LeaFaP

Literature Review on

Leading and Facilitating Professional Learning Communities – in selected European Countries

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Abstracts of the reviewed papers

Wiliam, D. & Leahy, S. (2012). Sustaining Formative Assessment with Teacher Learning Communities.

This paper begins by discussing five process components that can support the development of formative assessment in the classroom. Based on these findings, the implementation of teacher learning communities was chosen, for which a clear session structure was developed. A case study in a school district in England then aimed to improve formative assessment in the area of performance appraisal through the introduction of learning communities. The schools involved received support from a project team and the participating teachers took part in a one-day workshop, received a booklet with the key principles of formative assessment and handouts for monthly meetings. The individual groups worked with action plans. Facilitators were available to answer groups' questions and kept meeting minutes. The authors report on progress and their reasons.

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S. & Wallace, M. (Hrsg.) (2005). Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities. Research Report (637). University of Bristol.

This article seeks to clarify how useful and realisable the idea of professional learning communities (PLCs) is, what experiences have already been made with the use of the format and what conclusions can be drawn from this. The comprehensively presented project includes a literature review, a questionnaire analysis, case studies and presentations of workshop conferences. The results are presented in five substantive chapters. Finally, based on the findings of the project, the researchers formulate 12 dimensions of how a PLC can operate and work effectively.

Wiliam, D. (2007). Changing Classroom Practice. Educational Leadership, 65(4), 36–42.

The advantages of formative assessment in terms of students' learning speed and success are emphasised at the beginning of the article. It also discusses why and how teachers can sustainably change their teaching behaviour in the classroom. The approach of teacher learning communities is proposed as a promising solution. Based on studies of various models of learning communities, Wiliam presents a clearly structured and successful model in this article. The author explains the planning and framework conditions of PLCs as well as the use of an action plan. Finally, he describes a structured, consistent schedule for a PLC session.

Johannesson, P. (2022). Development of professional learning communities through action research: understanding professional learning in practice. Educational Action Research, 30(3), 411–426. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2020.1854100

In the study, PLCs are implemented as part of a case study in connection with action research at a single school and the teachers are both supported and researched by the University of Gothenburg. They meet weekly on site in two groups and deepen the possibilities of an inquiry-based attitude and in-depth reflection in order to underpin and improve their pedagogical practice in the classroom in the sense of action research. They are accompanied and supported by a doctoral student from the university as a 'critical friend'. As a result, for one group, the focus is more on action research as a new repertoire, while the other group prioritises the improvement of their own teaching practice.

Antinluoma, M., Ilomäki, L. & Toom, A. (2021). Practices of Professional Learning Communities. Frontiers in Education, 6. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.617613

The study categorises PLCs as a part of a school-wide school culture and assesses the extent to which it is a PLC based on the practices in the schools. Characteristics used by the authors are: shared values and vision, shared practice, supportive leadership, strengthening school culture and climate, supportive structures, professional learning and development, collaborative practice and cooperation.

Oppi, P. & Eisenschmidt, E. (2022). Developing a professional learning community through teacher leadership. A case in one Estonian school. Teaching and Teacher Education: Leadership and Professional Development, (1), 1–10.

The study by the University of Tallinn examines an Estonian school as part of a case study. The school management and three teachers form a team that is supported and accompanied by the university. The teachers take on the leadership role in a PLC on site in order to work with their colleagues on the topic of self-regulation among the students. The PLC process, the inquiry-based attitude or the reflection of the teachers is not decidedly deepened. Rather, the role of the internal moderators is described in detail, how it has developed over two years and how it goes hand in hand with the support of the school management.

Admiraal, W., Schenke, W., Jong, L. de, Emmelot, Y. & Sligte, H. (2021). Schools as professional learning communities: what can schools do to support professional development of their teachers? Professional Development in Education, 47(4), 684–698. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1665573

The article presents the school as a whole as one individual PLC, in which various forms of grassroots democratic PLCs have been initiated and partly stabilised. Moderation occurs solely through the school management, who directs the school PLC as a whole, which in turn leads to a new form of moderation. Other forms of leadership and management, on the other hand, are less described.

