

Creating Dissonance that Supports Inquiry and Growth: Moving from a Focus on Roles and Programmatic Functions to Unified and Effective Core Instruction for All Learners

During the current school year, SST region 6 developed and facilitated a year-long PD/training experience to extend what the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Exceptional Children (ODE-OEC) is learning through its work with State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) partner districts. Awarded to Ohio in 2012, this iteration of SPDG incorporates the use of integrated comprehensive services (ICS)¹ strategies to foster the effective use of the Ohio Improvement Process (OIP) in improving results for diverse – and often marginalized – groups of learners (e.g., students with disabilities) as part of district-wide continuous improvement.



Elise Frattura and Colleen Capper developed ICS. According to Frattura (personal communication, 2012):

ICS is about taking the best of what we know of good practice from special education, gifted education, and other areas and making it available to all children as part of the core instructional program. It is about proactively rebuilding the entire system and getting instruction right the first time for all children. It is not about moving special education back into the confines of regular education, nor is it about moving children back into an unchanged core. The focus of ICS is on building collaborative teaching and promoting the sharing of expertise among all adults in the system, rather than reinforcing a programmatically driven system that tends to separate/seclude adults and children by departmental functions.



SST 6 invited all districts in the region with a “D” or “F” on their state report card gap indicator (i.e., an indicator that reports the degree of gap between the academic achievement of students with disabilities receiving special education services as compared to all other children served by the district) to attend the year-long experience. From the list of eligible districts, SST 6 selected nine districts that were not only willing to participate, but also demonstrated a commitment to follow through on implementing what they learned through the training. Each district participating in the work brought a 6-to-10 member team that was comprised of the superintendent/superintendent

¹ ICS is organized around four cornerstones as illustrated above and defines comprehensive services as the array of services and supports, centered in differentiated curriculum and instruction, that all students receive to ensure academic and behavioral success. For more information, see: Frattura, E. M., & Capper, C. A. (2007). *Leading for social justice: Transforming schools for all learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

designee with decision-making authority, central office personnel including the director of special education, principals, and general classroom and special education (i.e., intervention specialists) teachers.

“We intentionally framed the training as a year-long *study* on how to close gaps to reinforce the notion that teams had to accept non-closure as a condition of participation,” explained SST region 6 Director Becky Rees. “It is sometimes hard for people to accept that there’s not a linear path, recipe, or quick fix that results from a training,” she added.

The study experience was developed as five half-day sessions, but due to extensive “snow days” in the region during winter months, the program involved three half-days and one full day of training. Content for the SST training was developed through Ohio’s SPDG. “Our consultants worked in pairs to identify units of content and corresponding agendas for each PD session in the series. It was about our learning too and building the capacity of SST personnel to train others in the use of ICS, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and other aspects of Ohio’s SPDG work – all within the context of the OIP,” explained Rees.

Rees ensured that all SST 6 consultants were involved in SPDG training in 2013-14, and also supported selected staff in attending an ICS Academy held in Wisconsin in summer 2014. “When we work with districts we focus on the whole system and how the four ICS cornerstones relate to and affect each other,” said Rees.



The focus across the five sessions targeted:

Session #1: Core beliefs and a district examination of current service delivery models

Session #2: Growth mindset, a review of relevant data, and the use of district-developed service delivery maps to identify ways to move from a reactive to a proactive stance in meeting learner needs

Session #3: Equity review of district data – such as disproportionality data, data on the number and type of learners with access to advanced course content – and an introduction of ability grouping and UDL

Session #4: Strategies – such as direct instruction and reciprocal teaching – and how they relate to UDL, and a focus on Hattie’s work around assessment capable learners

