



UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF AGENCY

NEW TEACHER
INDUCTION
PROGRAM
EMPOWERS
EDUCATOR-
CENTERED
GROWTH

BY JULIET CORRELL

Kayla Long, a first-year teacher, greets every student at the door with a smile and a handshake. Students enter the room reading the clear expectations on the board to get started — and they do. In the rare case that a student does not, peers take a leadership role and respectfully remind.

After the bell rings, Long enters the room and acknowledges students who are doing what they are supposed to do. “Savannah, I like that you have your device out and are logging into the quiz tool for the warm-up. Kyle, I notice that you and your team are talking about your next steps for the project. Isabella, I appreciate that you are working with your group to solve that problem. Jennifer, thank you for taking ownership for your team’s learning and getting out a device for everyone. Richard, great job of moving to the next step without being asked.”

Later, students demonstrate their understanding on sticky notes, check their perceptions with others, and provide peer assistance to support each other in this safe learning environment.

Individual and collective student agency permeate the room: the ability to make choices about and take an active role in setting their own learning course and adjusting, as needed, to reflect individual identities,

competencies, knowledge and skills, mindsets, and values. Together, the class demonstrates collective agency.

Like the agency that she has cultivated with her students, Long also has developed teacher agency. Long teaches 7th-grade English language arts at Young Junior High in the Arlington Independent School District in Texas. She participates in ongoing learning in a variety of ways. She collaborates formally and informally with other beginning teachers through professional learning communities (PLCs) and is a member of the district’s teacher academy, New Teacher Induction Program, a comprehensive approach to professional learning for beginning educators.



Kayla Long

The New Teacher Induction Program began last September and included a fall orientation session where new educators envisioned the ideal student learning environment and, using a graphic organizer to capture their thinking, backmapped specific steps required to achieve the ideal. This was the initial opportunity for Long and other new teachers to exercise agency through personal vision.

After exploring elements of the ideal classroom through collaborative conversations and identifying observed

NEW TERMINOLOGY

Silothargy

[si-LO-thar-gy] noun

- The undesired state where there is individual agency within silos.
- The opposite of EDUgency or interdependent system agency.

EDUgency

[ED-u-gency] noun

- The desired state of interdependent system agency, collective efficacy.

Source: Shannon Terry, Arlington Independent School District

gaps between current reality and the ideal state, teachers crafted a personalized professional learning plan to bridge the gap. From this exercise, preliminary problems of practice emerged from the group.

They identified eight professional learning strands that would guide their work over the course of the induction year. From September to April, the new teachers attended to their problems of practice during the new teacher professional learning sessions.

With 24 professional learning sessions comprising the New Teacher

IDEAS

Induction Program for the 2016-17 school year, individual agency around each educator's problem of practice would fuel their participation and direct their paths. A culture of inquiry, intentionality, and responsiveness to priority needs developed, serving as the catalyst for accelerating progress toward creating the ideal learning environment.

The focus of the New Teacher Induction Program is on individual teacher choice, not about what the professional learning department determines as teacher needs. This approach models the expectations for how teachers will facilitate learning for students. They have experienced that firsthand and then transferred that agency into their instructional practice.

"It was very welcoming to have a voice so early on," Long said. "I expect this trend to continue and grow, and I'm eager for it."

The Arlington district promotes several behaviors with intention across the system to foster a culture of agency. These traits include a growth mindset, grit, efficacy, and empowerment. (See diagram above.) Kelly Hastings,



Kelly Hastings

principal at Young Junior High, and her colleagues believe that individual agency is essential for creating collective efficacy within the school and larger organizational climate.

Long says that, to advocate for students, it is imperative that she has a voice as a teacher. "I have learned that when I am allowed to speak up, I am heard, and it really helps me with my students as a PBL (problem-based learning) teacher. I want my students to take control of their own learning. That



is a tool that they will keep through adulthood." It starts with the teacher.

Long says that her students seem to care more about their learning because they have voice and choice, and she can better meet their needs by providing them with a setting where they can advocate for themselves. It only makes sense for administrators to do the same for teachers, working backward.

