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## ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes two projects--one in the United States, one in England--that studied professional learning communities (PLCs). Part I of the paper describes the two projects. The American project is called the Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement project. The purpose of this study was to document and examine evidence of efforts taking place in American schools actively engaged in creating PLCs. The English project, Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities, set out to identify and provide practical examples of the following: characteristics of effective PLCs in different kinds of schools; key factors inside and outside schools that seem to help or hinder the development of PLCs; and innovative practices for ongoing professional learning and development. Part II of the paper discusses the commonalities of the two projects. Part III discusses emerging research issues stemming from the projects from the both the American and English perspectives. Appended are a heuristic model of a professional learning community, an assessment instrument, a description of research protocol, a matrix of a PLC organizer, and a list of PLC dimensions and critical attributes. (WFA)

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# An International Perspective on the Development of Learning Communities.

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# An International Perspective on the Development of Learning Communities

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## AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Interest in the concept of a professional learning community, and its perceived importance, stem from the belief that when teachers work collaboratively the quality of learning and teaching in the organisation improves (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). It is widely accepted that teacher professional development opportunities can promote individual teacher development, school improvement, and higher standards of pupil learning. Indeed, the progress of educational reform is claimed to depend on teachers' individual and collective capacity (Elmore, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Newmann and Associates, 1996; Little, 1999), and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupil learning (Geijsel, van den Berg & Slegers, 1999; Stoll, 1999). The claims for *professional learning communities* are even more inclusive. The notion of a 'community' draws attention to the potential that a broad range of people based inside and outside a school could mutually enhance each other's learning and school development. Strategies and processes could, therefore, be identified which help school communities to work together to promote individual, collective and organisational learning. While student learning would be the ultimate goal, a thriving professional learning community would offer school staff the opportunity of a rewarding and satisfying work environment, contributing to resolving issues of teacher recruitment and retention, as well as enhancing staff practice and leaders' repertoires of responses for dealing with complex issues (Toole & Louis, 2002).

This symposium has provided the opportunity for two project teams from two different countries to share our research, and through the process of attempting to come to some collective

understanding of the phenomenon we are studying – professional learning communities – in a sense we are, ourselves, engaging in creating a new professional learning community. In this paper we first briefly describe our two projects. Next, we look at our commonalities and then present some issues that we continue to grapple with in our projects. Our main aim, however, in this interactive symposium, is to be able to learn from each other and others researching professional learning communities, to achieve a better understanding within and across country contexts.

## Part I

### Summary of Projects in the United States and England

#### *United States Project: Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement*

The *Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* project presents original research conducted in PreK-12 schools engaged in creating professional learning communities. The authors document examples of schools actively working to reculture by initiating and implementing actions to improve student learning in their upcoming book, *Reculturing Schools as Professional Learning Communities* (Huffman & Hipp, in press, 2003).

The purpose of their work is to document and examine evidence of efforts taking place in rural, urban, and suburban PreK-12 schools that were actively engaged in creating professional learning communities (PLCs). Literature is reviewed that defines and identifies the distinguishing dimensions of PLCs – dimensions that study schools intentionally sought to create. A five-year, federally funded research study is explained including the methodology and demographics of the study schools. A Professional Learning Community Organizer (PLCO) (see Appendix A) is introduced, which realigns with Shirley Hord's (1997) original research. The

organizer provides the framework to explain the five PLC dimensions and related critical attributes (See Appendix B). The PLCO also merges Fullan's (1985) phases of change model, which includes: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization.

Huffman and Hipp (2003) provide extensive evidence of the progressive development of a PLC from initiation to implementation using exemplars and non-exemplars from interviews that either hinder or facilitate creating and sustaining PLCs. A new assessment tool, the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) (See Appendix C) and the *Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol* (Hord, 1997a) (Appendix D) are also included and can be used for diagnosis and evaluation of schools as they work toward school reform efforts.

Readers are also presented with information that connects professional learning community work to *a new approach* to school improvement. Five case studies have been written based on the work in study schools at all phases of development. These case studies can be used in schools and university classrooms for the purpose of engaging educators in reflection, open dialogue, problem finding, and problem solving. This first-hand documented information provides readers with unique issues as they wrestle with the challenges of transforming schools into organizations that meet diverse student needs and sustain school improvement.

Finally, lessons learned from this problem-based learning can easily transfer to the readers' own experiences in PreK-12 schools. The authors conclude by highlighting significant findings, reviewing the most recent related research that addresses sustaining such efforts, and offering suggestions for school leaders to consider as they engage in this demanding *undertaking* to institutionalize and sustain PLCs.

*English Project: Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*

Understanding of effective professional learning communities in English schools is still at a relatively early stage. The belief, however, that the quality of learning and teaching can be enhanced by teachers working and learning together has led the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) to fund a project. This project, *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, is being carried out by a team from the Universities of Bristol and Bath in England, from January 2002 to October 2004.

