

A New Year of Professional Learning

SCHOOL YEAR 2014-15



"We must act as if our institutions are ours to create, our learning is ours to define, the leadership we seek is ours to become." Peter Block

WHY TAKE TIME FOR COLLABORATION?

We see a rare opportunity this year to shape our profession by taking responsibility for our own learning. Together we will define, prioritize and plan the time we spend learning together, focusing our efforts on student success.

There is significant evidence that schools where staff regularly collaborate around professional learning experience powerful benefits for students and adults (Annenberg Institute 2004). These include a decreased drop out rate, lower absenteeism, greater academic achievement, and smaller achievement gaps. Educators in such schools also report decreased isolation, better morale, increased job satisfaction, and greater confidence. They report that although it was challenging to

learn to work collaboratively, the time was well used because "they had a greater respect for their peers' contribution to their success, and valued the time to learn and work with their colleagues, and had a stronger sense of community with the school. Most importantly, student achievement steadily increased [...] and teachers supported each other's professional growth (Learning Forward, 2013). Educators who have experienced collaborative professional learning consistently report that they would not want to return to a more traditional type of "PD." American educators value

WITH AND BY TEACHERS. NOT TO TEACHERS

collaboration, yet still report feeling isolated in their classrooms (OECD, Teaching and Learning International Survey, 2013). Our new contract provides time for us to establish a process of professional learning for all

members of the school staff. Each school has established a School-based Staff Development Committee (SDC) charged with coordinating professional learning activities that are appropriate, relevant, and embedded in our work.

Schools will begin the process of developing priorities by "knowing our students well," and then aligning their professional learning with what their students need. *Teacher voice is essential to the process of connecting student needs to relevant professional learning.*

Through the SDC, principals work to support and coordinate professional learning so that it meets the needs of the school community.

I participated in a study group on quality questioning. Together we studied strategies that can empower our students to be critical thinkers. As a collaborative group we learned that teaching and learning should not be done alone. This experience enriched our teaching and therefore enriched the learning in our classrooms. Beyond this, it was great working with teachers on a topic we chose to study. We look forward to more of this kind of learning!



Irene Castro IS 162, Bronx



Mary Flores-Camacho
Muscota New School, Manhattan

We chose to focus our inquiry on an area that our school community was already doing well - for *some* students. The goal of was to look at students holistically in order to enable *all* students to have discussions around close reading of complex text. In this way, we could build on what we already knew and deepen our understanding of teaching and learning. We were confident that by choosing student-student discussion as our concentration, we would be able to raise the rigor, and ultimately raise student's level of talk.

Teachers watched videos of their colleagues' classes engaging in rigorous student-to-student discussion. Our professional learning community learned several approaches to engage children in student led discussions.

What made this inquiry effective was that as a community we learned from each other in six consecutive vertical team meetings. We visited each other's classrooms, offered each other suggestions, and together moved ourselves to the next level. Throughout the process, we watched as our students effectively learned to lead discussions.

SOURCES CITED

Annenberg Institute, "*Professional Development Strategies that Improve Instruction*," 2004 online
<http://annenberginstitute.org/pdf/proflearning.pdf>

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Learning Forward, "*Establishing Time for Professional Learning*" 2013 online.

The OECS Teaching and Learning International Survey,
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis.htm>, 2014.



Richard Ciriello
Lower East Side Prep HS

Every Wednesday, I worked with the Social Studies Department to hold a Collaborative Laboratory. We had a menu of topics that teachers generated based on what they really needed in terms of professional development. Teachers got together to share lessons, and to give each other feedback. It was extremely powerful.