Ready to Teach

Alone in a Crowd

Problem-Based Learning Unit
Developed for Residency I Students

Fall 2013

Problem-Based Learning Writers Workgroup
Middle Tennessee State University
Womack Family Department of Educational Leadership

Heather Dillard EdD
Nancy Caukin EdD
Stephen Bartos, PhD

Edited by
Terry Goodin, EdD
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**Alone in a Crowd**

**Facilitator Notes**

This PBL event takes one week. The scenario is presented in one **session**, and teacher candidates will conduct research and fieldwork during a one-week timeframe. The time between the first class meeting and the field experience during the following week provides time for student research and collaboration on the final product. **PBL groups** will have 8-10 members. Group roles and responsibilities are illustrated in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Role</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty (1)</td>
<td>Act as a guide to ensure that all are fully exploring course content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (1)</td>
<td>Manage the PBL process during meetings. Read each scene aloud and moderate discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (1)</td>
<td>Take group notes using the PBL Learning Grid and distribute information to the group via email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants (8-10, including the quarterback and scribe)</td>
<td>Contribute to group discussions, research assigned tasks and present findings to group.</td>
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As Facilitator, your task is to manage the PBL process during the entire learning event. First, explain group roles and how to use the PBL Learning Grid. Allow students to set group roles if possible, knowing that this depends upon the experience levels of the group members. Explain the Quarterback’s role to them and give them the Scenes for the Session. Explain that they will be leading the group discussion, and that they should only give out one Scene at a time. Stress the importance of not rushing through the Scenes. They should allow enough time for the group to fully think through the problem.

Next, groups should move to Scene One. The Quarterback will read the Scene with no personal interpretation, and the group will begin to analyze the problem using the Learning Grid. Encourage them to summarize key information first, and then to move across the Learning Grid, using it as a method of brainstorming. Make sure they are allowing enough time at the end of the Session (the class period) to generate learning tasks for each group member.

Take a “hands off” approach as much as possible. Allow participants to struggle with concepts and direction. You may intervene with guiding questions that serve to “nudge” the group in the desired direction. This will most likely occur during the “Information Needed” Phase. Do not direct the problem-solving process, but allow time for the group members to raise
issues, discuss options, and talk about alternative solutions. One final caution: This Facilitator Guide is confidential, as there will be many notes that are meant for your eyes only.

Introduction

First year teacher Rachael Green is in her first week of class at Alto Pico Middle School. Even though she has “butterflies” in her stomach, she can’t think of anything that she has left undone. Her room is ready, she has prepared her first unit’s overall plan, and she has her whole first week’s worth of lesson plans ready. She is as prepared as she can be, but at the last minute, as she is reviewing her plans for the day, she realizes that Mr. Oak, her principal, had said something about Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs. Still confident, because she remembers the term from one of her teacher prep courses, she decides to Google the term over breakfast. To her shock, she gets over 40,000 hits! She knows that she can’t possibly research the concept fully, so she decides to “wing it.” The result is, naturally, overwhelming to a new teacher just coming into a situation where everyone seems to know what’s going on except her. Should she ask questions, and risk coming off as unprepared? Or, will her ignorance be on display to veteran teachers who will decide that she is just another college graduate “know-it-all?” What should she do?

Guiding Questions

(These are questions that should serve you in guiding student learning. Remember to allow students to work through the problem on their own, using the PBL Learning Grid. They may flounder; that’s OK.)

Session 1

- When you think of the term “Professional Learning Communities,” what comes to mind?
- Does a Professional Learning Community really have a place in schools? What do you think that would include? (We are trying to guide TCs to think about “purpose” in advance of requiring a Mission Statement as a product.)
- If you were to design the ideal teacher work environment, what would you include, and why?
- How would you describe adult learning as opposed to that displayed by young people? (Andragogy vs. Pedagogy)
- What role would you expect ____________ to play in the PLC? (Fill in the term(s) that teacher candidates use; for example, “communication,” “collaboration,” “accountability,” etc.
- If teacher candidates approach you for information: “That’s a really good question, who do you think would know that?” “Where would you expect to find the answer to that?” “How would you be sure that the information you find is accurate and complete?”
Faculty Meeting
(Use the product that TCs created in order to focus their activities for the day.) If necessary, here are some possible questions to use in helping TCs to focus their attention.

