PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTEd, 2011 – 2025) seeks to improve the quality and alignment of all teacher education efforts in South Africa. The strategy wants to encourage all educators, including principals, to take responsibility for their own professional development.

The strategy acknowledges a variety of methods that can be used in professional development, including learning with and from peers in professional learning communities, often called ‘PLCs’.

WHAT IS A PLC?

A PLC is a group of professionals who decide, voluntarily, to come together to learn with and from each other on needs they have identified themselves. PLCs can be within a school or between schools and are all about learning. Participants of a PLC take control of their own personal development.

WHY START OR PARTICIPATE IN A PLC?

Being part of a PLC can help you as principal to strengthen your professional practice. By starting or joining a PLC, you can set an example to others in the school. It can help your school on its journey to becoming a learning organisation.

Participating in a training can help you to develop awareness and build your professional knowledge. But, it can remain very difficult to translate the knowledge you gained into practice.

In a PLC, you can create opportunities for trying out new skills and approaches in a safe environment. You can reflect on current and new approaches and the impact on your work. As the topics for learning are decided by you, the learning in a PLCs is authentic, ‘real’, and immediately useful.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Should PLCs replace workshops and trainings inside or outside the school?**

No. But your PLC can help you to put knowledge gained from workshops into practice.

**Is participation in PLCs compulsory?**

No. But all educators are expected to engage in professional development. If you engage with your PLC regularly (after minimum of eight sessions), you can claim Teacher Development points (currently 10 points) in the SACE CPTD Management System. A PLC at school level is recorded as a type 2 activity; a PLC between schools as a type 1 activity.

**How often should we come together?**

There is no set timing, but some regularity is necessary for learning to take place.

**Are PLCs only for new principals?**

No. They offer a wonderful way of integrating expertise of more experienced principals with insights and skills of newly appointed principals.

**Are PLCs mostly beneficial for principals from underperforming schools?**

No. All schools are learning organisations. In a school where the principal and team take responsibility for their own learning, learning by learners will also improve.

**Can PLCs replace existing committees or structures?**

PLCs are all about learning. They cannot replace committees or structures that engage in a mandatory task. However, existing structures can work as PLCs if they go beyond what the structure must do and engage in learning. For example, a School Based Support Team can function as a PLC if the participants engage on learning beyond what the SBST must do. When members decide to engage in investigating how they can turn their teaching into teaching for diversity, the team becomes a PLC.
The character of a

Mutual trust and respect.

Collective responsibility for student learning.

We come together regularly - and keep in touch inbetween.

Inclusive membership. Diversity is an asset that builds our practice.

We apply what we learn and reflect on it the next time we meet.
Ten Characteristics of a PLC

Challenge each other with ideas and questions.
We reflect on our practice, together.

Shared vision to ensure learning by all learners.

Shared leadership in the PLC.
Systematic and rigorous. We use data to help in reflection.
Your leadership can motivate teachers to follow in your footsteps and participate in PLCs as well. Peer learning and collaboration amongst teachers is amongst the highest indicators of effectiveness in teachers’ development. It allows teachers to learn from colleagues, transfer that knowledge to their classroom practice, and be reflective about what you’ve learnt.

As principal, you can create a culture of collaborative learning in your school. You can give teachers encouragement and your practical support to establish and engage in PLCs, either within the school, or with teachers from other schools. For example, you can provide space and time for a PLC to meet; you can celebrate successes by giving a PLC opportunities to share their learning and progress with others.
"As principals in the circuit, we discuss topics that are difficult to the group members and find support with each other. We have a social media group to stay in touch between meetings."

Principal of a multi-grade school