KEY ELEMENT #3: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM CONTENT

Overview

Now that we’re clear on purpose and organization, we can begin to think about the content of what actually happens in professional learning communities blocks of time. A number of factors go into determining the curriculum content of the PLC.

1. The essence of a PLC is engagement by everyone in activities that enhance learning leading to a measurable positive impact on students.

2. A well-functioning PLC contains the following key elements:
   • Shared vision of essential student learning outcomes
   • Shared acceptance of teaching best practices
   • Shared understanding and practice of authentic formative assessment
   • Commitment to continuous improvement characterized by skills enhancement through feedback driven practice - shared process values
   • Valid and empowering performance analysis and feedback process
   • Team collaboration - coaching, support, and decision-making
   • Effective team leadership and facilitation

3. Activities vary in nature and scope and may contain the following features:
   a. “Critical Friends” methodology, i.e., cultivating new ways of examining student work and relating to colleagues
   b. Community personnel brought into the school to bolster curriculum and learning activities
   c. Extending classroom practice into the community
   d. Engaging teachers, administrators and students simultaneously in learning
   e. Peer supported development
**Cultural Shift:** There is a multidimensional cultural shift that occurs in well-performing PLCs, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Direction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult-centered environment</td>
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<td>Student-centered environment</td>
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<td>Teaching</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
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<td>Content coverage</td>
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<td>Demonstration of proficiency</td>
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<td>Individual teacher effort</td>
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<td>Collaborative teaming</td>
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<td>Privatization of practice</td>
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<td>Open sharing of practice</td>
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<td>External training</td>
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<td>Job-imbedded learning</td>
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<td>Infrequent summative assessments</td>
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<td>Frequent formative assessments</td>
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<td>Assessments to reward &amp; punish</td>
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<td>Assessments to inform &amp; motivate</td>
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<td>Reliance on one type of assessment</td>
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<td>Balanced assessments</td>
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<td>Remediation</td>
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<td>Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your kids &amp; my kids</td>
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<td>Our kids</td>
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What the Literature Says About Content

"...Review of teacher’s behavior by colleagues is the norm in the professional learning community (Louis & Cruse, 1995). This practice is not evaluative but is part of the ‘peers helping peers’ process. Such review is conducted regularly by teachers, who visit each other’s classrooms to observe, script notes, and discuss their observations with the visited peer. The process is based on the desire for individual and community improvement and is enabled by the mutual respect and trustworthiness of staff members." (SEDL, 1997)

“Once the exchange of craft knowledge becomes institutionally sanctioned, educators no longer feel pretentious or in violation of a taboo by sharing their insights. A new taboo—against withholding what we know—replaces the old. Repeated practice soon embeds generous disclosure of craft knowledge into the culture of a school or a school system.” (Barth)

Riccj DuFour has identified Six Characteristics of Effective PLCs
1. Shared mission (purpose, vision (clear direction, values (collective commitments), and goals (indicators, timelines, and targets)) – all focused on student learning
2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
4. Action orientation – learning by doing
5. A commitment to continuous improvement
6. Results orientation (DuFour, 2008)
EXERCISE: EXPLORING THE USE OF PROTOCOLS IN YOUR PLC

Instructions


2. Each participant will select one of the protocols to explain to the others on your team.
   a. Present a five minute overview of the protocol modeling the protocol activities and explaining the value of using the protocol selected in achieving the goals of your PLC.
   b. The remaining team members discuss the protocol and its ability to assist in the development of an effective PLC program.
   c. Continue in this process until every team member has presented a protocol.

3. Summarize the thoughts of the team around the use of protocols and which would be the best match to use at the beginning of your PLC.

4. Post conclusions on flip charts.
PEER SUPPORTED DEVELOPMENT (PSD)

Purpose

PSD is one aspect of a PLC that embraces a group-based methodology for driving culture change and professional development. It is an outcome-focused process where groups of teachers and/or administrators in a school continuously seek and share learning to enhance their competence in facilitating student success re:
- Achievement in core skills (NCLB)
- Achievement in 21st century skills
- Civic responsibility
- Social/emotional growth
- Post-secondary readiness (and access)

Impact of PSD

- Improved student performance (see above)
- Staff development, motivation, and enhancement of job satisfaction and performance
- Enhancement of distributed leadership
- Enhanced cultural resilience re: the ability to manage change
STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A PSD PROGRAM
Combining the What and How of Change Leadership

1. Identify the problem to be solved or goal to be met

2. Determine what type of program is the best approach to solving the problem or meeting the goal
   a. Create a project team to determine the best solution(s)
   b. Build the project team infrastructure - determine and describe key roles and governance structure
   c. Take steps to insure commitment to the team and goal is sufficient to insure success
   d. Create and implement a communication plan and process that addresses the resistance and needs of key stakeholders - communication is continual from this point on
   e. Collect stakeholder input
   f. Map all initiatives, current and future, and determine if a new initiative is in order to meet the goal and address key stakeholder needs. If a new initiative is not required, enhance what is already being done, or consolidate resources and focus on those initiatives with the most bang for the buck.
   g. If a new initiative is required, determine the best type of intervention/program to meet the goal - study the possibilities for change. If the answer is a PSD program, do the following ...

