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Leading a professional learning community for teacher educators: inquiry into college principals motives and challenges

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative study is to trace the process whereby Israeli Academic College of Education principals lead Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for teacher educators. The focus is on the unique situation in which various different roles (administrator/facilitator/learner) are integrated during this process. Seven semi-structured interviews underwent a thematic analysis that indicated two parallel journeys of PLC leadership: a journey of co-leading a PLC and cultivating creativity, and a journey of crystallizing intellectual identity and image through leading PLCs. The discussion provides an interpretation of these two journeys in accordance with both social-cognitive and social-classification theories. It examines the findings in terms of three types of tensions and fears typical of PLC leaders, as reflected in the literature.

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Introduction

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The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is becoming a significant component of teacher education culture around the world. Participating in PLCs has implications for the professional experience of teacher educators (Hadar and Brody 2018; Ping, Schellings, and Beijaard 2018; Reichenberg, Kleeman, and Sagee 2013; White 2013). Although the literature indicates the practical and functional aspects of such participation, there is a dearth of sources examining how teacher educators are empowered by leading the PLCs.

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In the context of Academic Colleges of Education (ACEs), it was noted that PLCs are usually mobilized by senior officials whose careers typically involve integrating several spheres of activity (such as research and publishing, teaching and supervision, participation on committees, leading initiatives and fulfilling administrative tasks) (Gutman and Oplatka 2020). Their role, therefore, undoubtedly enables them to examine the necessity and contribution of PLCs from a broader perspective (Hadar and Brody 2018). Combining the role of professional learning process initiator with that of manager at the ACE promises to create complexity and shape new work patterns. In light of the paucity of research that focuses on such a duality of roles, with the added value and challenges that arise, this study attempts to investigate the motivations and challenges of ACE principals as leaders of PLCs.

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Leading PLCs for teacher educators

The professional development of teacher educators has been discussed extensively in the academic literature. Many studies have presented innovative approaches, useful methods and strategies to promote professional development in different contexts (e.g., Reichenberg, Kleeman, and Sagee 2013) and have argued that this important issue appears to be neglected in various institutions and cultures (Levine 2010). According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2020), the importance of institutional support for the development of teacher educators inheres in the fact that many come to the profession without prior preparation – i.e., as a second career. This professional transition usually takes place at an older age after a period of working as teachers in schools where the demand is for a different set of skills (Murray 2016). On the one hand, the professional reality of ACEs demands new capabilities, but, on the other, it does not implement institutionalized and regulated learning. In response to this lacuna, studies (e.g., Kosnik et al. 2011) have proposed applied models for the professional development of teacher educators which include self-learning through individual initiatives.

Thus, appropriate frameworks were established in order to provide a space for the professional learning of teacher educators, in two ways: as an inter-institutional organization and as an intra-institutional (in-house) initiative. Hadar and Brody (2018) clarify the difference between the two. According to them, the first framework is based on the optimization of professional learning through the recruitment of expert facilitators from different institutions, while the second emphasizes the socio-cultural aspect as a factor that promotes learning. Therefore, the latest model, known as an in-house Professional Learning Community, is described as a job-embedded learning space used by educators for collaborative reflection, self-exploration and action research to improve teaching and research abilities (Dufour and Dufour 2006). An earlier study (Dufour 2004) indicates that this learning occurs in regular groups of staff that meet and work collaboratively, frequently and over a long-term period within an institution, in an effort to promote shared goals that have value and impact on student learning. It is expressed by providing the team of learners with a sense of belonging, minimizing their loneliness, increasing their commitment to continuous improvement in teaching and research qualifications, and emphasizing developing professional resilience (Tam 2015). The common denominators between these frameworks are learning through cooperation, collective responsibility for successful professional development, and reflection on its practical adjustment and application (Levine 2010; Schuck et al. 2013).

While the professional literature is inundated with research focused on the perspective of PLC participants (Ping, Schellings, and Beijgaard 2018), only a few studies refer to the PLC leaders' role, their place and experiences. These studies (e.g., Carpenter 2015; Jenkins 2016; Wilson 2016) have touched upon the experiences of PLC leaders, with emphasis on the entrepreneurial, leadership or administrative skills they require. However, the issues involved for ACE principals leading PLCs have not yet been discussed at length. Thus, despite the fact that the reality requires its principals to 'make themselves visible' in terms of leading initiatives and understanding the needs of the profession, demonstrating a professional presence and asserting themselves both academically and pedagogically, this issue is sensitive and challenging for many of them (Gutman 2018). In light of this, the current study represents an effort to review the perspective of ACE principals as PLC

leaders, with the understanding that creating a successful connection between these two roles constitutes a critical and challenging component of professional development in ACEs.

