

Abstract

In this study I researched the effects that the introduction of agendas, team created norms, and protocols had on increasing a PLCs team's productivity and collegiality in order to make PLC time more valuable and capable of positively impacting student learning. Three new interventions were introduced at each successive meeting: the use of agendas, the use of norms, and the use of protocols. The effectiveness of these interventions was tracked over several months. Data was collected through the use of PLC team surveys, group member interviews, observations, and artifacts. Findings revealed that the a) use of agendas, protocols, and norms led to increased productivity and focus on student learning, b) norms supported logistical, procedural, and interpersonal factors of PLC work and c) that productivity and collegiality are supported and inhibited by numerous variables including: support staff, time, and school and district initiatives and expectations for PLC work. Next steps include making the project sustainable so that these positive changes can continue and sharing the work done on a building level so that other PLC teams can implement these and other interventions as needed.

Research Questions

- How might our school increase equity-driven learning opportunities for all students through improving the productivity and collegiality of PLC meetings?
- How might strategic implementation of group-developed norms, protocols, and agendas affect the productivity of PLC meetings?
- How might strategic implementation of group-developed norms, protocols, and agendas affect the collegiality of PLC members both during and between meetings?

Relevance

This study was based on the assumption that professional learning communities play a critical role in providing an equitable education for all students (Horn, 2008). When professional learning communities are effectively implemented in schools, they shift the ultimate focus from teach-

ing to student learning, with the end goal that all students, including those historically marginalized and underserved, are provided ample opportunity to learn (DuFour, 2004). However, as is common with many school reform efforts, PLCs have been implemented in schools without clarity of the fundamental concepts. This lack of clarity causes failed efforts to increase student learning. Unfortunately, this was the case for many of the PLCs in my urban elementary school, Brown Elementary [pseudonym]. It was not uncommon for PLC time to be used for tasks which did not contribute to increased student learning.

Methods Interventions

I implemented several interventions; these included agendas, team-created norms, and a variety of protocols. I implemented each new intervention one at a time.

As a team we created a format for our agenda which I would email out on the Monday before our Friday PLC meeting to ask the team for important items to be placed on our PLC agenda. At the top of our agenda were our four focus questions. We had two sections at the bottom of our agenda one for members to place items not focused on student learning, such as field trips, that needed to be discussed at an upcoming grade level meeting and another titled "Hornet's Nest (Nuts and Bolts)" which were quick items to discuss in the last 5-10 minutes of the PLC meeting.

In order to create team norms I asked the team to participate in a brainstorming protocol. I asked each member to independently identify three characteristics or qualities that drive PLC work and three characteristics or qualities that restrict PLC work, and write each one on a Post-it note. I did this activity in hopes that we could begin to know what types of values and goals members were coming to the PLC with, after each member had time to identify their driving and restricting forces, we shared them one at a time, then grouped them into like categories. Through this activity it was apparent that members of the PLC valued collaboration, increasing student learning, differentiating to meet the needs of all of our students, having equitable

voice among all members of the PLC, and being prepared and focused at PLC meetings. We used these shared values as the springboard for a discussion on essential norms for our team.

A variety of protocols were introduced into our PLC meetings in order to increase productivity and collegiality. Members were asked to take on rotating team roles that included facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. We also used protocols for sharing and team discussion in order to evoke critical dialogue and reflection. A variety of sharing and discussion protocols were made available to choose from and the facilitator (which changed each meeting) was responsible for choosing the protocol to be used.

Methods Procedures

During this study I collected multiple data sources, these included surveys, interviews, observation notes, and a variety of artifacts.

Surveys. I asked that each member of the PLC complete a survey at the beginning of the study, two during the middle, and one at the end of the research process. Surveys were created through SurveyMonkey.com and sent to PLC members through email with a requested complete-by date (see Appendix C). Question responses were formatted as a rating scale and also allowed PLC members to provide additional open-ended comments if they wished.

Interviews. In addition to surveys, I conducted informal ethnographic interviews with some of the PLC members (Mills, 2011). I interviewed one or two PLC members after each survey was completed.

Observation Notes. During PLC meetings, I was an active participant-observer in order to observe the outcomes of implemented norms, protocols, and agendas (Mills, 2011).

Artifacts. Throughout the research process, I collected a variety of artifacts, including PLC agendas, evidence of team norms, PLC note taking forms, and examples of student work.