Assignment 3
A Professional Growth Plan

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April 17, 2011
Introduction

Empowering students to become lifelong learners is stated as a goal of many schools and school districts. One will often find the term “lifelong learner” in school vision or mission statements. Often overlooked, however, is the importance of fostering the growth of teachers so that they embody and model the ideals of a lifelong learner.

Administrators tasked with evaluating teacher performance too often take the traditional approach of a one-hour-each-year observation followed by a written summative evaluation. This type of evaluation process leaves little room for the encouragement of professional development. Hershberg and Robertson-Kraft (2010) state, “Evaluation systems should serve a dual purpose—quality assurance and professional growth. Too often, professional development is considered to be separate from the teacher evaluation and compensation system rather than a reinforcement where all resources are viewed as investments in developing teacher capacity” (Offer Additional Support section, para. 1).

The inclusion of some form of professional growth plan within the framework of the evaluation process is desirable, as a growth plan will serve to identify areas where further development is needed and will specify what actions or steps need to be taken in order to best facilitate growth. Professional growth plans benefit both the novice and experienced teacher. They can provide meaningful direction to assist an effective teacher improve upon his/her practice or offer a plan of improvement for a teacher who has been less effective.

The following is a professional growth plan created for an elementary-level teacher who has had less than three years teaching experience and who is struggling to meet the needs of his/her students. The plan outlines goals for professional development that target the teacher’s specific areas of weakness. It lists actions that will be taken on the part of the teacher as well as
others in the school district in order to work toward meeting the goals listed in the plan. An evaluation component is also included to measure progress toward outlined goals.

**Comprehensive Professional Growth Plan**

**Specific Objectives for Performance Improvement**

Peine (2007), in her book detailing a process for developing staff and improving instruction, states that the initial phase of the growth plan is one through which “…participants recognize and clarify their needs for professional growth” (p. 4). Due to the nature of this assignment, it is not possible to collaborate with a designated teacher in order to identify and clarify growth goals. In reality, of course, it would be much more effective to collaborate with the teacher for whom the plan is being created. Empowering teachers by allowing them to take primary responsibility and accountability for their own professional growth is an important part of an effective growth process (Peine, 2007). In order to ensure teachers successfully maintain responsibility and accountability for their own learning, however, it is advisable to provide well-thought-out professional development on how to effectively manage the improvement process. Some teachers will have a natural aptitude and innate motivation toward increasing their professional capacity while others will require a more structured, supportive framework in order to be successful.

The objectives of the current professional growth plan have been aligned with three of the five annual evaluation areas utilized by the designated teacher’s school district: curriculum and planning; standards-based instruction; and instructional environment. The following objectives address the teacher’s areas of need as identified through classroom observations conducted by school administrators:
(a) Prepare appropriate, detailed lesson plans that include all essential lesson parts (introduction, review, direct instruction, guided practice, independent practice, and closure) as well as essential questions and materials/manipulatives needed for each lesson taught.

(b) Encourage active participation of students through hands-on learning activities and the use of a variety of instructional learning strategies.

(c) Put procedures/routines in place that maximize instructional time and minimize off-task behaviors.

**Formal/Informal Activities**

The second phase of developing a professional growth plan involves listing specific steps/actions that the teacher and others will take to ensure that the goals identified in the initial phase are met. As the current plan has been created for a teacher who is experiencing difficulty in several key competence areas, assigning an experienced mentor teacher and detailing specific activities in which the two will engage is critical. It is important to match the mentor’s strengths with the teacher’s needs, as the mentoring process is a vital component in the second phase of the growth plan. The following are action steps involving the mentor teacher:

(a) The teacher will complete at least three separate observations in the mentor's classroom to observe small group reading, whole group reading/grammar, and mathematics.