3. Develop the PSD program
   a. Study the possibilities re: the type of program that would best fit your school by studying the research and benchmark successful programs.
   b. Create a PSD program that best fits your school and has the highest potential for meeting your goal. Program development must include the following elements be spelled out in detail:
      • Purpose
      • Organization
      • Content
      • Assessment
Leadership

c. Vet your PSD program with stakeholders and refine as necessary

4. Assesses readiness for change

   a. Conduct a readiness assessment to determine if all functional aspects of the school are at the level required to support the successful execution of the PSD program - if not, take appropriate steps to enhance infrastructure and leadership capacity to close capability gaps

   b. Clarify and redefine, as necessary, the roles for all stakeholders touched by the program

   c. Select, or ask for volunteers for the first program - typically 10-12 participants

5. Prepare for the PSD program

   a. Define and create PSD specific roles and protocols, e.g., facilitator, presenter, interviewer, etc.

   b. Create the appropriate competency and talent model (the behavioral performance standards against which the presenter will be evaluated and developed, e.g. Teacher or School Leader Model)

   c. Define the nature and scope of issues to be addressed - and the nature of the impact expected

   d. Conduct skill training re: the roles, e.g., how to give constructive feedback

6. Implement the PSD program

   a. Run and refine the first PSD program

   b. Assess and adjust as necessary

   c. Communicate successes

   d. Train those in the first program (10-12 participants) to create additional PSD groups within the teacher community

   e. Conduct additional programs and make it an ongoing part of your best practices
SAMPLE SCHOOL LEADER PSD PROGRAM

1. **Purpose:** to enhance the leadership capabilities of administrators and those in key leadership roles throughout the school, i.e., enhancement of distributed leadership for the purpose of improving student outcomes

2. **Organization:**
   a. Participants: 10-12 made up of administrators and others in key school leadership roles
   b. Meet monthly for one hour
   c. Roles: Program Sponsor/Owner, Facilitator, Presenter, Success Factor Interviewers (2), and Coaches/PSD Team Members. It is often the case that the facilitator is an outside consultant/coach. The Presenter and Interviewers change at each session
   d. Activities: pre-work, 1-hour team session, post-session report, ongoing progress reports, sharing of best practices with the school community

3. **Content:** (and process)
   a. Before the session:
      • **Presenter:**
        - Identifies challenge or goal to be analyzed - based upon a positive or negative event personally experienced. (Note: it is often useful to use the same process to debrief a success to identify and share best practices.)
        - Fills out and distributes the Presenter Protocol at least one week prior to the PSD session - this may include a requirement for pre-reading by all participants.
   b. At the session: (Note: times will vary to some degree, and made need to be adjusted with experience.)
• **Facilitator** reminds participants of the program purpose, session content, process, general operating guidelines, and reviews the standards against which the Presenter is being evaluated for development purposes, and facilitates the session activities
• **Presenter** clarifies issues and goals - conducts walkthrough of Presenter Protocol (5 minutes)
• **Interviewers** (2) interview the presenter with stop action at key points (stop points identified by the Facilitator) for group discussion led by the Facilitator (30 minutes)
• **Coaches/Participants** - using the Coach Protocol, identify activities that will help the Presenter attain goals; identify skill and talent development activities employing the School Leader Competency and Talent Model (10 minutes)
• **Facilitator** - Leads a discussion where the presenter is provided developmental feedback (10 minutes)
• **Prior-presenter(s)** - provides progress report on actions taken based on his/her feedback at an earlier session. The actions may be determined to be a best practice that should be communicated to the community at large (5 minutes)
• **Facilitator** - collects the Coach Protocols and gives them to the Presenter, and verifies the Presenter and prior Presenter(s) for the next session.

c. After the session:
• **Presenter** summarizes the feedback and creates a plan for addressing goal attainment and development of skills - the plan is distributed to other participants. The team may decide they want to create and employ a standard template to be used for this summary report.
• **Facilitator** summarizes key points from the session re: lessons learned and potential best practices identified, and distributes this to participants and the Program Sponsor