The aim of the project is to identify and provide practical examples of:

- the characteristics of effective professional learning communities in different kinds of schools;
- key factors inside and outside schools which seem to help or hinder the development of these communities;
- innovative practices for ongoing professional learning and development.

Project methodology includes:

- conducting a literature survey;
- developing a framework of characteristics and outcome indicators of effective professional learning communities;
- surveying headteachers (principals) or continuing professional development (CPD) co-ordinators of a national sample of nursery (pre-school), primary (elementary), secondary and special schools and providing them with feedback;

- examining links between characteristics of effective professional learning communities and student progress through detailed statistical analysis;
- carrying out detailed case studies in 16 different types of school settings or clusters;
- bringing representatives from case study schools together for workshops to share experiences and research findings;
- disseminating findings in ways to support those involved in creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities.

The project team is taking as its working definition that *an effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning* (Stoll et al, 2003a).

## Part II

### Commonalities Across International Studies

Evidence of commonalities exists across the England and the United States studies in purpose, design/process, and assessment of schools as learning communities.

#### *Purpose*

Since Peter Senge published his landmark book in 1990, *The Fifth Discipline*, both the corporate world and leading educators have been struggling with ways to foster and sustain learning communities, the “promise” for organizational reform. Practitioners and researchers alike have provided organizations a myriad of images as to “how” these learning communities should look, but few have formed these visions into reality (Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2000; Hord, 1997; Senge, 1990). The task has been considerably more



formidable than anticipated, thus the challenge of moving from concept to capability continues (Fullan, 2000; Zempke, 2000). The purpose of both projects is evident in the definition conceptualized by the English staff: *to create effective professional learning communities that have the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in school communities with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning.*

### *Design/Process*

The *Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* project began as a five-year federally funded R & D, intervention project (1995-2000) and continued with a team of six researchers. The English project, *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, with a team of seven researchers and two seconded teachers, is nationally funded and has a 2 ½ year focus from 2001-2004 on R & D, which emphasizes understanding and dissemination. Both studies were initiated with significant reviews of the literature (within and outside of education), not only exploring learning communities, but also the process of change. The United States project identified five dimensions of PLCs that emerged. These dimensions were reinforced with evidence from study schools moving from initiation, implementation, and, to a limited degree, institutionalization. This project focused initially on teachers and administrators. Researchers from the English project identified five participant groups related to stages of change: non-starters, starters, developers, mature and regressors. The inclusion of the stage of regression is critical to consider, as it speaks to the issue of sustainability. Sustaining professional learning communities is necessary to embed the dimensions of a PLC into the culture of a school, and to determine the effects on student learning. The two projects address the problematic, yet essential nature of involving both internal and external membership. These

stakeholders include both professional (administrators and faculty) and non-professionals (staff, parents, and community members) into the larger learning community.

Both projects involved multiple schools across wide regions including all grade levels, socio-economic levels, and settings – rural, suburban, and urban. The SEDL project, when funded, engaged a single Co-developer (change agent) in each of 12 carefully selected study sites (ranging from initiation to implementation), progressing to six schools, with support and coordination from SEDL staff and numerous training opportunities. The English project includes 16 study sites and is mainly using researchers and seconded teachers to study creation, development, and sustainability issues in each school, although teachers from the schools will be involved in workshops. Both project staff have spent a great deal of time in their schools, and have collected significant amounts of data to guide future efforts. These efforts have evolved into the conceptualization of an emergent heuristic model of process of operation and development of PLCs in schools (See Appendix E) and the PLCA (See Appendix A).

#### *Assessment of Schools as Learning Communities*

The complexity that exists in identifying schools as PLCs offers a challenge for researchers, principals, staff, parents, and other stakeholders. While many principals and faculties conceptualize their schools as organizations operating as learning communities, they rarely meet the operational criteria. Schools that are operating as professional learning communities must foster a culture in which learning by all is valued, encouraged, and supported. Additionally, within such communities, “the staff, intentionally and collectively, engage in learning and work on issues directly related to classroom practice that positively impacts student learning” (Cowan & Hord, 1999, p. 4). Thus, in assessing the level of progress along a

continuum of PLC development, specific school and classroom practices must be measured as determining factors of this development for school renewal.

The English staff has developed a national school questionnaire, *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, based on the literature review, with input on the items from practitioners. It has been distributed to 2300 schools across England. Methods of analysis involve factor analysis and correlational comparisons with independent outcome measures. The tool has been designed to collect an extensive amount of information including: opinions about professional learning in the school; perceptions of the features of a PLC in a school and the facilitating and inhibiting factors for such communities; and factual items about the range and extent of professional development activities in the school. The analysis is focused on four key areas/tasks: a) to establish basic descriptive data on the characteristics of PLCs, how professional development is conceived, developed, managed and resourced; and how the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) is evaluated at the school level; b) to conduct a factor analysis to identify key factors related to the development of a PLC; c) the impact of CPD and PLCs on teacher and student outcomes; and d) the selection of schools. Methods of analysis will involve factor analysis and comparisons with independent outcome measures, including Multilevel modeling to look at links with student progress and other student outcome data.

