

Developing Peer-to-Peer Leadership: Examining Professional Learning Communities and Coaching

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Indeed, virtually every other profession in modern life has transitioned to various forms of teamwork, yet most educators still work alone.

—Wagner et al.
(2006 p. 72)

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand and use adult-learning principles in leading change efforts.
- Apply the theory and practices of professional learning communities (PLCs) to schools.
- Understand how leaders may support PLCs.
- Use principles of effective coaching.

Introduction

As we remarked in Chapter 3, there has been much interest in a particular peer-to-peer school organizational structure—the professional learning community. In the PLC model, teachers are encouraged to collaborate on an equal footing, with no one person designated as the leader and with all sharing as equals in the learning process. Although it does not occur in all schools, this organizational change is happening more and more, and school leaders need to be equipped with information so they can assist teachers in advancing this exciting school reform. Earlier chapters elaborated on theories and strategies of change leadership for distrib-

uted and shared leadership in schools. In Chapter 7, we discussed the changing teaching culture in 21st century schools. This chapter moves that discussion to the next level—how to encourage peer-to-peer leadership, which some say is one of the most important school reforms of the past 50 years. Specifically, this chapter examines PLCs and peer-to-peer coaching, after first reviewing adult-learning theory.

Think About It

What are the consequences to student learning if teachers continue to work in isolation in schools?

Although we briefly introduced PLCs and **coaching** in earlier chapters, we did so in the context of leading teacher teams. In this chapter, we go into much more depth to look at the immense impact on differentiated educational settings these particular peer-to-peer school reforms are encountering. Specifically, in our examination of PLCs, we explore historical roots, theoretical underpinnings, and research into the connection of PLCs to student and teacher learning. We also consider some roadblocks to PLCs and how change leaders may work to overcome them. We close this chapter with a discussion of peer-to-peer leadership in coaching, as we consider principles of effective coaching, questions to use in coaching situations, and ground rules for peer-to-peer coaching.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

As a new school year approached, Michelle Sanchez reflected on ways she could support teachers at Cimmeron Middle School with deepened understandings, knowledge, and competence in designing, delivering, and assessing culturally responsive teaching.

As Cimmeron's principal, I hear teachers express their commitment to meeting the needs of every student. However, the changing demographics require us to deepen our responsiveness to student needs.

Building off successes with past professional learning communities at Cimmeron, I think I can help the staff learn together by using a book study. Through the discussions at the book study, we could find elements of culturally responsive pedagogy and explore the role that culture plays in establishing engaging classroom communities. We want to understand ways to share power and voice in inclusive classrooms where multiple activities and student groupings are maximized.

To build shared knowledge about Cimmeron while also promising inclusive, culturally responsive practices, I've begun to identify specific actions for the book study. I created a timeline to ensure

(continued)

there will be designated time to read, reflect, discuss, and act. Recommendations from the district's diversity office helped me prepare a suggested book list that staff can choose from. These include the following titles:

Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Michie, G. (1999). *Holler if you hear me*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S., & PODE, P. (2011). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

Singelton, G. E. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Tatum, B. D. (2003). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? A psychologist explains the development of racial identity*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Taylor, S. V., & Sobel, D. M. (2011). *Culturally responsive pedagogy: Teaching like our students' lives matter*. Boston, MA: Brill Publications.

Vitto, J. M. (2003). *Relationship-driven classroom management: Strategies that promote student motivation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

I've also begun to create a set of resources, such as reflection prompts that facilitators can use to guide book discussions in small-group and full-staff meetings. Some of these prompts are:

- Respond to the statement . . .
- Issues of inclusive, culturally responsive teaching are fundamental to improving the achievement gap. Offer your list of prioritized issues affecting this important topic.
- Based on today's discussion, identify three things that will enhance your learning environment.
- What are you still wondering about?