Huijboom, F., van Meeuwen, P., Rusman, E. & Vermeulen, M. (2021). Professional learning communities (PLCs) as learning environments for teachers: An in-depth examination of the development of seven PLCs and influencing factors. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 31, 100566. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2021.100566

In the study, PLCs were installed in schools for the professionalisation of teachers as well as in the classic sense for efforts regarding the double-decker model. Moderation is one of three steering factors in a PLC. Moderation is viewed from two perspectives: Positively as facilitating and increasing the performance of the PLCs, process optimisation (supporting role in organisation, planning, reflection). Critically, as an instance of autonomy that potentially restricts freedom, directs too much and restricts individuality.

Huijboom, F., van Meeuwen, P., Rusman, E. & Vermeulen, M. (2023). Differences and similarities in the development of Professional Learning Communities: A cross-case longitudinal study. Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 42, 100740. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2023.100740

Building on the study by Hujiboom et al. (2021), this study shows that the skills of the facilitator can stimulate the PLC to successfully carry out the inquiry cycle. By consistently carrying out such an enquiry process, it is possible to practice individual and collective learning at a high level.

Malone, A. & Gregory Smith. (2010). Developing schools as professional learning communities: The TL21 experience. US-China Education Review, 7(9), 106–114.

In connection with the national project 'Teaching and Learning for the 21 Century (TL21)', the study examines 15 secondary schools in and around Dublin. Their headteachers, deputy headteachers and two teachers of the main subjects attend workshops at the University of Maynooth with the aim of bringing PLCs into the schools in the sense of school culture and leading specialist teams there as PLCs. The focus is on the role of these 'critical friends' as well as the culture of meaningful collaboration in the technical meetings and their expansion into digital networks.

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> **Progan Romanato, L. & Gather Thurler, M. (2011). Coopération des enseignants et Nouvelles approches de l'organisation du travail dans les établissements scolaires. Recherche en education, 10. https//doi.org/10.4000/ree.4763.**
>
> In the French-Swiss article, the authors first analyse the system-related reasons for a 'going it alone mentality' in the teaching profession. They work out that this needs to be overcome on the part of teachers and school structures so that the desired school development can be driven forward through co-operative forms. They also emphasise the concept of the professional learning community as a suitable form for this and explain it briefly.

1. Introduction

In the context of the LeaFaP project, which aims to contribute to successful collaboration in schools in the service of school development, this review was compiled as one strand of six country-specific literature reviews. With this deliverable the project aims to gather knowledge about the specific quality of collaboration and the necessary management of successful cooperation in order to identify the support needs of professionals in learning groups (teachers, trainees, school leaders) and to develop and provide activities and a learning arrangement for people who support and mentor the learning groups. The aim is to enable learning groups to become a professional learning community (PLC).

The aim of the following synopsis is to systematise specific empirical experiences and conceptual ideas that have been discussed in Europe next to the countries of the consortium. The aim is to look at these other European scientific contributions to identify to what extent they answer to the question of how moderation, leadership or facilitation must be designed and brought out so that an exchange promotes learning and teaching development. Also, we looked for information the papers provide according to an inquiry-based and reflective approach of the learning groups to the challenges of school practice and what is actually practiced in PLCs. This paper together with comparable reviews of the scientific discourse from (1) the US-American, (2) Spain, (3) Norway, (4) Greece and (5) German-speaking countries (A/CH/D) will serve an international report that provides an international overview of conceptual ideas on the field of 'leading and facilitating for inquiry & reflection' in PLCs.

The papers to this review were initially searched according to two patterns: (1) We looked for English keywords such as 'facilitation', 'developing a professional learning community', 'supporting professional development', 'creating professional learning communities', 'becoming a professional community'. At the same time, statements should also be found that say something about the influence of these facilitating, guiding and supporting characteristics, roles and effects on PLCs. Furthermore, these papers (2) should be written in English and, if possible, not draw too much on the US-American discourse in their presentation, but rather offer insights and reflections from the European countries themselves. At the end of the review, a Swiss contribution written in French was cross-read in order to be able to include traces of PLCs there despite limited knowledge of the language.

