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Personalized Professional Development Plans

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Nancy Ruppert is the past-president of AMLE and past-president of NAPOMLE. She is the chair of the education department at UNC Asheville. Her current areas of interest are in advocating for middle school alumni and creating resources to advocate for middle level education. Here she invites readers to contribute to ideas for ongoing professional development.

How do we prepare teachers, counselors, and administrators to embrace a 'middle school mindset?' We start with a discussion of what is most important: knowing who our students are and knowing how to interact with them, their families, and one another. In May, colleagues met to deepen our own understanding and commitment to promote a middle school mindset.

I believe the purpose of an annual conference is to bring people together who are interested in planting seeds of ideas, providing and receiving inspiration, and developing commitment related to their own practice, as well as collectively being reminded that what we do matters. However, the experience is sustained only when educators work together over time to grow their own practice, plant their own seeds.

In the spring of 2018, professors of middle level education met at our state middle level conference. We began a conversation about what it means to speak the language of middle schools. We shared the notion that there is a middle school mindset that accompanies stakeholders' language. We also talked about the difference between a middle school mindset and the structures that exist in middle schools to support young people.

Fast forward two months. Middle level professors in the southeast hosted a middle school symposium to ignite the fire of middle school. A small group, 50 in all, came together to share, to write, to inspire one another to find ways to tell our story of the relationship between a middle school mindset and professional development to promote middle school structures. It was a starting point really. We are seeking ways to promote a middle school mindset in theory and in practice.

If we are going to share the middle school story, we need to share both inspiration and practical tools. This presentation introduces the idea that promoting a middle school mindset and middle school structures can be created in a format that can be shared; and that we should use the resources available to us provided by the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) and our other constituents who advocate for middle level students. Currently we are starting with the AMLE resources.

In our conversation we discussed the plethora of resources that exist on the AMLE.org website. From these conversations, we began to think of ways to give administrators and teams of teachers knowledge and activities related to a Personalized

Professional Development Plans. This session was designed to start the conversation with professors, teachers, and administrators.

Our first task was to examine what professional development (PD) looks like for middle school educators. A research summary on PD in middle schools was compiled by Bickman (2014) and is based on research on how adults learn. In her analysis, one group of studies suggest that adult learners want personalized learning, opportunities to communicate with colleagues, want to improve from experiences, and want learning to be purposeful. The amount of time needed, according to her reviews is 14+ hours (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapey (2007). Bickman (2007) also shares Guskey and Spark's (2002) work, that productive PD must focus on context, content, and product. She concludes with reminding us that PD must include knowledge, relevance, personal impact, and have practical application to educators. Therefore, the traditional, 'sit and git,' for an hour once a month may not impact educators' needs or student learning. According to research it must be sustained and ongoing. So, if we are going to use resources such as webinars, or have people read articles, we must encourage them to use the materials in an ongoing format that allows them to reflect on their own practice and consider alternatives or innovations that will affect the students in their classroom.

With a focus away from traditional PD, this new era of PD centers on collaboration and problem-based learning. Examples include professional learning communities (PLCs), Edcamp, Growth Buddies, and an Inquiry Project. PLCs was coined by Huffman and Hipp (2003). Ruebel (2012) provides a summary of current research on the impact of PLCs. In her review she cites Dufour's review that PLCs could be, "our best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement" (Dufour, 2007, p. 3). Edcamp is another recent PD format. Cook (2016) shares, "Built on the principle of connecting educators and participatory learning, EdCamps strive to bring educators together to share their interests and passions on topics that matter to them." Kordatzky and Lapean-Usher (2014) describe what they call 'growth buddies,' where teachers work together. In their description they share the power and importance of collaboration to grow professionally. In an American International School (AIS) in Amsterdam, middle school teachers worked together to create their own PD project this year. Some teachers worked individually; others worked together. At the end of the year they came together to share their products.

Each of these models address the needs of different groups. PLCs, in middle schools, most often focus on the academic needs of students, Edcamps bring people together to seek insight and inspiration towards common goals and work from there. Growth Buddies are smaller and more intentional, where colleagues work over time to grow professionally. Inquiry Projects dig deeply into an issue or strategy. The PD project allowed for teachers to be intentional about making change in their school. The common denominator in all of these goes back to context, content, and relevance. In addition, there is an underlying theme of collaboration and reflection which provide educators with social, emotional, and intellectual support.

In thinking about multiple venues and educator needs, we wondered, what could support these different configurations of PD? Or how could we take the learning of those involved in PD and give them a framework to follow? As an example, I used the resources on the AMLE website to review summaries, read articles and research, listen to

webinars, to create a planned support to help teachers who are interested in any of the topics that are addressed relating to middle school. So I invited educators to this session to discuss the possibility of creating a template for those interested in learning more or sharing middle school concepts. I used the Professional Development Plan template we use in North Carolina for teachers (NCDPI, 2015) as a base format.

Here is what we are thinking as well as a sample template:

What? Search AMLE and other resources to support your knowledge base. *Amle.org* including, but not limited to:

Research Summaries

Articles

Podcasts

Webinars

Books

Twitter Feeds

Other National Organization Websites

So What?

Why it is important? (consider data, consider inspiration, consider individual, student, or school-wide assets)

Now What?

Goals: Use the following template.

Goals to Consider:	Activities /Actions	Expected Outcomes/ Evidence of Completion	Resources	Timeline	Intended Audience(s)
			This We Believe Webinars Articles Research Summaries		
Once the research is done, break out specific activities for each nine weeks.					
Choose a	1st nine	2nd nine weeks	3rd nine	4th nine weeks.	

specific activity each nine weeks to monitor its impact on students	weeks		weeks	
Final Products	Share this experience at your State Middle School conference or at the AMLE National conference.			

For these modules we are looking for overviews from Teachers, Administrators, and Professors that give reasons why this is important. We invite quotes and insights, summaries of resources using each of the following resources, insights and creative activities that address the various aspects of middle school teaching. We invite authors to join us in this endeavor.

Research Summaries:
https://www.amle.org/SearchResults/tabid/86/Default.aspx?Search=Research+summaries
RMLE Online:
https://www.amle.org/Publications/ResearchinMiddleLevelEducationOnline/tabid/173/Default.aspx
Middle School Journal:
https://www.amle.org/Publications/MiddleSchoolJournal/tabid/175/Default.aspx
AMLE Magazine:
https://www.amle.org/Publications/AMLEMagazine/tabid/176/Default.aspx
Podcasts: https://www.amle.org/Publications/Podcasts/tabid/255/Default.aspx
Webinars: https://www.amle.org/SearchResults/tabid/86/Default.aspx?Search=Webinars
Books: https://www.amle.org/Shop/tabid/135/Default.aspx
The Clearing House has just been added as a resource for members.
https://www.amle.org/Publications/TheClearingHouse/tabid/782/Default.aspx

Next Steps

Our next steps are to begin to add and populate the modules. If you would like to participate, contact nruppert@unca.edu Current modules can be viewed at:
https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/mobile/folders/1G7-liAyaw-6_bBNdl-z508LgdGGGwbnd?usp=sharing_eil&ts=5aff1320

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