

Introduction

Every year I have a conversation with a colleague (someone different every time) about a feeling of isolation. “I am feeling overwhelmed, not sure this is the place for me, can't seem to figure out how to (insert dilemma here), etc...” These conversations have happened with both new and experienced teachers. Often what they are talking about is something that I myself have felt, am currently wondering about, or know someone else who has. After one of these conversations I asked a “veteran” teacher on our staff about their first few years of teaching and was surprised to hear just how much they struggled and how often they questioned their choice to be an educator. This was my first moment of, WHY DON'T WE HEAR THESE STORIES MORE OFTEN!?!? These experiences from colleagues that are well respected and seen as leaders by our staff would be a powerful influence in a new teacher's perspective. I think that it is important to recognize early on that there is a period of struggle, and that it is okay to feel overwhelmed at times. Through sharing these experiences, my hope is to foster the sharing of meaningful craft knowledge. How did we overcome those early struggles? What changed?

One of my first mentors told me “You never stop putting in the extra hours, that will never change. What does change, is that you get better at managing your time... You get better at managing your classroom... You learn to adapt what you are doing to the group of students in front of you, and that is what makes life as a teacher better. It's in the details...” As a new teacher at HTH this was comforting to hear. This interaction gave me a boost of confidence and is why this research is so important to me. Every staff member on our campus should feel comfortable and confident enough to share their craft knowledge and request it from others when they have a dilemma. This will not only strengthen our practice as educators, it will give our students a great example of what it means to be a lifelong learner.

As a member of the education community, I recognize that working at High Tech High Chula Vista (HTHCV) is a very unique opportunity and experience, yet it is not perfect. I often wonder how other educators share their craft knowledge and foster environments of safety and trust amongst their colleagues in traditional settings. The goal of this research is to find new and creative ways to share our experiences that help both the presenter and their audience. Although I am still in the early stages of my career as an educator, I can already see that even the most experienced teacher encounters those moments of feeling overwhelmed and questioning our choice to become an educator. Teaching can be one of the hardest professions at times, especially when we forget that education has been going on for centuries. We all need to be reminded from time to time that there is a solution, a strategy, or even an anecdote that can help us push through. Someone somewhere has already gone through it or something similar. The trick in acknowledging we need help and then, maybe even harder to do, finding the craft knowledge we need and learning from it!

Literature Review

Craft Knowledge

In this research, craft knowledge will be defined as the knowledge and wisdom that educators gain through experience. In the words of Carolina Guzmán (2009).

Basically, craft knowledge is the accumulated wisdom gained through teachers' experience and understanding and through their research on teaching practice and the meanings attached to the numerous dilemmas inherent in education. Craft knowledge includes applying a reflective approach to these problems, cultivating use of the imagination and showing commitment to the value of words, relationships and experiences. Beyond knowledge of the concepts to be applied, craft knowledge also involves certain skills, abilities and aptitudes among teachers in preparation. As a result, the emphasis is put on reflective judgement. By using the knowledge generated through research and trusting heavily in intuition, care and empathy in the teaching activity, the approach offers much more than a formal set of rules for teacher conduct. In summary, craft knowledge represents the construction of student-focused pedagogical knowledge through procedures that are related to the content of discipline and the application of reflective action on the part of the teacher. (p.327-328)

The sharing of craft knowledge doesn't always seem to be a resource tapped into by those in need of wisdom at my school. This strikes me as an area for growth when Roland S. Barth (2006) calls the sharing of craft knowledge as an action that "could transform our schools overnight" (p.2). In my early years as an educator I have been a part of those meetings where a colleague stands up to share an idea and immediately, eyes begin to roll as in "here we go again." I believe that part of this is because the sharing of craft knowledge should be something that is a part of the school culture and something that is seen as a responsibility. As Barth also points out, "Once the exchange of craft knowledge becomes institutionally sanctioned, educators no longer feel pretentious or in violation of a taboo by sharing their insights. A new taboo - against withholding what we know - replaces the old. Repeated practice soon embeds generous disclosure of craft knowledge into the culture of a school or a school system" (p.2). This is exactly what I propose to do through this research. Cultivate an environment where the generous and honest sharing of craft knowledge is embedded into our staff culture.

In talking to colleagues and reading about craft knowledge, I must also highlight that we don't always acknowledge that we HAVE anything to share. Because we don't all teach the same subject, you might also wonder if what you want to share is useful to teachers in other disciplines. On these two points Therese Day (2005, p. 25) says, "because it is so context-specific, craft knowledge is difficult to articulate and categorise." According to Brown and McIntyre (1993), "experienced 'expert' teachers have incorporated many practical routines and actions into their repertoires of teaching and they tend to be unaware of those very practices

that ensure the smooth running of their work in classrooms” (pp. 24-25). Day also points out that although craft knowledge is recognized as an important piece in a teacher's success it “receives scant attention in the literature on teacher education and pedagogy.” (pp. 24-25) In my teacher training through the High Tech High Credentialing Program I learned many teaching strategies that were also modeled by our instructors. I imagine that this is not typical of most teacher education programs. Beyond the program however, the opportunities to witness this knowledge in action are hard to come by. This can quickly lead to feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

