

Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose

A Three-Pronged Approach to Adult Learning

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We Know...

- The best PD is job-embedded
- The culture of a school impacts student and adult learning
- If we want lifelong student learners, we must have lifelong adult learners
- A school culture that values adult learning leads to higher retention of teachers
- Arkansas is currently developing a teacher equity plan to ensure high quality teachers are staffed in underserved schools.

**Identify area of
focus- Envision
ideal state**

**Analyze the
Evidence/Reflect
on results**

**Assess Current
Reality**

Action Research Cycle

**DO
IT!**

**Create a
Plan**

Autonomy

- Teachers are players not pawns.
- If teachers fail to grow, students fail to grow.
- Look closely at professional learning structures and philosophies on a school-by-school basis.
- Currently ADE rules allow for flexibility in PD delivery. *Sit and Get* should be out!
- In the current model, teachers can own their individual growth!



Autonomy

- *Helpful PD is designed based on active participation by educators in identifying their needs and in establishing job-embedded PD plans that meet those needs through collaboration, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than abstract discussions. (Killian and Roy, 2009)*

Areas to Consider When Increasing Autonomy

Task:

- Is it meaningful?
- Does it promote ongoing adult learning?
- *PD should be evaluated continuously and primarily on the basis of the effect it has on student achievement not compliance credit. (Elmore, 2002)*

Areas to Consider When Increasing Autonomy

Time:

- Are we aligning our vision with our schedule?
- Is the focus on the work and not a predetermined amount of time?
- Is time the constant? Is the student the constant? Learning should be constant—time the variable.
- *PD in the service of improvement requires commitment to consistency and focus over the long-term. The broad mission and goals that shape professional development should reflect a path of continuous improvement in specific domains of student learning. (Elmore, 2002)*

Areas to Consider When Increasing Autonomy

Technique:

- How do we support adult learning?
- How does it feel?
- How does it sound?
- How does it look?

- *The focus of professional development on enacted practice requires that the physical location of the learning be as close as possible to where the teaching itself occurs. (Elmore, 2002)*

Areas to Consider When Increasing Autonomy

Team:

- Do we trust adults to learn?
- How do leadership styles encourage or discourage productive team learning?
- Do teams feel compliant or autonomous?
- *Studies have shown that perceived control is an important component to one's happiness. However, what people feel like they want to control varies from person to person. The best strategy for an employer would be to figure out what's important to each individual employee. (Pink, 2009)*

Fed Ex Time

- Google
- 3M
- Atlassian
- Best Buy
- Certain progressive schools across the country—
15%-20% of time
- Problem solving based on interests and passions
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Results

- The Post-It Note
- Gmail, Google News, Google Maps
- Instant Messenger
- Quote from Google executive: *Basically, everything good in the last 7 years came from Fed Ex time.*
- This can be applied to schools AND counted as PD credit. PD rules provide for flexibility.



Outside of the Box

- Allowing time for teachers to work in self-selected teams on self-selected issues that aligned with their passion and vision for the school.
- Preferably isn't related to content area.
- Gives teachers a chance to directly apply their voice to the betterment of the school.
- I envision a school with highly motivated teachers who are always trying to improve practices and outcomes.



Mastery

*You need not see what someone is doing
to know if it is his vocation,
you have only to watch his eyes:
a cook mixing a sauce, a surgeon
making a primary incision,
a clerk completing a bill of lading,
wear the same rapt expression,
forgetting themselves in a function.*

*How beautiful it is,
that eye-on-the-object look.*

-W.H. Auden

Why Mastery?

- Control leads to compliance
- Autonomy leads to mastery.
- US statistic: 50% of employees are not engaged at work—nearly 20% are actively disengaged.
- \$300 billion in lost productivity.

Mastery is a Mindset

- Growth Mindset versus Fixed Mindset
- Encouraging effort not innate intelligence.
- Do not make great teaching seem like magic.
- Emphasize continued growth.

Mastery is a Mindset

- Precisely because no single algorithm exists for teaching, you have to experiment with possibilities and devise a novel solution. (Pink, 2009)
- Teaching effectiveness is malleable: Align all practices and schedules to reflect this truth
- What people believe shapes what people achieve. Allows us to work through difficulties.



Mastery is a Pain

- *Sit and Get* notions in adult learning hinders ongoing growth.
- *PD that lasted 14 hours or fewer showed no effects. The largest effects were PD efforts between 30-100 hours spread over 6-12 months on a targeted area with strategies. (Yoon, 2007)*
- *Hands-on adult learning supports meaningful PD work. It must be intensive rather than episodic, fragmented, and one shot (Darling Hammond, 2009).*

Mastery is Ongoing

- We will always reach but never quite achieve full mastery.
- Think of Michael Jordan, Cezanne, William Shakespeare: They worked boldly—ever in pursuit of continued growth.
- MJ: When he stopped loving growth, he stopped playing basketball—twice.



