Using Year-End PLC Reflections to Strengthen Next Year's Collaboration

Year-end PLC reflection is an often-overlooked leadership practice. Without it, teams repeat patterns rather than build capacity. Recently, I received a request to assist a K-12 school staff in doing a year-end reflection on the impact of their work in PLCs during the past year and to consider some plans and goals for the next year. They were also encouraged to provide suggestions to the leadership team for the next year. I thought my review items and questions might be helpful as you consider collecting reflections and future planning from your PLCs.

I structured the session in two rounds, each beginning with key PLC foundations followed by reflection questions for team conversations. PLCs were asked to keep a bullet list of items discussed to submit to the school leadership team. I began by highlighting an important difference between PLCs and other groups or teams teachers may have experienced. This included the concept of PLCs functioning as teams with shared accountability for student success.

Ways for Teachers to Collaborate

PWC

- Professional Working Community - collaborate to get work done

PLC

- Professional Learning Community - learning how to get a student learning outcome we are not getting now

PD

- Professional Development – Book study, workshop, training in teacher skill development

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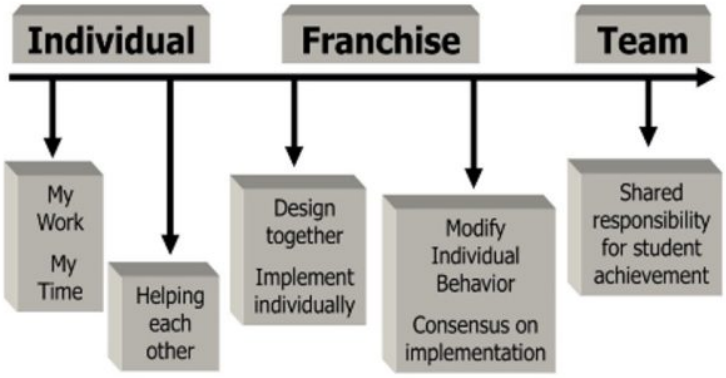
Creating Collective Teacher Efficacy



Big Idea
A Focus on Results

Professional Learning Communities judge their effectiveness on a basis of results. Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. **Every teacher-team participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress.** (DuFour)

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Why PLCs Matter In Teacher's Words

"Being in a strong PLC reminds me I'm not alone. We don't just share resources – we share responsibility for every student. I'm a better teacher because I learn alongside my colleagues." (Middle School Teacher, PLC Member)

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Round #1 Reflection Questions

Thinking back to your first PLC meetings, what feels different now?

Was there a point where your team moved from meeting together to functioning more as a team?

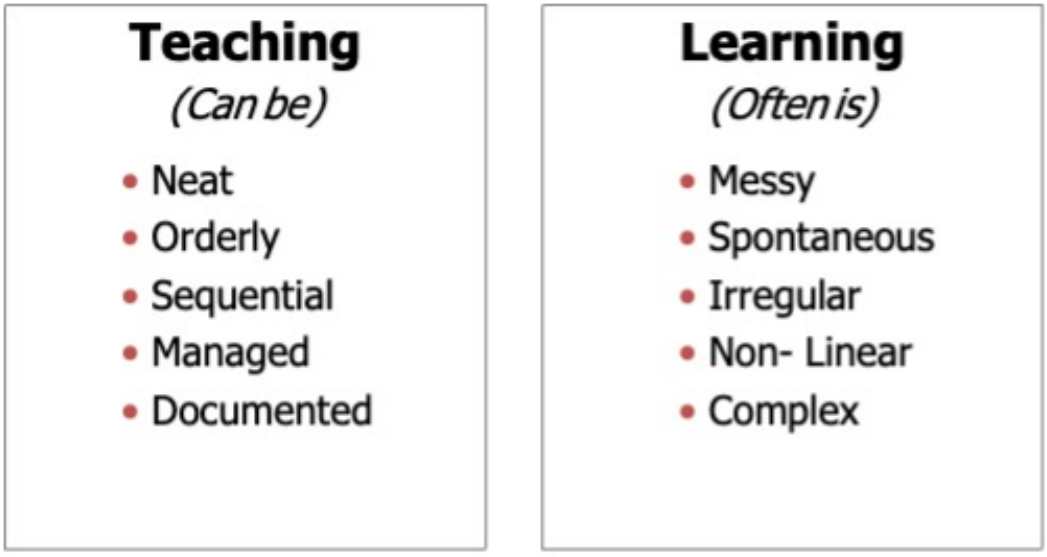
When did another team member's thinking influence your instruction?

