

Professional Learning Strategy:
Creating Differentiated Assessments Within a Diverse PLC
Final Assignment
By Lindsay Swanson

Introduction

Training in creating differentiated assessments with a common essential skill in a diverse collaborative team is a needed topic of professional learning largely because effective collaboration in CTE PLCs exhibits a current problem of practice (Goodwin, Hall & Simeral, 2019). Effective Professional Learning communities are a relatively new concept to Career and Technology teachers in Prosper ISD, and therefore have been implemented with a compliance mindset that has made little impact on student achievement. PLCs are a research based best practice; learning to function within a Professional Learning Community has proven to enhance student learning, improve teacher efficacy, and increase student achievement (Akiba & Liang, 2016). In addition, differentiation is proven to fulfill the requirements of teachers as intellectuals therefore positively impacts student achievement (Gulhamhussein, 2013). The format of continual learning and improvement through PLCS ensures that implementation is supported and monitored; implementation training is the critical change that guides success (Gulamhussein, 2013)

Call to Action

Professional Learning Communities are a permanent solution to the feeling of isolation and overwhelming burden of single handedly planning instruction, assessment and intervention for your course while many other educators are tackling the same essential standards and skills. While some teams may experience cohesiveness within content, Career and Technology teachers have the unique ability to network with industry professionals, gather workforce data, and collaborate to resolve gaps in employability skills that apply to all students, within the creative process of our diverse classrooms.

In essence, educators have the opportunity to be the driving force for a student to choose a career, master technical language and skills, practice employability standards within their industry, and become productive members of society!

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Professional Learning Blueprint

The professional learning will be initiated with a 3 hour session provided during contract or in-service hours. During the initial session, the concept of collaborative PLC work specifically in regards to CTE will be introduced with an informal pre-assessment in order to differentiate according to the specific needs of

teachers, utilizing rotating stations and allowing teacher choice based on need and interest.

Following the initial session, the Professional Learning continues with implementation support on campus from the Guiding Leadership Coalition as they address the needs of teachers implementing new strategies, and support and mentoring from veteran teachers from core content and administration as they identify needs and provide additional opportunities for reflection and evaluation during allotted PLC time.

The practice of meeting in collaborative teams biweekly remains a continual calendar event that will be added to google calendar that is highly prioritized and aligned to campus and district goals and improvement plans.

In addition, data should be collected routinely (at least once a quarter) in regards to commitment to a shared vision of PLC work, implementation support, teacher needs and problems of practice. These feedback surveys and questionnaires will allow the Guiding Leadership Coalition to identify and address potential obstacles to implementing. Feedback and data should also be collected in regards to the impact on student achievement, with the purpose of adapting strategies as needed.

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Audience

The audience will be composed of teachers required to participate in CTE PLC collaborative teams, including Guiding Leadership Coalition members who mentor and support implementation of PLC collaborative components (Gulhamhussein, 2013). Administrators and district staff who plan Professional Development schedules, evaluate student learning and monitor compliance to PLC standards will also be in attendance during professional learning sessions (Gulhamhussein, 2013).

The learning needs of all stakeholders include a focus on content, the opportunity for active learning, specific connection to content, and opportunity for collective collaboration and mentoring support during implementation. Partnership principles during professional learning include equality, or shared input in planning, as well as choice in what and how teachers learn. The prior experiences of teachers should be translated to case studies, and teacher experience should be respected and valued (Stewart, 2014). Topics should be based not just on problems of practice,

but also needs, wants and interests of participating teachers. Ample time is needed for training, as well as reflection, and all participants require collaboration in the form of feedback and methods of application in the classroom (Gulhamhussein, 2013). Lastly, modeling and active learning strategies during learning sessions and collaborative meetings is essential for successful implementation.

Fostering Collaboration

Collaboration remains an essential tenet of adult learning and professional education. In the initial session, collaboration is promoted through the use of active learning activities such as the Philosophical Question debate, Nearpod with embedded collaborative activities, and final section of station rotation within groups based on need and interest.

After the initial session, collaborative teams will be cemented for the current school year, many of which will be composed of blended or diverse courses. Collaborative teams, by nature, allow for open discussion, shared planning and collective responsibility. Professional Learning activities such as examining data on student progress, analyzing student work and designing and critiquing impactful lessons are other methods of fostering collaboration within teams (Stewart, 2014). Allowing opportunities to share teacher experiences in informal communication or completing cycles of teaching inquiry together cements the spirit of collaboration in professional learning within PLCs. Additionally, teachers should plan opportunities to collect feedback or data from observations or surveys, using this data to identify additional concerns and work together to address obstacles.

As participants find success with implementing new PLC strategies, differentiating assessments on common employability skills, there should be ample opportunity for facilitation of extended learning. The experience and expertise of teachers is one of our most valuable tools, and encouraging teachers into the role of facilitator allows them to build capacity while sharing experience and growing the skills necessary to successfully facilitate additional adult learning (Manicelli, 2020).

Fostering Self-Directed Learning

Research shows that teachers are internally motivated and self-directed by nature, preferring to self-select topics aligned with their own personal beliefs, values, and learning and professional goals (Manicelli, 2020). The preference for self-selected topics makes it essential that any professional learning session plans for differentiation and individualization during instruction. For my professional learning plan, this is especially pivotal during the initial session. Allowing professional

educators choice and voice in the content they learn is one way in which I will foster self-directed learning. At the mid-point in my initial session, educators will be given several station options with varying content. These stations will also include the flexibility to move from one station to the next, or stay at one station which serves a particular professional goal. Stations will be filled with teacher discourse, collaboration, and reciprocal learning. As the professional learning moves into the latter stages of collaborative team meetings, roles will be assigned but frequently rotated to ensure that each member of the team has an opportunity to facilitate as team leader and add practice to their repertoire, eventually aiding others in adopting the new strategies or practices (Cole, 2011).

