**PLC Portraits of Possibilities**

*~ Critical Considerations for Effective and Meaningful Meetings ~*

©Laura Benson

Having great opportunities to work with many PLC’s recently, I drafted these notes in response to the questions I received and to detail some rituals that help to make PLC collaborations edifying and practical. A key consideration is anchoring PLC work around student learning – Sharing student work deepens our understanding about proficiency and nurtures our creativity to respond to our students’ strengths, needs, and curiosities.

* Identify a **purpose** for each meeting - Whether PLC, department meeting, or grade level team meeting, it is helpful if each group has a clear understanding about why they are meeting together and the expectations about the tasks they should accomplish together.  A few compass questions might be:
* *What should each group focus on as they collaborate?*
* *Which group should work on developing or refining curriculum?*
* *Which group could serve as a vehicle of professional study?*
* *Is our PLC focus collaborative assessment and/or other efforts to help each of monitor our students’ growth and progress over time?*
* *Why are we together as a team? What tasks should we tackle as a team?*
* *What can we focus on together to check things off our individual “to do” lists?*
* Avoid meeting about meeting. Develop a **long-term schedule** to identify the purpose for each meeting with an understanding that the group may need to revise the schedule over time to meet unforeseen needs.
* Clarify each person’s **roles and responsibilities** so that expectations for each meeting are clear and public. Establishing identity as a group and as a group member are critical considerations to ensure effective and edifying collaborations (See Adaptive School research as well as the work of Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman for more about this.).
* Send out an **agenda** before each meeting to further clarify the purpose of the meeting and to enlist colleagues to bring or be ready for the task or topic of the meeting.
* Every so often, **reflect on how things are going.** Are the PLC collaborations meetings your group’s needs? Do any refinements need to be made to ensure that each meeting is valuable to you all?
* **Think about relationships** and devote time to nurturing trust and connectedness. This could be accomplished in a variety of thoughtful ways such as devoting the first 5-10 minutes of each meeting to catching up with one another as friends and a bit of visiting, if you will. Or, every 4th or 5th meeting could be an outing and/or more of a make and take type of meeting to take care of some of the physical prep work of our teaching while allowing for some casual conversations as we make or gather resources.

**Leading, Coaching, and Supporting PLC Teams**

* Some PLC groups will need your **modeling** of leading and facilitating a PLC meeting.  Others may just need a bit of coaching now.  So, it is likely that we would probably differentiate the support we give each PLC group. This also allows us to model the value and power of differentiation based on current understanding and the group's development as an effective team of collaborating colleagues.
* To offer those PLC's that want or need more structure, we can share and practice **protocols** from Adaptive Schools, Critical Friends Group, Visible Thinking, and the National School Reform.  Here is a link to some of these protocols:

<http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/protocols/>

* Also, I have attached a portrait of the steps a PLC can engage in to function as a **Data Team.**  Anchoring their collaborations around student work fosters deeper understanding about student proficiency and gives teachers a way to share the work of lesson planning, problem solve any challenges students face in progressing toward unit goals, and think about how they can create common formative (and summative) assessments together.
* To echo key messages from my own writing and PLC workshops focusing on **Trust, Time, and Teaching**, here is additional information from research about PLC's (synthesized by the School Improvement Network):

*Schools that are looking to set up or improve their Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, often face a number of challenges. In creating effective PLCs, administrators and teachers learned these four essential lessons:*

*1*. Build an atmosphere of collaboration and trust

2. Create opportunities to succeed

3. Define leadership roles and expectations

4. Start small and be relentlessly persistent

*Fostering and nurturing relationships, communicating openly, being transparent, and really developing an organizational identity—when you focus on those three elements, at the core of them is trust. As conversations focus on learning and not on blaming, the culture of collaboration develops. The essential function of a professional learning community is conversation around student learning.*

LINKS:

<http://plc.sdcoe.net/leadership.html> [This group offers some interesting suggestions for principals/administrators about leading and supporting PLC's.]

<http://theeducatorsroom.com/2013/02/4-ways-to-make-your-plc-meetings-more-productive/2/>

<http://www.solution-tree.com/blog/professional-development-is-not-a-spectator-sport/> [\*It can be very helpful to engage in a book study from one of Solution Tree's excellent books about PLC's - or maybe even a chapter from a key book you admire.]