SEEKING COHERENCE

With 75 schools located between Fort Worth and Dallas, Arlington ISD is a district with the ambitious goal that 100% of students will graduate prepared for college, career, and citizenship. For the district, the New Teacher Induction Program is a vehicle to foster individual agency for each teacher and empower educator-centered growth, intentionally modeling the same kind of learning designs that teachers apply with students in their classrooms.

The district seeks enhanced coherence around professional learning across the system, from teacher and principal leadership and learning to the central office and the larger community, to achieve collective efficacy and improve

outcomes for students. The concept of agency has gained significant interest in recent years. For the Arlington district, it's about taking ownership in numerous ways and encouraging autonomy balanced with a responsibility to facilitate peer learning, a process that fosters one's own growth as well.

Agency also involves responsiveness in interactions that span the district, as Shannon Terry, the district's director for professional learning, describes. "Teacher agency is multifaceted," Terry says. "When the teacher is exercising agency, the educator is attending to the priority needs

presented in the learning environment — whether it is student-focused, peer-related, or involves interactions with different constituencies, such as support staff, administrators, central office, parents, or community members. Teacher agency is taking ownership of the learning based on the needs being presented. Teacher agency invites growing yourself and growing others with priority assigned to students."



Shannon Terry

Teacher agency promotes student agency. The transformation happens when teachers exercise agency and they "reach to teach and teach to reach." Terry describes that reaching as the act of exercising agency and teaching to reach is modeling for students what agency looks like, so that students begin to reach, too.

BUILDING AGENCY

Before their work with the Learning Forward Academy, Hastings and Terry knew intuitively — and it was reflected in their early research — that working

with novice teachers, encouraging peer support, and immersing all learners (teachers, leaders, and students) in developing individual and system agency would positively impact teacher practice and student learning. The question was how to do that effectively and equitably.

In her building, Hastings says that instructional leaders visited classrooms and observed instruction, and faculty meetings focused on formal professional learning, but she sensed that there were additional needs for informal goal-driven learning, facilitated by peer support, and that this widespread change had to be led by the teachers exercising agency, not through principal direction.

Terry says she observed pockets of success around the district from individuals exercising agency at different levels and across different roles, but it was happening in silos. She and Hastings coined the term “silothargy” to describe this culture.

Hastings and Terry applied separately for Learning Forward Academy scholarships from the Learning Forward Foundation to support their professional learning, but as they looked more deeply at each other’s interests and topics, it was clear that their problems of practice complemented and supported one another. The common thread was a focus on moving beyond individual efficacy to generating collective efficacy through system agency or, as Terry calls it, “EDUgency.”

CONNECTING THE SILOS

Striving for coherence across professional learning efforts at the district and campus has been a core element of the New Teacher Induction Program and professional learning in general. Hastings and Terry have constructed a shared understanding of how to move from silothargy to EDUgency, and they work at each level

THE LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

The learning design of the Learning Forward Academy, including a structured learning process and clear accountability measures, has encouraged Kelly Hastings and Shannon Terry to meet and work on creating EDUgency together. The Academy has also offered tools and supported skill development to advance these efforts. In particular, the IC maps and cross-district collaboration have been applicable for the work at Arlington ISD.

“The Learning Forward Academy has connected dots for people like Kelly and me,” Terry says.

Hastings agrees. “The brilliance in the room is pretty cool when we get together.”

The Learning Forward Academy is an extended and profound learning experience that immerses members in a model of inquiry- and problem-based learning. Academy members work collaboratively to gain knowledge to solve significant student learning problems in their schools, districts, or organizations.

To learn more about the Academy or to apply: www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/academy.

to break down barriers between silos.

The Learning Forward Academy experience has furthered collaboration between the building and system to help connect the silos. Regular reflection and feedback loops that are embedded in the Academy process have sparked timely enhancements to the New Teacher Induction Program in ways that were much more responsive than in the past.

Terry refers to the constant stream of

information and learning back and forth between the implementers (principals and staff) and the designers (central office team) as “agency wavelengths” that calibrate and enhance the work.

