

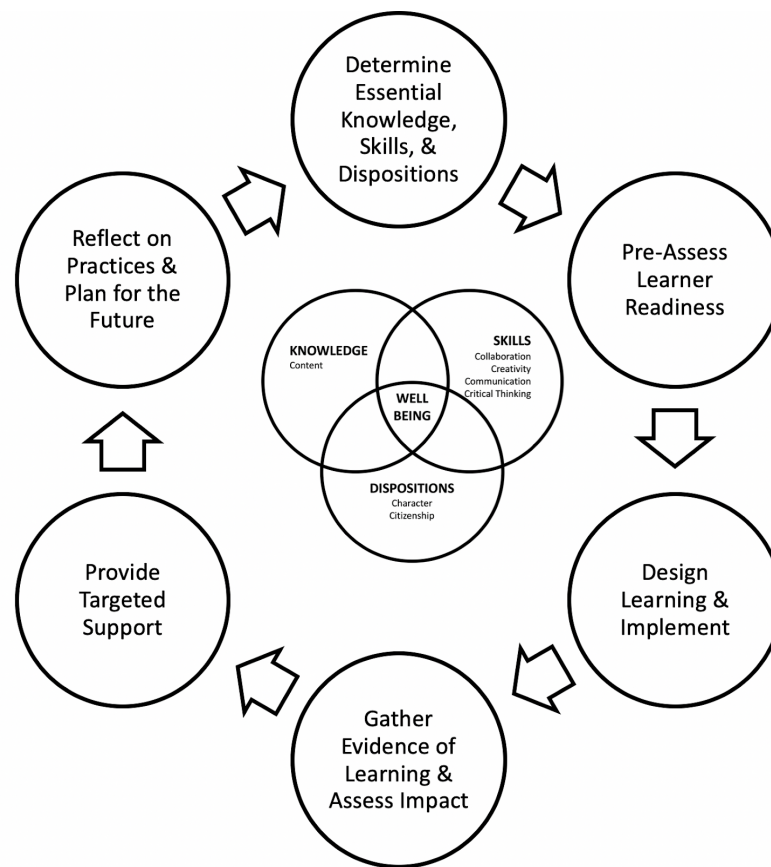
Professional Learning Communities



Intervention Overview

No educator, alone, can meet the demanding learning and wellbeing needs of every child and adult in a school. We must work together. Teachers have had significant training in their academic content area and in pedagogy, but most have had little to no training in team dynamics and strategic improvement processes. The professional learning community process is designed to help teachers come together to work in cycles of continuous improvement for both students and adults. While we hope that our classrooms are communities of learning for our students, Sergiovanni (1996) argues that this will not occur “unless schools also become learning communities for teachers” (p. 42). Professional learning communities, or PLCs, are typically small groups of teachers, school leaders or school staff who work together to co-plan, co-teach, and evaluate student learning and performance, as well as to build staff relationships and collaboration in cycles of continuous improvement. PLCs are grounded on the following three big ideas: 1) A focus on learning, 2) a collaborative culture, and 3) a results orientation (DuFour et al, 2016).

While the PLC process traditionally has targeted the improvement of student academic learning, several schools are starting to use the PLC process to pursue deep learning goals that seek the intentional and simultaneous development of students’ knowledge, skills, dispositions, and wellbeing. PLC teams that seek to foster wellbeing through intentionally developing skills and dispositions often see higher academic gains. Richardson and colleagues studied several such schools and share: “The school leaders that we met held themselves to a higher standard because they were concerned with desired student outcomes that went far beyond attendance, graduation, and success on standardized assessments of low-level learning...Their students tend to do as well on those measures as students at traditional schools (and often better). Their students also tend to thrive in a whole host of other outcomes that most schools do not even consider” (2021, p. 114; see Adler, 2017). Linking professional learning communities (PLCs) with positive psychology principles can help create a positive and supportive school and work environment, strengthen staff relationships and contribute to staff “flourishing” (Owen, 2016). The following framework summarizes the essential components to the PLC process. Notice that the intentional development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for wellbeing is at the center of this process.



Intervention Guide

Materials: Choose one of the instruments below depending on your team/school need.

Buffum and colleagues (2018) have put together several helpful resources for teams, two of which are included below.

- [Stages of Team Development](#)
- [The Trust on Our Team Survey](#)

DuFour and colleagues (2016) have also developed several tools for schools seeking to work together effectively as PLCs.

- [Critical Issues for Team Consideration](#)
- [Questions the Guide the Work of Your PLC](#)

Rencher and Boren (2019) have created a simple tool for teams seeking to assess how well they embody the three big ideas of a PLC in a deep learning environment.

- [PLCS Popping at 180](#)

Duration: 15-30 Minutes

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- Implementation:
1. Give each member of the team a copy of the chosen instrument (hard copy or electronic copy) and have them fill it out individually. This can be done before the meeting or in the meeting itself.
 2. The team leader and/or coach review the feedback/results of the surveys, and look for themes, patterns, strengths, opportunities, etc. to share with the team during the next meeting.
 3. The team or coach reviews the results with the team, helping the team to highlight strengths and opportunities, discuss aspirations, and set some best next step goals.
 4. Determine a reasonable time to revisit the instrument in the future.
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Does it work?

One study evaluated the characteristics of PLCs in three Australian public schools, and how they contribute to staff wellbeing and flourishing (Owen, 2016). Characteristics of these PLCs that were most linked to flourishing were positive collaboration, shared values, trusting relationships, accomplishment in co-planning and co-teaching, and supportive leadership. Many of these core characteristics are linked to improvements in relationships, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive emotion. According to Owen (2016), the most effective PLCs (both at improving staff wellbeing and student learning) are those that place an emphasis on positive psychology principles. A recent study of wellbeing and PLCs (Liang, Song & Sun, 2022), surveying 844 educators in southeastern China, identified six PLC components that contribute to educators' sense of wellbeing and purpose. These six components include: collective values and vision, collective responsibility, collective decision-making, shared individual practice, supportive conditions and critical collaboration. All of these components were shown to have a positive relationship with teacher wellbeing, particularly in increasing teacher autonomy, self-efficacy and emotional self-regulation (Liang, Song & Sun, 2022).

References:

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