

My Role in a Collaborative PLC Culture

By: Brent Bokhart, Crawfordsville Middle School

Contact: bbokhart@cville.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

In March of 2017 our proposal for a "late start" schedule to implement PLC's in our secondary schools was approved by the school board. As a result, Crawfordsville Middle School would have 45 minutes of PD/PLC time every Wednesday morning beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. Over the summer of 2017 I scheduled and planned for the first year of PLC's at my school. It was evident that we would be collaborating as a building in a much more intense manner than ever before in the past. Current initiatives included finishing curriculum mapping (over 90% complete) and beginning to collaboratively create common assessments aligned to those maps. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to account for the difficulty and intense nature of our current initiatives and intentionally attempt to balance the stress level that would come along with this by implementing team building activities during our PLC time.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose and background in mind, I wondered if it will help reduce staff stress and improve staff collaboration if team building activities were implemented into our PLC schedule for the year.

Methods/Procedures:

I began my insight into my wondering through reflection of the PLC schedule that I drafted over the summer. In late July and early August the school teacher leadership team reviewed the schedule and provided feedback accordingly. Schedule into PLC's was a combination of whole group and small group activities with 3 team building activities scheduled for September through January. These activities were scheduled for September 13th, November 29th, and January 24th.

Once the schedule was finalized I began researching team building activities. Upon completion of researching activities it was determined to do the following activities: 1) whole group compass points activity, 2) Tom Wujec build a tower, build a team challenge, and 3) collaborative decision making challenge activity. The compass points activity was implemented and worked with group work behaviors and understanding personal working interactions. The Tom Wujec challenge worked with effects of team performance. The third activity resulted in being canceled due to weather delays on scheduled times for activity and not conducting PLC's on those days. Both activities conducted received positive feedback with the compass points activity being the most liked and discussed beyond just the time that it took place. Staff referred to this particular activity multiple times throughout the year!

The data collection of the action research was qualitative and took place through teacher conferences. Conferences were already scheduled with each teacher in February as a protected time to have dialogue with each teacher in the building. Time was used during these conferences to ask focused questions of teachers in efforts of gaining teacher reflection and insight on the activities and their impact on PLC's and the staff as a whole. Focus revolved around the following 3 points: 1) What did you like? 2) What did you not like? and 3) What would you like to see different? These individual conferences occurred throughout the month of February with each teacher and feedback was recorded and common themes were identified to later provide

to learning and next steps. Having the chance to meet individually with each teacher and have dialogue about not just the activities, but our first year in the PLC process was very beneficial for future steps and planning.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my qualitative data the following common themes stuck out to me in which I learned that: 1) staff enjoys working with colleagues that are outside of their regular team, 2) staff enjoys taking a "breather" at times with team building activities, and 3) it is a tough balance to schedule time for both team building activities and current school initiatives.

When going through teacher reflections it was very common for staff to report that when doing the team building activities it was nice to work with other colleagues that they normally do not see. It is easy to get focused on their own department's goals and meetings and it is beneficial to learn about and from other team members as well and the team building activities provided a time for this to occur.

Secondly, staff also commonly reported that it was nice to take a "breather" from the daily or routine grind. This past year our school was heavily focused on creating common assessments aligned to our curriculum maps and at times staff felt caught in the "trenches" of this initiative. The team building activities offered a break from this while still gaining a benefit of collaborating with colleagues.

Lastly, it was also common to hear staff discuss knowing the difficulty of scheduling team building activities when also trying to implement initiatives such as our common assessments. Teachers discussed the difficulty of losing "work time" for creating common assessments when participating in a team building activity. Consensus definitely surrounded around once the PLC structure was more in place since this was year 1 that they could see being able to more easily schedule in team and culture building activities into the schedule.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Overall, the action research project as a whole was beneficial in my practice. It was a simple method of implementing and tracking the effectiveness of a strategy. The data collection and analysis does not have to be overly extensive to be beneficial in assessing effectiveness. I can easily see applying this to other areas of my administrative practice.

Feedback from my teachers was overall positive and will lead me to continue to research quality team and culture building activities. Gaining teacher reflection feedback is something I have also confirmed to continue to be important. Involving all teachers and especially the teacher leadership team will continue to provide insight into PLC planning.

As we move forward in our PLC journey it is also important to know that there will always be differences. While common themes certainly presented themselves in my qualitative data there were still individuals that were outside of those common themes in their reflective feedback. It will be important to continue to appropriately balance PLC planning with the wants and needs of both staff and school direction. I believe that continuing to apply the action research model into administrative practice will allow for a better understanding of how to plan and adjust not only our PLC's, but other school initiatives, programs, strategies, etc. as well.

References:

Wujec, Tom. Ted Talks. "Build a Tower, Build a Team." www.tomwujec.com/talks/
School Reform Initiative. "Compass Points Activity." www.schoolreforminitiative.org