

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MODEL FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In a time of high-stakes testing and criticism of schools' ability to serve students, the number of schools functioning as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is steadily increasing. As a structured, ongoing, embedded model for teacher collaboration, PLCs can result in "higher quality solutions to instructional problems, increased teacher confidence, and, not surprisingly, remarkable gains in achievement."¹ Mike Schmoker, an educational consultant and author of *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement*, states, "The use PLCs is the best, least expensive, most professionally rewarding way to improve schools."²

Richard and Rebecca DuFour, authors, educational consultants, national presenters, and past leaders of Professional Learning Communities, articulate the cultural shifts necessary for PLCs to flourish in schools. Schools need to move away from the culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration. "Collaborative conversations call on

¹ Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour, eds., *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (Indiana: Solution Tree), xiii.

² Ibid, 137.

team members to make public what has traditionally been private – goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, results.”³

Cultural Shifts in developing PLCs:

Cultural Shift	Traditional Schools	Professional Learning Communities
Collaboration	Teacher isolation	Collaborative teams
Developing a Mission Statement	Statements are generic	Statements clarify what students will learn
	Statements are brief, such as “We believe all students can learn.”	Statements address the question, “How will we know what students are learning?”
		Statements clarify how the school will respond when students do not learn.
Developing a Vision Statement	Statements are average opinions.	Statements are research-based.
	Statements deteriorate into wish lists.	Statements are credible and focus on essentials.
	Statements are often ignored.	Statements are used as a blueprint for improvement.
	Statements are often dictated or developed by few.	Statements are widely shared though broad collaboration.
Developing Goal Statements	Statements are random.	Statements are linked to vision.
	Goals are excessive in number.	Goals are few in number.
	Goals focus in means rather than ends.	Goals focus on desired outcome.
	Goals are impossible to assess or measure.	Goals are translated into measurable performance standards.
	Goals are not monitored.	Goals are monitored continuously.
		Goals are designed to produce short-term wins and also

³ Richard Dufour, “What is a Professional Learning Community,” Educational Leadership (May 2004): page ?.

		stretch aspirations.
Focus on Learning	Primarily focus on teaching.	Primarily focus on learning.
Curriculum	Each teacher independently decides what to teach.	Collaboratively agreed upon curriculum focuses on what students are expected to learn.
	Curriculum overload is common.	Reduced content means meaningful content is taught at greater depth.
		Assessment is developed through collaboration.
		A plan for responding to students who are not learning is developed through collaboration.
Collective Inquiry	Decisions about improvement strategies are made by “averaging opinions.”	Decisions are research-based with collective teams of teachers seeking out “best practices.”
Research and Results	Effectiveness of improvement strategies is externally validated. Teachers rely on other outside the school identify what works.	Approaches are internally validated. Teams of teachers try various approaches and collaborate on how the approaches affect student learning.
	Emphasis is placed on how teachers like various approaches.	The effect on student learning is the primary basis for assessing various improvement strategies.
Leadership	Administrators are viewed as being in leadership positions while teachers are viewed as “implementors” or followers.	Administrators are viewed as leaders of leaders. Teachers are viewed as transformational leaders.
Celebration	Celebration is infrequent. When teachers are recognized, the celebration almost always focuses on groups.	In addition to celebration and recognition when a standard is met, celebrations recognize improvement.
	Celebration and recognition occur when students reach an arbitrary standard.	The school works hard to “create” winners and celebrate successes.
	Recognition is limited to a few individuals.	Celebrations are linked to the vision and values of the school and improved student

		achievement.
Persistence	Improvement efforts frequently shift as new fads or trends come along.	The school is committed to “staying the course” in the attainment of the school vision. New initiatives are only implemented if it is determined that the change will help the school attain its vision of the future.
		The leader’s role is to promote, protect, and defend the school’s vision and values and to confront behavior that is incongruent with the school’s vision and values. ⁴

In the field of professional development for educators, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are an increasingly popular model for encouraging collaborative, job-embedded, on-going professional development. As collaborative teams meet, goals are set which are to directly impact student achievement. State and Nationally-tested subjects such as math and reading are likely areas for collaborative team goals. Since teachers who are not trained math and reading teachers are also expected to participate in professional development, music teachers become folded into math and reading focused teams and are expected to actively contribute to measurable increases in students test scores. Although growing students’ abilities in reading and math is certainly a worthy endeavor, music teachers, with increasingly limited teaching time with students, need to increase their skills and self-efficacy as professional music educators. Just as students deserve the highest quality reading and math instruction, students also deserve the music

⁴ Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour, *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (Indiana: Solution Tree), 10-28.

education experiences of the highest quality. Music teachers who increase their own capacity as instructors are more likely to provide higher quality learning experiences for students.

With the overwhelming success of PLCs to raise test scores in targeted areas, such as reading, math, and writing, this thesis aims to analyze the structural components of a PLC, apply them a music team, reflect on the team's success using the PLC model, and recommend to what extent and with which alterations the PLC model can be applied to K-12 music teams with orchestral, band, choral, and vocal/general music teachers.