Teacher Isolation

For a variety of reasons any teacher at any given time may find herself/himself stuck in their classroom working with students, grading papers, preparing lessons, trying to solve dilemmas and unable to get out of their space to seek out others opinions. As MacKenzie and Wolf (2012) write, “As educators at all levels of experience, we often find ourselves alone, searching through the mazes of confused perspectives of relationships.” We write, speak, perform, listen and reflect, yet as Boler (1999) notes, “self reflection may not be enough to lead to self-transformation; or even further, a living pedagogy of praxis cannot exist without vulnerability, thoughtfulness and sensuality between selves as they become fully present to place and other” (p. 18). Being comfortable with feeling vulnerable and putting ourselves out there when we need support can be a difficult task to achieve. However, these are the moments when it is most important to reach out and find support. Anthony Frascone (2011) believes that “By doing so, it reminds all stakeholders that we are a part of something greater than ourselves - the future that we in education have a hand in developing” (p. 35). This is a big statement for me as I believe that this is what I'm striving for through my research and my lead change idea, Lil Bits of Magic. A reminder that we are all a part of something bigger than our own classrooms and that we are all here together.

Another reason for the occurrence of teacher isolation at a campus like HTHCV is that as an organization HTH promotes teacher autonomy. Musanti & Pence (2010) state that, “Traditionally, teacher isolation has been confused with autonomy and independence” (p. 85). In an environment of this sort it can be intimidating to ask for support. Because of this, feelings of insecurity about our preparation, or lack of, can develop. We must also consider the idea that “most humans have two contradictory impulses: we love and need one another, and yet we crave privacy and autonomy” (Cain, p.5). While we may be interacting with colleagues on a daily basis and considering them as more than colleagues at times, this does not mean we are comfortable enough to solicit and/or give critique and feedback. As Paterson (2005) says, “In a typical school culture of teacher isolation it takes courage to be in a team that regularly observes each member teach and offers critiques on instructional improvement” (p. 14). I would say this is true at our campus where we have staff meetings 3 out of 5 days, teachers are expected to collaborate, and be engaged in collegial relationships. However, It requires a great degree of confidence and courage to acknowledge we need help and seek the support we need and we need time and space that is dedicated to building that up.

A Break From Isolation

Without opportunities for teachers to gather and share their experiences Isolation can also develop. Many would argue that teachers should create these opportunities on their own saying, “we are all adults.” But the fact is that most of us get caught up in our work and we forget to make time for this. As highlighted before, our campus has morning meetings three days out of five. These meetings are a mix of professional development, discipline, grade level, and logistical meetings. The ones that seem to be most beneficial are the ones where we get to gather for project tunings and/or dilemma consultancies. These are usually scheduled during the first 2 months of school and always leave me craving for more. We are usually assigned groups and they are intentionally chosen so that we work with colleagues from other grade levels giving us a wider range of perspective and experience. These are not only great to get us out of our comfort zones, they also force us to share a dilemma or a project we are designing. This is important because even though we’re adults, we sometimes have to be nudged into interacting with others, just like our students. Having a scheduled time for these exchanges also helps us be in the right frame of mind for this action to be productive. Here are the words of one of the teachers that Musanti and Pence (2010) interviewed during their study of the Collaboration Centers Project (CCP).

An important event or a situation that affected me [during CCP] was being able to meet during seminars and being able to have professional conversations with colleagues about ideas and things that we were implementing or things that weren’t being implemented, but that we thought were good ideas in the schools. . . . It allowed us to have a place to think about what we were doing and why we were doing things, and, and if it worked, or if it didn’t work and why. (Mary, Final Interview) (p. 80)

Milbrey W. McLaughlin (1993) wrote the following.

Effective responses to the challenges of contemporary classrooms require a spirited, reflective professional community of teachers a workplace setting that allows examination of assumptions about practice, focuses collective expertise on solutions based on classroom realities and supports efforts to change and grow professionally. Strong professional communities allow the expression of new ideas and innovations in terms of specific curricula and student characteristics. (p. 98)

Again illustrating the need for a time and space for this examination and dialogue to occur.

So who do we turn to for this? It all starts from the top. In my setting this would be our director. Grace Fleming (1999), who wrote about the efforts of three principals working towards collective efforts and the nurturing of learning communities on their sites, described the creation of these opportunities as “structured gatherings for group learning that involved the whole staff” (p. 4). The intention behind these gatherings: “involve the teachers in learning more and sharing that new knowledge with each other” (p. 4). Fleming elaborates on the importance of relationship

building between principal and teacher individually as a model for what it means to trust, support, and encourage others. The result of this was that teachers “became more concerned with finding strategies that worked than with fearing failure” (p.6). This is something I strongly relate to as our director, in my opinion, spends countless hours building relationships with each and every one of our staff members. I can say without hesitation that I trust her, that I have her full support, and that I am not afraid to take risks and fail. My director has the expectation that I am pushing my practice forward with a focus on improvements that are beneficial to all my students.

The piece that I am still wondering about is how important relationships are at my campus. I do believe that we have a great environment on our campus and that there is a strong sense of collegiality. But I wonder how far we have gone in developing these relationships. When I think about meeting times and time where we can “hang out” there are usually groups that form. Naturally, teachers tend to group with those they work with closest. I have always wondered how different our staff would be if we knew more about each other. My hope is that we can create an environment similar to the one that Fleming (1999) describes.

