

In the September 28, 2015 online Education Week issue, author Anthony Reboria discusses collaborative teacher team meetings and the effectiveness of meeting together as a form of teacher professional development. He claims that although team meetings are an important part of the teacher professional environment, some evidence indicates that teachers are not satisfied with this time spent together. That, in fact, some teachers think team meetings are a waste of time.

What an opportunity lost!

Of course, meetings that are not well planned and do not have a clear focus are not going to be effective uses of the limited time team members have during their very busy days. This is not surprising... any organization, business, or team structure that meets for the sake of meeting rather than for a clear and defined purpose would result in the members' shared dissatisfaction, disillusionment, and declarations that they will never participate again.

Planning agendas and meeting the needs of the participants are not easy tasks. Add the dimension of collaboration and the tone changes, especially if the participants do not understand the difference between cooperation and collaboration or if the meeting facilitator does not allow for voice and choice. A collective vision is also imperative for participants to understand the goals and objectives of this shared meeting time and space. This takes deliberate time and planning. It actually takes a *before* so that the intentional planning occurs; a *during* so that the meeting agenda items are addressed and the pace is appropriate; and an *after* so that the participants can reflect and debrief about the process, format, content, and outcomes of that meeting.

So, what's the role of the instructional coach in this setting?

Instructional coaches need to differentiate between professional development and professional learning. I'm sure we have all experienced meetings where the agenda items are checked off and we all leave the meeting thinking, "Couldn't we have submitted our 'answers' electronically and used the time for something more helpful to our practice?" I'm sure some of us have even wondered if a note in our mailboxes would have been just as "successful" as bringing people

together to hear a litany of items but not really talk about how any of those items influence student learning or instructional delivery. Those kinds of conditions may be considered professional development but when the content does not fit the need or expectations, these meetings become “sit and get” sessions with no follow up and no discernible way to demonstrate new learnings or how those learnings will be implemented in practice. In fact, very few new learnings can be attributed to these types of team meetings, a.k.a. teacher professional development sessions.

Coaches take note... gather the collective wisdom of the group and engage teachers in genuine and respectful learning experiences. I like what Martin, Kralger, Quatroche, and Bauserman say in their *Handbook of Professional Development in Education: Successful Models and Practices*: “...professional learning looks more like ‘ownership over compliance, conversation over transmission, deep understanding over enacting rules and routines, and goal directed activity over content coverage.’”

What that means is that when coaches bring their colleagues together for professional learning, everyone’s voice must be heard; collaboration and collective problem-solving must be the norm; shared goals and objectives must be clearly defined and intentional; working together in a non-evaluative environment is the “rule”; and all participants become deeply reflective practitioners so that their learning is consistent, persistent, and sustainable.