

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 220.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday. I'm so excited to bring this topic to you today. I'm going to dive right in because this comes directly from one of my clients. She's actually going to be on the podcast in an upcoming episode. So you'll have to be listening for her.

But I have to tell you, every single session I have with this client, she comes in and 30 minutes later, we have transformation. She has blown her own mind. She's blown my mind. She is the most amazing first year principal. I love her dearly. I love her mind and how open it is to coaching. Every single session she applies the work and has a brand new belief system, a brand new thought, a brand new idea, a brand new strategy when she walks away 30 minutes later. It's so fabulous.

So I'm going to talk to you today about how to create teacher buy in. I know this is a topic that is of high value to you because as a leader, you're constantly thinking about how do I get teachers to buy in to my vision or this idea or something the district is rolling out. We're going to talk about that today. It's actually very simple and very doable.

So I'm going to give you the story of this client session today. I'm going to use the context of that session to help you understand this process. Just to give it context, so that you can apply your situation to this situation, but I'm going to use the context of this coaching session to help you. Okay, so this client is a brand new first year principal.

She came to me saying she was feeling uncomfortable about running her PLC leadership meeting. So she has grade level representatives who are in

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

this PLC leadership team. Every school has one in her district. She's new to this district. She's feeling uncomfortable around them. Didn't know how to run them. Didn't know how to handle them.

Her thoughts around PLC was the first obstacle we had to overcome. So when I asked her what's uncomfortable about these meetings or why are you feeling this resistance to them? She said, "I'm new to PLC. I haven't had formal training. I should know it as the principal." You see that coming up? She also felt like the district had been training their teachers for the last six years. "So teachers have had six years of training. They know more than me. As the leader, I know less than them." So she was feeling that insecurity, and that discomfort of feeling like she should know something that she didn't know.

Her reaction to those thoughts was she was feeling a little bit embarrassed, a little uncomfortable that she didn't know what she thought she should. In response to that, she said she was kind of faking that she knew more. She was faking that she knew and understood what PLC was.

So I said to her, wait a minute, you've been a teacher. You've been in collaboration meetings. She said, "Yeah, I understand that. Here's what we did in my former district, but we didn't do PLC." I said, timeout. What do you know about PLC? Let's break this down. PLC is not some big scary thing that happens to you that's out there in the abyss of the education world. It's actually very concrete. It's very understandable. Tell me what you do know and do understand about PLCs.

So what I want to highlight here is that our brain is going to default to what we don't know and what we haven't learned and what we're not capable and what we're not trained in and what we're not an expert in. I want to redirect the brain back to what we do know. So I asked her, what do you know? What do you understand? What is clear about PLC? What are you comfortable with?

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

So what she said was, “I do understand that it's about helping students to receive the best instruction possible.” She said, “I know it's about teachers being informed of what's working and what's not and where to adjust their instruction.” I said, yeah. At the end of the day, all that PLC really is, is that it's about making informed instructional decisions.

Yes, it's a process. Yes, it has a title, a name. Professional Learning Communities. Yes, there's a specific process that somebody has developed and offer to school districts. That PLC might have some specific language that they use in their process and their approach. But at the end of the day, it's about a group of teachers coming together and learning through a process about how to make informed instructional decisions.

So whether you call it PLC or collaboration or whatever million names you want to call, when professional people called teachers get together and discuss their instructional practices, what's working, what's not, and what to adjust, that's PLC in action. It's basically a cycle. So what teachers do is they identify what is working, and they keep that. There's no need to throw it out, right? If it's working, you keep it.

Then they look at what's not working. Where are we not getting the results we want, and why might that be? They create a theory as to what could be the problem. They make an adjustment for that. They adjust for it, and then they apply that adjustment, that theory. They put that theory to test, and they assess it. Did this work? Did this adjustment in our instruction work? They evaluate the impact and then they keep this process going throughout the year. That's a PLC.