During this process, Hastings realized a desire and need to broaden her sphere of influence beyond Young Junior High, and she has done that in several ways that have deepened her leadership capabilities and the connection between her building and the central office, including serving as a member of the district’s Professional Learning Advisory Council as a principal representative and being one of only seven campuses selected to implement the new AISD Active Learning Cycle.

To move more deeply into systemwide EDUgency, Hastings and a colleague sponsored a viewing of the 2015 documentary film *Most Likely to Succeed*, inviting central office administrators and representatives from the university to participate and jointly consider with building principals the implications for fostering agency and effective practice.

DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

As an active learner in the New Teacher Induction Program, Long participated in a systematic learning design that included:

- Setting goals to ground the work;
- Identifying problems of practice;
- Selecting high-priority areas of need;
- Deepening knowledge through targeted, goal-aligned professional learning;
- Applying new learning to enhance practice; and
- Collaboratively reflecting on outcomes.

The process emphasized developing

individual agency, empowering educators through ownership, choice, and flexibility, and enabling them to make course corrections in their learning and instructional practice based on personal context.

The individual agency Long and other first-year teachers exercised was reciprocated by district leaders, who exercised agency in response to the teachers' problems of practice. This complementary process allowed new teachers to engage in and apply timely and relevant professional learning aligned to their most pressing student-focused needs. With that model in mind, Long felt empowered to champion agency with her students.

FOSTERING COLLECTIVE EDUGENCY

The New Teacher Induction Program has amassed widespread leadership commitment across the system and has been empowering and transformational, especially given the size and complexity of the district. Leadership support was evidenced by principals' engagement in talking about the concept of collective teacher efficacy and then problem solving on how to generate deeper buy-in from teachers and implementing the changes that the principal team generated.

The Young Junior High leadership team actively participated in its own professional learning, focused on enhancing the effectiveness of PLCs and providing teachers with a larger leadership role within their teams.

Hastings assures teachers in her building that they have the answers and that together they can reveal or generate them through focused, team-based conversations. Over the last year, as an outgrowth of her own professional learning through the Learning Forward Academy, Hastings has emphasized transparency and being explicit about what her staff is doing as adult learners

THE LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION AT WORK

Principal Kelly Hastings is participating in the Learning Forward Academy, funded through the 2016 Principal as Leader of Professional Learning Scholarship provided by the Learning Forward Foundation.

Shannon Terry, director of professional learning, is the recipient of the 2016 Patsy Hochman Scholarship recipient for the Learning Forward Academy. Her problem of practice describes the theory of change that underlies her joint work with Hastings:

"Creating a strong culture of collaboration and collective responsibility for the provision of sustained, job-embedded professional learning that supports teacher agency and the attainment of student, teacher, campus and district performance goals through the design, development, articulation,

implementation, and stewardship of a dedicated community of practice comprised of partner departments responsible for leading professional learning impacting first-year teachers in 2016-17, experienced teachers in 2017-18, and instructional leaders in 2018-19."

The Learning Forward Foundation supports the development of educators' capacity to improve student learning through innovation and improvement that transforms professional learning, framed by Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and implemented with a coherent design through grants, scholarships, and professional support. The foundation's vision is to educate, innovate, and transform educator professional learning.

To learn more about the foundation or apply for a scholarship or grant: www.learningforward.org/foundation.

and why. This includes teachers in the New Teacher Induction Program and the team as a whole.

Enhanced teacher agency is mitigating inequities and fostering educator and student-centered learning by ensuring that reciprocal teaching and learning occur between educator and student. Both teacher and student are elevating outcomes by becoming interconnected in the learning through tightly aligned, calibrated, and self-directed agency. Equity results as barriers are removed because of teacher agency aligning to (or being responsive to) student agency. Teachers need to be empowered before students can be, and this shared agency and collective efficacy is visible across the Young campus.

Teachers at Young strive to meet the school mission: "Teach, guide, and support all students to achieve academic and social success, as well as develop and

demonstrate respect for self and others." Students learned and applied future-ready skills (autonomy, collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, growth mindset, and professional ethics). Students began taking more ownership of their learning by reflecting using student tracking tools. Teachers realized they needed more tools to support the academic success of all students and started talking about learning more about differentiation. As a result, that is the focus for professional learning in 2017-18.