- Where do you think you would look to find the evidence of the PLC’s mission?
- When you first walked into the school, what did you see, feel and hear? How does that reflect the PLC?
- When you first walked into the classroom, what did you see, feel, and hear? Is the PLC mission reflected consistently between what is stated and what is practiced?
- What is the working relationship between teachers? How would that affect a PLC?
- What are the similarities and differences between administrator perceptions of the PLC mission as opposed to teacher perceptions?
- To what extent do staff members affect the PLC’s implementation?
- Remembering what you learned about culture, what part do you feel culture plays in the PLC implementation?

Final Class Session

Graphical representation of Learning
Don’t feel that you need to describe what this product should look like. Allow students the freedom to explore. For example, one group may choose to make a concept map, while another may collect images, or create a collage. Here are some types of questions that may help you to facilitate this activity. Feel free to add your own, and share your ideas with the PBL Writers Workgroup!

- What are some important concepts that you’ve learned through this experience?
- How would you organize this information?
- What sorts of images would you use to represent this learning, and how would you present this to others?
- What types of ways do organizations etc. represent this type of information?

Learning Objectives
(Do not share these with students. They are for your use.)

1. (Knowledge) Teacher Candidates will identify features of a PLC, relationships between teachers, between teachers and administrators as related to PLCs, and the role of subject matter and teaching.

2. (Application) Teacher Candidates will produce group norms for their “PLC” group.

3. (Synthesis) TLW organize the information from the diagnostic tool into a workable format.

4. (Analysis) TLW reflect upon their experiences and evaluate their findings.
Product

1. Research Brief (Knowledge/Comprehension) – Learning Objective # 1
2. Group Norms (Application) – Learning Objective # 2
3. Graphical Representation (Synthesis/Analysis) – Learning Objective #3
4. Reflection (Evaluation/Affective) – Learning Objective #4

Resources

(Here are some resources that you might expect your group members to identify during the Jigsaw Phase at the conclusion of the first Session (class meeting). Do not share these with the group. Use guiding questions to encourage thought, and only if necessary. If the group has identified appropriate learning goals while using the Learning Grid but can’t seem to think of good sources, then you should use guiding questions, like “What is the nature of the information that you have determined that you need? Where would you find this type of information?”)

1. Human
   - Teachers
   - Administration
   - Facilitator / Liaison
   - Fellow group members

The relationship component between teachers and teachers and between teachers and administrators will inform the PLC Mission Statement and should be included in reflections.

2. School / Teachers websites
3. Previous course notes
4. Internet / Library
5. School Info
6. Video Clips (YouTube; self-produced)

Learning Tasks and Activities
(These are examples of the types of tasks and activities that we would expect your groups to generate. These are for your use as you consider the group’s progress.)

1. Interviews
   - Informal

Confidential
2. Observations
   - Mission Statements
   - Mission Consistency Within the School Environment
   - Classroom Observations
   - PLC Meetings
   - Faculty Lounge
   - Teacher to Teacher Interactions
   - Administrator to Teacher Interactions
   - Informal/“Hanging out”

3. Internet

4. Research – Hard Copies and Web-based Resources
   - Academic
   - Practitioner

5. Check school data

6. Teacher Candidate Perceptions

Assessment

Assessment Exercises

PLC Group Norms
Time and Schedule

Calendar of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PBL, Group Work, Jigsaw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research, Prepare Brief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research, Upload Brief</td>
<td>Brief Draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Receive Feedback, Upload Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Revise Research Brief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fieldwork, Group Meeting</td>
<td>Group Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Receive Feedback</td>
<td>Revise Group Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fieldwork, Debrief</td>
<td>Final Group Product, Graphical Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New PBL</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

PBL Learning Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PBL Learning Grid</th>
<th>Key Points</th>
<th>Information Needed</th>
<th>Learning Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis and Solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Scene 1

It was Thursday morning and Rachael woke up early with another case of “morning sickness.” She wasn’t pregnant. But each morning for the past week, she woke up feeling a bit nauseous. The first week of school probably feels like this for every first year teacher, she told herself. As she lay in bed a few minutes longer she remembered the questions that her new principal had asked her in her interview.

