

# Education Research Association of Singapore



**COLLEGE** *of*  
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# Professional Learning Communities: Teacher and Administrator Shared Leadership Practices in Schools

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# Singapore's Educational System

- Intentional policies
- Comprehensive system
- Aligned curriculum
- High quality teachers and leaders

# 1997 - Education policy framework: Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN)

## **Critical Elements of this System:**

- Recruitment
- Training
- Compensation
- Professional Development
- Performance Appraisal
- Career Development

# 2003 – More focus on Innovation and Enterprise

- This became the Desired Outcome of Education (DOE) that was emphasized.
- Creates a mindset and core set of life skills and attitudes desired in students and teachers.

# 2005 - Teach Less Learn More (TLLM) introduced by MOE

- This policy builds on the past but reframes teaching to engage learners, prepare them for life, and teach to learn, not only to prepare for exams.
- In the classroom it shifts the focus from quantity of material covered to quality of learning.
- It challenges educators to consider three areas:
  - \* Remember why we teach
  - \* Reflect on what we teach
  - \* Reconsider how we teach

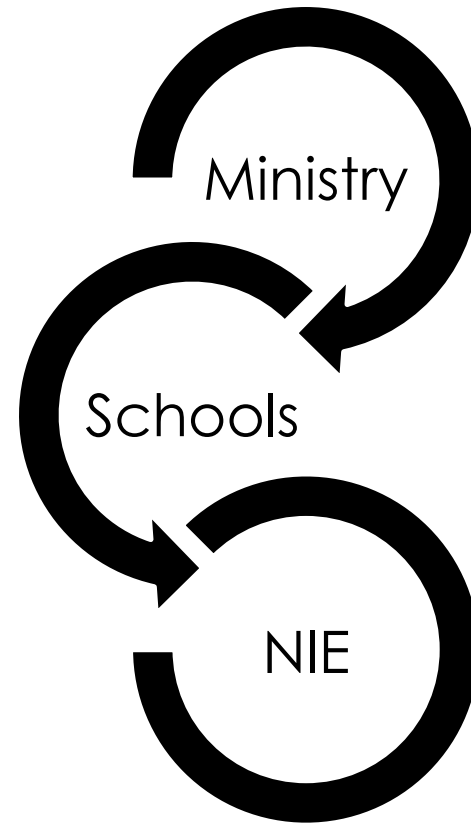
# 2009 – National Institute of Education Report

## *A Teacher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

This report outlined how teacher training would be redesigned in alignment with the goals of TLLM.

# Strengths of System

- Energy and urgency
- Open to new kinds of learning
- Broad cultural support
- Unified vision
- Effective communication



The Challenge: In any change initiative, however, the last steps or degrees of change are the hardest to achieve.

- To get to the sustaining phase of organizational change requires a great deal of clarification, collaboration, and follow-through.
- To get to the personal internalizing phase of change is most difficult, and requires a person to align personal values and beliefs with the organizational values and beliefs.
- Then comes the implementation.
- **So, what might a person or the leaders of an organization do??**

# Video from Simpletruths.com

Consider these steps:

Support your people

Focus on strengths

Remove Barriers

Simplify the message

Actions speak

Celebrate success

Take risks

Measure results

Innovate

Reinforce

**CHANGE IS GOOD**

# Professional Learning Community Model

Hipp and Huffman 2010 suggest the PLC model is:  
“Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults.”

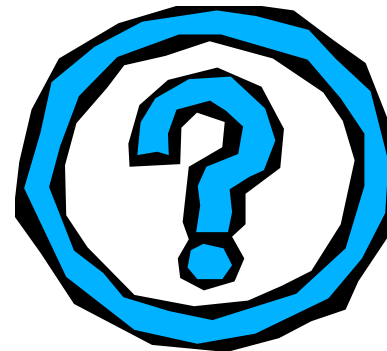
Hord and Sommers (2008) emphasize the work of PLCs as  
“continuous and intentional staff learning, so that staff always are increasing their effectiveness leading to students’ increased successful learning.”

Lieberman and Miller (1999) describe professional learning communities as “places in which teachers pursue clear, shared purposes for student learning, engage in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and take collective responsibility for student learning.”

