WEB RESOURCE 4: ONE PRINCIPAL'S THOUGHTS ON BUILDING CAPACITY IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

When I think about the role of principal, I reflect on the fact that secondary schools are incredibly busy places. It is amazing the variety and volume of questions and issues a principal can face in a day. Many hours of the day become consumed with the day-to-day running of a building. The management requirements of the position can easily supersede the instructional leadership component of the job. The challenge continues to be how do principals find the time to be instructional leaders? Secondary school principals are faced with the task of motivating and inspiring staff to change and improve their practice but are often faced with lack of time, closed classrooms, and siloed departments. How do you have common goals for school improvement when you have 15 different departments that barely communicate? How do you engage English, math, and science teachers at the same time as the cosmetology, construction, and transportation teachers to improve instructional practices? How do you find common ground?

My experience in one secondary school began with these questions to the teaching staff. "What do you want to learn? Is there one area that we all agree on that we can focus on together?" The answer was a resounding, "Yes! We want to learn more about technology; we want to learn how to integrate technology into our classrooms." As a principal, my thinking was we should be focusing on assessment and evaluation, but I also believed that we all must have an intrinsic motivation to learn, and so I needed to respect the voices of the learners. Technology became the gateway into our learning journey as a school. Our collaborative inquiries all had a technology component, and the majority of our financial resources shifted to support the acquisition of hardware and software in the building and training that supported teacher learning. The priority for me was the engagement of all teachers in all departments. I discovered that by aligning the learning around a common interest, in this case technology, the "buy-in" was much greater. *Technology became a means to engage teachers in collaborative learning.*

The end results were that classroom doors were opened; teachers from different departments were learning and working together. Learning Intentions were embedded in online lessons to which students had unlimited access. The teachers were sharing their assignments and students' finished products. Teachers invited each other to be part of the assessment process as students' projects were shared online. Assessment was being differentiated and shared. As a principal, I began to receive emails showcasing students' work. Student voice was included as opportunities were provided online for them to weigh in on their learning. Teachers were working collaboratively, and there was renewed energy in their work.

I believe that teachers were empowered to take control of their own learning, and we witnessed incredible shifts in teaching practice and classroom instruction as teachers began working together and sharing their learning. We started to build capacity, and networks of learning began to form among the staff. In the end, I could not keep up with all the different practices teachers were trying in their classrooms, and that was great!