I told her you don't need a ton of formal training. You don't need to read books or go to a workshop or get a certification paper that tells you, I am now hereby a registered PLC expert. All you need to know is that at its very core, you understand the process of collaboration. Yet, you might need to understand the specific structure to it or the language that PLC offers. but at the end of the day, you, as a principal, understand the purpose of collaboration.

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

So once we cleared that up, we moved on to discussing how to choose a topic for these PLC leadership meetings and to just choose one area of focus. The reason I highly recommend picking one area focus for the year is that it constrains you from trying to solve all of the problems and trying to cover all of your bases.

Teachers are going to highly appreciate when you practice constraint as a principal. Because they already feel like admins putting a million things on their plate, taking nothing off of the plate, going in all different directions, and asking teachers to do the same. Which is why we have scattered actions, scattered results, inconsistent actions, inconsistent results, and people feel like they're all over the place.

If you decide one topic for the year and you just dive deeply into that topic, you are going to feel clearer. You're going to feel like you have focus, and you can go deeper into that topic and really explore the core of the issue of what's going on, what needs support, what is actually working. What do we need to adjust, right?

So this client, I asked her if you just had to pick, there's no wrong answer. There's no right answer here. If you just had to choose a topic of conversation for this PLC leadership meeting, if there's one area of instruction that you want to talk about for the year, what would it be and why? She chose writing instruction.

I asked her why. She said, "Well, I've been talking a lot with the teachers. They say it's an area that they don't do for lots of different reasons. Some people honestly just don't like teaching it. Other people say, well, we don't have a formal curriculum for teaching writing. A lot of people say we don't have the time." I'm sure you've heard this. Other people were saying like, well, there are ELL students. Basically, like, it's hard to differentiate is what they were trying to say. They just felt like it was one more thing on the plate, and they didn't really have time to teach writing. Okay.

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

So those were the reasons. And she looked at the data and it was very inconsistent. She's noticed that some grade levels were implementing writing instruction, other people weren't. Even across a grade level, there were differences in teachers within a grade level who were spending more time or less time on writing instruction. So she loved her reason. She looked at the data. She loved her reason. She chose the one topic. I want to highlight this is very important. She felt good about this decision and this focus.

As a school leader, you have to love your reasons for making a decision. If you make a decision to focus on writing for the year, you want to love your reasons why. So she really felt strongly about this. I'm going to talk about why she felt strongly about it in a second.

But when you make decisions, you want to have clarity for yourself. Why am I making this decision? Do I love my reasons? That is going to help you create buy in. You have to be bought into your own decision before you can expect anybody else around you or those you lead to also buy in to your decisions and your vision for the year. That's really important. So I want to highlight that it.

It also helps you stay committed to staying on that topic throughout the course of the year. Committing to that one topic and not straying away and getting off track and talking about other things. You use that priority as the lens to filter out other things that you want to tackle. If you want to tackle writing this year, stick to writing for the year and then you move on to math or science or whatever it is you want to do. Okay, your brain is going to want to tackle everything at once. Bad idea. Doesn't work. Don't do it.

Okay. So number one, when you think you don't know how to approach something, as in my client didn't believe she had the expertise to hold PLC leadership team meetings. She felt she didn't know enough or that the teachers knew more than her, which could be true.

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

One, just be honest. Say hey, I'm new to PLC. I'm going to learn along the way. I'm going to welcome your expertise. I just want you to know that here's what I do know about PLCs. Instead of faking it till you make it, just be honest and assess what do you know, and what do you want to learn. Let teachers be aware of that. To be honest, they already know. They know what you know, and they know what you don't. So don't fake it.

But when you think you don't know something, I want you to ask yourself what you do know instead of listing all the reasons and all the things that you don't know. That's really powerful practice. Number two, choose one area of focus. Don't try to solve all of the problems at once.

When you focus on one area and you stick that out, it helps you stay focused. It makes your life so much simpler and so much easier as a principal because you know exactly what you're going to be talking about. You know exactly where you're headed. You know exactly why. You're going to keep other people on track. They will know what to expect as well. It makes it very simple to create conversations around one topic versus trying to tackle all of the topics. Your teachers will highly appreciate this.