# So, you may be wondering, how did I get interested in this PLC concept?

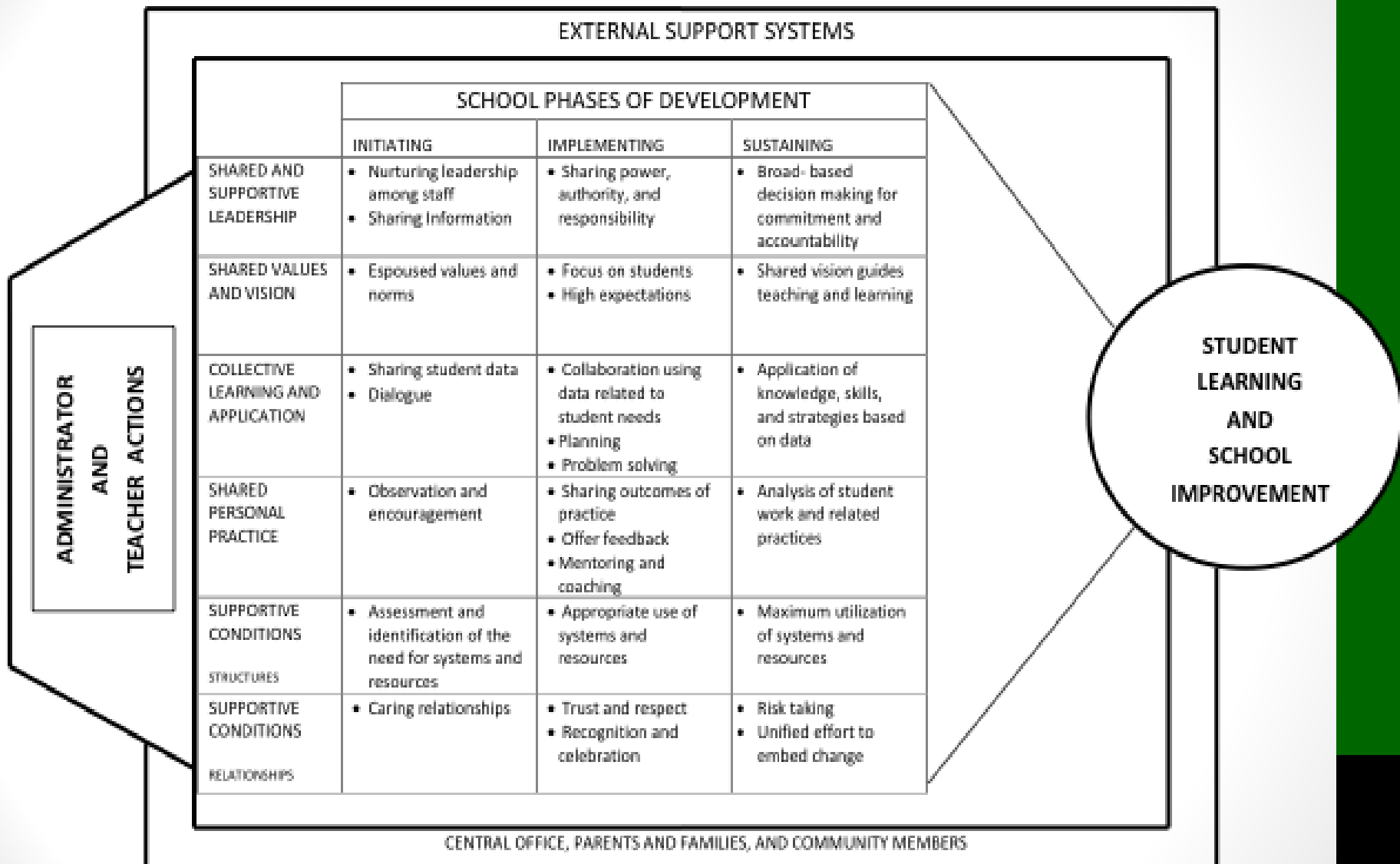
- In the U.S. there were **pockets of success**.
- We had **ideas and best practices**.
- The **challenge** was how to establish a collective **vision** and **implement** it on a larger scale.

