**Professional Learning Organizations**

**A Researched-Based Outline**

**By John Horak**

1. **Basic Premises of Professional Learning Communities**  *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* ***A PLC works collaboratively to identify student learning objectives***
* ***A PLC collaboratively creates common assessments***
* ***A PLC monitors each students learning on a frequent and timely basis***
* ***A PLC creates a systematic process to provide intervention for students who are experiencing difficulty and enrichment for those already proficient***
* ***A PLC focuses on data and uses data to fuel continuous improvement***
* ***The PLC concept is a process rather than a program.***
* ***The PLC process requires educators to create shared knowledge regarding how they can fulfill their collective purpose of high levels of learning for all students***

1. **Why Should We Use Professional Learning Communities?**

* ***Growing amount of evidence that documents improved teaching and learning with the use of PLCs.*** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*
* ***Significant gains in student achievement regardless of school demographics.*** *Newman,Wehlage, Secada (1996)*
* ***Documented increases in teacher and student learning.*** *Hall and Hord (2001)*
* ***There is a strong correlation between teacher collegiality and student respect, participation, and academic self-efficacy in the classroom****. McLaughlin & Talbert**(2006)*

1. **Establishing a PLC is a Process**

* ***Forming a PLC is a Process***
* ***Forming a PLC Takes 3 to 5 years***
* ***Leaders must provide the time for relationships to develop.***
* ***Leaders must support the implementation process.***
* ***Leaders must be patient***
* ***PLC are a way of conducting your professional life***
* ***PLC are a way of thinking***
* ***PLC is a way of doing business***

1. **Three Big Ideas of Professional Learning Communities**

* ***Intense Focus on Learning***
* ***Collaborative Culture***
* ***Focus on Results***

1. **The Four Fundamental Questions**

* **What do we want all students to learn?**
* **How will we know if they have learned it?**
* **How will we respond when they do not learn?**
* **How will we respond when students already know it?**

1. **What does a PLC look like?**

* ***Collaboration***
* ***Clarity of Student Learning***
* ***Data used to Diagnose Learning***
* ***Data Used to Improve Instruction***
* ***Systemic Intervention***
* ***Enrichment Activities for Proficient***

1. ***Where Do You Start In Implementing a Professional Learning Community?***

* **In order to create Professional Learning Community Leaders must develop an Effective Leadership Action Plan.**
* **The plan will guide the implementation of through the change cycle!**

1. **Four Building Blocks of PLCs** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **Mission**
* **Vision**
* **Values**
* **Goals**

1. **Mission (Building Block One)** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **Why do we exist?**
* **What are we here to do together?**
* **What is the business of our business?**
* **The mission statement must center on two questions…**

1. **What is it we expect all students to learn?**
2. **How will we respond when they do not learn?**

* **Without resolution of these crucial questions, mission statements will contribute little to the creation of a PLC.**

1. **Vision (Building Block Two)** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **What do we hope to become?**
* **What reputation do we want our school to have?**
* **How would people work together? Senge et al. (1994)**
* **How would people treat each other?**
* **How do we treat our students?**
* **What makes our school a great place to work?**
* **Vision presents a realistic, credible attractive future for the organization – a future that is better and more desirable than existing conditions.**

1. **Effective Vision Statements are:**
2. **Based on relevant background information and research**
3. **Desirable, feasible, and credible**
4. **Focused on clarifying direction and priorities**
5. **Easy to communicate**
6. **Developed through a collective process that promotes widespread ownership**
7. **Creating a Shared Vision** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **Building a shared vision is never ending work.**
* **Leaders Must be constantly……**

**Telling**

**Selling**

**Testing**

**Consulting**

**Co-creating**

1. **Values (Building Block Three)** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **How must we behave in order to make our shared vision a reality?**
* **Shared Values Create Culture!**
* **Guidelines regarding Values**

**Keep them few in number**

**Link them to statements directly to the vision statement**

**Be direct**

**Focus on behavior not beliefs**

**Focus on ourselves rather than others**

1. **Goals (Fourth Building Block)** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **Which step will we take first, and when?**
* **Goals need to be clearly linked to the vision**
* **Goals need to be created to provide short term wins**
* **Goals need to be clear**
* **Goals need to be constantly monitored**
* **Goals need to be limited in number (fewer than five)**
* **Translated into measurable performance standards**
* **Understood and accepted as significant by all parties**
* **Goals Must be Made Public Once Formulated**
* **Goals must have a timeline**
* **Goals produce evidence in order to demonstrate progress**

