



The Power of Professional Learning Communities: Bringing the Big Ideas to Life

by

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The Power of Professional Learning Communities

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community. **The path to change in the classroom lies within and through professional learning communities.**

- Milbrey McLaughlin, 1995



The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

- We accept learning as the fundamental purpose of our school and therefore are willing to examine all practices in light of their impact on learning.
- We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We cultivate a collaborative culture through development of high performing teams.
- We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.



Why Should We Collaborate?

- Gains in Student Achievement
- Higher Quality Solutions to Problems
- Increased Confidence Among All Staff
- Teachers Able to Support One Another's Strengths and Accommodate Weaknesses
- Ability to Test New Ideas
- More Support for New Teachers
- Expanded Pool of Ideas, Materials, Methods

- Judith Warren Little, 1990



Group IQ

There is such a thing as group IQ. While a group can be no smarter than the sum total of the knowledge and skills of its members, it can be much "dumber" if its internal workings don't allow people to share their talents.

- Robert Sternberg



Team Defined

A team is a group of people working interdependently toward a common goal for which members are mutually accountable.



What is Collaboration?

A systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.

- DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2002



The Focus of Collaboration

Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong.

- Michael Fullan, 2001



The most important question to consider when building a collaborative culture is not

“do we collaborate,” but rather,

“what do we collaborate about?”



**Teams in PLCs Collaborate
About the Right Things:
4 Critical Questions of Learning**

- What is it we expect them to learn?
- How will we know when they have learned it?
- How will we respond when they don't learn?
- How will we respond when they already know it?



Teams in PLCs...

Collaborate on the
Right
Issues
To
Impact
Child &
Adult
Learning





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The Importance of Building Shared Knowledge

- Professional Learning Communities always attempt to answer critical questions by BUILDING SHARED KNOWLEDGE, that is LEARNING TOGETHER.
- If people make decisions based upon access to the same pool of information, they increase the likelihood that they will arrive at the same conclusion.



Resources To Help Teams Build Shared Knowledge on Essential Outcomes

- State/Provincial/National Standards (e.g.NCTE/NCTM)
- District or department curriculum guides
- Assessment Frameworks (how will they be assessed)
- Vertical articulation
- Data on past student performance (local/state/national)
- Examples of student work and the criteria by which the quality of student work will be judged
- Textbook Presentation of Curriculum
- Curriculum Framework of High Performing Schools
- Workplace Skills/SCANS Report



Teams in PLCs Collaborate About the Right Things: 4 Critical Questions of Learning

- What is it we expect them to learn?
- **How will we know when they have learned it?**
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Two Essentials of Performance Based Assessment

- Can we agree on the criteria by which we will judge the quality of student work?

- Can we apply those criteria consistently (inter-rater reliability)?



Why Common Assessments

- *Efficiency* - by sharing the load teachers save time
- *Fairness* - promotes common goals, similar pacing, and consistent standards for assessing student proficiency
- *Effective monitoring* - provides timely evidence of whether the guaranteed and viable curriculum is being taught and *learned*
- *Team capacity* - collaborative teacher teams are able to identify and address problem areas in their program
- *Collective Response* - helps teams and the school create timely, systematic interventions for students
- *Informs individual teacher practice* - provides teachers with a basis of comparison regarding the achievement of their students so they can see strengths and weaknesses of their teaching



Interpreting Data

- Student Performance on the High-Stakes State Math Test:
 - Mean** **178**
 - Median** **177**
 - Mode** **180**
- Use the data presented above to answer the following question: To what extent is this school helping all students achieve at high levels in math?



Data Do Not Always Inform

Schools typically suffer from the DRIP syndrome - Data Rich, Information Poor.

Data alone will not inform professional practice. Data can become a catalyst for improvement only when we have a basis of comparison.



Main Idea/ Detail

Student #	Homeroom Class # 4
1	70
2	70
3	80
4	80
5	100
6	40
7	70
8	50
9	80
10	70
11	50
12	50
13	100
14	100
15	100
Avg. Score	74%
# Proficient	7 (47%)

STUDENT	Class #1	Class #2	Class #3	Class # 4	Total
1	50	90	100	70	
2	60	90	100	70	
3	70	90	80	80	
4	92	90	100	80	
5	90	90	100	100	
6	100	100	92	40	
7	90	100	80	70	
8	90	83	83	50	
9	83	100	100	80	
10	60	92	90	70	
11	92	100	90	50	
12	83	100	100	50	
13	92	100	80	100	
14	90	90	80	100	
15	100	100	90	100	
16	80	100	80		
17	90	92			
18	100				
Avg. Score	84%	95%	90%	74%	86%
# Proficient	14	17	16	7	54/66



To inform and impact professional practice, ensure all teachers receive:

- Timely and frequent information on the achievement of their students,
- In meeting an agreed-upon standard,
- On a valid assessment,
- In comparison to others.



**Sharing Data:
Beginning of Community**

Collecting data is only the first step toward wisdom, but sharing data is the first step toward community.

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr.



Formative Assessments Can Improve Student Learning

- A focus on the use of formative assessment in support of learning, developed through teacher learning communities, promises not only the largest potential gains in student achievement, but also provides a model for teacher professional development that can be implemented effectively at scale.

Dylan William and Marnie Thompson



Formative Assessments Can Improve Student Learning

- A review of over 250 articles by researchers from several countries established that improving formative assessments raises achievement. Few initiatives in education have had such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards.

Paul Black, et. al



Insist on Common Assessments

Teachers of the same course or grade level should have absolute common agreement on what they expect all their students to know and be able to do. Therefore, they should have common, collaboratively scored assessments at least once each quarter. The classroom activities leading up to those assessments might differ. The need to administer the same assessment should not differ.

Doug Reeves



Assessment *for* learning as the catalyst for school improvement

- Assessment for learning, when done well, is one of the most powerful, high-leverage strategies for improving student learning that we know of. Educators *collectively* become more skilled and focused at assessing, disaggregating, and using student achievement as a tool for ongoing improvement.

Michael Fullan



Key to Improved Results

Powerful, proven structures for improved results already exist. They begin when a group of teachers meet regularly as a team to identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set achievement goals, and then share and create lessons and strategies to improve upon those levels.

Mike Schmoker



Common Assessments can Improve Student Learning

- To the extent that teachers work together in teams to 1) analyze, understand and deconstruct standards, 2) transform standards into high quality classroom assessments, and 3) share and interpret results together, they benefit from the union of their wisdom about how to help students continue to grow as learners.

Rick Stiggins



Keys to “Formative Assessments”

To determine if an assessment is formative, ask:

1. Is it used to identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning?
2. Are students who are having difficulty provided with additional time and support for learning?
3. Are students given an additional opportunity to demonstrate their learning?



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**What Happens When
Kids Don't Learn?**

High expectations for success will be judged not only by the initial staff beliefs and behaviors, but also by the organization's response when some students do not learn."

- Larry Lezotte, 1991



A PLC Creates a specific plan for intervention and enrichment that...

- ✓ENSURES students receive additional time and support for learning
- ✓Is DIRECTIVE, not invitational
- ✓Is TIMELY, not sluggish
- ✓Is SYSTEMATIC, not random



Learning by Doing

- Capacity building..is not just workshops and professional development for all. It is the daily habit of *working together*, and you can't learn this from a workshop or course. You need to learn it by doing it and having mechanisms for getting better at it on purpose.

Michael Fullan