2. PLC understanding, setting and composition

When we are inquiring after professional learning communities, i.e. PLCs, in this article with a view across European strands of the discourse, then the first helpful paper is the one by the English expert and author Dylan Wiliam (2007). His understanding of cooperation in a PLC follows the idea of a systematically pre-planned and systematically pursued development work within the framework of a regular exchange of professional peers, in this case teachers. Wiliam pointed this out in 2007 (p. 38) as follows:

> „In these small, building-based groups, each participating teacher develops a specific plan for what he or she wants to change in his or her classroom practice. The groups meet regularly to support team members in carrying out and refining their plans."

A Dutch group of authors (Huijboom, van Meeuwen, Rusman & Vermeulen, 2023) present a similar view and a clear emphasis on the expectation of an exchange in which reflection on teaching practice is carried out jointly and recurrently and from which are drawn innovative ideas for the renewal of the teaching practice. Here, transfer in the sense of improvement of teaching becomes decisive, which then benefits the students' learning:

> *„A PLC can be regarded as a group of teachers who, in a culture of collective learning, cyclically, collaboratively, and reflectively examine teaching practices to improve and renew them to achieve better student learning outcomes."* (ibid., p. 1-2)

An overview of the selected articles from the European countries (Great Britain, Finland, the Netherlands, Estonia and Sweden), which were available in English, reveals a roughly comparable understanding of PLCs, namely a cooperation that is geared towards the learning of teachers and in which teachers engage into an exchange by a goal-oriented and also internally and externally stimulated process in order to further develop themselves with a clear focus on improving their teaching practice and ultimately commit themselves to more successful student learning.

If we look at the settings reported about, the majority of the PLC activities take place in the context of the single school, partly integrated into educational policy developments of the school system (e.g. curriculum development). This from the school administration required engagement can be both, an obligation and an impetus for more intensive cooperation within a collegium and thus an impulse for a PLC establishment. An example of this is the requirement in the Swedish school system, through which collaborative learning is specifically promoted and established. Here they include the action research approach (Johannesson, 2022). A contrasting article from England reports about a pushing moment of obligation that derives from the hierarchical situation of teachers towards their school leader. It was observed here that the accountability towards the school management had an intensifying effect. On the micro level of the PLC process there was to see that the PLCs consistently pursued didactic and methodical improvements in teaching (Wiliam & Leahy, 2012).

PLCs, as they are described, differ slightly in terms of their size and composition: they vary from pure (small) groups of teachers with the same domaine to a combination of a group of teachers with a person from the school management or even a constellation with university partners who join the PLC or facilitate it. In one case, we find a different understanding of a PLC as the collegium being the learning group (Admiraal, Schenke, de Jong, Emmelot & Sligte, 2021). The examples we draw from the Dutch discourse even focus on both in parallel: On the one hand, the school and the whole staff is the learning community that is fundamentally expected to systematically reflect on its pedagogical work, and then among the collegium there are PLCs as explicitly small groups that equally scrutinise their own practice and strive for successful learning for their students (Huijboom et al., 2023).

The idea of networking in PLCs therefore arises from at least two directions: (1) division into groups based on an overall collegial development (Antinluoma, Ilomäki & Toom, 2021; Admiraal et al., 2021) or (2) from the outset as a small group constellation, possibly with networking with other PLCs, but there is hardly anything laid out in more detail in the reviewed papers.

In addition to the 'typical' teacher PLCs, the European papers also include learning groups in collaboration with the university (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022). Linked to this is the model of 'teacher leaders', who are members of the PLCs trialled there who take on a moderating and supporting role. They in turn cooperate as part of a coordination team and expand their leadership competences for their PLC (ibid.)

The PLCs which are reported about additionally with empirical results or evaluative information, have emerged from cooperation with a university (Johannesson, 2022; Malone & Smith, 2010) or in connection with a particular further training setting (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Some establishments follow top-down impulses, see the example of the national mandate above, or they arise bottom-up from

informal cooperation engagement. The English example (Wiliam & Leahy, 2012) there is a training about how to work as a PLC which only multipliers attend and then inform their respected PLCs. The other group members learned from a 30-page written guide, based on theory. Overall, this points towards multiple paths of establishment with an introductory preparation for PLC work provided by people of the specific setting and with a connection beyond the individual school.

