

Cambridge Task Force, Meeting #2
April 16, 2015

1. Warm-Up

What/who makes you laugh?

2. Review Norms

3. Postpone "expert groups" on readings about coaching until next time.

4. Connection of High Expertise Teaching Project (HET) to this Task Force

The purpose of the HET project is to increase the practice of the "10 Big Rocks" of high-expertise teaching throughout the system. Coaches are one of the prime vehicles through which this can happen.

5. Review of "Charge" and key questions for us to answer

"To identify and recommend to the superintendent for consideration, a viable and sustainable model of instructional support for teachers that will continuously develop capacity for skillful practice."

Questions we will be answering:

- If I'm a CPS coach, how should I be spending my time? Where are we going to get the most productivity for teaching and learning out of all the things I spend my time on?
- What access do I need to teachers in what structures, schedule of meetings, etc.?
- What is the knowledge and skill base for a successful coaching?
- What is the support structure for coaches we want in place?
- How do we develop strong adult professional culture of the building: one to support trust, non-defensive self-examination of practice in relation to student results, and constant teacher learning? (referenced briefly in the "report," but not deeply)

6. Putting Adult Professional Culture on the table for our work

30 years of research confirms that strong adult professional culture correlates highly with student achievement.

The elements of such a culture are listed in Appendix B.

Discussion:

All the research on APC is correlational research – observational studies that start with schools that are doing well. Correlation is not causation – but maybe it is in this case. Suppose it's true that this culture causes better student achievement – what is the logic of that, if it's true? How does that work?

Tony Bryk finds Trust a core element of all strong cultures. Trust that what?

Discussion.

Sharing of Bryk's findings (see Appendix B)
Reference to School Culture Rewired book (Guenert and Whitaker)

School Culture Typography grid activity: Silently rate for a unit of which you are a part (from toxic to collaborative). Find your partner and discuss your answers – why did you choose what you did?

Observations about the role Common Planning Time groups might have in our recommendations:

- Importance of having the structures in place that promote collaboration. Some groups meet a 7 AM – no other time to meet
- It's not enough to have the structures and put the group together. Groups need someone internally or externally (leaders) to push the conversations so the group can function at a high level.
- We have to think about all the different ways that it's important to collaborate to push certain practices forward. District-level culture of trust and openness is also very important, and how do you build that across schools? (Not just in-school culture)

7. PLCs – role of coaches

- Review of document profiling Levels of Sophistication of Common Planning time groups (PLCs)...that is, teachers who teach the same content. View video and rate a 9th grade team reviewing student work.
- Discussion of ratings.

So what is the role of an instructional coach in helping people move up through these levels of sophistication? (open discussion)

Acknowledgment that it is an important part of the coach's role, and also complicated.

- Where is Cambridge right now? Answer: dramatically different at different schools.
- This task force can decide on a range of targets to work towards so teams are more high-functioning.**

Elephant in the living room: We are unionized. Teams at some schools choose to use their prep time as common planning time because they have seen and learned the value of that time. Requiring teachers to use their prep as a common planning time is a violation of the contract which is meant to protect the professional choices of the educators. Teachers can feel pressured to use their prep as common planning time or coaching time. Should teachers choose to preserve their prep time, both teachers and coaches are potentially put in an awkward position. Coaches should not be put in the position of implementing the goal of common planning time without the appropriate and necessary structures in place to support that goal. Some schools, particularly upper schools, have been able to schedule common planning time separately from prep time. We have to address these issues when thinking about the role of coaches moving forward.

-What surrounding conditions and commitments of other people are needed for coaches to function in a better way? → we will be including our ideas about this in our recommendations.

Our recommendations need to approach teachers as professionals, and get that message out on a deep level. Real use of common planning time to examine student data and design re-teaching together would be about a culture shift. If we go back to that place, there might be more leverage and more ability to push some changes in practice here.

-Once teachers bought in and saw how productive common planning can be, they are more willing to use that time to work together. If teachers haven't been in productive meetings like that, they aren't willing to put in the time because they don't know how productive they are.

-Unless you really support people around what it takes to be a PLC, they're not going to want to do it. It's perceived as an extra burden.

-Schools that have protocols for their common planning time, value it so much, and now are tightening it up so it can be even more productive.

-There need to be cultures in place so people can do that. People need to visit other schools that are doing it so they can see the benefit of it.

-Teachers are overwhelmed and overworked – there needs to be a sense of agency for teachers. The world that teachers are living in is shifting daily in terms of the demands on them. We can't make a recommendation without getting an input from teachers about how they feel they need to use their time.

-Agendas at these meetings make a huge difference – people want that.

-Have to relate everything back to kids in the classroom. You can see the difference when students understand outcomes. Teachers working together is the same thing – everything needs to be connected to team goals.