* ***Analyzing Student Data to Strengthen & Expand Student Learning*** © Laura Benson

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **“If…Then…”** **T-Chart Lesson Planning** | |
| **If students succeed at reading fiction…** | **…but struggle to read nonfiction…** |
|  | **…then,** model and engage students in reading BIOGRAPHIES. |
| **If students struggle with conventions…** | …**then** I model and practice editing with students…  \*Reading the piece aloud to let your “ear as editor” listen for grammar and flow  \*Using Spell Check!  \*Reading writing backwards |
|  | Use an individual editing checklist:  \*Students edit writing for 1-3 goals/skills at a time  \*First editing tasks = Name; Date; Title  \*After these 1st 3 tasks are mastered, teacher & student determine 1-3 new editing tasks/Expectations  [Repeat accomplishments & goal setting over time] |
| **If students struggle with elaboration/giving details or evidence…** | **…then**, I model & encourage students’ use of Double Bubble Maps; Tree Maps; and I teach students REVISION RITUALS: 1)Reread your writing.  [A few days or weeks later, I introduce this next step.]  2)Star a place where you could make a change in your writing.  [A few days or weeks later, I introduce this next step.]  3)Make the change! Have a go at making or changing one “*star*” (part) of your writing. |
|  | …and practice writing by creating pieces aloud: \*Flash Fiction  \*Nonfiction Nuggets  \*10:00 News  \*Front Page Story  \*Front Page Headlines  \*Oprah-style inter-views (of char. or even concepts; personify concepts) |

*The most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback.* Hattie (1992; 2009)

**The Power of Collaborative Assessment Partnerships**

Dr. Thomisana Piercy (2006), *Compelling Conversations*

|  |
| --- |
| **DATA TEAM TOOK KIT**  **Bring and refer to these during your Team Huddles:**   1. This year’s school improvement goal statements 2. Your team’s annual goal statement for the year 3. Current Data Team monthly goal 4. Next month’s Data Team goal frame 5. Student work, assessments, etc. for targeted obstacles 6. Targeted Teamwork notebook   **C:\Users\Laura Lynn Benson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\B5SCB6DG\MCj04326320000[1].png** |

|  |
| --- |
| **DATA TEAM TASKS**   1. Find the data: Treasure Hunt 2. Collect and chart data 3. Analyze strengths and obstacles to prioritize needs 4. Establish goals: set, review, revise 5. Select instructional strategies 6. Determine results indicators   **C:\Users\Laura Lynn Benson\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\B5SCB6DG\MCj04127600000[1].wmf** |

Formative Assessment Qualities of Compelling Conversations DataThomisana Piercy (2006)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Essential Question: *How can we measure learning?*** | |
| **School Improvement with Summative Data** | **School Improvement with Formative Compelling Conversation Data** |
| * Think big, start big; top-down data * Autopsy report; school is over, too late, kids not coming back to that grade * Burnt-cookie syndrome: Next batch will be better – but what about this batch? * School improvement plan is completed for central office; due date for plan may be prior to the release of previous assessment outcomes * School goals for crrent year cannot be informed * Accountability is done to teachers | * Think big, start small; bottom-up data * Individual, student-centered accountability * Invisible excellence discovered * Beliefs driven action * Data help articulate month Data Team goals * Individual studnets are named and discussed * Frequent, consistent monitoring of data * Midpoint, ongoing corrections * Deterioration and abandonment of bell curve * Slope of school achievement is changed one child at a time * Just-in-time professional development * Articulation of best practices * Cutlure of shared, data-based decision making * Invisible norms dispelled * Trust in colleageus built and enhanced * Increased teacher leadership capacity * Assessment measures crafted by teachers * Shared accountability is owned |

***DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK*** Sharon V. Kramer with Linda DuBose in Guskey’s (2009) *The Teacher as Assessment Leader*

Paul Black and Dylan William (1998) cite benefits to replacing this evaluative (judgmental) feedbackwith specific, descriptive, and immediate feedback. When teachers substituted comments for grades, students engaged more productively in improving their work (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2002). Students must be given the opportunity to apply the feedback by trying again (Black & William, 1998). Utilizing descriptive feedback, students revise, practice, and retry.

Useful feedback, says Thomas Guskey (2005), is both diagnostic and prescriptive. It reinforces precisely what students were expected to learn, identifies what was learned well, and describes what needs to be learned better. Descriptive feedback is specific and relates directly to learning. It is related to performance and makes comparisons to exemplars (Davies, 2000). Descriptive feedback is most effective when it points out both the strengths in the work and the areas needing improvement.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Examples of Descriptive Feedback** | **Nonexamples of Descriptive Feedback** |
| Your topic sentence tells the reader what you are writing about. | B+ [which offer no information to answer questions such as *What did the student do well? How can the student improve?*] |
| Your narrative is organized with a beginning, middle, and end. | Nice job  [Again, this feedback does NOT tell the student what he/she did well and does not help him/her gain insights about needs or next steps.] |
| Many of your sentences begin with the word and. Think about our focus lessons on combining sentences and sentence fluency. See if you can combine the sentences or use various words to begin the sentences. | Don’t use and to begin sentences. [How will the student fix this?] |

