

Teacher Teams: Building a Culture of Collaboration

Brian O'Connell: Teachers love doing work that is practical, and once you engage teams of teachers together around the work, they are learning from each other, they are learning from going through the process and socializing around the work of improving teacher practice. They see the value in it. So they are getting work done and they are improving their pedagogical skills. You just have to get your key point people, set up the time for the teachers to meet, and dig them in. If the teachers see that this is practical and viable work, they are going to buy in and you are going to get results.

Carrie James: We have picked 10 details in the passage, separate them.

Bryan Miltenberg: Yes, I was thinking of that too.

Teacher: Well, is it that they don't know that that's not relevant, or is it that they are laundry listing everything because they are afraid of being wrong.

Carrie James: It could be both.

Brian O'Connell: We have an organization of multiple teacher teams. For the most part, they are managed and lead by and formed by the administrators and the lead teachers, but then once we get into the more granular work, then we begin to cultivate who is our next layer of leadership within the building. Ideally, the goal of this organization is to get the teachers into a mindset, a paradigm where they are looking for the evidence, in their students' work, in their own practices, that makes them feel as if they are being successful and that the work they are doing is having an impact on the students.

Bryan Miltenberg: The overall goal of the teacher teams is to work on a multi-grade level to look at, "What are student weaknesses across the grades?" "What can be done to address those weaknesses?" and "How can we, after attempting the instruction, see what's working and what's not going forward?" So in week one, we came together and brought the findings that we had from looking at a recent assessment that was given throughout all the grade levels at the beginning of the year. We talked about what were the common strengths as well as what were the common weaknesses and then we decided what we really wanted to focus on. The next week I, as the host, came up with a lesson plan that would address some of those weaknesses. The team was able to look at it, both in reference to the Common Core standards as well as the Danielson framework, figure out what was working in the lesson, what could be improved. This week, I taught the lesson with the rest of the team observing and taking notes, and then we debriefed afterward and talked about what worked, what didn't, and what we wanted to do going forward.

Carrie James: If you look under the intended outcomes for today, we are going to analyze the 6-12 data. We are also going to define clear student outcomes, objectives, and design clear plans to address the writing needs in our future lessons, tasks, and assessments for all the grades. Now I think if I remember

correctly, we are going to be primarily focusing on 6th and 7th grade for the standards-based instruction, because we are trying to help Bryan and by the end of this session, our job is to have created an in-depth analysis document that indicates the data for all grades 6-12 and a plan of instructional strategies to address each one.

Bryan Miltenberg: So the most recent assessment that we gave students that we wanted to look at as a team was an argument essay. And I think what we found is that students might be able to make a claim, and students could organize their paper or essay around the claim, but when it came to finding the best evidence to support that claim and being able to give a rationale for why they had selected evidence that they had, we noticed that it was a weakness among all grade levels. So of course you are going to address it differently at each grade level, but the core idea is the same.

Carrie James: So we had shared out the task analysis: constructing strong position statements, the idea of elaboration as well as thoroughness, not getting lazy near the end. We also mentioned that they have weaknesses with the counter argument, in choosing the right evidence. Is there anything else that we want to add on to that list?

Speaker 4: I think I just wanted to throw one more thing in there, I was noticing that a lot of kids ended up summarizing.

Carrie James: Okay.

Speaker 4: So....

Carrie James: So maybe even just some prompt like how to deconstruct a prompt?

Bryan Miltenberg: And that goes back to being able to select the right evidence.

Carrie James: Right, right.

Bryan Miltenberg: So once we realize that this weakness was not happening just in our grade, but among all grades; we figured out that what we needed to do is to develop an instructional strategy that would address it. I want students to be able to figure out what are the strongest pieces of evidence to support an argument, how to prioritize which evidence they are selecting because some of them are giving me, giving us like an evidence dump.

Carrie James: The question I just want to ask is this, what standard do you think is most appropriate for his lesson, because I think I can think of two, I think the reading standard but I also think it's writing 7.1B right?

Bryan Miltenberg: In this lesson I want students to be able to read purposefully so that they will be able to select evidence that will be the strongest that will give them the best possible chance of supporting their claim, and to be able to provide a rationale for why they are selecting the evidence that they are selecting, because if you don't understand how you are making your argument, I don't think it's possible to make a truly strong argument. The structure of the lesson is going to be that the modeling will take place prior to the lesson. So students will come in having viewed this video in which I model this process of reading to find evidence, selecting the best evidence to support a claim, and being able to rationalize why you selected the evidence that you have.