The importance of relationships was clear in these schools. These teachers willingly put energy into their relationships with each other including the time to know about each other's personal lives. This was not invasive, nor gossipy, but had a sense of genuine caring about each other. That caring about each other translated to trusting each other professionally, which was critical to being able to work together as a whole staff. (p. 6-7)

This level of connection amongst our staff could lead to us recognizing other teachers for their expertise. Allowing us to actively seek out counsel regarding students, classroom management, or any other challenge in our practice. There is a thought that as new teachers begin their career in education pairing them with a “master teacher” or a mentor teacher is the best way to set them up for success. “Studies of mentoring relationships indicate that status prevents collaboration and resulting collegiality” (Insley, 1987). The title “master teacher” alone is intimidating. I can definitely see how this would limit my openness and increase my anxiety as a new teacher. While these relationships may “improve teacher learning, (they have) not ensured the development of collegial relationships” (Hertzog, Pensavalle, & Lemlech, p. 2). If relationship building leads to authentic collaboration, which leads to a greater sense of collegiality amongst our staff, then why don't we spend more time strengthening our relationships?

Relationships: Back to the Basics

Relationships seem to be at the core of our success in most settings. When we are engaged in positive relationships we tend to thrive by finding a better balance in our personal and work lives. It is also important to acknowledge how ‘growth-enhancing relationships’ (Jordan, 2006) can affect a teacher's development and overall success. Jordan elaborates this by saying:

The importance of these relationships is not just that they offer support, but that they also provide an opportunity to participate in a relationship that is growth-fostering for the other person as well as themselves. (p. 88)

At our campus Collegial Coaching pairings are an example of a structured opportunity where we work to “establish trusting, respectful and reciprocal relationships” (Le Cornu, 2013). These relationships are crucial when cultivating an environment of adult learning and continuous improvement. In Le Cornu’s research she found that new teachers flourished when they were able to participate in relationships that acknowledged them as professionals who had something to offer. This made it possible for these teachers to become active participants not only as learners, but as contributors within their learning community. This is an empowering experience for teachers, and one that helps them establish an identity within their setting. The confidence gained through relationships that are empowering and encouraging will certainly decrease, if not eliminate, feelings of isolation amongst our staff and increase the opportunities for the sharing of craft knowledge.

Collaboration & Collegial Relationships

Collaboration would seem to be a great way to share craft knowledge and overcome teacher isolation, but it is also a habit that we must practice. Collaboration is often seen as simply working with another person or groups of people. In describing what occurred during their study of the CCP Munsanti and Pence (2010) write the following.

Coordinators had intended to create a community of practice where teachers could collaborate with peers and learn from each other, but the unexpected outcome was that building a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) required a long process of learning to collaborate. Julie’s reflection aptly summarizes the position of collaboration in the context of the CCP:

Collaboration is an art in itself and I felt like it required a whole process of learning new skills on my part. Working with a peer is a new way of looking at teaching. The need to listen to [one] another and integrate someone else’s ideas is a neglected, but important part of teaching. (Julie, Reflective Paper #2) (p. 79)

Learning to collaborate can be difficult and does require a degree of practice and finesse in negotiating a balance between ideas and the needs of the parties involved. Although this may be a great strategy for building relationships and providing opportunities for observation it may not be the best for sharing of craft knowledge. Musantin and Pence (2010) also highlight that their study of the CCP “affirmed that collaboration is not always ‘comfortable and complacent’” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 247). Moments of conflict, tension, and resistance should be expected and also welcomed. Learning and change involves some degree of disruption to what teachers know, and resistance can become a catalyst for in depth reflection on what is taken for granted” (p. 86).

In order for collegial relationships to exist in any setting there have to be a clear expectations and understanding of the purpose of these interactions amongst colleagues. Norms should be set so that these relationships happen in an environment which is safe, supportive and based on trust. Collegial relationships require preparation and support and work best when they are authentic and not forced. As Hertzog, Pensavalle, and Lemlech (2000) remind us, “Hargreaves (1989) distinguished between contrived and authentic collegiality. He characterizes institutional and bureaucratic procedures that required joint efforts of teachers as contrived, primarily because of the formal and imposed nature of the interactions.” Lieberman, Saxl & Miles (1988) cautioned that, “authentic collegial behaviors need to be taught, nurtured and supported” (p. 1). At HTHCV we have the opportunity to work with a director who spends a lot of time working with us individually, observing us in action, and giving us feedback modeling what a collegial relationship looks and feels like. Grace Fleming (1999) highlights how three principals were able to transform their schools into communities of professional learners by working side by side with their teachers. She says, “The staff members in these schools had the benefit of close professional interactions with their principals as co-professionals rather than simply filling the traditional roles of supervisor and subordinate. Barbara, Patricia, and Linda invested the time and energy necessary for teachers to understand that collegial relationships between principals and teachers are possible and productive” (p. 3).

In a study of a teacher education program where collegiality was promoted Hertzog, Pensavalle, and Lemlech (2000) learned that “Collegial relationships enhanced critical thought about teaching, encouraged the sharing of ideas and reflection, and developed respect for other viewpoints” (p. 12). To be a new teacher and start your career as an educator with this under your belt is huge. This would increase the likelihood that a new teacher is comfortable collaborating with others and engaging in a reflective practice that taps into the craft knowledge of those around them. Being active participants in our professional community can also reinforce the idea that “we are never alone, and always learning, ... if we choose to enter into the relational and fluid spaces of community, creation, and inquiry” (MacKenzie & Wolf, p.18). These beliefs also lead us into thinking about shared purpose. With clear intentions and goals in place it would be much easier to create teacher buy in to engage in the work of relationship building.