The *Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA)* (Olivier, Hipp & Huffman, 2003) extends Hord's (1998) work, the *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* questionnaire, and is designed to assess perceptions about the school's principal, staff, and stakeholders (parents and community members) based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community and the critical attributes. The questionnaire contains statements about

practices that occur at the school level. This measure serves as a more descriptive tool of those practices observed at the school level relating to shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions, both relationships and structures.

An initial phase of this study was designed to provide evidence of construct validity for this new measure. A panel of 76 expert educators was chosen to provide data as to the importance of the 44 statements about practices occurring at the school level. These educators were from various levels of professional practice including classroom teachers, principals, assistant principals, district and regional administrators, university faculty members, and educational researchers. Ninety-eight (98) percent of the items were rated as high in importance with only one item receiving a rating of Medium in terms of relevance, thus all 44 items were retained for the initial field test.

The next phase of the study included a field test of the PLCA instrument in schools. In order to assess perceptions based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community, participants were asked to respond to statements about practices, which occur in schools. The field test resulted in 247 completed and usable surveys. Descriptive statistics included minimum and maximum values (1 and 4), item means, and standard deviations. Factor analysis was the method selected to provide evidence of construct validity. The analyses utilized a series of statistical procedures for the total sample of respondents ( $n=247$ ). Factor identification consisted of items reflecting the five dimensions of professional learning communities. While selection of the factors resulted from the statistical procedures, a critical choice incorporated the best conceptual and theoretical fit.

Finally, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients were computed for the factored subscales of the measure. For the five factored subscales, the Alpha coefficients ranged from a low of .83 (Collective Learning and Application and Supportive Conditions) to a high of .93 (Shared Values and Vision). Thus, the instrument yielded satisfactory internal consistency (Alpha coefficient) reliability for the factored subscales. With continued and expanded use of the PLCA, assessing these perceptions as noted by practices within the schools will continue to evolve, thus strengthening the database.

Endnote: Factor analyses utilized Varimax procedures using principal components and Orthogonal rotations. General Decision rules were used to retain items on particular factors. Questions related to the PLCA can be directed to Dianne Olivier at [dianne.Olivier@stmartinparish.k12.la.us](mailto:dianne.Olivier@stmartinparish.k12.la.us)

### Part III

#### Emerging Research Issues

Our research in both England and the United States has highlighted a number of research areas we plan to explore further. Also, it is our intention to seek opportunities involving international colleagues in conversations including the following issues.

1. *What are the features of a professional learning community?*

*English perspective:*

On what basis can judgments be made about whether or not a school is working towards becoming a professional learning community and about the stage of development it has reached towards becoming a “mature” community? What indicators can be used? Our working assumption, based upon the model, is that they will include factors such as: how learning and development opportunities are integrated into a coherent directional plan for the individual and

the school; how schools and individual teachers use available data (egg. autumn package<sup>1</sup>, OFSTED<sup>2</sup> appraisal and test scores) to promote professional learning aimed at improved teaching and learning; and how external factors including arrangements for networking and partnership have worked in creating and sustaining communities.

*United States Perspective:*

The term “learning community” has been interpreted in a variety of ways (Huffman, Hipp, Moller & Pankake, 2001). However, the theoretical framework and defining dimensions of this project emerged from Hord’s (1997) review of the literature that sought to:

- a) define and describe what the literature is calling the professional learning community; b) to describe what happens when a school staff studies, works, plans, and takes action collectively in behalf of increased learning for students; and c) to reveal what is known about how to create such communities of professionals in schools. (p. vii)

She defined PLCs as the professional staff learning together to direct their efforts toward improved student learning. Moreover, she conceptualized this collaborative culture as a vehicle to promote continuous learning and engage the educational system in school improvement as reflected through five dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions – relationships and structures.

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<sup>1</sup> School-based statistics compiled for each school by the DfES.

<sup>2</sup> Office for Standards in Education, England’s external school inspection system.

PLCs are “one model [of school improvement] that recognizes that school capacities must be grounded in the culture of the school and the normative behaviors of its staff” (Hord, et al, 2000, p. 1). This model evolved from Rosenholtz’s (1989) extensive research surrounding the conditions of teachers’ workplaces, Senge’s (1990) model of corporate learning organizations, and Sergiovanni’s (1994) work which argued that when a school functions as a community, its members embrace shared ideals, norms, purposes, and values. Our project was driven by the notion that if more was understood about change-ready schools, strategies could be initiated, implemented and sustained for pursuing continuous school improvement.