I've also created a template for individual action plans that teachers will be expected to use to personalize their professional development. Teachers will be asked to examine their classroom by considering the following prompts:

- Provide a brief description of your classroom, including the percentage of students with identified special needs, of students with English language needs, or of students performing below proficiency in standardized assessments.
- Identify at least two strategies from your book that you intend to apply.
- List your expected outcomes from the application of your selected strategies and explain how this will be evaluated.
- Provide your overall evaluation of the book. Would you recommend it to other colleagues? Why or why not?

Appreciating that "the devil is in the details" should help ensure success and sustainability with this book study initiative. I believe that attention to planning issues will help teachers deepen their understanding of the students in their classrooms and demonstrate a wider repertoire of ways to reach them. I intend to have teachers explicitly identify specific strategies they are using during teacher evaluation observations that I will be conducting in their classrooms.

Pre-Test

1. The art and science of teaching adults is known as
 - a. pedagogy.
 - b. polygamy.
 - c. androgynous.
 - d. andragogy.
2. Unlike regular teacher meetings, professional learning communities have a sense of
 - a. collaboration.
 - b. community.
 - c. communication.
 - d. professionalism.
3. Principal Hunnan has a “kick-off” welcome party for his faculty and staff for the district’s changes to incentive pay. This gathering fits the step of
 - a. creating structures for collaboration.
 - b. developing critical mass to support implementation.
 - c. sustaining the work.
 - d. clarifying the work for teams to accomplish.
4. Carla finds herself “talking down” to her mentee, Jorge. This practice violates Knight’s (2011) characteristic of
 - a. equality.
 - b. voice.
 - c. choice.
 - d. praxis.

Answers

1. d. andragogy. The answer can be found in Section 8.1.
2. b. community. The answer can be found in Section 8.2.
3. b. developing critical mass to support implementation. The answer can be found in Section 8.3.
4. b. voice. The answer can be found in Section 8.4.

8.1 Understanding Adult-Learning Theory

As an education leader involved in either PLCs or coaching, you will often be responsible for providing knowledge and developing understanding for other adults. Therefore, your work will need to be based on the principles of how adults acquire knowledge and skills. According to Knowles (1980), the characteristics of adult learners include the following:

- An independent self-concept so they can direct their own learning
- An accumulated reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning

- Learning needs that are closely related to changing social roles
- Interested in practical applications of knowledge
- Motivation to learn by internal rather than external factors

Gregory and Kuzmich (2007) noted similar characteristics in adult learners. These characteristics, including experiential, self-directed, life-applicable, and performance-centered, are summarized in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Characteristics of adult learners

Experiential Adults need to connect new ideas or actions to what they know and do well.	Self-Directed Adults need choice and opportunities to prioritize work.
Life Applicable Adults need learning that has real-life use and is transferable to their unique circumstances.	Performance Centered Adults like learning that is hands-on, is engaging, or gives them an opportunity for reflection.

Source: Gregory & Kuzmich (2007, p. xvi).

Andragogy vs. Pedagogy

Since learning is often described as the acquisition of knowledge with a resulting change in behavior, Knowles (1980) used **andragogy** to indicate adult-learning concepts, as opposed to **pedagogy**, which is often used to describe the learning processes for children. Knowles identifies three needs for adult learners: the need to participate, plan, and evaluate their learning; the need for experiential activities tied to the learning; and the need for topics relevant to their jobs or responsibilities.

The good news is that PLCs align closely with these principles of adult-learning theory established, in part, by Knowles (1980) with andragogy and by Mezirow and Associates (1990) with transformation theory (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999). Knowles's assumptions about adult learners stress self-directed learning, life experiences that serve as a source of information, a focus on problem-centered learning, and an internal motivation to learn. Mezirow's transformational learning begins with reflection on one's assumptions, followed by discourse regarding the reflective process, and concluding with action. Merriam recommended the use of reflection and dialogue with adult learners, as well as connecting their new learning to previous experiences. Leaders need to consider these assumptions, theories, and suggestions emerging from adult-learning theory when they construct PLCs at their schools (Williams, 2012, p. 31). "Adult-learning principles help us plan for the type of professional dialogue and interaction that supports learners who have years of life experiences to draw on" (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007, p. xvi).

