



**Knowledge hub**  
-  
**Collection of best practices**

**Summary of the best practice**

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) \*

TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS: A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR EDUCATORS

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented \*

Panama

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to \*

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

#### 4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) \*

Fundación ProEd (The ProEd Foundation)

#### 5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. \*

Equitable education; Professional learning communities; Teacher development; Empowerment; Collegiality

#### 6. What makes it a best practice? \*

We believe that ProEd's Teachers Teaching Teachers Professional Learning Community (PLC) implements principles from several best practice descriptions. We aim to ethically serve all educators regardless of race, gender, religious orientation, or socio-economic circumstances. Our work is relevant because it addresses the growing gap of educational inequity for marginalized school communities, especially in post-COVID analysis. ProEd programs are recognized by Panama's National Ministry of Education offering career points to educators who successfully complete program requirements and we partner with other NGOs, local universities and both public and private schools. We produce measurable results with a reasonable level of resources and time making our work both efficient and effective. Data drives ProEd PLC creating conditions for sustainability, scalability and replicability across local and global populations. While our direct target groups are the educators in Panama's public school system, the indirect beneficiaries of our work are the students who are impacted by their teachers who participate in ProEd PLC., which may include the criterion of youth and community involvement. It can be asserted that Quality Education (SDG #4) can influence all other sustainable development goals. ProEd is committed to providing best practices that support this claim.

## Description of the best practice

### 7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? \*

#### THE NEED FOR IMPROVED EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

“Panama ranked a dismal 129 out of 139 on quality of primary education despite ranking 26th overall on primary education enrollment...” (Panama Guide, 2011).

“...in the World Competitiveness Ranking, Panama gained a position around 70 but in the educational level it has the position of 120. This means that the education issue punishes the country” (Nationmaster.com, 2003-2011).

Headlines like these fill local newspapers, reports, and blog sites, with the statistics behind them appearing in international reviews and assessments as well. While Panama is achieving rapid commercial growth and transforming into a bustling economic bridge of the Americas, education lags in student gains and instructional technology. Despite Panama’s economic success, results on international standardized tests rank the country poorly, on par with or below lesser-developed countries like Tunisia, Indonesia, and Kyrgyzstan.

Government and community leaders have worked to increase student performance and improve public school learning conditions, but even with the considerable financial and intellectual resources available, Panama’s education system is far from making the grade. The problem is less about quantity—primary completion rates are consistently above 100%—and more about quality. In past years, government spending on education has hovered around 4% of GDP and in recent years has declined to 2.5%, well below the OECD average of 5%. Much of the quality problem is related to teacher qualification and investment. Though most of Panama’s primary teachers (90%) have some formal training, many do not have tertiary degrees; and even the national university programs in education have been widely classified as dramatically deficient for preparing teachers. Compounding this, opportunities within the system for upgrading skills are equally lacking and not consistent with international standards.

The ProEd Foundation is one organization working to bridge this gap. Founded in 2001 for the betterment of Panamanian education, ProEd began to concentrate in 2007 almost exclusively on the training of educators. ProEd’s Teachers Teaching Teachers Professional Learning Community (PLC) and Leadership Academy for School Directors were created to provide high-quality, continuous professional development for teachers and school administrators of all ethnic, socioeconomic and gender orientations in Panama’s public and low-income private schools. ProEd has developed curricular materials and delivered courses to nearly 2,000 educators for the purpose of school improvement measured by an increase in student learning.

## 8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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#### CREATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN PANAMA

ProEd methodology promotes the concept of the Professional Learning Community (PLC), about which much has been written in recent educational leadership literature. A PLC is a place where professionals come together to share concerns, solve problems and celebrate successes. Within a PLC, inquiry and reflection are guided by collaboration and trust-building for the purpose of ensuring stakeholder empowerment and growth, prompting questions such as “Where are we now?” and “Where are we going?” The lack of PLCs in Panama’s public education system contributes to school cultures that are more coercive than collegial, that defeat collaboration and empowerment, and that are often unproductive.

ProEd believes schools should be learning communities, guided by the purpose of producing diverse intellectual power and continuously supporting development. ProEd’s mission is to transform Panamanian schools into learning communities for the purpose of increased student performance. The ProEd Teachers Teaching Teachers PLC and the Leadership Academy for School Directors are designed to support educators as they upgrade and refine pedagogy, methods and leadership repertoires. The ProEd PLC incorporates the implementation design, which provides educators with a learning platform that combines theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching.

The ProEd PLC provides monthly professional development opportunities to teachers and school directors who influence an estimated 7,000 students annually. The ongoing PLC run throughout the school year, offering a variety of workshops and coaching sessions designed, facilitated and evaluated by ProEd instructional coaches. The scholarships provided to these educators comes from funding of local and international donors, grants and fundraising events.

The indirect beneficiaries of ProEd’s PLC are the students. Students of ProEd PLC participants learn better because their teachers and school leaders continue to learn through peer collaboration based on implementation of five elements of collegiality:

1. Sharing a language that is pedagogically precise and concrete;
2. Observing one another teaching;
3. Planning, teaching and evaluating lessons together;
4. Teaching teachers about the art of teaching; and
5. Asking for and providing one another with help.