## 2. *Defining ‘effectiveness’ of professional learning communities*

### *English perspective:*

‘Effectiveness’ can be viewed in a range of ways: impact on the school as an organisation and the learning of that organisation; impact on teachers, and, most fundamentally, impact on pupils. Effectiveness can also be looked at in terms of evolution over time, such that some schools are at a very early stage of development (early starters), others are further along the process (developers), while some are established (mature). This project will enable the English research team to explore the change and development of professional learning communities over time.

### *United States perspective:*

In *Documenting and Examining Practices in Creating Learning Communities* (Hipp & Huffman, 2002), we reported exemplars and non-exemplars that promote or hinder school efforts under each of the five dimensions of a PLC. This set of interviews finalized a three-year period as schools moved deeper into creating cultures reflecting PLCs. The analysis of data resulted in our Professional Learning Communities Organizer (PLCO) which incorporated Hord’s five

dimensions of a PLC and Fullan's phases of change model: initiation, implementation and institutionalization (Huffman & Hipp, 2003a). As we developed this tool, we envisioned a structure that could be used by school personnel and administrator preparation instructors and students to dialogue about creating and sustaining PLCs.

For each of Hord's dimensions we also reported themes gleaned from the interview data as critical attributes, moving in a progression from initiation to implementation, and less often, to institutionalization, reflecting the growth in schools seeking to become PLCs. We also noted these actions developed sequentially ranging from initiation efforts through implementation concerns, which resulted in institutionalization of ongoing change. We found the complex interaction of these elements in many schools, and eventually in all situations, contributes to student learning and school improvement.

In analyzing each dimension, we found critical attributes that specifically addressed the three phases of school development (See Appendix B). *Shared and Supportive Leadership* affected the other four dimensions as it served to guide the creation and delivery of the school's important decisions. It addressed whether the principal was the sole leader, and to what degree teacher leadership was in place, thus determining how decisions were made and carried out. Although few schools in our study engaged in a process to identify *Shared Vision and Values*, in schools at the institutionalization phase, we found commitment to student learning evident. This commitment was based on the inculcation of lived values and expressed school norms.

The third and fourth dimensions were re-conceptualized and found to be closely interrelated. In *Collective Learning and Application* teachers shared information and developed processes whereby they could work collaboratively to become more successful in applying strategies that worked well for students. *Shared Personal Practice* extended this process by



allowing and encouraging teachers to interact, provide feedback, and share results and best practices related to student learning. Finally, *Supportive Conditions*, impacted all the earlier dimensions. This dimension provided the springboard for creating PLCs, while also supporting and sustaining commitment. Added to the PLCO was the supportive base that included External Relationships and Support from central office staff, parents, and community members. We found the schools that were functioning at the institutional phase had these support systems firmly in place, which were deemed essential elements for school learning and school improvement.

Ultimately, we conceptualized Hord's five dimensions in a new light. First, we saw a critical link between *collective learning and application* and *shared personal practice* that could not be separated and therefore, should be placed together in this "non-sequential" set of attributes. Secondly, as the critical attributes emerged throughout these interviews, they logically fell on a continuum, reflecting evidence at the levels of initiation, implementation and institutionalization. Thirdly, we viewed *supportive conditions* encompassing all four dimensions, much like the way Peter Senge views the discipline of *systems thinking*, the fifth discipline (Senge, 1990). We feel that without a climate of trust and respect, and structures that promote continual learning, it is impossible to build a professional learning community.

### 3. *Who is included as 'professional' within the professional learning community?*

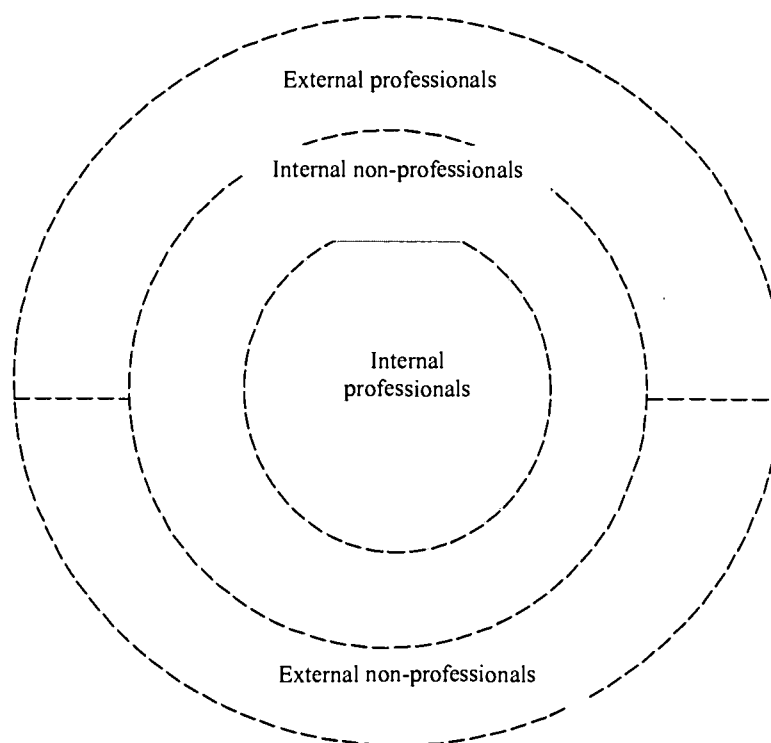
#### *English perspective:*

Our survey responses, early visits to case study schools and discussions with practitioners in a wide variety of settings, have highlighted that, while virtually all of the literature only considers teachers (including school leaders) to be members of professional learning communities, for many schools, especially those in certain contexts and those with younger

