

# Principals in a Professional Learning Community: Mobilizing Knowledge, Improving Decisions

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# Introduction

We propose using the Objective Knowledge Growth Framework (OKGF) in the development and maintenance of a website called the Canadian Principal Learning Network (CPLN) to assist principals in advancing their knowledge and skills in the area of decision-making -knowledge that is more responsive to a wider range of social, political and economic priorities outside of the university than currently exists.



*CPLN was made to provide participants with:*

1. A network of peer support to help them make decisions and resolve common problems;
2. An innovative model of reflective professional development in the form of the OKGF;
3. A database of sound empirical studies, evidenced-based research and practical literature that would lead to an informed decision-making process; and
4. A jointly-produced website to facilitate the above activities and to provide convenient access to information.



## *The website features:*



- (1) a tutorial on posting topics and following up;
- (2) auto subscriptions to categories (email notification);
- (3) 'closed' or completed topics, archived to wikis for future access by principals with similar concerns;
- (4) access to supporting and relevant literature (research, Ministry documents, legal case studies, etc);
- (5) network links to local, national and international researchers, experts and colleagues in the field.

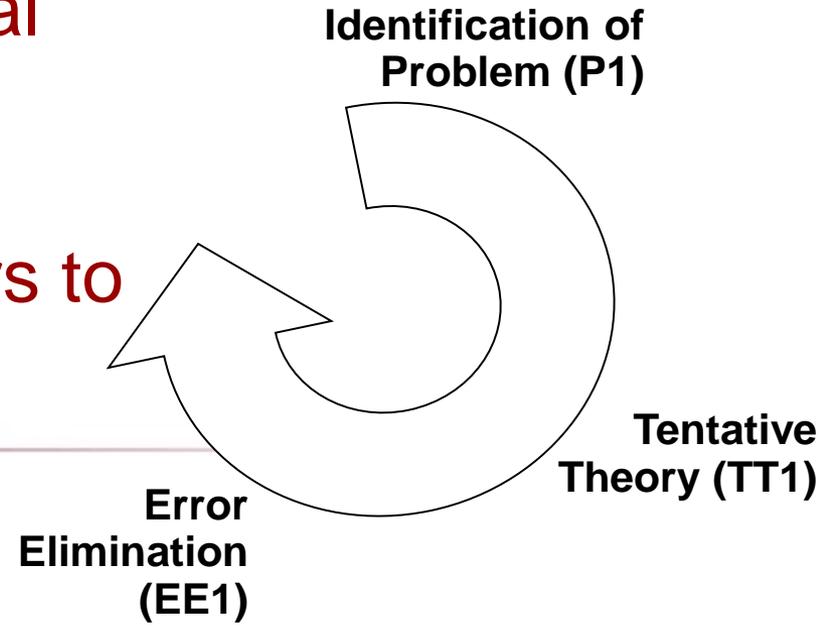
# OKGF for optimizing outcomes



Builds upon Popper's (1979; 2002) critical rationalism, which emphasizes that the dynamic growth of knowledge is stimulated by problems of practice, inconsistencies and intellectual conflicts.

This method encourages users to discover weak points in their theories and to question their argument.

## The OKGF schema



# Optimizing outcomes



The OKGF suggests that principals need to think carefully about the assumptions and beliefs they bring to the process of resolving a problem, because making decisions invokes judgment, which introduces the potential of bias as the decision made may be based on personal, social or political





One of the strongest characteristics about the OKGF is that it forces the principals to identify the problems they are facing.

Principals then gather information on the problem, and formulate a solution to resolve the problem. Essentially, the principals demarcate their theory/solution by putting it to the test, similar to the way scientists validate their hypotheses by conducting an experiment.

The stronger the theory/solution, the more effective it is in resolving the problem.





An example from the CPLN has a downtown high school principal concerned about Muslim students using their faith to get out of class and avoid serving detentions. He asks:

*“Is there anything in the Education Act that supports us in our efforts to keep students from leaving class to pray? We are not talking about Grant Days or Religious holidays... just being in class during the day.”*





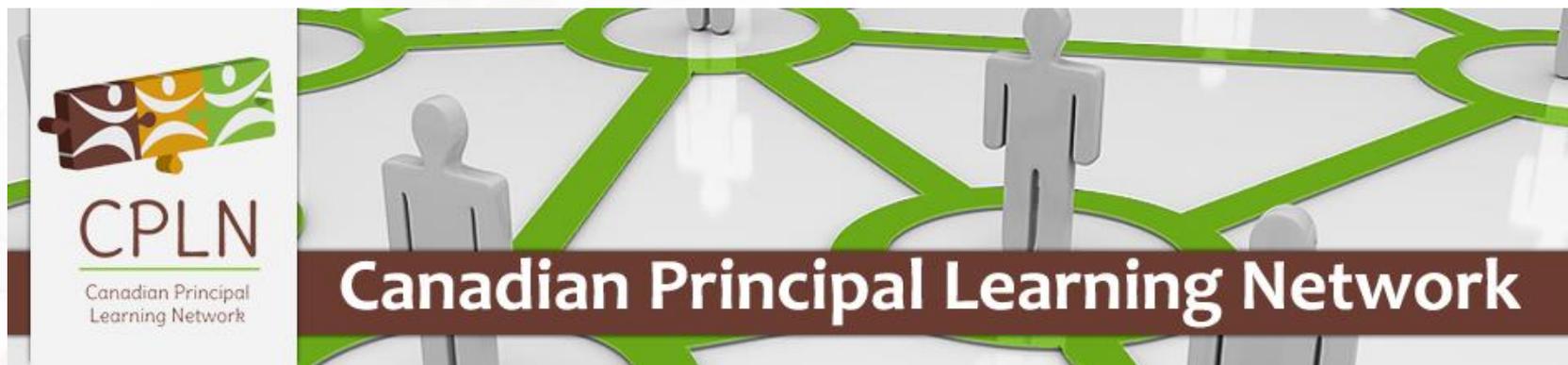
Using the OKGF framework, he handles the problem by breaking down the inputs/feedback received such as

(1) “checking with your Equity and Inclusion lead and with leaders of that faith to determine what is deemed time for prayer and requirements for how often” (Posting from CPLN); also looking into the proposed solution that of

(2) providing a space for prayers and



*continued...* speaking with the school district's legal expert about (3) exercising the Indirect power of the principal to deal with this issue by referring to sections 264 and 265 of the Education Act and the Regulation 298.





The CPLN is also viewed as a social process where researchers and research users engage and interact with each other on issues of interest which are pertinent to them along with plausible strategies and theories they are contemplating in order to resolve issues they are currently facing.

Moreover, the CPLN enables principals to easily access the views of colleagues and researchers alike on issues raised.



Researchers can bridge the gap between theory and practice by exchanging ideas and participating on the CPLN.



This form of online learning community is about actively engaging the principals beyond the traditional forums of attending workshops and seminars, which are mainly geared towards academic audiences.

As such, the CPLN mobilizes principals to become research users.



# Implications



The use of the OKGF and the CPLN website enables principals to go deeper into the various problems or issues they face.

Furthermore, this study suggests that, for principals' learning to continue, there needs to be ongoing support and structure.

Moreover, the problems faced by principals need to be connected to the actual dilemmas.



The reflections and collaboration captured in this study can also provide a model for preparing other principals for the learning that takes place within the environment of an online professional learning community using the OKGF.



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# THANKS!



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