Learning Styles

Both leaders and teachers need to consider another frame of reference when working in PLCs or coaching situations—that of **learning styles**. Similar to the diverse needs of students, adults also have diverse ways of learning and interacting.

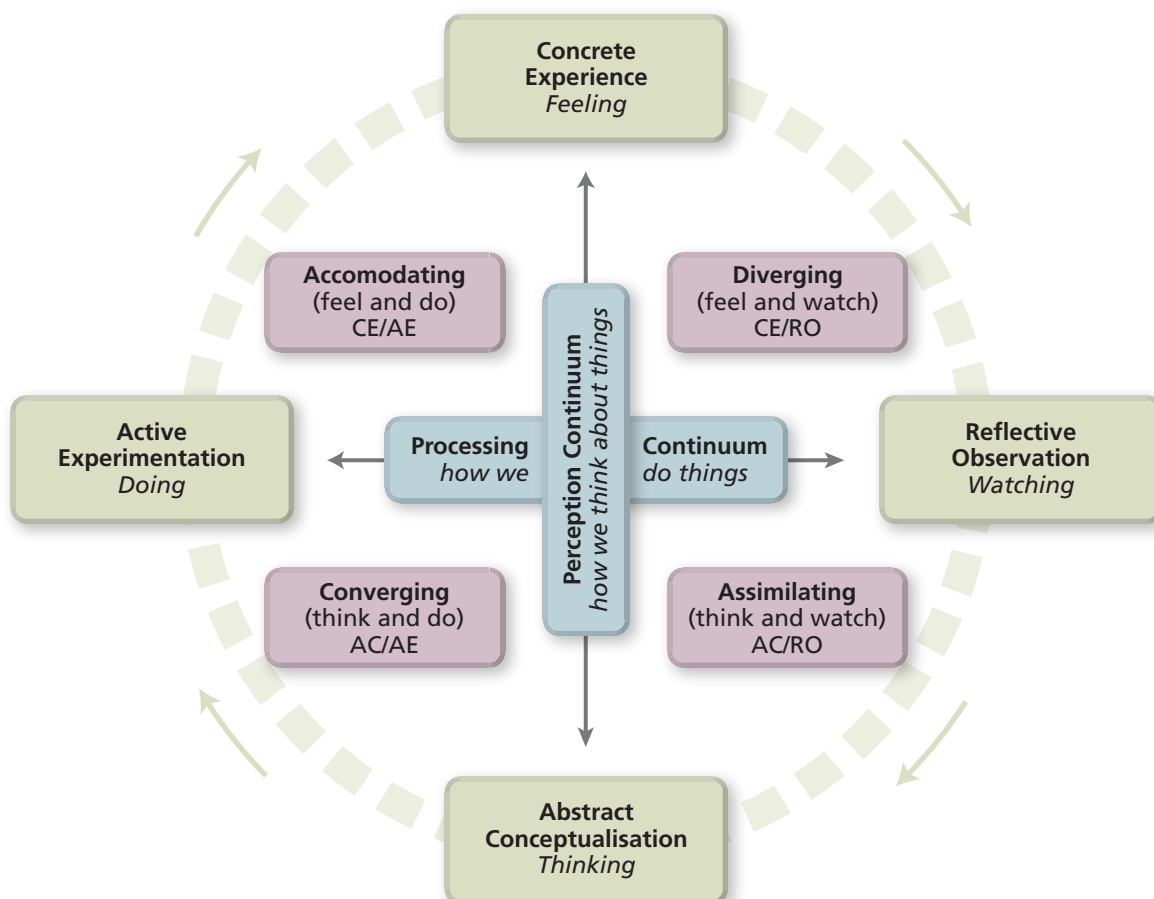
First, it must be stated that there is not a strong body of research in support of teaching students in their preferred learning style. "The contrast between the enormous popularity of

the learning-styles approach within education and the lack of credible evidence for its utility is, in our opinion, striking and disturbing,” (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008, p. 117). That said, there are good reasons for adults to understand the different ways their peers may approach and assimilate new information.

