Revisiting the WHY Behind Professional Learning Communities

I am currently consulting with a school district leadership team as they plan to introduce Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) systemwide next school year. Quite often, I am consulting with teams looking to strengthen, change, or fix PLCs that too are just another meeting on teachers' busy calendars. The effectiveness of PLCs doesn't lie in their structure alone—it lies in the shared purpose driving them. Without clarity around the "WHY," PLCs can easily become routine or compliance-based rather than transformative. Its great to be engaged at the early stage where we can define the compelling reasons for PLCs before laying out the design and process.

My first planning session is looking at arriving at an agreed upon WHY. I thought that readers of this blog who have PLCs in place might find some of the questions and information we are exploring valuable in having your building and teacher leaders revisit their purposes as this school year comes to a close or next year begins.

We will start and end our first session with this slide.

The Why for PLCs

What do you see as the primary purpose?

<u>These questions shared at the start of our session will be discussed as the leaders combine their thinking with material presented</u>.

- How do you currently see teachers collaborating to support each other's professional growth and student learning?
- What specific student outcomes or learning experiences do you want to see improved or enhanced?
- In what ways do you believe collaboration among teachers could directly influence the learning environment you envision for students?
- What do you see as the primary purpose of PLCs?

<u>As an opening discussion leaders will respond to these statements</u>.

Richard DuFour – "A Professional Learning Community is a group of educators who are committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve."

Michael Fullan – "PLCs are not just about teachers working together, but about building the conditions where educators continuously develop the skills, knowledge, and shared purpose necessary to create meaningful student learning experiences."

Andy Hargreaves & Dennis Shirley – "A true PLC is not merely a group of teachers meeting regularly but a structure where continuous professional inquiry, shared responsibility, and a focus on student outcomes are embedded into the culture of the school."

Shirley Hord – "PLCs are composed of professionals who work interdependently in reflective dialogue and take collective responsibility for student learning in a way that leads to continuous improvement."

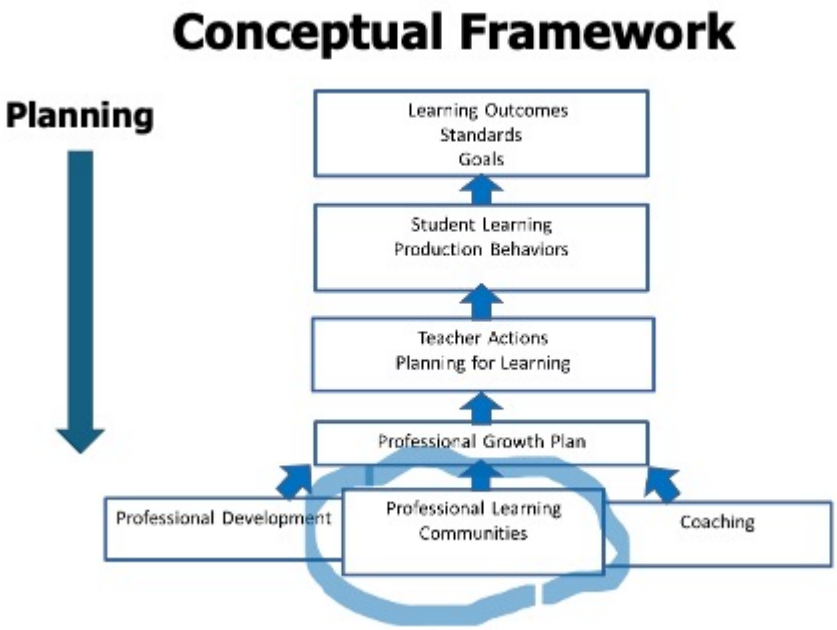
Roland Barth – "The most powerful form of professional development is a community of teachers learning together, challenging each other's assumptions, and testing new approaches in a supportive environment."

In addition, we will listen to a podcast excerpt with Mike Mattos and Dr. Anthony Muhammad, two of the authors of **"Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities – Fourth Edition** where they points out:

"The P in the PLC stands for professional and professionals don't just go through a rite of passage or some course of study to enter the field, but are expected to continue to evolve with the evolving knowledge base in the field. It's the assumption that a research-based profession continues to grow. When teachers get a chance to learn, experiment, and grow their professionalism, their effectiveness improves."

My plan is to add two elements from my work in defining PLCs.

First will be considering how planning backwards from desired student outcomes establishes the work of PLCs. (My favorite PLC question: What do our students need us to learn?)



Secondly, differentiating Professional Working Communities (PWCs) from Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

As we reach agreements around how PLCs could assist in reaching this system's mission and vision, we will be able to start the design of PLC groups and initial processes for them to tap the collective wisdom and passion of educators to continuously improve student learning. Our future planning will focus on the creating professional culture where teachers grow alongside their students, driven by shared goals and a

belief in their combined capacity to make a difference. With effective PLCs teachers move beyond silos and develop a collective sense of responsibility for all students' learning, breaking down barriers that might otherwise limit progress.