



A Department-Wide Journey towards Collaboration

**An Interview with Tyson Evans- 8th Grade Science
Teacher, John Muir Middle School- LAUSD
UCLA Science Methods Instructor- UCLA Center X**

By Jon Kovach, UCLA Center X Professional Learning Partner, Science

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“Take Chances, Take Time, Reflect.”

Tyson Evans has spent his entire teaching career at John Muir Middle School in South Los Angeles. During these 12 years Muir has changed back and forth from single-track, three-track, and four-track school calendars. The school has also endured a large number of teacher layoffs, multiple changes in administration and class size, and a reconstitution with a community-based non-profit organization. After reflecting on his journey he has discovered some underlying principles on how he and others have been able to grow as professionals and leaders in education.

Professional Learning: *“I constantly try to evolve my craft.”*

Tyson believes in the importance of being a life-long learner as a classroom teacher, “Finding people that have good ideas, and getting in there to pick their brain.” So when his teaching methods professor invited him to a professional development facilitated by the University of Wisconsin and SCALE (System Wide Change for All Learners and Educators), Tyson readily accepted. Tyson was engaged during the weeklong course because “it made sense to him.” His enthusiasm about the program was evident when teaching the model lessons to his students that semester. His dedication to the implementation of the model lessons and reflection of the process was recognized by the facilitators, so he was invited the following year to become one of the facilitators for that course. Tyson credits this networking and support from SCALE for helping him to gain the confidence to bring this model and structure of professional development back to his department. After sharing these ideas with his colleagues, several fellow teachers became facilitators for SCALE and other projects, “they quickly picked it up, and now they are taking it to their other careers and school sites.”

Finding this training allowed Tyson to pursue his professional growth further and reflect on “what was working” to guide his next steps in the classroom, and with his colleagues. He and other potential leaders in his department have also had the opportunity to attend other trainings, through West ED and Project 2061. Tyson believes giving all teachers, not just administrators or instructional specialists, chances to attend professional learning opportunities to grow is important, “It allowed teachers to feel as professionals, and have the time to talk and collaborate.”

Through these experiences, Tyson learned that meeting your audience’s needs is an important component when designing and facilitating professional development for other adults. “If you go in and don’t know the needs of your audience, and getting a feel of what they are expecting and where they are at, it’s going to fall flat on its face. By taking the time to create clear objectives and goals... and a clear agenda of how you are going to get there, that’s the key.” Once the goals are set, Tyson allows teachers to work with them on their own and explore ways

to incorporate them into their classrooms. This allows teachers to see the practicality so that ultimately the strategies will transfer to their classroom practice.

Risk Taking: *"We had a great principal and he really encouraged taking chances."*

Muir Middle School had the opportunity to participate in a state funded grant that focused on teacher retention (TRI- Teacher Retention Initiative through the UCLA Science Project). The department was not happy just meeting the requirements for the grant. The coordinator for the grant, the UCLA Science Project's former director, Irene Swanson, was very open to all their ideas and Tyson stated, "...we used the grant for everything we could get." The grant allowed them to structure a safe environment and provide support so teachers could take risks, share their ideas with others, express concerns and reflect about the results. This fostered shared leadership in the department so others felt comfortable leading professional development with the group. Tyson has taken his experiences and provides this structure to his methods class and his collaboration with novice teachers in his department. "Teacher leaders need to be willing to take chances, get out of their classrooms and seek opportunities. Seek out professional developments or collaborative groups in or out of your school site, and take those risks."

Reflection: *"One of the biggest keys to teacher leadership is taking time to slow down and reflect."*

Tyson has found that time for reflection must be incorporated consistently to grow as a teacher leader. With the TRI grant, his department was given time to develop many ideas to use in the classroom, but they also created a deliberate structure to reflect on how it was affecting student learning. "We also spent a lot of time reflecting on the work we were doing. What was being successful, what wasn't being successful, what do we need to scrap and start over, and what is it we need to revise?" This structure created accountability to implement the work and bring back student samples and data to discuss as a group. Through these discussions the department was able to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies in the classroom. Honoring this time for reflection allowed them to craft their own larger goals and objectives for their department that created buy-in and valued everyone's contributions. Muir is now being reconstituted and this has caused a large change in staff members with a sizeable group of novice teachers. Tyson is embracing this opportunity and reflecting on his past work to help him grow a new group of teacher leaders.