Pashler et al. (2008) stated that most learning-style taxonomies are “type” theories that place individuals into separate groups. Credit is given to C. G. Jung (1926/1964) for his influence in the development of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test as the forerunner for future learning-styles inventories. This test remains popular even today, though it was first released in 1940 (Pashler et al., 2008). Another form of the learning-styles inventories is the aligning of individuals into a two-by-two dimensional matrix. Two writers popularized this type of system. Gregorc introduced the Gregorc Style Delineator in 1982, and Kolb introduced a similar system in 1984. Figure 8.1 displays the various dimensions of Kolb’s system. Along one dimension is the preferred mode of perception (concrete to abstract), and the other dimension reflects the preferred mode of processing (active experimentation to reflective observations).

Figure 8.1: Kolb’s learning styles

According to Kolb’s model, different methods of perceiving and processing combine to create the four learning styles of a learning cycle.



Source: © concept David Kolb, adaptation and design Alan Chapman 2005–06, based on Kolb's learning styles, 1984. Figure accessed at <http://www.businessballs.com/freepdfmaterials/kolblearningstylesdiagram.pdf>. Reprinted by permission of Alan Chapman and David Kolb.

Although others have recast these earlier learning-style systems with other terminology, the results are essentially the same. Table 8.2 is a compilation of these other popular inventories that have grouped individuals into one of four types. Additional information and sample tests may be accessed through the web links.

Table 8.2: Summary of four-type learning style systems

Gregorc (1982) http://www.ieslearning.co.uk/mind.html http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/learning/gregorc.htm	Kolb (1984) http://infed.org/mobi/david-a-kolb-on-experiential-learning/	True Colors (Lowry, 1979) http://truecolorsintl.com http://www.kean.edu/~fosborne/E3230/E3230-04bLearningStyles.htm	Silver/Strong/Hanson (Silver & Hansen, 1998) http://educatoral.com/learning_styles.html
Abstract/Random Imaginative Emotional Holistic	Diverger Values positive, caring environments	Blue Values making relationships work	Interpersonal/SF (Sensing-Feeling) Likes social interaction to process and use concrete information
Abstract/Sequential Intellectual Analytical Theoretical	Assimilator One who seeks to learn and do research	Green Values making ideas work	Understanding NT (Intuitive-Thinking) Uses reasoning and logic to explore ideas
Concrete/Sequential Task oriented Efficient Detailed	Converger Organizes information, values what is useful	Gold Values making the structure work	Mastery ST (Sensing-Thinking) Processes information concretely and sequentially
Concrete/Random Divergent Experiential Inventive	Creative Likes to experiment with new ideas	Orange Values creating active work	Self-Expressive NF (Intuitive-Feeling) Uses feelings to construct novel products or ideas

Source: Compilation of popular inventories, from Gregory, G. & Kuzmich, L. (2007). *Teacher Teams that Get Results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p. xvii. Reprinted with permission.

The goal of understanding learning styles is ultimately to learn to value what each style may add to the whole. Knowing that one's peers perceive work and process ideas in divergent ways greatly assists leaders and teachers in the important collaborative work with one another, particularly in peer-to-peer learning situations.

8.2 Professional Learning Communities: A 21st Century Professional Development Model

As the chapter's opening quote suggests, teaching has traditionally been one of the most isolated of all professions. New research is just now beginning to confirm the positive effects on student and adult learning when teachers routinely examine the practice of teaching. Garrett (2010) reported on a middle school teacher in the San Joaquin Valley who likened the PLC to a grove of giant sequoias:

To someone standing at the foot of one of the massive organisms, peering upward toward its top, the fragility of the sequoia's shallow root structure may be hard to imagine. Growing in isolation, the giants are susceptible to winds and erosion. But when growing close to other sequoias in a grove, their roots intermingle, providing the entire group of trees with a strong, supportive foundation that helps them all endure the ravages of nature. Similarly, a lone teacher, however capable, may languish in isolation. The encouragement, expertise, and support of colleagues in the learning community create a team even more resilient than the strengths of its individual experts (cited in Garrett, 2010, p. 4).