(b) During each classroom observation, the teacher will take written notes regarding specific instructional strategies used, procedures/routines in evidence, behavior management strategies observed, and any other aspects of the mentor’s classroom that are of interest. The teacher will also list any questions he/she has for the mentor teacher.
(c) The teacher will complete a follow-up conference with his/her mentor after each observation to discuss what was observed and to ask any questions the teacher may have.

(d) The teacher will complete a follow-up conference with a school administrator after each observation in the mentor's classroom to discuss what was observed, ask any questions the teacher may have, and to discuss how the teacher will utilize what he/she has observed in the mentor’s class in his/her own classroom.

(e) The teacher will submit detailed lesson plans that include for each lesson taught: essential question(s); instructional plan that includes all necessary lesson parts; and a list of materials/manipulatives. Plans should be posted to the district’s online lesson-planning site a week in advance, so that administrator/mentor feedback is possible prior to the teaching of the lessons.

The use of video to support the development of professional practice in the field of teaching is well established and has several advantages. Sherin (2004) states, “Video allows one to enter the world of the classroom without having to be in the position of teaching in-the-moment” (p. 13). With video, it is possible to capture a lesson for later analysis. One has the luxury of replaying recorded events and noticing things one might not ordinarily observe in the midst of carrying out a lesson. A study done by Seidel, Sturmer, Blomberg, Kobarg, and Schwindt (2011) found that teachers reported greater benefits from watching and reflecting upon videotapes of their own teaching rather than those of other teachers.

(f) The teacher will videotape one lesson of his/her choosing per week. The mentor will assist the teacher in using the taped content to interpret and reflect on classroom practices. The reflection process will specifically target the teacher’s identified areas of weakness.
Professional development trainings have gotten a bad reputation over the years for being ineffective at resulting in positive, permanent changes in instructional practice. Carter (2010) derides the process of staff development she calls “drive-through training” and advocates building professional learning communities instead. Within the framework of a growth plan, however, a one-time training that is specifically matched to a teacher’s identified need can be effective. The plan itself, like a professional learning community, will provide ongoing support for what is learned during the training. Continued reflection and utilization of concepts learned will be more likely to occur.

(g) The teacher will attend a classroom management training.

**Evaluation**

As the current growth plan is written for a relatively inexperienced teacher, it is important to provide evaluation components that will not only gauge progress but that will encourage self-reflection, provide an atmosphere of support, and improve the teacher’s sense of self-efficacy. Elliott, Issacs, and Chugani (2010) support this point of view as evidenced by the advice they give supervisors of beginning teachers, “Do not make the first year of teaching a game of ‘education survivor’. Early career teachers need support and supervision” (p. 141).

Throughout the course of the growth plan, the mentor and school administration should strive to build an effective, supportive, collegial relationship with the teacher. Discussions held with the teacher should be substantive in nature and geared toward the encouragement of lasting change in instructional practice. The teacher should have input into modifying his/her own learning plan throughout the process and should feel that she/he is engaging in authentic collaboration. As the teacher in this case is inexperienced, the responsibility for monitoring plan progress and modeling appropriate discussions/reflections, at least at the beginning of the plan,
will fall mainly on the mentor and school administrators.

Peine (2007) describes what she believes to be the hallmarks of professional growth: acquiring new knowledge/skills; applying new knowledge/skills; enhancing reflective practices; improving student achievement; and contributing to the learning community. As the teacher engages in the activities of the growth plan, opportunities for acquiring new knowledge/skills will be rife. Over the course of the plan, the mentor and school administrators should be able to observe the teacher applying new knowledge, be able to assess student learning, and observe the teacher becoming more reflective in regards to his/her instructional practice. Most of the activities listed in phase two of the growth plan include an evaluation component within each objective. This allows evaluation to be specific and ongoing throughout the course of the plan.

The following evaluation component, although not included in the action steps of phase two, is an important means of providing the teacher with meaningful feedback on progress made. School administrators and the mentor will complete at least four formal observations in the teacher’s classroom during the course of the growth plan. Observations will focus on targeted skills. Feedback will be given in a timely manner following these observations.