“Would you describe yourself as a loner or more of a team player?” Mr. Oak had asked her. Immediately she had stated that she was a team player and enjoyed working with others. Mr. Oak went on to ask her to describe instances she had working with others on group projects. Even though she was not sure where this line of questioning was going, she tried her best to describe her past experiences, camps, youth groups, and so on, and her experience of working with her teammates in her Residency I class.

She recalled vividly the feeling of relief when Mr. Oak said, “I am glad to hear you say that.” The tension in her neck began to release a bit as he went on to explain, “At this school our teachers work in PLC teams. The majority of a teacher’s work is accomplished as a team in our Professional Learning Communities.” On the spiral notebook she had brought to the interview, she jotted down “Professional Learning Communities.” I’ll look that up, she thought. I’ve had that in class, and it can’t be that hard. I like working in teams!

Now she lay in bed trying to remember what she had learned about PLCs. Today was the day for her first PLC meeting. She knew the time of her meeting and the location but she had no idea what to expect or what she should bring. The only thing she knew was that she was required to spend today’s planning period in the classroom of Mr. Jacobs, her department head.

Rachael began to get ready for this important day. She purposefully took her time, trying to calm the nervous feeling in the pit of her stomach. At last, she put on the outfit she had so carefully laid out the night before, and regarded herself in the mirror. Not bad, she thought. She was ready. As she ate her breakfast, Cheerios and a banana, Rachael thought again about the PLC meeting. Pulling her iPad out of her backpack, she decided to do a quick Google search of Professional Learning Communities. Her spoon stopped halfway to her mouth, and her stomach began to churn as the search engine returned over 40,000 sites.
Scene 2

The first two periods had gone by without a hitch. The students were beginning to know what procedures were expected of them when they came in to Rachael’s classroom. Although she did notice a few students who were choosing to talk softly while they were working, she decided not to make a big deal out of it and let it go.

When the bell rang for second period to end, Rachael quickly grabbed a few things from her desk before walking down the hallway to Mr. Jacob’s classroom. She had downloaded a few documents onto her iPad after breakfast this morning. With those in hand she felt a bit more prepared for the PLC meeting. She also grabbed a notepad and a pen. She hoped it was not necessary to bring anything else with her but she figured if she arrived early to the meeting she would have time to run back and grab anything else she needed.

Mr. Jacobs was a really nice man who reminded Rachael of her dad. She couldn’t help but smile when he welcomed her to his room. She was the first one to arrive and was not sure if she should sit in a certain location. She tried to hide the fact that she was already starting to sweat and started making small talk with him at the door. As other teachers began filing in she followed their lead and grabbed a desk to pull it into the circle they were forming. She noticed that most of the teachers brought in snacks, a binder, and notepad. She recognized the binder as the one she had been given by Mr. Oak when she was hired. She did not want to draw attention to herself as she left to go and retrieve it from her desk. Recognizing that the sweat beads were starting to show on her forehead she made the quick decision to run back to the room and grab the notebook.

Rachael dashed back down the hallway to Mr. Jacobs’ room. Everyone stopped talking when she entered the room. She took her seat again, this time placing the binder carefully on the desk. The meeting was brought to order by Mr. Jacobs, who welcomed everyone. He asked if they could begin by going around the circle and making introductions for the sake of the new faculty members. Rachael was so relieved because she had been trying her best to remember the name of the lady sitting beside of her, who had offered her a granola bar. As everyone around the circle spoke, Rachael tried to make up ways to remember each person’s name. When it came her turn she barely choked out her name. As soon as the conversation moved to something else she was going to write down the names but she did not want to get caught doing it now. She was already embarrassed by not knowing their names after four days of teaching with them.