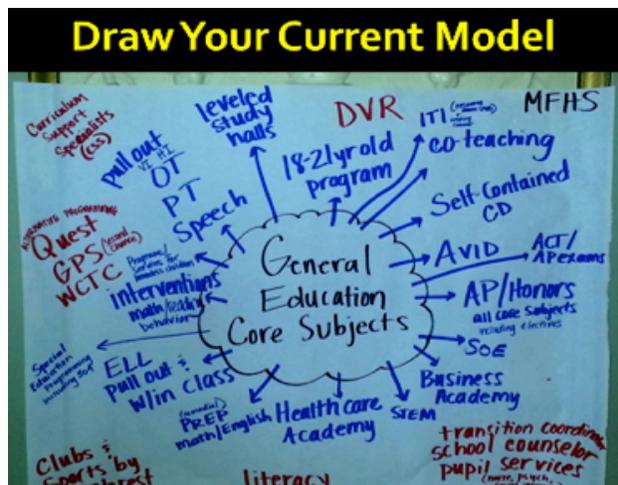
Session #5: Strategies for co-planning and co-serving within the content of the OIP, natural proportions, connections to IEP development, and effective use of funds.

SST 6 personnel used feedback from participating district teams to make adjustments across the year. For example, when teams needed additional ways to think about how to change core beliefs, SST 6 introduced more content on the importance of expectations using Dweck’s concept of a growth versus fixed mindset.²

² For more information about mindsets, see: Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Start with the non-negotiables. ICS can be characterized using four cornerstones, which include focusing on equity, access to high-quality teaching and learning (focusing on curriculum and instruction, and building teacher capacity), equitable structures (addressing location and arrangement of educational services), and implementing change (focusing on funding and policy issues) (Frattura and Capper, 2007).

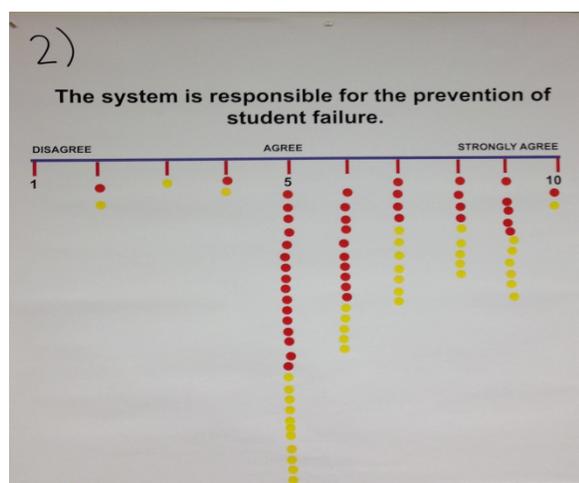
According to Capper and Frattura (2008), district and school leaders who support social justice engage in seven key strategies: (1) serve as a radar for inequities and view problems as problems of inequity; (2) co-create and sustain a non-negotiable inclusive, social justice/equity vision; (3) hold themselves responsible for changing inequities; (4) imagine a different way of meeting student needs, where students are not segregated; (5) identify and prioritize equity goals; (6) take action to eliminate inequities; and (7) respond to resistance.



A key component of study experience involved engaging district teams in thinking about ICS non-negotiables and how practices across their districts aligned with them.

The first of the four inter-related ICS cornerstones is *Core Principles*, which focuses on equity and articulates the following non-negotiables (i.e., statements of belief):

- The primary aim of teaching and learning is the prevention of student failure.
- The system is responsible for the prevention of student failure.
- All instruction for all learners; including students with disabilities, linguistically diverse, students who are advanced and challenged learners, is premised on a rigorous core curriculum for all students.



- The continuum of services allows for large group, small group, and 1:1 instruction based on “how” each child learns, within Tier I (Core).
- Special and general educators, interventionists, Title supports, etc. co-plan together in order to share knowledge and expertise with each other and to intentionally increase each other’s capacity to better serve all learners.
- Using the principles of Universal Design for Learning – curriculum is differentiated based on the needs of all learners the first time the concept is taught, versus taught to a *normed* group of students and then modified after-the-fact.