children or large numbers of pupils with special needs, the role of other staff employed by the school is equally critical. We, therefore, are now distinguishing between four groups: internal professionals – teachers and other staff; internal non-professionals – parents and governors (non-employee members of the school organisation); external professionals – LEA and university staff and consultants; and external non-professionals – wider community representatives, business and industry etc. Pupils are part of the internal non-professional group, although a number of respondents have told us, they are “in the centre”. In terms of our exploration, therefore, we will be taking the internal professionals (shaded in Table 1) as our starting point in exploring how they create and sustain effective professional learning communities, but will be looking at the role of all of the other groups in relation to this key group. It is possible, of course, that our research will lead us to a redefinition.

Table 1:

*Membership of the Professional Learning Community*



Research on secondary schools suggests that the academic department-based structure may result in members of the department having a stronger sense of belonging to a departmental community than a whole school community (Siskin, 1994). Similarly, in large primary schools a similar situation may emerge between staff in infant (5-7 year olds) and junior (7-11 year olds) departments, and in any school between teaching and support staff. It is therefore plausible to imagine that there may be more than one professional learning community in a school. Our research will seek to explore this, as well as look at the boundaries between internal and external professional learning communities, particularly in relation to networks in which schools are involved.

*United States perspective:*

Our research clearly indicates that the most important element in the development of a professional learning community is the leadership and determination of the principal. Without strong and sustained direction from the lead administrator, the effort often is limited and inconclusive. Initial support from a critical mass of teacher leaders generally provides the support the principal needs to pursue the PLC development.

While it is most important for the school professional staff (teachers and administrators) to first become a learning community, the development of a professional learning community that can provide sustained opportunities for student learning must include all stakeholders. The limited research in schools that have reached the institutionalization phase, clearly supports the need for schools to broaden the base of involvement to include students (when age appropriate), other staff in schools, parents, community members, and central office staff. This broad-based involvement provides more opportunities for the PLC dimensions and attributes to be embedded in the larger school culture. Thus, when key leadership personnel leave the school, their

leadership functions can be continued by other teacher/administrator leaders and supported by central office, parent, and community members.

For stakeholders to commit to spending time in school related programs and activities, their involvement must be highly valued and they must feel their time is well spent. All participants must be informed by clear and constant communication, thus allowing input at all levels guided by a systematic plan. Also, the development of this more open and inclusive school organization does not occur overnight. Commitment to this effort must be given several years for relationships to grow and build trust based on meaningful experiences.

4. *How long does it take before a PLC is sustainable and what barriers must be overcome?*

*English perspective:*

Our research will take place over two and a half years. While this will give us the opportunity to follow schools over time, research on change suggests that implementation does not happen overnight: it is a slow process (see Fullan, 2001). This means that in a considerable number of our case studies, at least, we are unlikely to be able to ascertain whether the creation and development of an effective professional learning community is sustainable. For those schools that are identified as at a 'mature' point when our case studies start, we hope to be able to explore how professional learning community is maintained. Revisiting the schools some years after the end of the project might also give helpful insights, as a group of researchers found when they went back to schools that were successful 'against the odds' five years after initial visits (Maden, 2001; McMahon, 2001).

It is too early in the English project to gain a detailed understanding of staff changes, although indications from one case study school that experienced leadership changes suggest those could be significant. This is supported by the findings of recent research examining the

implementation by schools of the pilot for the national strategy for 11-14 year olds (Stoll et al, 2003b).

*United States perspective:*

Sustaining a PLC is complicated by many factors. Some factors, such as central office and state mandates, are out of the control of the local school. Nevertheless, to sustain a PLC – or reach the phase of institutionalization – school leaders must be cognizant and proactive in dealing with external influences and internal issues that present themselves as barriers.

Internal issues exist in many forms. Financial limitations and time constraints often perplex leaders. While it is true these are serious concerns, school leaders must be creative and collaborative as they seek the monetary and time resources they need. Blatant resistance to the project may also hinder the development of PLC efforts. Using the talents and support of the critical mass of teacher leaders who are working within the PLC culture facilitates the inclusion of staff who are uncommitted. Experienced leaders will also recognize the barriers of lack of communication, stress, overload, and lack of positive reinforcement, and deal with these issues early on and continuously. One attribute appeared in most every interview in the schools we studied. This attribute was trust. Developing relationships and a school culture based on trust is essential and the foundation on which all else is built.

