

6 Essential Characteristics of a PLC

(adapted from *Learning by Doing*)

1. Shared mission, vision, values, goals

Educators in a PLC benefit from clarity regarding their shared purpose, a common understanding of the school they are trying to create, collective communities to help move the school in the desired direction, and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) goals to mark their progress.

2. Collaborative teams focused on learning

In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to adult learning. “Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.”

3. Collective inquiry

Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team’s decision-making process.

4. Action orientation and experimentation

Members of a PLC constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas. They learn by doing.

5. Commitment to Continuous improvement

Not content with the status quo, members of a PLC constantly seek better ways to achieve mutual goals and accomplish their fundamental purpose of learning for all. All teams engage in an ongoing cycle of:

- Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
- Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implementing the strategies and ideas
- Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

6. Results orientation

Educators in a PLC assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice. “The success of the PLC concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.” —Richard DuFour

Developing Norms

Comments to the Facilitator: This activity will enable a group to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules. In existing groups, anonymity will help ensure that everyone is able to express their ideas freely. For this reason, it is essential to provide pens or pencils or to ask that everyone use the same type of writing implement.

Supplies: Index cards, pens or pencils, poster paper, display board, tape, tacks

Time: Two hours

Directions

1. Explain to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that govern individual behavior, facilitate the work of the group, and enable the group to accomplish its task.
2. Provide examples of norms.
3. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:
 - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
 - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
 - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.
4. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.
5. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.
6. Shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.
7. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.
8. When all of the cards have been sorted, ask the group to write the norm suggested by each group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms on a large sheet of paper.
9. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

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When Establishing Norms, Consider:	Proposed Norm
<p>Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When do we meet? ■ Will we set a beginning and ending time? ■ Will we start and end on time? 	
<p>Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How will we encourage listening? ■ How will we discourage interrupting? 	
<p>Confidentiality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Will the meetings be open? ■ Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence? ■ What can be said after the meeting? 	
<p>Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How will we make decisions? ■ Are we an advisory or a decision-making body? ■ Will we reach decisions by consensus? ■ How will we deal with conflicts? 	
<p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How will we encourage everyone's participation? ■ Will we have an attendance policy? 	
<p>Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What do we expect from members? ■ Are there requirements for participation? 	
<p>Used with permission of the National Staff Development Council, www.nsd.org, 2006. All rights reserved. From <i>Keys to Successful Meetings</i> by Stephanie Hirsh, Ann Delehant, and Sherry Sparks. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council, 1994.</p>	

The Professional Learning Communities at Work™ Continuum: Laying the Foundation

DIRECTIONS: Individually, silently, and *honestly* assess the current reality of your school's implementation of each indicator listed in the left column. Consider what evidence or anecdotes support your assessment. This form may also be used to assess district or team implementation.

We have a clear sense of our collective purpose, the school we are attempting to create to achieve that purpose, the commitments we must make and honor to become that school, and the specific goals that will help monitor our progress.

Indicator	Pre-Initiating	Initiating	Implementing	Developing	Sustaining
Shared Mission It is evident that learning for all is our core purpose.	The purpose of the school has not been articulated. Most staff members view the mission of the school as teaching. They operate from the assumption that although all students should have the opportunity to learn, responsibility for learning belongs to the individual student and will be determined by his or her ability and effort.	An attempt has been made to clarify the purpose of the school through the development of a formal mission statement. Few people were involved in its creation. It does little to impact professional practice or the assumptions behind those practices.	A process has been initiated to provide greater focus and clarity regarding the mission of learning for all. Steps are being taken to clarify what, specifically, students are to learn and to monitor their learning. Some teachers are concerned that these efforts will deprive them of academic freedom.	Teachers are beginning to see evidence of the benefits of clearly established expectations for student learning and systematic processes to monitor student learning. They are becoming more analytical in assessing the evidence of student learning and are looking for ways to become more effective in assessing student learning and providing instruction to enhance student learning.	Staff members are committed to helping all students learn. They demonstrate that commitment by working collaboratively to clarify what students are to learn in each unit, creating frequent common formative assessments to monitor each student's learning on an ongoing basis, and implementing a systematic plan of intervention when students experience difficulty. They are willing to examine all practices and procedures in light of their impact on learning.

