



## Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”

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### ‘Critical Questions’ Series April 2009

#### What Worked?

#### Success Analysis: A Legitimate Form of Professional Development

In the poem, *To Look at Any Thing*, John Moffitt wrote, “*To look at any thing, If you would know that thing, You must look at it long.*” Do we, as educators, carefully and thoughtfully reflect on what works in education? Do we know that thing? Are we looking at it long? We anticipate, react, and redirect, but do we take time to reflect? Reflection. We all know we **should** do it; we feel guilty for **not** doing it, but unless we have a long commute, we don’t seem to have time to do it.

As professional development coaches, we have the opportunity to encourage teachers to engage in focused and deliberate reflection related to effective practice. To look at it long. However, we have discovered that those teachers who are able to carve out time to reflect rarely reflect on the successes of the day. Rather, most teachers analyze the shortcomings of their practice. The questions many teachers are asking themselves are questions that relate to the gap between what they accomplished and what they hoped to accomplish; what needs to be tweaked? What didn’t work? What still needs to be done? In essence we are working from a deficit model. We push kids, we push teachers and we push each other towards excellence. But we often neglect to reflect on what worked, why it worked and celebrate the student learning that has taken place. Certainly, individual and collaborative reflection focused on improvement is critical for growth, but we believe that reflection focused on accomplishments may have the same kind of transformative power.

As professional development coaches, it is our responsibility to ensure that there is a balance between celebrating success and determining strategies for improvement. Analyzing success is not merely a pat on the back or an “atta way”; rather, it is a deeper look into to why it worked and what were the integral pieces that contributed to the success. What would happen if we analyzed and celebrated our successes with the same kind of relentlessness that we scrutinize our shortcomings? Noting patterns, trends and outliers in the success data may enable us to replicate or transfer those achievements.

We put our idea to the test at the January OPSI conference held in Seattle this winter. We designed a break-out session for coaches, mentors and instructional leaders to network and discuss coaching successes. We were thrilled when our proposal was

accepted! That elation was to be followed quickly by disappointment when we realized we were assigned to present the *last* session on the *last* day of the conference. (If you have ever been to a large conference, you know by the end, conference-goers have lost most of their zest for learning.) This was not the case with our session!

Not only were we overwhelmed by the turnout, but we were also amazed by the engagement and enthusiasm of the participants. Our session provided practice using the Success Analysis Protocol from McDonald's text, *The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice*. "The purpose of the protocol is to engage colleagues in collaborative analysis of cases from practice in order to understand the circumstances and actions that make them successful ones, and then to apply this understanding to future practice." (p. 61). The room was abuzz... late on a Friday! We believe the positive, almost grateful and relieved reaction we received from participants at our session suggests a craving for recognition and feedback related to teaching and learning successes, rather than solely examining teaching and learning shortfalls. We were motivated and inspired by the comments participants made about the value of analyzing their practice through a positive lens and sharing successes.

Yes, there is much to do. There is much to fix. It is our responsibility and duty as teaching professionals to live the life of a learner. But if we don't safeguard time and opportunities to reflect on our successes, and celebrate those successes we are only telling half the story.

Are you tempted to give this a try? These are the questions that might initiate a productive discussion with colleagues or prompt an inner conversation: What worked? Why did it work? Who did it work for?

*"To look at any thing, If you would know that thing, You must look at it long"*

#### References

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