**Literature Review**

Milne (2007) studied the impact of reward (pay, promotion, bonuses, et al.) and recognition (non-financial award) programs on the motivation, performance, and interest of employees. She observed that some organizations were spending large amounts of money investing in these types of activities in the hope that they would “…encourage employee loyalty, foster teamwork and ultimately facilitate the development of the desired culture…” (2007, p. 29). To be successful, Milne found that a reward and recognition program “… must be an intrinsic part of the organisational culture, embedded in policy and in the practice of management who
must ‘walk the talk’. It must be supported by structures and must be highly visible within the organisation thereby giving a strong message that the process itself is valued as well as a strong message that employees and their contributions are valued” (p. 36). Employees must feel that the recognition they receive is genuine and deserved.

Milne notes, however, that there is much research to support the point of view that what truly motivates employees and leads to higher levels of organizational commitment has more to do with how an employee is treated than in any increase in pay. Recognition is successful because it involves a manager/leader taking note of and valuing what an employee is accomplishing. “A big part of motivating people is giving direction and purpose to what they do” (p. 31). This is certainly true in public education, where a lack of purpose and support can quickly lead to disillusionment and burnout.

The teaching profession is one in which a high rate of burnout and attrition are well documented phenomena. Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2006) state, “Research on job stress and burnout has produced a laundry list of job demands and (lack of) job resources as potential predictors [of job dissatisfaction] beyond those in the DCM [demands-control model], including emotional demands, low social support, lack of supervisory support, and lack of performance feedback, to name only a few” (p. 496). In their study, Hakanen et al., used the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model as the basis for their research on how job demands and job resources affect teacher well being. They found that increasing job demands, especially those not directly related to instruction such as faculty meetings, parent interactions, and community commitments, led to lower job satisfaction. Hakanen et al. identified a positive relationship between job resources (job control, supervisory support, information, and social climate) and job satisfaction. The more resources a teacher has available, the greater his/her self-efficacy and satisfaction.
Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) also examined the issue of teacher burnout and attrition. They investigated the relationship between a series of well-established stressors that teachers typically face: lack of self-efficacy; student discipline issues; insufficient support by superiors or colleagues; and teacher workload. Not surprisingly, the findings of the study demonstrated the importance of a “supportive and stress-free environment along with a strong sense of teacher efficacy associated with student engagement” (p. 210). The findings also suggested that teachers could shoulder a heavier workload as long as they had supportive superiors and less stress from students.

The implications of these studies are fairly clear and consistent for practitioners. Sass et al. state, “these results provide relatively strong evidence that school change and climate start at the administrative level” (p. 212). Efforts by administrators should be focused on lessening teacher workloads wherever possible, especially in regards to non-instructional tasks. Administrative support was found to be a vital component of teacher job satisfaction. “The supportive professional leader is one who realizes the importance of issues that directly impact teachers in the classroom and works to meet each teacher’s needs. This includes such aspects as working to procure necessary resources and materials, but even more importantly fostering teacher participation in decision-making and providing valuable opportunities for professional growth” (212). To do so will nurture teacher development and lead to less attrition and higher levels of job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the professional growth plan is that of increasing student achievement through increasing teacher competency. By fostering ongoing improvement in a teacher’s knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, one is enabling that teacher to better meet the needs
of his/her students. Being motivated to improve one’s practice is a key ingredient to the success of the growth process.

Teaching can often be a stressful business, especially for novice teachers. The eagerness and enthusiasm of the novice teacher can quickly erode in the face of high demands and insufficient job resources. It is imperative to find ways to address or lessen the high demands of teaching as well as provide needed support/resources. Teachers who have been nurtured and feel a greater investment in the school as well as the teaching profession are the ones most likely to remain in the profession long term. Professional growth plans can be utilized as a vehicle to enable both teachers and administrators to work collaboratively toward addressing or avoiding factors that lead to negative outcomes such as teacher burnout and attrition.
References