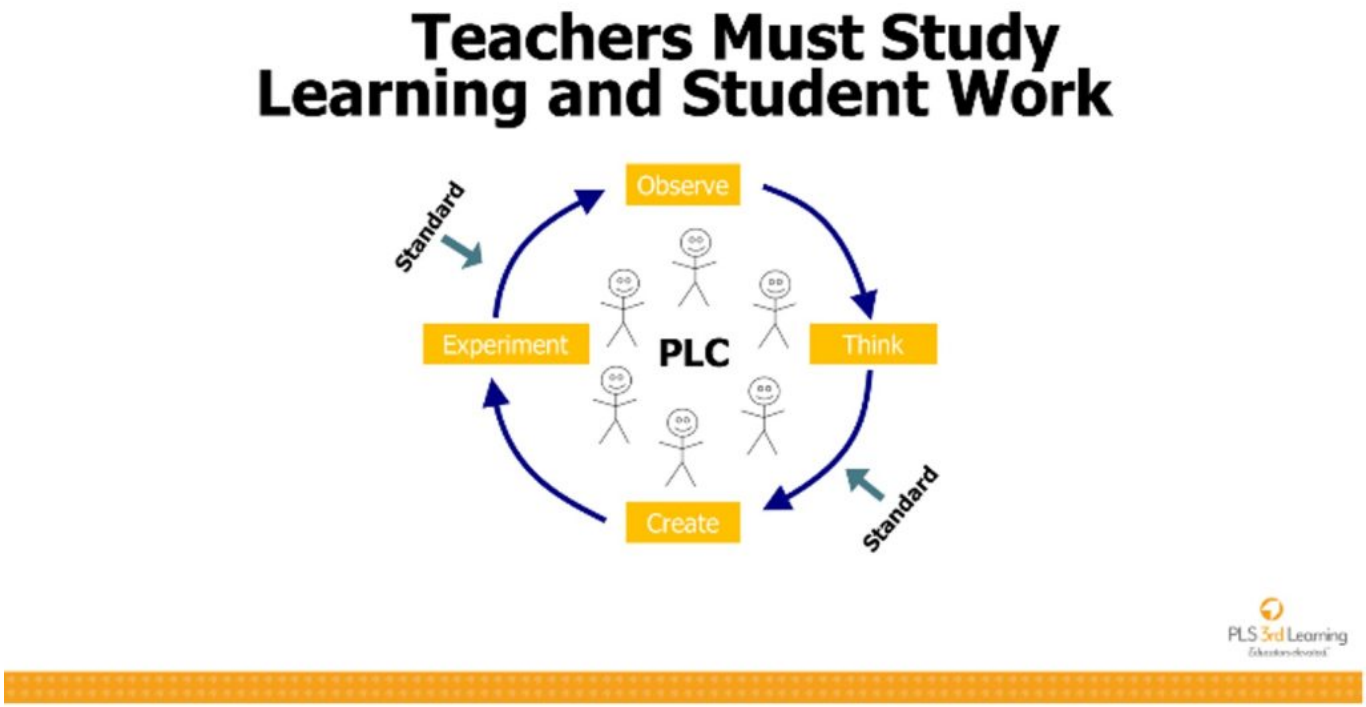
What PLC activities led to your experimentation or learning?

How did the PLC impact students?

After teams reflected on how their collaboration evolved this year, we shifted the conversation toward how PLC work could become even more impactful for students next year. I reviewed the importance of PLCs frequently examining student work, assessments, and performances. Together, teachers study student learning and hypothesize on how they can increase student success.

PLCs consistently ask, *"What do our students need us to learn?"*





I used the following points from [Learning from Practice: How Professional Learning Communities Transform Teaching](), by Ramiro Seré to spark the next conversation.

- **Start with real problems of practice**. PLCs work best when conversations begin with authentic classroom challenges, not abstract theory or generic goals.
- **Make practice visible early.** Student work, lesson plans, and assessment tools anchor discussions in reality and prevent conversations from staying superficial.
- **Protect the focus**. When PLC time turns into logistics or announcements, learning disappears. Clear norms help keep the work pedagogical.
- **Go slow to go deep.** Trust, reflection, and improvement take time. PLCs cannot be rushed or compressed into occasional meetings.
- **Accept discomfort as part of learning.** Sharing unfinished or unsuccessful work feels risky, but it is often where the most powerful learning happens.
- **Treat PLCs as a practice, not a program.** Their strength lies not in a prescribed structure, but in sustained habits of collaboration and inquiry.

Round #2 Reflection Questions

What would make your collaboration more impactful for students next year?

If your PLC is even more successful next year, what might students experience differently?

What should your PLC definitely continue next year?

What should your PLC strengthen next year?

What PLC facilitator or administration leadership actions might strengthen your PLC next year?

Leadership teams can gain their clearest understanding of PLC progress when they step back and look across patterns emerging from multiple team reflections. Here are a few of the insights that arose when AI summarized the information that the PLCs submitted. The reflections provided leadership with evidence of where collaboration is already improving instruction—and where structural supports are still needed.

Collaboration as the Core Strength – The most consistent theme was that teacher collaboration improved practice:

- Sharing strategies, resources, and student insights
- Learning from colleagues' experiences
- Building trust and stronger professional relationships

This shifted PLCs from "meetings" to valuable working sessions.

Focus on Student Support and Outcomes – PLCs became more effective when centered on:

- Specific student needs (behavior + academic)
- Intervention strategies
- Consistent expectations across classrooms

There's a clear shift toward student-centered problem solving,

not just discussion.

Shift Toward Long-Term Planning – There's a desire to move from:

- "Getting through the day" → intentional planning
- Reactive teaching → proactive systems

Future focus includes:

- Scope and sequence development
- Curriculum alignment
- Cross-department collaboration

Desire for Autonomy with Support – Teachers prefer setting their own relevant goals.

But still want:

- Clear direction from leadership
- Alignment with school-wide priorities
- Support and feedback

Balance = autonomy + guidance

When PLC teams pause to reflect together on how their collaboration influenced teaching and learning, they begin building the habits that make improvement sustainable. This one-hour activity provided some great input for school leaders' planning and PLC agendas as this year ends and next year begins. If you're planning year-end PLC reflection conversations—or designing how next year's collaboration will better impact student learning—I'd be glad to think alongside you. You can reach me sbarkley@pls3rdlearning.com.