

Audit



Professional Learning Communities:
source materials for school leaders and
other leaders of professional learning

Investigating the culture of your professional learning community

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Introduction

The culture of organisations is very powerful, reflecting the beliefs and values of people in the community. Culture is displayed in many ways – through signs, symbols, ceremonies and rituals. The way a school, centre or college staff meeting or assembly is carried out, sends obvious or very subtle messages about what is important. Schools, centres and colleges are also full of visual symbols. Whether or not it is intended, they give out messages about what is valued. As pupils, parents and other visitors walk up to the entrance, they may receive messages even before they get inside. What the front entrance looks like, what's on the walls throughout the building, whether there's rubbish on the floor, whether movement around the school, centre or college is orderly – all of these are given some kind of meaning.

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Quote displayed in a project school

One of the project nursery schools had posters all around the building, conveying messages about learning, enquiry, leadership, teamwork and continuous improvement.

In a secondary school, labelled boxes in a deputy head's office highlighted the emphasis on learning for all.

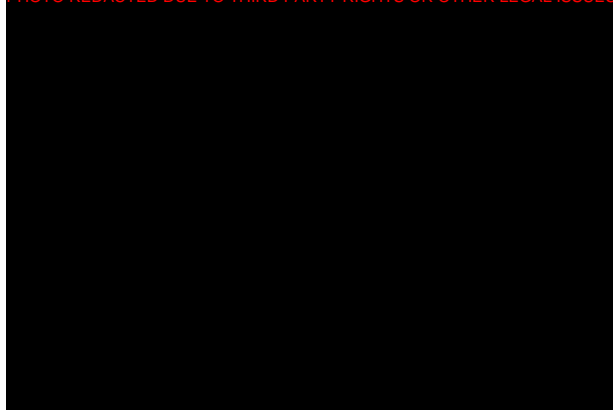
Metaphors also say a lot about an organisation and the way it operates. The deputy head and co-ordinator of continuing professional development in one secondary school used a metaphor of a lava lamp with moving oil blobs to describe his school's PLC:

“The learning community is the lamp but different things move around. At the moment the (subject) department is rising and is near the top of the lamp, but in three years time... it may look different.”

A head also described the fluctuating nature of PLC development:

“You can't be growing all the time. There are ebbs and flows: when you get into a new school year; after a few weeks; the beginning of a new term; the end of term tidying up and rewards and satisfaction... There are phases when you have spurts, or when you chill out, or when the waters are distinctly choppy.”

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Files on display in a project school

The purposes of this set of activities

The purposes of these activities are to:

- help you explore your PLC's culture
- surface perceptions about what messages are being given out
- help build shared understandings

How might you use these activities

We have included a selection of questions and tasks about aspects of school culture for you to reflect on, work on and discuss. You will need to consider who to involve in the dialogue or tasks. You may want to start with them as self-evaluation tasks for the staff, to help build shared understandings. It may be that you will also want to involve pupils, parents,

governors (school council members), colleagues in other schools, nursery settings, centres or colleges, external critical friends, or members of other community agencies. Getting their personal perspectives on your PLC's culture could be a valuable way to involve them and build relationships.

Questions and activities

Think about your school's, centre's or college's ceremonies, rituals and symbols.
What do they say about your focus?



What are the first things that catch your eye when you enter your school, centre or college?
What messages do they give out?

If lists of staff and their photographs are displayed, who is included?
Has anyone been missed out?

Questions and activities

Give a group of pupils a camera and ask them to take and explain:

- three photos that reflect things that are important to their learning
- three photos that reflect things they think the staff believe are important to pupils' learning

Discuss the photos. What do the pupils' comparisons tell you about your focus on learning?



If you were an anthropologist and you had to pick three artefacts that represented your school, centre or college, what would they be and what do they represent?

What else can you see, hear, feel and even smell in your PLC? Photocopy this page onto A3 paper



Think of metaphors that characterise your school, centre or college and what it is like to be on the staff. What do they tell you about your professional learning community?



Our school, centre or college is like...

because...

Being on staff here is like...

because...

This tells us that...

Now you have gathered all of this data, you will need to think about how you use it to help develop your PLC. You may find the **Planning** (Booklet 9) and **Action** (Booklets 10–11) activities helpful with this.



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Audit

Investigating the culture of your professional learning community

Comparing your preferred future and the current situation in your
professional learning community

Deciding where you are as a professional learning community

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