PLCs Working on Student Motivation

I was recently asked to facilitate a high school staff who had been working in PLCs that were department centered around curriculum and assessment. I was given a request to create an opportunity for them to focus on individual student success.

The staff was regrouped for the day into teams of about six who were teaching at least some of the time at a common grade level. This created an opportunity for them to have students in common so that most of the time that an individual student was discussed at least two teachers were working with that student.

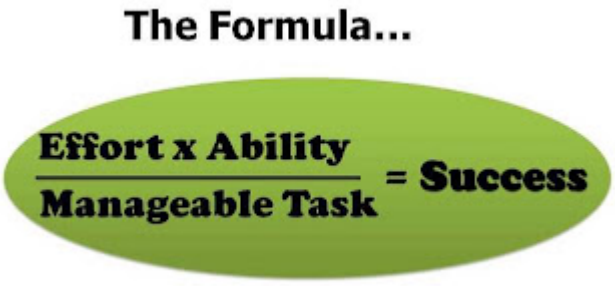
At the start of the session I asked staff to each identify one student who fit these descriptions:

- A student who was failing the class but had the ability to pass
- A student who was at the C/B level who had the ability of being a top performer
- A student earning an A who was not putting much effort into the class

I reiterated with the group my backwards processing that student success was produced by student behaviors (students, not teachers, cause student achievement). Therefore our focus for the day would be on what student behaviors were needed and what options did we have as teachers to generate those necessary student behaviors.

As we explored possibilities teams discussed the students on their list throughout the day. Along with a goal of having a plan for the individual students, generalizations were made about ways to engage all students. Here are some of the elements we explore:

Working with the formula from my book Tapping Student Effort,



(Effort times ability focused on a manageable task creates success) we examined…

Pictures of the Future – Did teachers know what these students saw in their futures? Were there students who didn't have a future picture? How connections could be made between efforts in school with future plans? (Planning Future Pictures)

Beliefs About Ability – Were students aware that ability is connected to effort? Did they have a growth mindset? (Mindset)

Sources of Control – What did these students see as survival needs, belonging, power, freedom, and fun? How could these be sources of motivation? (Compelling Whys?)

Differentiation – Were the tasks that students were asked to complete manageable? Was substantial effort needed to successfully complete tasks and if a student worked hard, could they predict some success?

Learning Styles – Did the teacher and student have an understanding of style preferences? Were there patterns in style among the groups of students? (My experiences show many struggling learners tend to have concrete global and kinesthetic preferences and a sensing perceiver temperament style.)

Because of our focus on student behaviors, the administrators of the school gathered the names of students identified in each category and agreed to conduct classroom observations

looking specifically at these students and recording “what they do” in class. This data will be shared with the PLCs as they further explore strategies and approaches to implement teacher behaviors to gain student behaviors. Teachers will have each of the three identified students complete the Kaleidoscope Learning Style Profile for additional insights as they continue implementing options and observing changes in student behavior and hopefully increases in student achievement.

My experience has been that these teacher conversations about specific students lead to ideas for larger changes in teaching practice. In the middle of this PD session one teacher created a plan to build her next unit of study around researching and Skyping interviews to produce written formal reports around careers that students were considering.