Furthermore, some papers summarise two different ways of understanding the starting point for the learning community: Some papers start with the particular understanding of the concept of a PLC as a specific type of collaboration and as a method and they discuss the opportunities of such a method and how it was established. On the opposite there is the starting point with the idea of a collaborative practice (Antinluoma, Ilomäki & Toom, 2021, p. 9), in which there is a shared responsibility for students, for example in class teams or co-teaching, and then an elaborated professional collaboration develops in these groups, which then characterises them as a PLC.

3. PLC as an exchange with special requirements

If one takes stock of the specific activities in PLCs that are reported on, the focus is, as expected, on collegial exchange and the conversation referred to a dialogue, to which some papers then operate even more clearly with terms that place the exchange under aspirational qualities, e.g. refer to an inquiry-based attitude and deep reflection. This is also the case in the French contribution with the words *"interroger"* and *"réflexion"* (Progin Romanato & Gather Turler, 2011, pp. 13-14).

The way in which this exchange is encouraged and supported varies greatly. In some papers, school leaders are explicitly mentioned as important for promoting successful PLC work. This is expressed, among other things, in the sense that they should generally support the learning culture in a collegium, sometimes also that they even should participate in a PLC in a moderating capacity (Antinluoma et al. 2021). Also, support for PLC work or its development by people outside the individual school is conceptually considered, not least against the background that some articles have arisen from cooperation between universities and schools. In these constellations, it is recognised as a complementary requirement that the exchange in the PLC should be carried out with an inquiry-based approach. The university partners, familiar with such an approach, then also serve as supporters.

In the Irish paper, this is derived as a consequence of the OECD study 'Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers' 2005:

> *"A key strategy is to encourage teachers to become more enquiring, reflective practitioners, and to do so in collaboration with colleagues" (OECD, 2005, S. 110 quoted by Malone & Smith, 2010, S. 2).*

A few articles mention that reference is also made to literature as part of providing knowledge to the exchange and that texts are read in preparation for this. It can be assumed - but is not stated - that these are academic texts or academic texts prepared for practical use. Twice in the European papers, the claim to work with data analysis and to reflect and make evidence-based teaching and school development decisions is explicitly mentioned, for example in the Estonian article by Oppi and Eisenschmidt (2022) and in the Swedish article by Johannesson (2022, p. 412):

> *"The changes in the Swedish Education Act in 2010 state that all education in Sweden should rest on science and proven experience (SFS [The Swedish Code of Statutes] 2010, 800), which requires schools to adopt research findings and scientific methods in their daily work."*

PLC-related cooperation is said to be a collaboration geared towards learning and the professionalisation of teachers, which promises to change practice as a result. Thus, the main focus of the selected papers on PLCs is on teaching improvement and the associated better learning and development conditions for students. The objectives for the pupils that are at stake in the school practice that needs to be improved range from the expansion of subject-specific competences in various school subjects to the general implementation of motivational and interdisciplinary goals, e.g. becoming more capable of self-direction to the goal that the children and young people feel comfortable and heard at school, i.e. have a voice: *"pupil voice"* (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas & Wallace, 2005, p. 149).

In addition to successful student learning, the importance of the learning culture within the teaching staff is occasionally mentioned as a goal, the necessary building of trust is addressed and the school management is assigned a decisive role in this (Antinluoma et al. 2021). So, the papers see further benefits in the environment of PLCs at the individual school.

4. Inquiry-based learning and reflection in PLCs

The two quality characteristics of a PLC, which are at the centre of the characteristics of a PLC pursued in the project - inquiry & reflection - are expressed differently in the descriptions of what constitutes a PLC. In some papers they can be read as a claim, sometimes explicitly formulated, sometimes merely implied.