5. *How do you determine if you are developing as a PLC?*

*English perspective:*

As part of the dissemination project, the English team will be developing tools that might be used by schools. In the meanwhile, the survey offers school communities the possibility of considering the current state of a range of issues and whether these issues have changed for the

better or worse in the last two years or have remained the same. The team is returning survey data to schools with comparative data for other schools in their phase (i.e., secondary).

*United States perspective:*

The *Professional Learning Community Assessment (See Appendix C)* was designed to assess perceptions about the school's principal, staff, and stakeholders (parents and community members) based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community and the critical attributes (Olivier, Hipp & Huffman, 2003). Moreover, is intended to support and enhance the development of professional learning communities and contributes toward continuous learning and school improvement. We envision schools using this tool to determine where they are in the progression from initiation to implementation to institutionalization and develop plans to meet their goals.

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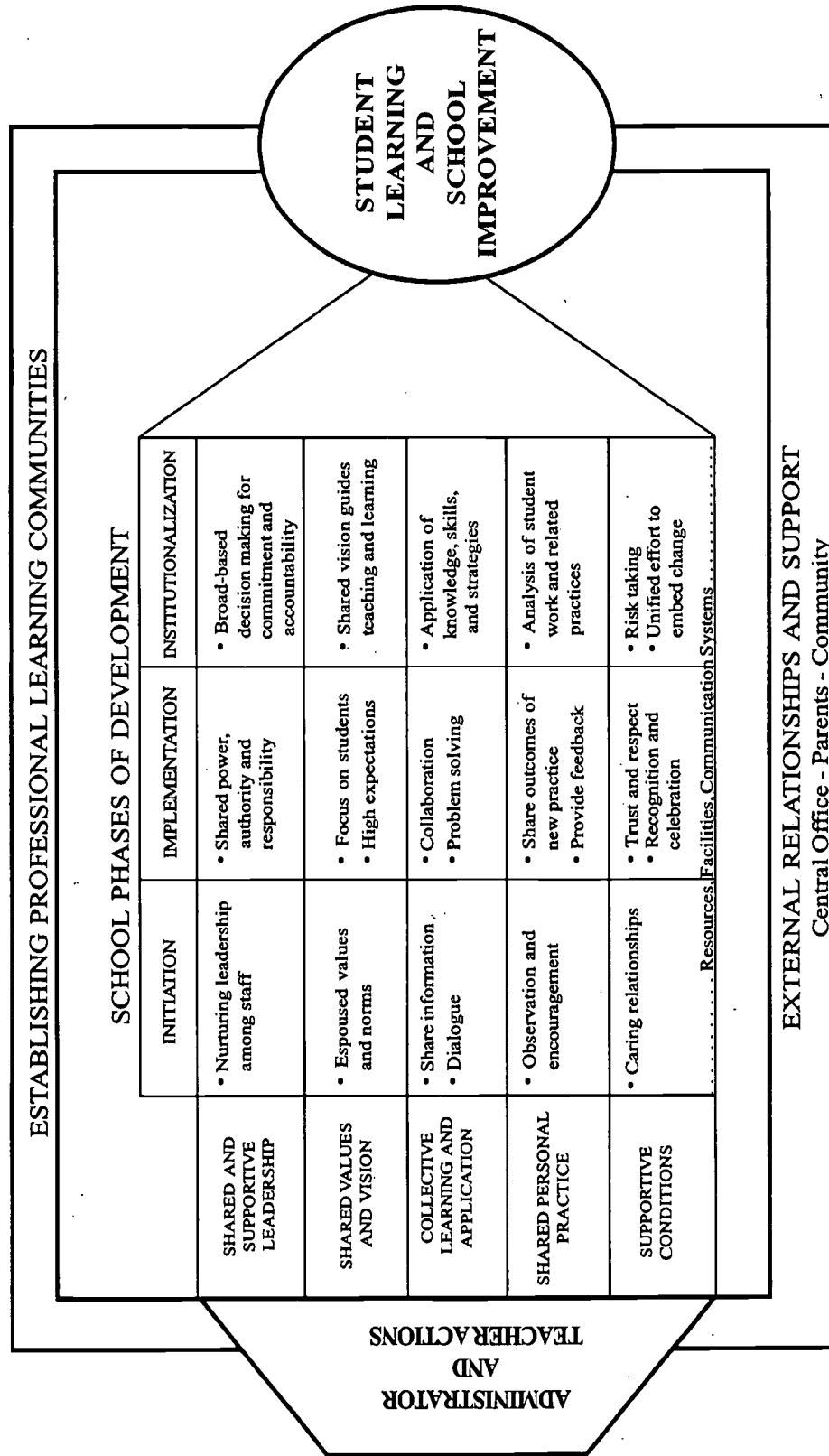
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# Appendix A

