LEAD 5393  
Teacher Leadership in Action: Norms, Goals, and Tasks

Faye Gillespie

American College of Education

After encountering an environment that diminished student learning, limited teacher autonomy, and exhibited unsafe behaviors, a grass root teacher initiative was deemed needed in the Business & Finance Department of William T. Dwyer Community High School, located in Palm Beach County Florida. With a population of almost 3,000 students and a detached campus setting, it was seen as appropriate to start with a single confined department within the campus. As situations of concern increased daily, so did the teacher frustrations and need to respond. With new administration unable to contain or support, a strong current began to flow toward a call to action. After several open meetings, a group of teacher leaders came together to establish a framework for a departmental initiative. The group decided to use the Community of Practice framework, as it contained a structure for practitioners with a shared purpose and allowed for members to select themselves. In addition, the CoP was characterized by a purpose to develop members, increase the exchange of knowledge, and accomplish a specific task. With the framework decided, the next steps are set forth to establish norms, set goals, and determine tasks required to begin this initiative and insure sustainability.

**Establishing Norms**

The establishment of norms was deemed as a fundamental element to the overall success of this initiative. By insuring that protocols were in place, we created a “safe and equitable environment” (Dichter & Zydney, 2015, p. 49). It is certain that the protocols and norms which we take the time to create will not be wasted, as they “help us develop the habits we wish we had” (p.49). In addition, by creating a system for the procedural functionality of practitioner gatherings, we can maximize the productivity of the community. In the educational system where there exists a no time to waste philosophy, this Community of Practice will seek to establish norms that maximize results and efficiently utilize the time invested by all members. All three founders of this initiative view our roles as members and facilitators. “Facilitation is an important part of any protocol” (p.49). With this in mind, each founding member of this community accepts their obligation to demonstrate equality, encourage participation, and create trust. In addition, facilitators must “always keep part of their focus on the process and goal” (p.49).

The setting of norms for this initiative was derived by utilizing Wentworth’s “Forming Ground Rules” protocol. This protocol involves the written recording of what each member deems as vital to them functioning successfully within the community. Following this, each teacher reveals their needs to the other members. As teachers reveal their requirements to each other, discussions transpire, and rules develop. These are rules that all the group needs to adhere to and follow (Ban, 2016, slide 2). Below, in Table 1: Forming Ground Rules, the results from our meeting to set norms is revealed.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table 1: Forming Ground Rules | |
| 1. Each person writes down what he or she needs to work productively within the group.   Ms. Price - members that believe change is possible and are unwilling to accept present conditions, punctual, members invested, open and honest communication  Ms. Weiss - equality in all issues with a shared sense of responsibility  Ms. Gillespie – member that are trusted, open, and committed to problem solving |
| 1. Each person names on thing from his/her list.   Ms. Price – honesty  Ms. Weiss – equity  Ms. Gillespie - committed |
| 1. Ask for clarifications   Ms. Price – each member must demonstrate honesty about the problems, solutions, and inadequacies to establish change alone. We must also demonstrate honesty and respect when dealing with students, as well as teachers.  Ms. Weiss – equity must be seen in all tasks related to the initiative and equity must mean that all have a voice to determine best practices. We must embrace the unique skills and all members work toward the common goal.  Ms. Gillespie – each teacher must be committed to the goals set forth and willing to remain committed during painful change. By staying committed, the hopes are for a sustainable initiative that can eventually grow into a school wide commitment. |
| 1. Combine items to make the list more manageable.   Honest, Equitable, Committed |
| 1. Ask if everyone can abide by the ground rule.   Ms. Price – yes  Ms. Weiss – yes  Ms. Gillespie - yes |
| 1. Ask if any of the ground rules are hard to follow.   Ms. Price – no  Ms. Weiss – no  Ms. Gillespie - no |
| 1. Refer to the ground rules as needed during group work.   Group members are to demonstrate and model honesty, as a moral characteristic and be truthful always.  Group members are to demonstrate equity and equality in all practices.  Group members are to remain committed to the success of the initiative and foster same among others. |

