



SETTING UP PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

1 WHAT IS CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)?

CPD is about building on existing knowledge, beyond any initial training, and enriching that with new knowledge, innovative thinking and up to date strategies. It is a lifelong, systematic and planned process to maintain and develop professional competence.

HOW BEST TO HAVE ACCESS TO CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Recent research around in-service training of teachers suggests that workshops have minimal impact on their practice and attitudes. Internal staff development, peer mentoring, team planning and sharing of best practices have proven to be the most effective. The emphasis has shifted to collaborative models known as professional learning communities which reflect the core mission of formal education which is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This shift to a focus on learning has profound implications for schools.

2 WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC)?

A **PLC** is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise and collaborates to improve own teaching skills as well as the academic performance of students.

THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PLCS:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Shared vision and focus on learning for all learners
- Collaborative and reflective enquiry
- Collaborative leadership
- Collective responsibility for student learning A Model for South African Schools
- Coherent, responsive, rigorous enquiry into practice

WHAT DOES THE PLC AIM TO ACHIEVE?

According to Richard DuFour there are three crucial questions to be asked in education today:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

It is the task of every teacher to respond to these questions and participation in the PLC facilitates this enquiry. However, for these skills and knowledge to be developed via the PLC, the school needs to be an **enabling environment**.

3 WHAT IS AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT?

Opportunity: Allocation of time, access to CPD activities

Willingness: Eagerness and curiosity to participate and collaborate in PLC

Commitment: CPD is seen as an ongoing priority in the school

Evaluation: The need and impact of CPD activities assessed by the PLC

Self-Reflection: Teachers are open to learn and take feedback from their own practice

4 THE PLC AS MODEL FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Learner outcomes are greatly improved when educators are equipped to identify and intervene to address barriers to learning and to differentiate their teaching methods. Learning diversity in classrooms can depend on language, culture, home circumstance, learning ability, way of learning, interests and strengths and all learners have the right to participate in learning.

Initial teacher training or professional development may not equip teachers with the skills to teach inclusively. We at Inclusive Education South Africa believe that the PLC model of collaborative and innovative learning ensures that all learners receive the appropriate support they need to flourish in the education system.

Tips

A few questions when starting a PLC:

- ▶ Where do we want to go?
- ▶ What do we want to achieve as soon as possible and what can wait?
- ▶ What skills do we need to develop before starting?
- ▶ How will we monitor our progress?
- ▶ How will we communicate our progress to others?

See more questions at Gather-Thurler, 2000; Koffi et al., 2000 in *A guideline for South African Schools in Professional Learning Communities Department of Basic Education*

RESOURCES

- ▶ A guideline for South African Schools in Professional Learning Communities Department of Basic Education
- ▶ The guidelines for Full Service / Inclusive Schools, DBE, 2010
- ▶ The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (Page 14)



“Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect that focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results”

Richard DuFour

“PLCs are communities that provide the setting and necessary support for groups of classroom teachers, school managers and subject advisors to participate collectively in determining their own developmental trajectories, and to set up activities that will drive their development.”

The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (Page 14)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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