

The information below is a comparison of key characteristics of PLC and CoP. There are other similarities and differences. PLC are practiced in an educational setting while CoP have been most successful in the business community. To access further information go to the web under Professional Learning Communities, Richard DuFour and Communities of Practice, Etienne Wenger.

Professional Learning Communities	Communities of Practice
Definition: PLC is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student where educators embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within.	Definition: CoP are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor. They share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.
Characteristics:	Characteristics
Focus on learning: High levels of learning are the reason that the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it.	Domain: It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other.
Collaborative culture: Composed of collaborative teams engaged in a systematic process in which members work interdependently to achieve common goals that impact their classroom practice linked to the purpose of learning for all.	Community: Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. They do not necessarily work together on a daily basis but they interact and learn together.
Collective inquiry: Teams engage in collective inquiry into best practices in teaching and best practices in learning. This enables them to develop new skills and capabilities leading to new experiences and awareness.	Practice: Members are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems, in short a shared practice.
Action orientation: Understands that the most powerful learning occurs in a context of taking action and value engagement and experience as the most effective teachers. (learning by doing)	Activities: CoP develop their practice through a variety of activities such as: joint problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, coordination and synergy, discussing developments, documentation projects, visits and mapping knowledge and identifying gaps.
Commitment to continuous improvement: Gathers evidence of current levels of student learning, develop strategies to build on strengths and address weaknesses, implement strategies, analyze the impact of changes and apply new knowledge in next cycle.	Organizational design: Enables practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need; creates a direct link between learning and performance; addresses the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing; not limited by formal structures and creates connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries
Results orientation: Realizes that all efforts in the above areas must be assessed on the basis of results rather than intentions.	Benefits: Individual/help with challenges, access to expertise, confidence, meaningful work, personal development, reputation, professional identity, networking, marketability. Organization/problem solving, time saving, knowledge sharing, synergy across units, reuse of resources, keeping abreast, innovation, retention of talents, new strategies.
Adapted from "Learning by Doing", DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many	Adapted from "Communities of Practice" by Etienne Wenger www.ewenger.com