-PLCs are a perfect place to plan how to structure the learning. How much framing the learning about we doing for teachers? We need to apply the principles of RBT to adult learning. Meetings all look different at different grade level teams.

-There isn't and needs to be some common shared images of what high-functioning teams look and sound like.

-We need to show people what they look like and set an agenda in which coaches play significant role and help people move toward that

-Central office support needs to be there for the growing of the ability. PLCs have been put into place in some school districts and wrecked the environment because there is a lack of clarity of what they should do.

What is the role of the PLC?

-Helpful to focus on error analysis of recent student work that we all gave them so we can figure out what is causing the misconceptions, mistakes, misunderstandings. Then we figure out together who needs re-teaching, and invent new ways to do it. We have to have clear objectives, and get the kids to know what it they are. It has to be the most worthwhile thing for them. The error analysis thing becomes the activity that pulls in other practicee that have to do with lesson planning.

-The question is a good starting point for what the support will be from the central office.

-We often use the term “support” but need a common understanding of what that means.

There seems to be a tacit assumption that, because the achievement gap hasn't radically narrowed, our instructional coaching efforts are failing. There are, indeed, problems surfaced in the report that should be fixed. But whatever changes we make to coaching structure and mission, there are other systemic factors that will enable coaches to maximize their effectiveness. Identifying what those things are will help us make connections.

- **Coherence of curriculum, common assessments and criteria for success**
- **Leadership and modeling from the top for development of Strong Adult Professional culture**

8. Straw Poll on Report Recommendations

-Answering *Yes/no/interesting* to each point in report

QUESTIONS FOR NEXT TIME:

What are the highest leverage uses of coaches' time for improvement of teaching and learning (and therefore student results)?

What surrounding conditions and commitments of others are needed for coaches to function to maximum effect for improving teaching and learning?

In what skills should coaches become proficient?

What recommendations do we want to make for improving the "viable and sustainable model of instructional support for teachers?"

APPENDIX A

THE BIG ROCKS OF HIGH EXPERTISE TEACHING (H.E.T. Project)

1. Content Analysis: Digging deeply into content for rigorous planning, leading to objectives and criteria for success being on-target and clear to students
2. Error analysis of student work to deliver re-teaching to those who need it [Data]
3. Feedback: frequent, timely, non-judgmental, and useful.
4. Making Students' Thinking Visible
5. Using a variety of cognitive strategies matched to content and students
6. Communicating 3 critical messages re: effort-based ability
7. Making students feel known and value: Cultural Proficiency and Personal Relationship Building
8. Building a classroom climate of community, risk-taking, and ownership
9. High volume of student reading/writing and explicit embedded literacy instruction
10. Direct vocabulary instruction and practice

Skills pertaining to Planning

1. High Expertise Teachers ***dig deeply into their content as they are planning*** lessons. Thus they identify the most worthwhile learning targets in the materials and make sure the students know what they are. They also make sure the learning experiences the students do are logically aligned with the learning targets (objectives) and that the assessment will give good data about student mastery. The hierarchy of concepts within the content are outlined. Student misconceptions and points of difficulty are anticipated and provided for in the lesson because the teacher did the student tasks him/herself.
2. High expertise teachers know how to study student work, all the way from standardized tests to work samples from yesterday's class. They can analyze student errors and identify gaps in student learning. Thus skillful ***error analysis leads directly to re-teaching*** for those students who didn't get it the first time around.
3. High Expertise Teachers arrange for a constant ***flow of feedback to students*** on their performance. The feedback is non-judgmental and keyed to specific criteria the students are clear about. Thus the students can self-evaluate and use

techniques they have been taught to set effective goals and plans of action to improve.

Skills Pertaining to Instruction

4. High Expertise Teachers **make students' thinking visible** during class interaction by using a constellation of interactive skills. Thus there is a high degree of student talk both with the teacher and with one another about the content at a high level of thinking. The students are active thinkers with the content and the teacher gets a constant reading on who understands and who doesn't. In turn, the students are required to become good listeners to one another and be active processors of information.
5. High Expertise Teachers have a **repertoire of research-based cognitive strategies** like visual imagery and modeling thinking aloud. These strategies, chosen to match the students, the curriculum and the content, make concepts and ideas clear and accessible to students. Thus when content needs re-teaching for students who didn't get it the first time around, the teacher has alternative approaches to use. They check thoroughly for understanding and get students engaged in activating and summarizing strategies.

