



# Professional Learning Communities- A guideline for South African schools



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





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## Foreword



In 2011, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs A Motshekga and the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr B. Nzimande launched the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED) to strengthen the progress and address the challenges in improving teacher quality.

The research on teacher development points to the importance of teacher professional learning communities in promoting teacher development. One of the provisions in the ISPFTED, therefore, is the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to strengthen teacher professionalism to promote collective participation in professional activities for professional development.

According to the ISPTED, “the key players in the establishment of PLCs will be the PEDs, districts, teacher organizations, subject-based professional teacher associations and the teachers themselves. The role of the DBE will be to” support the work of PLCs by developing activities and materials that can help stimulate their work. 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.” This guideline is thus part of the responsibility taken up by the DBE to stimulate and support PEDs and other stakeholders to set up, maintain and ensure PLCs work effectively.

It is our hope that teachers will respond well to the ideas and find ways of engaging regularly with each other and specialists to improve their own subject knowledge and teaching and assessment skills

Together with our partner, the Flemish Development Agency (VVOB), the PLC guidelines will be advocated and distributed widely and capacity building programmes will be put in place.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Motshekga', written in a cursive style.

**MRS AM MOTSHEKGA, MP**  
**MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION**  
**DATE: MAY 2015**

## 1. DBE Vision

The knowledge and skills that children need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century society are changing all the time. Various education reforms have changed what and how teachers need to teach. In order to keep abreast of these changes, teachers need to engage in lifelong professional development.

Challenges facing teacher professional development in South Africa are considerable. They include limited access to quality continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers and a weaknesses in the system to achieve dramatic improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Much professional development is still organized as isolated and one-time trainings, lacking a coherent strategy, monitoring and follow-up. Research has indicated that these one-off initiatives often fail to have durable effects on teaching and learning. Research also stresses the importance of working together as a cornerstone of effective professional development.

Why do we develop ourselves as teachers? Why do we have professional development?

Effective professional development is development that has a sustainable, positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Research has shown that professional development activities are more effective when they:

- build on previous knowledge and experiences;
- involve educators in active learning;
- are relevant and context related;
- stimulate interaction and collaboration;
- are teacher-driven and promote ownership in learning;
- promote critical and systematic reflection.

DBE believes that PLCs can make professional development more relevant and effective.

## 2. Who is this guideline for?

This guideline is for staff at the Provincial and District offices of Education and School based Educators.

## 3. Why was it written?

Research literature on PLCs shows that when they are well practised, they contribute to improved teacher and learner learning and morale. The practice of teachers working together is not new in the South African education system. However, despite some examples of excellence, in many schools they do not exist at all; in others, they exist but not in a form that supports teacher learning. There is also uncertainty about what PLCs are and how they should be implemented.

The establishment of PLCs has been put forward in the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011-2025 (ISPFTED) as an instrument to strengthen teacher professionalism. The ISPFTED aims for the wide establishment of subject-based and issue-based PLCs by 2017. This guideline will support provinces and districts in helping teachers, principals and SMTs in initiating and sustaining effective PLCs.

## 4. What are PLCs?

The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development defines PLCs as follows:

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.  
(ISPFTED, p.14)

Let's get a better idea at what a PLC is by looking at its name. It consists of three words: Professional, learning and community

#### - Professional

A PLC is the work of professionals. This means that members of a PLC adopt a professional attitude. This implies a focus on the interests of the learners and on supporting them in their learning. It also means that work in the PLC is driven by knowledge and research. This can be that teachers discuss how to translate educational innovations into their practice. It can also mean that teachers contribute to the research base by investigating and reflecting on their own practice.

#### - Learning

PLCs are all about learning: learning for learners as well as learning for teachers, learning for leaders, and learning for schools. Professional learning includes learning based on knowledge from practice and knowledge from research. This research can be done by teachers in their classrooms, for example by comparing the effect of various instructional strategies on learning.

#### - Community

PLCs are based on the vision that learning is more effective when it takes place within a community of professionals. Schools can provide the structure and culture to facilitate such collective learning.

## 5. Why Should Schools Support PLCs?

PLCs help to increase the capacity of the school to achieve sustainable improvement in the learning that takes place in the school. They fulfil a need for more professional development to become more authentic, timely and relevant.

