

With a Little Help from My Friends:

*Professional Learning Communities in
the Band Director's World*

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What is a PLC? A Professional Learning Community is organizational arrangement that is characterized by shared leadership, common values, mutual vision, shared personal practices, and collective creativity.

The PLC movement may affect music educators in two major ways.

1. Team Members within a school building.

Music teaching professionals may be invited (or required) to participate in PLC teams within their own school. In such case, the music teacher becomes an integral component of a cross-curricular team, recognized as an equal partner and valued resource within the school community.

2. Team Members of music educators

Music educators may choose to become involved in a PLC comprised of other music teachers within their vertical teams (local schools), districts, regions, and professional organizations. Potential benefits for music educators may include:

- Emotional Support
- Decreased Isolation
- Personal Growth
- Professional Growth
- Decreased Teacher Attrition
- Effective Problem Solving

Common Attributes:

Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

The mission or purpose of a PLC is to facilitate student learning through the collaborative, interdependent practice of teachers. This has been described as a synergy of efforts in which staff members are committed to principles each believes in and works toward implementing. (DuFour & Eaker, 1998)

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Leadership is shared among both formal and informal leaders (Phillips, 2003). Opportunities are present for staff members to influence the school's activities and policies (King & Newmann, 2000).

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Each member's input is valued and trusted. Cognitive Dissonance results in harmonies problem solving.

Collaborative Culture

DuFour & Eaker (1998) describe this as working together toward common purpose, all the while learning together and continually improving.

Collective Inquiry

This characteristic is evident when the plc teams exchange ideas on curriculum, instruction, and job embedded professional development.

Supportive Conditions

Hord (1997) stipulates that required supportive conditions, especially time, include (a) reduced staff isolation, (b) increased staff capacity, (c) provision of a caring, productive environment, and (d) improved quality of student programs.

The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools conducted a five-year study in the early 1990s that included analysis of data from over 1500 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States. The Center also conducted field research in forty-four schools in sixteen states.

Schools that were successful in linking their improvement initiatives included characteristics of PLCs including: (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995):

- a. Teachers are guided by a clear, commonly held, shared purpose for student learning
- b. Teachers feel a sense of collective responsibility for student learning
- c. Teachers collaborate with one another to promote student learning
- d. Teachers enjoy increased autonomy at the school site

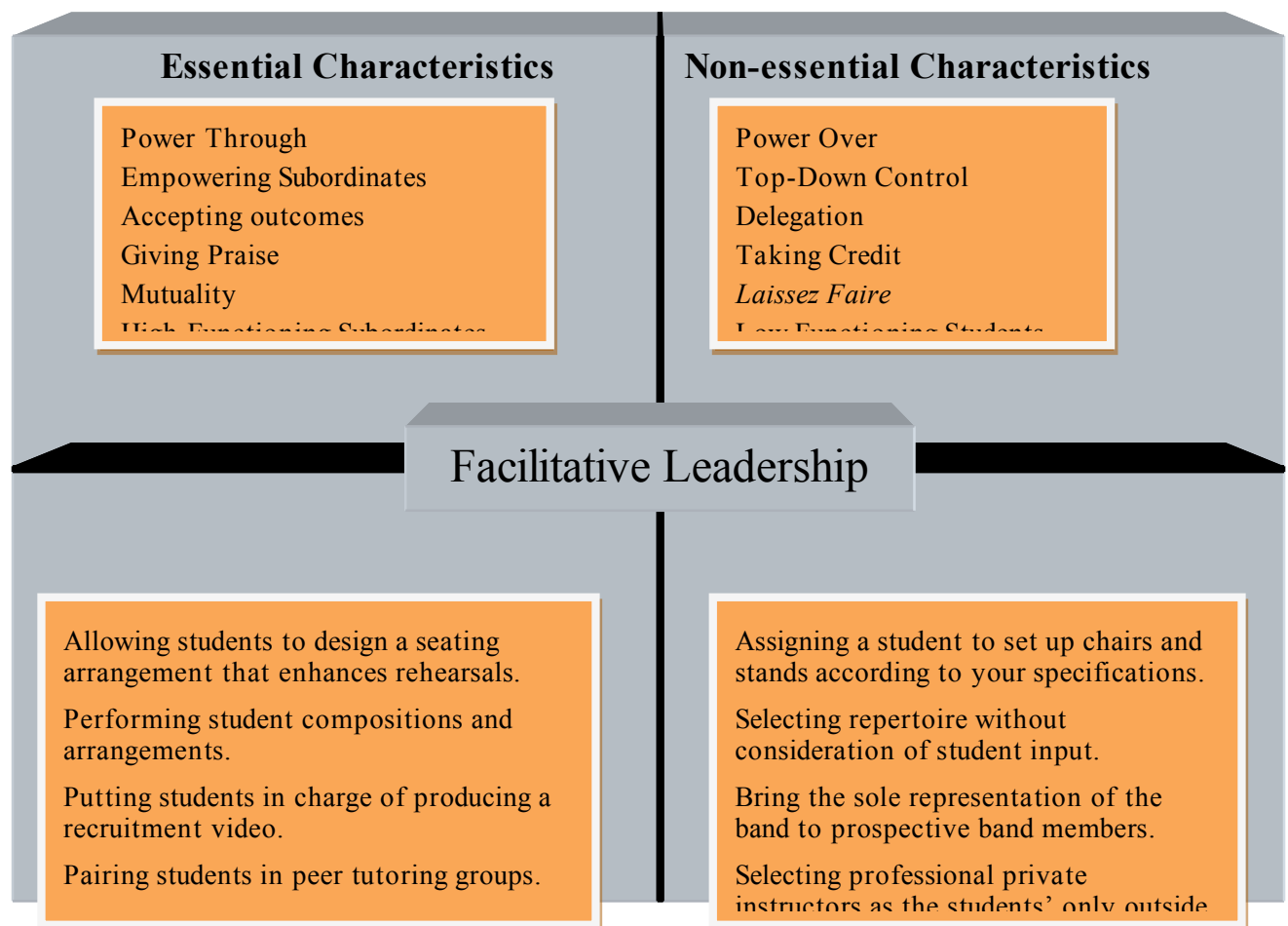
Are you skeptical? Consider this quote from Richard DuFour (2007):

