



Interaction Institute  
*for* Social Change

# NORTH CAROLINA NETWORK FOR SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT

---

A Case Study of a State-Wide  
Collaborative Leadership Building and Culture  
Building Initiative



## About the Interaction Institute for Social Change

The Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) is a nonprofit organization that partners with individuals, organizations, and communities to achieve greater social impact. Our multicultural team of seasoned consultants provides network building, consulting, facilitation, leadership development, and training services to a diverse array of clients that includes networks, collaboratives, and coalitions; nonprofit organizations of all sizes; schools and school systems; intermediary organizations; public sector agencies; international NGOs; and foundations. Our clients work in all disciplines of the social sector and are located throughout the United States, in Ireland, and beyond. We are particularly committed to building the leadership and collaborative capacity of grassroots leaders to engage, speak out, and participate fully in determining the policies and decisions that affect their lives and their communities.

The work of IISC is informed by our theory of social change, mission, and values. At our core, we practice and teach facilitative leadership – a model rooted in shared power and decision making, consensus building, collaborative skill, and servant leadership. We continually strive to deepen our capacity to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression related to various dimensions of diversity and design culturally appropriate processes and services that consciously address power dynamics.

IISC was founded in 1993 by Interaction Associates (IA) as an expression of its commitment to social change and as a way of bringing its collaborative methodologies into the social sector. Since that time, IISC has grown from a staff of two to an organization with nearly twenty staff members and a cadre of affiliates who have worked with thousands of change agents across the globe and social sector. In support of these efforts, IISC has adapted the collaborative and leadership development methodologies inherited from IA and created new and innovative approaches to working with and meeting the needs of social change leaders.

**North Carolina Network for School-Based Management:** A Case Study of a State-Wide Collaborative Leadership Development and Culture Building Initiative.

Written by Curtis Ogden, Senior Associate, IISC, January 2007.

© 2007 Interaction Institute for Social Change. All rights reserved.

Interaction Institute for Social Change  
625 Mt. Auburn Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
617-234-2700

P.O. Box 969, Belfast BT5 9AN  
Northern Ireland  
+44 2890 803296

[www.interactioninstitute.org](http://www.interactioninstitute.org)

---



## Executive Summary

In 1996, in its efforts to help boost student academic performance, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that school-based management (SBM) be used as the method of decision-making in the state's public schools. This transfer of authority from state and district offices to individual schools provided principals, teachers, students, and parents with greater responsibility for decisions about budget, personnel, and curriculum. In response to this mandate, the North Carolina Network for School-Based Management (NC Network) was established to develop strategies for schools and districts across the state to implement SBM.

The NC Network proceeded to identify essential supports for school-based teams to accomplish their student performance goals, which included leadership development. In order for schools to successfully implement SBM, it was clear that individual leaders and teams required skills to collaborate with a broad base of stakeholders. To this end, the NC Network decided to provide its membership with Facilitative Leadership® training, a core program of the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC).

Facilitative Leadership® is a model of leadership that emphasizes several practices geared toward “inspiring and creating the conditions for self-empowerment so that people can work together to achieve a common goal.” Over the past ten years, IISC has worked with the NC Network to train a cadre of trainers

throughout the state who offer regular Facilitative Leadership® trainings to a variety of school and district personnel. The goal has been to train as many people in every member district as possible, so that schools develop cultures of collaboration that achieve student performance goals. To date, over 4,000 people have received training through the NC Network.

While Facilitative Leadership® training is just one of several strategies to boost student achievement, over time there have been numerous reported shifts in the ways that schools conduct their business and staff work with one another. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in those districts and schools where Facilitative Leadership® has been embraced, results have included a shared language around planning, more focused meetings, more efficient use of time, increased collaboration, greater numbers of people stepping into leadership opportunities, and more inclusive decision-making. While the NC Network has not demonstrated a direct causal relationship between Facilitative Leadership® training and increased student performance, there is increasing support for creating skillful collaborative communities in reaching that important goal.



