In response to decades of disappointing school reform efforts, DuFour and Eaker (1998) offered professional learning communities (PLC) as a new model for school change. This model included building the foundation of a professional learning community, sustaining the school improvement process, and embedding change in the culture of a school and its surrounding community.

Since then, Dufour and Eaker have updated the professional learning community model to include new insights they have gained through further practice and research. They examine the promise, potential, problems and pitfalls surrounding the PLC concept.

Despite increasing popularity of PLCs, transforming the culture of a traditional school to embrace and reflect the PLC concept remains complex and challenging.

Professional learning community defined: *educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for education.* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006)

Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

1. **Shared Mission (Purpose), Vision (Clear Direction), Values (Collective Commitments) and Goals (Indicators, Timelines, Targets) - All Focused on Student Learning**
   a. These attributes constitute the foundation of a PLC and address how educators will work to improve schools and reinforce moral purpose and collective responsibility that clarify why daily work is important.
   b. Share a collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create.
   c. The guiding principles are embedded in the hearts and minds of people throughout the school.
   d. Focus on a commitment to the learning of each student.
   e. Members of PLC create and are guided by a clear and compelling vision of what their schools must become to help students learn
   f. Create collective commitments that clarify what each member will do to contribute to creating organizations, using results-oriented goals to mark progress.

2. **Collaborative Culture with a Focus on Learning**
   a. Fundamental building block of the organization.
   b. Members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to purpose of learning for all
c. To achieve results, all stakeholders must be focused on the right issues
d. than an individual one.
e. Team learning focuses on organizational renewal and a willingness to work
   together in the continuous improvement process.
f. Collaboration is a systemic process; teachers work together
   interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice in order to
   improve results for students, team and school

3. Collective Inquiry into Best Practice and Current Reality
   a. Acute sense of curiosity and openness to new possibilities.
   b. Process of searching for answers is more important than having an answer.
   c. Candid clarification of current best practices and assessment of student
      learning levels informs decisions and ability to achieve consensus

4. Action Orientation: Learning by Doing
   a. Unwilling to tolerate inaction - function quickly to turn aspirations into
      action and visions into reality
   b. Reflect on what happened and why, develop new theories, try new tests,
      and evaluate the results.
   c. By working collaboratively and engaging in collective inquiry, teachers can
      serve as catalysts for action

5. Commitment to Continuous Improvement
   a. Questioning the status quo, seeking new methods and reflecting on results.
   b. Create conditions for perpetual learning
   c. What do we hope to achieve?
   d. What are our strategies and ideas, and how will we implement them?
   e. What criteria will we use to assess our improvement efforts?

6. Results Orientation
   a. Everything must be assessed on the basis of results rather than intentions.
   b. Assessment must be ongoing.

insights for improving schools, Bloomington, IN: National Educational Services.