

Literature Review

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Citation

McCombs, B. (2010). Culture of Collaboration. *Learning and Leading with Technology*, 10-13.

Summary of the Article

In 2003, the residents of Kannapolis City Schools in North Carolina learned the importance of technology and the 21st century. They had been a town centered on textile mills to keep them financially stable for over 100 years, until 2003 when all of the plants shut down. Many people in the community lost their livelihood and the only thing they were qualified for. This was until one of the old mills was purchased at auction and converted into the North Carolina Research Campus for advancements in biotechnology, nutrition, and health. This restored the economy in Kannapolis North Carolina, but the residents had to be trained in a completely different field, in which they had no prior knowledge.

The technology director of the school district, along with the three principals, attended a seminar in order to adapt to the new learning curve. "We learned about being change agents, facilitating collaborative planning, implementing flexible scheduling, using alternative assessments to evaluate both teachers and student work, and identifying Web 2.0 tools for administrative and instructional use." (McCombs, 2010). Through all of this discussion and planning, arose a determination to create an environment filled with technology, where students would actively engage in their learning. The leaders of the district knew there would have to be time for teachers to collaborate with each other in order to adapt their curriculum for such changes.

The first action that was taken to implement this new plan was a dynamic professional development program for the teachers and administrators, which would lead to an exceptional collaboration amongst students and staff. To help cut down on time, six teachers who were already familiar with technology and used it frequently were trained first. These six teachers served as their guinea pigs to better determine which topics were valuable for the actual professional development program. Once the program was decided upon, the six teachers served as mentors to assist their peers throughout the summer of professional development, and the entire school year. The mentors provided hands-on sessions, where they would model skills they were teaching and show their peers how to implement these changes in their own classrooms.

The professional development was given over the course of several weeks. The first day the teachers convened they all received a laptop, a projector, interactive whiteboard, and a flash drive. "Through discussion and role play, they discovered that collaboration looks like both in their own planning sessions and in student-centered learning" (McCombs, 2010). The teachers were also made aware of the principals expectations for the curriculum, and tried to mold their lessons around high-order thinking skills.

As the school year began, the teachers were fitted with the task of collaborating with another teacher who was not in their content area. For example, the high school teachers created a unit where they would all talk about the presidential election in their classroom. They used all the technology they had been given to complete this collaborative cross-curriculum unit. All the while, teachers were able to support each other in successes, as well as challenges

that they were facing each day. This served as a backbone, which allowed the teachers to become more comfortable with the technology changes and not get frustrated. Although they had each other as support, some teachers went outside the realm of their community and created professional learning communities through Twitter and Facebook to allow them to bring new ideas to the group. Through all of these processes, the teachers became more comfortable with sharing strategies and asking for help when they needed it.

The reason the Kannapolis City Schools was able to turn their failing community into a technology-rich institute for learning and collaborating was due to amazing professional development program. Without the funding for professional development, they would have never been able to get all of the teachers on board with the changes. The teachers, who once complained about participating in mandatory professional development, now were planning the days for everyone in the district.

Reflection

What the Kannapolis City Schools did was nothing short of amazing. This school district went completely out of their element and seized a new opportunity. They knew that their students would not have the skills they needed for their futures with the unfortunate closing of all the factories in the town, so they took charge and changed the methods in which they delivered their curriculum to better prepare the students.

With the right tools and the proper support from the administration, anything is possible for a school district. The professional development sessions were the most important piece of the puzzle. From reading this article I have learned how powerful professional

development can be. Here is a school district that was in a serious predicament and they taught all of their teachers how to integrate technology into their classrooms. It is a feat all in itself to have all of the teachers on board with such a drastic change in the curriculum. Often times, teachers who have been teaching for many years tend to not want to change their style of teaching. This school district was able to get everyone on board, all through professional development. This article really makes me feel as though I can make a change in my district through professional development.