*“I don’t see Facilitative Leadership primarily as a training program. I see it as a process that you use on a daily basis all the time in what you do.”*

– Myra Best, Executive Director  
North Carolina Network

## Background

In 1996, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated that school-based management (SBM) be used as the method of decision-making in public schools and that its primary purpose be to bolster student performance. SBM is a strategy to improve education by transferring significant decision-making authority from state and district offices to individual schools. SBM provides principals, teachers, students, and parents greater control over the education process by giving them responsibility for decisions about budget, personnel, and curriculum. To this end, proponents of SBM encourage and support norms of collegiality and collaboration among these various stakeholders.

In response to the General Assembly’s mandate, the North Carolina Network for School-Based Management (NC Network) was established to develop systemic strategies to implement SBM in schools and school districts across the state. Under the leadership of founding director Myra Best, the NC Network set out to determine the supports necessary for leaders and school-based teams to accomplish their student performance goals. It began by reaching out to principals and school

improvement teams representing teachers, non-certified staff, school board members, parents, and other community members. With input from these key stakeholders, the NC Network identified the following four specific elements essential to the effective implementation of SBM:

- clear board/administrative policies and parameters for shared decision-making;
- school improvement plans focused on the achievement of all students;
- training for school improvement teams in developing and monitoring achievement focused plans; and
- leadership development.

## The Challenge

Myra Best recognized that in order for school-based management to increase student achievement, new roles, behaviors, and knowledge were required for school and district staff. With respect to leadership development in particular, the NC Network was interested in providing its members with a structure and skill set that they could use to become collaborative problem-solvers. As Best explains: “In education, most people are trained to work in isolation. They’re not trained to work in teams and solve problems together. You are an island unto yourself.” Best believed that once clearly defined and functioning structures for shared decision-making were in place and stakeholders had the skills to work collaboratively, school districts would be able to achieve their student improvement goals. The challenge was finding the best approach to infuse collaborative skills into the school and district cultures of the NC Network’s members.



## IISC's Framing of the Challenge

Today's educators are using a variety of strategies to improve teaching and learning, restructure schools, and transform school systems. As an integral part of these processes, educational leaders are being called upon to engage and build agreement among disparate opinions and multiple constituencies, as well as challenge isolationist school cultures. Therefore, skillful collaboration holds an important key to effective and lasting improvement efforts.

Collaboration is not simply about learning to get along; it is a method for accessing innovation and optimizing performance. With regard to problem-solving in the face of complex and changing social challenges (or "adaptive problems"), research and the experience of the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) suggest that tapping the wisdom and participation of diverse groups yields more intelligent solutions than unilateral decision-making that ignores input from key stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, collaborative problem-solving is a means of increasing ownership of and engagement in implementing proposed solutions.

Collaboration does not come naturally to everyone. The good news is that collaborative skills can be taught and developed, provided that there is commitment to do so. David Straus, founder of Interaction Associates, emphasizes that leaders should not underestimate the profound effect they

<sup>1</sup> See James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*. (New York: Doubleday, 2004) and Ron Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

have on the cultures of their organizations and communities, that their support is in fact "essential if an organization or community is to build a collaborative environment."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the degree to which leaders at all levels and of all types, both formal and informal, can learn, model, and inhabit the skills of collaboration, the more likely it is that entire organizations and systems – public schools and public school districts – will develop the mindset, heart-set, and skill-set that allows them to respond effectively to problems in a context of constant change.

## The Process

After reviewing a number of programs, the NC Network decided to pilot one of IISC's core training programs, Facilitative Leadership®, with some of its members. Facilitative Leadership® is a three day workshop that helps participants develop the skills and attributes of leaders who "create and inspire the conditions for self-empowerment so that people can work together to achieve a common goal." At the heart of the workshop are seven leadership practices (see diagram on following page). During the course of the training, participants learn how to:

- create a vision of success and enroll others in its pursuit;
- lead collaborative planning and problem solving discussions;
- decide who should be involved in making decisions and how to involve them;
- coach and inspire others to perform at their best;
- design meetings, project plans, and change strategies

<sup>2</sup> David Straus. *How to Make Collaboration Work: Powerful Ways to Build Consensus, Solve Problems, and Make Decisions*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002).

with concrete milestones and accountabilities that people understand and support;

- consider three dimensions of success: results, process, and relationships; and
- celebrate accomplishments in authentic and motivating ways.