Professional learning of teacher educators in the Israeli context

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In Israel, as elsewhere, there is a tendency to create formal frameworks for professional development of teacher educators. For example, in 1998, the MOFET Institute was established as a Ministry of Education-funded non-profit organization, with the aim of bridging the gap and serving as a 'professional learning hothouse' for teacher educators from all 23 ACEs in Israel. Since then, MOFET has been operating several such frameworks with emphasis on the professional needs of teacher educators, such as the development of advanced skills for teacher students, promoting academic capabilities, and educational research. Traditionally, permanent 'groups of interest' meet periodically under the guidance of a facilitator and learn by sharing experiences and insights derived from professional experience. This format has a formal character: participation in these learning events involves tuition, and its graduates receive a certificate of completion (Cochran-Smith et al. 2020; Margolin 2011; Reichenberg, Kleeman, and Sagee 2013).

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Besides the activities of the MOFET Institute, there is also a discernible trend of establishing in-house PLCs (Ping, Schellings, and Beijaard 2018) which lay emphasis on specific disciplines (Shulman and Sherin 2004; Tam 2015) or enhance interdisciplinary skills (Hadar and Brody 2018). While a disciplinary PLCs are usually established on the initiative of academic department heads who wish to reinforce certain issues in teaching a particular field of study, inter-disciplinary in-house PLCs are often created by administrators who seek to leverage the soft academic skills of faculty members in teaching and research. The change in direction these skills frequently **takes** poses a cultural challenge that characterizes the Israeli teacher education system (Cochran-Smith et al. 2020; Gutman 2021).

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Statement of research problem: challenges in leading PLCs

The researchers who examined the different mediums of professional development for teacher educators (such as Ping, Schellings, and Beijaard 2018) pointed to existing challenges and potential tensions, some of which are due to the participants' varying levels of motivation to devote themselves to ongoing learning. According to studies, while participation in the inter-institutional PLCs is perceived as an attractive and exclusive experience in many ways (Reichenberg, Kleeman, and Sagee 2013), the intra-disciplinary in-house PLCs are perceived as a professional duty, and maintaining the motivation in a stable, long-term learning routine in this medium appears to be challenging for participants and leaders (Shulman and Sherin 2004).

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Fleming, G. L (2004) also argues that staff's motivation for organizational learning, and the desire to support the initiatives of the management team and demonstrate proper organizational citizenship, tend to change over time. Thus, leading a stable and evolving in-house PLC equipped with inner motivation and perseverance requires techniques of sophistication and awareness of the unique characteristics of the intended audience.

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Brody and Hadar (2015) claim that junior and novice teacher educators, who are the major target audience for these PLCs, usually work part-time in several institutions, hence participation may conflict with their other obligations elsewhere. Moreover, their commitment to the institution in general, and to the professional development processes initiated by that institution in particular, is lower than that of their senior colleagues who hold full-time positions (Vanderlinde et al. 2016). 125

Although this situation varies according to social and cultural contexts, Hargreaves (2000) identifies the characteristics of teacher educators at various career stages and their predictable motivation for professional learning in community. Thus, for example, the novice teacher educators tend to face dilemmas regarding their dedication to a PLC. On the one hand, they see this as an opportunity to acquire meaningful knowledge that will serve them throughout their careers and strengthen working relations with their colleagues in the new workplace (Kosnik et al. 2011). On the other hand, their status in the institution, and sometimes even in the profession, is unstable, and therefore they tend to be skeptical about the future applicability of the topics studied in the PLC (Vanderlinde et al. 2016; White 2013). In contrast, mid-career teacher educators, who often consider the need for professional renewal and identify community learning as an opportunity to realize their passion, may also feel overloaded and unable to meet the demands of such a long-term obligation (Hadar and Brody 2017; Ping, Schellings, and Beijgaard 2018). Furthermore, late-career teacher educators, who naturally yearn to share their experience with the PLC and leave their legacy (Gutman and Oplatka 2020), also find themselves faced with the challenge of committing themselves to learning, developing and adopting new teaching methods that differ from those they have practiced for many years (Hargreaves 2000; Tam 2015). These complex characteristics are challenging for those who are eager to promote change in the institution through the PLC, and within a short time may lead to the decline of the initiative or changes in the organizational learning format (Carpenter 2015). 130 135 140 145

