

Promoting System – Wide Collaborative Conversations



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Outcomes



- How can professional communities achieve effectiveness?
- What identity and practices do successful groups consistently live to achieve success?
- What strategies and structures support groups in creating shared meaning, common purpose and collective expertise?
- What communication patterns promote high levels of collaboration in professional communities?

AGENDA

- The Importance of Identity
- What? Professional Communities Learning
- Why? Principles of Complex Systems
- How? Two Ways of Talking
- How? Seven Norms of Collaborative Work
- How? Collaborative Conversations: Listening to Understand
- Organize and Integrate

NOTES and STRATEGIES



GOAL OF ADAPTIVE SCHOOLS TRAINING

To develop our collective identity and capacity as collaborators and inquirers

Identity

Our identity, who we believe we are, drives our perceptions of the world, our interactions with others, our construction of meaning, our choices and behaviors, and the way we fulfill the responsibilities of our many roles. How we carry out each role is influenced by the identity we develop for ourselves.

Our beliefs, values, capacities, and behaviors are congruent with our sense of identity. As our sense of identity changes, so do our beliefs, values, capacities, and behaviors. Most often, this sense of identity is held unconsciously, without calculation or deliberation. An identity carries with it goals and presuppositions that influence the setting of personal standards and criteria for interactions with others (adapted from Ellison & Hayes, 2010).

THE ELEMENTS OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

The Adaptive School A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups,
Garmston and Wellman, 2009, (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA. Christopher Gordon

The emerging research base supports the importance of the essential elements of professional community. We are drawing here from three arenas, research on

- the effects of adult culture on student learning;
- the impacts of teacher collective efficacy on student learning;
- the effects of teachers' academic optimism on student learning.

1. Compelling purpose, shared standards and academic focus

Communities come into existence and thrive because of a common purpose for working together. A group's compelling purpose establishes reciprocal expectations for its members.

International evidence suggests that educational reform's progress depends on teachers' individual and collective capacity and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning (Stoll, et al., 2006).

Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) assert that teachers' professional communities operate with a sense of moral authority and moral responsibility for making a difference in the lives of students. Such purpose must be grounded in clearly articulated standards for both student and teacher performance.

Defining and refining the meaning of doing good work is the task of a professional learning community. Understandable performance and product standards are important catalysts for conversations among colleagues and for focusing conversations with students and parents.

2. Collective efficacy and shared responsibility for student learning

The personal efficacy of individual teachers is a well-studied phenomenon (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Highly efficacious teachers believe that their teaching knowledge and skills can overcome external factors to make an important difference for their students. Teachers with stronger personal efficacy beliefs consistently outperform teachers in the same settings with weaker beliefs.

These applications in education are based on the concepts of self-efficacy that Albert Bandura (1977) introduced more than a quarter century ago. Self-efficacy is the belief in our capacity to organize and carry out a plan of action to produce some goal.

More recent work (Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2004) extends these concepts into the collective realm of teaching. To have a high degree of collective efficacy means that group members believe that they and others, individually and together, are capable of producing increased student success and of overcoming obstacles to that goal.

3. Collaborative culture

Who teachers are to one another is as important as who they are to their students.

In high-performing and improving schools, studies show that collaboration is the norm (Little, 1982; Newman & Associates, 1997). We are not talking here about project-based collaboration or the “contrived collegiality” as described by Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) in which administrators create tasks and agendas to occupy teachers’ collective energies.

Rather, we are referring to sharing expertise and perspectives on teaching and learning processes, examining data on students and developing a sense of mutual support and shared responsibility for effective instruction.

Collaboration and collegiality in this way are part of one’s professional identity.

Collaboration does not happen by chance; it has to be taught, practiced and learned. Developing collaborative cultures is the work of leaders who realize that a collection of superstar teachers working in isolation cannot produce the same results as interdependent colleagues who share and develop professional practices together.

4. Communal application of effective teaching practices and deprivatized practice

The norm of privacy has deep roots in schools.