Feedback from the pilot was very positive and suggested that the content translated well into participants' work. Subsequently, the NC Network decided to offer Facilitative Leadership® to its membership in an ongoing fashion through a licensing agreement with IISC. Under this arrangement, IISC led early efforts to build the capacity in each of the NC Network's member districts to conduct their own trainings. The Education Practice within IISC spearheaded this

work, following its commitment to bringing IISC's collaborative methodology into schools and school systems, helping stakeholders set direction, develop coherent plans, and build agreements around reforms that aim to raise overall student achievement and eliminate achievement gaps.

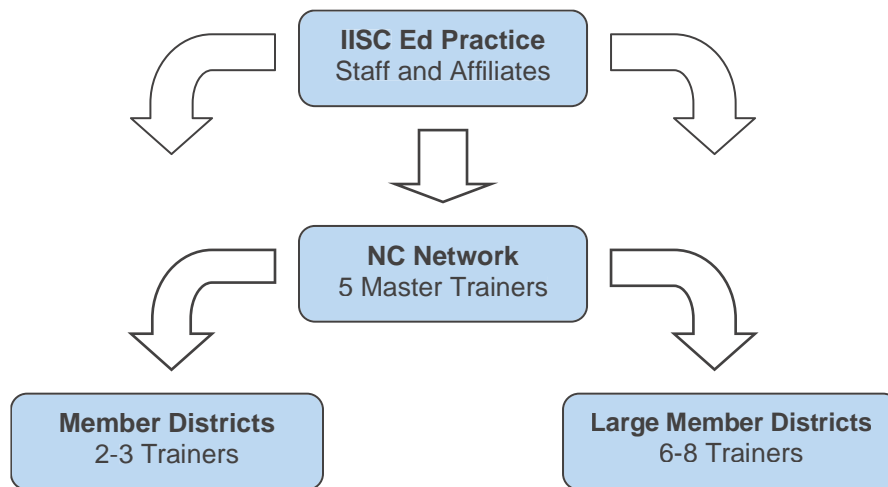
IISC trainers provided initial Facilitative Leadership® trainings and certified a cadre of NC Network trainers. "The goal," explains Myra Best, "was to have a minimum of three trainers for all member districts and six to eight certified trainers for large districts." Once these trainers had achieved certification, the NC Network worked to support their ongoing skill development and maintain a training base in each district.

### *The Seven Practices of Facilitative Leadership*



© 1987, 1994, 1997, Interaction Associates, L.L.C. Used with permission.

## NC Network Training Infrastructure



The NC Network also developed a process whereby interested and skilled individuals could achieve Master Trainer status through specially designed IISC training workshops. “This made logistical sense,” explains Best, “because we had a high attrition rate. You have people who retire and you have people who go to other places and you need to have some sort of capacity to continue to offer certification training on an annual basis.” Five Master Trainers currently provide trainings for aspiring trainers throughout the state. After participants complete a Training for Trainers workshop, Master Trainers continue to coach and support these candidates so that they can achieve their certification.

Once they are certified, trainers run at least one Facilitative Leadership® training each year in their district and attend an annual trainers meeting run by IISC. Furthermore, to keep trainers and trainees

deeply engaged in the skills, IISC has worked with the NC Network to develop a follow-up training to the standard three day workshop. Now NC Network trainers can offer half-day, whole day and two day sessions based upon the skills a given group expresses interest in working on in greater depth.

To accomplish its goals the NC Network strives to train as many people in Facilitative Leadership® as possible. Best explains: “What we recommend is that if you are a new district you first train the principal and a school improvement team leader, which is typically a teacher. After that our goal is for you to reach capacity and have everybody in the district trained in Facilitative Leadership®.” The NC Network provides funding for one training session per district per year and tracks data so that it can maintain a level of quality across its membership.