A few minutes into the meeting a phrase stood out. She recalled pulling up a document about SMART goals on the PLC website. She turned on her iPad and pulled up the document. “As you all know we always begin our year by writing our SMART goals for the year,” Mr. Jacobs stated. “To begin we need to take a look at our current reality.” With this most of the teachers began turning pages in their notebooks. Although Rachael did not know what they were turning to, she grabbed her notebook and began thumbing through the pages as well. Her eyes strained over to Mrs. Brown (the lady who had offered the granola bar – she would remember that because granola bars are brown) and noticed that she stopped on some type of spreadsheet.
Mrs. Brown spoke up first. “According to last year’s TVAAS scores the majority of our students scored very well,” she stated. “Yes, that seems to be true,” Mr. Jacobs replied, “but do we notice any subgroups that appeared to struggle?” As they discussed the NCEs, Rachael began to tune out the conversation and tried to decipher the data on the spreadsheet. She wasn’t exactly sure what each of the columns and rows represented.

Her attention was brought back into focus as she heard the clicking of fingers on the keyboards around her. Several of the teachers were typing something into their laptops or iPads. Those who did not bring a computer were moving towards someone who had one. Just as the pit of her stomach was starting to drop, Mrs. Brown motioned to her, stating “Here, look on with me; this website will be new for you.” Mrs. Brown navigated through several drop down menus when finally she stopped on a page that looked totally foreign to Rachael. As she continued to click, Mrs. Brown said “I am trying to pull up a report on the various subgroups in our school, so that we can look at their data separate from the other students.”

With a few additional clicks, Mrs. Brown’s screen showed another spreadsheet that looked similar in style to the spreadsheet in her folder. With that, the group discussion went back to the SMART goals. Mr. Glenn stated, “It seems to me that our current reality is that ELL students and SPED students are struggling.” The other members of the group agreed with his statement and Mr. Jacobs recorded their statements on his laptop. Rachael had been so involved in what she was doing that she did not notice how Mr. Jacobs seemed to be keeping minutes of the entire meeting. She hoped he was not recording the fact that she had just sat back and said nothing of value during the entire meeting.
Scene 3

Mr. Jacobs had been typing feverishly as the group spoke and Rachael listened. Finally he said “Here is what I have recorded as our SMART goal for the year.” He went on to read the statement and asked the group if they agreed. Rachael’s jaw almost dropped as she realized how eloquently he had stated in two simple sentences what they had been discussing for the past half hour. After a few clicks on the computer, Mr. Jacobs presented a printed copy of the document and sent it around the room for the group to sign. Mrs. Brown offered to make copies for everyone and stated that she would place them in each teacher’s mailbox before the end of the day. As Mr. Jacobs moved on to the next item of discussion, Mrs. Brown whispered to her, “When you get it be sure to place it in your teacher binder; this is where we keep all our important papers all year.”

Mr. Jacobs was handing out another document to each of the group members. “We should have started the meeting with this, but I wanted to make sure we had enough time to discuss our SMART goals,” he said. “Mr. Oak asked me to give you all a copy of this document.” Rachael recognized the title “A Big Picture Look at Professional Learning Communities” from her web search at breakfast. Mr. Jacobs continued, “Since we have so many new faculty members this year, Mr. Oak wants to have a bit more training on PLCs this year. He has asked that we all read over this sheet. He is looking for volunteers to lead some of the professional development workshops on PLCs. And he wants each of us, even veteran teachers, to consider signing up for one or two of the workshops for in-service hours.” With that, the meeting was adjourned. As everyone moved their desks back to the place where they originally sat, Mrs. Brown said to Rachael, “There is a lot to learn these days as a teacher. My door is open anytime if you need anything”.

At that moment the bell rang and each teacher made a quick dash back to their classroom. Rachael did not have time to stop and analyze the meeting; she was too busy trying to beat the students to the classroom as she realized that her projector was turned off and the bellwork assignment was not waiting for the students.