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A Reflection on CARTE as Eastern Kentucky University's Response to Senate Bill 1

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Abstract

Using a grant from the Council on Postsecondary Education to respond to specific mandates of Senate Bill 1, Eastern Kentucky University created the Curriculum Alignment for Retention and Transition at Eastern initiative (CARTE). In its first phase, CARTE developed a hybrid professional learning community, an organizational network of embedded professional learning communities whose major task consisted of aligning sixty-four syllabi identified as key University courses in General Education and Teacher Preparation with the Kentucky Common Core Standards, and a chart for insuring deep learning on the part of the faculty. In addition to meeting 100% of our major goal, the embedded professional learning communities began inquiry into preferred pedagogies for implementing the standards.

Keywords: Senate Bill 1, curriculum alignment, professional learning communities, Eastern Kentucky University

Introduction

The Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1 (SB1) in 2009 in order to, among other things, improve retention and graduation rates while preparing future teachers in the Commonwealth. As part of its response, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) wrote a proposal to the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) that centered around two objectives:

- revise syllabi of the courses relevant to educator preparation and SB1; and
- train over 100 higher education faculty to align [course] content and pedagogy with SB1 and the Kentucky Core Standards (KCAS) including part-time faculty and those of independent institutions in the region.

In addition, the University described four planned products:

- syllabi in key introductory general education courses, undergraduate and graduate content courses, and pre-education courses for pre-service and in-service/school leaders will be aligned with KCAS;

- on-line modules will be created to assist other faculty and adjuncts with alignment to standards;
- faculty will utilize instructional strategies that facilitate student success and increase retention and graduation rates; and
- pre-service and in-service teachers and school leaders will be able to demonstrate application of the KCAS in lesson planning, instruction, assessment, and leadership activities.

The Problem

When Eastern received the grant, which was written by members of the College of Education, the problem to be solved was figuring out the most effective method of achieving the objectives and products. In summary, we developed six solutions that were a combination of processes and products.

Solutions

Solution I: Hybrid PLC. The most important decision confronting Eastern was who would oversee the grant and assure its implementation. The University

administration realized the entire initiative needed to be faculty-driven, non-political (i.e., not tied to a specific department or college), and handled by an individual/organization that commanded both campus-wide respect and trust while possessing the necessary expertise and credentials. The Teaching & Learning Center (TLC) with its motto of “Helping teachers help students learn” was deemed the best choice. Naming the new initiative Curriculum Alignment for Retention and Transition at Eastern (CARTE), the TLC’s co-directors, whose expertise resided primarily in professional development, formed an Executive Committee consisting of the two of them and two experienced instructors from the College of Education who were familiar with K-12 (both having taught in the area), the KCAS, and the intricacies of educational policies in the Commonwealth (in fact, one of the representatives served on the state’s Board of Education).

The next major problem was figuring out the most effective means of professional development. After some exploratory work with key campus stakeholders, the Executive Committee proposed a solution that meant synthesizing a new format. To promote professional development on campus, the TLC had found more success with professional learning communities (PLC) based upon the Miami model than with using the traditional “sit and get” workshops and forums (Cox, 2004). Similarly, the College of Education, especially in the K-12 environment, had relied upon the Stiggins-DuFour model more than paid consultants and all-day workshops (DuFour, Eaker, and Many, 2006). However, the two PLC forms differed from each other, offering individual strengths and weaknesses. The solution, then, was to create a hybrid version of these two models. While both models utilized a true community (instead of committee)

format, the higher education model prioritized research/scholarship while the K-12 model focused on reviewing student data to improve learning. The Executive Committee believed both emphases to be relevant to the work at EKU and therefore adopted both in the hybrid model.

What the Executive Committee (which in itself functioned as a PLC) created, then, was a synthesized version of the PLC that came about because of the complementary expertise in the two domains of professional development and education. While the extant models often diverged in formats and purposes, our hybrid PLC exhibited the following common traits:

- a trained facilitator (more Miami model) as PLC leader;
- bringing together instructors from common domains (both Miami and Stiggins-DuFour model);
- a dual focus on research (Miami) and assessment (Stiggins-DuFour); and
- a product – a syllabus that aligned KCAS with higher education student learning outcomes, that focused more on a course/discipline product (Miami model) than on improving an individual student/class (Stiggins-DuFour).

