Creating and Managing Powerful Professional Learning Teams

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Creating and Managing Powerful Learning Teams

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What’s in a name?

- “Learning Team”
- “Professional Learning Community”
- “Collaborative Action Research Group”
- “Whole-Faculty Study Group”
- “Critical Friends Group (CFG)”
- “Inquiry-Oriented Learning Community”
Learning teams serve to connect and network small groups of teachers to do just what their name entails – learn from practice. They meet on a regular basis and their time together is often structured by the use of protocols to ensure focused, deliberate conversation and dialogue by teachers about student work and student learning.
What are protocols?

- A script or series of timed steps for how a conversation among teachers on a chosen topic will develop

Numerous protocols are available from the National School Reform Faculty

http://www.nsrfharmony.org
## Professional Development

### Traditional PD
- Begins with answer
- Driven by expert
- Communication trainer -> teachers
- Relationships hierarchical
- Research informs practice

### Learning Teams
- Begins with question
- Driven by participants
- Communication among teachers
- Relationship reciprocal
- Practice is research
Commingling tools creates job-embedded professional development that is powerful enough to lead to school improvement.
Components of the Action Research (Inquiry) Cycle

- Wondering (Question) Development
- Data Collection
- Data Analysis
- Synthesis/Sharing
- Action
What might a learning team look like?

(OVERARCHING QUESTION)
What actions can we take as fourth grade teachers to improve reading achievement of our lowest quartile students?

(DEBBI)
What is the relationship between my fourth graders’ fluency development and the reading of fractured fairy-tale plays?

(ANNE)
In what ways can word walls (instituted in primary grades in our school) be effectively adopted for use with struggling readers in my 4th grade class during literacy center time?

(BRIAN)
What role does co-teaching play in differentiating instruction during reading time for all learners in my class?
Q: Who leads the learning team?
A: A coach or leadership rotates among teachers

The coach...

- Identifies time to meet
- Facilitates the group in establishing and maintaining norms
- Helps the group maintain their focus on teacher practice and student learning
- Builds a plan that ties to school goals
- Maintains communication with principal
- Facilitates the establishment of agendas that target the group’s focus and goals
- Engages the group in the documentation of the activities and strategies explored
What might a learning team look like?

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(Debe)
What is the relationship between my fourth graders’ fluency development and the reading of fractured fairy-tale plays?

(Anne)
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(Brian)
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Debbi’s Wondering

What is the relationship between my fourth graders’ fluency development and the reading of fractured fairy tales?
Why fluency and fractured fairy tales?

- Supported by research
- Fun for students and Debbi
- Took a small amount of time
Debbi’s Instructional Plan

- **Day One**: Students chose parts, Debbi read the play to the group, then students practiced silently.

- **Day Two**: Students practiced silently, then aloud with the group to Debbi; Debbi followed with short individual conferences.

- **Day Three**: Students practiced silently, then aloud with the group to Debbi.

- **Day Four**: Students practiced silently, then presented aloud with the group to the class.
Debbi’s Data

- DIBELS
- Observation of Students - Anecdotal Notes
- Student Artifacts – “Dear Mrs. Hubbell” letters
Debbi’s Data Analysis

- Chart DIBELS data - Compare DIBELS scores over time
- Read Through Observations and Student Artifacts multiple times asking questions such as:
  - What was happening?
  - What have I learned about myself as a teacher?
  - What have I learned about children?
  - What are the implications of my findings for my teaching?
- Continually discussed data and analysis with her learning team
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Nancy Fichtman Dana, College of Education, University of Florida
Debbi’s Themes:

- Enjoyment/Enthusiasm
- Students perceive academic benefits
- Positive social interactions
Dear Mrs. Hubbell, I would like to do more fractured fairy tales because the fairy tales bring more happiness to the school day and more laughter to the morning and the evening and we also learn a lesson from the tales. For instance we learned from one of the plays that you don’t have to be perfect to marry prince that lesson was from spider-ella.
Dear Mrs. Hubble, I really liked doing the fractured fairy tales because they teach you a lesson. For example, the cheeta and the sloth play taught you to start slow and save your energy for later when you get to the finish line. I also like them because they help you read more fluently and with expression.

Dear Mrs. Hubble! I really did like it and I would really want you to do more action fairy tales. And the last fairy tale we did I learned lots of new words that I didn’t know. So it helped build my vocabulary. And it helps you become more of a fluent reader.
Positive social interactions ...

Dear Miss Hubbell,

I like the plays we did in class. And I like to be in the plays too. I also like to enter some of the class. From being in the plays I learned to try your best at everything and do not be embarrassed.
Learning Team’s Action

- Develop school/district wide fluency objectives
- Homework for 60 wpm kids vs. 180 wpm kids
- Make literacy centers more effective
- Connect to struggling readers in secondary school
What might a learning team look like?

(Overarching Question)
What actions can we take as fourth grade teachers to improve reading achievement of our lowest quartile students?