The PLC is one of the most compelling innovations in education today; therefore, we will now add to the initial definitions provided in Chapter 3 and consider various descriptions from key experts in the field.

To review, a professional learning community is a peer-to-peer vehicle for engaging teachers in examining both the art and science of teaching and in implementing reform-based change in the classroom (Lakshmanan, Heath, Perlmutter, & Elder, 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Nelson, Slavitt, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008; Richmond & Manokore, 2011). Little (2003) suggested that PLCs are groups in which new knowledge about instruction and content is constructed and where existing assumptions about teaching and learning are critiqued. The phrase *professional learning community*, say authors DuFour and Eaker (1998), has been chosen purposefully.

A professional is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base. . . . *Learning* suggests ongoing action and perpetual curiosity. . . . The school that operates as a *professional learning community* recognizes that its members must engage in ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement. . . . In a professional learning community, educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone. (pp. xi–xii)

Finally, many note that the phenomenon of the PLC, due to its bottom-up leadership design, is every bit as much a cultural change as a structural one. Garrett (2010) quoted a county office administrator tasked with providing assistance to schools moving toward PLCs: "A professional learning community . . . is perhaps best defined as a fundamental shift in a school's culture" (p. 4). Hargreaves (1994) offered a comparison of the culture between the PLC and more traditional forms of professional development: PLCs are development oriented and create a platform for all participants to share leadership, whereas traditional professional development is more contrived and regulated from the top down. Table 8.3 shows a comparison of more traditional forms of teacher professional development and PLCs.

Table 8.3: Traditional professional development vs. PLCs

Traditional Professional Development	Professional Learning Community
Fulfillment of seat time and the accumulation of clock hours	Educators learning what matters most in support of their work with students
Acquisition of knowledge and skills	Developing deeper understanding and applying knowledge and skills meaningfully to support student learning
Learning for individual improvement	Learning for individual and school improvement
Professional learning through activities conducted away from the school/district site	Professional learning through job-embedded activities and reflection
Outside “experts” as professional developers	Teachers as experts
Evaluating professional development on the basis of participant satisfaction	Evaluating professional development on the basis of what participants learn, what they do with what they learn, and how it affects students’ learning
Recertification as the primary purpose for professional development	Professional development serving multiple purposes, including enhancement of individual and organizational capacity, improved student learning, and recertification

Source: Adapted from New Hampshire, Department of Education (2009)

Historical Roots and Theoretical Underpinnings

Professional learning communities began in the world of business with the belief that people in organizations can learn and grow from and with one another (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). Follett (1924/2001) is credited by some as beginning the movement toward professional collaboration with her interest in ways that individuals relate in the workplace. This relational approach to the business environment did not catch on right away. The next several decades were still characterized by a rigid hierarchical form of leadership that did not encourage peer-to-peer leadership. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, collaborative models started to flourish in organizations. In the 1990s, Senge (1990) gained international prominence in promoting “**learning organizations**.” He made a good point about the benefits of team learning: “When teams are truly learning, not only are they producing extraordinary results, but the individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise” (Senge, 1990, p. 10).

As the idea of learning organizations gained popularity in the business community, interest was renewed regarding principles of adult learning. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, Knowles (1979) pushed leaders to challenge traditional assumptions regarding adult learning in the workplace. He asserted that a person’s skill level would depreciate unless he or she engaged in a lifelong program of professional development. According to Williams (2012), “Knowles’s assumption contradicted the one-shot workshop model for professional development and increased support for job-embedded collaboration and learning” (p. 32).