So number three, we're going to talk about buy in. Buy in happens when teachers see the value in something. When they see the value for students, when they understand the value of teaching something to students, and they see that impact on students, they're much more likely to be committed to that.

But I'll tell you this, when they see the value in teaching something to students that values themselves as teachers, that's when they're sold. When teachers see the value in it for them, what's in it for them? Why should I spend my time and energy and attention on this topic, learning how to teach this topic, spending time out of my precious minutes with my kiddos on this curriculum or this type of instruction.

When they see the value in it for them, then they're sold. That is what creates buy in. To have buy in means to be completely sold on an idea or

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

on a vision or on a belief. When teachers see what's in it for them, way more motivating, way more committed, and way more likely to sustain the practice that you're aiming to implement.

I know as educators, we want to believe that we're sold when we understand something as being good for kids. That's true to a point. We know we go into teaching because we love kids and we want to support them. We want to help them evolve and become wonderful humans out in the world creating their own value and contributing and creating income for themselves and living great lives. That's why we go into education. We take value in that.

But we also take value, at our deepest level, at the human level, we are most deeply motivated and take action when something is of high value to us. When the effort required for something that we're working on has a payout for us. That's not being selfish. That's being human. So if we can agree as school leaders that every human on the planet approaches work in this way, then it's just easier to try and figure out how we create that buy in as a leader which equals value. Value creates buy in, right?

If somebody comes knocking on your door and says, "I sell weight loss." You're like, okay, but what's in it for me? Why do I care that you sell weight loss? Yeah, I might want to lose a few pounds, but why do I need to pay you? They tell you step by step this is why you're overeating. This is when you overeat. This is why you don't exercise. This is how you should exercise. These are the foods you should have. I have a step by step plan. I'm going to help you with it. You're going to lose five pounds in the next 30 days.

You're like, "Whoa, now I have a buy in. I'm interested." Because that person is offering you valuable information. You want the result. You see what's in it for you. You know you don't exercise enough and you want to exercise, but you're not sure why you keep blowing it off. This person is going to tell you why and how to get over it. That creates value.

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

For teachers, when you as the leader go into a staff meeting and say, “Hey, this is something we're going to implement. Why is it important to you?” I'm going to talk you through what my client and I discussed. It's so, so powerful. So okay, she chose writing instruction. I asked her what is the value of writing for students? She's like well, it's like a life skill that kids need. I said yeah, but let's go deeper.

She's like well, they need to know how to write and for everything in their life, whether they're texting, they're typing on the computer, they're writing on a piece of paper, if they're writing a greeting card. I said yeah. She said, “They need the skill. They need it to work. They need it to communicate. I said yes, keep going.

I said to her writing is a form of expression. It's a human form of expression. It is a gift that humans have been given to express themselves through the art of writing. Not every mammal on the planet has that gift. It is something that is an honor as a human on the planet. It's our obligation to ensure that the little humans on the planet are able to receive the gift of expressing themselves and their talents and their brilliance and their skill sets through writing.

Yes, I know reading and writing are connected, but I'm talking about that outward expression. The ability to express themselves through writing is highly valuable for students. It's highly valuable for the human race. This is how we communicate with one another. It's how we express love and joy. We tell our stories through writing. We tell our experiences. We help other people through our writing. It's very important. So we got on this tangent of all the reasons why it's valuable to teach children writing for their sake.

Now, we got to dig in here. What's in it for teachers? Why should teachers take time out of their teaching day to prioritize writing? What's in it for them? I asked her this question. How could teachers teach if they couldn't write? If no one had taught them how to write. How would they be teaching students if writing were out of the options for instruction. They could talk. They could do nonverbals. But if they couldn't write things down, anchor

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

charts, worksheets, paper. Anything in written form, if you took that out of the writing or out of the teaching realm, then what?