This claim is not yet entirely clear when just talking about implementing a new teaching practice (Wiliam & Leahy, 2012). The authors make it clear that one of the discussion points of a PLC should be whether the learning intentions that the group members set themselves have been realised in each case or whether they need to focus on them again. To this end, the PLC concept includes to operate with the instrument of the action plan (ibid.), i.e. a form of precise and written planning of the objectives and steps to be taken as well as indicators to check when an objective has been achieved (examples can be found in the previous Erasmus+ project TePinTeach: http://www.tepinteach.eu/deliverables/action-plan/).

At a next level, some European papers expand on specific requirements within the joint exchange, such as helping each other, reflecting, and sharing knowledge and experiences (Admiraal et al., 2021). The proposal to study texts together also refers at least indirectly to an inquiry-based attitude and reflection. This becomes clear in the Dutch paper when it explicitly speaks of an investigative and reflective character of the dialogue about teaching: *"reflectively examine teaching practices"* (Huijboom et al., 2023, p. 1).

A further level of linking PLCs with the research-based approach crystallises where they refer to the concept of action research as a methodological arrangement and underpin learning and development in school practice with PLCs, as can be seen in the Irish (Malone & Smith, 2010) and Swedish papers. In this paper direct reference is made to a volume on action research which is based on the use of research methods for teacher learning. Thus, this notion also extends to the understanding of PLC:

> *"Among the many approaches to action research, the one undertaken by the teachers in this study could be best described as classroom action research, which is defined as 'involv[ing] the use of qualitative modes of enquiry and data collection by teachers (often with help from academic partners) with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices' (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014, 11)." (Johannesson et al., 2022, p. 415)*

In the papers we usually see the connection from the inquiry-based approach and the endeavours to reflect to transfer, because the goal of a changed practice and its testing is considered.

5. General support of PLCs and supporting roles

In the European articles, various roles come into play that serve to support successful PLC work. On the one hand, there is talk of a role of a person from the PLC leading or moderating the group, with one of the papers referring to a leading teacher. The Estonian authors (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022, p. 3) borrow here from some articles from the wider international environment:

> *"The teacher leaders' role in PLCs is to motivate their colleagues toward improving their performance (Poekert et al., 2016) and to create a supportive environment for the participants to co-construct knowledge about teaching, in which individual teachers help to achieve the shared goal of improving students' learning (Hairon et al., 2015)."*

The exact difference between moderating and leading within the PLC is only hinted at. But it is clear that it is given a prominent position, which also ascribes more responsibility to it, and that the climate and working methods develop in a way that is favourable to PLC members. The authors criticise the lack of information on what exactly needs to be done in terms of internal management:

> *"However, the role of teacher leaders in developing and leading PLCs is somewhat ambiguous as there is a lack of research on what is the role of teacher leaders in developing and maintaining the PLC."* (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022, p. 3)

Then again, the role of coordination emerges, which is conceived within the school and provides a unifying view across all learning groups at the single school and maintains the connection to the school management, not least in the service of a common overall school goal or vision (Admiraal et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the idea of counselling (with terms such as facilitation and advocacy) is quite naturally considered an important support for PLC work in some of the papers. In the majority of cases, these external supporters have goals such as (1) supporting the cooperation in its quality of processes and structures, (2) helping the group to maintain a clear focus and systematically pursue developmental steps one after the other (Huijboom et. al., 2021 and 2023) or helping to practise the basics of action research (Johannesson, 2022) and even being able to provide subject-specific knowledge aspects (Wiliam, 2007).

It can therefore be summarised that the idea of guidance and counselling makes it more likely to lead to a specifically learning-oriented exchange, to introduce obligations for cooperation and structures, then acts as a promoter and trainer of the inquiry approach and reflective type of communication and sometimes even as a source of inspiration for professional knowledge.

In the Swedish and Irish papers, the external facilitator is also recognised as being on an equal footing with the PLC members on the one hand, and on the other hand as providing critical suggestions when involving teachers in action research. Here, the facilitator is a *"critical friend"* (Johannesson, 2022, p. 413; Malone & Smith, 2010). This should reduce the risk of ending up in superficial conversation and instead accompany the teachers in the challenging development work so that they actually learn (Johannesson, 2022).

