



In 2014, NISL was awarded a \$12 million US Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to implement its Executive Development Program (EDP) and study the results in California, Florida and Mississippi. The study will assess the impact of the EDP and its aligned coaching model on principals, teachers and students.

The following interview is with David Krakoff who is the principal of Stuart Middle School (Martin County School District) in Stuart, Florida. Krakoff has been principal for three years and participated in the NISL study.

What were your initial thoughts of the Executive Development Program?

My first impression was that I was really going to enjoy this. I wanted to learn and I wanted to have more of a systemized support system to help me guide my students to deeper levels of learning. I was absolutely thrilled because for years in my education career, I have thought about how to deepen students' level of learning, the study of how kids learn, and how people learn. It always amazed me that across our country, some schools have done a fantastic job, but by and large, we have fallen behind on an international scale.

What was your Action Learning Project (ALP) experience like?

The ALP makes you reflect on the purpose of an instructional leader. As I started to write my ALP and looked at potential barriers, challenges, and threats, I began thinking very strategically and proactively to try and predict what challenges I might face and how to overcome them. It's similar to making a giant lesson plan for a multiple-year vision for the entire school. For me, the ALP put into greater focus my philosophy of reaching deeper levels of learning. It gave me structure and the support to be able to carry out my plan more efficiently.

My NISL coach has also been a tremendous support guiding me to achieve the goals of my action plan. She looks at the data and visits classrooms with me. Her role has been collaborative – she asks probing questions to make me think and she has made me a better principal by giving me confidence that the steps I'm taking are matching what is best for my school.

I talked to my coach about the collaborative learning teams I had established when I felt that it had become a matter of compliance for the teams to complete the assessments. I wanted to push the teams to the next step. My coach and I went back to the EDP text Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performance Systems and a document detailing how the Boston Public Schools' superintendent implemented a "teachers leading teachers" philosophy and discussed how we could get increased buy-in from the teachers. I took the models of Shanghai, Singapore and Boston to develop a coaching model and course of study.

How did you create buy-in from your teachers and staff? How has NISL impacted your school and students?

This is my third year here, and when I first arrived as principal, this school had been an A school under the Florida letter grade system for schools. However, the test scores were very stagnant and I inherited a veteran staff, set in their ways, that assumed they were doing a fantastic job based on the Florida letter grade.

David Krakoff



David Krakoff, principal of
Stuart Middle School in
Stuart, FL

I led some workshops for faculty in which I asked them to write about a particular challenge that they had. They had to create a product that solved the problem. When I asked them to reflect on their thought process and what they learned, we started to compare whether this same thought process was happening in our classrooms. Once they did that exercise, I think the lightbulb went on. They reflected that they didn't truly learn when someone told them how to do something. They learned when they had to apply it themselves. We had to adjust how we instruct and we got buy-in by showing them through their own learning that this is how human beings learn.

I had to provide the tools, a philosophy, and model for how we were actually going to deepen levels and what that looks like. Much of the NISL research has helped tremendously in understanding how people learn, recognizing preconceptions, making observations and metacognition. Based on the examples detailed in Beyond PD, we've developed our own internal coaching model where teachers are now starting to lead teachers and teachers are starting to bring the research-based instructional strategies to our school. I'm just a guide or facilitator of that. The teachers are doing the work.

We've developed collaborative learning teams amongst the staff which meet several times per week to share common assessment data. The teams also help each other with differentiation when sets of students struggle with particular standards and we go about it in a different way because we want to reach every single kid, every single student, every day. So our professional development is becoming embedded in our daily practice here and the teachers are driving it while I guide it. The morale of our staff and the engagement among our teachers is incredible right now.

Last year, we actually had the highest rates of student growth of any public middle school in our tri-county region in South Florida. We are very proud that we're very successful with growth so when you ask me how that's different, the message from NISL was loud and clear: all means all.

Finally, what advice would you give to a principal who is about to start the EDP?

The advice I would give is to start day one with a completely open mind. Keep your mind open from session to session and you'll grow because you'll have no choice but to grow as an instructional leader because NISL is going to push you to think about things you have not even considered.

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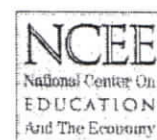
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