Indicator	Pre-Initiating	Initiating	Implementing	Developing	Sustaining
<p>Shared Vision We have a shared understanding of and commitment to the school we are attempting to create.</p>	<p>No effort has been made to engage staff in describing the preferred conditions for the school.</p>	<p>A formal vision statement has been created for the school, but most staff members are unaware of it.</p>	<p>Staff members have participated in a process to clarify the school they are trying to create, and leadership calls attention to the resulting vision statement on a regular basis. Many staff members question the relevance of the vision statement, and their behavior is generally unaffected by it.</p>	<p>Staff members have worked together to describe the school they are trying to create. They have endorsed this general description and use it to guide their school improvement efforts and their professional development.</p>	<p>Staff members can and do routinely articulate the major principles of the school's shared vision and use those principles to guide their day-to-day efforts and decisions. They honestly assess the current reality in their school and continually seek more effective strategies for reducing the discrepancy between that reality and their school they are working to create.</p>
<p>Collective Commitments (Shared Values) We have made commitments to each other regarding how we must behave in order to achieve our shared vision.</p>	<p>Staff members have not yet articulated the attitudes, behaviors, or commitments they are prepared to demonstrate in order to advance the mission of learning for all and the vision of what the school might become.</p>	<p>Administrators or a committee of teachers have created statements of beliefs regarding the school's purpose and its direction. Staff members have reviewed and reacted to those statements. Initial drafts have been amended based on staff feedback. There is no attempt to translate the beliefs into the specific commitments or behaviors that staff will model.</p>	<p>A statement has been developed that articulates the specific commitments staff have been asked to embrace to help the school fulfill its purpose and move closer to its vision. The commitments are stated as behaviors rather than beliefs. Many staff object to specifying these commitments and prefer to focus on what other groups must do to improve the school.</p>	<p>Staff members have been engaged in the process to articulate the collective commitments that will advance the school toward its vision. They endorse the commitments and seek ways to bring them to life in the school.</p>	<p>The collective commitments are embraced by staff, embedded in the school's culture, and evident to observers of the school. They help define the school and what it stands for. Examples of the commitments are shared in stories and celebrations, and people are challenged when they behave in ways that are inconsistent with the collective commitments.</p>

Indicator	Pre-Initiating	Initiating	Implementing	Developing	Sustaining
<p>Common School Goals</p> <p>We have articulated our long-term priorities, short-term targets, and timelines for achieving those targets.</p>	<p>No effort has been made to engage the staff in establishing school improvement goals related to student learning.</p>	<p>Goals for the school have been established by the administration or school improvement team as part of the formal district process for school improvement. Most staff would be unable to articulate a goal that has been established for their school.</p>	<p>Staff members have been made aware of the long-term and short-term goals for the school. Tools and strategies have been developed and implemented to monitor the school's progress toward its goals. Little has been done to translate the school goal into meaningful targets for either collaborative teams or individual teachers.</p>	<p>The school goal has been translated into specific goals that directly impact student achievement for each collaborative team. If teams are successful in achieving their goals, the school will achieve its goal as well. Teams are exploring different strategies for achieving their goals.</p>	<p>All staff members pursue measurable goals that are directly linked to the school's goals as part of their routine responsibilities. Teams work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable. The celebration of the achievement of goals is part of the school culture and an important element in sustaining the PLC process.</p>

Walk Around Survey



<p>PLC's are like _____ because _____</p>	<p>My thoughts...</p>
<p>Ideas from Survey Partner 1</p>	
<p>Ideas from Survey Partner 2</p>	