

**Tight on Culture,  
Loose on Rules:  
Lessons From Leading  
Three Different PLCs**

Troy Gobble



# TIGHT ON CULTURE, LOOSE ON RULES

LESSONS FROM LEADING THREE DIFFERENT PLCs

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## Culture – SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths** and **Weaknesses**  
*of the school culture*
- **Opportunities** and **Threats**  
*... for student learning at the school*

## Teacher Teams in My Career



Time for teachers to meet,  
no structures in place for  
what to do

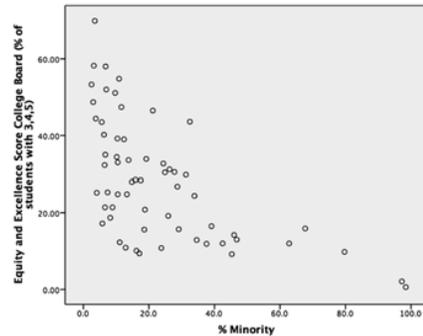


Birth of a PLC, structures  
created as we grew and  
learned



Mature PLC

## Graph That Launched a Thousand Discussions ...



How do we explain the difference?

It is **NOT** simply time for teachers to meet and “collaborate.”

Your school has provided teacher teams a clear vision of why the teams exist.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

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Your school has provided teacher teams with examples and models of strong and weak team work.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

Teachers have to understand **how and why** the collaborative teams exist.

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## How will they do that?

### You will teach them!

- You must provide teams with examples and models of strong and weak team work.
- You must provide teams a clear vision of why the teams exist.

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## Why do we have collaborative team time?

- We will know exactly what we expect students to learn.
- We will collectively measure students' progress.
- We will use that data to improve our instruction.
- We will use that data to provide appropriate assistance for our students.
- Our Mission: Success for every student.

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## My First School – “Common Plan”



- The school board and administration allowed us time to meet, but they never told us what to do while we were meeting.
- What did we talk about?

Teachers	Weather
Students	Cubs or Sox
Parents	Family

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## My First School



- The school board and administration allowed us time to meet, but they never told us what to do while we were meeting.
- What did we talk about?
  - When it was about our classes, the discussion was about calendar, choices, and equipment.

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## The 3 Cs of meetings

- Cooperation
- Coordination
- Collaboration

At my first school, we were cooperating.



We might ...

- Share with each other interesting lessons or discuss schedules or exchange test questions, but ...
- There was no commitment to use that information to bring about change in each teacher's classroom.

## Coordination



- We all recognize these teams ...
  - "If we divide and conquer this work, we will get it done quickly."
- Teachers are working together, they are working efficiently, but they are not learning as a group.
- Coordination is about efficiency.

## Collaboration



"... collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own ...."

—Schrage, *Shared Minds: The New Technologies of Collaboration* (1990)

## Collaboration

“... Collaboration creates a shared meaning about a process, a product, or an event. In this sense, there is nothing routine about it. Something is there that wasn't there before.”

—**Schrage**, *Shared Minds: The New Technologies of Collaboration*

We must teach team leaders how to make effective and meaningful agendas that match the purpose of your PLC.

Your school holds teams accountable for their work in collaborative teams.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

Schools with successful collaborative teams have administrators who ...

- Rotate from team to team to observe the work.
- Hold teams accountable for the work (products and change).
- Gather evidence about what's working and what's not.
- Give clear parameters (loose-tight).
- Celebrate and spread the great work with the entire school.

—**Erkens & Twadell**, *Leading By Design: An Action Framework for PLC at Work Leaders* (2012)

## Rotate From Team to Team to Observe the Work

- You need to be seen!
- Administrators need to demonstrate their commitment to the process by being in the meetings.
- You should provide feedback to the team leader and team members

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## Hold Teams Accountable for the Work (Products and Change)



### Biology PLC

	Outcomes Written	Regular level M.C. written	Honors Level M.C. Written	Multi-Level Thinking Quest.	FRQ Written	Common Lab Act / Assess.	Assessments Given	Data Analyzed	Revisions Created
Scientific Method	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕			⊕	⊕	⊕
Ecology	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕			⊕	⊕	⊕
Biochemistry	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕			⊕	⊕	
Cells	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕	⊕			

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## Hold Teams Accountable for the Work (Products and Change)



### Data Analysis

#### (What could have been better?)

- Which questions did your students underperform?
- Which questions did your students perform at a lower level than other classes?

### Teacher Review of Data

#### (What are you going to do about it?)

- What essential skills will you need to reteach immediately based on the data? How will you do this?
- What will you need to present differently next year when teaching this unit? Is another teacher teaching this idea well?

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## Give Clear Parameters (Loose–Tight)



### At Stevenson

- Loose
  - Teachers can choose what data to collect or use.
- Tight
  - Teams must use data to drive their decisions.
  - No scheduling activities during collaborative team time

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**Celebrate and Spread the Great Work  
With the Entire School**

- Great chance to provide excellent examples of teamwork to the rest of the building.
- Also, teachers will need reinforcement ... this can be difficult and frustrating work!

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**What is NOT the role of an administrator  
in an effective PLC?**

- Participate in every team meeting.
- Do the teams' work for them.
- Interfere or interrupt team time.
- Tell them exactly what to do.
- Judge harshly.

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**Other Lessons ...**

Admin team meetings need to be run as PLC meetings as well.

- Data-based
- Focused on student learning
- Product-oriented – What are we going to do based on this data?

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**Paint a Data Picture**

- Student achievement data
- Engagement data
- Discipline data
- Satisfaction data
- Demographic data

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A Vision that Focuses on Results,  
Not Good Intentions

- What is our current (data-based) reality?
- What is our vision of what we hope to become as a school?
- If we achieve our vision, what impact will we see on the data?

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Rick DuFour’s Memo – 2000

- What is it we want all students to know and be able to do as a result of this course or this unit of instruction?
- What, if any, prerequisite knowledge and skills are required to master the intended outcomes of the course or unit?
- How can we assess each students current level of knowledge and skills?

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Rick DuFour’s Memo – 2000

- By what criteria will we judge the quality of a student’s work?
- How will we assess student learning?
- What are our strategies for responding to students who do not demonstrate mastery of their intended outcomes?
- Based on our analysis of data and information on student achievement, how can we get better results as a team?

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## Structure vs. Culture

“... if you want to change and improve the climate and outcomes of schooling—both for students and teachers—there are features of the school culture that have to be changed, and if they are not changed, your well-intended efforts will be defeated.”

—**Sarason**, *Revisiting the Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* (1996), p.340

## Another way to say it ...

“You can’t talk your way out of a culture that you have behaved your way into, you have to behave your way out.”

—**Doug Conant**  
Former CEO of Campbell Soup Company

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## Thank You

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