Once the classroom door is closed, the teacher is god. In this sphere of autonomy lies both greatness and sorrow. Within the zone of isolation, some teachers still find ways to develop craft knowledge, content knowledge and compassion for their students. These extraordinary individuals manage to stimulate their teaching and continually renew their passion for daily interactions with young minds.

All too often, however, this same isolation buffers mediocrity and hides high performers from those who might learn from their modeling, consultation and coaching.

When practice is deprivatized, teachers visit one another’s classrooms to observe master teaching, to coach one another, to mentor and to solve problems in the living laboratory of instructional space.

Students are the beneficiaries of shared teaching repertoires.

By developing communities of practice, teachers establish working zones between the macro world of district initiatives and resources and the micro world of their classrooms (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). In this way they develop more coherent instructional approaches that represent a shared understanding of their unique settings.

5. Relational trust in one another, in students and in parents

In their work on the effects of academic optimism on student achievement, Hoy, Tarter & Woolfolk Hoy (2006) point out that collective efficacy is the cognitive side of the equation, academic emphasis is the behavioral side, and faculty trust in one another, in students and in parents is the affective side.

Given the powerful biochemical connections between thinking and feeling in our bodies and our brains, it is difficult to separate these functions in practice.

Trust is the glue that binds community members to one another.

This is equally true for teacher communities, classroom communities and parent communities. When all three parties hold the expectations for their relationships, and these expectations are grounded in shared goals and values, trust is a powerful resource for learning.

Bryk and Schneider (2002), in their seminal work in Chicago schools, name four elements of relational trust:

- Respect
- Competence
- Personal Regard for others
- Integrity: congruence in talk and behaviors

6. Individual and group learning based on ongoing assessment and feedback

“Learning is a basic, adaptive function of humans. More than any other species, people are designed to be flexible learners and active agents in acquiring knowledge and skills” (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999, p. xi).

Cognitive science tells us that learning is socially constructed and individually integrated; learning therefore requires engaging with other learners, and is an active process for all involved. Individual and collective learning is one of the key characteristics of effective professional learning communities (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005).

For adult groups, learning how to learn *together* requires conscious attention, purposeful structures and meaningful feedback. One form of feedback arises when teachers look at student work together to explore what is working and what might require modification in their curricular and instructional approaches.

Groups apply another form of feedback when they take time to reflect on their own processes and outcomes to consider which practices to continue, which to abandon and which to modify.

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES LEARNING

ELEMENT: _____



HEADLINE:

ILLUSTRATION:

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “COMPLICATED” AND “COMPLEX” MATTERS

Larry Cuban, June 8, 2010

<http://larrycuban.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/the-difference-between-complicated-and-complex-matters/>

What’s the difference between sending a rocket to the moon and getting children to succeed in school? What’s the difference between a surgeon extracting a brain tumor and judge and jury deciding guilt or innocence for a person accused of murder?

Answers: sending a rocket to the moon and surgeons extracting brain tumors are complicated tasks while getting children to succeed in school (or, for that matter, raising a child) and the criminal justice system are complex.

According to York University (Ontario, Canada) business professor Brenda Zimmerman, complicated procedures like brain surgery and rocket launchings require engineer-designed blueprints, step-by-step algorithms, well-trained staff, and exquisite combinations of computer software running carefully calibrated equipment. Think rocket landing on the moon in 1969, doctor-controlled robotic arms doing brain surgery, and the U.S. “shock and awe” invasion of Iraq in 2003.

A complicated system assumes expert and rational leaders, top-down planning, smooth implementation of policies, and a clock-like organization that runs smoothly. Work is specified and delegated to particular units.

Certainty about outcomes is in the air the organization breathes. Complicated systems use the most sophisticated math, technical, and engineering expertise in mapping out flow charts to solve problems.

Yet even those sophisticated systems fail from time to time: the Challenger shuttle disaster, Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown, and the 2010 BP oil leak.