Describing these processes raises questions about unique characteristics that motivate and challenge PLC leaders who hold managerial roles at ACEs (such as dean of faculty, head of research authority or head of academic program). The significance of the study stems from two aspects: firstly, from the changing nature of learning needs and trends in the professional development of teacher educators; and secondly, from the hybrid identity and multiple roles of ACE principals who are expected to support and lead these trends in the quest to establish PLCs. 150 155

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Data were collected through interviews with seven senior teacher educators who serve in academic-administrative positions in three ACEs in the center of Israel, as presented in Table 1. The sampling process was based on three criteria: (a) experience in teacher education (over 15 years); (b) seniority and dedication in an academic-administrative position in the college (such as head of an academic program or dean of a faculty); and (c) background in initiating, developing and facilitating in-house PLCs. This 'criterion sampling', which is defined as selecting specific cases that meet a specific criterion (Patton 2014), is derived in the present study from the need to explore a combination of different roles (management 160 165

Table 1. The sample data.

#	Pen Name	Age	Gender	College Location	Teaching-Research Area	Position	Period of			
							Professorship (years)	Holding the position (years)	Leading PLCs (years)	Experience in teacher education (years)
1	Prof. A	65	M	Center	Philosophy	Head of Chair	10	6	6	30
2	Prof. D	50	F	Center	Sociology	Dean of Faculty	3	4	4	18
3	Prof. G	67	M	Center	Psychology	Head of Research Authority	6	4	6	24
4	Prof. M	66	M	Center	Music education	Dean of Faculty	18	4	12	32
5	Prof. B	66	F	Center	Educational Science	Dean of Faculty	7	4	10	32
6	Prof. N	67	F	Center	Educational Management	Head of MA program	4	4	12	16
7	Prof. H	49	F	Center	Educational Science	Head of MA program	1	3	11	15

in the institution; initiating the idea of establishing a PLC; guiding, leading and evaluating the outcomes from a top-down viewpoint) with emphasis on organizational change. During the one-hour, semi-structured interviews, the interviewees were asked about their experiences in leading PLCs, with emphasis on both the administrative and professional aspects involved. 170

The semi-structured interview is intended to enable interviewees to influence the content of the discussion, and to share issues of importance from their own point of view (Flick 2018). Therefore, in addition to the questions raised by the interviewer, the interviewees chose to relate to the motives of establishing a PLC and challenges that they had encountered at different stages, the added value that the process held for them and their understanding of how to lead a PLC. 175

In order to determine the main categories that emerged from the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted (Smith 2015). In the first stage of analyzing the findings, the most frequent trends that the interviewees' testimonies revealed were identified. Those which were repeated by at least four interviewees (defined as the majority of the sample) were labeled appropriately. The six most dominant trends in the interviews were accompanied by examples from the testimonies that lent them greater depth. In the second stage, these six trends were divided into two main areas. The first area covered by the findings reflects a journey of organizational learning, continuous change and adherence to fostering creativity in the PLC; this is called a 'Journey of Co-leading PLCs and Cultivating Creativity'. The second area refers to the experiences and emotions that shape the identity and image of the interviewees as PLC leaders; this is called a 'Journey of Crystallizing Intellectual Identity and Image through Leading PLCs'. This division was validated in consultation with two experts in the field: a number of selected quotations were analyzed by them to ensure that the findings were appropriately categorized. 180 185 190

Findings and discussion

The interviewees shared their experiences of leading PLCs, emphasizing their respective motivations and challenges. Their testimonies pointed to two main areas in this regard. The first area referred to the motives for establishing a PLC, which addressed the need to bridge gaps in collective knowledge, establish a social 'hothouse' for early-career teacher educators, cultivate creativity and cooperative creating of new specialization for the ACE. The second area, which is related to emotions and experiences of PLC leaders, refers to the need for a 'positive self' (i.e., self-positioning, self-determination, self-challenging and self-realization) in an intellectual sense. These areas can be described as 'journeys', namely a series of changes and milestones in progressing toward a new perspective and new status, as a result of the individual transition between different events, situations and circumstances (Kibel 2003). In the context of the present study, findings can be seen in the form of two parallel journeys: the first relates to co-leading and cultivating creativity among staff (CCC journey), and the second allows a look at the internal world of the interviewees and refers to the crystallization of intellectual identity and image (III journey). 195 200 205