**“Intense Focus on Learning”**

1. **Focus on Learning** *DuFour & Eaker (1998)*

* **PLCs embrace their fundamental purpose as their fundamental focus. PLC schools look at everything through the lens of learning.**
* **Everyone must work together to focus on learning for every child.**
* **We don’t blame the parents we look at ourselves**
* **In a traditional school - Teachers just see their job to teach – it’s the students’ job to learn.**
* **In a Professional Learning Community - Teachers see their responsibility as ensuring learning! When that happens it changes the way that teachers, teach. Student learning cannot be left to chance it is too important.**

1. **What do we want all students to learn?**

* **Teachers must meet in groups and discuss exactly what it is that they want the students in their classes to learn.**

1. **How will we know if the students have learned it?**

* **Teachers should plan out common assessments**
* **Multiple formative assessments should be given**
* **Team meetings to review formative assessments are important**

1. **How will we respond when they do not learn?**

* **Intervention is mandatory**
* **Students must be told immediately, time cannot be wasted. Students are then assigned to a trained paraprofessional. They are told failure is unacceptable.**
* **Response is systematic, school-wide and timely manner**

1. **How will we respond when students already know it?**

**(Enrichment Activities)**

* **Start student mentor programs**
* **Geography Bee**
* **Intramural Sports**
* **Cultural Studies**
* **Peer Assistance Programs**
* **Academic competition Teams**
* **Manners Classes**
* **Cultural studies**
* **Community Projects**
* **Learning Fair Creation (Renaissance Festival)**
* **Get creative……**

1. **When a PLC Team of teachers is clarifying what it is that they want students to learn, they need to use the following tools.**

* **State Standards (TEKS)**
* **Textbooks**
* **District Curriculum Guides**
* **Assessment Framework**

1. **If the standards are put out by the state, why talk about them?**

* **People come up with different meaning for the standards.**
* **They need to decide what is important.**
* **This will help teachers to identify the power TEKS**

1. **Creating Common Assessments**

* **Creating common assessment generates a greater degree of commitment and internal accountability.**
* **PLC teams may want to start with this question first (How will we know if the students have learner it?) It will take the teachers back to question one and it is an easier place to start for some groups.**

1. **Goal of a PLC: Create assessments for learning instead of assessments of learning**

* **Formative assessments are used as a tool of improvement instead of a summative tool to measure learning.**

1. **Cultural Shift to a Focus on Learning**

* **Schools must focus on learning not teaching. This is a big shift. As leaders it is our job to sell this concept.**
* **Schools are not about adult comfort and job security. They are about student learning.**
* **Teachers must abandon the Bell Curve because having 5% of the students fail is unacceptable.**
* **Students don’t get to choose where they go to school most of the time, teachers do get to choose where they want to work! There are 1,100 school districts.**

**“Collaborative Culture”**

1. **Teams and Collaboration are Fundamental for PLCs**

* **Team is a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which they are held mutually accountable**
* **Collaboration is a systemic process in which adults in a building engage in constant collective inquiry in order to impact their practice in order to get better results.**

1. **A Collaborative Culture**

* **Teams should start out small until people learn how to work together.**
* **Teams should be thoughtfully created**

1. **Types of Teams**

* **Continuous Improvement Team**
* **Grade Level Teams**
* **Content area Teams**
* **Many others are possible…..**

1. **Protected Time on a Weekly Basis**

* **Leaders must find teachers the time in order to meet without adding to the length of the school day.**
* **Elementary PLCs should meet every day**
* **Secondary PLCs should meet 3 or 4 times a week**

1. **Results of Teamwork**

* **It lessens teacher isolation**
* **Teachers enjoy their job more and thus do a better job.**
* **Creates a teacher support group**

1. **Daily Common Planning Meetings**

* **The more often teachers can meet the better**
* **It takes time to establish relationships and values.**

1. **Leaders Should Monitor Teamwork Through Their Products**

**PLC Teams should Build a Notebook of their Products (examples)**

* **Lists of team norms**
* **List of team values**
* **List of common assessments**
* **An example of a common assessment**
* **Leaders should not accept an agenda as proof of a meeting**

1. **The Problem of Teachers Working Alone in Isolation**

* **In traditional schools teachers work in isolation. Every teacher is kind of like the king or queen of their own kingdom. Teachers in traditional schools decide what the kids will learn and they decide if the kids have learned it. Does this make sense? This makes them responsible alone for all students who are not achieving. There is no way in isolation that individual teacher alone working in isolation has all of the knowledge, all the skills and all the time to help every child who is not passing.**