The Value of Shared Purpose

Last year as I waited in a doctor's office I came across an article titled “Leadership in the Age of the Unthinkable” by Antonio Lucio (2012). In this piece he makes five points on how we can engage in leadership that can lead to authentic change in a world that is constantly changing in unpredictable ways. Lucio claims that “for the foreseeable future instability and unpredictability will become the new normal.” He then reminds us that “we are all protagonist and script writers of history, and that is a powerful reassuring thought” (p.1). This made me think a lot about the nature of our school, our focus on project based learning, and how there are always moving parts. More often than not we also face unexpected changes and have to adapt while in motion. Herein lies another opportunity for teachers to feel overwhelmed and isolated by the demands

that our setting can present. Having a clear vision and purpose for what we do can be a great source of reassurance, especially when we believe that we are working towards a greater good.

People or organizations need to be more anchored than ever in purpose. Purpose is the moral compass that allows us to navigate through challenging times without losing our core in the process. Finding out what we stand for and drawing the “do not cross line” in the sand is more critical than ever. In the age of transparency we will be judged by our intentions, actions and omissions. (Lucio, 2012)

In thinking about how we can come together as whole staff I also considered Alfie Kohn’s (2008) words about how Progressive Education is defined when he says “Talk to enough progressive educators, in fact, and you’ll begin to notice certain paradoxes: Some people focus on the unique needs of individual students, while others invoke the importance of a *community* of learners; some described learning as a process, more journey than destination, while others believe that tasks should result in authentic products that can be shared” (p.1). As educators we all have our interpretations for what is important for our students to take away from their experience in our classrooms. How then, can we reach a consensus on what our vision as a school is? This question took me back to Fleming’s piece on principals and teachers, and I thought about her words about the crucial role that principals play in leading a staff towards working with a common purpose. Our director does that, and does it very well. This excerpt describes my own experience.

These principals were able to serve alongside of teachers without "pulling rank" in order for their individual views to prevail in a group. They worked elbow-to-elbow with their teachers to identify and meet the needs of their students. At times they would put aside their own preferences in agreeing with the larger group's consensus for action. Each teacher had stories of his or her principal's efforts to interact personally with each teacher to learn more about the individual's philosophy, concerns and interests regarding teaching and learning. The teachers in Patricia's and Linda's schools understood that their principal would be supportive and help them correct any mistakes they might make which led to the belief the principal trusted and respected them as professionals. (Fleming, p. 3)

The piece that is missing at our campus is where as a staff we identify the vision for our students and our school, and then specify our roles in working to make this vision a reality. Ultimately, I believe that every teacher out there wants to be successful. Every teacher wants to be clear with their role and purpose. Because “teachers want schools with a strong instructional culture—a culture that fosters great teaching. They value schools where the entire faculty shares a clear vision of excellent instruction, and where school leaders focus on helping all teachers reach their full potential in the classroom” (Greenhouse Schools, 2012). I would emphasize the part of leaders focusing on helping ALL teachers reach their full potential in the classroom. What I am proposing through this research is that we also make time for our staff to share their craft knowledge. Our director *cannot* be doing this work all by herself, we must make a commitment

to being active protagonists in the change we wish to see. This research is my first step toward rewriting the script and creating a *lil bit of* history for our campus along the way.

Setting Description

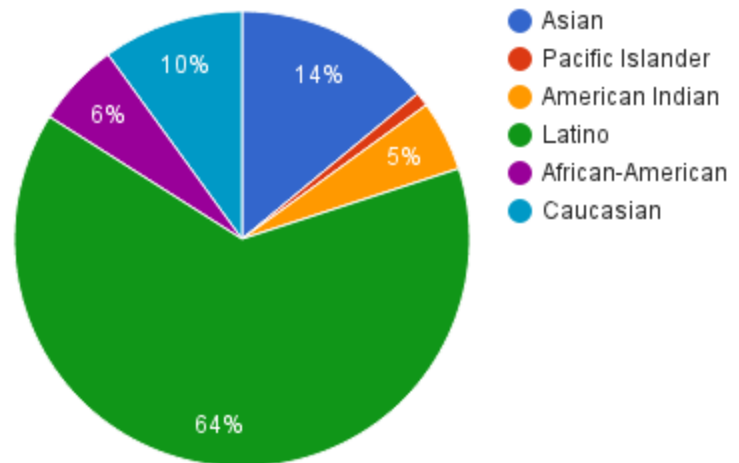
High Tech High Chula Vista (HTHCV) is situated in the South Bay region of San Diego. The South Bay is bordered by greater San Diego in the north, the Pacific Ocean in the west, the US-Mexico border in the south, and coastal mountains in the east. Due to its proximity to the border, the South Bay has a sizable immigrant population and is home to nearly a quarter of San Diego County’s Latino population. Chula Vista is the largest city within the South Bay community.