Solution II: Organizational Structure of the Embedded PLCs. As the KCAS involved various areas, we established the hybrid PLCs in six specific domains: English, Natural Sciences, Teacher Education, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Communication. However, in order to keep all PLCs flowing along in one direction and at a common pace, we decided to network the Executive Committee and the PLCs in an effective organizational structure. Between the Executive Committee and the individual PLCs, we created an 11-member Super PLC composed of the Executive Committee members and the

facilitators of each PLC as the organization chart in Figure 1 reveals.

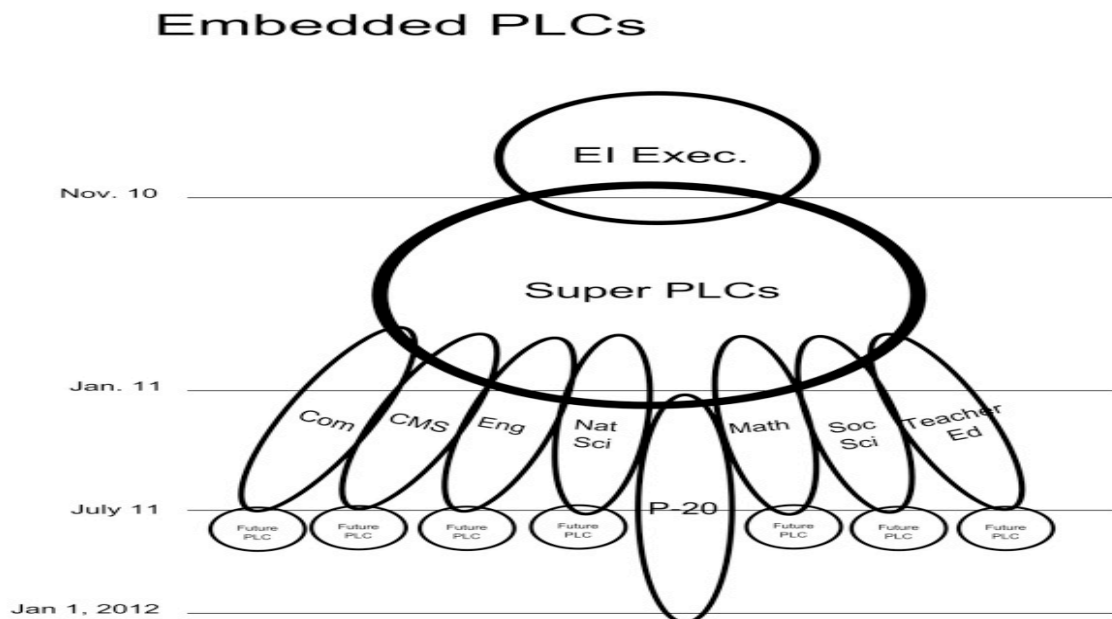
We held formal meetings of the Executive Committee each month and followed those up with the Executive Committee meeting with the Super PLC. The individual PLCs met 6-7 times per semester. The meetings' regularity ensured that problems, successes, challenges, and next steps were constantly being reviewed. Pertinent information was shared in both directions. Informal communications by email and in person obviously occurred quite frequently, as the TLC served as a clearing house/ground zero. We even hired a half-time Operations Specialist (OS) to handle the day-by-day logistics. The CPE grant paid for administration, stipends for PLC members during their first semester, and realigned syllabi. Results from the

CARTE Evaluation Report affirm that the Executive Committee and the Super PLC worked together effectively. Results can be viewed at

<http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>.

To keep track of our progress, we also established a BlackBoard website for all members of CARTE. On it we placed minutes of every meeting of any group within the Embedded PLC structure and realigned syllabi and other key documents. For instance, we developed pedagogical and retention strategies, created documents, and posted such things as "Optimal Student Learning as Persistence: How Faculty Can Contribute to Retention" and "Know Your Audience: Characteristics of EKU Students" for usage and review. Results can be viewed at <http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>.