At the same time, the Irish paper sensitises to the fact that personal conflicts with the critical friend providing advice can also arise due to different power in the relationship and that this can be mitigated by changing the leadership role (Malone & Smith, 2010).

Last but not least, some papers show that preparatory workshops and inputs are considered necessary at least for multipliers, who then communicate the new information back to their PLC group, and thus

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supportive preparation is planned (Wiliam et al., 2012). This again points to the need for a guiding person within the group.

> *"TL21 CPD workshops aimed towards promoting approaches whereby schools could increasingly draw on and energise their own capacities to consider, plan and act in order to bring about more desirable teaching and learning experiences in conditions familiar to each school." (Malony& Smith, 2010, p. 109*)

6. The specific role of external support through counselling & guidance (facilitation)

Across the European examples, the role of external support and advice, which we also refer to as facilitation, proves to be multifaceted. Each PLC approach places more or less broad demands on this function and the person who fulfils it. With rather limited functions, there is the idea of the facilitator as merely an organisational person who creates a pleasant setting (e.g. with coffee catering) and ensures that the course of the meeting is structured. In other positions, the narrow view is expanded to the extent that this person also ensures that an agenda is written and the documentation in the form of a protocol is taken by them.

The range of tasks is significantly extended if the facilitator introduces the group to the understanding of PLC and the research-based, questioning approach - inquiry - and familiarises them step by step with the mode and cycle of a research-based approach. It is also characterised as guiding the PLC work and repeatedly giving the group impulses to cooperate in a learning-oriented manner - and thus also preventing groups from getting stuck in a relaxed exchange, but really concentrating on focusing on those moments in which they recognise the need for development and have to step out of their comfort zone in order to change, as is made clear in the Irish paper with reference to the much-quoted Canadian authors Fullan & Hargreaves:

> *"It was conscious of what Fullan and Hargreaves had to say about those forms of "comfortable collaboration" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) where the privacy of the teachers' classroom is protected and there is no deep probing of issues of teaching and learning." (Malone & Smith, 2010, p. 111)*

In the most comprehensive sense, the facilitator is the person by whose help a PLC develops its quality in the direction of learning and development, which also includes drawing on empirical data or professionalising literature. In addition, the English paper opens up the idea to include experts who also support the PLC thematically in a subject (Wiliam, 2007).

Two additional perspectives that are introduced in the discussion about counsellors and advisors are particularly worth mentioning: (1) As early as 2007, Wiliam speaks of the fact that school supervisors (administrators) or other professionals in the education system can offer support and facilitation, thereby placing a responsibility in the school system itself. In one of the Dutch articles (Huijboom et al., 2021), it is again emphasised that the facilitator plays a supporting role for a PLC, but at the same time should be aware of the tension that the claim to autonomy in the teaching profession must be handled sensitively. Where he/she plans and keeps an eye on what is happening in the PLC, an awareness of the individual and collective autonomy dimension must be developed at the same time, i.e. that he/she should limit him/herself and not make the group dependent, but rather strengthen its ability to steer itself.

The French paper refers to the importance of teacher autonomy and to the autonomy-parity pattern, which stands in the way of collaborative commitments and which must be reflected upon if collaborative development work is to be carried out (Progin Romanato & Gather Turler, 2011).

Only a few papers describe external support in more detail. In one of the Dutch studies (Huijboom, 2023), it is reported that these external consultants were largely responsible for the fact that the PLCs involved in the project were more clearly organised and worked more efficiently and effectively because someone had guided them. They also observed that the learning groups were more consistent in following the inquiry-based sequence of steps (cycle). Furthermore, it was perceived that their meeting organisation, materials and contact between meetings were better prepared (Huijboom, 2023). The authors therefore attribute a decisive role to external advice, not only in the organisation, but also in the mediation within the PLC.

External counsellors and facilitators ensure that the group is learning-oriented by initiating group work, giving feedback or encouraging the giving of feedback so that teachers can learn from each other. They also provide questioning techniques to support the exchange. Furthermore, they initiate group building activities, bring in relevant resources (literature sources, materials) and guide reflection. The facilitator introduces the use of an action plan (Wiliam, 2007) so that teachers can follow their development steps in a focussed manner.