Research shows that PLCs enhance teacher quality in various ways:

- They help bridging the gap between education theory, policy and practice, creating spaces for addressing practical issues and connecting pedagogical practice with subject content knowledge.
- They provide spaces where teachers share innovative ideas with experienced teachers and where experienced teachers mentor young teachers. This stimulates teachers to interrogate and re-invigorate their practice rather than to recycle old ideas.

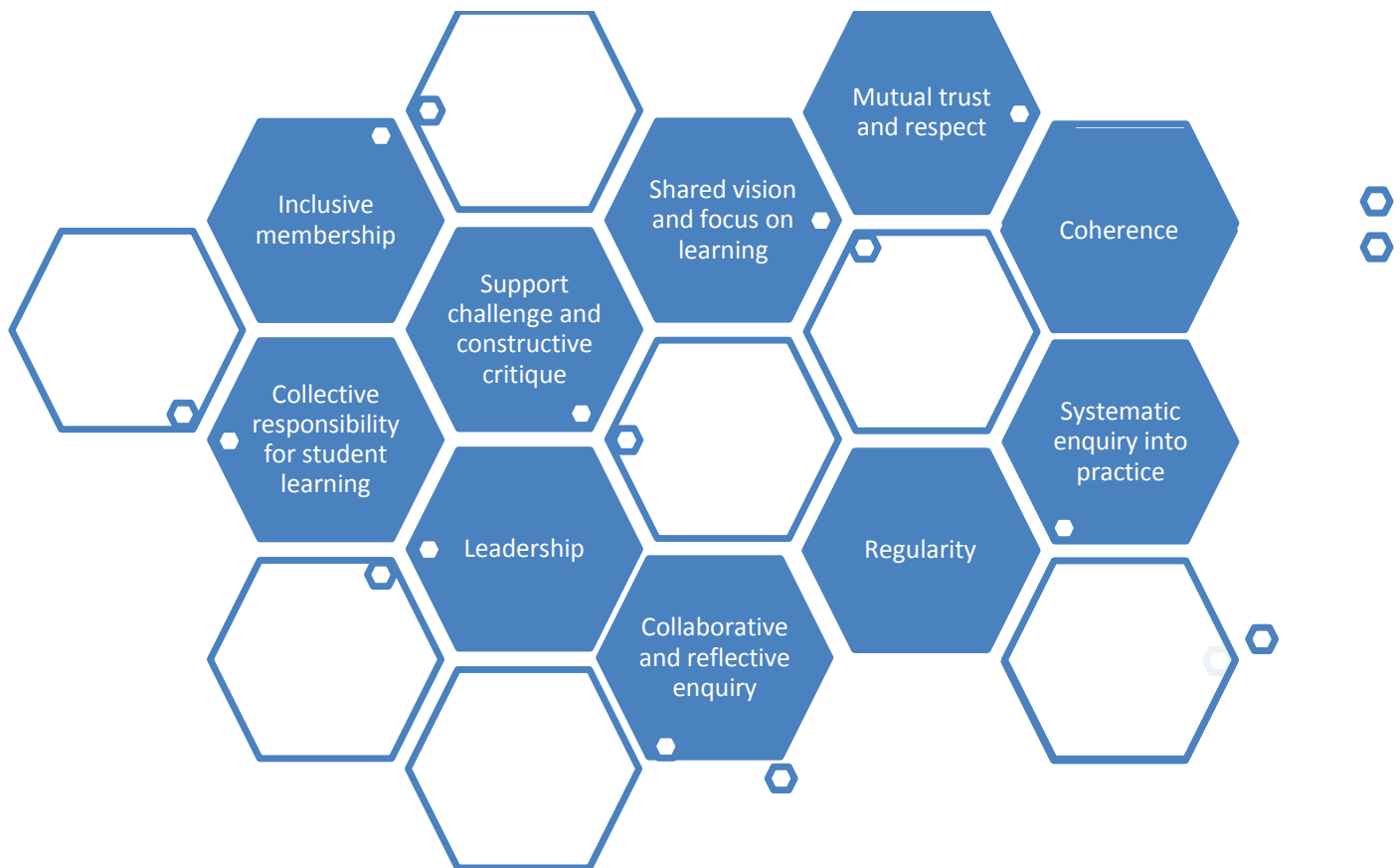
Ultimately, professional learning communities (PLC) have **two major goals**: improved teacher practice (1) which leads to improved learner achievement (2).

