

Professional Learning – A new perspective on Teaching

Glenn Wagner- I was seconded to the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo. And so I spent two years there with their Teacher Outreach program. So I had a chance to drive content, create content for science and physics teachers literally throughout the world and put online for teachers to download. And we worked with a lotta teachers. So I had a chance to go to a lotta conferences to be able to showcase some of the things that make them better teachers. I think of anything that I got out of that experience with Perimeter is to understand the needs of teachers. And when you start talking with teachers, when you start working with teachers, they tell you things that you would not know if you were just sitting in the classroom teaching all by yourself or even just going to the staff room. And they tell you about the things they find difficult. The things that their students will do or won't do. And you just get a new view of teaching, of what it means from somebody else's perspective, and I think that is the biggest take away that I got. To find out what these teachers do, how they do it, and what I need to do in order to make them better teachers ultimately. It also allowed me to see other students in action. Occasionally, we went into some classrooms and we watched the kids use the resources that we created. And so it gave me an idea of what level the kids will go to. Like will they go mathematically deep, generally not. So that informs my pride to say, "Okay, keep it more "conceptual and if the mathematics comes into play, "then we bring that in afterwards." So it just gave me the idea that those conceptual understandings are incredibly important. Not so much the math, not so much the skills, but what is it they need to know. What questions can they design around these things that they learn about? So I brought that into my classroom a little bit more and I understand a little bit better just by watching other teachers work with their own students. And I'm a teacher, I love to share these things because I see what effect they have on my students. Not that I say that they're great or anything like that, but when you watch the students play with these things, it becomes absolutely fantastic. Here at the school, we've had a workshop at the end of September on concept map making. And I wanted the teachers during our PD activity to see what it is that the kids do when they're building these concept maps. So prior to the activity, I videotaped my students on my phone and showed them making concept maps and how they were working on it, because the sell is all about the students. So I showed the teachers how this operates and watched the kids working on it, and of course you have their attention. And then you get them to work with concept mapping but as a student, so the workshop all revolved around hands-on, so this is what I do, here's what you can do too. And then afterwards of course the greatest compliment is people go off and use it. Then we had about half a dozen teachers go off and introduce concept mapping in their classroom, and I thought that's awesome.

Jenn Meeker- Glenn ran a workshop on concept mapping. And I was sitting beside a staff member who would be reluctant to probably try that. And he said, "Oh, I can't

do that in my course area." And Glenn overheard that and came right over with some examples. And that teacher tried it this semester. He's already tried it twice. I've had the opportunity to sit in on another new teacher, first year, we just gave him full contract this year, and he is excited and he's been working with Glenn and he just tried his first opportunity at knowledge building. And I had the opportunity, he invited me into his classroom to see the first day. So there's a teacher, brand new, who could have said, "Oh, I don't wanna try this right now." Or "Let me try it first, and then I'll have you come in." But he invited me in 'cause he had the confidence 'cause Glenn has been helping him along, mentoring him. And it was amazing, I watched the students who were very reluctant at first. To like, "You mean we don't have a test. "What is this?" They were questioning everything. "We're doing this on our own?" And Glenn had reassured him that the students would come along. And sure enough, they have. And I've been able to go in and see the final products and they're pretty amazing.

Glenn Wagner - I think we get stuck in our ways in a way. In other words, we get into this pattern of our teaching and I think every teacher wants their kids to be engaged. They want to love learning, they want them to engage with each other around the content that they're experts at. And sometimes, I don't think they know these different strategies that they can use. They haven't seen them. Because again a lotta teachers, we work in isolation, and we don't have a tendency to talk with other teachers of any significance where I say, "Hey, here's a really neat idea, you should try it. "Let's work through this and here's how it works," and daduhda. But you need that time to be able to do that. So I think when we had these times, the teachers had time to sit there and look at it and say, "Hey, I think I can use this for my classroom." Importantly, I think after the fact, that support needs to be there as well. So when the teachers were trying the concept mapping or the knowledge building, I'd be there. I'd say, "Listen, call me over." Or I'd come and take a look at some of the work that they would post up on their board and have a conversation about how it went. And of course, the teachers loved it because the kids were right involved in there. And I can't stress this enough, it's all about what they see the students doing. So it's about taking a teacher and say, "Come over and look at this thing. "I wanna show you this thing called voice over video. "And it's a really neat way of getting kids "to learn something, then turn and teach somebody else "about what is they learned." And then they see the kids in action. They say, "Hey, I'd love to try that for my class. "So show me how to do that." So once you get the teachers to come in and watch the students play and work in these areas where they're collaborating and communicating, they want that for their classroom. So that's the kinda thing that I love bringing in and let the kids sell it.