By utilizing the protocol “Forming Ground Rules”, we were easily able to identify the conditions for which we desire to feel safe and invested in the initiative. Ms. Price shared that we must be honest with members and ourselves about situations and the possibilities for change. She suggested that we must “keep it real” and acknowledge that culture and socioeconomic factors are involved. Ms. Weiss insisted that equity and equality must be seen in the group and in methods for which we addressed problems. My need was that the group be committed to a plan that allowed for changes as needed. Members should expect difficult days as the initiative takes root. We must expect questions and ask questions as the initiative grows. “Leadership that can nourish and sustain passion and commitment is needed as educators are challenged to adapt and shift their practices and mindsets in the rapidly changing education landscape” (Cherkowski, (2012, p. 2)

Reflection on the ground rules and norms for the initiative prove to be enlightening. The foundations we desire for this initiative resemble some the elements we desire to develop in our students. Verbal conversations, prior to the forming of the initiative and during the establishment of norms, kept centering on our needs as they related to our personal success. It was realized that the protocol we used to create the Community of Practice norms might offer insight to the creation of a new set of norms for our students.

**Goal Setting and Force Field Analysis**

As we embarked upon outlining our actions and objectives for this initiative, we kept our eyes open to the reality of daily conditions for which teachers and learners are expected to find security and knowledge. In order to prepare for the establishment for action plan, we took into account material that “good instructional models for character development take into consideration need” (Vessels, 1998, p.49). We acknowledged that moral character can be viewed as “a combination of social and personal integrity”(p.41). Through a session designed to consider an appropriate plan of action and objectives, our Community of Practice considered the following questions.

1. How shall we define what is good or right?
2. What can be taught?
3. Under what conditions will learning best occur?
4. Can we infuse moral instruction into our content?
5. Can we model the desired behaviors which increase community?
6. Are we respectful to the rights provided under the 1st Amendment?

These are questions which helped lead the development of the goals and objectives of the action plan. In Table 2: Goal Setting and Force Field Analysis, the goals are set forth and objectives established.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table 2: Goal Setting and Force Field Analysis | |
| Goals of the Action Plan:  A “Professional Zone” will be established to enable students to achieve increased security in their moral development, which leads to the actualization of a stronger overall academic learning community. By design the learning community (Business & Finance Department of William T. Dwyer Community High School) will create this Professional Zone where expectations are created by both teachers and students. In this zone, all values and beliefs are to be respected. The importance of moral character will be explicitly modeled, taught, and supported. Characteristics and virtues that reflect personal-integrity will be praised and rewarded. Since this department represents students that have shown an interest developing professional skills, the zone will offer a safe place to do the right thing. It is by design that students may see these positive changes as opportunities to try on a “professional” approach to conflicts, conversations, and emotion situations that warrant release.  Objectives:   * Conduct a Climate Survey for all students and teachers in the department. * Teachers will evaluate and develop methods to enhance the Developmental Internal Assets of students. * Create Focus Groups (student, teacher, and combined) which define appropriate behaviors for the zone and an incentive system. * Create Banners and Posters based on Focus Group suggestions and qualitative data collection methods. * Role play and model desired behaviors. * Visual enhance the department through efforts of the students to create ownership and pride of space. * Celebrate positive and professional behaviors. * Collect data that demonstrates increased academic learning as the result of moral and character development initiative. * Continue to use a cycle to problem solution, as to create continued growth with regards to the initiative. | |
| Driving Forces  (Needs/supports making success more likely) | **Restraining Forces**  (Barriers to success) |
| * Peers embrace the Professional Zone * Teachers model desired behaviors * Professionalism becomes trend * Student show excitement toward rewards and incentives associated with the Professional Zone * Increased Teacher commitment * Increased Community * Increased student self-esteem * Decreased occurances of negative communication * Academics trend upwards * Increased outside support * CoP thrives and continually evolves * Friendships increase * Descalation of agression * Moral reflection increases | * Peers reject the Professional Zone * Teachers fail to model behaviors * Professionalism fails to trend * Students fail to value the rewards and incentives associated with the Professional Zone * Decreased Teacher commitment * Decreased Community * Decreased student self-esteem * Increased occurances of negative communication * Academics fail to change or decline * Decreased support * CoP fails to thrive and evolve * Friendships decrease * Acts of agression * Moral reflection fails to take root |

