Example of Professional Learning Community – Introduction

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Hi, my name is Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan and I am program coordinator for the Career and Technical Special Populations Training and Resource Education Center at Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service. Welcome to this webcast on Professional Learning Communities. While one-shot professional development sessions can be helpful, for them to be truly effective they need to be more ongoing, help teachers process the information, and especially give them a chance to apply what they have learned. To help address these concerns, we propose that you form a Professional Learning Community or PLC. A PLC is composed of a group of teachers who wish to help students improve their learning. The members help each other by sharing ideas, brainstorming, and troubleshooting. We provided the staff at an ISD the opportunity to participate in such a PLC, particularly emphasizing the value of bringing ESL and special education personnel to the table. The mission of this PLC was to determine ways in which CTE could help special education and ESL personnel understand CTE curriculum and seek their advice on how it can be made more accessible. Several ideas were generated some of which are highlighted here. A PLC can be an avenue for individuals to collaborate on tools that can be used effectively in serving special populations. In this example, the members are working on a program inventory that can be used to inform the IEP committee about the tools, instructional methods, physical environment, and evaluation strategies used in your course.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: What's the most high volume course that you find spent in?

Teachers: Oh, DIM and BIM. Target the one that they're all in.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Fantastic! Okay, excellent. Alright, so do we know enough about both of those? Is it DIM or BIM? Which one do you want to pick? DIM? Okay, let's do BIM. Okay, great. Alright, in BIM, what do you feel like is being used the most? Don't worry about using just those words, feel free to make notes and change those things. If you're interested, I will email you the Word version of this, so you can manipulate it as you go. But for example in the BIM course, what of these things that you actually end up having that you use? Write as percentages, as well as maybe rank order. I'll let you guys discuss that for a second.

Teachers: So there are no textbooks and there are no worksheets. We're doing everything through SAM this year, which is an online module, so there's the concrete experience, and discussion, and lecture.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, very good. So go ahead and put down, it sounds like, concrete experience, discussion, and lecture. Since it's all online, maybe the concrete experience will be the higher percentage?

Teachers: Yes.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Would you say that? Okay. So maybe you can put down that as, what do you think, like 50% of the course?
Teachers: Maybe even higher than that. I think audio visual also count because you're hearing what they're saying to you. They're talking you through it as you see it. Yeah, exactly.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, put that down. Great.

Teacher: Maybe 70%?

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: 70%, okay. 70% concrete experience, and then audio visual. Now, there's no harm in taking 70% concrete experience and breaking that down, too. I'm okay with that as well. Within 70% of the computerized experience there's some audio visual, there's some discussion maybe based on the computer information if that's the case.

Teachers: Discussion is really little because it's the kids doing the stuff. You might go up and talk to the kids. They might ask questions about certain things. When I get two students asking the same question, then we stop and we all talk it through.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, great. So then I would put 20% is discussion. That would be your way to describe it. And then we decided audio visual material we can probably put the rest of the percentage in there. And again, it doesn't have to add up to 100%, that's fine. What I need the committee to understand as soon as they see that first few words and the figures next to them, "Oh gosh 70% of it is online," that means assistive technology might be required. A student might need a better keyboard. So as special ed people, what would you recommend to somebody who uses a computer almost 100% of the time? What are your recommendations to modify a course like that?

Teachers: Well it's probably going to need to be read to the students.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Okay, excellent. So you may possibly need a screen reader that requires a text to speech type of software.

Teacher: Shorter assignments.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Shorter assignments, which is actually a very good thing to come up with for the next thing because we're asking about your test format. We're asking how do you test in your BIMS. So what kind of tests are usually done?

Teachers: It's really would be other, right?

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: Is it other? What do you think?

Teachers: You could put it under computation, but need to clarify it. It's under other because you're in Word and actually doing things like print this document.

Dr. Lakshmi Mahadevan: So you're running the applications and then explaining the process of the applications, very good. Yes, absolutely you can put down high level applications. Or based on Bloom's Taxonomy, you could do evaluation, or analysis, or inference, or those kinds of words as well.