**“Focus on Results”**

1. **Professional Learning Communities “Focus on Results”**

* **Teachers need to be focused on data**
* **Teachers need to focus on student Learning Data**
* **Data must be gathered in Instructional Focus Visits**
* **Leaders must sell data constantly**
* **Leaders must talk about data to illustrate its importance**
* **Teachers need to study and discuss data compiled about research-based instruction and its implementation**

1. **Main Factor that Sets Professional Learning Communities Apart from Traditional Schools**

* **Data driven instruction**
* **The importance placed on data is what sets PLCs apart.**

1. **PLCs Constantly Gather Data**

Four Major Overlapping Sources(Bernhart, 2004)

* **Data should be gathered on School Processes**
* **Data should be gathered on Student Learning**
* **Data should be gathered on Perceptions**
* **Data should be gathered on Demographics**

1. **Teachers should disaggregate assessment data collectively**

* **Teachers should have meetings to review assessment results**
* **Teachers should take the test objectives and student expectations when reviewing their assessments responses, and look to see how the students performed on corresponding questions.**
* **Teachers must continually discuss ways to improve student learning**

1. **Data Successes Leads to Celebrations**

* **Acknowledging Short term wins is a must**
* **Recognition makes people feel noted and appreciated**
* **It reinforces shared values and signals what is important**
* **It illustrates the values of the school and encourages others to act in accordance with those values**
* **It fuels momentum**

1. **Data to Improve Teacher Practice**

* **Walkthrough data should be shared with teachers and trends in instruction identified**
* **Teachers should study research based instructional articles**

1. **Why do we need to develop structural and relational practices at the same time for professional learning community success?**

* **We want professionals not technicians**
* **We want our teachers to learn in the most effective manner**
* **We want positive interdependence**
* **We want a successful learning organization not just individuals learning individually**

1. **Assumptions and Insights about Adult Change**

* **There is a growing body of research to indicate that changes in practices lead to changes in belief (Caine & Caine, 1997)**
* **Change comes when teachers share a common concern and commit to change because of a common purpose. However Hall and Hord (2001) outline multiple levels of concern and use through which teachers must proceed as they adopt innovations. Common purpose is not one imposed from without but one that is developed through deep discussion and reflection on commonly held values shared over a period of time as innovative instructional strategies are discussed and reflected upon.**
* **Change in practice requires clear targets and specific, frequent feedback.**
* **Changes are a result of time spent in a cycle of implementation that honors the four stages of change: Understanding, personalization, operationalization, and evaluation. (Hall & and Hord, 2001)**
* **Effective change can be enhanced by monitoring the level of use of new practices and supporting higher levels of implementation.**

1. **Adult Learning – The Key to creating a PLC**

* **Adults prefer to measure their learning against professional standards (Danielson, 1996)**
* **Adults learn best through social interaction (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007)**
* **Teachers should study research-based instruction methods in groups in order to improve the effectiveness of classroom instruction.**

1. **Leaders Must Focus on Creating Adult Learning as well as student learning**

* **Leaders must facilitate the formation of teacher PLCs**
* **Leaders must Facilitate Organizational Learning**
* **Leaders must teach teachers and staff relational skills & techniques**
* **Interdependent Groups and Systems must be created**

1. **Most adults have not been taught to work in groups!**

* **The authors suggest starting with small carefully constructed groups to facilitate success. (Groups of Three)**
* **Leaders must develop structural and relational practices at the same time for PLC success!**
* **Groups must be structured for success. If they start out good it will last. If they start out poorly it will continue.**

1. **Four Conditions for Effective Adult Interaction**

* **Relationships of Interdependence Based on Shared Norms**
* **Effective interpersonal interaction, face to face, this creates a social construction of meaning**
* **Methods of managing conflict**
* **Methods should promote group accountability**

1. **Assumptions and Insights about Adult Interaction**

* **If adults learn best through social interaction, then attention to adult interaction, interpersonal skills and group skills, is needed**

1. **PLCs need to support four conditions for effective adult interaction**

* **Relationships need to foster interdependence reflected in shared norms, goals, outcomes, assessments, and practices.**
* **Significant, effective interpersonal interaction, preferably face to face interaction, is needed to permit social construction of meaning.**
* **Understanding of various approaches to conflict and conflict management strategies are needed.**
* **Interactions should promote both individual and group accountability and responsibility.**

1. **An observation on Committees**

* **Committees Jump From: A disorienting Dilemma - to - planning a course of action**
* **This cannot be done – Small PLC Groups must spend time examining, and talking about feelings, values, assumptions, shared experiences, purposes, roles, relationships**
* **If these things are not discussed they will surface later in a negative manner undermining group effectiveness.**