Founded in the fall of 2007, HTHCV is one of the first of two high schools opened as a California Statewide Benefit Charter School. We serve approximately 639 students in grades 9-12. Our students are 51% female and 49% male, 51% qualify for free and reduced lunch, 7% are english language learners, and 12% of our students receive special education services. Students are selected by random lottery from a pool of applicants that represent the diversity of the South Bay.

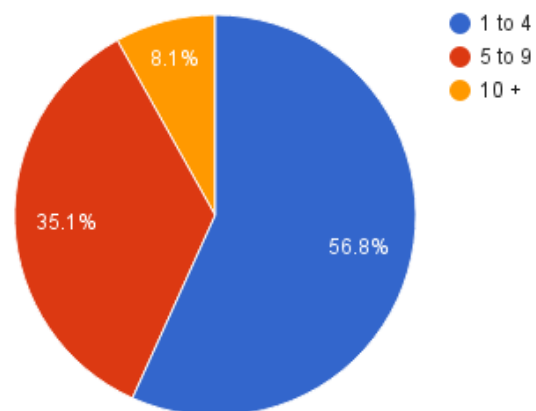
HTHCV is a project-based learning school where each teacher creates her/his own curriculum based on the High Tech High design principles of common intellectual mission, adult world connection, personalization, and teacher as designer. These principles allow for us as teachers to teach what we are passionate about as we teach our students skills that are valuable not only in their academic experience but in their real lives as well. This is especially important in working towards personalization and creating projects that truly engage the student.

There are 35 teachers on staff at HTHCV and they range in experience from being in their first year of teaching to having over 15 years of experience. The way our campus was designed it is possible to go a day or two without engaging a colleague who works in a different grade level. This is important to note as the number of teachers in their first 4 years is more than half of our staff. I am one of two art teachers and I work primarily with 12th grade students. The other art teacher works with 9th

HTHCV Race/Ethnicity for all Grades



Years of Teaching Experience at HTHCV



graders. He is in his second year of teaching and the only time we ever meet is if there is a scheduled “disciplines meeting” which seem to come around only 3-4 times a school year. I often wonder if he is going through anything that I could help with. On the bright side, his role is different than mine and he gets to work closely with six teachers which gives him built-in support as he co-teaches with them throughout the year. One of these teachers has been in education for over 15 years, one is in the 5 to 8 year range, and the other four are in the 1 to 4 range. Teachers in other roles such as humanities or the sciences collaborate closely with at most one or two other teachers throughout the year. Although we are one of the biggest staffs in our organization, the fact that over 50% of our staff are in their first four years of teaching can still lead to feelings of isolation. Safety and trust play a large role in this and I plan for my research to help us improve in that sense.

The leading change idea of my research was launched last year as part of my fieldwork. Deeply inspired by Roland S. Barth’s “Improving relationships within the schoolhouse,” I proposed several ideas to my director one of them was the following:

- A 2-3 minute segment in our morning meetings next school year where volunteers share out a successful structure, activity, experience, etc. as a model for colleagues to use and/or adapt for their own classroom. The goal being to build a sense of community amongst our staff, to highlight that we all have a successful structure working in our classroom, and to create opportunities for those that don't usually share out.

After a round of clarifying questions I found myself wondering how I was going to do all of this!? My director agreed to the idea as long as I was willing to follow up with her and lead it. She also asked me to go ahead and launch this staff success share-out idea at the following weeks all staff meeting and that I should give it a catchy name! I left my director’s office both happy and incredibly nervous. Proposing ideas and leading activities were not things that I pictured myself doing, but my first year in the High Tech High Graduate School of Education has given me the voice and knowledge to back my ideas with research. It has also given me the confidence to step in front of my colleagues and push for something that I think will make our school an even greater place. So I got to work on what I could call this and came up with “Lil Bits of Magic.” I explained the purpose of this new addition to our all-staff logistics meetings and introduced our first volunteer. As an incentive I also offered a free t-shirt to anyone who would volunteer as a presenter of something magical from their classroom. After my first volunteer shared his “bit of magic,” a group quiz structure that he and the rest of our Math team had implemented this year, I once again explained the purpose and that the share out could be a success from our classroom, an anecdote about something we did, a celebration of a student, a new activity or structure that worked for us, in essence anything positive about our practice. After that meeting I had four colleagues approach me and say that they would love to participate and share something during a future “Lil Bits of Magic.” Unfortunately this was at the very end of the school year so we only had one more opportunity to do this. This school year we have had six presenters sharing everything from team building strategies to assessment protocols. Through

small activities like Lil Bits of Magic we can start the process of acknowledging commonalities amongst us and begin working towards a greater sense of safety and trust so that we can share dilemmas about our practice.

Methods

This project was designed to look closely at the sense of safety & trust within a staff culture and how it impacts the sharing of craft knowledge amongst colleagues. Initially I set out to measure and strengthen the sense of safety and trust in sharing dilemmas of practice with colleagues. However, based on the baseline data I collected I had to shift my aim. More on that is in the findings section. Here is how I went about collecting data for my research.