Why study learning communities?



# Professional Learning Community Organizer

ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES



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Source: Hipp, K.K., and Huffman, J.B. (2010). *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its best*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

# PLC Dimensions

- **Shared and Supportive Leadership:** School administrators share power, authority, and decision making, while promoting and nurturing leadership.
- **Shared Values and Vision:** The staff share visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.
- **Collective Learning and Application:** The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities.

# PLC Dimensions continued

- **Shared Personal Practice:** Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning, and to increase human capacity.
- **Supportive Conditions:**  
Relationships include respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationship among the entire school community.  
Structures include systems (communication and technology) and resources (personnel, facilities, time, fiscal, and materials) to enable staff to examine practices and student outcomes.

# PLC Critical Attributes

- **Shared and Supportive Leadership**
  - Nurturing leadership among staff
  - Shared power, authority, and responsibility
  - Broad-based decision-making that reflects commitment and accountability
  - Sharing information
- **Shared Values and Vision**
  - Espoused values and norms
  - Focus on student learning
  - High expectations
  - Shared vision guides teaching and learning
- **Collective Learning and Application**
  - Sharing information
  - Seeking new knowledge, skills, and strategies
  - Working collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities

# PLC Critical Attributes con't

- **Shared Personal Practice**

- Peer observations to offer knowledge, skills, and encouragement
- Feedback to improve instructional practices
- Sharing outcomes of instructional practices
- Coaching and mentoring

- **Supportive Conditions**

- Structures

- Resources (time, money, materials, people)
- Facilities
- Communication systems

- Relationships

- Caring relationships
- Trust and respect
- Recognition and celebration
- Risk-taking
- Unified effort to embed change

- Thus our research team struggled with the confusion of how to send a clear message to “demystify” this PLC concept.
- Based on our 2003 book, *Reculturing Schools as Professional Learning Communities*, we challenged ourselves to produce a book more attuned to best practice, tools, assessments, case studies, adaptive change and sustaining that change.

## *Demystifying PLCs: School Leadership at Its Best*

**Hipp and Huffman, 2010**

# Shared and Supportive Leadership

Basis for a positive culture



# What does sharing leadership look like?

- Nurturing talent → Supporting teachers as leaders
- Sharing power → Delegating
- Sharing authority → Increase input in decisions
- Responsibility → Everyone is responsible for all students.

# Sharing leadership continued

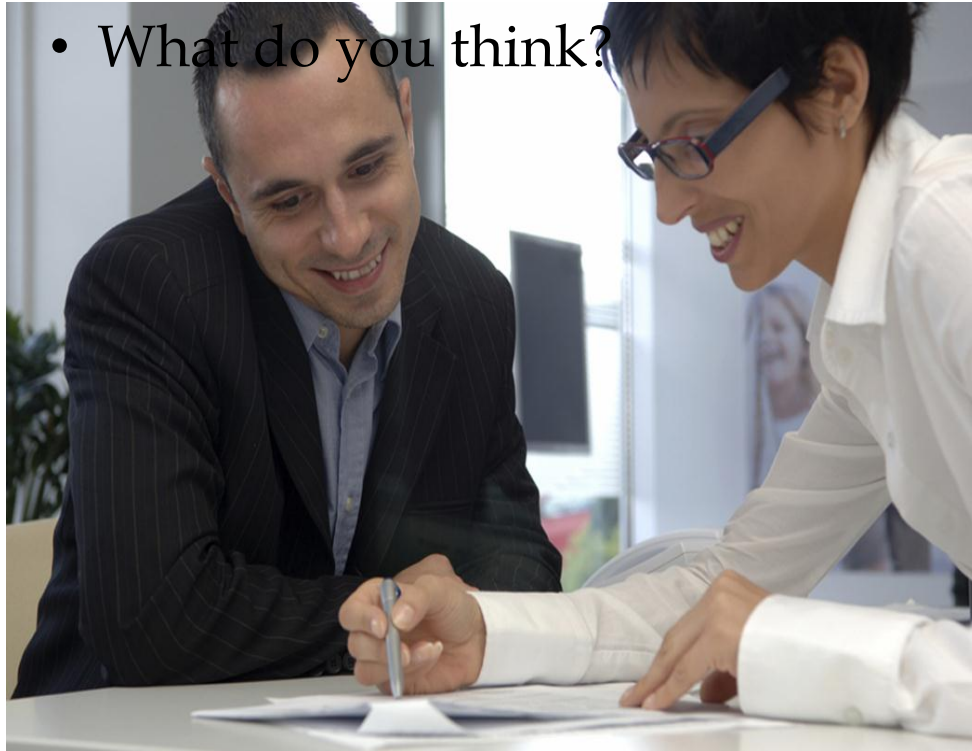
- Broad-based decision making → Multiple level committee and task structure
- Commitment → Dedication to students and the collective culture
- Accountability → High standards lived by all
- Sharing information → Open doors and clear communication