## 6. Key Characteristics of PLCs

Let's explore in more depth what PLCs actually are. Researchers have defined what the key characteristics of effective PLCs are. Below we unpack the main characteristics.

1. Mutual trust and respect
2. Support challenge and constructive critique
3. Shared vision and focus on learning for all learners
4. Collaborative and reflective enquiry
5. Inclusive membership
6. Leadership
7. Collective responsibility for student learning

8. Coherent, responsive change in practice
9. Regularity
10. Systematic, rigorous enquiry into practice



### 1. Mutual trust and respect

A PLC cannot be successful if members do not trust each other and respect each other's differences. A spirit where people are not afraid to talk about challenges they experience in their teaching, critically comment to others, refrain from gender stereotyping and share their ideas on learning, is crucial for a PLC. Mutual trust and respect don't come automatically. A lot of time and effort are needed to create them, but once they are there, real and powerful learning can take place.

### 2. Support challenge and constructive critique

In a successful PLC, members challenge each other with ideas and questions. Constructive critique is invited and appreciated. Only by challenging and critiquing each other, can members learn and align their ideas on learning.

### 3. Shared vision and clear focus on ensuring learning for all pupils

A shared vision on what constitutes high-quality teaching and learning is critical. When teachers take ownership of this commitment, learning (not teaching) becomes the focus. A vision needs to be translated into a concrete, realistic and useful learning focus, which challenges teachers to question their current practice, make changes and inform their own learning needs.

### 4. Collaborative & Reflective Inquiry

Preparing, teaching and assessing learners have long been individual tasks of every teacher. Effective PLCs challenge this view and encourage opening up one's classrooms through peer learning, team teaching, observations and mentoring. Improving learning in a PLC becomes a collective responsibility. Such collective responsibility helps to sustain commitment, creates peer pressure, improves accountability and reduces isolation. Reflective inquiry means



that teachers have thorough conversations about their teaching and learning. By frequently examining one's practice through mutual observation and case analysis, joint planning and applying new ideas and information, members of a PLC gain a deeper understanding of educational processes.

## **5. Inclusive membership & Openness**

Diversity within a PLC helps creating a stimulating learning environment. PLCs should be open to new members. They mustn't discriminate according to gender. Moreover, steps should be taken in order to make sure that PLCs have a gender balanced representation. Effective PLCs are not isolated communities, but form networks with other schools, invite external experts or members from other PLCs without losing their focus. In this way, expertise and alternative viewpoints can be brought into the PLC.

## **6. Leadership**

Supportive school management is a major condition for effective PLCs. Principals need to provide practical support to PLCs such as adapting teachers' timetables, providing a space for the PLCs and resources such as paper and flipcharts. Secondly, school leaders should give instructional leadership through encouraging and motivating teachers to participate, setting and monitoring the agenda, creating a culture conducive to collaborative learning, promoting enquiry and building capacity. However, PLCs also require distributed leadership. This means that not just one member is the leader of the PLC, but that many members, both males and females, take up leadership functions such as setting the agenda, developing resources, coordinating group activities, supporting colleagues' learning.

## **7. Collective responsibility for learners' learning**

Members in a PLC come together to build a collective understanding of how all their learners learn and how to improve it. Through activities such as lesson study, team teaching and action research, teachers learn to look beyond their own classroom. Giving feedback on how other teachers teach, will help teachers to reflect on their own teaching as well. How learners learn not only depends on what happens in one teacher's classroom, but also what happens in the years before and after.

## **8. Coherent, responsive change in practice**

By regularly coming together, working from a shared vision towards collectively agreed outcomes and by focusing on elements of teachers' practice such as student thinking, tasks and instructional practices, professional development for teachers engaging in PLCs will be more coherent and responsive to changes in practice than the traditional, one-off forms of professional development. Teachers can discuss and learn something in a PLC, apply it in their practice and reflect on it during the next PLC meeting. PLC discussions that result in changes in practice can be followed up by monitoring that practice, for example through lesson observations and error analysis, enhancing coherence in professional development.

## **9. Regularity**

A successful PLC requires that its members come together regularly. Only by meeting regularly can the necessary depth of discussions, progressive gains in knowledge and sustainable effects on teaching and learning be achieved. A minimum frequency of PLC sessions is hard to determine. It depends on the duration of the PLC sessions and the follow-up communication in between. PLC sessions can be followed up with electronic communication means, reducing the need for face-to-face sessions.