4. **Assessment:**
   a. A formal evaluation process for capturing the impact on students, teachers, and leaders is designed and implemented by the participants and the program sponsor is.
   b. The impact is assessed against the goals provided by each Presenter in the Presenter Protocols and against overall program goals.
5. **Leadership:**
   a. Prior to the start of the program clear leadership responsibility and authority is established with regard to different roles, e.g.:
      - Program Sponsor/Owner
      - Facilitator
      - Interviewers
      - Coaches/Participants
   b. Additional leadership development can take place if the facilitator role is one that rotates among participants rather than given to an outside consultant. However, training in that role will be necessary.
   c. In collaboration with the Program Sponsor, the participants decide which learnings/practices should be institutionalized and disseminated throughout the school.
PRESENTER PROTOCOL

NAME: ______________________  POSITION: ___________________________  DATE PRESENTING: __________

CHALLENGE/GOAL SNAPSHOT: ________________________________________________________________

SITUATIONAL VARIABLES:
• Setting: ________________________________________________________________
• How Long Has the Issue/Challenge/Goal Existed and/or Been Important: ________________________
• Key Stakeholders: ________________________________________________________________
• Expected Obstacles/Resistance: _________________________________________________________
• Stage of Group Development: __________________________________________________________
• Student Outcomes Being Addressed: _____________________________________________________

• Other School & SPD/PLC Goals Being Addressed: ________________________________

• What Success Will Look Like: __________________________________________________________

• What Coaches Should Look For - Nature of Assistance Sought: ________________________________

• Competency & Talent Focus Requested (circle):

A. LEADING & MANAGING THE ORGANIZATION
   1. Outcome and Accountability Driven
   2. Vision
   3. Communication
   4. Systems Orientation

B. LEADING AND MANAGING PEOPLE
   5. Leader Self-Image
   6. Good Judgment
   7. Reading Self & Others
   8. Motivating/Influencing
   9. Talent Management

C. MANAGING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT
   10. Political Savvy
   11. Creating Strategic Relationships

D. MANAGING SELF
   12. Professionalism
   13. Self-Confidence
   14. Flexibility

• Suggested Preparation/Readings: _________________________________________________________

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COACH PROTOCOL

NAME: ___________________  POSITION: ___________________  DATE OBSERVING: ________________

PERSON PRESENTING: ___________________  Position: ___________________

HOW WELL HAS THE PRESENTER FORMULATED THE GOAL/CHALLENGE: ________________________________

ARE DESIRED OUTCOMES APPROPRIATE AND REALISTIC?

LIST ANY OTHER OBSTACLES OR SOURCES OF RESISTANCE MISSED BY THE PRESENTER: ________________

BASED ON WHAT YOU HEARD, AND KEEPING THE RULES OF GOOD FEEDBACK IN MIND:

• What should the Presenter focus on doing Less of: ________________________________

• What should the Presenter focus on doing More of: ________________________________

• What Competencies/Talents need more emphasis (circle) and in what context: ________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. LEADING &amp; MANAGING THE ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>B. LEADING AND MANAGING PEOPLE</th>
<th>C. MANAGING THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>D. MANAGING SELF</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Talent Management</td>
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</table>

• What Activities and Development Opportunities are Required for the Presenter to Meet His/Her Challenge/Goal?: ________________

• WHAT DID YOU LEARN DURING THIS SESSION THAT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO YOU IN YOUR JOB: ________________

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RULES OF GOOD FEEDBACK

1. Be thoughtful - put it in writing.

2. Balance the feedback - positive and negative - and start with the positive.

3. Only address items the recipient can change/control.

4. Be very objective - the feedback should be data and not opinion-based, i.e., not personalized.

5. Be very specific - to include providing context and relevant examples.

6. Provide recommendations that are prioritized and reflect a sequence for implementation - either based on a logic or the ability to obtain success quickly and build confidence.

7. Provide recommendations that also address how to leverage strengths.

8. Provide opportunities for support in implementing recommendations

9. Insure that mutually agreed upon rules of confidentiality are followed.
SUCCESS FACTOR INTERVIEWING (SFI)

Overview

One of the key elements determining the success of the PSD methodology described above is the SFI, i.e., the technique employed by the two interviewers during the session. Interviewing as a technique to gather data to understand or assess performance can be either the worst or best methodology for obtaining valid information. Unfortunately, in 99% of the cases, it is the former, i.e., the worst. This need not be the case if the right interviewing technique is employed, i.e., Success Factor Interviewing (SFI). The SFI provides behavioral data that are reliable and valid reflections of knowledge, skills/competencies, and talents.

