COLLABORATION for CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Teamwork Beyond the Core Content Areas in a PLC at Work®

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Reproducible pages are in italics.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work process increases levels of student learning, and the PLC movement continues to gain momentum and respect among researchers and educational organizations due to its positive impact on learning institutions. As Richard DuFour and Robert Marzano (2011) make clear: "The potential of the PLC process to improve schools has repeatedly been cited not only by researchers but also by professional organizations that serve as advocates for teachers and principals" (p. 21).

Though the PLC process includes all educators, much that has been written about the topic addresses or is most easily applied to core academic subjects and the teachers of those subjects. Although there continues to be a worldwide emphasis on academic learning and testing, most educators and parents will acknowledge there is more to educating students than academics alone. As teachers and leaders of career and technical education (CTE), we need to help other educators, employers, community members, students, and parents increase their awareness of the value of CTE. Many stakeholders recognize that CTE is important because it prepares students for college *and* careers. This is true, but it is not the only value to CTE. When students have a concentration of CTE on their transcripts, they have multiple avenues to pursue as they move into adulthood. Further, a CTE background provides skills and benefits that will last a lifetime. The following list shows lifelong skills learned in CTE programs of study. Some skills are unique to certain CTE pathways while others are more general to any CTE program of study.

- Apply for grants and scholarships.
- Secure and sustain an income.
- Network with people you don't know.
- Introduce yourself to potential employers.
- Present ideas and new concepts.
- Work as a member of a team.

- Manage general finances.
- Reconcile bank statements.
- Set up and monitor personal budgets.
- Apply for credit and loans.
- Be an entrepreneur.
- Use and maintain hand tools.
- Use and maintain power equipment.
- Read and understand technical information.
- Assemble and repair household items.
- Install household appliances.
- Demonstrate workplace etiquette.

The PLC process has been proven to strengthen learning in core academics, and CTE can also strengthen professional learning communities. Career and technical education teachers and teams consistently search for meaningful ways to become more effective, respected, and integrated into the vital systems and processes of PLCs.

PLCs and CTE have similarities in their growth in popularity and recognition in the 21st century. CTE is gaining momentum throughout many parts of the world; for example, Australia, Russia, countries in Western Europe, countries in Central Africa, and others have a significant focus on CTE, also known as vocational education (Association for Career and Technical Education, n.d.). In 2019, the United States Congress reauthorized the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 with a supporting budget of 1.2 billion dollars per year (Perkins Collaborative Resource Network, n.d.b). With this funding the government is asking every state to improve several aspects of CTE. There is an expectation to embed academics, prepare students for careers and college, and be nimble with responses to the local job market's needs by providing industry-ready and well-prepared employees. The following list mentions several but not all of the expectations for improvement in CTE (*Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006*, 2019).

- Develop more fully the academic knowledge and technical and employability skills of secondary education students.
- Develop challenging academic and technical standards and assist students in meeting such standards.
- Include preparation for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations in current emerging professions.

- Develop, implement, and improve career and technical education.
- Promote the development of services and activities that integrate rigorous and challenging academic and career and technical instruction.
- Conduct best practices that improve career and technical education programs of study, services, and activities.

CTE programs play an instrumental role in schools by offering a rich curriculum that connects students to core content, college, employment, and other real-life experiences. Embedding PLC processes in CTE programs of study can have an impact in meeting national and local community expectations of CTE. With the research supporting the PLC process for improving schools along with the support and demand for CTE to improve, partnering PLC and CTE efforts should improve both. DuFour and Marzano (2011) state, "The best strategy for improving schools and districts is developing the collective capacity of educators to function as members of a professional learning community" (p. 21). However, in our experience, we have witnessed the attempt by some schools to establish a PLC culture with a clear absence of CTE and other singleton teachers. In fact, in some cases, schools only use their CTE programs and teachers to house or supervise students while other teams collaborate. This needs to change or at least be reversed occasionally so teams with CTE representation can collaborate.

For example, we have observed in some schools a perception that the CTE courses are not as important as core academics. This perception is perpetuated when states do not have accurate methods to measure the effectiveness of CTE curricula and success as they do for academic subjects. However, in most of these cases the district or school decision makers have not been exposed to effective approaches of integrating CTE teams into PLC processes. This is a perfect opportunity for these leaders to start from scratch with the integration of CTE programs of study.

CTE teachers functioning in a PLC is not as easy as it may sound and will require a shift in the culture of the team to create collective commitments to the collaborative processes. In *Starting a Movement*, Kenneth C. Williams and Tom Hierck (2015) describe how to build a PLC and acknowledge that changing the culture to accept working together is not easy: "Working together is a lot more challenging than working alone. Focusing on what we as teachers can do instead of on what we don't have requires a collective commitment" (p. 1). However, teachers working interdependently within collaborative teams is not a fad. PLCs lead a movement in education that is changing how teachers work together for the success of their

students. For a movement like this to pay off in schools, it must involve all teachers, including CTE teachers.

This book will explicitly describe how PLC processes that are often coveted for academic courses can be applied in a CTE context. Throughout the following chapters, we integrate PLC processes into CTE programs of study, reinforcing the research base of PLC processes while honoring the intent of CTE programs to prepare students for college and career. In our effort to clearly communicate the integration of PLC processes with CTE we provide numerous CTE-specific resources and reproducible worksheets throughout this book. If you are well versed in PLC, you will recognize many of the processes as similar to those covered in other PLC-related publications.