1. **Teacher meetings should not just focus on student learning but teacher learning as well**

* **Teachers must engage in reflection upon research-based instruction practices**
* **Teachers must engage in collective evaluation of researched-based instructional practices**
* **Teachers should collaborate in meetings about research-based instruction techniques**
* **Teachers must assess new instructional practices as a group and improve their implementation for the teachers on that campus**

1. **Effective PLC Meetings**

* **Meetings must focus on teacher Learning, their interactions and support of student learning**
* **Meetings should discuss teaching practices in order to improve instruction**
* **Teachers should engage in reflection, evaluation, and collaboration**
* **Meetings should have time, agendas, topics and protocols must change in order to match the various meeting needs.**
* **Meetings should be about creating systems that ensures student learning.**

1. **Assumptions about student Learning**

* **Effective student learning is supported by ensuring that every teacher is an effective professional who actively seeks ways to improve their practice.**

1. **Pyramid of Interventions**

* **When PLCs fail it is because the Pyramid of Teacher and Leader Interventions has been left out.**
* **Adult learning is imperative if a school is to become a true learning community**
* **Adults must model new approaches and the learning process for their students**
* **Principals need to establish their own PLCs for modeling purposes and support.**

1. **How Do We create Effective Learning Environments for Adults**

* **Have adults engage in Experiential Learning**
* **Have adults engage in Collaborative Learning**
* **Have adults engage in Self-Directed Learning**
* **Have adults engage in Reflective Learning**

1. **How can we influence change in teachers’ beliefs and practices?**

* **Change is ongoing**
* **Change should be viewed as capacity building**
* **Change should be viewed as systems changing**
* **Change must match the individual and cultural beliefs as well as the context and purposes of the principal change agents – the teachers**
* **Change must attend to people’s reactions, feelings, perceptions and attitudes**
* **Changes in practice lead to changes in beliefs**

1. **Data and Change**

* **When student learning data is the sole source of information the emphasis is on changing students not changing teaching. Student learning data must be interpreted through for changes needed in teaching, thereby shifting the responsibility, ownership, and commitment for improved learning to improvements in teaching.**

1. **PLC Equation**
2. **What Conditions are Needed for an Effective PLC?**

(Authors Perspective – Foord & Haar)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Perspective** | **Author(s)** |
| **Tight and Loose Control** | **DuFour & Eaker (1998)** |
| **Stages and Conditions** | **Collay, Dunlap, Enloe,& Gagene** |
| **Centered Foci** | **Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000)** |
| **Structural and Social Supports** | **Louis, Kruse, Bryk (1995)** |
| **Ways we think and Interact** | **Toole (2001)** |
| **Four Commitments** | **Seriovanni (1994)** |
| **Technical Culture, professional norms, organizational policies** | **McLaughlin & Talbot (2006)** |
| **Collective Capability and Efficacy** | **Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy(2004)** |
| **Authentic Collegiality** | **Little (1990), Hargreaves (1994)** |
| **Leadership Actions and Support** | **Hord (2004)** |
| **Cooperative Learning** | **Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2006)** |

1. **PLCs Progress through Five Stages** Collay et al. (1998)

* **Initiating**
* **Forming**
* **Maintaining**
* **Sustaining**
* **Transforming**

1. **Six Conditions of a PLC** Bransford et al (2000)

* **Building Community**
* **Constructing Knowledge**
* **Supporting Learners**
* **Documenting Reflection**
* **Assessing Expectations**
* **Changing Culture**

1. **Structural Supports for PLCs Include** Louis et al. (1995)

* **Shared Values**
* **Reflective practice**
* **Deprivatizaion of success**
* **Focus on student learning**
* **Collaboration**

1. **Tight and Loose Leadership Simultaneously**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * **Tight Leadership** | * **Loose Leadership** |
| * **Tight leadership is the concept that some things are non-negotiable.** * **The leadership team must insist that certain objectives must be achieved.** * **Tight leaders must insist on...**  1. **Having a learning centered school and not a teacher centered school** 2. **Mission formulation using dialog.** 3. **Vision creation in small group discussion** 4. **Values must be discussed and clarified by teacher groups.** 5. **Goals are specifically identified in PLC meetings.** | * **Loose leadership is the idea that the leadership team does not mandate certain methods or means that are used to achieve an objective.** * **Loose Leaders Guide by asking questions** * **Leaders allow teacher groups to create methods through group discussions to enhance professional practice in the organization. PLC groups create products.** * **These groups demonstrate accountability to leadership**   **By creating…**   1. **Group Norms** 2. **Group Vision** 3. **Formative Assessments** 4. **Power TEKS** |

1. **Toole defines beliefs in community as “Ways we think” with effective thinking involving when…**

* **Systems thinking is used**
* **Shared purpose is present**
* **Collective focus on student learning is the norm**
* **Innovation in instructive practices is the norm**
* **Collective responsibility is established**

1. **Four Commitments Identified In PLCs** (Seriovanni) 1994

* **PLCs create a “Web of Relationships”**

This web is made up of the values, beliefs, norms, and practices that the teachers believe in. This leads to increased professionalism and the four commitments.

