

A school principal's final assignment for PLN 1
December 16, 2014

I appreciate that the philosophical foundation and purposeful direction of The Penn Literacy Network (PLN) 1 course -- grounded in research, practical strategies, and the expectation that participants will utilize and share their experiences regarding the skills and strategies learned in class. The class text *The Plainer Truths of Reading Writing Talking Across the Curriculum* by Morton Botel was especially helpful to me as a building principal. The comprehensive framework of the text and methodology provided sound, irrefutable evidence about research-based skills/strategies that support literacy instruction and learning. I foresee utilizing *The Plainer Truths of Reading Writing Talking Across the Curriculum* with staff on a regular basis as we become more involved as a whole school with PLN.

I believe that the PLN 1 course objectives -- learning and promoting a framework designed to incorporate reading, writing, talking, listening and thinking across the curriculum -- are desperately needed by our school. Personally, I believe that we have been lacking an effective, strategic literacy plan and department leadership for at least eight to ten years. The overview and objectives promoted by the PLN 1 course provide the direction and support that we so desperately need to change the culture of our school, expectations we set for our school community, and the individual skill sets of our teachers and administrators.

The class sessions that focused on demonstration and discussion were incredibly beneficial. The demonstration and discussion format enabled each participant to share their application of learned strategies, be actively engaged in their learning, and develop a personal plan to improve their own skill set. I found the class sessions to be collaborative, non-threatening, and tailored to meet the needs of the group.

I would have preferred to be included in a teacher group versus being segregated with the administrative group. We eventually came to the realization that it was more beneficial to our administrative group to be incorporated into the teacher groups. Participating with a teacher group was more helpful to me and I believe the teachers appreciated our participation. I spoke with several teachers in the class and they understood that we were interested in their thoughts and opinions and the teaching and learning that are happening in their classrooms.

An innovative idea that may benefit the administrator and the teacher would be partnering together to implement a particular skill/strategy learned in the course. I believe that such an experience where an administrator and a teacher were collaborating to plan, instruct, assess, and reflect together would be a very worthwhile experience. I also believe that there should be consideration given to the idea of additional class sessions for administrators to discuss short-term and long-term planning needs related to their faculty and/or school. This would require

a much greater commitment on the part of the administrator, but I believe that the result would ensure the success of the school's literacy initiative.

I do not have an extensive literacy background or a wealth of experience providing literacy instruction. I was a middle school science teacher and taught a curriculum that was heavily based on laboratory experiences. The majority of our reading and writing was narrowly focused on technical reading and writing specifically formatted for traditional lab reports that focused on recording and expressing data. The majority of the data recorded did not require writing in complete sentences and/or paragraph form. Looking back, I should have been doing more in my classroom to support the literacy needs of my students.

As a building administrator I receive training and support from the district as well as outside organizations to support curriculum and instruction. Generally, the training and instruction we receive is an isolated experience, fairly general, and not targeted to the specific needs of our school. The PLN 1 course has enabled the building administration and teachers work collaboratively on a common goal. It has also given me greater confidence in my ability to support and plan the direction of our literacy program.

I was honestly surprised at the level of need that some of our teachers and administrators (myself included) had regarding some of the literacy topics covered. Although we had a wealth of teaching and administrative experience in the class we were all clearly lacking to some degree in one or more areas of literacy awareness and/or instruction. Given this fact, I am happy to have taken the course, which enabled me to improve my own skills. I look forward to participating in the PLN 2B course. I am also grateful that several of our teachers took the PLN 1 class and will be taking the PLN 2B course as well. The positive experience that we all had is encouraging. The success and satisfaction of our experience in the course have helped us persuade more of our staff to enroll in the PLN 1 course being offered in the summer.

The implication of taking the PLN 1 course for our school is that we have committed to implementing the framework's perspective on language, literacy, and learning. We are actively collaborating with our Language Arts Coordinator, Dorie Martin who is our PLN 1 co-facilitator, to educate our staff on the PLN framework of reading, writing, talking, listening and thinking across the curriculum. Specifically, we have set expectations for this current school year to utilize traditional faculty meetings as professional development opportunities to introduce the BDA lesson plan format, engagement model, and the 10-minute summary to our staff. We are building capacity, ensuring small pockets of success, and using positive peer pressure to further our mission. We have also worked collaboratively to provide funding for professional development and we have worked with staff to get a commitment from them to take the appropriate PLN course.

The implications for me regarding this course are great. We are a high performing school and the expectation is to show continuous improvement. It is imperative that our school achieves concrete performance goals related to student achievement. Our mission is to be passionate educators, delivering high quality and engaging instruction, employing research-based strategies, acting as servant-leaders, reflecting on our performance, collaborating with stakeholders, and being good role models. In order to meet our lofty expectations the organizational elements, which include our culture, structures and systems, resources, stakeholders, and environment, must be managed in a way that is coherent.

A critical element to the success of our mission, and principle theory of action, is that the most direct way to increase student learning is to improve teachers' instructional practice. Therefore, if we help all teachers improve their instructional practice we will accomplish high levels of achievement for all students. I believe that the PLN course will provide our staff with the research-based skills/strategies necessary to support our students as we develop our literacy program.

Our strategy, designed to support our instructional core and build capacity, will be to improve our teachers' knowledge and skill, improve student engagement, and provide academically challenging content. The PLN's objectives and framework support our strategy and mission of raising student performance for all students.

Our administrative team will be meeting over the winter break to answer the following critical questions in order to develop a well-articulated plan to move forward efficiently and effectively:

- Do we agree that the PLN coursework is the most effective way to strengthen our instructional core?
- Do we agree that the PLN coursework will support staff and administration to improve student achievement?
- Is our strategy aligned with our theory of action?
- Based on our strategy, what activities should be consuming our time and resources?
- What activities and programs currently consume our time and resources? Are these aligned with our strategy, or are they diverting our focus?
- Based on our strategy, which activities should we grow, drop or modify?
- How do we clearly communicate our strategy and ensure it is well understood?
- Does everyone understand his or her role in supporting the strategy?
- Does everyone embrace the strategy? How do we know?
- How can we do a better job of communicating our strategy and inspiring people to be committed to implementing it?