Because we are using the Improvement Research (IR) framework for this study I had to collect some baseline data to later compare and, hopefully, show evidence for improvement by the end of my research. In preparing to do this I had several conversations with colleagues about what questions I needed to ask in order to learn more about our sense of safety and trust. This was a much more difficult task than I anticipated. I had never done research and had never created a survey of this nature, so this was all new to me. One day during class I was talking with a classmate about my research. She had just been announced as someone (other than the instructors) whom we could also go to for feedback and support as we prepared to collect data. She happened to be sitting next to me, so I quickly asked if she could take a look at my survey and offer me her feedback. She asked what I was attempting to study and after my explanation she suggested that maybe we could share the survey she had created for her own study. It turned out that we were attempting to study very similar topics! Without hesitation I agreed to use her survey, acknowledging that we would also be able to compare our surveys once we completed the study.

After adapting a few of the questions to use the same language I had used in my study (e.g. the word “challenges” instead of “dilemmas”) I then shared it with my director to get her approval and send out the survey to my colleagues. Instead of the "Yes, go for it" email I was hoping for I got, "Can we meet and talk about this before you send this out?" I got really anxious when I saw this, not sure why exactly. Probably because I knew there were two questions in the survey that might not need to be there. Before my meeting I had two colleagues fill out the survey without giving them full context (my mistake) and then debriefed with them afterwards about their thoughts on it. Both said they thought the survey was fine but wondered what it was about. After a full explanation of the research I will be doing it was clear to them why most of the questions were asked. They just had concerns about how other colleagues would respond to the two questions about trusting our supervisor. Would everyone answer honestly? I felt pretty confident that everyone would if I explained my project.

During the meeting with my director she had similar questions. She wondered if everyone would answer truthfully and pushed me to think about what I would do with the data, given that there was no space for comments to better understand the responses. Specifically regarding the

questions about trust and support from colleagues and supervisors, how would I work with that data if it came back negative? I had no way of knowing why they responded the way they did! Just assumptions, and we know where that leads to...

My director shared that when she collects surveys from us and asks a similar question about trust and support she always has a space for comments. This way if something does come up she has some context for why the responder answered the way they did. If she needs to, she can then address the situation by taking action or explaining her thoughts about it. I decided to remove the questions about trust and support from our supervisor since it didn't really affect my research. It would however, impact my research in raising the anxiety level for some of my colleagues and possibly influence the way they responded to my survey. After making these adjustments I went ahead and shared the survey with all of my colleagues using Google Forms.

I asked my director for a few minutes at the next staff meeting for my colleagues to fill out the survey. She granted this time and at the following morning meeting I asked everyone to pull up the survey and respond to it. The two colleagues who had volunteered to fill out the first version of the survey reported that it took only about 3 minutes to fill out so I made sure to highlight how quick this would be. I also went into more detail about the why I was giving this survey. Everyone in attendance filled out the survey and since it had been shared with everyone through Google even those who were not present were able to complete the survey on their own time. After receiving all the responses I went ahead and used the graphing functions of Google Forms to create graphs and charts that were helpful in breaking down the data. A very important step that I took when first creating the survey was that I made it so that all responses came through as anonymous. This was also something that I clarified when I first shared the survey with my colleagues.

Another aspect that we implemented from the IR framework into our research was the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycles. These cycles were opportunities for us to focus on something specific, plan an action, implement it, observe and collect data, then use this information to take next steps and enter a new cycle. My first cycle was looking at the cornerstone change idea in my research project, Lil Bits of Magic (LBOM) which is a 3-5 minute segment in our Staff Logistics meetings where volunteers share out a successful structure, activity, experience, etc. as a model for colleagues to use and/or adapt for their own classroom. LBOM had been a part of our Staff Logistics meetings since the end of our previous school year and I had never collected any feedback other than comments that were made in passing. So for this first cycle I decided to collect an exit card in order to understand what my colleagues thought about the change idea. I went ahead and made a small quarter sheet (4.25 x 5.5") handout that had three questions:

1. What is useful about LBOM?
2. What is missing from LBOM?
3. Do you have any suggestions for other ways to share our "magic" AND increase opportunities to connect with colleagues we don't see every day?

I handed out this exit card after our 11th presentation and collected it at the end of our staff meeting. This gave my colleagues about 20-25 minutes to fill it out before the end of our meeting.

I also planned and scheduled interviews with colleagues to talk about their experience at our school focusing on their sense of safety and trust on our campus. To set these interviews up I sent out calendar invites through Google with options for meeting before school, during lunch, or after school. Through findings from the baseline data survey I had identified teachers in their first four years as the colleagues I would focus on for these interviews. So, I sent out invitations to 10 of my 33 colleagues. This did not include all of the teachers who were in the demographic that I was choosing to focus on but it was based on colleagues who had agreed to participate in my research as interviewees following the baseline data survey.

For these interviews we met in my classroom and started out with me explaining my project and being explicit that this would be presented as anonymous in my writing. I also asked their permission to record the interview so that I could focus on the conversation and not miss any important details. To start the conversation I asked my colleague to state their name and years of experience teaching at High Tech High. Only one of my colleagues asked why they needed to state their name if this was going to be anonymous. I realized this was not essential to my project and didn't have a good reason for why I had done that. We had a good laugh about it and continued. My first prompt was for my colleague to share about their experience working at our school. This was followed by a question about how they would describe our environment or staff culture. From here I did not have a set line of questions but instead would focus on their first two responses and delve deeper into their responses. For example, I would say "Can you tell me more about xxx...." or "You mentioned xxxx, can you tell me more about that?" This made for a very comfortable 20 to 25 minutes where my colleagues talked about their experience at our school. After concluding these interviews I was able to go through the audio and pull out quotes that related to my study. After doing so I analyzed this data for similarities and contrasting differences.