## **10. Systematic, rigorous enquiry into practice**

In successful PLCs teachers collect data about the teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms. Data can include personal assessment results, results from nation-wide assessments such as the ANAs and artefacts of practice such as student thinking, tasks and instructional practices. These data enable error analysis and inform discussions

on the effectiveness of instructional approaches, important bottlenecks in the transitions between years or the need for external expertise.

## 7. Who is Responsible for PLCs?

The major responsibility for initiating and supporting PLCs lies with the PEDs and teachers. However, lots of people and organisations have responsibilities in supporting PLCs. These include the DBE, district officials, principals, HODs, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), subject-based professional teacher associations and the teacher unions. Ultimately, though, the key for success of any PLC lies with its participants, the teachers.

## 8. Who Are the Key Players in PLCs and What Are Their Roles?

The figure below show how the key components of PLCs, policy makers, school leaders, teachers and knowledge, need to work together in order to change professional practice and improve learning outcomes. Successful PLCs require a shared vision on professional development in which teachers, school leaders and policy makers work together in order to change professional practice in ways that improve the learning, engagement and well-being of every South African learner.



### 8.1 The Role of the Teacher

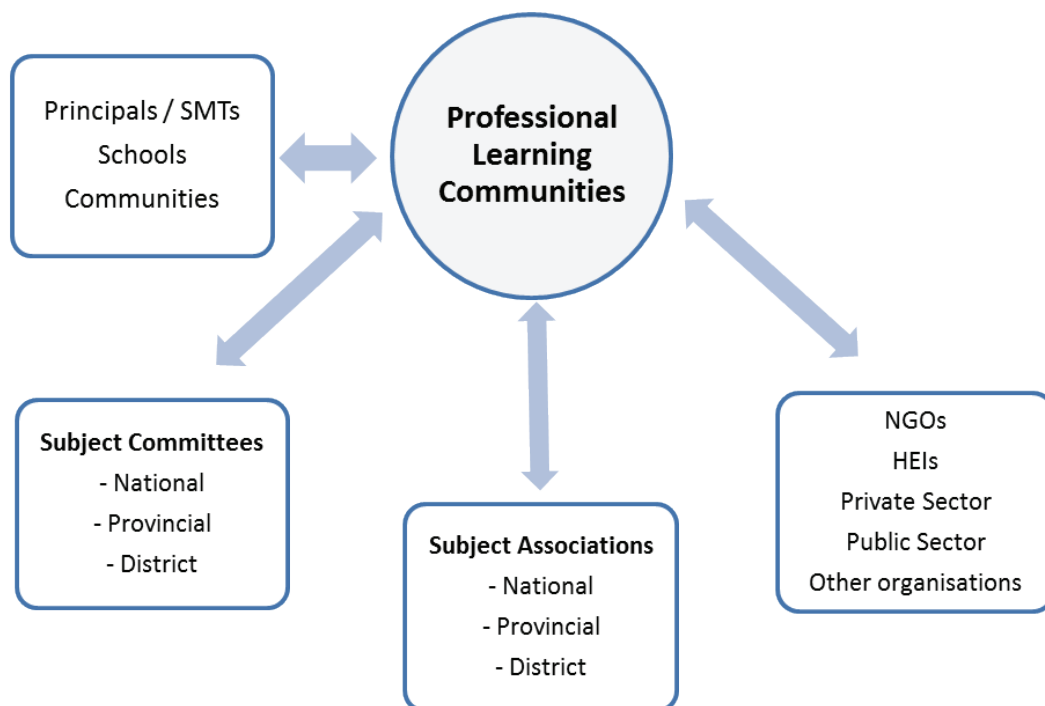
- Be motivated to actively engage in PLCs as a way to strengthen teacher professionalism and improve learning outcomes.
- Be open to contribute as well as to learn
- To regard actively participating in PLCs as an integral part of teaching practice.
- To take up leadership roles in PLCs, such as facilitation, setting the agenda and defining outcomes.

## 8.2 The Role of the School Management Team

- To motivate teachers to engage in PLCs and creating the conditions wherein PLCs can thrive. However, the role of the principal is not to chair every PLC meeting.
- To guide the process to establish PLCs in the school. The box on page 10 contains some questions that can help to guide this process. This includes informing teachers about PLCs, coordinating the formulation of expected outcomes and outputs and identifying people willing to take up leadership roles.
- To support PLCs by resource allocation, logistics and timetabling.