Interestingly, it is also not clear from the Dutch system's contributions how these external advisors are funded, but there is at least one reference in Admiraal et al. (2021) that the individual school could apply to the Ministry of Education via the school management to have corresponding activities at the school funded for three years or that teachers could be given time off if they are used for coordinating work with PLCs (also in cooperation with the school management).

The English example (Wiliam, 2007) provides an even more detailed practical insight, as he shows the exact process for productive PLC meetings as a time-structure. An additional quality of support in the PLC-establishing project there was the distinction that the external consultant did not directly influence the implementation within the framework of school development at the school, but that he/she only responded purposefully to the specific requests of the individual PLCs. The factor of adaptive support was emphasised here and this was documented in a logbook in order to be able to analyse what PLCs need or consider necessary, as well as what they request or give as feedback (ibid.).

The majority of the papers do not explicitly formulate the required competences on the part of the facilitator and counsellor, but derive them from the objectives they set out and the activities that are conceptually required of them. These include the fact that, in addition to moderation and communication skills, a facilitator should have the ability to guide a research-based approach (Huijboom et al., 2023, p. 12):

> „The combination of using dialogical skills and fully applying the inquiry cycle could strongly stimulate PLC development".

7. The specific role of internal support through group management (leader)

The role of an internal moderator or leader of the PLC, which is assumed by a teacher, is not discussed as intensively as that of external counselling and support in the European papers. This may be partly related to the trial settings that the external university partners or external counsellors already bring to the institution and assign them an important role.

And even where leadership among teachers is addressed (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022, p. 4), it is not a leadership desired by the peer group, but one that was provided top-down:

> „*The study group was led by three teachers who represented the formal form of teacher leadership, as they became leaders not based on their own initiative but rather as requested by the school principal.*"

Nevertheless, within this peer leadership, moderation and subtasks are taken on alternately, such as keeping an eye on time, coordinating preparatory tasks and formulating the outlook (ibid.). The leadership of the group can therefore be formal or informal, but is in any case aimed at supporting colleagues in their professional development and should help them to improve their teaching and contribute to better student learning. In the context of working with the groups, the lead teacher is expected to have a transformative power. They surround the PLCs with three forms of care: (1) they analyse what was successful in a PLC and what needs improvement, (2) they ensure professionalisation through in-depth content (reading) and that everyone brings something to the group's learning from the preparation and (3) they clarify responsibility for the session design, decide who will take over the moderation in the session (if they do not do this themselves), help to be stringent in terms of time and involve everyone (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022).

Another interesting observation made in the Estonian paper was that the teachers who coordinate PLCs, *"teacher leaders"* (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022, p. 1), first had to familiarise themselves with this role because they initially did not want to take on this exposed position or did not explicitly identify with it and therefore had difficulties getting started. They would have needed support for this, but did not feel appropriately supported by the school management (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022). Similarly, in the Irish article, there is also a negative side to internal management, where in individual cases there is talk of alienation from the teaching staff (Malone & Smith, 2010).

A second interesting observation is made by one of the articles with regard to the milestones in the development of a PLC. In the Estonian paper, two stages can be roughly distinguished (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022): In the first stage (first year), the PLCs focused more on theoretical aspects (on the subject-specific topic); in the second year, they then developed suitable and applicable practical tools for teaching. In addition, the teachers agreed on shorter sessions for the second stage, each lasting one hour and taking place every 14 days. Learning from the experiences of the first year, efforts were increased to focus more on successful student learning. Here in the context of *"learning strategies - learning about effective ways to learn and practicing them with students (fifth and sixth graders)"* (ibid., p. 4).

8. The importance of school leadership

In the English article by Wiliam & Leahy (2012), the school management is ascribed the more traditional role of providing teachers with the time resources and time off to participate in PLCs and contribute to the project. In this role, they ultimately represent the intermediary position between the project and the teachers and are responsible for managing the entire school. A supporting factor here, as mentioned in the Irish paper, is how PLCs are well supported through timetabling:

> "*Where these meetings were established as scheduled events within the school's timetable, they tended to yield promising results.*" (Malone & Smith, 2010, p. 111)

In the Estonian paper (Oppi & Eisenschmidt, 2022), it was noted during the course of the first year of exploration that although the school management exercised supportive functions, it can also cause disruptions, not least if it no longer supports the teachers with time resources, as happened here in the

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following year of exploration. According to the authors, the PLCs, which had come together here informally in a bottom-up approach, needed this though. In the Finnish study, participants from two schools reported that the change in school leadership had a positive impact on the development of PLCs (Antinluoma et al., 2021).