The situation as Dwyer involves several internal and external factors that contribute to a population of students which make the daily exchange of knowledge challenging for teachers and learners. Communication is rarely appropriate, and behaviors are prone to generate violence. Expectations set by administration are commonly mocked. To create a community where academics can be taught, the goals for this initiative was to establish a zone where social exchange was part of the normed academic content. Thus, a “Professional Zone” was envisioned as part of every course in the Business & Finance Department. To be in the “Zone”, a student would show respect, tolerance, morality, and various characteristics associated with moral-integrity. By including students in climate surveys, focus groups, and promotional planning, students can see the initiative as their idea. The objectives stated may be actualized in a non-numeric sequence. While “no single profession or institution can assume the full responsibility for creating the conditions that children need to flourish, learning communities guided by shared beliefs, which is based on mutual trust and respect” can produce change (Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012, p. 38).

The forces were examined by our group to acknowledge pressure that can secure or inhibit change. Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) authored the “Force Field Analysis” which was utilized to consider the opposing forces related to the initiative and creation of Professional Zone. This method of analysis allowed for the consideration of driving forces opposed to the restraining forces. For clarity one can in vision a center of equilibrium where, for change to occur, the driving forces must supersede the opposing forces. It is fully acknowledged that change must be conceived as beneficial to all parties and promoted in ways the students find rewarding. While we could hope for all to achieve intrinsic rewards, this is not realistic due to the various levels of student self-worth and actualization. For the initiative to become a success, the actions within the Zone must have student support and commitment. Peer perception and the degree of community that can be established are forces to monitor. A change to the left or right of our present academic status, within the department, will not only affect our initiative, but also the level of support from teachers and outside sources. Visually, an effective initiative should show increased positive conversations and respect. The ways that we accomplish this are certain to continually evolve, if the initiative proves to be sustainable.

Let us keep in mind that the high school students themselves are, also, evolving and that “typically, the student has a fragile self-esteem and incomplete identity formation, they tend to strategically exploit social occasions and casual friendship patterns to enhance the self in the minds of others and themselves. It is this same uncertainty about self that causes them to be more clannish, intolerant, prejudiced, and crueler than they have been in the past or will be in the future” (Praeger, 1998, p. 49). When we combine these developmental psychological conditions with the socioeconomic and environmental conditions created by busing students from their communities, we create challenges like the ones we seek to address with this initiative.

**Group Tasks and Evaluation Planning**

What shall we do? In keeping with our norms, the tasks to springboard the “Professional Zone” shall be equitably divided. Consideration was given to the strengths and skills of the members. The tasks to be addressed are as stated:

* Create a teacher Dwyer School Climate Survey.
* Create a student Dwyer School Climate Survey.
* Use the survey results to define the present nature of the school climate. Compare the similarities and differences between teachers and students.
* Plan and host focus groups (teacher, student, and combined) to brainstorm best practices for establishing, monitoring, and sustaining the Professional Zone.
* Organize a special meeting and invite trained experts within the school who have advanced training in the development of adolescents. At this meeting, consider the present external and internal development assets of Dwyer students functioning within the department.
* Determine, order, and create promotional materials for the Professional Zone. This should heavily involve students to allow student ownership.
* Plan the incentives. Allow students to decide these and celebrate consistently.
* Collect academic data for a beginning initiative benchmark and monitor changes using a quantitative analysis.
* Keep a journal of field observation within the department to allow for qualitative analysis.
* Create opportunities for students to visual enhance the area of the department.
* Celebrate positive and professional behaviors within the staff, as well as students.
* Create a calendar to review the progress of the initiative,
* Use a cyclic approach to behavior modification by monitoring, identifying, reteaching, and celebration.