## 8.3 The Role of the Districts (DTDCs)

- To support PLCs with resources and expertise on facilitation skills, video analysis, development of teaching resources, the use of ICT etc.
- To highlight issues for discussion at provincial and national level.
- To function as a hub for exchanging PLC practices within the district.
- To create opportunities for follow up via PLCs in other professional development activities, such as workshops.
- DTDCs Provide annual progress reports of implementation of PLCs to the provincial level.
- To develop synergies between PLCs and district subject committees.



## 8.4 The Role of the Provinces (PEDs/ PTDI)

- The main responsibility for providing the enabling environment for PLCs to be successful lies with the provinces.
- To provide external input to PLCs through subject advisors or trained mentor teachers.
- To provide support to PLCs through the development of expertise in the use of evidence-based assessments such as ANA and the NSC to determine teachers' own development trajectories;
- To monitor the implementation of PLCs in the province, recording inputs from the districts.
- To develop synergies between PLCs and provincial and district subject committees.
- To function as a hub for exchanging PLC practices within the province.
- To inform the national level on matters pertaining to the implementation of PLCs

- To provide annual progress reports of implementation of PLCs to the national level.

### **8.5 The Role of the National Level**

- To ensure a common vision for PLCs and their implementation and to ensure that each province works towards the same objectives.
- To invite expert contributors to the discussions on an ad-hoc basis in order to keep informed about local and international good practices on PLCs;
- To assist with the development of meaningful activities to stimulate the development of the learning communities.
- To provide teachers with resources that help them to integrate their own professional knowledge with the latest research-based knowledge about content and practice.

### **8.6 The Role of Teacher Unions**

- Teacher unions have a responsibility to promote teacher professionalism through advocating, supporting and encouraging teachers to participate actively and meaningfully in PLCs and address their development needs.

### **8.7 The Role of SACE**

- Participating in PLCs is recognized as a teacher-initiated or Type 1 Professional Development Activity within the SACE CPTD system. Teachers must attend at least 8 relevant educational meetings and/or breakfast sessions per annum in order to claim 10 Professional Development points for the year, including discussing educational topics with colleagues. Teachers need to report on PLC meetings and how they contributed to professional development in their Professional Development Portfolio.
- Additionally, a variety of activities that can be done within PLCs are also classified as Type 1 Professional Development Activities. These include mentoring and coaching less experienced teachers, reading educational materials, researching and developing materials for teaching and learning, using the ANA (diagnostic) results in the improvement of teaching and learning and initiating and/or leading school projects.
- Also, a number of activities, classified as school-initiated or Type 2 Professional Development Activities can be part of the activities of a PLC. These include discussing educational topics with colleagues and taking part in interventions responding to ANA results.
- Finally, activities that involve the contribution of external experts in PLCs could be classified as a Type 3 Professional Development Activity.

### **8.8 The Role of Subject-Based Teacher Organizations**

- To bring in expertise and collaborate with other partners to develop diagnostic self-assessment tools that will help to identify areas of improvement for individual teachers. These areas of improvement can then be worked on within the PLCs.
- To develop, select and share materials and resources that can be used in PLCs.
- To develop an on-line clearinghouse where resources developed in PLCs can be shared.
- To develop an on-line forum that can be used to facilitate follow-up discussions within PLCs and to create links between PLCs.

### **8.9 The Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

- To strengthen the knowledge base on teacher professional development and PLCs and disseminate results widely in order to benefit the education system.
- To integrate PLCs in their offer of professional development. For example, training materials could include materials for use in PLCs, follow-up activities etc.

- To instil a recognition for the need of continuous professional development in their pre-service teacher training programmes.
- To encourage students to engage with activities (such as reflection, peer observation, action research) which are central in PLCs.
- To build awareness, insights and skills on the support of PLCs for school leaders in their in-service programmes (e.g. ACE school management)
- To encourage students of pre-service and in-service programmes for school leaders to form their own PLCs.

### Questions to ask when starting a PLC

How do you start a PLC? One way is to organize a thorough discussion with all stakeholders. The questions below may serve as a guideline for such a discussion.