Collegiality requires all teachers to work together and increases the likelihood that all students are targeted for success, despite their ethnic origins, learning styles or potential disabilities. ProEd focuses on human capacity development through provision of new teaching technologies and techniques and the creation of collegial learning environments. It provides continuous

professional development for teachers and administrators, sets high expectations for its core teaching team and program participants, and emphasizes inquiry, knowledge sharing and collaboration. To these ends, ProEd relies on the qualitative and quantitative analysis presented in the following section to chart progress and determine program strengths and needs.

## 9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? \*

### PROED PLC LASTING IMPACT

ProEd has collected and analyzed significant data on teacher empowerment, teacher effectiveness, school culture and student performance. ProEd benefits from annual action research using data from interviews, surveys, classroom observations and other diagnostics to determine program strengths and limitations. Analysis of monthly feedback from participants helps ProEd modify and advance its programs, enhancing quality yearly.

Findings from a 2011 ethno-methodological case study drawing on qualitative data from teacher interviews and classroom observations indicated that ProEd PLC participants felt they could influence change in their schools to a considerable degree by implementing new instructional methods and by sharing new knowledge with colleagues. In a related 2012 study, data from a school culture survey identified observable changes in classroom practice of PLC participants, which in turn catalyzed change within schools that positively impacted school culture.

During the 2013 school year, ProEd measured effects of PLC participation on students' reading performance. This investigation was replicated from a World Bank study in Peru that tested second grade students' ability to read and comprehend 60 words in 60 seconds. The target population in Panama was similar to that designated for Peru and included 150 second graders from five rural schools. A pretest was administered at the beginning of the school year and post data collection took place at the end of the year. Teachers of these students attended monthly ProEd workshops designed to improve literacy instruction, resulting in increased reading fluency and comprehension.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a 2-year school closure of Panama's public schools. This encouraged ProEd to partner with the Center for Educational Research and the Quality Leadership University in the design of a 12-week intervention to inform evolving practice and policy responses utilizing mobile phone technology, dissemination of reading material through WhatsApp, a cross-platform messaging freeware service, to maintain and improve children's reading levels during the school shutdown. Given the cost effectiveness and potential replicability of this low-tech intervention, it has immediate and longer-term implications for the use of mobile technology as a supplemental or complementary learning tool, especially for developing regions and during periods of school closure.

## 10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? \*

## SUSTAINABILITY, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE FUTURE

ProEd was founded in 2001; it shifted focus toward teacher training in 2007 and began PLC educator training in 2009. To date, over 2,000 educators have received ProEd PLC training and the foundation plans to run similar PLC trainings adding more educators over the next several years implementing hybrid learning platforms to provide development opportunities to a wider population of educators throughout the region. ProEd is now Panama's only NGO fully dedicated to the professional development of K-12 teachers and school directors.

Throughout its experience, ProEd has learned some valuable lessons. First and foremost is that, as much research worldwide indicates, teachers—more than most other education inputs—can dramatically affect student learning outcomes. Secondly, and equally important, school improvement is almost impossible without school director support. Focusing only on teachers without integrating school administration is insufficient to ensure sustainable transformation. To address this, ProEd obtained three-year (2013-2015) funding to implement the Leadership Academy for School Directors. This collegial outreach to school leaders has produced observable changes in classroom practice that has influenced school-wide change in collegial behavior.

A third lesson learned is that change cannot be mandated or made obligatory. With any organizational change, particularly in education, it is imperative to invite stakeholders (teachers and school directors in this case) to the learning table for participative discussion and development. ProEd takes great care to create welcoming, safe, stimulating and supportive learning environments. Teachers are provided with nutritious meals throughout the sessions and travel stipends for those traveling long distances. These gestures professionalize and personalize the PLC, motivating teachers to remain active in the monthly development program. ProEd also constantly solicits and incorporates feedback from its participants, in order to better serve its target population and maintain a balanced, two-way dynamic for programming.

## 11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? \*

The ProEd response

Addressing quality-related educational weaknesses and closing the gap on education inequity have been priorities of the ProEd Foundation, especially since 2009 when it began to concentrate fully on teacher training. ProEd has learned some valuable lessons in its nearly two decades of existence. Most important of these, as much research worldwide indicates, is that teachers—more than most other education inputs—can dramatically affect student-learning outcomes. Thus, ProEd’s current signature teacher training programs are geared toward improving teaching quality and diminishing educational inequity: the Teachers Teaching Teachers intensive courses of broad-based training; the Strengthening Reading and Writing Fundamentals interactive workshops for improving literacy; and the more recent, longer-term, New Teacher Induction Program for certifying a generation of educators skilled in leadership and active learning. All programs are based on world-class standards and methods that utilize the work of noted scholars and practitioners.

ProEd has trained educators in both public and private sectors, in urban and rural schools; they have incorporated methods for building PLCs among program participants and within the schools of the individual participants; and they have resulted in improved performance for both teachers and students. ProEd focuses on human resource capacity development through provision of new teaching technologies and methods. ProEd is now Panama’s only non-governmental organization (NGO) fully dedicated to the professional development of PK-12 teachers. ProEd will continue to create a network of enlightened educators for the purpose of propelling school improvement, consequently, contributing to better, more effective educational systems.

## 12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. \*

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). Student achievement through staff development. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Psychoyos, D. (2018). The implementation of international standard driven teacher training in Panama. Presented at the LAURDS International Conference: Perspectives on Culture, Research Strategies and Doctoral Studies in Latin America. Panama City, Panama, July 26-27, 2018.

Fundación ProEd (2018). Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.fundacionproed.org/>.