(Debbi)
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(Aanne)
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(Brian)
What role does co-teaching play in differentiating instruction during reading time for all learners in my class?
To Discuss on Our Forum

Have more questions about professional learning teams? Advice or input you want to share on launching PLTs or making them more effective?

Join our new discussion forum on PLTs and keep the conversation going:

www.edweek.org/go/plt

www.teachermagazine.org  www.teachersourcebook.org
Teacher PD Sourcebook

For more information on professional development resources, including our professional development directory, visit the Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook:

http://www.teachersourcebook.org
Professional Learning Teams

Teaming to improve the quality of instruction

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Effective learning teams focus on . . .

- Professional learning
- Building collective knowledge
- Working within a small, cohesive group
- Developing an ethic of interpersonal support and caring
In all cases, the focus is on student achievement and success through the education and learning of adults.
What do you mean, another meeting!!!

Source unknown
How do we make it happen?
Step 1: Build the Foundation

Give teachers a rationale for why they should engage in professional learning teams. At this stage you should lead activities to help teachers answer this question . . .

Why should we do this?
Help teachers understand that . . .

Effective teaching matters
Teacher professional learning matters
Collaborative team learning works

Learning teams are about improving the quality of instruction.
Step 2: Preview the Process

Give teachers information about the professional learning team process. This step helps teachers answer the question . . .

What will we be doing?
What will we be doing?

• Provide a clear picture of team behaviors and activities.
• Give teachers opportunities to compare and contrast with current team meetings.
• Help teachers identify appropriate and inappropriate activities for learning team meetings.
Step 3: Prepare and Organize

This step involves taking care of logistical considerations. It answers the question . .

What do we need to do to get ready?
Four Readiness Considerations

1. What do teachers need to know and be able to do?
2. What is the current level of teacher motivation and commitment?
3. What factors and policies in the school organization will facilitate this effort, and which might be barriers?
4. What incentives are in place to help move this initiative forward?
Other Logistical Considerations

- How many people per team?
- When will we meet?
- How often will we meet?
- Where will we meet?
- Who will be on each team?
Step 4: Define Team Expectations

This step involves the team in setting norms. This is the first thing the teachers will do when they get together, and plays a major role in helping teams be productive. It answers the question . . .

What behaviors do we value in one another?
Setting norms in this way can . . .

• Give teams a meaningful task to begin their first meetings.

• Provide an opportunity for conversations that can help team members get to know one another and begin building trust.

• Provide a way for a team leader to guide productive meetings.
Step 5: Set Data-Based Goals

Teachers will focus their study and learning on an area in which their students need them to be more effective teachers. This step answers the question . . .

What is our purpose?
What is our purpose?

For these meetings, team goals focus on teacher learning. For example,

• What can we do differently in our classroom to improve student fluency in math computation?

• What research-based teaching strategies can we use to increase student reading comprehension?

  or

• We will study inquiry-based teaching methods to promote higher-order thinking and problem-solving.
Step 6: Develop a Plan

Focus on planning as a process, not as a form to fill out. It involves giving teachers guidance in how to think about what is, what should be, and how to fill in that gap. This step answers the question . . .

*How will we achieve our purpose?*
Provide questions such as . . .

- What do we believe high-quality teaching in this area looks like?
- What do our current instructional practices look like?
- What beliefs about our students do we want our teaching to reflect?
- What do we need to understand at a deeper level to be able to increase student learning in this area?
Step 7: Conduct Successful Meetings

Productive meetings occur with careful attention, planning, troubleshooting, and concrete suggestions for how team members can interact productively.

This step answers the question . . .

How will we get this done?
Productive Conversations

1. Share facts
2. Share feelings and reactions
3. Discuss applications and implications
4. Make a decision
Communicate, Communicate!

Team logs should contain . . .

• Big ideas
• Decisions
• Plans for the next meeting
Step 8: Maintain Team Momentum

A number of barriers and issues will arise that might derail teams without awareness and attention. This step answers the question . . .

*How will we keep it going?*
Step 9: Assess Team Progress.

Throughout the process, keep track of changes in teacher learning, teacher behaviors, and results.

This step helps teams answer the question... 

*How are we doing?*
Step 10: Lead for Success

Successfully guiding teams takes ongoing learning, awareness, and regular practice. This step answers the question . . .

What does a facilitator need to know and do to make learning teams successful?
Professional Resources

![The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Professional Development](image1)
![Team to Teach](image2)
Question & Answer Session
Question

How do public schools schedule PLTs into the school day?
Question

Does the whole faculty have to buy in, or can a group of 4-5 teachers commit to get it rolling?
How do we get more staff to participate without making it mandatory?
Question

How can I get teachers to open up and share lessons without being protective of their work?
How do you balance the need for teacher directed topics of inquiry with district- or school-wide initiatives?
Question

What kinds of tools (webinars? wikis?) can be used to facilitate collaboration?
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An on-demand archive of this webinar is going to be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24hrs.

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