From Terry's view at the system level, she has incorporated the building blocks of individual agency throughout the implementation of the New Teacher Induction Program, including fostering a growth mindset, offering concrete opportunities for teachers to develop and measure grit, using a quantifiable scale, and developing

efficacy, ultimately empowering educators and resulting in agency.

MONITORING PROGRESS

Like any mission worth undertaking, this journey has changed and evolved. Hastings and Terry view this as a work in progress — an ongoing learning opportunity for them as individuals and as a team. They monitor the effectiveness of the learning designs for the New Teacher Induction Program and assess efforts to align campus-based and district structures to support agency and leadership. They recognize that teacher education and teacher leadership are a complex set of interconnected systems.

To determine if this approach is successful, educators on the Young Leadership team are using Innovation Configuration (IC) maps to self-assess their level of proficiency on the Learning Communities and Leadership standards of Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

They determined their areas for growth, shared with the other teachers in their PLCs, and they’re using the IC maps to gauge and document progress. Teachers say they feel a positive and strong sense of agency, fostered by the central office. By observing PLCs, Hastings can see that teachers are talking about how they can offer more agency to their students, scaffolding their agency, and are releasing some control.

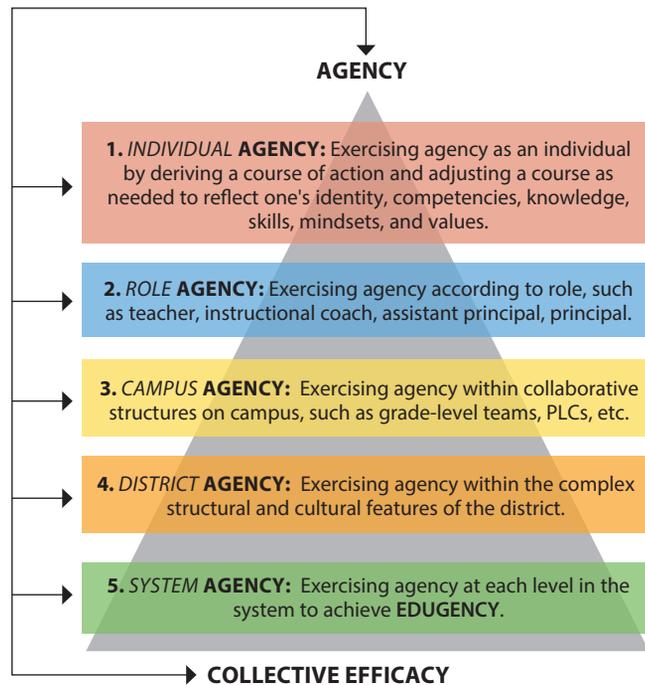
Students are using tracking tools to set goals and monitor their progress and using protocols to guide their collaborative work with other students.

Next year, the leadership team will concentrate on the IC maps for the Resources, Data, Learning Designs, and Implementation standards.

Hastings and Terry describe these lessons learned that will drive district enhancements for new teacher professional learning.

SYSTEMS

Educational systems have an opportunity to advance agency among educators through the design, development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of an infrastructure supporting agency and leading to collective efficacy, thereby improving student outcomes.



- Resist the tendency to oversimplify the concept of agency with simple voice and choice.
- Consider how to systematically incorporate adult learning theory in a way that allows agency and then collective efficacy to have the greatest effect.
- Recognize that discovering and articulating a hierarchy and design for how teacher agency contributes to system agency and EDUgency requires a growth mindset within the settings of role, identity, and context

Renee Pope, a professional learning



Renee Pope

coordinator in the district, has been instrumental in collaborating with the team to promote formative reflection among all stakeholders to enhance the New Teacher Induction Program, based on what they learned about agency along the way.

“The greatest support for empowering teachers to exercise agency is the autonomy to do so,” Pope says. “However, the ability to exercise agency is directly related to an individual’s willingness to reflect on his or her practice. At the very beginning, new teachers experienced frustration exercising agency because they feel they must know and do everything. Coaching conversations with campus and team leaders is helping new teachers continuously reflect with a growth mindset. I am hopeful that these conversations will help them exercise their agency in ways that yield student success.”

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

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