In the 1990s, Hord (1997) was instrumental in advancing the idea of PLCs. From her extensive review of the literature, Hord developed a framework that was eventually used by many theorists. Her framework, gleaned from an extensive review of the literature from schools, businesses, and other organizations, included five critical dimensions of a professional learning community: (a) shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective

learning and the application of learning, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions (collegial relationships and structures).

By the beginning of the 21st century, the idea of learning organizations began to catch on in schools. Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) noted that, "Members of the education community became intrigued with the idea that schools should be about adult learning as well as student learning" (p. 36). As a result of this interest by educators in learning organizations, Senge et al. (2000) wrote *Schools That Learn* and asserted, "The learning disciplines found in *The Fifth Discipline* [Senge, 1990] offer teachers and administrators genuine help for dealing

with the dilemmas and pressures of education today" (p. 7). As schools became involved in constructing collaborative structures, the term *learning organizations* came to be known in education circles as *professional learning communities* (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). For more information about PLCs, see the All Things PLC website: <http://www.allthingsplc.info/aboutSite.php>.

Think About It

What are some of the potential benefits for students when teachers choose to work in PLCs?

Even though the idea of schools as learning organizations did not gain popularity until recently, the theories upon which this idea is based have been around for much longer. According to Jones, Gardner, Robertson, and Robert (2013), the theoretical constructs of PLCs had their beginnings in the social constructivist ideas promoted by Vygotsky (1978), Dewey (1970), and Wertsch (1991). Vygotsky focused on the interactions between people and the sociocultural environment in which they interact (Crawford, 1996). Social constructivism, according to Vygotsky's theory, emphasizes three major themes:

1. *Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development.* Vygotsky felt that social learning precedes development.
2. *The more knowledgeable other (MKO).* Individuals learn from the MKO, who is anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner.
3. *The zone of proximal development (ZPD).* According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurred in this zone, which is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance or with peer collaboration and the student's ability to solve the problem independently.

In PLCs teachers play an active part in "constructing" their own learning, which, in turn, becomes a reciprocal experience for other teachers. Table 8.2 compared the more traditional forms of professional development with PLCs. In the traditional models, schools have customarily held a transmissionist or instructionist model, in which an expert "transmits" information to teachers. In contrast, Vygotsky's theory promotes learning contexts in which teachers play an active role in their own learning.

Similarly, Dewey's writings (Dewey 1933/1985, 1938/1997) serve as a foundation for the development of PLCs, as he envisioned "a laboratory model for schools where teachers engage in collective inquiry in order to weigh their practices and innovations against empirical evidence and critical dialogue," (Wood, 2007, p. 282). This format, Dewey argued, would have teachers engaged in focused professional conversations with one another regarding classroom teaching and learning, which, in turn, would stimulate innovation and further inquiry. This spiraling process, Wood went on to say, would culminate in ongoing construction of knowledge from practice (Wood, 2007).

Other theorists agreed with Dewey's idea of "schools as centers of inquiry" (Schaefer, 1967; Calderwood, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2003). If real change is going to occur in schools, many believe it will be a bottom-up process, coming from teachers, rather than one that is top-down, or administration driven. Change leaders need to be aware that when teachers experience the autonomy of leading efforts in the construction of knowledge, true reform is possible. Perhaps Wood (2007) captured this ideal best: "These arguments offer a vision of teachers not only as users of pedagogical knowledge, but also as creators of it" (p. 282).