Finally, I created a new site where the Lil Bits of Magic resources could be shared and requested feedback on the usability of this new format from 10 of my colleagues. I asked them to give me feedback on:

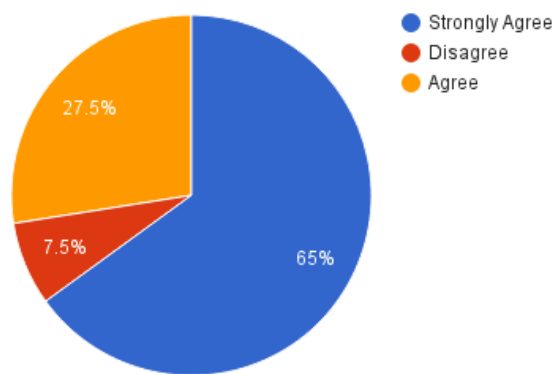
1. The layout of the site.
 - a. Is it easy to navigate?
 - b. Is there something missing?
 - c. Is there something there a page or tab that could be removed/consolidated?
2. The resources.
 - a. Is the new format easier to use?
 - b. Is there something missing?
3. Other suggestions.

This data was very informative in finalizing my product for this research.

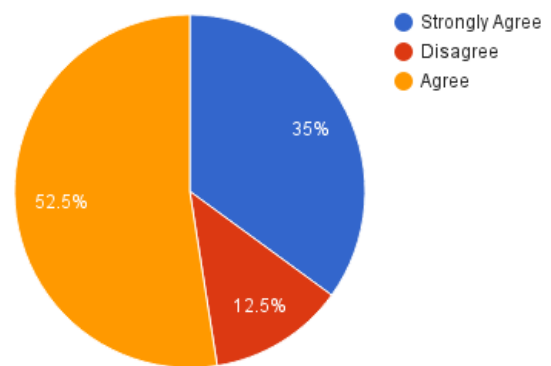
Findings

Since November, I had been focused on working towards improving the sense of trust and safety around sharing challenges in our teaching practice with colleagues. This was the “need/area for improvement” I had identified for my setting based on conversations I had with colleagues in the past. As I made progress on my master’s project I read a lot about the sharing of craft knowledge, teacher isolation, collaboration, collegial relationships, and shared purpose. This was in preparation for the actions I would take towards improvement of the sense of safety and trust. Then in December I administered a “School culture and relationships” survey of my colleagues to collect the baseline required for my project... the results did not match my interpretation of the conversations I had in the past, but it did highlight an area of opportunity for growth: the network within our school.

I feel safe sharing my greatest challenges as an educator with colleagues in my school.



I know how to find resources for professional growth.



“Baseline Data” Survey Results 12/15

As you can see in the charts above, both are very strong towards Agree/Strongly Agree. However, knowing how to find resources had the highest Disagree percentage of any question asked. When paired with another question in the survey where colleagues were asked to check off the names of those whom they had recently held conversations (any conversation) about their teaching practice, *I noticed that teachers in their first 4 years were checked off considerably less than other colleagues. The survey showed how 11 teachers (all in their first four years at HTHCV) had a conversation (any conversation) about their teaching practice with 9 colleagues or less. The remaining networks were largely clumped in the 11 to 16 range with a few outliers as high as 22 and 23.* This information helped me consider networks as an area that I could focus on towards improvement, especially when you consider that teachers in their first four years make up over 50% of our staff. This shift in focus helped me fine tune the aim of my project from:

By June 2016 teachers at HTHCV will report a greater sense of safety and trust about sharing dilemmas of practice with colleagues.

to

By June 2016 teachers at HTHCV will show an increase in the number of colleagues they reach out to when facing challenges.

This shift also reinforced the value of my main change idea, Lil Bits of Magic (LBOM), which is a 3-5 minute segment in our Staff Logistics meetings where volunteers share out a successful structure, activity, experience, etc. as a model for colleagues to use and/or adapt for their own classroom. The goal is to build a sense of community amongst our staff, to highlight that we all have a successful structure working in our classroom, and to create opportunities for those that don't usually share out. This segment is a perfect opportunity for my colleagues and me to share areas of expertise. In Le Cornu's (2013) research she found that new teachers flourished when they were able to participate in relationships that acknowledged them as professionals who had something to offer. This made it possible for these teachers to become active participants not only as learners, but as contributors as well, within their learning community. This is an empowering experience for teachers, and it also helps them establish an identity within their setting. The confidence gained through relationships that are empowering and encouraging will certainly decrease, if not eliminate, feelings of isolation amongst our staff and increase the opportunities for the sharing of craft knowledge. How did I not make this connection before!?

To ensure that the LBOM structure was working towards this new aim I also collected "exit card" feedback in regards to this segment of our logistics meetings. We've had 10 presentations since last spring and this is what my colleagues have to say:

What is useful about LBOM?

- Fun
- Great way to build culture/community
- Something to look forward to in staff meetings
- Great way to spotlight "best practices" and new ideas
- Great opportunity to find potential collaborations with others.

What is missing from LBOM?