Figure 1: Embedded PLCs



(Note: in the above figure, disregard the CMS and the P-20 PLCs since they are projections of possible future directions).

In addition, to reach other targeted groups, CARTE held workshops on and off campus. In January 2011, we sponsored an all-day campus workshop with specific breakout sessions on aspects of CARTE for essentially all those faculty from the desired disciplines who would be our PLC membership. Halfway through the process, we held another workshop for this group to update our progress. Furthermore, we trained facilitators, held a training session for the entire College of Education, met with the Council of Deans and Chairs Association, and even offered some on-line training. Sample workshop agendas can be viewed at <http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>.

Also, members of the Executive Committee fanned out around the region, offering training for independents (such as Midway, Union, and the University of the Cumberlands) and regionals (e.g., Murray). We even ran workshops to train teaching assistants and part-time faculty to help them understand KCAS, best practices in teaching, and retention strategies. Approximately 360 faculty participated in this professional development. Sample workshop evaluations can be viewed at <http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>. Evidence of ECU faculty participation is posted on the following website: http://coe.eku.edu/DataDashboard/EKU_Initiatives/SB1_PD_Roster.pdf. Finally, to ensure wider dissemination of our efforts, the CARTE Executive Committee and PLC facilitators (i.e., the Super PLC) presented four sessions at the CPE's Architecture for Implementing the Common Core Standards: Strategies, Partnerships, and Progress conference in Louisville in February 2012.

Solution III: The Product of Pedagogically Oriented Aligned Syllabi.

The pay-off for the process just described was the creation of syllabi that

both aligned with the KCAS and demonstrated the faculty creator's deep thought on the faculty creator's part about the pedagogical implications of those standards. 64 courses in general education (in Mathematics, English, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Communication) were identified as key; by 6/01/12, 39 aligned syllabi were completed, and by 8/01/12 (the end of summer school), the remaining 25 will be complete, and we will have achieved 100% of our goal. Specific courses and their disposition can be viewed at <http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>. Importantly, the faculty who created these syllabi are the very ones who will be teaching these courses in Fall 2012.

The completed product, however, is much more than a regular college course aligned with KCAS. A sample syllabus can be viewed at <http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>. To encourage and ensure that faculty designers reflected upon the pedagogical implications and the depth of their students' learning, we created a rubric for faculty self-assessment called the FIP-M Chart. At the end of each syllabus, faculty evaluated their expectations for their students in reading and writing according to four levels of complexity:

F=Factual. Instructors expect students to identify and explain what is expected by the standard.

I=Interpretive. Instructors prompt (through an assessment) students to apply the standard effectively in the context of the course/discipline.

P=Procedural. Instructors expect students to apply the standard strategically and intentionally in the construct of the course/discipline without prompting.

M=Metacognitive. Instructors expect students to articulate how the standard affects learning for themselves or others (i.e., think

about their own knowledge, the way they learn, and/or the way strategic thinking affects the learning of their students).

Syllabi must also indicate if students are expected to be able to teach the standards to others (e.g., as P-12 teachers) and at which level they are expected to do so. Obviously, the faculty creators needed significant time to engage their PLC in deep collegial discussion. While the alignment on the syllabi of the Student Learning Outcomes tracked the content that connected the KCAS to the course expectations, the FIP-M alignment forced faculty to consider the pedagogical implications. The alignment process, therefore, required faculty to think through *what* the learning expectations were in addition to *how*—and to what extent—they, as instructors, would teach and assess students' success on those learning expectations. The process led faculty to begin asking relevant and powerful questions about pedagogy and assessment.

Solution IV: Our Joint Website on Highly Effective Teaching and Learning.

The editors of *Kentucky Journal of Excellence in College Teaching and Learning* asked us to expand this section to a separate reflection, so please see our companion reflection elsewhere in this journal about our joint website at www.kycorestandards.org/teaching.aspx. Importantly, this website, along with CPE-developed online modules, allowed us to divert more of our grant into syllabus production.