In the Dutch examples, all papers refer to the school management. On the one hand, it is mentioned here that the contributions that group leaders and school leaders make to the functioning of PLCs should be integrated into an overall context of school development or the goal and vision of school development (Admiraal et al., 2021; Huijboom et al., 2023). Especially where the collegium as a whole refers to the PLCs and smaller groups operate separately, the school leader has a moderating role to play in networking between the PLCs (Admiraal et al., 2021). One of the papers explicitly refers to the school leader in his/her *"key role"* (Huijboom et al., 2023, p. 3), i.e. the role in creating a learning culture in which cooperative learning is embedded in a place of trust, support and a shared vision. The Irish paper refers to a somewhat demanding school leadership role:

> *"A number of principals and deputy principals have adopted a more assertive role in terms of driving the teaching and learning agenda forwards, as opposed to merely facilitating it." (Malone & Smith, 2012, p. 113)*

In the articles across European countries, the school leadership role, also seen as a school leadership team, is thus assigned three main areas of responsibility: (1) The role of being responsible for resources, from which it can free up teachers' capacities so that they can engage in PLC work and promote collegial learning. (2) Furthermore, the school leader or the school management team is the group that makes it possible for a learning-friendly setting to develop in the first place, in which people cooperate intensively and relate to each other and receive motivation and resources. In this context, school management also creates resources when it transfers the coordinating or counselling task to teachers and supports them. (3) In addition, the school management ensures that the ideas for lesson development from individual groups are related to each other and contribute to a network that makes school development as a whole a reality. These tasks show a certain proximity to the concept of Leadership for Learning (Robinson et al., 2017).

9. Summary

In this review across selected articles from European countries that are not part of the other report strands emerging in the initial phase of the LeaFaP project, a core of PLC characteristics can be identified as a common understanding of how exactly teachers work together in this way, how processes are structured and qualitatively designed, and what topics and goals they work with. It also becomes clear how they are supported from within and from the outside - conceptually and also how it was implemented in single exploration projects.

Despite slight differences in the details of the definition of PLC, it is clear from these contributions that this is a development-orientated cooperation between teachers that should actually have a transfer effect at the level of students and their learning success, both subject-related and interdisciplinary. Collaboration with universities is an important source of inspiration here.

A broad range of supporting and facilitation moments becomes clear and the possibilities of a moderating and content-related leadership by members of the PLC is also shown in an initial sketch of conceptual views. How this is or can be flanked or co-directed by the school internal supervisory level and higher levels in the school system was also summarised in initial examples.

Possible additional aspects of interest, such as getting a more accurate picture of how teachers across schools can work together in PLCs in other schools or whether it would be useful to involve students in the development of PLC work, could not be found in the articles.

Interestingly, for all their diversity, the breadth of topics in PLCs is focussed on teaching and student learning - much like the original approach (Hord, 1997) and not on other professional tasks, the collegial learning culture development excluded. It can therefore be said that, on the one hand, the papers very much convey the long-standing PLC concept (teachers learning to teach better and achieve more successful student learning). On the other hand, forms of work such as action research or evidence-based reflection are associated with it, which convey a particular expectation that is more widespread in more recent discourses.

Some of the included quotations indicate what was recognisable when reading the papers, namely that all of them make some reference to the English-language debate from the broader international area (USA, Canada, Singapore, Australia, etc.) and thus also incorporate conceptual ideas from the broader international area into our European compilation.

Finally, it should be noted that the papers do not mention PLCs of school leaders or other pedagogical staff pursuing their professionalisation in PLCs, as the consortium has already tested in previous projects (Kansteiner et al., 2022).

10. Authors

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