- Where do we want to go?
- Who is working with us?
- What do we want to achieve as soon as possible and what can wait?
- What do we need to invest?
- What skills do we need to develop before starting?
- How will we monitor our progress?
- How will we communicate our progress to others?
- Who will be the facilitator and what are his/ her tasks?
- How will we make decisions?
- How will we encourage participation
- How and when will we know if we have achieved our objectives?
- What do we expect from each member?
- Does the project has the support of all stakeholders?
- When and how frequently do we meet?
- Is there support for scheduling ongoing meetings?

(Gather-Thurler, 2000; Koffi et al., 2000)

## 9. What is the Role of the Facilitator?

The facilitator has a crucial role to play in PLCs. He or she needs to be able to motivate, build trust, understand group dynamics, facilitate discussion and guard outcomes.

The facilitator participates in PLC discussions, supports teachers by identifying gaps in their understanding and serves as a bridge to other PLCs. In this way, the facilitator provides content to the PLC, guides the process of inquiry and contributes to the community building process. The role of the facilitator isn't to tell teachers what to do, to impose ideas or to judge people. Rather, a facilitator needs to support discussion and step in when it risks wandering off.

In practice the role and responsibilities of the facilitator may vary. He or she can take more initiative when there are many new members in the PLC. Gradually, as members become more experienced, the facilitator's role may evolve into a less directive and more facilitative role. Facilitators should make sure that all perspectives are valued and that the perspective of the leader or facilitators doesn't get priority. PLCs in which the facilitator dares to question how things are done, are more likely to spark creativity, to remain responsive to emerging questions and shared interests and to be sustainable in the long run.

Facilitators may need to take on a 'gatekeeper' role as well, recognizing pitfalls and providing corrective feedback. This can happen when members are not making adequate progress or fail to develop their portfolios. Playing both a supportive and regulating role can be difficult.

The role of the facilitator should be described as explicitly as possible, including how far he or she should take up a 'gatekeeper' role in addition to the facilitator role. Moreover, facilitator tasks can be taken up by different people. This discussion on what the role of the facilitator is, can best be organized when the PLC is established.

## 10. What is the Role of the School?

PLCs are about more than organizing frequent teacher meetings. It's about changes in school culture.

How are PLCs integrated within wider changes in school culture?		
	School that focuses on traditional forms of CPD	School that integrates PLCs in its DNA
<b>How work is organized</b>	Inflexible organization: everyone protects and keeps to his or her own timetable, area of specialization, routines, and specified duties	Flexible, collaborative organization that fosters reorganization to address needs, initiatives, and problems.
<b>Professional relations</b>	Individualism: "egg carton" model with few discussions about professional matters.	Collegiality and cooperation: discussions of professional challenges and shared undertakings.
<b>Culture and collective identity</b>	Teachers see their job as a set of routines to be completed, each on their own, without much reflective thought	Teachers see their job as one where problems are to be solved, and one that requires reflection.
<b>Leadership and ways of exercising power</b>	The principal prefers to manage and operate alone, based on a bureaucratic, authoritarian model.	Leadership, including the role and function of the principal, is collaborative; authority is shared.
<b>School as a learning organization</b>	Teachers see the school as merely a workplace, and have little concern about its future. They feel obliged to be accountable to authority for results and methods.	Teachers see themselves as professionals, working on solutions to problems and improving the quality of instruction. They feel obliged to acquire competencies, and to be accountable to their peers.

Adapted from Katz et al., 2009

## 11. What is the Relation with Subject Committees and Subject Associations?

National, provincial and district level subject committees support the DBE with curriculum implementation. Their focus lies in supporting the DBE with policy formulation and implementation. PLCs are initiatives at school level mainly, that enable teachers to determine and work on their own professional development needs.

The role of subject associations has been described above. They can strengthen PLC with ideas, content and expertise. Conferences and seminar can infuse PLCs with outcomes of recent educational research and foster exchange among PLCs.

Therefore, PLCs at school level need to interact with subject committees and subject associations. On the one hand, PLCs will benefit from the infusion from external ideas and knowledge. On the other hand, subject committees and subject associations can use input from PLCs as they seek to know the effect of policy measures or research on school level.