Complex systems like criminal justice, health care, and schools, however, are filled with hundreds of moving parts, scores of players of varied expertise, and independence, yet missing a “mission control” that runs all these different parts within an ever-changing political, economic, and societal environment. The result is constant adaptations in design and action. Recall the U.S. President, Congress, lobbying groups, and scores of interest groups trying to get a reform health care bill into law during 2010 in the midst of a slow recovery from the quasi-Great Depression of 2008. Or ponder the U.S.’s bungled efforts to build a democratic Iraq between 2003-2010 after the engineered “shock and awe” got rid of Saddam Hussein.

Blueprints, technical experts, strategic plans, and savvy managers simply are inadequate to get complex systems with thousands of reciprocal ties between people to operate effectively in such constantly changing and unpredictable environments. These web-like complex systems of interdependent units adapt continuously to turbulent surroundings.

Or consider how the criminal justice system created plea bargains to avoid gridlock. Interdependent parts of the system (police, defense lawyers, district attorneys, and judges) adapted to overflowing court dockets. In similar fashion, schools adapted to external lobbying by adding financial management courses to the regular curriculum.

Health care, criminal justice, and school systems, even with their façades of command-and-control mechanisms and policy manuals filled with procedures for subordinates to follow are constantly buffeted by unpredictable events. Picture a hospital emergency room, a kindergarten class of wailing and reclusive 5 year-olds, and judges doing arraignments one after the other.

So what if schools, hospitals and courts resemble spider webs of interconnecting strands rather than carefully designed and well-oiled machines?

One practical outcome of this distinction is to approach planned change differently. Those who run complicated systems (e.g., airplane and automotive industrialists, investment bankers, computer hardware and software CEOs) introduce change by laying out a detailed design of what is to be changed, include step-by-step procedures to implement the change and overcome any employee resistance, and reduce variation in performance once change is implemented. These designs are highly rational, mechanical, and smooth.

The problem for those who inhabit complex systems like schools is that change, conflict, and unplanned changes occur all the time...as do adaptations, due to the web-like independent and interdependent relationships that make up the system. What happens when smart people try to graft procedures from complicated organizations onto complex systems?

Trying to toilet train a 3-week old baby is an absurd example of the thinking that occurs when a *complicated* solution (designing a flow chart for teaching toilet training) meets a *complex* problem (a baby that feeds continually, sleeps 20 hours a day, and soils her diapers repeatedly). Inevitably, the toilet training flow chart gets adapted again and again until the baby is ready to be toilet trained—a year or more later. Or consider a less absurd example of the pay-for-performance plans imported from *complicated* business systems to be installed in *complex* school districts. The pay-for-performance policy will get adapted repeatedly and, over time, will become unrecognizable to designers and promoters.

The answer then, to the so-what question is: At the minimum, know that working

in a complex system means adapting to changes, dealing with conflicts, and learning constantly. These are natural, not aberrations. Know further that reform designs borrowed from complicated systems and imposed from the top in complex systems will hardly make a dent in the daily work of those whose job is convert policy into action.

What might be some examples in your personal or professional life of a complicated and complex matter?

What might be some connections you are making between complex systems and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)?



Excerpted from Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (2009) *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative group*, (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA. Christopher Gordon.

The Path of Dialogue

Dialogue is a reflective learning process in which group members seek to understand one another's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions. The word dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* means "through" and *logos* means "word." In this meaning-making through words, group members inquire into their own and others' beliefs, values, and mental models to better understand how things work in their world. In dialogue, listening is as important as speaking. For skilled group members, much of the work is done internally.

Dialogue creates an emotional and cognitive safety zone in which ideas flow for examination without judgment. Although many of the capabilities and tools of dialogue and skilled discussion are the same, their core intentions are quite different and require different personal and collective monitoring processes.

