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## Steps for Starting a Professional Learning Community (PLC): A Literature Review

John T. Sutton

*PROSPECT S-STEM*, john@result-ed.com

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## Steps for Starting a Professional Learning Community (PLC) – A Literature Review

A review of 23 articles/blogs/archived documents (referred to in this article as resources) identifying steps to create and develop a PLC were reviewed during the time period of November 17 through November 30, 2023. The articles were acquired through a key word online search that included “PLCs,” “Starting a PLC,” “Steps in Creating a PLC,” and “Building your PLC.” After the pool of 23 resources was acquired, an initial review was conducted and three of these resources were determined to not provide sufficient, relevant information to be included in the summary. One of the first steps in conducting a thorough review of the remaining 20 resources was to identify multiple headings to organize information to be examined more closely. At the outset, a set of five were included in a table. As each resource was reviewed, information, if provided, was copied from the resource, and pasted under each heading. Exhibit A includes the headings and provides a summary of how many information pieces were included in that heading across all 22 resources.

Exhibit A. Headings and Total Items for PLC Resource Review

Article/Resource	Steps in Starting a PLC	Definition of PLC	Benefits of PLCs	Audiences/Members of PLCs
20	118 identified steps (some duplications)	18 definitions provided (some duplications)	33 benefits identified	47 total: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administrators (6)</li> <li>● Educators (7)</li> <li>● Leaders (9)</li> <li>● Teachers (13)</li> <li>● Others (12)</li> </ul>

This article is intended to focus only on the Steps in Starting a PLC category in an attempt to synthesize the variety of the 122 identified steps into a few themes. These themes, conveyed in Exhibit B, are organized based on the frequency of the identified steps conveyed across all articles. The description that follows each theme is based on the information conveyed in each article/blog/archived document.

Exhibit B. Steps in Starting a PLC Themes and Descriptions

Theme	Description
<i>Leadership</i>	Leadership for an effective professional learning community is critical to carry out the work in meeting goals. <i>An effective professional learning community has a leader who is trustworthy while helping to overcome conflicts, who provides teachers with autonomy, and who recognizes and celebrates success (Reynolds, 2016).</i> It is important to consider a number of factors in considering PLC leadership. Even though it may start with an administrator or principle as the organizer, the role of leader may shift to a teacher as some point. <i>Having transparent expectations of the PLC leader is important. The PLC leader should take on the role of facilitating conversations, which means ensuring everyone has a voice within the planning walls. But the PLC leader does not come into the PLC carrying more than they can handle. The goal is for the PLC leader to be a facilitator, not the hero leader who does all the work. (Honaker, Senn, and Fetherolf, 2022).</i> Since PLCs are collaborative, it is important to