## Impact

The NC Network has collected evaluations from Facilitative Leadership® trainings since 1999. In light of the feedback it has received, Myra Best says that those who have been trained have consistently found the skills applicable in their schools, their classrooms, as well as in extracurricular activities (i.e., church and community meetings). “I think across the board, teachers, administrators, central office, custodians, transportation people, all of them consistently see the value of the training in what they do.” Best’s observations are echoed by the experiences of others who have been integrally involved in developing facilitative leaders around the state.

### Alan Teasley

*Director of Grants Administration, Durham Public Schools*

*“One of the things I would tell people in Facilitative Leadership® training is I’m changing people’s experience of work one meeting at a time.”*

As a grants administrator for the Durham Public Schools in the late 1990s, Alan Teasley was originally involved in writing proposals for and serving in an advisory capacity with the North Carolina Network. He later went through Facilitative Leadership® training and then a year later became a trainer in the Durham Public Schools (DPS). While he was not the first trainer in the district, he has now been doing training longer than anyone else in DPS. He is also

one of the NC Network’s Master Trainers.

Teasley has also observed many changes in his district as a result of Facilitative Leadership®. From his perspective, one of the most profound lessons for people has been the notion that leaders are made, not born. “By the end of a training,” Teasley explains, “they see leadership as a matter of skill and process, and adherence to certain processes and procedures, with integrity.” In other words, they begin to see their own leadership potential. In addition, people really begin to understand the potential of collaboration. “It’s like they get a glimpse, a glimmer that it is possible to work together.”

In the winter of the 2004-2005 school year, the Durham Public Schools undertook a high school reform initiative. Concerned that upper administration might take a top-down approach with decision-making, Teasley took it upon himself to intervene. He approached the lead administrators and offered to facilitate a collaborative process. “It was the most brazen self-promotion I had ever done. And I thought it would be a facilitation opportunity of a lifetime.” The group accepted his offer and Teasley proceeded to facilitate group meetings twice a month for a year-and-a-half.

Using Facilitative Leadership® skills, Teasley made sure that a process was in place for moving the reform conversations forward. Each meeting had a clear agenda and was highly interactive. Teasley kept participants focused on the desired outcomes of the overall process and the ground rules established by the group. “We made sure they had ownership of it and we modeled the process,” he says. Those eighteen months of work resulted in all of the high



school schedules in the district changing to a block schedule. The high school process had been so successful that the district started a middle school reform group with Teasley as the lead facilitator. “It was the process that has really made a difference,” says Teasley.

For Teasley, the power of Facilitative Leadership® has a direct link to the goals of the NC Network. From his experience, often the critical step in school reform is getting people to break out of old bad habits, including the inability or unwillingness to take the time to collaborate. “It suggests to me that the know-how, the expertise for actually turning around some of these schools is not necessarily rocket science. It’s really about getting people to work together. Then the knowledge and wisdom will come.”

**Teresa Pierrie**  
*Smaller Learning Communities Director,  
Wake Public Schools*

*“In schools where we’ve trained key leaders and administrators, you’ll see them bring along their whole school improvement team and then their department leaders. They will take the time.”*

Teresa Pierrie discovered Facilitative Leadership® five years ago while working with the Wake Public Schools Professional Development Department. She initially took the introductory training for immediate application in her job-- providing support, coaching, and feedback to teachers in her district. Two years

later she sought out the opportunity to be trained as a trainer.

Pierrie has since implemented various models and tools of Facilitative Leadership® in her teacher trainings. She has found the practice of considering different dimensions of success a particularly helpful practice. For example, she makes sure that her trainees understand that classrooms are not simply built around results. Pierrie tells teachers, “If you want a certain instructional result, and you are not getting it, you have to look back to see if you’re using the right process and if you’ve established the right kinds of relationships.” Similarly she has used the different dimensions of success as the basis for an evaluation system for a new high school student advisory program.

