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BUILDING BLOCK III: TEACHERS' INDUCTION PROGRAMME

UNIT XI - ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

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UNIT XI - ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

INTRODUCTION

Professional networks can make significant long-term efficiency gains by sharing and employing best practices for the construction of high-quality and flexible school environments. Although the nature, scale and organization of networks can be significantly diverse, here we focus on creating networks to ensure the learning and professional development of teachers, responding to their specific training needs in a coordinated manner and thereby helping to prepare them to make informed educational decisions.

Within this framework, we acknowledge the creation of a professional network within an approach that looks at networks as providing teachers mentors with a place where they can share cultural practices and activities and strengthen their competencies, also engaging in learning to become a teacher mentor as a process of knowledge-creation with other teachers mentors.

Here **we envisage this network as a form of “associative alliance”** to a) lower the financial and structural difficulties in setting up a professional network; and b) focus on the professionals rather than on schools per se, thus favouring a bottom-up approach whereby the teacher mentor have a high degree of autonomy when participating in these networks.

In doing so, we aim at preparing schools for consolidating and operating networks that can move beyond the professional development needs teachers mentors have. That is, we operate through and **spiral model** where schools are used to identify and request teachers mentors' participation who, in turn, through their participation in these professional networks, can set the foundations for building up more holistic school networks (Figure 11).

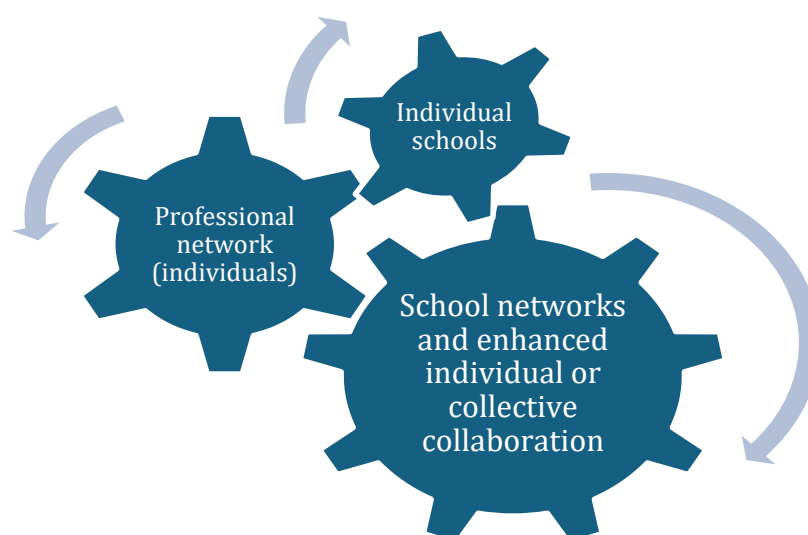


Figure 11 - The spiral of professional networks

This unit revolves around an action plan teachers mentors must think of, discuss and set up to effectively start, develop and sustain a network of professionals on mentoring. As shown in the spiral model, this professional network aims at moving beyond individuals (at an earlier stage) to look and ask for a more holistic involvement of schools as learning organizations (at an – ideally – later stage).

OBJECTIVES

- To identify and understand the key stages involved in the creation of a professional network
- To make teachers mentors competent professionals in the organization of networks though the development of a dedicated action plan

CONTENTS

- The steps involved in the creation of professional networks
- Key areas of discussion and reflection in the sharing of practices and experiences among teachers mentors
- Shared Leadership: definition, challenges, and opportunities

DURATION, ACTIVITIES AND DYNAMICS

Estimated working time: 90m

Running time for activity and dynamic:

Activity	Dynamic	Duration	Total Duration
1. Creating a network core	1 – Reflecting on the strategies to create a network	30m	30m
2. Establishing teacher mentors' relationships and creating and agenda	1 - Reflecting on the path to building up relationships	30m	30m
3. Adopting a shared leadership approach	1 – Discussion about shared leadership	30m	30m
			90m

Activity 1: Creating a network core | 30 Minutes

The first step when thinking of setting up a professional network is the creation of a “management team” or “network core” among 3 or more professionals from the same or diverse schools. This core group need to both think of the practicalities of the networks (where to meet, when, in which way, who is responsible for what) and the content and goals of each meeting. In the beginning, this core of people will struggle to reach other teachers mentors and set up informal, one-off meetings to discuss the how and when of this professional network.

Therefore, the creation of the network will depend upon **the capacity of mapping schools that actively promote induction initiatives based on mentoring schemes.**

In doing so, schools should at least offer one teacher mentor representative with the time and resources to contact other schools and professionals. This can take two strategies:

Strategy A: Create small teams of teachers (ideally a teacher mentor + a teacher from the school board) and provide them with time and platforms to contact schools in the same area with mentoring schemes or are interested in creating a mentoring initiative.

