



Summary of the NCREST report: Adult Learning in the New Tech Network's South Carolina Learning Network

Case Study research conducted by:

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About NCREST

NCREST works to advance education stakeholders' understanding of the complex and challenging work of restructuring schools. NCREST was founded in 1990 by Linda Darling-Hammond and Ann Lieberman, NCREST's current Co-Directors are Jacqueline Ancess and Thomas Hatch. NCREST is affiliated with the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University.

About this research

Funded by the ECMC Foundation, this study is one product from a research initiative to document New Tech Network's (NTN's) four-year South Carolina Learning Network initiative (SCLN). This research included an extensive literature review, interviews, surveys, observations of events, and document analysis.

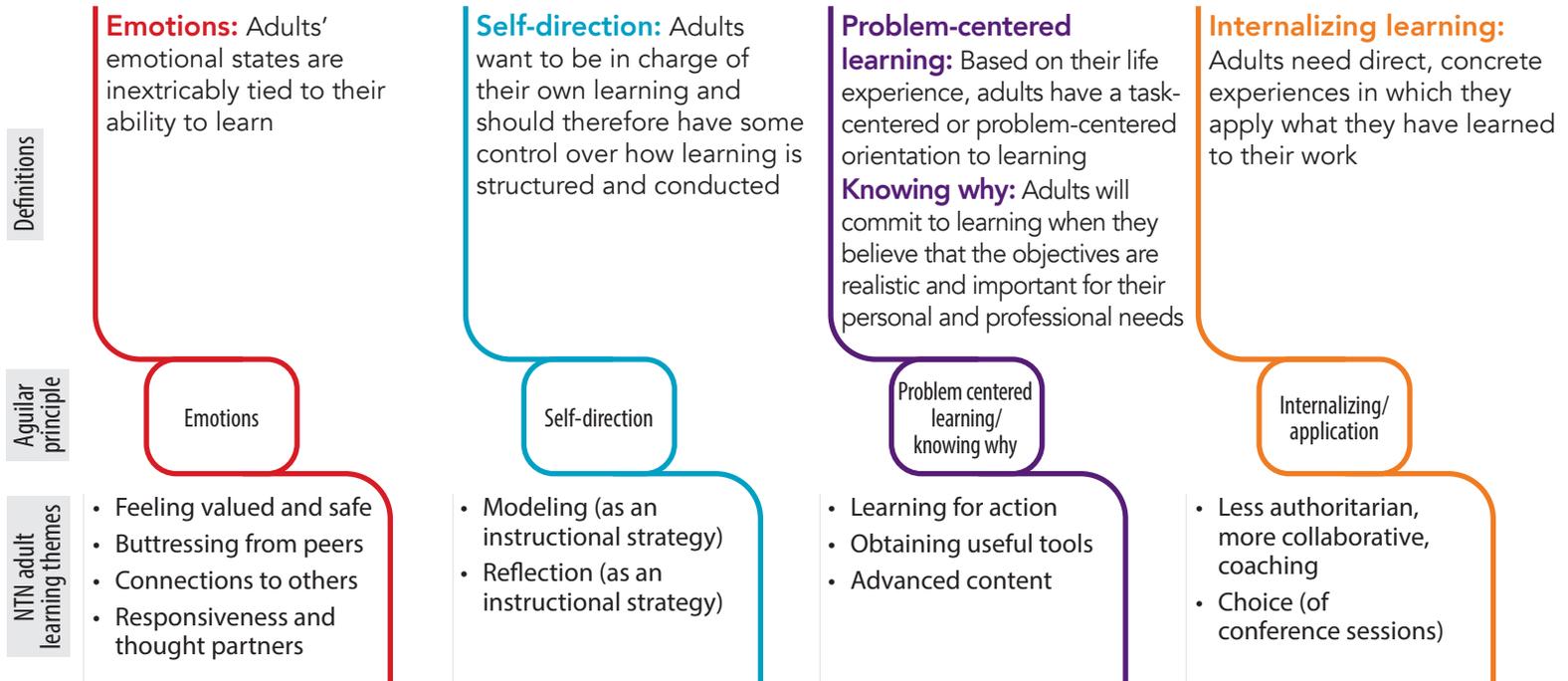
Six principles of adult learning

"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." (Duke, 1993)

Elena Aguilar's *Six Principles of Adult Learning* (2014) draws upon the work of Malcolm Knowles (1973), 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.