## Professional Learning Community Organizer



Source: Huffman, J. B. & Hipp, K. K. (2003). Professional learning community organizer. In J. B. Huffman & K. K. Hipp (Eds.). Professional learning communities: Initiation to implementation (in-press). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

## APPENDIX B

### PLC Dimensions and Critical Attributes

- **Shared and Supportive Leadership**
  - Nurturing leadership among staff
  - Shared power, authority and responsibility
  - Broad-based decision-making that reflects commitment and accountability
  
- **Shared Values and Vision**
  - Espoused values and norms
  - Focus on student learning
  - High expectations
  - Shared vision guides teaching and learning
  
- **Collective Learning and Application**
  - Sharing information
  - Seeking new knowledge, skills and strategies
  - Working collaboratively to plan, solve problems and improve learning opportunities
  
- **Shared Personal Practice**
  - Peer observations to offer knowledge, skills and encouragement
  - Feedback to improve instructional practices
  - Sharing outcomes of instructional practices
  - Coaching and mentoring
  
- **Supportive Conditions**
  - Relationships
    - Caring relationships
    - Trust and respect
    - Recognition and celebration
    - Risk-taking
    - Unified effort to embed change
  - Structures
  - Resources (time, money, materials, people)
  - Facilities
  - Communication systems

**Appendix C**  
**Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA)**

**Directions:**

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. There are no right or wrong responses. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices, which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement.

**Key Terms:**

- # Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- # Staff = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- # Stakeholders = Parents and community members

**Scale:** 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

2 = Disagree (D)

3 = Agree (A)

4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	<b>Shared and Supportive Leadership</b>	SD	D	A	SA
1.	The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	The staff have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for students learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
		SD	D	A	SA
	<b>Shared Values and Vision</b>				
11.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
12.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
13.	The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school=s values and vision.	0	0	0	0
15.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
16.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
17.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school=s vision.	0	0	0	0
18.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
	<b>Collective Learning and Application</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
19.	The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
20.	Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
21.	The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
22.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
23.	The staff engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0
24.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
25.	School staff and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
26.	School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
	<b>Shared Personal Practice</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
27.	Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
28.	The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
29.	The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0

	STATEMENTS	SCALE			
		SD	D	A	SA
30.	The staff collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
31.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
32.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
	<b>Supportive Conditions - Relationships</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
33.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
34.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
35.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
36.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0
	<b>Supportive Conditions - Structures</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
37.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
38.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
39.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
40.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
41.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
42.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
43.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
44.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.	0	0	0	0
45.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0

Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2003). Professional learning community assessment. In J. B. Huffman & K. K. Hipp (Eds.). *Reculturing schools as professional learning communities* (in press,). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

## APPENDIX D

### Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Research Protocol

#### ***Supportive & Shared Leadership:***

Our intent is to find out what they think leadership is and if and how widely leadership is shared among administrators and teachers- ask for evidence that supports their comments.

#### **Tell me about leadership in this school.**

Use these probes:

- Who are the leaders?
- What do they do that makes them a leader?
- Is leadership shared? If so, how?
- Tell me how decisions get made. About what? By whom? etc.
- How did this decision-making process come about? By whom?
- Give example on how a school decision was made recently.

Is this different from the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

#### ***Shared Values & Vision:***

Our intent is to find out the values behind the vision, who was involved in creating the vision, and who believes in it- ask for evidence that supports their comments.

*Tell me what the staff would say is important about the work they do here.*

Use these probes:

- How do you know?
- How is it reflected in the school?
- In the classroom?
- With students?

Tell me about the school's vision of improvement.

- What process did the school use to create a vision?
- Who decided on this vision? How does the staff feel about it?
- How is the vision communicated? Externally? Internally?
- How is the vision reflected in the school activities and operation?

Is this different from the past? If so, who or what has made it different?



***Collective Learning & Application:***

Our intent is to find out if all of the staff members come together to reflect on their work for students and learn from each other in substantive dialogue- ask for evidence that supports their comments.

Tell me about how the staff comes together to learn.

Use these probes:

- How many of the staff comes together to learn?
- When? How often? About what?
- How do staff members determine what they want to learn?
- Tell me about how the staff uses what they learn.

Is this different from the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

***Supportive Conditions:***

Tell me about conditions in the school that support teachers' work together.

Our intent is to find out what is in place- **structures** (for example time and space for staff to meet) and **relationships** the staff has with each other that support teachers work together- ask for evidence that supports their comments.

Use these probes:

- What structures support collective learning?
- How do staff members communicate with each other?
- How do they communicate with people outside of the school?
- When do teachers have time to collaborate?
- What resources are available to support teachers learning together?
- How do staff members work with each other? Cooperate? Support?
- Who are the staff members that motivate and inspire?

