abstracts

TOGETHER WE CAN DO MORE: COLLABORATION & TEAMS AMPLIFY LEARNING

**Keys to collaboration:**
What it takes to move toward collective responsibility.
*By Tracy Crow*

Having professional learning communities on the schedule doesn’t always fulfill teachers’ collaboration needs. How can schools and systems create structures and supports so educators engage in the kinds of collaborative problem solving and intentional learning that they value? Here are several critical factors in supporting meaningful collaboration for lead learners to consider.

**Talk that teaches:**
How to promote professional dialogue and growth.
*By Lynsey Gibbons and Melinda Knapp*

What types of talk promote teachers’ professional growth? In two vignettes, 4th-grade teachers and instructional leaders examine student work and observe classroom instruction. These learning designs encourage teachers to talk in ways that develop a shared understanding of teaching, which is instrumental to their professional growth. Instructional leaders play an important role in creating a culture that encourages learning and growth.

**Collaboration by design:**
School chooses strategies that allow teachers to learn with and from each other.
*By Jeff Keller and Marfel Kusko*

Teachers at Marylin Avenue School in Livermore, California, used data team process, lesson study, peer observations, and lab lessons to identify needs, set goals, and plan professional learning that was job-embedded, ongoing, and focused on the curriculum. Marylin’s learning system allowed teachers to take risks and innovate and encouraged everyone to measure for effectiveness. Since engaging in these learning practices, student test scores in math and English language arts have increased.

**In the driver’s seat:**
Teacher-led model moves learning in the right direction.
*By Lisa Sullivan and Theresa Westover*

Grants through California’s Teacher-Based Reform (T-BAR) program allowed teachers to select professional learning that would meet their personal needs and be responsive to their local school context. A survey and case study showed that the majority of teachers felt their participation increased their confidence and pedagogical knowledge, improved their classroom instruction strategies, and eased their transition to Common Core standards and expectations.

**Crowdlearning:**
8 districts pool resources to focus on assessment literacy.
*By Paula Dillon, Cassandra Erkens, Diane Sanna, and Linda F. Savastano*

Eight Rhode Island school districts joined together to develop a culture of assessment literacy through ongoing professional learning focused on team-specific actions aligned to school, district, and state initiatives. The districts pooled their funding to engage a national expert to coach and guide their work. Their goal was to create a professional learning community that would develop understanding and application of assessment for learning at the classroom and building levels. Early results are promising.

**Coaching side by side:**
One-on-one collaboration creates caring, connected teachers.
*By Nancy Akhavan*

A school district administrator sets out to find insights into optimal coaching experiences for classroom teachers. She surveyed teachers around the U.S. and analyzed student achievement data to determine what types of coaching have a positive impact for teachers and student learning. Study results highlighted five attributes for coaching: people skills; a focus on the teacher’s needs; availability; an understanding of data’s role in planning instruction; and working side by side with teachers.

**What is an authentic professional learning community?**
*By Shirley Hord*

The most supportive environment for doing learning and improvement work is the professional learning community. Six research-based attributes that distinguish an authentic professional learning community are: structural conditions, supportive relational conditions, shared values and vision, intentional collective learning, peers supporting peers, and a shared and supportive leadership.

**Create a safe space to learn:**
Probing encourages teachers to delve deep into their thinking.
*By Amy B. Colton, Georgea M. Langer, and Loretta S. Goff*

Probes are statements or questions that invite a deeper level of conversation about how teachers are thinking about a student’s learning. Probing is a communication skill that serves a critical role in promoting and maintaining a trusting environment while also supporting teachers to stay open to new ways of thinking and being.
features

When status quo is a no-go:
Maryland high school redefines its professional learning.
By Jared C. Wastler and Shannon Zepp

School leaders at Liberty High School in Eldersburg, Maryland, developed a professional learning system by identifying diverse professional learning opportunities, building a menu of options from which staff members may choose, then scheduling and promoting these learning opportunities. Today, teachers lead and facilitate all professional learning. Data plays a key role in the process, both as an observational and an evaluative component, to support professional learning.

More lessons from Bhutan:
6 years later, change takes root and flourishes.
By Alison Teley and Laurie Levine

Six years after they began their work promoting sustainable special education programs and practices in Bhutan, two U.S. educators pause to reflect on what they've learned, share the successful elements of their experience, and explore how this knowledge can impact their future work. Building open and trusting relationships in a culturally diverse environment was as critical to the work as instilling the fundamental tenets of special education.

Important lessons from a software giant.
By Stephanie Hirsh

The key to success for any educational organization is rooted in these learning fundamentals: Culture matters, learning is for everyone, and a growth mindset is essential.

columns

Lessons from research:
Professional learning for math teachers is a plus for students.
By Joellen Killion

An international study based on TIMSS data shows that professional learning for teachers of 4th- and 8th-grade math is associated with increased student achievement.

From the director:
Why collaboration matters.
By Stephanie Hirsh

It’s not just by chance that Learning Communities is the first of the Standards for Professional Learning. Learning collaboratively and collective responsibility contribute to more successful learning for students.

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