohn | Instructional leader  (and leads team of coaches at her campus) | Carolina HS  (Greenville) |
| 1. Janet Rizer | Instructional Coach | Bells ES  (Colleton) |

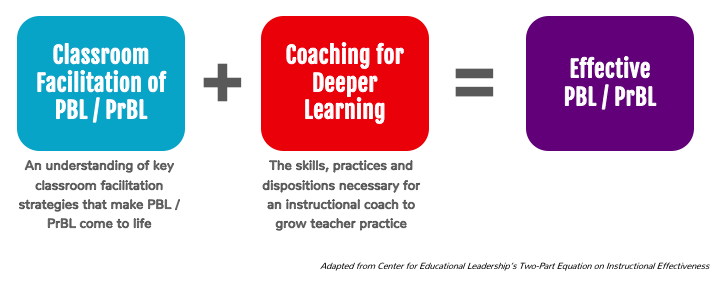
**E. Teachers (interviews in pairs; n=6)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interviewee** | **Role** | **School/Site** |
| 1. John Hildebrand | Teacher | Palmetto  (Colleton) |
| 1. Mason Dillard 2. Becca Genovese | Teachers | Greenville EC  (Greenville) |
| 1. Tori Atkins, Math 2. Mindi Mott, Science 3. Tiffany Nicholson, English | Teachers | NT @Mann  (Greenville) |

Appendix B

**NTN Model for Coach Development Program**

**COACH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FACILITATION | COACHING |
| **Student Ownership of Learning & Process**   * [Student Understanding of Process](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1H1XQ4E5N46htAllfbHtwI36vo6ts75mH4G_1ErHrmcI/edit) * Formative Assessment * [Productive Struggle](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qExuymXOMhucLap1Dr95fSt2TyHxDo2xE9Q75Y9O05M/edit)   **Active, Social, Equitable Learning**   * [Protocols & Structures](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hu14Kv62vHpA1asEZec2SMjpdfwBRNXNaFVUyOy9uYc/edit)   **Culture of Care**   * [Community Circles](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zK88vowPrq7HcwImAJwXiytucB_mY_3EY9n5vAlPAfo/edit) * [Personal Connection](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18MdnDJKXyXWH18AktgivUw0B2nIEkOugijQmVD6Ogik/edit) * [Warm Demander](https://helpcenter.newtechnetwork.org/hc/en-us/articles/360030282572)   **Questioning Strategies**   * [Types and Level of Questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/182zlYkXMElQjCtxL2ooumWBdjvYd3ENlnS9lKaPWMYA/edit) * Teacher as Coach | **How You Show Up**   * [Dialogical Coaching](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1B4vTOdh7iuVi_CZ47b6V1hciGu5p996n3eMiCIKL0Sk/edit) * [Coaching with Grace](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18JDgtbfpTq6BN1XCqTsVLo0oGwdqKHPOoWJys5MGVtI/edit) * [Listening](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NRfulLgKF9Pdg7MywuKAxkk4r5gfMsOC2Vc5SV8kFqU/edit)   **Active, Social, Equitable Learning**   * [Protocols & Structures](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CgYieblgWdYMsA0CCwJxobtd6Pd0Ke2Z1gJYVJN1ZPE/edit) * [Experiential Learning Cycle](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XALBnclrSt93ppcWkRHurSmmyWACSy2gFhVsx9ewYKo/edit)   **Coaching Conditions & Structures**   * [Managing Your Weekly Schedule](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VAb4C7SRKhdlnKOmV3W6d7zSHmIPHsL8Cn0BF4TJ6oE/edit) * [Shared Expectations](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fIET2iWzN75FLJJT2bQz-SvDzV_gP5_dPlv6RRBoYls/edit)   [**Coaching Cycle**](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/17zYS3I-xgnyef28uIjlx_stjN1dm8z3G_hY6Cd-GuIo/edit)   * [Capturing Current Reality](https://docs.google.com/document/d/187k5utoB3OT0pJ8ImOEgSNPZw9ngstWEbI_frgq__qg/edit) * [Identify Teacher’s Goal for Growth](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AXlem-Rj7E0C0ywulPSdyj-u4ZkzJSbyTygnw12r8Zw/edit) * [Learn - Experiment - Reflect](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1O9NsVnK-iz4I9LsoEppQ7aoKQQzW9Wua2DAH0MAmDug/edit) |

 Source: NTN Toolkit / Coaching Development Program

1. For information on NCREST, see <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/ncrest/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For information on the New Tech Network, see <https://newtechnetwork.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Appendix C for a table of driving questions, intended outcomes, and assignments NTN staff emailed to SCLN leaders prior to the fall 2019 and spring 2020 SCLN convenings. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Some of the participants did not participate in the CDC during the 2019-20 academic year because they were participating in the newer *Leading for Deeper Learning* subgroup that NTN offered to SCLN districts. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Zone of proximal development. (2009). In *Penguin dictionary of psychology.* Retrieved from Credo Reference database. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)