- More variety (e.g. Class management, Positive environment, etc.)
- Participating in the activities/strategies shared
- Video of the activity/strategy "magic in action"
- Making LBOM Resources user friendly
- Small group share outs to increase opportunities AND reduce anxieties around presenting to the whole staff.

It was great to read my colleagues' positive responses to the structure and was also great to read some of the areas for improvement that they identified. I was struck by the request for more variety, specifically around resources and strategies for classroom management and cultivation of positive environments. Another suggestion that I had not considered was to have our staff experience the presenters' "magic" by actually participating in the activity. What a great idea!

Other suggestions were things that I was already working towards as well, so they were nice affirmations that I was on the right track.

At this point in my work I also wanted to hear directly from some of my colleagues. When looking at the data from the question where colleagues checked off the names of those whom they had recently held conversations about their teaching practice, I noticed that newer teachers (1-3 years with HTH, 48% of our staff) had the smallest networks. This was really interesting to me and it led me to focus on this group of colleagues for one-on-one interviews about their experience at our school. The first interview was with a teacher who had previous experience in a traditional setting but was in only their second year with HTH. They talked to me about a concept called “Status Treatment” that is used in the math classroom.

Teacher 1 - 2nd year with HTH

In ... education, we talk about status all the time right? People who don't always share their voice have status in the classroom that is low. A new teacher walks in with low status even in an accepting group. It takes time to become known, part of the group, it's just a human thing. So we talk about doing status treatments, [this is where we] show your work today and show everybody that you did awesome work. Look, this person has stuff to contribute, we are going to show it off, and hopefully now [this person] is invited into more conversations. So, we didn't have much turnover last year, but there ARE quiet voices and maybe part of that is inviting them into the discussion and saying look at the cool stuff these people are doing as a status treatment.

This sounded like a beautiful way to describe what LBOM is attempting to achieve! It also made me think about how I approach highlighting the work of my students and that I could be a bit more intentional with whose work we present and how. The idea that in one action we could help build a student's confidence and also give them a voice amongst their peers is genius! The interview I had immediately following this one helped me step back into the shoes of a new teacher coming into our environment for the first time.

Teacher 2 - 1st year with HTH

The amazing thing about the community is that it's small, so it's really close. To a new person coming into that it was hard to sort of know my place at first. When you see how close everyone is and how much everyone cares about each other when you are new, you don't know what to offer or how to act. It's easy to become an observer and take a back seat because you are nervous about saying the wrong thing or making a bad impression.

This was a bit hard to listen to. How could this have happened at our school? What can we do moving forward so that new members of our staff feel welcome and a part of everything we do as quickly as possible? My next interview was in contrast to this experience and presented a slightly different perspective.

Teacher 3 - 2nd year with HTH

You have to be willing to ask. I would say, and I noticed this very early on, is that the second I knew the right questions to ask it was very easy to get my answer, but if you are not willing to ask first of all or not know exactly what question to ask, and there are so many questions to ask based on this just being such a different environment, I think it can be very challenging. The transition [from academic coach to teacher] really helped because it made me first understand HTH in general, then I worked on my relationships, then [on] understand[ing] specifically what I needed to work on first.

Because I share the same experience, having been an Academic Coach working closely with the Inclusion Specialist, I agreed that I felt much more prepared for the transition to becoming a teacher at HTH. Could it be possible to recruit ALL our teachers in this way? Still, the theme that came up again was that of relationships. The next interview presented yet another perspective that I had not considered, and one that most likely is shared by many of our students in one way or another.

Teacher 4 - 2nd year with HTH

The biggest thing for me about the large group settings is that I feel that we are in a room of really smart people. Sometimes it takes me a minute to process what is going on. I know that there are people who are going to speak up regardless, so I don't need to have my voice heard. Being a first generation student I'm always worried that the second I speak up that's what it will be, "oh, that's a first gen way to look at it."

This colleague went on to say how they had never been singled out in this way at our campus but that this was just something that they had always felt. This led me to think a lot about my students and the work that I do to make sure that my classroom is a safe space. How are we structuring meetings and other opportunities for those colleagues who experience the same insecurities that many of our students feel? It took me back to the feedback I received from LBOM and the request for alternative presentation methods where staff could present in smaller groups to reduce anxiety. I realized that this was an actual need that many of our newest members face. A great place to start is as one interviewee said, relationships. When we are engaged in positive relationships we tend to thrive by finding a better balance in our personal and work lives or as Goleman (1995) says, "resonant relationships are like emotional vitamins, sustaining us through tough times and nourishing us daily" (p.4). In a study looking at building teacher resilience and the role of relationships Rosie Le Cornu (2013) states:

A key insight from the study was that in order for the new teachers to feel confident and competent they needed to be sustained by - and be able to sustain - relationships based on mutual trust, respect, care and integrity. (p. 2)

Somehow I came full circle right back to where I found myself about a year ago - thinking about relationships, how to build confidence, and the sense of safety and trust. What I am realizing now is that in fact, the sense of safety & trust and the number of colleagues with whom we network is more closely linked to the depth of the relationships we cultivate as a staff. This research is grounded in the development of these relationships, which are based on comfort, trust, and a deeper sense of belonging. Structures such as Lil Bits Of Magic provide the time, space, and environment for craft knowledge to be shared in a format that is entertaining, informative, and beneficial to the community.

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