Moving CTE Teams Past Their Differences

CTE collaborative teams are different from those in other content areas where there are two or more teachers teaching the same content. Moving CTE teams past their differences will require some special consideration focused on finding commonalities. Even in schools that do include CTE teachers within their PLC culture, there is often very little understanding of how to support the work of these unique teams. In *Transforming School Culture*, Anthony Muhammad (2009) writes that the PLC process involves securing or creating a culture of an unwavering belief by all stakeholders that all students can learn at high levels and clear and concise policies and procedures to achieve the belief. Philosophically, this makes sense for CTE teams—all teachers within an assigned team work interdependently toward shared goals to improve the learning of all the students they serve. Practically, though, this can be a high hurdle for CTE teams when the teachers might not have common curricula or students.

So, how do CTE teachers move past their differences to form purposeful, high-functioning collaborative teams? This book is designed to provide the clarity of purpose and procedures for collaboration that will help teachers who don't have content partners work within a team. For CTE teams to find their purpose together, they need to find their common denominators—the content, skills, and behaviors that bring their otherwise very different curricula together for a common purpose. These common denominators might be unique to your CTE team or school, but they do exist, and you can find them if you are willing to collaborate on what you have in common. This means the team members will need to discipline themselves to think past all the differences in order to discover what they do share. The common denominators of an eclectic team may or may not be standards or finite skills within the different curricula, but the CTE team can identify commonalities from one program

of studies to the next. A team's common denominators may also be focused on class management, instructional processes, student or adult behaviors, or curricula that are expected across programs.

Working as a collaborative CTE team requires teachers to be highly committed to continually improving student learning, their own learning, and the learning of their teammates. This work might not be easy at first—but the payoff for student learning in technical education programs that set them up for college and career success is well worth the work.

Getting the Most Out of This Book

Although this book is intentionally focused on integrating PLC processes with CTE teams or teams with CTE representation, any reader interested in learning more about best practices within a PLC will find the information, protocols, and templates useful. A team might include several CTE teachers of the same or similar courses, or it might be one CTE teacher working with teachers of music, physical education, or other areas. Readers will find an abundance of strategies for singleton teachers (those who are the only ones who teach their subjects and are therefore on teams with teachers who don't teach the same things) and for teachers who share the same programs of study with others on their team. These strategies are also appropriate for school leaders to learn, especially administrators who supervise teams with CTE representation.

Each chapter explains strategies and processes for cyclical operations for CTE teachers in a PLC. The topics we present are closely interrelated, and many processes are prerequisites for later chapters. The PLC process in CTE will function well when all aspects are present and executed with fidelity. Even so, different teams may start their journeys in different places and add components along the way. The intent of this book is to help schools change their PLC approach to include CTE with PLC efforts in an ongoing manner, not a one-and-done activity.

Chapter 1 examines the three big ideas of PLC culture and the four critical questions of collaborative teams and how readers can integrate them into a CTE team's culture and routines. This includes methods to help CTE teams focus on the right work as they collaborate—the right work being how to increase student learning.

Chapter 2 provides clarity on how to bring teachers from different subject areas together into a high-performing collaborative team. The rest of the work in this book hinges on teachers functioning in true collaboration with other professionals. This chapter clarifies what collaboration is as well as what to do with collaborative time.

Chapter 3 examines the logistics of collaboration. When teacher teams have clarity regarding their existence as a team, they are ready to refine the logistics of their collaborative time. This chapter covers many aspects of collaborative work, such as record keeping, roles in team meetings, schedules, norms for collaborating, and commitments between meetings.

Chapter 4 focuses on the content and on how to find essential learning that is common to members of the CTE team who don't teach the same program of study. The essential learnings we discuss are program specific and can include soft skills students must learn. This chapter includes unwrapping the technical jargon in the curriculum to show how it will be learned in a classroom and understood by the students. It discusses learning targets along with methods to identify learning targets in the essential learner outcomes. This chapter will help teachers develop commonality in effective teaching strategies on common essential learnings from class to class.

Chapter 5 covers the development of assessments and how to use them to confirm students are learning the essential outcomes. This chapter provides examples of aligning assessment questions to learner outcomes and references to test blueprints to inform the team of what is necessary for success on a high-stakes assessment. It also covers different types of assessments, assessment cycles, instruction and assessment plans, and calibrating scoring processes.

Chapter 6 addresses reflecting on data, which is where many collaborative teams get tripped up. This chapter focuses on what to do with the data from assessments and how to set up SMART goals (strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound). It also includes different ways to analyze assessment results and provides strategies to put the data to work, rather than working for the data.

Chapter 7 furthers the use of data to set up intervention and enrichment systems. In addition to clarifying a schoolwide pyramid of interventions, we also describe how to set up intervention models within the CTE team or the classroom.

Finally, appendix A presents a glossary of terms while appendix B provides numerous reproducible worksheets and tools that CTE teams can use to enact the concepts from this book. Each chapter concludes with a set of vital action steps for your team to utilize as they create their new norms.

We encourage you to make the most of this book in three ways.

1. Use the strategies at the conclusion of each chapter (in the sections titled Vital Action Steps for CTE Teams) to reflect on how you might improve your team.

2. Plan time within the school year to experiment with structuring team meetings with the proposed protocols. As you become more comfortable using these collaborative protocols to structure your team conversations, customize them to meet the unique needs of your team.
3. Use the reproducible tools to increase your team's organization and to hold yourself and your team accountable to establishing a collaborative team culture.