

PLCs Build Schoolwide

Creative Capacity

Develop teachers' creative confidence and students' creative thinking skills.

Take a fresh look at professional learning communities and consider how yours can lead your school's creative capacity-building initiatives. Each of those three powerful words—professional, learning, and community—suggests promising practices that can strengthen your school. Innovative schools use their PLCs as creative leadership teams to build teachers' creative confidence and students' creative thinking skills.

Pro-fes-sion-al

[pruh-fesh-uh-nl] noun: person who is expert at work
Professionals are recognized experts in their fields. Leverage the creative expertise within your faculty. Share the collective responsibility to collaboratively transform your school for optimal learning, enriched with creative experiences for adults and children.

Learn-ing

[lur-ning] noun: systematic process of acquiring knowledge and skills
Treating educators as learners is fundamental to the work of PLCs. Principals and teachers must explore, question, investigate, and coach one another. Aspiring to be an art-infused school is only the first step. Next, teachers need to learn how to implement arts integration. You will see the benefits of increased student engagement and achievement quickly. Observing and listening



Small teams within this PLC created mobiles to articulate the priorities of their school. Orchard Gardens, Boston, Massachusetts

RIGHT: Orchard Gardens, Boston, Massachusetts



to children during art-infused experiences is an incredibly powerful way to teach teachers the benefits of this creative approach.

Com-mu-ni-ty

[kuh-myoo-ni-tee] noun: a group that shares common interests, locality, culture, and purpose

The desire to improve each individual and the collective community is rooted in mutual respect and a shared vision. The culture of a community determines how inclusive the effort and how far-reaching the benefits. Schools that are deeply committed to art-infused education reach beyond the school to engage like-minded neighbors in art councils or museums and universities.

PLC

noun: a collegial group united in their commitment to a learning outcome

Simplistically, a PLC is a group of professionals who gather, as a community, to learn. In reality it is much more. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction considers PLCs so central to effective schools that the state website outlines five attributes essential to schools' PLCs:

1. Supportive and shared leadership;
2. Collective creativity;

3. Shared values and vision;
4. Supportive conditions; and
5. Shared personal practice.

With support from North Carolina A+ Schools and the Crayola Champion Creatively Alive Children grant, Community Charter School in Charlotte addresses these five pillars with special emphasis on collective creativity.

“Our vision is to use arts integration to develop children's confidence and growth, while enriching academic rigor. Our shared leadership is based on trust and our teachers' willingness to take risks, to stretch themselves and find new creative strengths,” explains principal Anissa Miller. “All our staff wanted to incorporate art into academics to add rigor and engagement. We made a commitment to collective creativity.”

Miller's creative leadership team conducts monthly walkthroughs to help teachers integrate the arts, and debriefs after the creative lesson to strengthen classroom teachers' capacity and confidence.

Common Language

A tangible element of a PLC is the community's shared use of a vocabulary that aligns with priorities. Schools that are deeply committed to arts

integration convey this message throughout each hour of the day with intentional and casual use of specific language.

Miller believes a shared language unifies a school. The “robust arts-based vocabulary” they use “communicates our commitment to collective creativity,” she explains. “Art words aren't relegated to the music, dance, or art room or a special hour of the day,” art teacher Lisa Carpenter adds. “Art words have meaning throughout our lives. Our entire learning community—students and faculty—listen for them and use these words.”

Universal Arts-Based Vocabulary

Miller points out how smoothly these words fit into classroom and hallway conversations and how it adds meaning to their school culture. Instead of hearing teachers telling children to “settle down” or “stand in line,” she now hears them request the rest position. Teachers don't harp on children to pay attention; instead they ask them to “be a respectful audience.” Students respond intentionally to these phrases and can often be overheard telling classmates to “control your tone” when a peer gets too rowdy.

Another common word the school uses is “informance,” which Carpenter defines as “similar to performance but more focused on process than outcome.” For example, after gathering information about historical leaders, students shared insights in a living museum informance. “Dressed in original costumes, standing under handcrafted signage, these characters shared information when museum

INSTEAD OF...	REFER TO...
Be quiet	Rest position
Work together	Ensemble
Point of view	Perspective
Listen and watch respectfully	Audience
Settle down, notice your speed of moving	Tempo
Calm down, you're too noisy, or speak up if too soft-spoken	Tone



Focusing on arts-infused education helps PLC's articulate priorities as they bond professionally and personally. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Community Charter School, Charlotte, North Carolina; Horace Mann Elementary, Sedalia, Missouri

visitors pushed their buttons,” she explains. Informal informances occur throughout the school year, giving students practice presenting what they know, building off the art term performance.

Leonardo Learners

PLCs are often inspired by an innovative leader. New Egypt Primary School in New Jersey and RJ Richey Elementary School in Burnet, Texas, both formed creative leadership teams based on Leonardo da Vinci’s taxonomy. New Egypt principal Richard DeMarco says, “da Vinci is our creative muse. He saw how interdisciplinary art is, and inspires us to weave art into every subject, every day.” The school’s creative leadership team uses da Vinci’s vision to bring a scholarly approach to the integration of science and art.

Similarly, at RJ Richey Elementary, “da Vinci and his taxonomy inspired our creative leadership team,” reports principal Jill Wittekiend. “We are grounded on Leonardo’s seven principles and how to apply them school-wide.” The principles are:

- *Curiosita*—Insatiably curious about life, with an unrelenting quest for more learning.

- *Dimostrazione*—Demonstrate and build knowledge through experience, persistence, and experimenting (with a willingness to learn from mistakes).
- *Sensazione*—Continuous refinement of senses, especially sight, as a way to enliven experiences.
- *Sfumato*—Willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty (literally means “going up in smoke”).
- *Arte-Scienza*—Balancing between science and art, logic, and imagination.
- *Corporalita*—Cultivating fitness, poise, ambidexterity, and grace.
- *Connessione*—Appreciation for the interconnectedness of all phenomena.

Beyond the Building

The best scenario for a creative leadership team begins when principals leverage the creative expertise within the faculty. Art teachers on staff are invaluable resources to teach colleagues as well as students. They often serve as chief creative officers within their

schools, coaching teachers on integrating the arts. Yet, if a school doesn’t have an art teacher, as an interim solution reach out to art experts in the community who may be found in arts councils, museums, and universities.

Alexandria Elementary School in Calhoun, Alabama, did just that. The school does not have an art teacher, but has a deep desire to infuse more art experiences throughout the school. So staff reached out to nearby Jacksonville State University to join their PLC, says Rebecca Grogan, assistant principal.

“They helped us form a creative leadership team that is bringing art into our teaching. ... Our relationship with the university is deepening since they have art-integration expertise,” Grogan explains. “It’s a win-win for both organizations. I love how comfortable my teachers are now with calling up the university professors and saying, ‘I have an art-integration idea; how do you think I could do this?’ That level of partnership didn’t exist before.” 