Strategy B: Select one teacher mentor from your school and provide him with time to contact and visit other schools to gather information about needs and possibilities to create an informal, one-off meeting.

Considering this, teachers mentors will need to discuss.

Dynamic 1 – Reflecting on the strategies to create a network | 30 Minutes

- a. Teachers mentors in this activity have to discuss the pros and cons of either strategy and reflect on which one is the more suitable according to their particular context/area. In particular, issues about schemes & time and the possibilities for creating informal meetings outside school hours should be addressed in this discussion.
- b. Once the discussion is over, teachers mentors will recreate this very first one-off meeting among professionals from different schools and will talk around:
 - a. Mapping of potential schools and teachers in their area.
 - b. Mapping their professional needs.
 - c. The capacity to set up a meeting agenda.
 - d. Think of a first professional meeting around the concept of “collaborative learning”: how to prepare dynamics, the organization of the meeting, etc.

Activity 2: Establishing teachers mentors’ relationships and creating an agenda | 30 Minutes

The second step is to generate a trust base among the “core network” team. First meetings need to have a clear purpose and address the most immediate needs according to practicalities and priority issues. This activity places teachers mentors in that position and asks them to set up an agenda attractive enough to reach new members and move forward.

Certain conditions are needed to promote this professional network, but the fundamental one is the creation of trust among all potential partners. Thus, the establishment of relationships can benefit from the approach used to build relationships between teachers mentors and teachers mentees presented in the LOOP project (see [Annex 33](#)).

Dynamic 1 - Reflecting on the path for building up relationships | 30 Minutes

In this activity, teachers mentors working in groups must pick up one of the areas presented and discuss key strategies and approaches to effectively address these in an imaginary agenda of teachers mentors’ meetings.

- a. Each group should imagine they are the “network core”, or those teachers that will be leading the creation and launching of the network, at least in its earlier stages. If the previous activity involved making contact and establishing the very first practical priorities, this second activity involves the scenario of teachers from different schools, meeting to establish this “network core”.

In these initial tentative meetings, teachers mentors need to present or imagine different strategies to focus on how these 5 areas could be addressed. Some examples are presented here (teachers mentors can use them, merge, or modify them, and add new ones!).

- **Review meetings:** arrange one-off meetings to focus on the teachers mentors needs and strengthen your relationship. Here, the mapping of needs can follow the proposed “Direction supports” to organize these needs among the abovementioned “emotional, communication, physical and instructional” supports.



- Remembering beginnings: sharing and discussing pitfalls, challenges, unexpected barriers, and ways teachers used different strategies to overcome these.
 - Promoting dialogue: among teachers who want to become teacher mentor and/or have some informal experiences in mentoring.
 - Using strengths-based feedback: to enhance clarification, informally evaluate or comment on mentoring strategies and agree on common goals and priorities.
- b. Once they have worked out 2 or 3 of the proposed areas, they have to agree to set up an initial agenda of activities to offer future teachers mentors from other schools, and for the “network core” to follow in a more structured way.

Activity 3: Adopting a Shared Leadership approach | 30 Minutes

In a context of scarce resources and time and, given the current start-of-art of mentoring schemes in most countries, teachers mentors face the challenge to find the time and energy to move beyond one-off meetings and implement the proposed agenda, as displayed in the previous activity. Now it is time to think about the concept of shared leadership to deepen our understanding and brainstorm strategies to take the most of the available time teachers mentors and the teacher mentee of this “core network” have by relying on each other’s criteria and agency.

Considering the lack of time and resources to build up a network, the “network core” members need to take ownership and responsibility for the part they play in the structure of the network and/or the development of the meeting agenda.

In this activity, we present a working definition of shared leadership and propose a discussion around the challenges of shared leadership. Here we give some examples of challenges but of course, it is suggested that teachers mentors think of other challenges as well.

Dynamic 1 – Discussion about shared leadership | 30 Minutes

- a. Presentation of “Shared Leadership” working definition: *“Shared leadership is when each teacher mentor within an organization takes ownership and responsibility for the part they play. In effect, shared leadership enables each teacher mentor to shoulder their work without the oversight from a command-and-control style manager.”* Discussion in groups and then among all teachers mentors.
- b. Presentation and discussion of potential challenges:
- a. How to establish an appropriate supervision/evaluation of actions taken.
 - b. How to ensure effective communication and practical knowledge of “who-is-doing-what”.
 - c. Decision-making procedures and fair distribution of tasks.
 - d. Investing time in the structure and organization of meetings vs. time invested in effectively implementing meetings (design of sessions, preparing materials, etc.)

ANNEXES



Annex 33 – Reflecting on the path for building up relationships

The scheme represents a possible path for building relationships among teachers mentors.



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