

What is a Professional Learning Community?

Professional learning communities (PLCs) consist of a group of educators working together to deepen their understanding of pre-determined topic. PLCs usually meet with a facilitator to keep the group focused and on track, but all members of the PLC take responsibility for the learning process.

Emergent Curriculum

We often talk about emergent curriculum as part of developmentally appropriate practice. Teachers should plan based on the interests and developmental needs of the children in their care. But do we model this in teacher/ staff professional development?

Most often, our professional development consists of pre-designed workshops with specific activities around one topic, for a two – three hour session. After the session is over, so is the learning. We hope that participants take the content from the workshop and apply it in their work, but with no follow up, we have no way of confirming if this happens or not.

As early childhood educators, we know that the children in our care all grow and develop at different rates. Each child has a different style of learning. The same is true of adults. Our current model of professional development rarely takes this into consideration.

PLCs offer participants a chance to study together, learn from each other, and take ownership of the learning in a way that traditional workshops do not. A trained facilitator helps guide the PLC participants through the learning process using articles, books, activities, and participant experiences.

Creating a PLC

“To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results.”

Richard DuFour

Determine the logistics of when, where, how long, and how often will the group meet. PLCs can be structured to meet during rest time, in the evening, or on the weekends. They can meet as often as once per week, or once per month. Depending on the focus and number of group members, each session can last from one to two hours. Group discussion can be initiated with a book or an article. Expanded discussion should include the experiences of each participant, with time to discuss challenges, questions, strategies and successes.

Big Ideas of a PLC

- Ensure that participants are learning
 - Identify the topic of study
 - Identify overall goals for the group
 - Clarify expectations for learning
 - What can we do if a participant is struggling with the content?
 - What will we do if a participant is not keeping up with the on-going activities?
 - How will the facilitator and other group members support each other?

- Create a culture of collaboration
 - What does collaboration look like?
 - How can we work together so that we are not so isolated in our rooms or our programs?
 - How can we share ideas and discoveries?
 - In what ways can we promote teamwork?

- Focus on results
 - What do we expect participants to know and be able to do at the end of the PLC?
 - How can we measure the attainment of our group goals?
 - How can we measure individual learning?
 - What accountability has been established?

Ideas for Getting Started

- Choose a book club format, reading and discussing one chapter per month
- Focus on a series of articles based on a topic of interest
- Understanding assessment
- Implementing curriculum and instruction/ teaching strategies
- Exploring a program philosophy or vision
- Understanding a specific domain of learning

References:

DuFour, R. (May 2004). What is a "Professional Learning Community?" *Educational Leadership*. Retrieved August 2 2011 from http://pdonline.ascd.org/pd_online/secondary_reading/el200405_dufour.html,