

Theme: Emotional Safety in Professional Learning Network

Professional learning networks require shared understanding and commitment to respect and collaboration, otherwise they have a tendency to reproduce power hierarchies

- Often PLN's emerge in an environment usually characterized by hierarchies, and usually characterized by individuals from different personal and professional contexts networking to collaborate on pedagogical issues.
- When a PLN emerges in a hierarchical system or a system that is too small (such as within a school itself) it has a tendency to reproduce this, as school leaders like principals are shown to take a more active role in discussions than classroom teachers will when they know that their principal is in the network with them.
 - This obviously limits the willingness of participants to collaborate openly and equally and reinforces the same top-down structure that PLN's seek to disrupt.
- PLN's are effective at disrupting power structures particularly when there is a shared sense of responsibility for moderating and upholding values within the group, as all participants are able to rely on a sense of reciprocal trust with a focus on shared responsibility instead of hierarchical control.

Jesacher-Roessler, L., Nesseler, K., Schneider, C., & Bremm, N. (2026). Facilitating professional learning networks: the challenging role of hierarchical power structures. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 11(1), 27-43.

Professional learning networks can allow people with diverse identities to share their knowledge in an environment more geared towards collaboration than western professional development typically offers

In recent years educators have increasingly turned to the online space to extend their professional development. Often these forums are seen as ideal learning environments because participants are able to engage in various ways that align with their unique skills, expertise, needs and areas of practice.

- Online tools are often celebrated in this sense because they reduce temporal and spatial constraints, offering spaces for participatory cultures without the usual barriers that educators can encounter when working in a space where their area is less common.

In their research, (Trust et al, 2016I) found that because of the decentralized nature of professional learning networks, participants who didn't necessarily work in education were able to collaborate with educators, which contributed to teachers reporting that they felt empowered and up to date on relevant information related to their field.

- In this way, professional learning networks can help to offer educators with more opportunities to collaborate outside of their field, while simultaneously offering opportunities for lifelong learning and collaboration to others who may work outside of education.

Trust et al (2016) also found that despite PLN's being so fluid in terms of how and why teachers might be looking for support, consistently teachers expressed that they felt supported to find, share and create knowledge when they accessed their PLN. Teachers also reported that they felt their affective, social, cognitive and identity aspects for growth for the entire person were supported, meaning that teachers felt the knowledge that they gained transcended their teaching practice and contributed to a more meaningful life outside of the classroom as well.

Trust, T., Krutka, D. G., & Carpenter, J. P. (2016). "Together we are better": Professional learning networks for teachers. *Computers & education*, 102, 15-34.

Case study that might be helpful, might not: How PLN can lead to better inclusive education practices

Professional Learning Communities (usually education frames it as a community) are groups that bring educators together to reflect on their teaching practices by sharing their experiences and offering each other support.

- Usually they are based on mutual trust, shared goals, and collective responsibility.
- PLC's can play an important role in creating more inclusive schools by ensuring that all educators are aligned in their beliefs and values related to diversity, as well as creating opportunities for educators to work together to develop solutions to shared challenges.

Veslemøy Maria Fossum Johansson & Marte Karoline Herrebrøden (2025) Cultivating inclusive schools: the role of extended professional learning communities, *Educational Research*, 67:4, 442-460, DOI: 10.1080/00131881.2025.2548263

- Specifically for teachers working in inclusive education, often there's a top down approach to professional development, meaning that teachers receive training that is less relevant to their everyday challenges.
 - These approaches also often prioritize curriculum, rather than the importance of collaborative learning and the ways that teachers also often need support with processing their job.
 - In this way, professional learning networks have been demonstrated to be an avenue for teachers to process difficult experiences and emotions, as well as contribute to overall better culture in a school that is more aligned with how staff think, act and feel.

Citation: Zorde, O., & Lapidot-Lefler, N. (2025). Sustainable Educational Infrastructure: Professional Learning Communities as Catalysts for Lasting Inclusive Practices and Human Well-Being. *Sustainability*, 17(7), 3106. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17073106>