While Pierrie can point to numerous isolated successes resulting from the use of Facilitative Leadership® practices, she acknowledges that broad-based change requires buy-in from senior leadership. On the one hand, she feels that teachers are developing the skills to build collaborative professional learning communities as a first step towards raising student achievement. On the other hand, without support from administrators, she has seen Facilitative Leadership® operate as more of a marginalized “sub-culture.” Pierrie is, however, encouraged by the new leadership in her district, which advocates collaboration. “I feel like we’re on the cusp of significant change,” she says.



## **Dawnelle Hyland**

***Program Director, Chewing Middle School***

*“Facilitative Leadership is one of the most practical trainings I’ve taken as an educator and probably has the most immediacy in the sense that I can literally come right back in the building and start to use it.”*

Dawnelle Hyland was first introduced to Facilitative Leadership® in 2000 as a 6th grade language arts and social studies teacher. She found the description of the training on her district’s website and decided to enroll. “At the time,” Hyland explains, “I was chairing the school site-based committee and was very interested in having the power of people’s participation.”

The impact of the training was immediate for Hyland. “I couldn’t wait to get back and start to put into practice a lot of the tools.” She was especially excited by the skills she learned around creating meeting agendas and designing planning and decision-making processes. “I re-wrote the format for our agendas and assigned roles in meetings. . . . We also used the tools to design conversations and stay focused – ‘Are we visioning right now? Are we defining the problem? Are we solving something? Where are we?’” According to Hyland, the members of the site-based team appreciated that their time was valued and that meetings were more focused.

Hyland later appealed to one of her district’s trainers to give her additional coaching in Facilitative Leadership® and ultimately won the support of her

superintendent to become trained as a trainer. She has been a district trainer for four years now. In addition to delivering trainings, she continues to apply the skills she has learned in her new role as the director of a school reform initiative in her middle school. In this role she works with teachers and teams of teachers on curriculum issues and instructional practices. In addition, she teaches an elective class to students focused on leadership development and says that she finds room to apply many of the skills through her facilitation of that course.

Hyland acknowledges that it is difficult to make a direct link between the learning and application of Facilitative Leadership® skills and improved student performance. For one, the training is only one of several supports needed to make SBM effective. However, she does believe that the implementation of the skills has resulted in a critical morale boost for teachers. “I have to believe that when teachers feel that their contribution is valued, they’re willing to go the extra mile. And I think that improves student performance.” Hyland notes that the people who are on the leadership team and the curriculum leaders council in her school, where Facilitative Leadership® is most often modeled, are the ones who are being innovative in their classrooms. “And it does show in their results,” she says. “A lot of the teachers that we have on the leadership team have the better results in the school.”



## **Paul Keene**

***Director of ESL and Foreign Language,  
Durham Public Schools***

*“The culture really did change. There’s an article in today’s paper about the superintendent engaging community stakeholders, trying to get input from them.”*

In 1996, Paul Keene left the classroom for an administrative role in the Granville County Schools. He eventually became involved in a total quality education initiative, one aspect of which included receiving Facilitative Leadership® training. Given his responsibilities as a director of staff development, Keene was also trained as a trainer and went on to teach Facilitative Leadership® in his district for six years.

According to Keene, the Granville County Schools offered training at least twice a year, and over time opened its workshops to include not only school administrators and teachers, but also students and local business people. “This made for a very rich mix,” he says. Keene says that Facilitative Leadership® was both validating and eye opening for participants. “It gave people who had been formed in the old top-down command and control kind of leadership, something they could hang on to as they moved into a more collaborative model. They liked that.”

Keene remarks that he witnessed a significant culture shift in his district, including adversarial situations turned into genuine collaborations. He relays one

particular story of a newly named department chair who was faced with the prospect of leading meetings that had been, for as long as anyone could remember, rancorous and unfocused. The woman had attended a Facilitative Leadership® workshop the year before her first as chair and began to put into practice the tools from the training. “Now three years later,” remarks Keene, “those department meetings are smoothly functioning, the group is collaborating. They’ve done extraordinary things like curriculum mapping. I don’t think they could have done that before they had those tools for facilitation.”