Action Research

- The Joy is in the pursuit
- *Teachers must actually try new practices with the students for whom they teach. If the new practices succeed with students, then teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their values and attitudes, and on the changes in them that are required as a result of this experience. Instruction itself is the most potent form of professional development available to schools. (Guskey)*
- Mastery attracts because mastery eludes.



Action Research

- *Teachers are still, for the most part, treated as solo practitioners operating in isolation from one another under conditions of work that severely limit their exposure to other adults doing the same work. The work day of teachers is still designed around the expectation that teachers' work is composed exclusively of delivering content to students, not, among other things, to cultivating knowledge and skill about how to improve their work. (Elmore, 2002)*

Purpose

- Purpose is the context for autonomy and mastery. Purpose provides activation energy for living.
- Compliance versus engagement.
- *Often PD days are specified contractually so that professional development becomes associated with a specific number of discrete days, disconnected from any focused strategy to equip teachers with the knowledge and skill they need to improve student learning in specific domains.*
(Elmore, 2002)

Richard Elmore and Purpose

- *Despite massive evidence to the contrary, the prevailing assumption is that teachers learn most of what they need to know about how to teach before they enter the classroom. (Elmore, 2002)*
- *Spending more money on existing professional development activities, as most are presently designed, is unlikely to have any significant effect on either knowledge and skill of educators or on the performance of students. (Elmore, 2002)*



Cultivating Purpose

- Connect teachers to their individual purposes.
- Allow teachers to grow in their purpose.
- Support their continued growth and link to purpose.
- Show how individual purposes create collective purpose.



The Pronoun Test

- *They* versus *We* schools
- *They* schools are less connected and purpose-aligned than *We* schools.
- When he visited companies and talked with employees, Robert Reich listened carefully for the pronouns people used. Did employees refer to their companies as “they” or as “we”? “They” suggested at least some amount of disengagement, and perhaps even alienation. “We” suggested the opposite—that employees felt that they were part of something significant and meaningful.

A Better Arkansas

- Job-embedded professional development supports a growth mindset in teachers.
- Principals could advocate for a system that creates opportunities for “in-house” professional development that is ongoing and reflective.
- The following action research based, and ADE approved, model of professional development consists of four prongs:



Step 1

- PGPs developed with principal, assistant principals, academic coaches, or lead teachers.
- PGPs would be ongoing complete with targeted strategies to address growth areas.
- Next year, 18 PD hours directly related to the PGP is required.

Step 2

- Using PGPs as a guide, teachers would be observed or video themselves teaching.
- The observation data would inform conversations with principals or academic coaches concerning growth of teaching practices.
- Teachers would implement the feedback into another lesson that would be observed or videoed.

Step 2 Continued...

- Could use platforms such as Bloomboard or Torsh to spur reflective teaching.
- These tools should not be viewed as evaluative.
- They are intended for growth.
- Feedback from observer is crucial.

Step 3

- After a culminating conference between the teacher and the observer, the teacher completes a reflection, discusses growth opportunities, and counts the experiences toward their required professional development hours.
- The teacher continues to grow in this area through multiple observation cycles in the future. This aligns with the research that indicates 30-100 hours concerning a topic or strategy yields the best results.



Step 4

- Teachers can use all artifacts from the observation cycle as evidence for TESS as well as PD credit.
 - The teaching samples could be available to other teachers to open the proverbial doors of classrooms across the campus.
 - Also can provide opportunities for teachers to observe experts and to be observed by and to receive feedback from experts.
 - ***The Instructional leaders must be knowledgeable about how to implement this process.***
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Results

- Teachers become authors of their own professional development
- Streamlines the evaluation cycle
- PD is growth oriented, not compliance- based
- Could cut teacher attrition by increasing administrative support and increasing teacher voice

Recommendation

- Partnership between ADE, Arkansas education co-ops, and SBE to identify and highlight examples of job-embedded professional development in Arkansas schools.
- Possible SBE sub-committee that includes stakeholders from around the state concerning professional development.
- Monthly or bi-monthly reports to SBE identifying best practices in professional development that incorporate action research cycles to improve individual practice.



Bold Examples Will Make Us Better

- “I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” – Maya Angelou
- When schools see models of successful job-embedded PD, they will seek to understand.
- Sizeable gains in teaching and learning require bold action
- We should be dedicated to bold action.