Extension is also an integral component of self-directed learning for adults; additional resources should be provided that align with authentic topics of interest and innovative strategies. To provide extension opportunities that fit the needs of teachers, I will obtain feedback from them in open response form in order to identify trends in response and areas of greatest need. In order for teachers to participate in self-directed extension of learning, the topics must be specific and applicable to the content and level in which they teach (Gulhamhussein, 2014). These extension resources can be discussed in PLC and provided as materials for later learning, facilitated by teachers who are most passionate or experienced in those areas.

Professional Learning Instructors

For the initial session during in-service hours or within allotted professional development at the onset of the new school year, I will present information on the basics of creating differentiated assessments with common essential employability skills in diverse teams. This initial session will include modeling of strategies, learner discourse and goal setting to identify essential standards and skills. As a member of a model PLC in a previous district, and a participant in additional training through Solution Tree, I am uniquely suited to introduce new concepts and support the creation of protocols and norms.

After the initial session, team leaders and members of the Guiding Coalition will continue as additional support, gathering feedback and evaluating the implementation of differentiated assessments and the impact on student achievement.

5 Key Principles of Effective Professional Learning

The five key principles of effective professional learning are duration, support, active engagement, modeling, and specific content (Gulhamhussein, 2013). In my professional training, the duration will initially be a three-hour session followed by

continuing meetings with a collaborative team on at least a bi-weekly basis. Meetings should be, at minimum, forty-five minutes in length, and an agenda should be provided to ensure efficient use of time. The support provided after the initial session and during the process of actively meeting with collaborative teams will come in the form of team leaders (one per team), members of the Guiding Leadership Coalition (rotating as needed), instructional coaches, mentors and CTE coordinators. Support will also be provided in the form of surveys and questionnaires throughout the school year and during implementation of differentiated assessments to allow teachers to request additional help, identify problems of practice, or request specific professional learning content based on needs. During the initial session, I will model how to differentiate instruction based on prior knowledge and interest, as well as model the aspects of a collaborative team such as creating agendas, protocols, and norms. Each participant will have the opportunity to have these procedures modeled to them through myself or another veteran teacher or support system attending. To actively engage the audience, I will use storytelling during the duration of my short presentation, embedded with activities that allow for collaboration such as the Philosophical Question or Nearpod activities. In the summary of my presentation, I will use a moving call to action to inspire and motivate the adoption of new strategies. Finally, as teachers break into differentiated groups, they will be actively engaged in practicing new strategies in a collaborative setting. The content of my presentation and professional learning is focused on Career and Technology teachers who teach high school credit CTE courses. The focus on employability skills and expectation of common essential standards makes the content uniquely specific to this group.

Timeline

The initial session will be provided during contract hours or during summer Professional learning days. The initial session will be three hours in length, where at minimum 50% of the time will be dedicated to practicing the new strategy with supporting stakeholders in place. This initial training will be open to any campus within the district.

After the initial session, the professional learning would become continual with no specific end date. Collaborative teams would return to their home campus and meet at a minimum 45 minutes a session, biweekly. Once a quarter, during professional development days within our contract, feedback surveys and forms will be provided to identify problems of practice, teacher needs, and evaluate the current level of support and commitment to implementation.

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Resources and Media

Initial Session Presentation link-

https://np1.nearpod.com/sharePresentation.php?code=3b03ae87f5d140d4d16f2e1d7c3d42f0-1&oc=user-created&utm_source=link

Templates for modeling-

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1vmhx8iYkKMnGBs97kRFInfYH94D3zBbd8aHmfmvVh8A/edit?usp=drive_link

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gaZ206Q003Pebma5kTS27JCBND2ID8Df9Gcp3KKY-VE/edit?usp=drive_link

TEKS:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iMdVk3Xa6lNAeWHOMyPrPoKrVUqM4vYB?usp=drive_link

Collaborative team shared drive/folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D5rE9b8PHm9gIV3MHu_ISDvY75u763VF?usp=drive_link

Supporting staff:

Mentors, Guiding Coalition team, Instructional coaches and CTE coordinators available via google calendar.

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/r>

Team Lead Google Classroom:

<https://classroom.google.com/c/NzkwNzE2NTg2MDU4>

The above referenced resources are housed in digital form to ensure access to all district employees, but will also be provided via traditional paper copy during the initial session. The presentation listed above contains additional references, embedded media clips and active engagement activities. Google calendar will house the meeting times and dates, while the Team Lead google classroom serves as a support for all Team Leaders in collaborative teams. The TEKS, blank templates and agendas are all housed in the shared folder in google drive and remain accessible to anyone within Prosper ISD. These materials will be used not only for modeling during the initial session, but as supports and aids during the biweekly Collaborative team meetings.

Summary

There is ample reason for educators to pursue professional learning opportunities as consistently as possible. First, it allows educators a safe space to improve the practices we are most passionate about: our teaching strategies and our students corresponding academic and personal success. In addition, improving Professional Learning is a crucial step in transforming schools (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andre, Richardson, and Orphanos, 2009). Professional Learning Communities allow for this development to occur as a job embedded activity that brings essential support for implementation when compared with one stop workshops. Secondly, Professional Learning Communities are pivotal for singleton teachers within programs such as Career and Technology; we need substantial support and guidance in implementing differentiated strategies and activities toward a common essential skill. We've heard the phrase work smart, not hard many times, and it applies to collaboration with our peers. Professional Learning with a community of our peers directs us toward a process of inquiry where educators innovate together, examine teaching strategies to support the achievement of collective goals, and expose each other to pedagogical research in our content areas (Gulhamhussein, 2013).

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