Carrie James: Alright, when you are providing the warm feedback you want to avoid judgment statements such as, "I like" or "this was good" or "great job". Instead try using comments like "I saw" or "I noticed", "I heard" or "I see evidence of the Danielson competency in this". That way it's specific and actionable. And the same thing with the cool feedback, instead like I said before, instead of saying "here's what wrong with it", identifying possible disconnects, gaps, suggestions for change. Remember this lesson is going to help us all, so we want to provide feedback that can help us all, and using feedback that will help strengthen the lesson plan.

Speaker 5: I focused in really on one particular section- the do now- that was directly responsive to the task. One thing I noticed in there that was done really well was that there was student choice. So I saw that you had three questions, they had to answer 2 out of 3 questions.

Carrie James: The one cool feedback, again it is kind of a question, how will the kids know that they picked the most relevant evidence; how will they know that they have got the best rationale for it?

Bryan Miltenberg: Do you think there should be sort of a more explicit prompt for students to generate questions here?

Carrie James: Perhaps you could just model what it would look like. You know, like, go up to someone's evidence and say okay, this is, you know, this is what I am going to say. Just model what you want them to do.

Bryan Miltenberg: Being able to work in teacher teams is awesome because it builds a culture of trust among the teachers where we all know that our main goal is to help each other and although at times, there is going to be an aspect of being critical, we know that that criticism is directed towards helping each other improve. So you saw me do the steps in the video. The steps are first to read the text. As you read, underline anything related to the claim, whether strong, weak, or whatever, and then when you go back to re-read what you have underlined and select those what you think are strongest, most directly related to the claim, and then you want to be able to give your reasoning, to be able to explain why you think this is the strongest. So, Zubadah, can you tell me your first piece of evidence and your rationale.

Zubadah: “9 out of 10 Americans are concerned about mobile apps collecting their data without their consent” and our rationale was, we thought that this piece of evidence supported the claim well because it showed that almost all of the Americans don’t agree with having their privacy public.

Bryan Miltenberg: Thumbs up if you thought the evidence they chose was strong. Thumbs up they thought their rationale was logical and insightful. Does it make sense? Did the rationale make sense? Absolutely. Thank you. And the last one was, I believe, Sarah, yes, can you explain your second piece of evidence and rationale?

Sarah: “73% of Internet users have said they’re not okay with an online search engine keeping track of what they search”, and our rationale was “people, and the majority of them, are worried about big companies such as Google keeping track of their thoughts that they put on the Internet because they really don’t want it to be kept track of and maybe showed to a third party or a company.”

Bryan Miltenberg: Thumbs up if you thought this case of evidence was strong. Thumbs down if you thought it wasn’t. Thumbs up if you thought their rationale made sense and supported their choice. Absolutely. Last thoughts. Any questions?

Carrie James: Our goal today is to engage in the observing and providing feedback to Bryan using the Danielson framework for effective teaching, and we are going to be focusing on the third domain specifically 3B and 3D. I think with 3D, I would focus on the use of lots of quality feedback, and that may be with students providing feedback to each other and a teacher providing feedback to the students as well. So it comes from a variety of different areas.

Speaker 3: So students indicating that they thoroughly understand the characteristics of high-quality work and so at the ending, when you put up the student sample of what was the good, you know finding the strong evidence, students were asked at that point to say “well you know do you agree or do you disagree that this evidence is strong?” and they definitely were able to say that they agree and you know circulating around the room, a lot of students were able to say they have those same pieces of evidence as well. I guess I was thinking of right pointers for students who are still picking bad evidence like, you know looking for statistics, looking for strong statistics, looking for things that would say that this is strong. So maybe like a list of things that you can look for, things that have sources to back them up that would make them strong.

Bryan Miltenberg: I think the biggest impact of being on a teacher team is that you get high quality feedback from different teachers at different levels with different areas of expertise. You don’t have to teach a lesson and then fix it for the second time through. You have already got an ace lesson, because those teachers are bringing their whole world of expertise to that lesson. You are ready to go at the beginning.

Brian O’Connell: The greatest benefit that our school has seen from implementing teacher teams has been

in the form of innovation and ownership. There are initiatives happening in the school that I am not even aware of and that makes me proudest, because that's that step in the right direction of teacher accountability being self-motivated. Teachers are taking the starting point that you engaged them with and they're adding value, and making things better, and then we discover this value and this innovation from these teacher teams being somewhat autonomous in their work. Then we can cross pollinate it back to other teams. And that's how you get the cyclical teaching and learning organization, and that has been the greatest win in empowering teacher teams to be self-accountable at doing the work to improve teaching and learning, because we are creating little cells of innovation throughout the building.