Is this different from the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

***Shared Personal Practice (Peers Sharing with Peers):***

Tell me about any situations in which the staff shares their practice and solicits feedback from each other to improve their teaching (i.e., classroom observation, examining student work).

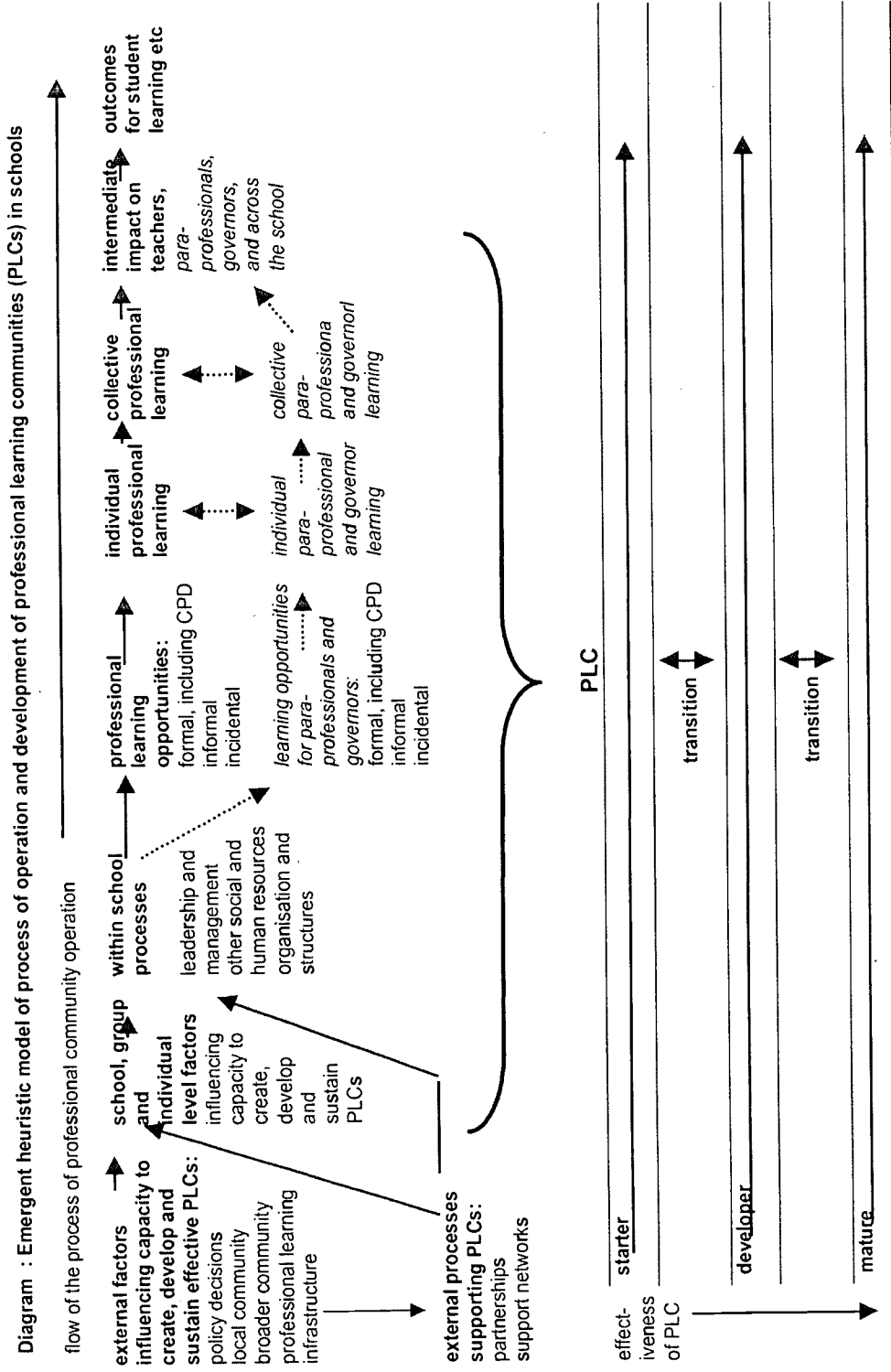
Our intent is to find out if the staff is sharing their work with each other and then giving relevant feedback that will improve teacher practice- ask for evidence that supports their comments.

Use these probes:

- Do teachers go into each other's classrooms to observe them at work with students?
- Do teachers work together to examine student work?
- Do they give substantive feedback to each other on their observations or on student work?
- How do you know what to look for in giving peer review and feedback?
- How did these processes come about? Who initiates it?
- How are they integrated into the school schedule?

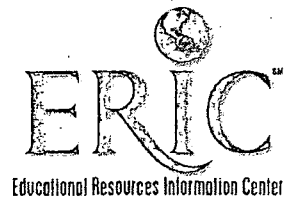
Is this different from the past? If so, who or what has made it different?

APPENDIX E





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