NTN is aligned to the research-based principles of adult learning

Mapping of themes from participants to Aguilar's principles:



This summary was prepared in August 2020 by New Tech Network. To cite the full report please use the following:
Barnett, E., Kafka, T., & Kim, J. (2020). Adult Learning in the New Tech Network's SCLN Project.
New York, NY: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching.

Growth documented by SCLN participants

SCLN participants felt they and others had experienced intrapersonal growth, specifically changes in knowledge; in passion, energy and commitment; and, in worldview.

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“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.”

— SCLN PARTICIPANT

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Professional growth manifested in changes in practice

Interviewees noted that districts and schools had changed, at the **district**, **school**, and **classroom** levels. The shift to project-based learning involves more than technical changes in practice; it challenges the established “rhythm” of schooling and requires reflection on beliefs, values, identity, and mindsets. This type of change is necessary for professional growth (Smith, 2001) and was evident in the SCLN.

District leaders had gained a better understanding of how to more effectively support schools and opened new channels of communication.

Important **school** changes attributed to NTN included school culture, the schools’ physical layout, and support for teachers.

Classroom level changes- shift to PBL as the primary mode of instruction across the majority of classrooms.

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“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.”

— SCLN PARTICIPANT

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“[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.’”

— SCLN PARTICIPANT

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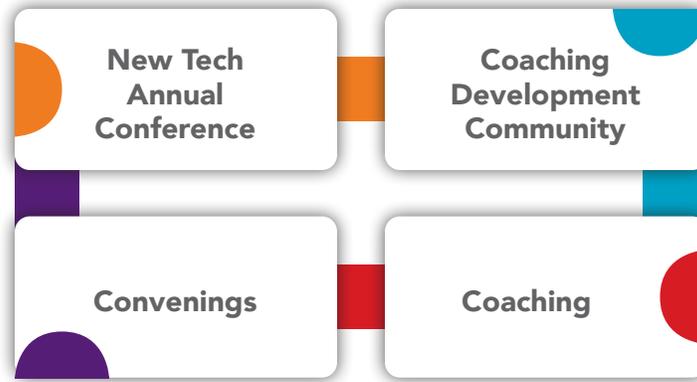
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“I always used to try to give kids everything they need – here’s this and this and this and this and now use it – like they need all these things before they can do this but they don’t. When I give them a problem, they already know so much more than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

— SCLN PARTICIPANT

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Findings specific to the four types of adult learning experiences in the SCLN



NTAC

The New Tech Annual Conference (NTAC) was especially valued by SCLN leaders and teachers as an orientation to the New Tech Network culture and framework in an immersive environment.

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:

"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

New Tech Annual Conference



CDC

The Coaching Development Community (CDC) was created to prepare and support SCLN local coaches, based on the core NTN principles. Participants' comments highlighted the beneficial aspects of the CDC:

1) Powerful/meaningfulness: 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.

"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

Coaching Development Community

2) Trust and safety: *"Trust and vulnerability are 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."*

– INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

3) Responsiveness: *"[NTN CDC Coach] was 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."*

– INSTRUCTIONAL COACH

4) Participants were especially appreciative of the less authoritarian (more **collaborative**) approach to coaching as well as the modeling of good coaching practice that occurred.

"[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." – PRINCIPAL

Modeling: *"Every time [the instructional coach]... shows us, while leading us in some way, [he] is also doing exactly what he's trying to teach us about."* – TEACHER





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."*
 – 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 convenings



Coaching

Interview responses on how NTN coaching supports professional growth emphasized the following themes: establishing trust, serving as a thought partner, and providing useful tools.

NTN Coaching

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



New Tech Network

Visit the NTN Research website, newtechnetwork.org/resources/new-tech-school-model-efficacy-and-effectiveness/, to view additional research findings.