Structure and relationship between Subject Committees and PLCs	
Subject Committees	PLCs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide ongoing curriculum expertise, guidance and leadership</li><li>• Provide a for the review of national strategies as well as national and international analyses of assessments;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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 development trajectories, and to set up activities that will drive their development.</li></ul>

## 12. What Activities can be done in a PLC?

PLCs are instruments for teachers to shape their own professional development. Each PLC will have its own vision and mission and define activities to achieve those. Some types of activities that can take place in PLCs are:

- Analyse learner results of ANA and NSC, link these results to teaching quality and members' development trajectories;
- Analyse if there any significant differences in learning outcomes for male and female learners and take appropriate actions, if necessary.
- Discuss, critique and adapt the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements to their own circumstances;
- Discuss how to interpret and use curriculum support materials such as the workbooks distributed to teachers and schools by the DBE;
- Collect and analyse data on learning in order to improve learning quality.
- Record and discuss video records of practice and other learning materials.
- Identify an area for improvement and use expertise within the PLC to help address that difficulty.
- Prepare lessons together and observe each other while teaching these lessons. Discuss the lessons afterwards in the PLC.
- Prepare a lesson for team teaching. This means that several teachers prepare, teach and assess a lesson together.
- Discuss how a certain piece of educational research could be

Many more activities can be done in PLCs. There is no fixed agenda for PLCs. The agenda will vary according to the time available, the size of the group; the degree participants know each other and many other factors.

However, collaboration within a group doesn't happen automatically and takes time to evolve. The table below provides a possible path for the development of a PLC. First, you start with activities that focus on access and motivation (stage 1). It's important to spend sufficient time on these, as they are a condition for success later. Gradually, as members start to get to know each other, activities can focus on constructing knowledge together and critically reflecting and inquiring (stage 4 & 5).

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Focus	Access & Motivation	Socialization	Information Exchange	Knowledge Construction	Development (Reflection)
Approx. duration	2 meetings	2 meetings	4 meetings	Variable	Variable
Activities	<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating access <input type="checkbox"/> Icebreakers <input type="checkbox"/> Discussing rules	<input type="checkbox"/> Getting to know each other. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop shared understanding on PLCs. <input type="checkbox"/> Developing mission & vision	<input type="checkbox"/> Presenting and discussing results of individual tasks. <input type="checkbox"/> Exchanging teaching resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss questions for enquiry <input type="checkbox"/> Development of resources in effective work teams. <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson study <input type="checkbox"/> Error analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploring the use of new materials and technologies

## 13. Questions and Answers

### 13.1 Should PLCs replace workshops and trainings outside the school?

No, school-based PLCs must be enriched with new ideas and knowledge gained from sources beyond the school. This can be done through the establishment of partnerships (to access and gain support from outside expertise), networks of learning communities and endorsed professional development activities.

### 13.2 Should participation in PLCs be made compulsory?

All teachers should engage in lifelong professional development. From 2016 onwards, all SACE-registered educators need to collect professional development points on a regular basis. However, teachers should decide for themselves which form of professional development is most effective for them.

### 13.3 Are PLCs only for new teachers?

No, PLCs are for all teachers. Ideally, PLCs consist of a mix of new and experienced teachers, as both have their particular learning needs and expertise. New teachers can learn from experienced teachers on how to deal with specific learner difficulties and use tried-and-tested resources. Experienced teachers can benefit from these interactions, as it requires them to make their own thinking explicit. This can help to reflect on their own teaching. Experienced teachers can also learn from new ideas, enthusiasm and technologies that new teachers can bring into the PLC.

### 13.4 Are PLCs organized within a school or among schools?

Most PLCs will be organized at school level. This minimizes transport costs and organisational challenges, for example to align time tables for the participating members. However, PLCs can be organized between schools as well. Some schools are too small and therefore would do best to team up with neighbouring schools. If financial and logistical constraints can be overcome, inter-school PLCs can be a very effective way to exchange ideas and align organisational cultures between the schools.

### 13.5 Are PLCs grade and subject bound?

PLCs should respond to a need. This need can be to improve class discipline, or to enhance math instruction within grade 5. It can also be to improve the transition between grade 3 and 4. It can focus on languages or sciences. Depending on the need, PLCs can be set up for one grade or subject or include various grades and subjects. In high



schools, PLCs will often be subject-specific groups. Foundation and intermediate teachers might be better off forming grade- or phase specific PLCs, although finally it should reflect the desired outcome.