Solution V: Key Documents and Resources. As our original proposal stated that “Faculty will utilize instructional strategies that facilitate student success and increase retention and graduation rates,” we knew that to help our PLCs with their tasks, we had to go beyond our pedagogical

website and provide some basic resources on retention. As we became immersed in the research, we discovered that one principle of retention dealt with an understanding of the particular students being taught.

Therefore, we created the two aforementioned key documents:

- “Optimal Learning as Persistence” which provides a summary of strategies faculty can utilize that increase the retention of students, and
- “Know Your Audience” which offers an insight into the idiosyncratic nature of EKU students.

Additionally, members of the Executive Committee have created resources for training other faculty members on the expectations of SB1 and CARTE as well as the aforementioned collaboration with CPE staff to develop the Best Practices for Highly Effective Teaching Module and Resources. The Executive Committee will also be considering the use of additional modules, particularly related to EKU's unique alignment expectations, as it moves into the next phase of faculty professional development. This need will be determined and met as the project coordinators evaluate follow-up and future opportunities.

Solution VI: An Independent Evaluation Report. To provide oversight on the various processes and products created by and for CARTE, in May 2012 we ran an online survey of faculty participants in the initiative. Thirty-seven participants (58%) responded, and at least 50% responded in each content area (the lone exception was Communication). In summary, participants indicated the value of professional development through the Embedded hybrid PLC models, a greater understanding of teacher preparation, and a greater knowledge of Common Core Standards. For the full

report, see

<http://www.tlc.eku.edu/keydocuments>.

Next Steps

CARTE was conceived of as an initiative that would evolve over three phases:

Phase I (1/11-6/12):

- *Organization*: establishing a core group of key faculty primarily in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences and Education.
- *Education*: learning about the Common Core Standards (CCS) and the Embedded Professional Learning Community (EPLC) structure.
- *Product*: developing 100% of designated CCS-aligned syllabi.

Phase II (7/12+):

- *Organization*: bringing additional faculty on board.
- *Education*: learning about assessment, teaching-learning strategies, and retention.
- *Product*: developing instructional strategies based on best practices and CCS-aligned syllabi as well as assessment instruments based on assurance of learning.

Phase III (7/13):

- *Organization*: increasing the critical mass of relevant faculty.
- *Education*: learning advanced assessment techniques.
- *Product*: using the assessment instruments as well as their results.

Phase I of CARTE has been extremely successful for a number of reasons:

- Our EPLC Model, synthesized from earlier PLC approaches, has been effective. Faculty value the dedicated

time for a deep conversation that the grant has created.

- The overall three-phase structure provides time to absorb the process and produce the aligned syllabi.
- By the end of the summer, CARTE will attain its goal of 100% aligned syllabi.
- EKU has received national recognition as demonstrated by invitations for CARTE participants to present at statewide and national conferences as well as publications.
- Seeds for Phases II and III have been planted: Our EPLC structure is in place, a teaching-learning website has been created with the CPE, key documents on retention and a profile of EKU students have been created, and the PLC participants have realized the importance of assessment and the need to develop assessments for their products.

Of course, the success of the next two phases will depend upon support by the administration and the continued hard work by the faculty participants. More attention needs to be paid to the implementation of the standards, the development of instructional strategies, and the creation of effective assessment instruments. And, obviously it will be a few years down the road before we learn if all this work has successfully impacted retention. Finally, while pre-service teachers in EKU's education programs are already incorporating the KCAS in their instructional plans, their clinical experiences, and student teaching (evidence of such can be found on the College of Education website, <http://coeaccreditation.eku.edu/eku-initiatives-kcas>), we will both monitor this work and see if other possibilities exist.

Conclusion

At this point we remain convinced that CARTE has been a proper, ethical, and effective response to SB1. Furthermore, the success of CARTE is a testament to the ability of faculty-driven initiatives to reach maximum potential. Finally, at an institution of higher education whose Quality Enhancement Plan is “EKU will graduate

informed, critical, and creative thinkers who communicate effectively,” CARTE provides evidence that its faculty are both models and practitioners of the QEP ideal as this report demonstrates in its creative processes and products devised to meet the Commonwealth’s mandate in SB1.

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