Closely aligned with the construction of knowledge, the concept of teachers working as reflective practitioners has been extremely popular among many education theorists. Noteworthy among them is Schön (1983), whose call for reflective practitioners includes teachers being thinkers, inquirers, and conceptualizers. In addition, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) proposed a taxonomy of the types of knowledge necessary for the complex art of teaching. It includes **knowledge-for-practice**, which is knowledge that originates from outside experts; **knowledge-in-practice**, which is built as teachers go about their work; and **knowledge-of-practice**, which is a deliberate construction of knowledge by communities of teachers drawing on both outside experts and inquiry into daily practice. Woods (2007) believed that current reform measures calling for learning communities should build on the idea of knowledge-of-practice:

Teacher learning communities, such as professional networks, critical friends' groups, study groups, and teacher research collaboratives, provide settings for teachers to learn and build knowledge together. Teachers are not simply constructed as learners; they also become *knowers*. Over time, schools become places not only for learning but also for deliberate construction and dissemination of knowledge born of research. (Woods, 2007, p. 285)

Jones et al. (2013) agreed with the idea of shared learning communities and believed that those communities are built on the idea of distribution of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994; Stoll et al., 2006; Wenger, 1998). As discussed in Chapter 1, communities of practice, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), serve as a forerunner for PLCs. Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice along three dimensions:

1. *What it is about*: It is a *joint enterprise* as understood and continually renegotiated by its members.
2. *How it functions*: Mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity.
3. *What capability it has produced*: The shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time (Wenger, 1998 pp. 73–84)

The basic premise purported by Lave and Wenger (1991) is that communities of practice are everywhere and that we are, more often than not, involved in a number of them. Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both individuals and the social network. These practices are thus owned by the community and created over time by a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of communities, *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). Other more recent theorists believe that the process of reculturing schools as PLCs is a journey from initiation to implementation to institutionalization or sustainability (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008).

Research Support for PLCs

Although PLCs have received a great deal of attention in the literature, few research studies have been conducted to determine their effectiveness. In general, the literature and research base has explored benefits for teachers and impact on student performance.

Assessing the Impact on Student Performance

Improvement in student performance should be the very heart of PLC work. Furthermore, as teachers participate in PLCs, it is expected that increases in student learning will follow. In practice, however, change cannot be singular and disjointed; rather, it should be collaborative and embedded within day-to-day work to address the needs of students (Seashore Louis & Marks, 1996). Therefore, it can be difficult to show direct relationships between PLCs and student outcomes. Supovitz (2002) found that an explicit focus on instructional improvement is necessary for PLCs to have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. Without such focus, PLCs may have a positive effect on culture and teachers' feelings of well-being, but not necessarily on student achievement. We will present some older studies and some newer ones that point to the possibility that teachers' involvement in PLCs can produce positive gains in student learning.

Due to the relative newness of PLCs as a 21st century education reform, older studies documenting growth in student achievement were not based on PLCs, per se, but on teachers working collaboratively. One of the first researchers to look at the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement was Rosenholtz (1989), whose study in 78 elementary schools revealed student achievement gains in reading and math after teachers participated in collaborative learning groups. Smith and Scott (1990) reported on studies in six schools. Four of the schools that were identified as successful on the basis of student achievement on standardized achievement tests showed evidence of teachers talking with one another about teaching, working together to design their classes, and teaching each other about teaching. The two unsuccessful schools did not have these collaborative practices (Smith & Scott, 1990, p. 16). Finally, Hord (1997) listed the following research-supported student outcomes from schools where teachers were involved in PLCs:

- Decreased dropout rate and fewer classes "cut"
- Lower rates of absenteeism
- Increased learning that is distributed more equitably in the smaller high schools
- Larger academic gains in math, science, history, and reading than in traditional schools

However, some newer studies have appeared that also point to the effectiveness of PLCs for increasing learning. Following are some examples from the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement's website:

- Researchers (Hughes & Kritsonis, 2007) selected a sample of schools from a database of schools with staff who had attended PLC workshops and that were possibly implementing PLCs. During a three-year period, 90.6% of these schools reported an increase in standardized math scores, and 81.3% reported an increase in English/language arts scores between 5 points and 26 points.
- Case studies of three elementary schools showed that during a five-year period, students from minority and low-income families improved their scores on state achievement tests from less than 50% proficient to 75% proficient.