Researchers who have studied schools where educators actually engage in PLC practices have consistently cited those practices as our best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Louis & Marks, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Newmann, 1996; Reeves, 2006; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005; Sparks, 2005). Those practices have been endorsed by the National Staff Development Council, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. They certainly "complement" the recent recommendations presented in *Success in the Middle* by the National Middle School Association (2006) and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2006).

It would be inaccurate to portray PLC concepts as a fad, bandwagon, or recipe. We have known for decades that students benefit when the teachers in their schools work in collaborative teams (Little, 1990), establish a guaranteed and viable curriculum to ensure all students have access to the same knowledge and skills (Marzano, 2003), monitor student learning on a frequent and timely basis (Lezotte, 1997), use formative assessments to identify students who need additional support for learning (Reeves, 2006), and demonstrate high expectations for student achievement through a collective commitment to help all students learn (Brophy & Good, 2002). These concepts represent more than "ideas worth considering": they continue to represent best practices for meeting the needs of all students.

A Professional Learning Community Key Aspect: Shared Leadership

Frayer Model on Leadership



Shared Leadership and Music Learning Shared/Facilitative Leadership and Music Learning:

What is your Leadership Style?

Facilitative.....Non-Facilitative

Teacher permits students to function independently within limits set by you.	Teacher presents problems, gets suggestions, and makes decision.	Teacher presents ideas and invites questions.	Teacher makes and announces decision.
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Your Leadership Style Helps To Determine the Strength Of Your Student Leadership!

Band directors with greater facilitative leadership tend to have a greater amount of student leadership within their programs (Davison, 2007).

Consider the following:

The Student Musician Leadership Continua

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Social Dimension

Student Sabotages the Organization's Social Dynamic.	Student Behaviors Fluctuate According to Situation. Student is influenced easily.	Student Facilitates a Growth in the Organization's Social Dynamic.
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Musical Dimension

Student's Musicianship Hinders the Ensemble's Performance.	Student's Musicianship is developing, and could affect group performance positively or negatively.	Student's Musicianship demonstrates an appropriate model for other students.
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Our goal is to move our students from left to right by being facilitative leaders and by using sound teaching practices.



Biographical Information

Jim Holcomb is the music and dance supervisor for Memphis City Schools. Under his leadership, the district has been selected as a mentor district that values arts education by the President's Council on the Arts and the Humanities and by the American Music Conference as "The 100 Best Communities for Music Education" for three years. In 2006, he was named TN Music Educator's Administrator of the Year. Jim has presented at numerous state and national conferences, and has served on the boards of many arts advocacy associations.

Dr. John Vance has been teaching in the Memphis City Schools for ten years. Before that, he taught in several schools in Alabama. John received his BS (1983) and MS (1986) in Music Education from Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama. He completed his Doctorate in 1996 from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa and is currently the band director at Treadwell High School.

Dr. Dru Davison teaches for the Memphis City Schools and has previously taught in Arkansas and Texas. He holds a PhD in music education from the University of North Texas and a MME and BME from Arkansas State University. He is an active performer and clinician, and has presented at numerous conferences on topics such as leadership development and improvisation.

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