

## **An assistant principal's final assignment for PLN 1** **December 2014**

Taking the PLN class collectively with my administrative peers has been a rewarding experience for our school and for my professional development as a curriculum leader. This is true for several reasons. Because we chose to take this class together with our head principal, it has allowed us the opportunity to act immediately, collaborating on new ideas in the moment and rolling our initiatives as we saw fit just as soon as we were introduced to them.

The first two weeks of the program introduced us to The Four Lenses of Learning, or the idea that every lesson should include: meaningful connections, social engagement, a language based approach and have a human element. This framework took hold when we were introduced to the Engagement Model. With this framework of teaching a lesson, it became immediately evident that if each lesson were conducted following this plan, the students would be engaged in all four lenses with a clear dedication to reading, writing, talking and listening. Once our administrative team saw this framework, we were convinced that this was the direction our school needed to go in order to meet the demands of The Common Core Standards while overall improving our instructional approach.

As mentioned earlier, we were able to move quickly. We asked our Language Arts Coordinator to present the PLN Engagement Model to our Language Arts and Social Studies teachers at our next faculty meeting. We made printouts of the materials and made sure that every teacher in the school was exposed to the model as well. Immediately teachers began to experiment with the steps. Many reported back to us with excitement about how well the lessons flowed and just how truly engaged the students were during the entire lesson. As a grade level administrator, I was able to observe my teachers in the classrooms. The pace and the rigor of the lessons were remarkable compared to what I had been seeing in the past. I witnessed less talking by the teacher and more reading, writing and talking by the students. It was and continues to be remarkable.

In the book, *Activate*, it suggested a 100-Day Plan to implement changes in a new direction. I started to organize one for my 6<sup>th</sup> grade team, but soon realized that collaboration with our Language Arts Coordinator and the need to keep initiatives at an acceptable number and pace for our staff was essential. We started making a weekly plan of what we would introduce to the staff instead. This has morphed into a monthly calendar that our administrative team meets about each week. The initiatives that we introduce to the teachers are always rooted in the Engagement Model. For instance, we have since presented working with novels, DOK questioning, text-dependent questions for practice and as assessments, guided reading with non-fiction texts, and vocabulary introduction, all embedded in the Engagement Model.

The support from our superiors has been incredible as well. As The University of Pennsylvania carries such a strong reputation in our area, as soon as we declared that we were dedicated to this program and seeing immediate improvements, our district decided to offer additional courses. I would say that almost 100% of our Language Arts teachers would have taken either PLN1 or PLN2B by the end of the summer of 2015. This will be tremendous to have our entire Language Arts department dedicated to the research and framework of The Penn Literacy Network. I also intend to take PLN2B in order to be at least in step with my teachers.

My greatest drive at this point is to make sure that the administrative team creates a vision and plan for our Language Arts program 6-8 that includes all of the necessary parts of an effective instructional program. This should include, but not be limited to: an updated curriculum framework, key instructional practices that should be demonstrated daily (i.e.- the engagement model, daily reading, writing, talking, nonfiction focus, etc.), updated instructional materials, a professional development plan with follow-ups and measures to hold teachers accountable (and administrators for encouraging the new adaptations), an updated writing framework, data teams, established interventions, fair and standard driven assessments and benchmarks, and finally a measure to see if these initiatives were effective and a plan to make changes if they are not.

It has come up time and time again in our discussions in class that the teachers would like more focused direction. With the help of our Language Arts Coordinator and the backing by administration and our new superintendent, we hope to be able to present a clear and focused vision for language arts. This class has helped our administration to identify research based and effective strategies. Because of our backing of this program, many teachers have signed up for the spring offering of PLN1 and many more intend to take the summer course. When a majority of our teachers are on board with this framework, then we as administrators can follow up with continuing professional development that focuses on some specific areas of need. Our school is a high performing school, but like most, we struggle to show growth with our highest achieving students. This can be addressed by ensuring a few things for our teachers: 1.) they are exposed to the standards at the next grade level, 2.) they work with the grade level above to introduce appropriate lessons at a higher level, 3.) teachers are using a common language in their lesson delivery so that each year they are scaffolding the skill instead of teaching it with a whole new approach.

Another school-wide need is to strengthen our writing program. Our current push is to have writing present in all disciplines. PLN's introduction of The John Collins Five Types of Writing has provided a tool for easily obtainable writing assignments that can be done easily by any teacher in the school, including music, health, foreign language, etc. We have spoken about having formal trainings in his approach. The goal is to have this accomplished by next year.

At this point, we know what needs to be done. It is going to take a lot of work and focus to make our plans a reality. The most important next step is to sit down together as a team and devise a timeline that establishes when we will do each step and what our roles are in completing the process. Although a difficult and daunting task, it is exciting to think of the end results of our efforts. This is what is best for our student's learning, and that is our ultimate goal.