



# April Gathering: Asking Ourselves Hard Questions

Conversations...take time. We need to sit together, to listen, to worry and dream together. As this age of turmoil tears us apart, we need to reclaim time to be together. *Margaret Wheatley*

**Question Focus:** How could you use your remaining Project Success time to impact learners this year or to set the stage for next year? How can you assess the work this year and share what you learned to maximize our collective progress next year?

We are the stories we tell. **Please send me your story to post and share.** Researchers Nicholas Christakis & James Fowler found that “Social networks magnify whatever they are seeded with.” We have so many strengths, unique talents and successes to share. Imagine if we magnified their effects!

But we also have **failures**. We often “forget” to talk about these. Working together with colleagues, for example, is both powerful and difficult. (Check out our metaphors.) At a recent week-long Apple educators conference, this was the motto: celebrate failure. One of the attendees, Meg Wilson, wrote, “Failure is where we change our thinking about something. Failure is the opportunity to re-evaluate ideas, thoughts, and processes. Failure is where we discover what didn’t work. Failure is where we explore other options and opportunities. Failure is where we are challenged to do better, and to be better.” (Read her blog post: “It’s about the People, Not the Technology” <http://bit.ly/lz1xWI>)

## How do we know if we’ve succeeded or failed?

What are measures that have meaning to your team?

How are these assessments guiding you in moving toward our collective goal – success for each child? What information

have you gleaned that will put us on the path we are seeking? Wheatley writes that for measures to matter we need clarity of purpose, extraordinary levels of participation, information from anywhere that might contribute to those purposes, unique and complex formulas that would work for a while and then would be replaced by new ones. We’re looking forward to learning with each team about your meaningful measures.

The right measurements give us access to the information we need to grow - so what is "right" keeps changing.

*Margaret Wheatley*

**How valuable do you think this work has been or could be?** In sharing our work, we noticed the following patterns that can support us all in our goal:

- Connecting with individuals.
- Preparing to fail: it’s okay and provides learning for everyone.
- Letting go of control (example: kids help us with technology).
- Support group of knowledgeable teachers to assist in inquiry project.
- A broad question that allows multiple perspectives.
- Teamwork toward a specific end goal.
- Focus on student learning.
- Having set time to meet/collaborate.
- Building relationships: knowing what everyone is doing; knowing each other.
- Meaningful meetings with clear intentions.
- Thinking outside of the box: letting go, being flexible, innovative and enthusiastic.
- When we collaborate, amazing things happen!
- We are excited about new things happening!

Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.

*Winston Churchill*



**What are the failures we can celebrate?** We noticed the following patterns that can inspire us to “do better, be better.”

- Great strategies (or at least learning them) take time (so we sometimes don’t start).
  - We worry about curricular pressures
  - We worry about the extra work
  - We are not all interested in new ways (or “new” ways).
- Resentment can happen when some people get more “stuff” (technology, time, acknowledgement).
- Sometimes our “naming” gives people a way to be dismissive (Project Success, Reading Power, collaboration).
- We struggle to collect meaningful/relevant data.
- It’s difficult to communicate the vision/purpose.
- There are uneven levels of commitment.
- It’s very difficult to sustain enthusiasm and commitment throughout the school year.

### Ideas that emerged

- We need tools and time to build relationships.
- We need a plan for collaboration prior to the year starting.

While we wish to invite people to work WITH us, not LIKE us – and we know that it is our diversity that makes us strong, that fosters innovation, that supports our diverse learners – **there are some things that we already know make a difference for vulnerable learners.**

Collaborating alone can reinforce the status quo; it can produce consensus rather than challenge. But effective PLCs are not interested in cosy consensus or contrived collegiality, they want to push the boundaries of their collective knowledge rather than just sharing what is already known.

*Alma Harris and Michelle Jones*

Consider Atul Gawunde’s story. He devised a simple checklist for surgeons to use before any operating: It reduced death rates and complication rates by one third. (Read an article here: <http://bit.ly/JeYBJZ>.)

**But** only 25% of hospitals have adopted the checklist procedure. Why? He argues that the checklist demands a values shift:

1. Humility. “Recognize that no matter how smart we are, how well-trained, no matter how much experience, you will fail. You won't have it all together every time, every day.”
2. Discipline. “The way you overcome failure is by doing the same thing the same way, every time, over and over.”
3. Teamwork. "The belief that other people, no matter their station or specialty or background, can save you from an error."

We want to tell people – here are some practices that everyone should do. They make a massive difference for all kids and for our vulnerable learners in particular. We want to say – here is the research, here is the data, here is a checklist. **We want to say - just do it. But they won’t.**

**We need a values shift first.** We need to consider Peter Block’s hard, hard questions: What are some of the things we are complaining about related to this project (which is success for each child)? What are some of our contributions to the very things you are complaining about? In considering teamwork, how are we expanding our team to include each educator (it’s only by working together that we can support each child)?

See our checklist for growing your team.

Collaboration is less about broadcasting what I'm about and more about platforming what others are about. *Charles Lee*