Working Together

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EDU 600

Teacher as Leader

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February 25th, 2012

As a teacher in a tiny school that has just started the implementation of a collaborative working environment, it has been interesting to see how everyone has reacted to the change in our building. In order for a school to become a true Professional Learning Community, everyone must be working together towards a common goal. The Principal in the building must develop a sense of importance in the staff, and we all must work together to effectively make sure every child is learning.

The role of the teacher sets the tone in their classroom. As suggested by Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, (2008) "teachers can apply the same principles and concepts to create learning communities in their classrooms" (p.283). In my classroom, I start the year off by going over the 'guidelines', and students are required to brainstorm the guidelines they would like their teacher to follow. Afterwards, I go through the guidelines that I have set for them, so they know my expectations. My classroom guidelines are always in line with school policy. I have seen other teachers who start the year off with only their list of rules. I believe this process sets the tone with the students right from the beginning, and it is clear someone is in charge and more important than the others.

I tell my students regularly that we are on the learning journey together and everything we do collectively can be shared with the school and the community. Prior to each unit, I outline what our curriculum outcomes are and what we as a group are expected to learn. In our classroom, we provide feedback for ourselves as well as our peers, and I even welcome feedback for myself from the students. At times students are asked to self-assess assignments using a rubric. I found all of the concepts that I already instill in my classroom are in line with having a professional learning community within my classroom. Because I am the only teacher for all of the grade seven and eight students in our building, it proves to be difficult to work truly

collaboratively with a teaching partner. Also, I lack the support to work together to plan units and to come up with formative assessments for students.

Just as a teacher sets the tone in their classroom, a principal sets the tone in the building. Our principal was able to come into our building and effectively implement change in our learning environment. We as a staff have seen a lot of change in the previous two years because the former two principals came in and made sweeping changes that no one was very sure of. The entire staff was wary of yet another principal. Our current principal has made sweeping changes, in a seamless manner. She has placed our school well on the path of becoming a Professional Learning Community. She has a defined mission, given a clear view of curriculum expectations, and the most positive energy I have seen in an administrator. After reading the chapter, it is like our Principal, in her short time here, has done her best to follow exactly what is outlined in how to become a Professional Learning Community and fulfill the role of the Principal.

She works just as hard as the rest of us, is a constant promoter of the progress we are making, always complements us, and is brutally honest. It has been hard for even the most hesitant teachers to argue her logistics. She has never come out and stated that we are a Professional Learning Community, and when I questioned her about it, she shrugged and said, "we are on our way, but have a long way to go".

There are some great things about working in a very small school, but when it comes to the Professional Learning Community concept, it is more difficult for our teacher collaboration. I have one collaboration partner who is in their second year of teaching and is still trying to get comfortable in their role as classroom teacher. The two of us have all the students in Grades five through eight in the building. We are trying our best to assist and support each other as well as our learners. I look forward to the future and furthering our progress toward being a true PLC.

References

DuFour, R., DuFour, R,, & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work.* Bloomington, (IN): Solution Tree Press.