Professional Learning Communities - Advantages Part 1

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Alright that’s your test format. What kind of structure do you have in your classroom? Sounds like you said you have some discussion. Do you expect independent work from the students?

Teachers: Yes.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, so let’s put that down. In fact, it sounds like it’s very high, so let’s put down like 90% or used very often. How about some kind of small group or large group interactions?

Teacher: We don’t do any large group or small groups.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, so you can put zero in there, that’s fine. What about any kind of visual things? Do they have to work on maps, or charts, or use anything visual?

Teacher: They work in Excel.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: In Excel, okay. Again, this is not cut in concrete. You guys can take this and revamp it any way you want. I need you to actually operationally define your classroom, and that’s what we need. This is just to give you an idea, but it doesn’t have to be this at all. At this point we’ll do that they use graphs, for example. If it’s Excel, they might have to use graphs or they might have to use spreadsheet computations that might apply. There is a lot of independent work. What about peer tutors? Are you allowing for peer tutors? Can they work with each other?

Teacher: I do, I allow that.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay great, so put that down as something that is part of your class structure. Then finally, here are your assignments. This is a little bit different from test format because assignments can be really well modified. These are things that we really can change because in our CTE classroom, we do a lot of doing, like you just said, versus testing. So special ed teachers really need to know that the only way they can pass in your class is by actually performing and demonstrating versus taking a test, where they could go to content mastery and take a multiple choice test or those kind of things. So it’s not going to be that predictable. It might have to change in your classroom. How are you willing to do some other things? Do you do any oral reports or ask the students to do any other kind of demonstrations, short papers?

Teacher: I usually let them do at least one oral report. Most of it is lab projects and demonstrating what they know.
Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Fantastic, so put those down and you can very easily put N/A here. That’s fine, okay because that applies more in that particular classroom. What applies more? Then look at your grading criteria. This is where you decide, “Alright, I want to have my student master,” which means without supervision and without any help, open the word document and execute the functions as required. That’s what you mean by your grading criteria. Again, this is not modified criteria. All we’re asking here is how do you grade your regular students in a classroom. How do you give them extra credit? Can they do any make-up work? What’s your participation policy? What’s your attendance policy? All of that is very important to discuss here. Now, let’s revisit this. Did you get a chance to write your notes down somewhere? Okay, great. So now, let’s revisit this and go back to our special ed department. Even I understand there’s not a department and ask you guys how do we make sure this classroom is accessible to our students? For example, a student whose language is not primarily English, how are they going to fare in a classroom that requires a lot of technical instructions? Again, in the special ed department, how is that going to help the students? So yes, we can do a screen reader, but what do we do for English Language Learners? What would you recommend?

Teacher: Well, they need an opportunity to talk to their peers, so the peer tutoring would be absolutely essential. And also use a word dictionary or even a glossary.

Teacher: I think that would work well in special ed, too, to have a specific list. You’re talking about really specific technical things.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Like a vocabulary master list of sorts?

Teacher: Yeah, kind of like what you did with the IEP stuff. For me, I know what all that means, but nobody else does. So if you go into a BIM class or DIM class, it would be helpful, I think even for special ed kids to know, I mean they’re probably going to know a lot more than an ESL kid, but it wouldn’t hurt to have that. So there’s some kind of visual of what you’re talking about.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: And it works almost like the old fashion flash card system. You can just pull it up and show the student. We talk about class accommodations all the time. Redefine, re-explain, review, we use those words all the time, so that’s helpful for all our students including our English Language Learners when we do that. One of the things that I see a challenge in is independent work. This class calls for almost 100% independent work. What would you guys recommend from the special ed perspective and the ELL perspective that we do this? For example, I can find a student who is nonverbal or tends to not speak much English tend to stay on their own, do their own work. They appear not motivated. The teacher doesn’t know how to communicate with this student. So how do we get that student to be independent and the other students who may have had an aid before or have had not so much activity going on in their around them? Often we find that in a CTE classroom, there’s so much going on at one time and everybody doesn’t really get one-on-one time with the teacher like 45 minutes at the most.
How would you recommend that our CTE teachers make it more accessible when it turns out to be more of an independent structure?

Teacher: Well I think that chunking down, breaking down the directions and the assignments when they’re working on this. I remember helping some kids out with some DIM stuff, or when they’re creating a resume, or a party invitation, or whatever. You’d have to say, and I deal with this all the time, “You need to do steps one and two. I’m going to help some other people. I’ll be back in ten minutes, and then we’re going to work on three and four.”

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Do you find that valuable when you hear that suggestion? I find something like chunking works with everybody. It sounds like a lot of work. “Oh my god do I have to do all this for one student?” Imagine this, the one student actually goes forward and it’s an obtainable step. It’s chunking, but it’s obtainable steps within the chunking. So you are making sure that the student is succeeding as they go. In the mean while, everybody else is also being motivated to go forward. So maybe they are two or three steps ahead because we’re doing modified curriculum.

Teacher: I think that it would work with the ESL students, too. You can’t say, “Grab your book, turn to page 40, read these paragraphs, and do steps 1-10.”

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Yeah, you can’t say all of them at one time or do open book.

Teacher: It appears that they’re being lazy or they’re not participating. But I think with the with the language processing, they are trying to figure that out.