

Structures & Formats for Instructional Feedback: The Power of Public Practice

Premise

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been posited as essential to promoting increased student achievement. However, a significant challenge in PLC work involves supporting teams in moving beyond simply discussing student data in global terms, or “admiring the problem” (e.g. discussing reasons why performance is not improving). Research (Hattie, 2009) indicates a key factor in changing/improving complex human skills such as teaching is “actionable performance feedback”. Regrettably such feedback is not routinely a component of the PLC process, or anywhere else in the typical teachers’ daily experience. In other words, to appreciably improve routine teacher instruction the PLC process must move beyond simply talking about various forms of student data, brainstorming possible teaching strategies and the like to focusing on the actual teaching practices producing the data being discussed. Useful feedback requires a clear evidence based observational tool utilized across ALL formats to foster coherence and a shared focus which, of course, can change over time as the instructional improvement priorities mature and evolve. This “actionable feedback”, what the Canyon’s District in Salt Lake calls “Public Practice”, provides the context for developing the reflective practice essential to instructional improvement. Connecting the dots, one could say, between our teaching and student learning... or connecting the “talk to the walk”.

*The work lies in face-to-face interactions among people
responsible for student learning around the work, in the
presence of the work...If you can't see it – it isn't there.*

- Richard Elmore

Structures & Formats Essential to Providing Meaningful-Actionable Feedback:

- 1) Peer Coaching – EVERY teacher a coach!** – every 2-4 weeks each PLC member visits a designated PLC member’s classroom (beginning w/leadership team volunteers). Feedback is shared and discussed/explored at the following PLC. A new member then volunteers for the next observational cycle (random or “drop in” works best, usually on prep time).
- 2) Team Coaching or Learning Walks/Instructional Tours** – 4-8 colleagues (often across PLC/content areas) observe for 20 min. – immediate debrief in the hall for 5-7 min. while one colleague covers the class. Later detailed discussions/inquiry/exploration of questions during PLC time.
- 3) Classroom Video Clips** – 2-7 min. clips demonstrating some aspect of instruction that is of mutual concern (e.g. structuring the use of academic language in discussion) using the same observational tool. Usually moves from viewing out of district teachers (e.g. Teaching Channel, Fisher/Frey, Anita Archer) to individuals viewing their own tapes, to sharing clips in PLC & beyond.
- 4) Expert/Technical Coaching** – 1 to 1 coaching with a professional coach (e.g. literacy/math coach) tied to specific implementation goals
- 5) Brief Principal Walk Throughs** – focused on key global indicators of the observational tool (e.g. simple indicators of the same key instructional domains(e.g. engagement, academic language, critical thinking, scaffolding support), usually 5-10 min. – provide some form of brief feedback (e.g. 3 x 5 NCR card left on the teacher’s desk).
- 6) Common Formative Assessment/Problem Solving** – examine samples of student work, quizzes, writing, tests, etc. – analyze/discuss what kind of instruction produced these results (e.g. what is working and why so as to scale it up, what is not working and figure out potential alternatives to employ/evaluate in the problem solving or inquiry cycle).