SFI Applications

Once mastered, the SFI can be utilized for the following:

- **Debriefing specific events for the purpose of professional development coaching to build skills and shape talents**
- Surfacing behavioral data for the creation or validation of competency/talent models
- Evaluating people against competency/talent models to evaluate specific competency/talent proficiency - for the purpose of selection, promotion, or the creation of customized development programs
- Studying processes in detail, in particular the task-behavior interface
- Investigating organizational incidents
- Building stakeholder relationships - through the deepened understanding of needs, desires, concerns, and fears
- Monitoring performance from a distance, e.g., when employees are at remote locations
The First Requirement - Clear and Meaningful Job Performance Standards

Job standards - from useless to useful:

- Blind faith - I know it when I see it
- Intuition/gut feeling
- Generic knowledge and skill list
- Traditional job description
- Behavioral checklist
- Generic competency list
- Validated competency model
- Process-based job or role description with validated competencies
**Identifying the Right Data**

The goal of the SFI interviewer is to sort the **wheat** from **chaff** when it comes to behavioral data (thoughts, feelings, and actions). The following is a depiction of someone’s mind:

The memory “pearls”, i.e., critical/emotion-laden events below the squiggly line, are the **wheat** and the focus of the SFI. Opening them up and having them recalled in high detail provides the behavioral data required to understand and evaluate performance and to identify development opportunities.
The Critical Event Storyline

A memory pearl/critical event contains many sub-events along the timeline of the story the event captures. The job of the interviewer is to probe these sub-events for behavioral data, and to keep the “story” moving.

PSD application: in the coaching process the critical event is pre-determined by the Presenter, i.e., you will be analyzing and evaluating a specific set of activities defined by the Presenter - which will contain sub-events as part of the overall process event retelling process.

Evaluation Methodologies

From powerless to powerful re: ability to predict future performance

- References
- Resume’ analysis
- *Traditional interview*
- Panel interview
- Psychological testing
- Observation

- **Behavioral Interview**
- Assessment center (if employing validated standards)
- 360° evaluation (if employing validated standards)
- Work sample
- **Success Factor Interview (SFI)**
**Interview Technique Comparison**

The chart on the next page displays the probes and questions typical of three types of interviews, i.e., Traditional, Behavioral, and SFI. None of the techniques is useful for development or selection purposes if the behavioral standards being evaluated have not been made measurable, i.e., observable behavioral indicators have not been established.

**SAMPLE OF PSD PROBES AND QUESTIONS (For School Leaders)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL (useless)</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL (better)</th>
<th>SFI (best)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • What are your strengths?  
• What are your weaknesses?  
• How would your supervisor, describe you? Your strengths and limitations and development requirements?  
• What have been your biggest challenges as a principal?  
• How would you handle xyz situation with a teacher?  
• How well do you collaborate with your colleagues? | • Give me an example of a time when you had to do xyz in the cafeteria or with a parent (this should be followed by behavioral probes)  
• Give me an example of your xyz skills  
• Give me an example that highlights the type of skills you wish to develop | • Tell me about a time (on the job) when you were particularly satisfied (or dissatisfied)  
- provide me with a one minute snapshot of that situation.  
• PSD application:  
- Provide us with a one-minute snapshot of the situation and why it was satisfying and/or dissatisfying  
- Take me back to the beginning and describe:  
  • What you did  
  • What you saw  
  • What you felt  
  • What you said  
  • What you heard  
  • What you thought  
- Tell me more  
- Jump to the next most relevant thing that happened, etc.  
- Describe the outcome |
The SFI is completely non-leading, as opposed to the other techniques, which is critical to obtaining valid data that truly reflects what capabilities are employed by the Presenter and are “front of mind” for that person.

**SFI Points of Note**

- It is very hard for interviewees to lie, i.e., fabricate data.
- It is very easy for the interviewer to miss good data - this is an interviewer dependent technique.
- The interviewer controls the interview, but should do only 10% or less of the talking.
- It is important not to get lost in the stories being told, as that is easy to do, particularly when superior performance is being demonstrated.
- Competencies and talents travel, and therefore, the type of situation you uncover and probe doesn’t matter, whether it is positive or negative.
- It’s important that the interview setting and process itself be as stress free as possible, otherwise access to the pearls will be difficult. It is important that trust has been established within the group, and that rules of effective feedback are in play.
- If the interviewer is new to the process, it is often easier to have two people conduct the SFI to support one another, and for one to take notes.
- Typical responses of people who have been interviewed using the SFI process to the process are:
  - “I learned things about myself I really didn’t know.”
  - “I didn’t realize that I respond the same way every time when that happens”
  - “I have some strengths I need to employ more.”
  - “It highlighted how clueless I am when faced with that particular situation.”
  - “That’s a talent or skill that’s going to be difficult for me to develop. It might be smart for me to let someone else do that.”
  - “I know someone who is really much better than I am at that. I need to watch what they do more closely.”
  - “I need to expand my toolkit in these areas.”
  - “It’s now very clear to me where I need to focus my development efforts.”
**SFI Application for the PSD**

