

# Professional Learning Communities



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# The PLC Process

# 1

## Start with a vision.

Having a clear vision is important in creating a true learning community. Core principles must be established as nonnegotiable. Without direction, the implementation of PLCs will fail, much like a ship traveling on a tempestuous sea in the dark.

Matthews and Crow (2010) cite Nanus's four roles that principals must play as visionary leaders: *direction-setter, change agent, spokesperson, and coach*. These roles are critical in effectively establishing and communicating a vision for a PLC. (p. 160)



## Characteristics of Effective Visions

Vision has **broad appeal**.

Vision **deals with change**.

Vision **encourages faith and hope**.

Vision **has high ideals**.

Vision **defines the destination and the journey**.



## A Closer Look

## Professional

Professionals are responsible and accountable for delivering an effective instructional program to students so that they can learn well. Professionals are dedicated to their own learning and to that of students.

## Learning

Learning is the activity in which professionals engage to enhance their knowledge and skills.

## Communities

Communities consist of individuals coming together in a group in order to interact in meaningful activities to learn deeply with colleagues about an identified topic, to develop shared meaning, and identify shared purposes related to the topic.

# The PLC Process

## Facilitating Collaboration



### 2

#### Charter a trailblazing team.

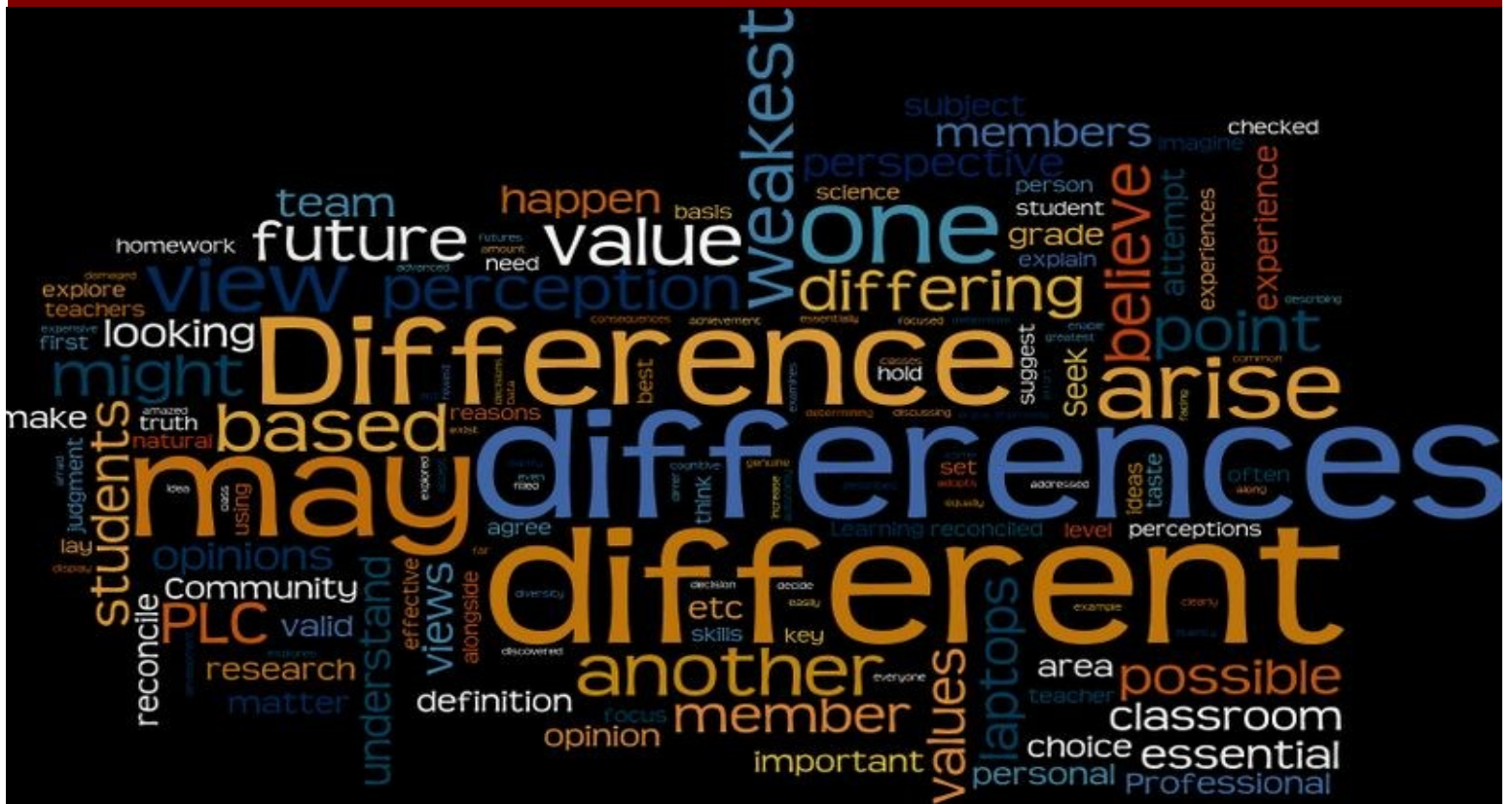
To create a learning community, the formation of a core group committed to the central vision of the school is critical. Selection of the individuals for the core team must be made based on team member attributes (relationship builder, system thinker, problem solver, innovator, etc.).