### **13.6 How often should members of PLCs come together?**

There's no fixed frequency or duration for PLC meetings. The more frequent, intensive and long the PLC meetings are, the more their members will be able to gain from it. In order to build trust and create the group dynamics that are necessary for PLCs to succeed, members should regularly meet. PLCs that fail to create this trust and dynamics should consider increasing the frequency of the meetings.

### **13.7 How does engagement in PLCs link with existing IQMS structures?**

The purpose of IQMS is to evaluate an educator's performance, identify specific needs for support and development, to provide support for continued growth, to promote accountability and, finally, to monitor an institution's overall effectiveness. In this way, IQMS will help teachers identify their professional development needs. Teachers can then decide to engage in PLCs to address these needs.

### **13.8 How do teachers report on their engagement in PLCs?**

All teachers will be required to record their professional development in a Professional Development Portfolio (PDP). These PDPs can contain information on engagement in PLCs (number of meetings, dates, agenda...) as well as the outputs and outcomes of the PLCs. These can include lesson plans, notes of lesson observations, reflections etc.

### **13.9 How can teachers find the necessary time to engage in PLCs?**

Continuous professional development is a core task for every teacher. PLCs are an instrument to engage in meaningful professional development and are therefore not an add-on to the existing tasks and responsibilities of teachers.

Time for teachers to participate in PLCs should be scheduled into the school year. PLC meetings can take place during the immediate pre- and post-term periods in order to minimize loss of teacher time. Teaching schedules can be organized in such a way that teachers have some time during the school week to have a PLC meeting.

Some ideas to help scheduling PLCs (based on SADTU Curtis Nkondo Professional Development Institute):

- Provide common preparation time: build the master schedule to provide common preparation periods for teachers. Each team might designate one day per week to engage in collaborative rather than individual planning.
- Parallel scheduling: schedule common preparation time by timetabling specialists (e.g. music, art, PE) to provide lessons to learners across an entire grade level at the same time each day. This will free teacher to engage in PLCs during those times.
- Stay at the school for additional time on certain days during the week to participate in professional development activities after the learners have gone home, or while learners are participating in supervised afternoon study hours.
- Adjust start and end time: gain time to engage in PLCs by starting the workday early or extending the workday one day each week.
- Use immediate pre- and post- term periods – stay at school for a day or two after school closes for the holidays or return to school two days before schools open for the term, and these days could be used for in-school professional development.
- Shared classes: combine learners across two different grade levels or classes into one class. While one teacher or team teaches, the other team engages in PLCs.
- Group activities, events and testing: teams of non-teaching staff members or trusted community members could coordinate activities that require supervision of learners rather than instructional expertise while teachers engage in team collaboration.

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### Subject Committees and PLCs – the national context

- In 2010, the Ministerial Project Committee (MPC) for the Curriculum, Assessment and Policy Statement recommended the establishment of Subject Committees. The MPC was of the view that only Subject Committees for Languages, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, History, Geography and Life Orientation should be established.
- At the Senior Management meeting of 25 July 2012, a decision was taken that all 29 subjects should be catered for. This proposal for the establishment of Subject Committees includes subjects in the General Education and Training band.
- In pursuit of this objective, the Department has made good progress in establishing Subject Committees as platforms for effective debates within the subjects as well as an efficient mechanism for continuous, coherent curriculum review and delivery.
- In 2011, the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs A Motshekga and the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr B. Nzimande launched the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED) to strengthen the progress made in teacher development and address the challenges in improving teacher quality.

- One of the provisions in the framework is the establishment of professional communities of practice (PLCs) to strengthen teacher professionalism and to promote collective participation in professional activities for professional development (ISPFTED, Activity 3.3, page 14).
- PLCs as envisaged in ISPFTED 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.
- According to the ISPFTED, the key players in the establishment of PLCs will be the PEDs, districts, teacher organizations, subject-based professional teacher associations and the teachers themselves.
- The Subject Committees are strong vehicles to promote discussion and inputs by subject specialists on curriculum policy development and implementation, and the proposed subject committee structures are well-defined and regulated at national, provincial and district levels. The PLCs are slanted towards teacher professional development as indicated in the ISPFTED.
- The proposal that Subject Committees are established at national, provincial and district levels was approved by HEDCOM in its meeting on 13-14 March 2014.
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Published by the Department of Basic Education

222 Struben Street

Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001

Telephone: 012 357 3000 Fax: 012 323 0601

ISBN: 978-1-4315-2269-9

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