The SFI is employed in the PSD session as follows:

1. After the Presenter Protocol has been distributed and information clarified, the Interviewer(s) starts the SFI re: the school leader critical event being analyzed.

2. Process overview:
   - Interviewers start by asking the Presenter to take us to the beginning when this idea first came to mind and provide a one-minute snapshot of the situation, and why it was designated as either a positive or negative event.
   - Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, i.e., principal competencies and talents, are illuminated by having the Presenter “replaying the videotape” of the event and employing the probes described in the chart presented earlier.
   - The “story” is stopped at critical points by the Facilitator for discussion re: what the decision options are, and what courses of action might be employed - this is then played out to see what the presenter(s) actually did.
   - During this process, peers/coaches are taking notes and identifying what skills and competencies are being demonstrated, which need development, and what can be done to assist the Presenter to meet his/her goals.

3. SFI technique specifics for the Interviewers:
   - Remind Presenter of the process to be used
   - Must speak in the first person - I versus we
   - Will be interrupting frequently - to drill down for additional detail
• Will push for concrete examples if words like usually, typically, occasionally, basically, or generally, are used
• Ask for a one-minute overview that encapsulates the story and explains why it was a high or low.
• Probes/Questions:
  - Take me back to the beginning.
  - What let up to the situation?
  - What did you do?
  - What did you say?
  - What did you think?
  - What did you feel?
  - What did you see?
  - What did you hear?
  - Tell me more.
  - What happened next?
  - Take me to the next most relevant thing that happened?
  - What was the outcome?
• Start all probes with “What”
• Probe when you hear emotion, values, opinions, conclusions, judgments, changes in thinking, transitions, etc.
• Ask clarifying questions
• Probe deeply around critical meetings, one-on-one interactions, or key phone calls,
• Remember to ask everything in the past tense.
• Stay neutral to what you hear
• Remember not to get lost in a story or to praise the interviewee for an specific content. The only encouragement given, if any, is for the level of detail provided.

4. Don’t do the following:
   • Talk too much
   • Start probes with “how”
• Double up on questions
• Ask questions that are closed ended - yes/no response
• Tell or sell (versus seek)
• Ask leading questions
• Ask hypothetical questions

• Start probes with “why”
• Accept responses that start with typically, usually, basically, occasionally, etc.
• Praise story content
• Get lost in the story
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Instructions
1. Using all the analysis work you've done so far, summarize the major elements of your content design below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT OF CONTENT:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What key content design elements will your professional learning community include in order to best support educators in meeting the stated purpose(s) of your PLC program?</td>
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EVALUATION OF YOUR CONTENT DESIGN

Instructions:
1. On your own, respond to each item.
2. When everyone is done, compare your results to those of your team members.
3. Use the items the team agrees are either a “no” or “somewhat” as input in refining the design you summarized on the prior page. In other words, a “no” or “somewhat” indicates some elements of your Content design may need tuning up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The content description will be easily understood by all stakeholders.</td>
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<td>2. The content will be embraced by students.</td>
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<td>3. The content elements address all aspects of your Purpose.</td>
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<td>4. The content reflects a deep focus on what must be done - it is very targeted in facilitating the accomplishment of your PLC goals.</td>
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<td>5. The content design is not just pie in the sky - it is doable in your setting.</td>
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<td>6. All elements of your content design are “intentional”, i.e., you can provide a meaningful rationale for each element as it relates to achieving PLC goals.</td>
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<td>7. You are prepared to address the rationale for what content was left out of your design.</td>
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<td>8. The design leverages your strengths as a school.</td>
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<td>9. The path to content design implementation is clear.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The knowledge and skill development requirements associated with each content element are clear and can be addressed effectively.</td>
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<td>11. The knowledge and skill development requirements necessary to make the content come alive and fully engage students are clear and can be addressed effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The knowledge and skill requirements to effectively engage students and personalize the PLC experience, exclusive of content, are clear and can be addressed effectively.</td>
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