Journey of co-leading a PLC and cultivating creativity

Q4 The process of encouraging creative ideas is described in many studies as a key axis in PLC-based professional development. For example, Allen (2015) emphasized the importance of collective creativity in art teacher education. The same issue arises in Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986, 94), which enhances cooperative and operative efficacy for 'continuously improvising multiple skills to manage ever changing ambiguous circumstances'. Furthermore, his studies highlight the interpersonal aspects of organizational learning, since human behavior is constantly influenced by the mutual effects of cognitive and environmental factors (Jenkins 2016). According to Ping, Schellings, and Beijaard (2018), the need for cognitive and social learning often leads to community-setting initiatives, as it is easily identified as a gap in collective knowledge in the field. These claims are in line with the evidence presented in this study: for the establishment of a PLC, the need for social and cognitive learning was also identified as a gap in the field.

In this study, the interviewees described a CCC journey that began as a response to *identifying the dearth of knowledge* in the field, in cooperation with officials in the ACE and stemming from the authentic needs of the staff, rather than from the organizational and managerial agenda. It led to the stable positioning of the PLC and the spirit of cultivating creativity and encouraging the creation of new and useful expertise for the institution, as an end-product of the PLCs. This initiative was presented openly to the fellows and was supported by them, as can be witnessed in the words of some interviewees in the following examples:

Prof. G. (67, male head of research authority): I conducted a workshop on academic writing. This initiative did not stem from an organizational need, but from knowledge and familiarity with the needs of the field. The people joined without hesitation because everywhere else these things are paid for and come from outside the institution. The workshop became something of a collaborative and social event.

Moreover, Prof. D. (50, female dean of faculty) also referred to the dearth of knowledge as a motive for the initiative.

Identifying the dearth of knowledge in the field is made possible by the fact that I have an overview and a broad perspective on the needs of various teams in the college, and close contact with other employees. This greatly facilitates the joint organization.

In a similar vein to the above two testimonies, Prof. B. (66, female dean of faculty) mentioned the difficulty of institutionalizing theoretical knowledge among pedagogical supervisors, which led her to establish a PLC.

I saw the lack of a combination of theory and research into pedagogical supervision, for up until then the 'oral law' had prevailed and the college supervisors relied solely on experience. I gave a lecture to my staff that was the basis for establishing a learning community. It spread by word of mouth until the group was formed.

Another issue that emerged as a factor enabling the establishment and maintenance of a PLC was the endeavor to create a *professional-social hothouse for cultivating creativity*. Special emphasis was also placed on the importance of providing space for the activity and creativity of early-career teacher educators and allowing them to become recognized in the ACE. The interviewees defined their role as encouraging the creation of new ideas

for the PLC during the learning process. Similar to evidence in previous studies (Brody and Hadar 2015; Gutman 2020; Gutman and Oplatka 2020), interviewees in this study placed special emphasis on providing space for the activity and creativity of early-career teacher educators. According to them, active participation in the PLC enables new teacher educators to become acquainted with the organizational culture and to acquire familiarity in the ACE as a result of their expertise. Some examples illustrating this follow. 255

Prof. N. (67, female head of academic program): I see my role as being able to develop people with ideas; give them a platform, tools and space for growth and exposure. Because I am associated with many people, even those who do not participate in the learning communities, a lot of people come to me with ideas and say: Listen, why don't we do it. Once everyone feels that they are growing and leading, and their ideas are being realized, the community breathes . . . I have the privilege, in light of my advanced age, to be the supervisor that advances those younger than me. And that's what I do in mentoring groups. 260

Chen and Wang (2015) support this finding by claiming that teamwork combining collaborative learning among novice educators builds the experience of professional growth, a sense of autonomy and empowerment. Gutman (2019) adds that these work processes between early career and veteran teacher educators lead to more sophisticated deliverables, inspiration for building resilience and the art of collaborative leadership. In keeping with these statements, the following interviewees referred to the magic of the PLC and its power in creating a culture of camaraderie and attractive collaborations between colleagues at different career stages. This is how it sounds: 265 270

