

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES AND NETWORKS

RSH 702 APA Style for Professional Writing

by

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Abstract

As the influx of technology available for use in schools continues its momentum, educators in Professional Learning Communities must find further ways to remain connected during the times that their PLCs are not meeting. The integration of technology opens avenues for continued communication and collective coherence among all stakeholders. Educators who find that development of the new skills demanded by their positions must occur on the job may find that extending their PLCs to include a relevant and varied Professional Learning Network allows for solid learning and support as veteran educators work to use and integrate changing technology into their practice with positive student outcomes in mind.

Keywords: PLCs, PLNs, technology, collaboration, integration, goals, outcomes

Overview

As the involvement and importance of technology in daily living, learning, and leading continues to grow, school based professional learning communities face an increased need to effectively incorporate it into their instructional practice. By planning collaboratively for the incorporation of technology, educators and administrators are able to keep student learning as the goal, which is then enhanced by the use of digital tools (Thoma, 2017). Many professional educators are finding that their areas of expertise are quickly undergoing a shift, which requires them to acquire the skills to remain current while on the job (Deissler, 2015). While organizational Professional Learning Communities allow for the implementation of a protected process in which those with a common goal, vision, and mission collaborate (Bates, 2016), the fast integration of technology requires members to expand their PLC to a Professional Learning Network. This is especially valuable to educators who have been in their field for over 10 years. By establishing and growing a PLN, those who may not have received training in the skills necessary to evolve with their changing positions during their preparation programs can expand their resource base for continued learning with and about technology (Deissler, 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to examine how educators in Professional Learning Communities can further their understanding and application of technology in an educational setting by expanding their PLC to include an established Professional Learning Network (Deissler, 2015). As the influx of technology continues to increase, it will be necessary for educators to remain in a job embedded learning cycle that includes professional development (Bates, 2016).

Justification

This project represents a reflective look at the broad range of options that educators have for continuing to develop skills that will help them successfully manage and champion the role technology can and will play in the lives of students today and going forward. Understanding the value of a collaborative culture and maintaining an awareness of the tools that provide a means to improved integration of technology (Thoma, 2017) will allow educators to continue the process of best implementing technology with continuous improvement in mind and collective inquiry as a framework upon which to build improved student outcomes (Bates, 2016).

Annotated Bibliography

Bates, C. C., Huber, R., & McClure, E. (2016). Stay Connected: Using Technology to Enhance Professional Learning Communities. *Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 99–102.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1469>

This article addresses how integration of technology can enhance the collaborative efforts of educators in a Professional Learning Community. Teachers who instruct students in their classrooms are under time constraints. Although time may be provided during the work week for them to meet with other like-minded educators, there are bound to be scheduling conflicts. As teachers work in their PLCs to move toward improved student outcomes, they will find that the use of technology will allow them to further remain connected with each other, even during times of separation such as summer break (p. 99).

With a literacy coach to help carve out time to meet, suggest resources, and provide guidance, teachers can better experience the ongoing and extensive professional development that PLCs are intended to provide. Meaningful integration of technology may help overcome some of the challenges that have been identified as barriers to productive PLCs. By choosing and utilizing appropriate technology, teachers can connect with each other even when they are unable to meet. Use of technology in PLCs may help educators envision ways to select and apply technology in their practice.

Outside of the PLC, technology facilitates the creation of an additional learning support system, which provides a means for participants to join from any location. This means that thoughts can be shared at their formation rather than waiting until the next scheduled meeting (p. 100). Technology integration as a means to extend PLCs also allows for the sharing of resources in multiple ways, including providing a way to collect and display

data (p. 101). Additionally, technology can extend a PLC beyond the four walls of its building of origin, while helping ensure diversity among the contributors (p. 102).

Deissler, C. ed., Ding, L., Neumann, K., & Kopcha, T. (2015). Professional Learning Networks to Support School Librarians' Development of Instructional Technology

Expertise. *TechTrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, 59(3), 27–40.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-015-0850-1>

This article identifies many ways that expanding a Professional Learning Community to include a Professional Learning Network will help educators employed in evolutionary fields grow and develop the skills necessary to meet the changing needs of their profession. The speed at which technology changes has made it necessary for those in certain fields to acquire on the job skills in order to keep up with the influx of new ideas. In order to remain current, many educators must transform their training to include solid technology integration while also maintaining the more traditional aspects of their profession (p. 27). This on the job training occurs when the demands of the profession exceed the content of the professional's college or university training program, and it becomes necessary to develop skills not addressed in their original training (p. 28). Such needs include the development of an understanding of technology, but also the growth of pedagogical skills necessary for thorough contribution to the profession. Educators can strongly grow their professional learning and networking opportunities by expanding their PLC to a PLN (p. 29). Doing so ensures that professional educators have a comprehensive and well-rounded resource for opportunities to learn in most any area of their career (p. 31).

Thoma, J. Jennifer. ed., Hutchison, A., Johnson, D., Johnson, K., & Stromer, E. (2017). Planning for Technology Integration in a Professional Learning Community. *Reading Teacher*, 71(2), 167–175. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1604>

In this article, the authors explore how working as a team in a Professional Learning Community can help educators achieve meaningful integration of technology in their classrooms (p. 167). This task is not to be completed in isolation, but rather in a team that shares a common view with favorable student outcomes as the central focus. Tools used among members of a PLC may further facilitate successful and meaningful technology integration. The article addresses the barriers that educators may face during technology integration by explaining a process called the Technology Integration Planning Cycle, which helps team members identify goals, (p. 169) tools, and desired outcomes following adoption of the TIPC (p. 170). Working together in a PLC to implement the Technology Integration Planning Cycle strengthens the learning community by helping to establish a common goal as well as identify desired student outcomes (p. 172). The guidance provided by the Technology Integration model is designed to provide working and established PLCs with the ability to become autonomous as they set goals for including technology in their instruction (p. 174).

References

- Bates, C. C., Huber, R., & McClure, E. (2016). Stay Connected: Using Technology to Enhance Professional Learning Communities. *Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 99–102. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1469>
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Reflection

As a library media and technology specialist, I have a very unique opportunity to serve students and teachers in a public middle school setting. Oh, Middle School! What a very special time and place on the path of life! During middle school, everything is changing for everyone. The students find that their friendships are dynamic and often uncertain. They don't know what's happening to their bodies. They struggle with social and emotional issues that are often more than a youth should have to carry. One constant norm I've noticed is the presence and importance of technology in nearly everything my students do. It is a part of nearly every one of their interactions. They like to be connected at all times, for fun, for an attentional outlet, and all too often--for acceptance. Our students today are SO very connected to tech, that it is sometimes the greatest challenge to get them to connect with other humans. That said, it is imperative that we integrate technology into their daily school experience, and that we integrate it well. Because I am not a young educator, I can honestly say that my tech savvy status has been earned on my job. When I completed my MEd in Instructional Technology, we were still using floppy disks. Therefore, I have found it even further necessary to remain a life-long learner--to grow and change with the ebb and flow that is my profession. When I read this assignment, I started reflecting more upon the current buzz in my school, which is Professional Learning Communities. In the last year, I have become a much more adept user of social media for professional connections. I realized that my PLC extends far beyond my school into an interesting, unique, and often quirky group of amazing professionals who have become my Professional Learning Network. While my PLC allows me to remain connected with my in house colleagues, the PLN allows me to learn and grow with others in my same position. Since it is my goal to use and incorporate technology into my daily practice, I decided to take a closer

look at how my PLC and PLN expand my ability to grow my own tech skills while helping me find avenues for meaningful integration in my classes.