It was decided that Ms. Price would create, distribute, collect, and analyze the Dwyer School Climate Surveys. I, Ms. Gillespie would conduct focus groups and collect information from these groups. This information would be used to establish and promote the Professional Zone according to majority. Ms. Weiss would invite experts and host a session aimed at evaluating the present developmental assets available to students of Dwyer. Based on all the information collected, along with observations, all members would host promotional sessions to allow students to use their creativity surrounding the making of flyers, posters, and banners. This is viewed as a constructive use of time, which is a developmental asset. Incentives would be purchased with departmental funds and determined by the students with the focus groups.

To evaluate the results of this initiative, climate surveys, focus groups, and developmental asset assessments will occur monthly. These results will be used in conjunction with both academic student data and journalized observations by each member. The CoP will formally meet every two weeks to evaluate the bimonthly progress of the initiative and explore needed modifications to the plan. At these sessions, additional promotions and incentives will be considered. Each meeting will consider ways to enhance an internal or external developmental asset, suggested by Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (Hustedde & Score, 1995). Eternal assets shall include support, empowerment, boundaries & expectations, and constructive use of time. While internal assets will encompass a commitment to learning, positive values, school competences, social competence, and positive identity. It is imperative that the results be analyzed, along with developmental processes and outside forces which seek to create additional challenges for the Dwyer initiative.

**Conclusion**

As we move from the establishment of the initiative by the CoP and into the actualization of the “Professional Zone” at William T. Dwyer Community High School, let us not forget that as educators and leaders we seek to solve problems and create changes that lead to a more positive educational experience and stronger society. The attempts we make and the time we invest in our students is never wasted. “Understanding how school leaders can nourish and sustain passion and commitment is an essential area of research on learning communities” (Cherkowski, 2012, p. 56). As learning communities evolve so will the frameworks and tools we use to achieve results. Once fully materialized, the Dwyer “Professional Zone” has the potential to create an improved educational environment where students of diversity can reach their full potential.

**Resources**

Anderson, D., Imdieke, S., Lubig, J., Reissner, L., Sabin, J., & Standerford, S. N. (2010). Self-

study through collaborative conference protocol: Studying self through the eyes of

colleagues. Teaching and Learning, 24(2), 59-71.

Baron, D. (2007). Using text-based protocols: Chalk talk. Principal Leadership: High School

Edition, 7(8), 43-45.

Brighton, C.M., & Moon, T.R. (2007). Action research step-by-step: A tool for educators to

change their worlds. *Gifted Child Today*, 30(2), 23.

Cherkowski, S. (2012). Teacher commitment in sustainable learning communities: A new

“ancient” story of educational leadership. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 35(1), 56-68.

Dichter, A., & Zydney, J. M. (2015). Net results: Online protocols boost group learning potential.

JSD. *The Learning Forward Journal*, 36(2), 48-50.

Hustedde, R., & Score, M. (1995). Force-field analysis: Incorporating critical thinking in goal

setting. Community Development Society, CD Practice, 4, 1-7. Search Institute (2006).

Vernon-Dobson, L. J., & Floyd, L. O. (2010). Building leadership capacity via school

partnerships and teacher teams. *Clearing House*, 85(1), 38-49.

Vessels, G.G. (1998). Character and Community Development: A School Planning and Teacher

Training Handbook, p. 41-54.

Wood, D. R. (2007). Professional learning communities: Teachers, knowledge, and knowing.

*Theory Into Practice*, 46(4), 281-290.