Prof. D.: A great change was created thanks to the community – in the emancipation of the younger lecturers alongside the veterans. The intention is [to ensure] less authority from above, a more attentive ear, and more independence. And indeed, the lecturers come out of their holes. It's really fun to see people come here and smile. 275

Prof. M. (66, male dean of faculty): The uniqueness [of the PLC] lay in the fact that the lecturers were the ones to raise ideas and imbue these encounters with content. Since then, our staff has become a kind of family. I am proud to say that this is what I managed to lead, it has worked exceptionally well already for several years and the novice teachers are beginning to feel comfortable and meaningful in the college. 280

The professional impact of learning in the community was also expressed by the other interviewees. According to them, one of the goals that were set during the PLC meetings was *cooperative creating of new specialization*, which may be useful and necessary in ACEs. The development of new expertise within the PLC, such as new teaching methods (Chen and Wang 2015) and research methodologies (Schuck et al. 2013), is well documented in previous studies which highlight the value of collaborations as leveraging and positioning innovation. In this regard, the present study equates being a PLC leader to the creation of a new role. Here are some illustrative examples. 285

Prof. N.: At the time, together with the group we developed a cross-disciplinary model to implement 'project-based learning' [PBL] that could cover various subjects, including the more verbal subjects with an emphasis on reading and memorizing, as well as the humanities and the exact sciences. Knowledge of PBL gives our lecturers a new specialization and new thinking about their pedagogy. 290

Prof. D. provided a tangible example of the process of formulating practical and essential expertise within the PLC. 295

During the meetings we talked a lot about student evaluation, because it is a complex subject and depends on content and style. Then, we took a step forward and started talking about methods to evaluate their peer-assessment. What is a good evaluation? How can we apply a culture of peer assessment? And how can we provide feedback to the teacher student on the peer assessment they conducted? Assessing assessment is an important area of expertise for teacher educators.

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This section revealed three consistent motives for establishing PLC: the absorption of the local learning needs; willingness to cultivating creativity and provide a supportive ground for early-career teacher educators; and cooperative creating of new expertise. According to the interviewees, these factors may be a motivating force that encourages teacher educators to join and persevere, hence ensuring a stable, creative and productive PLC. The significant challenge, however, is to ensure the existence of the CCC journey as part of the PLC process. This journey is accompanied by the voices of the interviewees explicitly pointing to three motivations for establishing and leading PLCs: cultivating creativity, cooperative creation of a new specialization and fostering a culture of camaraderie between colleagues at different career stages. These findings connect to Social Cognitive Learning (Bandura 1986), which sees the process of observation, modeling, imitation and collective efficacy as the focus of a PLC (Jenkins 2016). In his later study, Bandura (2001) claims that such 'modeling also plays a prominent role in creativity', and therefore he proposes encouraging professional learning in communities whose goals include striving for innovation.

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Journey of crystallizing intellectual identity and image through leading PLCs

The interviewees described a personal journey in which they were given the opportunity to lead a PLC, which also led to the crystallization of their intellectual identity and image (Ill journey). This description corresponds to the processes that are explained within the framework of Social Classification Theory (Turner 1999), whereby success or failure in processes and initiatives of importance to the individual has an impact on his or her personal identity and social image. Trepte and Loy (2017) also point to the relationship between the two, arguing that appreciating individuals in a specific aspect influences their identity and self-classification into a dedicated group of experts. The present study indicates that establishing PLCs, and their successful existence, has an effect on the self-positioning of facilitators and leaders as figures possessing the necessary intellectual property and professional knowledge. The self-determination process, according to which the individual interprets events in relation to their psychological needs, influences the motivation required for action (Ryan and Deci 2017). The interviewees in this study appear to have tended to show a similar pattern. For instance, their testimonies highlight their yearning to establish themselves as experienced experts able to adapt outdated knowledge to the spirit of the new era, to be prominent and original voices in the ACE, and consistently to delve into up-to-date materials in order to make them accessible to the PLC participants. For example, the contribution of the ability of *adaptation of the old knowledge to the new era* to the Ill journey, as a technique for crystallizing intellectual identity, was thus:

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Prof. G.: The leadership of PLCs gives me a broad view of various things I have done over the years, some of which I have not used for some time. This knowledge becomes forgotten or hidden over time. It allows me to create new connections between what I do today and what I did in the past, to create something new and better that can contribute to people.