PURPOSE

In order to encourage music teachers to be determining forces in their own professional development, instead of being folded into non-musical learning strategies and goals, this thesis seeks to propose one recommended model for music teams who wish to meet to increase their individual and joint capacity to raise student achievement in the music classroom.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem of this thesis is to determine to what extent and with which adaptations the Professional Learning Communities model can be used as a template for professional development in music education.

SUB-QUESTIONS

1. What are the defining structural components of PLCs?
2. What will the St. Louis Park music team find when they apply the PLC model to their music team professional development meetings?
3. What can be learned from the music PLC as advice to other music teams who might try this model?
4. How can music educators apply the practices of professional learning communities to professional development practice?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

ASSUMPTIONS

This thesis assumes that professional development is a valuable aspect of an educator's career and that quality professional development has the potential to change the practice of the teachers and therefore positively impact the performance of the students. It is also assumed that music teachers find value in their own professional development and would value dedicated time with other music colleagues to address improving student achievement in their music classroom. Finally, this thesis assumes that the gains in student achievement after implementation of PLCs in the curricular areas other than music might be transferable to a music setting.

SECTION I:

What currently Exists in education

Current states in education

Acheivement Gap – report what is

(Work backwards from PLCs – talk about

What is happening now?

What is the matter with that picture?

SECTION II:

Structural Components of a PLC

Purpose of section:

The purpose of clarifying the structural components of a Professional Learning Community is to enable the reader to understand the function of the various components as they are commonly implemented.

Function of section:

This section functions as the background information which allows the reader to compare a more “traditional” implementation of PLCs with the application of the model to teachers focusing on K-12 music curriculum.

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

Shared Mission, Vision, Values, Goals

Norms

- Group
- Conflict

Shared Knowledge

Essential Outcomes

Common Assessments

Use of Data

- Examining student assessments
- What do you do when they don't get it?
- What do you do when they know it?

Common Teaching Activities and Pacing Guides

SECTION III: From Theory to Practice

Purpose of section:

The notes taken at music meetings are the record of our work as it transpired. This record serves as a basis against which to compare and assess our work when making a recommendation about how a music PLC might conduct itself in the future.

Function of section:

The section functions as the groundwork against which to compare future recommendations, based on our successes and challenges in St. Louis Park.

SECTION IV: Assessment of Application

Purpose of section:

The purpose of this section is to reflect upon and assess the proceedings and actions as they occurred in St. Louis Park's Music PLC, 2006-2007.

Function of section:

This section will function as the evaluation of how we implemented the PLC model for music specialists K-12 in St. Louis Park, 2006-2007. By evaluating the success and failures of our meetings, a more informed model can be recommended to other music teachers in the next section of this paper.

Further Notes:

Reflections on these meetings, regular opportunities for reflection by group members to me

- What to keep, changes
 - Via e-mail, written, verbal feedback

SECTION V:
Recommended Model

Purpose of section:

The purpose of this section is to recommend a PLC model for which will serve the needs of music educators in band, orchestra, choir, and general/vocal classrooms in grades K-12.

Function of section:

This section will function as the culmination of background knowledge, application, and assessment of a PLC for music educators. By recommending a model based on the experience of the music team in St. Louis Park, other music teams may have a starting point for their own collaborative work as professional music educators.

WORKS CONSULTED

A. Books

DuFour, Richard, Robert Eaker, Robert, and Rebecca DuFour, eds. *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Indiana: National Educational Service, 2005.

Eaker, Robert, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour. *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*. Indiana: Solution Tree, 2002.

Eaker, Robert, Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Gayle Karhanek. *Whatever it Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Indiana: National Educational Service, 2004.

Marzano, Robert J. *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003.

Marzano, Robert J, Timothy Waters, and Brian A. McNulty. *School Leadership that Works*. Colorado: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2005.

B. Periodicals

Conway, Colleen M., Shannan Hinnard, Dan Albert, and Ryan Hourigan. "Professional Development for Arts Teachers." *Arts Education Policy Review* (September – October 2005): ?.

Conway, Colleen M., Shannan Hinnard, Dan Albert, and Ryan Hourigan. "Voices of Music Teachers Regarding Professional Development." *Arts Education Policy Review* (September – October 2005): 11-14.

DuFour, Richard. "What is a 'Professional Learning Community?'" *Educational Leadership* (May 2004): ?.

C. Internet Sources

D. Interviews (does this included e-mails from my colleagues?)

E. Scripted Notes (?)

PCAE

Outline 5 sections
Paragraph describing each

Cover letter

Thesis prospectus has been approved

Professional reasons for this thesis

- applying PLC to music teaching
- one of my ways to attain professional goals
- to that end, one of my first attempts at practical applications

A Committee member will . . .

Take questions

Read entire thesis

For the 9th

Sections

Intro

What I am writing

What I hope to do with it

Intention of thesis