## **Janice King**

***Assistant Principal, Mangum Elementary  
School***

*“I really liked the format in which the information was given. It was a lot of movement and hands-on teaching, so that we were using the tools while we were learning about them.”*

Janice King was introduced to Facilitative Leadership® as a resource teacher in the Granville County Schools. Like Dawnelle Hyland, she had an immediate reaction to the skills and concepts offered by the workshop. “It was information that put into words and structure things that I knew intuitively.” King particularly appreciated the hands-on way in which the training was delivered, which allowed her to not only learn about but also experience the tools. King was able to utilize her Facilitative Leadership® skills almost immediately when she was presented with a situation that involved a student who had



multiple challenges—academic, emotional, and physical. These challenges implicated not only school staff, but the sheriff’s department, social services, and local community members. Using her newly acquired skills, King helped to plan and convene a multi-stakeholder meeting focused on how best to respond to the child’s needs. “Being able to talk about the purpose of the meeting and then laying out an agenda that allowed each one of those groups to have input into the plan was beneficial not only to the student, but it was also beneficial to each of us as we were learning about each other and meeting, some of us, for the first time face-to-face.”

Like Paul Keene, King says that over time she has seen her school district, in which she now serves as an elementary school assistant principal and trainer, embrace many of the tools taught in Facilitative Leadership®. The evidence for this includes the agendas used in centrally organized meetings, the vocabulary used around decision-making, and the process utilized for prioritizing and building agreements. She has also observed a variety of school-based groups combining tools in carrying out plans and projects.

With respect to its impact on student performance, Janice King believes that students benefit directly from the tools that facilitative leaders, including teachers, use. From her perspective, Facilitative Leadership® applied in the classroom helps to increase students’ independence around choosing options for their own growth, which is a vital component of student engagement. Furthermore, she feels that the tools help students in their

preparation for life outside of school. “The tools can be used in many organizations, so I do see that [Facilitative Leadership®] could have a broader positive effect than just student classroom achievement.”




## Looking Forward

Alan Teasley is careful to note that becoming a facilitative leader, let alone reaping its benefits, is not an overnight endeavor. “I’m not sure it works if you just pat them on the back and send them out after three days and let life take its course,” he says. “It’s all there in the three days but not if you don’t revisit it, if you don’t take it on, if you don’t even have the opportunity to be a leader in that regard. So you have to begin to step up and say, ‘I’ll facilitate this. I’ll lead this. Can I be department chair?’ Or use it in your teaching.”

The NC Network is banking on that kind of initiative and commitment to create school environments that are conducive to increased student performance. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that as a result of Facilitative Leadership® training, diverse stakeholders in schools and districts around North Carolina are working together, building inclusive conversations, and implementing collaborative strategies to improve academic outcomes. Furthermore, there is widespread conviction that improving collaborative processes can only have a positive impact on student achievement.

Myra Best says that there will always be a need for Facilitative Leadership® training in the NC Network, given staff turnover in the member districts. Furthermore, Best and others have observed that ongoing training in and use of the skills provides deeper insights. As Alan Teasley explains, “I never really get tired of training people in Facilitative

Leadership® because the more I use it, the richer it seems to me, and the richer the skill set. So now I go back and read the manual and say, ‘I swear that wasn’t in there the last time I checked.’” 

---



### **Selected Statements from Facilitative Leadership® Trainees Collected by the North Carolina Network**

“This workshop was the most helpful and useful workshop I have attended since I have been teaching. I can use it in life, school, and at home.”

“The training made me realize that I am a leader in my current role. Leadership comes in a variety of roles and there are leadership qualities and potential in all of us.”

“This is a workshop that allows you to learn how to incorporate ideas and empower those involved to develop and carry out successful plans.”

“Excellent! I received reinforcement of procedures I already used that worked and gave me many more tools to add to my leadership kit. Eye-opening!”

“Exceptional training - useful strategies - essential information/insights for anyone in a leadership role.”

“There’s a lot of work from vision to implementation. This workshop teaches you to work smarter, not harder.”

“One workshop that really gives you tools to take back and start using immediately.”