According to Matthews and Crow (2010), leadership should come from a variety of sources in the school community, thereby increasing and enriching the school's leadership capacity.

#### How can leaders facilitate collaboration in others?

Use this checklist to aid in facilitating collaboration.

- ◆ Is the collaboration relevant (related to student learning difficulties and ways to overcome those difficulties) to teachers?
- ◆ Do teachers have the expertise to collaborate on the issues at hand?
- ◆ Are teachers committed to the vision of the school?
- ◆ Are teachers given adequate time to collaborate?





# The PLC Process

## 3

### Support team development.

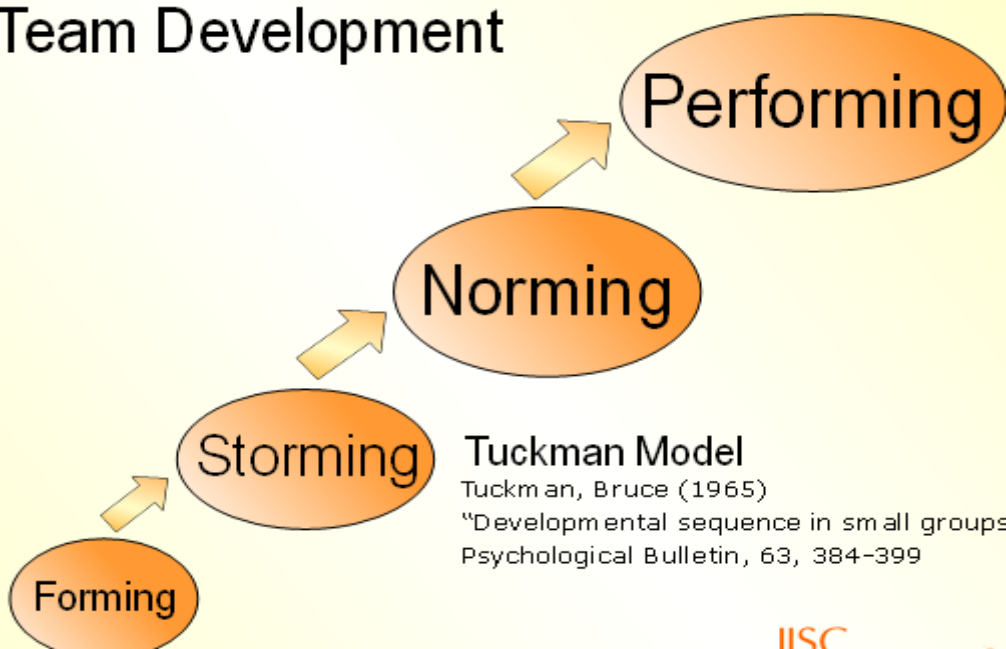
To create a learning community, principals must support team development. Principals must understand that teams need skills and knowledge to participate in teams. According to Matthews and Crow (2010), research suggests that teams need skills and knowledge in the following areas: group roles, stages of group development, leadership in small groups, effective communication, trust building, problem-solving, planning, decision-making, effective ways to conduct meetings, conflict resolution, and group process evaluation.

Principals can support team development in several practical ways. Principals can provide time for teams to meet, establish procedural expectations (creating meeting agendas, meeting minutes, etc.), and developing understanding of what learning tasks should be accomplished during PLC meetings. PLC focus questions can be used to guide all work of PLCs. Principals mediate by resolving conflict and helping faculty members overcome frustrations.

## Guiding Questions

- What knowledge, skills, and dispositions must each student acquire as a result of this course, grade level, and/or unit of instruction? What do we want our students to know?
- What evidence will we gather to monitor student learning on a timely basis? How will we know they learned?
- How will we provide students with additional time and support in a timely, directive, and systematic way when they experience difficulty in their learning? What will be do if they do not learn?
- How will we enrich the learning of students who are already proficient?