The Path of Discussion

Discussion, in its Latin root *discutere*, means "to shake apart." It focuses on the parts and their relationships to one another – the causes, the effects and the ripple effects of proposed actions and solutions. In its most ineffective forms, discussion consists of serial sharing and serial advocacy without much group-member inquiry into the thinking and proposals of others. Participants attempt to reach decisions through a variety of voting and consensus techniques. When discussion is unskilled and dialogue is absent, decisions are often low quality, represent the opinions of the most vocal members or leader, lack group commitment, and do not stay made. Three elements shape skilled discussions: (a) clarity about decision-making processes and authority, (b) knowledge of the boundaries surrounding the topics open to the group's decision-making authority, and (c) standards for orderly decision-making meetings.

Dialogue and Discussion



Personal Reflection

Jot your thoughts...

What might be some implications of these two ways of talking for creating and sustaining professional communities?

THE SEVEN NORMS OF COLLABORATIVE WORK

Pausing

Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision-making.

Paraphrasing

Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you “So...” or “As you are...” or “You’re thinking...” and following the starter with a paraphrase assists members of the group to hear and understand one another as they formulate decisions.

Posing Questions

Two intentions of posing questions are to explore and specify thinking. Questions may be posed to explore perceptions, assumptions, and interpretations and invite others to inquire into their own thinking. For example, “What might be some outcomes we are envisioning?” Use focusing questions such as, “Which students, specifically?” or “What might be an example of that?” to increase the clarity and precision of group members’ thinking. Inquire into the ideas of others’ before advocating for one’s own ideas.

Providing data

Providing data, both qualitative and quantitative, in a variety of forms supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Data have no meaning beyond that which we make of them; shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing, and interpreting data.

Putting ideas on the table

Ideas are the heart of a meaningful dialogue. Label the intention of your comments. For example, you might say, “Here is one idea...” or “One thought I have is...” or “Here is a possible approach...”

Paying attention to self and others

Meaningful dialogue is facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others, and is aware of not only what he or she is saying, but also how it is said and how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning style when planning for, facilitating, and participating in group meetings.

Responding to others in their own language forms is one manifestation of this norm.

Presuming positive intentions

Assuming that others’ intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and eliminates unintentional putdowns. Using positive intentions in your speech is one manifestation of this norm.

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is one of the most valuable and least used communication tools. Even people who naturally and skillfully paraphrase in one-on-one settings often neglect this vital behavior during group interactions. It is a basic tool for illuminating thought and challenging misconceptions.

Try this experiment. Paraphrase, and then ask a question. Do this several times. Now ask questions without preceding them with paraphrases. Since a well-crafted paraphrase communicates, “I am trying to understand you—and therefore, I value what you have to say” and establishes a relationship between people and ideas, questions preceded by paraphrases will be perceived similarly. Questions by themselves, no matter how artfully constructed, put a degree of psychological distance between the asker and the asked. Paraphrasing aligns the parties and creates a safe environment for thinking.

Mediational paraphrases reflect the speaker’s content and the speaker’s emotions about the content and frame a logical level for holding the content. The paraphrase reflects content back to the speaker for further consideration and connects that response to the flow of discourse emerging within the group. Such paraphrasing creates permission to probe for details and elaboration. Without the paraphrase, probing may be perceived as interrogation.

THE THREE TYPES OF PARAPHRASES

Acknowledging	Organizing	Abstracting
A brief statement in the listener's own words	A statement that offers themes or containers	A statement that shifts the conversation to a higher or lower level of abstraction
Metaphorically: a mirror	Metaphorically: baskets or boxes	Metaphorically: an elevator or escalator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You’re concerned about... • You would like to see... • You’re feeling bad about... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You seem to have two goals here: one is about ____ and the other is about ____. • We seem to be struggling with three themes: where to ____, how to ____, and who should ____. • On the one hand, we ____, and on the other, we ____. 	Shifting up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value* • belief • goal • assumption • concept • intention <p><i>*What’s really important to you is...</i></p>

Organizing and Integrating

*Given today's exploration, what might I
...stop doing?
...continue doing?
...start doing?*