The value of teaching writing for teachers is so that they can continue to pass along the gift of expression. That's huge. They have been given the gift of learning how to write. It's the most important gift we can offer to kids because it gives them a way to express themselves for the rest of their lives. Teachers want students to be able to express themselves, to express what they know and how they know it. It all comes down to writing it and doing it in a way that's unique to every student. Because the way that one student writes his or her story is very different than their peer. The same is true with teachers.

We've got to understand the value of writing for kids, for teachers, for the school community. Why is it valuable that we all know how to write? What's in it for the world, for society? I love to ask this question. What is the cost of not prioritizing and spending time on teaching writing? If teachers were to say, "Okay, like we don't value writing. It's not that important. Kids don't really need to know it. I don't have time for it." What's the cost of making that decision?

We already know because some people are not prioritizing it in our classrooms, and kids are exiting elementary, middle, and high school and God knows college maybe, I don't know, not really able to write. We want to ask ourselves, what is our obligation to our students? Why are we in this? If we are not going to pass along the gift of expression that is writing, the means of expressing our talents and skill sets, what is that going to cost the world in the end? When we think of it that way, do we now value the time required to teach writing? Reading too, of course.

But we really want to slow ourselves down and say wait a minute, we're robbing children the gift of learning how to write because we don't like it or we don't have a curriculum or we don't have time. That is being selfish. Thinking that we don't have time to give kids the gift of expression through

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

writing is robbing them of one of the most precious gifts we have as humans.

So what's the short term value for teachers? Their students can better express themselves. They can better understand what kids know and what they don't know based on their ability to write. Children are going to be able to communicate with teacher and with each other. Teachers are going to be able to communicate to kids through writing. It makes it easier for them to teach. It makes their life and job easier when they teach kids how to write. They get to write. Children get to write. Writing is a part of what we do.

How can we sit here as educators and say we don't have time to teach writing? It's just one more thing on the plate. We don't have the curriculum. We don't really have the time. I don't really like to teach writing. There's too many language learners in here. It's too difficult to teach writing.

What? What's the cost of not prioritizing and spending time on teaching writing? What's the lifetime value of teaching all kids to write? What's in it for our teachers? Teachers have to see the value for themselves. Why is it important to them that children know how to write? That students have time for writing. That they learn the skill set of teaching writing. What's in it for them? How much joy and value are they contributing to the world when they offer that skill set, when they teach the skill set of writing. When they give kids time and space to practice it and to fail at it and to try again.

The way to get teacher buy in on any instructional topic is to show them the value. What's in it for them? How it impacts their ability to teach in the short term and the long term, how it impacts children moving forward and the world at large. Once you start getting into the value of what we're doing here in education, it gets very clear on what we need to prioritize.

I get it. There are lots of things to prioritize, and there's never enough time. Too much to do and not enough time. So this is where your school has to sit down and your leadership teams and have the conversations. What about our school is the priority? What do we know is working? What do I

Ep #220: Creating Teacher Buy-In

already know is working? Where do I see gaps? Then what do we need to adjust to close those gaps? To improve how we serve and things that we offer to kids. What's the value in it for us? How does it benefit us as educators to offer this to kids?

So sit with that this week. Think about your schools, what your schools need. What's the one thing you want to work on for the rest of this year or into next year? What's in it for teachers? Get the buy in. Once they see the value in it for themselves, it's very simple to move your school forward, and it's so fun to do it. Have an amazing week. I'll talk to you guys next week. Take care. Bye.

If this podcast resonates with you, you have to sign up for the Empowered Principal coaching program. It's my exclusive one to one coaching and mentorship program for school leaders who believe in possibility. This program is designed for principals who are hungry for the fastest transformation in the industry. If you want to create the best connections, impact, and legacy for yourself and your school, the Empowered Principal program was designed for you. Join me at angelakellycoaching.com/work-dash-with-me to learn more. I'd love to support you in becoming an empowered school leader.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.