### Team Development



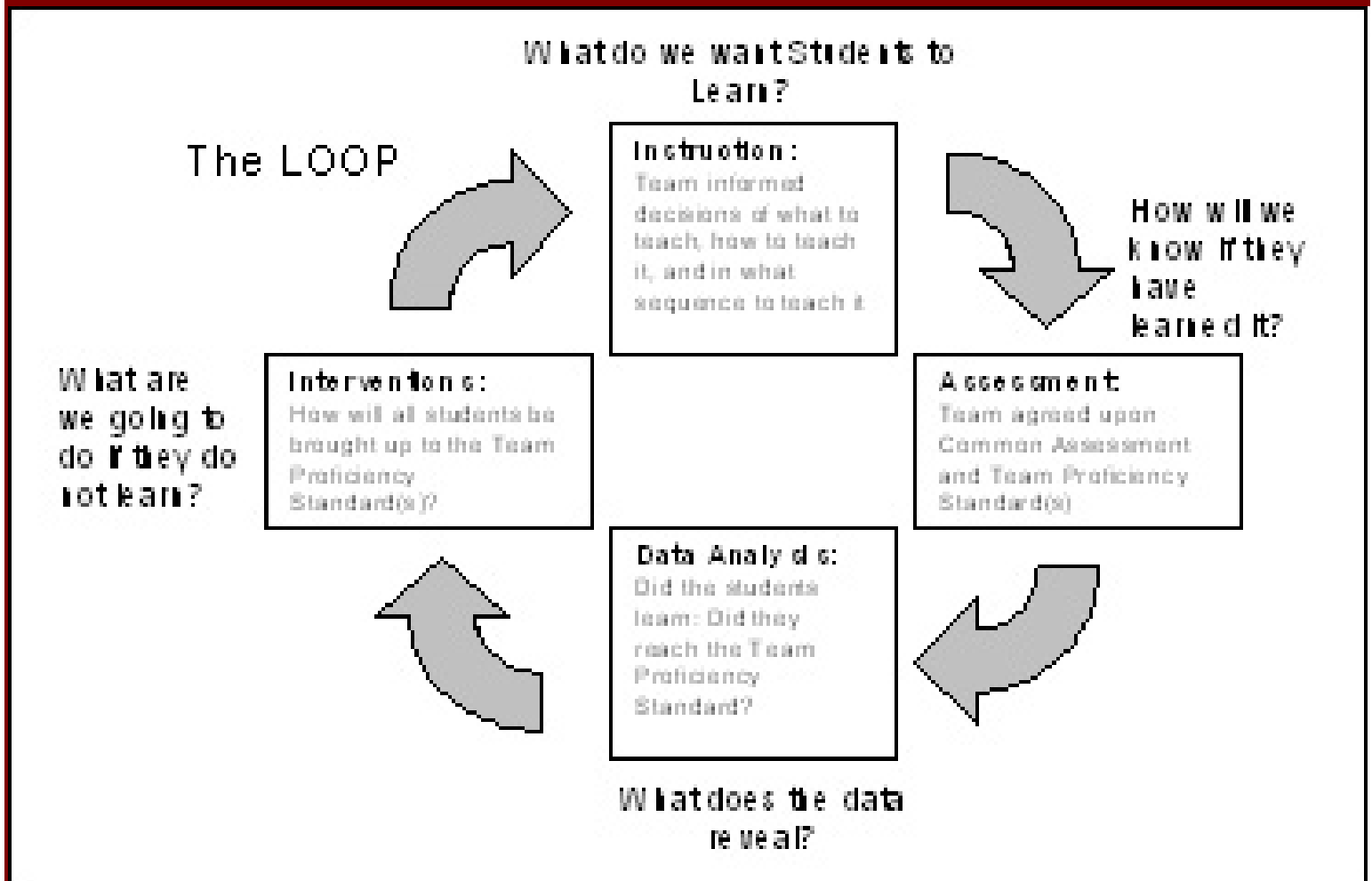
#### Tuckman Model

Tuckman, Bruce (1965)

"Developmental sequence in small groups"  
Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384-399

# Characteristics of PLCs

- ♦ **A focus on Continuous Improvement**
- ♦ **Shared mission, vision, and values**
- ♦ **Collaborative teamwork**
- ♦ **Results-Oriented**
- ♦ **Collective Inquiry**
- ♦ **Context-specific**
- ♦ **Aligned with reform initiatives**
- ♦ **Ongoing**



# The PLC Process

# 4

## Continue to move professional learning communities forward.

Professional learning communities evolve. It is the principal's role to monitor, guide, and facilitate this evolutionary process. Principals must support teams by continuously providing opportunities for growth by providing ongoing professional development related to areas of need. It is the principal's role to facilitate the process of highlighting the link between data and instruction and to ultimately guide the process of developing collective intelligence.

### The Hats a Principal Wears Throughout the PLC Process

**Scheduler   Activator   Visionary   Manager   Liaison**

**Collaborator   Facilitator   Mediator   Supporter**

**Teacher   Researcher**



### References

Crow, G. & Matthews, L. (2010). *The Principalship: New Roles in a Professional Learning Community*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many (2006). *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work™*

Hord, Shirley. (2009). Professional Learning Communities. *National Staff Development Council*, 30. Retrieved from [http://artofeducating.com/\\_library/prof%20learning/collaborative%20learning/Hord%20-%20Prof%20Learning%20Communities.pdf](http://artofeducating.com/_library/prof%20learning/collaborative%20learning/Hord%20-%20Prof%20Learning%20Communities.pdf).