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Introduction

Being a Professional Means Being a Learner

The word *professional* has a nice ring to it, but though we use it frequently, we seldom pause to reflect on its meaning. It is a normal adult routine to search for and secure a job, but becoming a professional requires years of preparation and planning. Furthermore, the choice of a profession usually indicates a person's commitment to investing the better part of one's lifetime in a single pursuit.

What makes someone a professional? In athletics, it's simply being paid for your work. But that minimalist definition obscures an essential truth: even with hard work, passion, and commitment, not everyone can become a professional athlete. Simply offering yourself for employment doesn't gain you a position on a major league team. That opportunity is extended only to those who have demonstrated a profound mastery of their craft.

Qualities That Define Professionals

Fundamentally, all professionals are expected to bring two qualities to their work:

1. Mastery of their field's knowledge base
2. The ability to craft creative solutions to nonroutine problems

Mastery of Their Field's Knowledge Base

Successful professionals need to be on top of (or at least capable of accessing) all that is known by practitioners in their field. We expect lawyers to know the law, doctors to know medicine, and architects to know architecture. In education, we are expected to develop content mastery through our preservice training, by staying current with professional reading, and by attending in-service programs. Hopefully, through these activities, we end up with a working knowledge of the profession's knowledge. Schools, universities, and collaborative

Habit of Inquiry

Clarifying a Shared Vision for Success



This chapter introduces the first habit of inquiry needed by those engaged in the practice of educational architecture: a clear shared vision to guide their work when they are planning for teaching and learning. This chapter—and this entire book—are built on one assumption: the overarching justification for our work as professional educators and the rationale for investing our time with a PLC team are the pursuit of universal student success. This is extremely difficult and challenging work. What makes it so challenging is that we are trying to accomplish something that has eluded and confounded us up until now.

In areas where we are happy with our past success, it is usually a mistake, as well as a waste of our energy and the time of our colleagues, to spend our limited collaborative planning time documenting our successful practices in great detail. While it might be helpful for an external university researcher, spending PLC team time producing such documentation will provide little added benefit for our current students.

In terms of collaborative planning, the wise thing to do in areas where we've been successful is to take note of what worked and stay the course. However, in areas where we are unhappy with past results, it is imperative for us to try something new. If we are dissatisfied with the performance of our students yet continue to conduct business as we have in the past, there is no logical justification for expecting different results. This book is devoted to the exploration of a straightforward and disciplined process that educators and school teams can use when they wish to emulate the crew of the Starship Enterprise and go boldly where no one has gone before. Action research invites you to explore creative ways to achieve difficult things that, in all likelihood, have yet to be accomplished. As Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) point out, significant performance improvement comes through purposefully addressing adaptive challenges—challenges with no known solution, challenges that cause us to experiment, discover, adjust, and adapt.

Habit of Inquiry

Acting Purposefully While Collecting Data

Thus far you have dealt with two Habits of Inquiry: Clarifying a Shared Vision for Success and Articulating Theories of Action. This was important work, and hopefully, these exercises helped you reflect on your values and your best thinking. But it has yet to be determined if the values and ideas reflected in your shared vision and the actions enunciated in your visual theory of action will succeed in getting your students to the desired outcome of universal student success. This is why Habit of Inquiry 3, Acting Purposefully While Collecting Data, is so critical. Understanding the real-world effectiveness of your theory of action will be essential if your collaborative action research is to produce the professional learning sought by you and your colleagues.

The Three Impact Questions

It is often said that one of the most difficult aspects of the action research process is finding a research question worth investigating. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the first step of the inquiry process be the development of research questions. Although this makes sense when the action research project is being conducted by and for an individual practitioner, the purpose and function of the research question is quite different when the research is being conducted as part of PLC work.

If you are a member of a PLC team, you are approaching your action research already aware that the purpose of your PLC is to collaboratively discover ways to foster universal student success on priority achievement targets. Therefore, your essential action research question was set when your team chose a target for the team to pursue. That question was, “What will it take to produce universal student success with _____?”

Still, if you are to succeed in producing the professional knowledge and developing the insight you are after, three subquestions will need to become a routine part of your inquiry.