District teams were introduced to the non-negotiables early in the study experience. SST 6 consultants led teams in drawing their local service delivery models (aka their bubble charts) and reflecting on the extent to

which those models resulted in less time in general education for many children (i.e., more push-out than pull-in approaches).

Each team member indicated his/her level of agreement with the non-negotiables in session 1, revisiting his/her personal beliefs about these statements at each successive session. “We work to ensure that teams don’t view the exercise as a special education activity, but rather as an activity about the marginalization of students, whether they be students with disabilities, students of poverty, or other traditionally marginalized groups,” said Rees.

From reactive to proactive. Supporting districts in more effectively using the OIP to ensure the full inclusion and access to strong core instruction for all learners requires SST personnel who understand the content and connections between approaches such as ICS and Ohio’s improvement framework. SST region 6 support educators in rethinking their current systems, and taking steps to make sustainable improvements on behalf of all learners.

Helping teams move from using a reactive to a proactive approach means organizing services and supports so that services are brought to all students through teacher-based teams of experts, intentionally interrupting practices such as ability grouping that have been shown to be ineffective or even harmful, and aligning resources with district-identified goals for improving student achievement and learning.

Rees explains: “District leadership teams (DLTs) need to talk about how to instill the non-negotiables across the district, building leadership teams (BLTs) should be aligning everything with the non-negotiables, and teacher-based teams (TBTs) should serve as a vehicle for co-planning and co-serving all learners. District and school leaders have to ensure that systems and structures are in place across all schools, that the district decisions about policy and funding to support teaching and learning are operationalized at the school level, and that all staff adhere to the non-negotiables.”

Looking ahead. Six of the nine district teams that have participated in the study experience will have the opportunity to attend the June-July *Leading for Social Justice Institute: Ensuring ALL Students are Supported*, which is being sponsored by SST regions 3, 6, and 9.



The Institute includes presentations by Dr. Elise Frattura, Dr. Shannon Chavez-Korell, and Jonathon Saphier; as well as guided district team discussion and planning time. During the 2015-2016 school year, each of the six district teams will be assigned an SST 6 consultant who will meet monthly with the team in their district, and provide coaching using the team action plan that developed during the year-long study experience.

Rees’ advice to fellow SST directors and staff: “You have to be willing to jump into the work even though there is no linear path. If we go into it thinking it has to be perfect and that we have to have all the answers, we’ll never start. It’s a learning journey for all of us, not just for our districts.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- For more information about ICS or strategies to increase equity and social justice, contact Dr. Elise Frattura for information about the White Paper Series developed by Frattura and Capper in 2014, or consider the following resources:
 - Theoharis, G., & Scanlan, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Leadership for increasingly diverse schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.
 - Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
 - Capper, C. A., & Frattura, E. (2008) (2nd ed.). *Meeting the needs of students of all abilities: Leading beyond inclusion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
 - Frattura, E. M., & Capper, C. A. (2007). *Leading for social justice: Transforming schools for all learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- For information about a district that used ICS to improve results for all children, go to www.movingyournumbers.org and read the Stoughton Area School District (Wisconsin) case study. [Note: go to *Tools & Resources*, and then to *District Downloadable Resources*.]
- For more information about the OIP and how it can be used to support district-wide improvement, go to the Ohio Leadership Advisory Council website at: www.OhioLeadership.org and click on **OIP Modules and Resources**.
- For more information about the strategies highlighted in this article, contact Becky Rees, Director, SST Region 6, at brees@sst6.org.

SHARE YOUR STORIES

A unified system involves collaboration among all components so that as issues are identified, the system is able to respond in an effective, coherent, and timely manner. The strategies highlighted in this story are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they are intended to spark idea sharing across SSTs. All SSTs are encouraged to submit examples that can be highlighted in future articles. To submit ideas for future articles, contact Dr. Jim Gay, Director, OLAC, at jimgay@basa-ohio.org.