Essential Elements of Professional Learning Communities:

Put the “L” for Learning back in PLCs!
What’s your superpower?

- Find a group of 3 near you. Move if you have to.
- Share 1 personal and 1 educator “superpower” that you possess.
- Alyson will model
Why are we here?

1. To revisit the power of PLCs for teacher learning
2. To learn some simple strategies to reinvigorate your PLCs to maximize learning

Note: Suggested group norms are posted on the wall.
My Assumptions

- Who am I?
- If we want all kids to be learning, teachers need to be learning, too (Sarason, 1972)
- High quality PD (Duration, content-focus, active learning, collective participation, coherence) is one way to emphasize teacher learning (Desimone, 2009)
- Learning is situated, social, and distributed (Putnam & Borko, 2000)
Assumptions, continued...

- PLCs can be places for LEARNING that capitalize on that view of learning

- PLC – we must clearly define it:
  - shared values/norms; focus on student learning; reflective dialogue; deprivatizing practice; focus on collaboration
  - IT IS NOT: a “meeting”; division of labor; passive sharing of info
Microlabs

- Structured discussion
- Groups of 3
- Each person gets 1 minute to answer question.
- Each round all three people answer the SAME question.
- RULES:
  - Do not interrupt!
  - Silence is okay if time is left over. It’s YOUR minute.
  - We’ll time your group
- Questions follow this slide, one at a time.
Question 1

- What are your experiences with PLCs – good, bad, or indifferent?
- Why do you say that?
Question 2

- If you could improve one thing about your PLC experience in the past, what would it be and why?
Did you talk about how PLCs benefit from...

- Structures?
- Ways to enhance learning of individuals?
- Ways to stay focused on student learning and improve teaching practice?
Is this based on research? Where does this come from?

- Literature reviews of what matters and what impacts teacher & student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008)
- Recent chapter in Sage Handbook of Learning (Vescio & Adams, 2015)
- Recent Learning Forward article focused on individual learning within collective learning spaces (PLCs) (Adams & Vescio, 2015)
Fig. 1. Layered model of professional development based on the PDC paradigm.
Hadar & Brody (2011, 2013)

Fig. 1. Layered model of professional development based on the PDC paradigm.
Conversations within inquiry-based PLCs can be stifled if they focus too much on “proving” and/or “non-negotiation” stances (Slavit, Nelson, & Deuel, 2013)

Overly polite, compliant agreement does not push learning in collaboration (Kuusisaari, 2014)
What this means for us:

- PLCs consist of individual learners at different stages of growth
- ...YET... PLCs are all about “shared vision and purpose”
- How can we help individual teachers learn through these group structures?
Remember I mentioned: PLCs benefit from...

- Structures?
- Ways to enhance learning of individuals?
- Ways to stay focused on student learning and improve teaching practice?
PLCs benefit from...

- **Structures (like protocols)**
  - everyone talks, thinks, processes concepts

- **Ways to enhance learning of individuals**
  - Norms to protect learners
  - Protocols to allow push back in a safe way and allow critique of ideas

- **Ways to stay focused on student learning** (helps teachers engage in the PLC) and then connect that to teacher practice (to really push teacher learning)
  - Examination of student learning (not just numbers)
  - Then... CONNECTION to teaching practice and collaborative support to improve
Read “Willing to Be Disturbed” (8 min.).
Highlight meaningful sentences. Be ready to choose 1 to share.

Groups of 3
Read sentence aloud.
Other group members discuss what it means and why they think you chose it.
Then, finally, you get to interpret it.
Repeat once for each person (3 min. per round)
Microlab & Last Word Debrief

- How did it feel to talk in these 2 ways?
- Why were the 2 protocols structured like that?
  - Microlabs – no talking; each person answers a question
  - Save the Last Word – text protocol; read then others interpret; reader then states opinion.
- How might you use these protocols in the future? With adults? With students?
Stand up and PRACTICE!

- To what extent do you prefer a neat work area?

MUST be neat........................................... I like messy.
To what extent do you currently implement well-functioning PLCs in your context?

We got it!..............................................we are far from it!
To what extent is it your official responsibility or role in making that happen?

It’s my job..........................................................I’m not at all involved

- THEN... take a step in either direction to indicate where you WISH you could stand in relation to that question
To what extent are the PLC facilitators in your context well trained and effective?

Very strong..............................................................very weak

- THEN...pairs from different ends of continuum discuss how they accomplished this, or what the biggest challenges are -- (5 min.)
To what extent are the people you work with open to communicating and learning in these ways?

Very open ........................................ very resistant
Imagine yourself bringing these ideas back to your context and trying to implement learning communities or change the way they function.

Think about what the most negative person might say in response.

Pair up with someone near you and share that “Yeah, but...” reaction.

NOW...Brainstorm some replies!
Norms make it safe to have these conversations
- Zones of comfort/danger

What do you still need to know in order to develop strong PLCs in your context? How can you continue to encourage teacher learning in these group spaces?
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