Professional Learning Communities

Part 2 of 3

**Collaborative Culture:**

***Overarching Idea:*** *instead of sharing data, they [teachers] respond to data, which requires a sense of mutual accountability and changing classroom practices.*

**6 Core Principles of PLCs:** Richard Dufour believes that to become a professional learning community you have to do all 6 of the core principles on a daily basis: 1. create a culture of collaboration, 2. have a shared mission, vision, and value, 3. have a collective desire to implement best practice, 4. have an action-orientation, 5. be focused on continuous improvement, 6. and focus on results. **“You must do them all.”**

**Focus Question:** What helps students learn at highest level?

**Current PLC Issues:**

1. Issues at fundamental aspects of PLC process--- schools need to delve in at deeper level.
2. It has been superficial. Example: we will organize people into groups and give them time together--with no clear purpose or goal.
3. Teachers must stop saying: (abolish state testing, parents bring better kids, need better administrators)
4. WE need to change as a profession (as a collaborative teaching community) “Stop being passive and take some initiative”
5. Shift toward: “Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself” -Rumi *(The ecstatic poems of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, a Persian poet and Sufi master born 807 years ago in 1207, have sold millions of copies in recent years, making him the most popular poet in the US.)*

**Steps to an effective/productive PLC:**

1. **Talk about Achievement:** The PLCs must come together and decide what their **core values/ beliefs** are and **what is the purpose of school/teaching?**
2. **Purpose of school:** prepare every student for continuous learning beyond K-12 system (must be lifelong learners) What do they need to be true lifelong learners?
3. **How do we define this purpose/ how should we provide evidence?:** present evidence of students getting better (how can you present that?-- *reduction in failure rate, student work portfolio, student satisfaction surveys, state testing scores, etc*.) In other words, this is what success looks like (show proof)!
4. **Every school/learning community should debate their purpose and the way they provide evidence on their own. However you define it, provide evidence that your students are successfully learning or becoming successful.**
5. **Create a Viable Curriculum:** elect to teach certain standards and not others. Focus on more skills and thought rather than standards. Timeline, concepts, skills, thought, critical analysis, project-based learning, etc. (prepare kids for success at next level)
6. **Collaborate on best practices:**

* Focus student learning on essential aspects vs. memorizing things/facts
* Curriculum vs. Content standards-- overlap, by and large curriculum is tool for helping kids acquire knowledge and skills.
* Don’t let textbook or state department lead--what are the outcomes? Gain better understanding of standards (endurance leverage) preparing students for success (overarching lessons) rather than “common core”
* Guaranteed curriculum= need approval by actual teachers that implement these standards. You cannot get it by implementing and handing out documents, as the state department does.
* “Narrow focus in the curriculum”
* Mission, vision, value, goals
* Need to have teacher voices and community stakeholders

**Example of PLC goals (small to large):**

* Constantly check for student understanding
* As a team, gather evidence on if students are learning through common assessments?
* Identify kids that didn’t learn
* The reason to develop teams is to improve and inform professional practice
* At the end of every common assessment find one area where a student/member excelled.
* What were the strategies? Can we all use that? Look at strengths.
* Discover through evaluations and student performance
* Use effective instructional tools to make a better learning community.
* Teams must first admit, then address lack of skills, resources, or proper instructional strategies/tools individually
* To address this the entire team must collaborate via internet with other professionals, do professional development, collaborate with another team in the building, and/or seek resources and ideas

***Richard Dufour states, “Unless you are using actual evidence of student learning to inform and improve practice then you are not yet a professional learning community.”***