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The example of a challenge in this regard can be seen in the testimony of Prof. A. (65, head of chair), who mentioned his concerns as a longtime faculty member sensing a loss of authority and the need to remain a prominent figure in the institution. He spoke of the empowerment of the PLC as a medium for overcoming these concerns.

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I think there is awareness of one's position among college staff in the years before retirement. There is a feeling that on the one hand there are young people, whom you may know less well, new college teachers, and on the other hand there is still a desire *to be dominant*, the one who will still be listened to and who will still be a prominent voice in the college. Creating groups that are constantly meeting and developing topical *issues* offers the opportunity to listen and take part. It certainly helps to remain dominant, to leave an impression on people.

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Other evidence suggests a pattern of self-categorization, that is, being able to determine those groups they feel they belong to (in-groups) and those they do not consider themselves members of (out-groups), while comparing their worth and value (Trepte and Loy 2017). A more specific example shows the interviewee's tendency to move away from self-categorization into two prominent 'out-groups' (management role-holder and PLC leader), but to associate with an in-group which combines these two roles and emphasizes their unique qualities. For example, Prof. B. emphasized the contribution of a multi-role combination as a way of addressing the challenges of the Ill journey through which they can stand out and be dominant in the college.

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Prof. B.: I felt that I was the expert here, although there are great experts who guide other groups, but as a management role-holder who also leads a PLC, I can certainly stand out. Although I am the faculty dean, and although this role is important and high-level, I am number 3 or 4 in the college, but I am considered an administrator rather than an expert. For me, the leadership of a learning community can make up for this. The structure of a learning community and the nature of the learning I intended to create in the group can certainly be emphasized.

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Other testimonies added a new dimension to the PLC's contribution. Similar to the previous findings (Gutman and Oplatka 2020), a self-challenging pattern emerged here that helps in *coping with the outmodedness* of the interviewees' professional knowledge. They saw it as an incentive to reinvigorate their professional erudition, since reality requires them to position themselves as a constantly up-to-date and updated source of knowledge, thus preserving their intellectual image. The process of continually updating their own professional knowledge, which would not have occurred had they not taken on the role of PLC leader, was now underway and was accompanied by a sense of satisfaction. These were the testimonies:

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Prof. B.: I have now been in the role of PLC leader for several years. Although the participants change each year, there are several regulars who remain. And this makes me invest more in preparing for each encounter with the PLC, each time bringing new materials, reading, updating and renewing so that participants will not be exposed to subjects that have already been studied.

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The other interviewees spoke of the PLC as a significant scaffold for their constant self-learning process. This is how they sounded:

Prof. A.: I'm learning all the time to stay in the loop. It is important that they [the participants] regard me as someone who is an expert on recent innovations in the field. Although this takes a lot of time and a greater investment than it usually would, I am happy with that because it puts me in a different state of mind. In my normal routine, there is no way I would have achieved this. Leading the PLC keeps me in good shape, and the knowledge I convey to people never becomes outdated.

Prof. G.: Being the leader of a PLC – it means hearing others and listening. That's why I'm constantly updated and exposed to new issues.

This section reveals patterns that are associated with characteristics of social psychology, including self-determination, self-positioning and self-categorization. A notable finding indicates that there is balance and unity between those challenges identified by interviewees in establishing and leading PLCs and the motives for these processes. This consolidation indicates a pattern of self-challenging among the interviewees. The testimonies in this section outlined a series of steps to strengthen the professional identity of the PLC leaders. This journey is expressed in the willingness of the leaders to devote themselves to collaborative learning within the group, to ensure professional preparation for each encounter, to be differentiated as an intellectual and dominant figure, and to create original implementation of their old knowledge. Furthermore, the opportunity for multi-role integration was seen as a lever for their status in an institution acquired by the PLC leadership.