# How would these actions look in schools? Some examples include:

- Self Managed Teams – teachers given the autonomy (and budget) to make and implement decisions affecting their team and students.
- Action Research Projects – teachers, individually, or collectively, working together on basic research projects that affect classroom and student improvement.
- Teacher Networks – *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 1998), linked by common interests, professional engagement and social connection.

Please turn to your neighbor and share examples of one or two of leadership actions in your schools.

- What do you think?



# Another way to share leadership . . .

## **Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC)**

- \* Structure for **teacher** collaboration around teaching and learning
- \* Ensures alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards
- \* Ongoing job embedded professional development

# PTLC



# PTLC Steps

1. Study-work in teams to develop common understanding of student knowledge and assessments
2. Select – select strategies and assessment techniques
3. Plan – collaborate to plan a lesson and decide which data to collect
4. Implement – deliver lesson, record results, and collect evidence
5. Analyze – examine student work to determine student knowledge
6. Adjust – reflect, refine, and modify

# The 2009 survey reported by MetLife supports collaboration:

- Greater collaboration would have a major impact on improving student achievement, according to 67% of teachers and 78% principals.
- Nine out of ten teachers agreed that other teachers contribute to their success in the classroom.
- Teachers in schools with higher levels of collaboration are more likely to be very satisfied with teaching as a career (68% vs. 54% in schools with lower levels of collaboration).

**Source: MetLife. (2009).** The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Collaborating for student success. New York. Author.

How do you know what you are doing is an accurate picture of what is happening in the school?

# Assessments

## Formal

Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R)