* **Four Commitments:**

1. Teachers using exemplary instructional practices
2. Teachers working toward ensuring learning for all (valued social ends)
3. Teachers commit to one’s practice and the practice itself
4. Teachers practice an ethic of caring
5. **Schools Differ From One Another in Three Ways**

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006)

* **Technical Culture:** views of students, conceptions of subject content, beliefs about student learning, and understanding of effective pedagogy and assessment
* **Professional Norms:** collegial relations, views of professional expertise, and conceptions of career
* **Organizational Policies:** criteria for course or class assignments and resource allocation

1. **Authentic Collegiality is a Must for PLCs** Little (1990)

* **A focus on collegiality has a strong relationship to the teacher’s willingness to examine and apply new instructional ideas, methods and materials resulting in gains in student achievement and increased professional confidence.**

1. **Warning against Imposed Collegiality** Hargreaves (1994)

* **Imposed collegiality stifles teachers collaborative efforts because it lacks a central purpose agreed on by participants for directing their own improvement.**
* **An authentic mentoring community sustains teacher commitment through deep formative dialog and reflection.**

1. **Principals Role in Promoting Effective PLCs**  Hord (2004)

* **Not only are principal’s actions crucial, but also teacher perception of his/her actions. These perceptions determine the teachers’ willingness to support the principal’s actions.**

1. **Five Dimensions of Leadership that is Crucial for PLCs** Hord (2004)

* **Developing Collective Values and Vision**
* **Supporting Shared Decision Making**
* **Promoting Continuous Learning**
* **Encouraging Collaboration**
* **Providing Support**

1. **Guidelines for Principals Implementing PLCs**

* **Attend to the building blocks of a PLC**
* **Communicate the importance of mission, vision, values and goals on a daily basis**
* **Create collaborative structures with a focus on teaching and learning**
* **Shape the school culture to support a PLC**
* **Foster an approach to curriculum that focuses on learning rather than teaching**
* **Encourage teachers to think as leaders**
* **Establish personal credibility**
* **Be fixated on results**
* **Recognize that continuous improvement requires continuous learning**

1. **How Do we promote Effective Relationships in PLCs?**

* **Leaders can increase the relational practices by teaching, guiding, and expecting professional learning conditions within PLCs.**
* **Creating the Conditions of Cooperative Learning**
  + - 1. **Interdependence of roles, responsibilities and goals**
      2. **Face-to-face interaction**
      3. **Effective interpersonal interaction**
      4. **Effective group processing**
      5. **Individual and group accountability**

1. **Leaders Must Insist on the use of SMART Goals**

* **Accountability is best assured with SMART Goals**
* **Specific**
* **Measureable**
* **Accountable**
* **Realistic**
* **Timely**

1. **Coaching Teachers is Essential for Effective PLC Development**

* **Only through the use of coaching are teachers able to achieve high levels of concept understanding, skill attainment, and the ability to apply and solve problems**

1. **What are the Roles and Responsibilities of a Coach?**

* **Effective use of questioning in order to broaden teacher perspective**
* **Focuses conversations on essential changes in practices**
* **Effective coaching increases commitment to change**
* **Coaching questions distributes responsibility for change among the educators**

1. **Why do PLCs Fail?**

* **Leaders must develop Structural and Relational Practices at the same time**
* **Leaders don’t develop the Relational Practices.**

1. **Creating a Professional Learning Community**

* **In order to create a Professional Learning Community we must develop an Effective Leadership Action Plan.**
* **The plan will guide the implementation of through the change cycle!**

1. **How can we develop an Effective Leadership Action Plan?**
2. **Identify the Purpose**

What do we want to get done?

What are the critical issues we need to understand better?

At the end is it going to be helpful to us?

Where are we and where do we want to be?

1. **Develop SMART Goals**
2. **Develop Individual Action Plans to Meet SMART Goals**

Develop individual action plans for each SMART Goal, distributed accountability for monitoring the plan, and shared accountability for assessing the progress on each of the plans.

1. **Assess Alignment and Effectiveness of Action Plans**