Summary and conclusions

This study points to the two main journeys experienced by interviewees in this study, one of which serves as a motivation factor for the establishment of the PLC, and the other which involves a number of challenges. Motivation for the initiation of a PLC can be seen as emphasizing its contribution as a medium for social-cognitive learning and encouraging creativity by collaboration between colleagues with different levels of seniority and experience (CCC journey). However, the III journey allows us to look at aspects related to intellectual identity from the perspective of social psychology, thus revealing the challenges inherent in the important issues behind the establishment of a PLC. The successful experience of these two journeys coincides with the patterns of coping with the tensions and fears that characterize the work of PLC leaders (Figure 1).

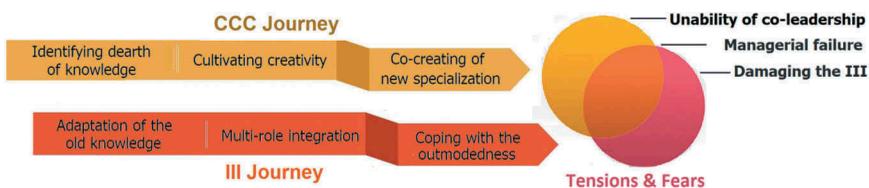


Figure 1. CCC & III Journeys of PLC leadership versus tensions and fears.

Recent studies (e.g., Vanderlinde et al. 2016) present the challenges that typically follow 415
the integration of multiple roles among teacher educators, and at times even leave the
individual in a state of tension and fear. These studies posit three likely areas of such tension.
The first area of concern is the *fear of managerial failure*, that is, exposing one's vulnerabil-
ities in this role. More concretely, when the individual initiates the establishment of a PLC 420
and makes efforts to develop their vision, they may find themselves confronting
a professional image that differs from the one to which they are accustomed in their daily
routine (Hord and Sommers 2008). This may be due, inter alia, to a lower motivation among
colleagues to enlist and commit to the ongoing learning process, which will undoubtedly
damage the leader's image and be interpreted as a failure, revealing their unofficial status as
weak (Fleming, G. L 2004). However, the interviewees in the current study did not express 425
concerns about this potential failure. Moreover, they discussed ways of minimizing such risk,
including careful listening to the professional needs of the team, involving other role-
holders as partners, providing a space for creative ideas and a hothouse for developing
early-career colleagues, and finally, encouraging the cooperative creation of useful specia-
lizations and expertise and defining this as a final common goal for the PLC. 430

The second area of concern is the fear of *damaging the intellectual image and identity*.
The rotation of the roles (administrator–facilitator–learner) that occurs naturally whilst
leading a PLC may cast doubt on one's authority as a source of an up-to-date knowledge
when compared with the participants. Although they are required to serve as personal 435
examples of lifelong learners (Carpenter 2015; Hadar and Brody 2017), such leadership may
expose them to difficulties with the ability to learn continuously (Hargreaves 2000; Oplatka
and Nupar 2016). In contrast, interviewees in this study saw the opportunity to give their
colleagues room to express ideas as a 'privilege' acquired with age and seniority and were
not at all concerned about their status, thus indicating their acceptance of the cooperative
nature of the PLC in which responsibility is shared equally among its participants. 440

The third area of concern is linked to the *challenge of demonstrating co-leadership*
(Fleming, G. L 2004), in keeping with the cooperative nature of the PLC (Ping, Schellings,
and Beijaard 2018). Given the fact that some ACE principals do not define themselves as
having the skills of co-leadership (Gutman 2019), they may feel uncomfortable being on 445
the same level of learning as their subordinates (Carpenter 2015; Fleming, G. L 2004). This
issue is expressed in the findings of this study as a point of strength and an empowering
experience. The interviewees testified that creating a PLC in cooperation with people they
knew well and with new participants creates an incentive for them to learn actively, to
mitigate the problem of outmoded knowledge and to provide satisfaction.

The main limitation of the present study stems from the fact that its conclusions are 450
derived from a small group of subjects with unique characteristics. Interviewees who
participated in this study hold senior positions in ACE as well as combining management
roles alongside the PLC leadership. It can be assumed that the findings and the models
produced in this study will not match the motives and challenges of PLC leaders in other
institutions and cultures who are not engaged in management or hold senior positions. 455
Although this study took a retrospective view of PLC leaders, ignoring other perspectives, it
presents a new effort to examine the issue and to gain insights that have not yet been
discussed in the literature, and therefore may serve as a basis for further research on the role
and experiences of PLC leaders in teacher education in different contexts and perspectives.

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