*If we employed the practice of descriptive feedback, we could inform our understanding of the science of teaching, helping everyone, including master teachers, see and hence solidfy their own craft knowledge. With such specific, informational feedback, we can better support all teachers trying to master their craft.* Cassandra Erkens in Thomas Guskey’s (2009) *The Principal as Assessment Leader*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The Formative Process**  **Dr. Connie Kamm, The Leadership and Learning Center** | |
| **Steps in the Formative Process** | **Implementation of the Formative Process in My Classroom** |
| 1. Identify and **post the priority standards** for learning that students need to master. Through the identified standards, address what students must know (concepts) and what students must be able to do (skills). |  |
| 1. Determine and **post the criteria** used to determine if students have mastered the selected standards. These criteria should be written in student friendly terms. Students should be invited to join teachers in determining these criteria. Advanced criteria can also be posted that will challenge students who have already reached mastery. Proficiency, however, must be set according to the skills and concepts expressed in the selected standards. |  |
| 1. **Provide an exemplar** for students of what the completed project/assignment looks like. Do not use an exemplar or model created by a student currently in the classroom. Have students apply the standards-based criteria to this exemplar. |  |
| 1. Have students **produce a first draft** or beginning portion of the project/ assignment. This first step may be more successful if it is completed in a classroom setting as opposed to requiring students to produce the first draft or portion of their work for homework. |  |
| 1. When the project/assignment is collected for the first time, provide the opportunity for students to **peer assess** using the standards-based criteria. Remind the students that it is their responsibility to help one another meet the criteria. Students do need to learn how to peer assess. Provide very clear guidelines for this activity. |  |
| 1. Provide ample opportunities for students to **self assess** based on the specific standards-based criteria. |  |
| 1. To more thoroughly guide student learning, **specific and timely teacher feedback** is essential**.** The teacher’s feedback does not include a grade during this formative cycle. |  |
| 1. Allow students **another opportunity** to apply the standards-based criteria as they revise their work according to the feedback that they have received. Remember, one major component of formative assessment is providing **multiple opportunities for success.** |  |
| 1. **Repeat** this cycle until each student reaches mastery of the identified standards. |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Doing Data Right**  November 2015 | Volume **73** | Number **3** - *Educational Leadership* (p. 16-21)   * + - 1. **Are We Motivating Students with Data?** by *Caitlin C. Farrell, Julie A. Marsh*       2. *and Melanie Bertrand* [excerpt of article] |

* **Mastery Orientation**
* Embraced a *learning perspective*—a belief that examining and reflecting on the data would help students identify weaknesses, what contributes to them, and how they could address gaps.
* Focused on *growth-related information*, articulating a clear relationship between effort and outcomes and encouraging students to consider their progress.
* Shared individual-level data privately with students in ways that focused student attention on how they were performing relative to their own past performance or how close they were to reaching standards.
* Sometimes used intangible rewards like praise and discussion of positive results to emphasize key messages about progress.
* Involved students in analysis, goal setting, and follow-up.
* For instance, students had opportunities to graph their own results and identify topics on which to focus their reflection.
* Were highly involved in supporting students' next steps.
* In whole-group or individual interventions, teachers did not simply repeat the same content and approach but instead tried multiple ways to reteach the material.

**Questions to Guide Practice**

Educators are unlikely to have control over the broader state and federal accountability messages that shape data-use practices. But with an eye for what's realistic and possible, we offer some questions that educators who want to engage students with data should ask themselves:

***For teachers:***

* What is your purpose in engaging your students with data, and how do you structure your classroom practices to meet these goals?
* What elements of your data-use practice are inadvertently emphasizing performance?
* How could you reorganize or refine your data-use practices to reflect a mastery orientation?

***For school and district administrators****:*

* How are school or district policies and routines framing messages around data for your teachers that might translate to a mastery or performance orientation within classrooms?
* Do school policies and programs emphasize the values of performance, status, and extrinsic rewards; or do these policies recognize effort and growth?
* As we work toward the laudable goal of involving students in data use, we want to make sure that our data-use practices support and motivate students, rather than deflate or demotivate them.

**Link:** http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov15/vol73/num03/Are-We-Motivating-Students-with-Data¢.aspx

|  |
| --- |
| ***Collaborative Team Meeting Logistics*** |

**Source:** Adapted from Fisher & Frey (2007 and 2013) in *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Grade:** | **Date:** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lead Teacher/Facilitator:** | |
| **Teachers in attendance:** | |
| **Discussion points:** | **Questions raised:** | |
| **Objective for the coming week:** | **Resources needed:** | |

|  |
| --- |
| **Implementation Steps:** |
| **Item Analysis Summary** |
| **Assessment tool:** |
| **Areas of strength in student work:** |
| **Areas of weakness in student work:** |
| **Teacher practice: What should be preserved?** |
| **Teacher practice: Identify gaps between existing and desired practice.** |
| **Teacher practice: What aspects of existing practice pose a barrier to implementing desired practice?** |
| **Teacher practice: Identify interventions or unit modifications.** |
| **Unanswered questions:** |