	<p>consider how to share responsibilities and rotate various jobs during meetings. As an example, there should be someone accepting responsibility to build a draft agenda, communication about the meeting, facilitate, record, provide snacks or meeting space, and other tasks for each meeting. It is often suggested some of these responsibilities might rotate with each meeting so that everyone has an active role over time.</p>
<i>Vision</i>	<p>A vision for a PLC is important since it describes what the administrators, staff, faculty, and stakeholders want they hope to accomplish through the PLC. For many institutions, there may be a multiple step process necessary to identify what they want, share information with others, and discuss perspectives and views to get to commonalities that everyone can agree upon. Regardless of the process, establishing a common vision is critical to next steps in forming and engaging the PLC.</p>
<i>Collaboration</i>	<p>Collaboration is a key feature of professional learning communities (PLCs). It is important to create an engaging and welcoming environment that provides the support to address the challenge of learning that is the focus of the PLC. Create an environment that encourages and supports members shared ideas and engaging in respectful dialogue working together on a regular basis. <i>Everyone in the learning community should be encourage to share their viewpoints and experiences so other members can relate to each other and share strategies (Burton, 2021).</i></p>
<i>Support</i>	<p>Support for PLCs is multi-dimensional and may look different based on institutional and PLC structures. One common thread that appears in this area is the need for supportive conditions. Those conditions will likely include time, space, recognition, resources, and participant needs. Additionally, the needs to be support for professionalism and a desire for long-term growth and student success. Support doesn't operate as a "stand-alone" or "one and done" approach, rather it is an ongoing feature and expectation of the institutional culture.</p>
<i>Goals</i>	<p>Early on in the process of creating and operationalizing the PLC, it has been important to engage in a goal setting approach. While goals can be revisited and restated over time, it is important that the goals of the PLC align with the goals of its members. It is equally important that all members understand the goals, so collectively the PLC can determine how to reach goals and assess progress in meeting the goals.</p>
<i>Share</i>	<p>Professional learning communities that have been successful in their efforts have all had sharing as an underlying premise. That sharing has included personal practice, ownership, accountability, experiences, thinking, and resources. The PLC and all its members have been enriched and benefited from a sharing mindset.</p>
<i>Focus</i>	<p>Professional learning communities can address a variety of educational and institutional challenges most productively when there is a clear and agreed upon focus. That focus can be established early and reflect the priorities of all members. That focus can change over time while continuing to keep student success as a desired outcome. The focus can take the PLC through a variety of learning situations and include ways to assess success for the PLC's work as</p>

	well as student success. Finally, the focus can include the results for members and by members to inform and, if successful, shift the focus to the next challenge.
<i>Commitment</i>	For PLCs to engage in the important work of student success, faculty growth, and institutional change, there needs to be a commitment at multiple levels. The institution must commit to providing the time, space, and support for PLCs to operate. The PLC, it's members and leaders, must commit to meeting regularly and prioritizing the time to engage with and contribute to the PLC. Finally, the PLC needs strong leadership to facilitate and guide the PLC through a variety of educational challenges. That requires commitment to select and support leadership in carrying out their roles and expectations from the PLC and the institution.
<i>Culture</i>	There are a variety of areas within the culture of the PLC that can be developed and nurtured through the PLC. In order for PLCs to be most effective there needs to be in place a learning culture and atmosphere of trust and honesty. The PLC, through it's members and leadership, need to operate in a culture of collaboration and empowerment. There must be a culture of growth and permeates and contributes to member engagement and learning. By recognizing and striving to address these cultural norms and expectations, the PLC is best positioned to be productive and successful.
<i>Data Driven</i>	There are a variety of data sources that can be examined or explored to gain insights into and guide decisions. Being data driven is also important when it comes to support for the PLC. <i>Data used by the PLC must be current and relevant. When PLCs can present hard data as a metric for success, they receive more support from administration and teachers. Communities that rely on intuition and personal opinions rarely succeed in completing their objectives. The PLCs that implement a variety of student data and research to drive their choices, on the other hand, regularly find a clear path forward. They are able to be truly strategic with their decision-making processes and are able to confidently recommend effective solutions to the problems they are working to address in their communities. (The Educator's Guide to Professional Learning Communities [PLC], Otus.)</i>
<i>Others</i>	In addition to the steps that formed the primary themes listed, there were 51 other steps identified across the articles. These additional steps, while not sufficient to establish a theme, included important considerations such as celebrating success, creating a culture, being data-driven, having clear communications, understanding context, focus on equity and setting up norms and expectations. Many of the additional steps were in the form of actions that will enhance the PLCs effectiveness such as being proactive, being reflective, allowing for regular dialogue and engage people emotionally, culturally, and experientially.

In conclusion, there are a number of steps that can influence and inform the creation, development, and growth of a PLC. It isn't necessary to use a lock-step approach, rather it is cyclical and evolving. The steps take into consideration and accommodates the context of the institution and the need to improve for a variety of reasons. The steps allow for quick wins and

changes that require significant time, research, and resolution. Always with a plan that reflects member and institutional priorities. It is hoped that by identifying what has been consistently identified as important steps to the success of the PLC provides sufficient information to start.