

The Seven Stages of Professional Learning Teams

| Stages | Questions That Define This Stage | Description of This Stage | How to Move Forward |
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| Stage 1 Filling the Time | What exactly are we supposed to do? | Teams in this stage believe in the PLC concepts but lack clear guidelines or experiences regarding what they need to focus on during collaboration time. Teams in this stage typically struggle to fill time or move to the other extreme and try to accomplish too many things too quickly. This stage is characterized by frustration, bewilderment, and a desire to go back to what was comfortable. | Teams in this stage need clear guidelines and work expectations. It also helps to identify clear and specific tasks for the group, utilize agendas, create norms, and collective commitments. Creating a PLC structure for the teams will be a crucial foundation for the teams. |
| Stage 2 Sharing Personal Practice | What is everyone doing in their classroom? | Teachers in this stage may be genuinely interested in what other teachers are doing, hoping to pick up new ideas. Talking about teaching feels like collaboration to the novice teacher but does not include the in-depth look at learning. Conversations about practice are comfortable at this stage but there is a danger in never really taking a step toward talking about student learning. | Teacher and school leaders can promote meaningful work by requiring team members to arrive at collaborative decisions around curriculum, assessment, or instruction. Need to move from individual milestones to collective milestones and goals. A discussion about shared accountability is warranted at this stage. |
| Stage 3 Planning Planning | What should we be teaching and how do we lighten the load for each other? | Teachers utilize the team approach to plan together. Rather than each teacher individually planning every lesson, different members take responsibility for sets of lessons and share their planning work with others. Unfortunately, teams often grow comfortable with shared planning and fail to focus on results. Teacher attention remains centered on teaching rather than learning. | Use student achievement data in the planning process. The questions to ask are, "Are students learning what you want them to learn? How do you know they are learning?" |
| Stage 4 Developing Common Assessments | How do you know students learned? What does mastery look like? | Shared assessments force teachers to define exactly what students should learn and what evidence is necessary for documenting success. Novice teams may work to avoid common assessments, thereby steering clear of difficult conversations, but common assessments are essential if teams are to shift their focus from teaching to learning | Teacher and school leaders should consider moderating difficult conversations and modeling strategies for joint decision-making. Time spent on the differences between assessments <i>of</i> learning and <i>for</i> learning is critical. Skill development and P.D on assessment practices is critical at this stage. |

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| <p>Stage 5 Analyzing Student Learning</p> | <p>Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?</p> | <p>Professional learning teams begin to shift their focus from teaching to learning. Teachers spend time looking and dissecting student work, analyzing the strengths and areas of improvement for each student. Teams can be very motivated in this stage and can be driven by results. However, teachers are also put in a delicate position of publicly facing results of their classroom which may pose an intensely personal response. Collective intelligence provides a never-ending source of solutions for addressing shared challenges.</p> | <p>Provide structures and tools for effective data analysis. Emotional support and patience is required during this stage. Create safe environments. Separate the person from the practice is an essential first step in teams examining results together. School leaders should walk the walk, modeling a data oriented approach while publically reflecting on their own work.</p> |
| <p>Stage 6 Adapting instruction to student needs</p> | <p>How can we adjust instruction to help those students struggling and those exceeding expectations?</p> | <p>Teachers, teacher leaders, and school leaders collectively commit to helping all students improve and learn. Behaviors in the teams represent this commitment. Teams are typically performing at high levels taking collective responsibility for student success rather than responding as individuals.</p> | <p>Pose reflective, provocative questions to the team to explore various approaches to intervention and enrichment. Provide professional development in intervention development.</p> |
| <p>Stage 7 Reflecting on Instruction</p> | <p>Which practices are most effective with our students?</p> | <p>This question brings the process of professional learning team development full circle, connecting learning back to teaching. Teams are engaged in deep reflection, tackling innovative projects such as action research and lesson study. In this stage, you will find teachers observing other classrooms, video taping instruction, intentionally inviting others into the group and “growing” the success of the team into a school culture.</p> | <p>Teacher and school leaders should facilitate a team’s ability to explore the teaching-learning connection. Teachers observing each other, providing release time for special projects, facilitating cross-team conversations, and expanding the culture school and district wide.</p> |

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