Skills Pertaining to Motivation

6. High Expertise Teachers convince students to believe in **"effort based ability."** Thus they consistently send the messages: **"What we're doing is important; You can do it; and I won't give up on you" (tenacity and perseverance.)** These messages are sent through daily interactive teacher behavior, through class structures and routines, and through policies and procedures. These teachers take it upon themselves to teach the students explicitly *how* to exert effective effort.
7. High Expertise Teachers make **students feel known and valued.** Thus they know about the students' life and culture and show an interest in their activities and success. The unrelenting tenacity and high-expectations of teachers with low-performing students also becomes evidence to the student that the teacher thinks they are worthwhile. *Cultural Proficiency* becomes an important skill set, because understanding and valuing students' family values, cultural heritage, and norms of behavior become important to making instruction appropriate as well as making individuals be authentically known and respected.
8. High Expertise Teachers create a **climate of community, risk-taking, and ownership** among all their students. Thus the students know each other as people and have been taught the skills to cooperate. The students feel safe to make mistakes and view errors as feedback, not judgments; thus they take academic risks and challenge themselves to do hard work. And the students have voice and ownership in constructing the "rules of the classroom game."

Skills Pertaining to Literacy

9. High Expertise Teachers make ***literacy*** an embedded priority. Thus regardless of their subject or academic discipline, they ensure a high volume of quality reading and writing about their content, and they scaffold the students' entry into text. Of particular importance, they are assiduous at facilitating "literate conversations" (Allington 2011) about the text.

10. High Expertise Teachers become committed and proficient in **vocabulary instruction**. Regardless of their academic discipline, they understand that the words and the concepts they represent are intimately related and indispensable to student learning.

How Leaders Build Trust and Strengthen Adult Professional Culture

Interpersonal Skills

“You cannot make demands on people you do not have a relationship with.”

-- Hargreaves

Adapted from Tony Bryk’s findings for what a leader does to build Relational Trust:

- Ensures staff gets to know one other as people
- Is present very frequently in halls and classrooms and has useful, short conversations with teachers
- Shows vulnerability and makes it safe to make mistakes (this aims more broadly at faculty-wide ethos of non-defensive self-examination of practice in relation to student results.) Therefore participates visibly as a learner in all PD.
- Demonstrates respect for differing points of view through active listening
- Goes the extra mile to show consideration of individuals beyond formal requirements
- Is demonstrably competent
- Has no hidden agendas. Is transparent and forthcoming with information about what is going on, how processes work, and how decisions are made
- Keeps her/his word
- Shows integrity (strength to stand up for important values and commitments consistently, e.g. children first) sincerity, and reliability
- Keeps us safe from the behavior of toxic people

Overall...shows Vulnerability and Strength at the same time. J. Saphier

Some further comments about “trust”

The faculty and staff trust the leader. Trust that what?

“I trust that you won’t humiliate me or think poorly of me if I make a mistake.

Overall, I trust that it is safe for me to be *vulnerable* in front of you.”

“I trust that you will keep your *promises*, that you will do what you say you’ll do.”

“I trust that you won’t withhold *information*, that is, that you’ll be transparent about what is going on in the organization and, with regard to me, that you won’t talk to others behind my back and will give me honest feedback about my performance.”

“I trust that your primary *motives* are for the interests of our clients/our students, not your own career advancement and power.”

“I trust that you will safeguard the openness of our culture by reacting directly to toxic or negative behavior of adults.”

“I trust that when things get tough I can count on you to make firm *decisions* that reflect what is best for students and for our school. Decisions will be made based on objective data.”

Norms of Adult Professional Culture that this Trust Enables the Leader(s) to Build

Safety to take risks, be vulnerable in front of colleagues

Non-defensive self-examination of teaching practice in relation to student results

Constant use of data to re-focus teaching

Frequent teaching in the presence of other adults (Public Teaching)

Constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching

Deep collaboration and deliberate design for interdependent work and joint responsibility for student results

Commitment to implement “Smart is something you can get” in classroom practice, class structures, and school policies and procedures

Urgency and press to do better for our disadvantaged students

Honest, open communication and ability to have difficult conversations

Human environment of caring, appreciation and recognition, celebration, traditions we look forward to...starting point of getting to know one another

Demanding and high standards for teaching expertise for all teachers

Clarity and Legitimacy in decision-making

What leaders do to build any one of these norms:

Say it – that you value and want to strengthen this norm. And say it again and again in many

different ways and settings

Model it – so that people see you acting in congruence with this norm

Organize for it – create events, structures, times, groupings so as to induce and facilitate

staff acting in congruence with the norm

Protect it – meaning the people who first step up and risk acting this way, and also preventing competing structures or demands to neutralize the efforts to build the norm

Reward it – meaning the people who act this way get recognition and tangible support from

you to continue, and they get it in ways that do not set them up for appearing to be your favorites

A few other characteristics found repetitively in the literature on Adult Professional Culture about successful leaders:

- Manages decision-making so decisions have legitimacy, and makes decisions for the good of the whole (and the good of the students)
- Is not confused by the snowball effect of new mandates and initiatives. Can set limits and say “no.”
- Maintains moral compass to do what is best for students
- Conveys urgency and willingness to deal with conflict
- Models constant learning and participates in PD with teachers as a learner
- Shows gratitude, appreciation, and recognition.
- Nurtures joint responsibility for student results.