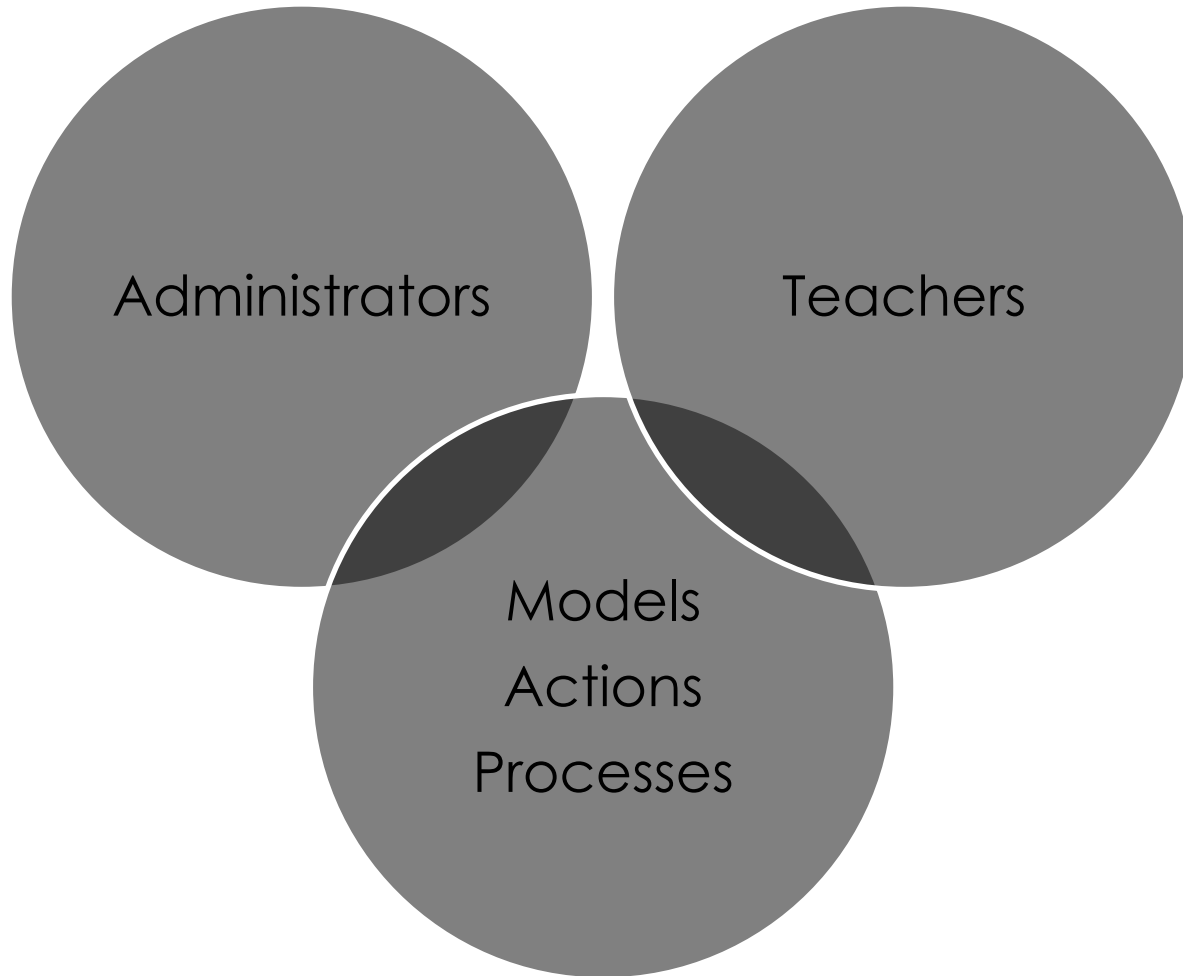
Instrument that assesses classroom and school practices

## Informal

Dialogue

Non-judgemental process in which all voices and experiences are listened to and considered.

Now you may be wondering, how do administrators enable teachers to engage in these models, actions, and processes?



# Three Leadership Strategies

1. **Communicating Clear Expectations** - through words and actions
2. **Building Capacity** - offering support in a timely manner
3. **Monitoring and Reviewing** - maintaining focus on instructional improvement

In a research study (Cowan, Morrissey, Leo, 1999) on the professionalization of teachers, findings indicate:

1. **Principals** played a critical **role** in nurturing and supporting teachers.
2. **Collaboration**, based on trust and respect, was targeted for student learning.
3. **Teachers were accountable** to students, one another, parents, and the community.
4. **Teachers were committed** to students being successful learners, regardless of their background or circumstance.

# Another study on sustaining leadership is reported by Hargreaves and Fink:

1. The future of **leadership** must be embedded in hearts and minds of **many**, not a few select **people**.

*School leadership is a culture of intentional holistic common actions.*

2. **Leadership is a vertical system** that extends over time. Illustrated by Wenger's (1998) *inbound and outbound knowledge*.

*Emphasis on continuity of action through planned leadership succession is critical.*

3. **School systems support** developing a **culture** that creates conditions for distributed leadership.

*This develops the breadth and depth of necessary experiences for many.*

# Carl Glickman responds to the question: “How do teaching and learning improve?”

. . . the answer is not mystery. It's as simple as this:  
I cannot improve my craft in isolation from others. To improve, I must have formats, structures, and plans for reflecting on, changing, and assessing my practice [which] . . . must be continually tested and upgraded with my colleagues.

# Thus, in conclusion . . .

- For our efforts to succeed, all of us must teach and lead in concert toward a shared vision of improving learning . . . not only for our students, but also for ourselves as well . . .
- Video – *It's In Every One of Us*  
New Era Media (1987)

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**Thank you -  
Questions ?**

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