

# Professional Learning Community Observation Guide: Overview and Uses

## Introduction

The PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY OBSERVATION GUIDE helps groups establish a common vision for effective collaboration, develop a shared understanding of what it means to work effectively as a PLC, and deepen their understanding of, and commitment to, the collaborative processes necessary to improve instructional practices. The Guide can foster the open communication needed to develop common norms, vision, and goals. The PLC Observation Guide is also a meaningful tool for self-monitoring a PLC's development.

## Organization of the PLC Observation Guide

The PLC Observation Guide is structured around three research-based elements of an effective Professional Learning Community: Shared Vision and Ways of Working, Collaboration, and Reflective Dialogue. The elements are described in detail by the bulleted indicators. The guide also includes a section contrasting two kinds of collaborative interactions, “supportive” and “developmental” practices (see p. 2 of this overview).

### **I. Collaboration**

Collaboration refers to sharing expertise and perspectives on teaching and learning processes, examining data about students, and developing a sense of mutual support and shared responsibility for effective instruction.

### **II. Shared Vision and Ways of Working**

Professional learning communities (PLC) focus on student learning as the end and teaching as the means. Developing consciousness about norms and values is central to the community-building process.

### **III. Reflective Dialogue**

Reflective dialogue helps develop shared understandings of such things as the purposes of and processes for learning. Shared understandings bind communities together and bind members to shared goals and shared work.

## **Professional Interactions to Develop Capacity for Institutional Change:**

Stevens and Kahne (2006) identify types of practice that Professional Learning Communities generally gravitate towards: supportive (interactions through which teachers exchange information, advice, and approaches for addressing specific tasks, problems, or concerns) and developmental (interactions and activities through which teacher communities attempt to improve the collective instructional capacity of their members and change classroom practices). While both practices are collaborative in nature, only developmental practices lead to lasting, systemic change.

### **Uses of the PLC Observation Guide:**

#### *Building a Shared Vision of Effective Collaboration:*

The PLC Observation Guide can be used to initiate conversations where group members surface current ideas about collaboration. It can also support on-going dialogue that helps establish common language and ideas about collaboration. Examining a videotaped PLC or a case study description of a collaborative group through the lens of the PLC Observation Guide can further allow colleagues to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the work of an effective professional learning community.

#### *Reflection*

The PLC Observation Guide can provide support for periodic, meaningful self-monitoring and reflection. Using the guide to examine the group's process can foster open communication and focus attention on the key elements of effective collaboration.

#### *Observation*

The guide can be used by outside observers who are hoping to learn about the workings of a PLC. The PLC Observation Guide provides concise descriptions of what effective collaboration may look like. The terminology used in the guide clearly identifies what evidence an outside observer might look for when observing a highly functional PLC.

**Please Note** – *The guide is not meant to be used to provide evaluative feedback to a group.*

### **References:**

Stevens, W.D. & Kahne, J. (2006). *Professional communities and instructional improvement practices: A study of small high schools in Chicago*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.