

Professional Development through the Lens of the Unconference Technique: A New Approach for Teacher Voice in Professional Development

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Rationale

Teachers within the District of Columbia currently do not have a voice in choosing professional development during their work hours or professional development days. Professional development days and times are usually decided by Central Office or administration and often are based upon a new curriculum rollout by the district rather than based upon teachers' needs. The unconference format will allow teachers to develop and create meaningful, differentiated professional development that is structured to meet their needs. The Unconference Model is similar to an open space format. Teachers will brainstorm ideas and form a scatterplot of ideas on the day of professional development. People who have similar ideas group them together to form one session. After similar ideas are grouped together to form sessions, participants will select which sessions they would like to attend. Anyone can be a presenter in an event. If a participant finds a session is not meeting their needs, they can apply the law of two feet. The law of two feet means that participants should walk away and find another session that meets their needs.

Literature

In a study by J.P. Carpenter, he found that participants rated their Edcamp experiences highly and planned to return again to future Edcamps. One reason he found that teachers wanted to attend Edcamps were that they could find other teachers who had similar interests and concerns. In another study by J. Demski, Kristen Swanson remarked how school districts rely heavily on paying someone from outside the school to solve a problem, not taking into consideration the expertise of staff within the school who could run a similar session with more knowledge of the students and specific building. Provenzano, ISTE's Outstanding Teacher of the Year in 2013, used Edcamp to grow in the areas he needed, not the areas his district decided the majority needed.

Data/Tools/Process

I created a survey using Google Forms to be used with 50 current DCPS teachers during the Washington Teachers' Union Shared Vision Conference in February 2016. This is an all day Saturday conference where participants can earn 6 PLUs. These teachers voluntarily attended professional development, which demonstrates self-motivation and an intrinsic value for lifelong learning. When

participants for the Shared Vision Conference registered at the sign in desk, I asked them to fill out a paper survey created from Google Forms. Their identity was kept anonymous in the survey. They were asked questions about their current satisfaction with district professional development. Would like to receive more technology professional development. Would they attend an unconference in the future?

Data Analysis

Looking at the data, I found that most teachers wanted the district to offer the unconference and would attend an unconference as an option for professional development. Most teachers stated their reasons for wanting to attend an Edcamp were for technology or not getting the PD that they needed from the district. 90% of teachers surveyed said they would like the district to offer more technology as professional development.

Recommendations

My recommendation is that the district looks uses an unconference model, which could be held during a few of the district's professional development days. This will allow for teacher differentiation so a first year and veteran 30 year teacher will both have their needs met at the conference. With the unconference model, teachers' opinions matter and are heard. Right now there isn't a time scheduled during professional development for teachers to address specific concerns in their class. This model will allow for more student driven professional development.

Currently DCPS does not offer technology professional development to all schools; yet majority of the teachers surveyed feel that they want more technology professional development. My recommendation is to offer multiple technology professional development sessions differentiated based on needs at Central Office throughout the school year to all teachers.

Bibliography

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