

Preservice Teachers use of PLC's During Their Student-Teaching Experience

Jason Dossett
University of Florida
J.Dossett@ufl.edu

Heather Nesbitt
University of Florida
Heather.Nesbitt@ufl.edu

Tre Easterly
University of Florida
Tre.Easterly@ufl.edu

PRESERVICE TEACHERS USE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES DURING THEIR STUDENT-TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

There is an increasing importance of professional development for teachers. For preservice teachers learning to be professionals in education, the role of professional development reinforces the role of professionalism. One of the most critical components of being a preservice teacher is building a professional identity in a K-12 school. Professional teachers are actively engaged in their schools, and one example of their engagement is in professional learning communities (PLC). A PLC is a group of people sharing and interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002).

The [State] Educator Accomplished Practices (EAPs) are [State]'s standards for effective teaching. While providing guidance to teachers, they also provide a framework for evaluation of teaching ([State] Department of Education, N.D.). University supervisors at the [University] noticed an opportunity to enhance continuous professional development of preservice teachers. Specifically, the EAPs say, "the effective educator consistently examines and uses data-informed research to improve instruction and student achievement." [University] agriculture preservice teachers meet for reflection throughout the student-teaching semester, but it was felt that the time together could be more purposeful.

Previous research has shown that professional development that focuses on content knowledge and allows teachers to be a part of active and collaborative learning has been shown to provide changes in teacher knowledge and practice. (Birman et al., 2000, Desimone et al. 2002, Desimone 2009, 2011, Garet et al. 2001).

Preservice teachers have an expectation to meet throughout their student-teaching semester, and the idea to turn those meetings into a PLC was put into practice during the Spring 2022 semester. The Preservice teachers used this time to build their content knowledge, share ideas relating to classroom management, and develop relationships with fellow preservice teachers.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

Four PLC meetings were held throughout the were held the student teaching semester. The first meeting provided an introduction to the process before student teaching, then the preservice teachers participated in the PLC throughout their student teaching experience. Preservice teachers were given a topic to discuss during their PLC's. They were expected to set measurable goals for student learning and were expected to collect data to measure their progress. Upon completion of student-teaching, preservice teachers shared their data and reported the findings from the semester.

Preservice teachers were grouped initially based on the level they were teaching. There were three groups; middle school, foundations, and upper level. Once students were grouped, each group was provided with a topic related to a teaching practice. Middle school preservice teachers discussed formative assessment. Foundations preservice teachers discussed motivating students to learn. Upper level preservice teachers discussed problem-based learning.

Results to date/implications

Overall preservice teachers felt having a PLC to participate in “was a great opportunity to work with their peers for a common goal.” Another preservice teacher said:

“I think going through the process of the PLC is really going to help me so that when I get into a school and I begin a PLC I'm not that naive first year teacher, like I'm going to understand what's going on.”

Preservice teachers stated one of the most prevalent strengths of this innovation was learning what a PLC was and how to work with others in their professional teaching career. Students also remarked on how the PLC helped with their knowledge of formative assessment. Preservice teachers spent time answering questions such as why formative assessment is important and how to implement it into their classes.

Participants had multiple thoughts about their PLC. One participant said the PLC “gives me some different ideas that I didn't necessarily even have in my brain before this.” Another participant said, “we could exchange ideas and frustrations.” The PLC allowed students to share experiences with those in similar situations and helped them feel like they were not alone and having similar experiences. Another participant said the PLC “made me talk to people about teaching in a professional way”. Another participant learned about teaching strategies and other things to impact their classroom teaching.

Future plans/advice to others

While the reception of this innovation was positive, there are some areas that should be adjusted when implemented next time. Making the PLC an integral part of the student-teaching experience could help with buy-in. One solution that could help with integration is grading the PLC involvement. One preservice teacher remarked “her buy-in could have been higher, but because the PLC was not tied to her grade it made it more difficult.”

One preservice teacher remarked “having expectations for topics you'd want these PLC's to be based on would be valuable.” Ensuring topics are thoughtful and worth the time spent discussing is especially important for this process.

Costs/resources needed

While there was no direct cost in doing the PLC's, there was a need for time and travel for the supervisor. Time was spent developing the PLC group, questions, and securing a location for the group meeting. There was also time spent traveling to and from the PLC location.

References

- Birman, B. F., Desimone, L., Porter, A. C., & Garet, M. S. (2000). Designing professional development that works. *Educational Leadership*, 57(8), 28-33.
- Desimone, L. M., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-year Longitudinal Study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 81-112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737024002081>
- Desimone, L. M. (2009). Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181-199.
- Desimone, L. M. (2011). A primer on effective professional development. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(6), 68-71.
- [State] Department of Education. (n.d.). *The [State] educator accomplished practices (eaps)*. [State] Department of Education. <https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/professional-dev/the-fl-educator-accomplished-practices.stml>
- Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.
- Mitchell, C. & Sackney, L. (2000). *Profound improvement: Building capacity for a learning community*. Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Toole, J. C. & Louis, K. S. (2002). The role of professional learning communities in international education. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (eds), *Second International Handbook of Educational leadership and Administration*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.