- In a study at an urban middle school, Thompson et al. (2004) found that as the sixth-grade teachers met in groups to implement changes in their classroom literacy instruction, students' scores on standardized reading tests showed a modest gain (the first gain in six years). (<http://www.centerforcsri.org/plc/literature.html>)

Assessing the Impact on Teacher Outcomes

Although the stated goal of the PLC collaborative structure is that of student learning, we cannot overlook research that points to teacher learning and growth. Research suggests that the PLC is one of the most effective strategies schools have found for promoting long-term professional development for educators (Dallas, 2006; Schmoker, 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). In fact, Stoll et al. (2006) asserted that PLCs can be most effective when their purpose is to enhance teacher effectiveness for the ultimate benefit of students. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) found that in a decade of studying schools, whenever they identified an effective school or an effective department within a school, without exception, that school or department was part of a collaborative PLC. Other researchers also found that teachers in PLCs may experience a variety of benefits that contribute to improved student achievement, including

- reduction of isolation of teachers;
- increased commitment to the school's mission and goals and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission;
- shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for student success;
- powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice and that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners;
- increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles they play in helping all students achieve expectations;
- higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students;
- more satisfaction and higher morale and lower rates of absenteeism;
- significant advances into making teaching adaptations for students and changes for learners made more quickly than in traditional schools;
- commitment to making significant and lasting changes; and
- higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental, systemic change. (Goldring et al., 2007, as cited in DuFour & DuFour, 2012)

Think About It

Of all the positive outcomes listed for PLCs, which do you feel might be the easiest to sustain? The most difficult?

Characteristics of PLCs

In Chapter 4, we briefly discussed some of the characteristics of PLCs. We expand that discussion in this chapter because many teachers may think that they have been collaborating in PLCs for years, when, in fact, they have not. According to Wilhelm (2006), PLCs are not just teachers getting together in collaborative teams to talk. So, what distinguishes a PLC from other kinds of regular collaborative meetings that teachers have? Building on our initial discussion of PLCs in earlier chapters, we feel that the notion of *community* is what makes PLCs

unique: “The focus is not just on individual teachers’ professional learning but of professional learning within a community context,” (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 225). In this way, PLCs picture learning and professional development as critically rooted in Vygotsky’s social context (Jones et al., 2013).

Even though PLCs vary widely in individual schools and districts, there is some agreement on common features. Many theorists (Nelson, 2009; Nickerson & Moriarty, 2005; Secada & Adjian, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006) believe that PLCs have five common characteristics:

1. Building the foundation on teachers’ shared values and vision (typically with a focus on student learning)
2. Promoting collective responsibility for student learning
3. Increasing reflective professional inquiry
4. Promoting collaboration
5. Integrating collective and individual learning

Underscoring the importance of the second characteristic, Hord (1997) asserted that key to the PLC is an undeviating focus on student learning: “Students are pictured as academically capable, and staff envision learning environments to support and realize each student’s potential achievement. These shared values and visions lead to binding norms of behavior” (p. 19).

8.3 School Leadership to Support PLCs

A major premise of this text is that leadership is key to the successful implementation of the many differentiated reforms taking place in schools. Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) lent support for this notion: “Never before in the history of education has there been such a clarion call for leaders who can create a culture that fosters both adult and student learning” (p. 36). Even though this chapter focuses on peer-to-peer leadership, the role of principals, by virtue of their authority on a school’s campus, remains critical to encourage or discourage teachers in pursuing personal development as part of their job. Louis and Kruse (1995) identified the supportive leadership of the principal as one of the key conditions needed for PLCs to flourish at a school. In additional confirmation of the principal’s leadership style to the success of PLCs, Prestine (1993) asserted that, in addition to being supportive, principals must have the ability to distribute authority, facilitate the work of the staff, and be able to take part without controlling. In such an open atmosphere, the principal can encourage reflection, inquiry, sharing, and dialogue among teachers. Similarly, Senge et al. (2000) talked about the impetus for change often coming first from the principal. He referred to principals becoming a “lead teacher and lead learner, and steward of the learning process as a whole” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 15).

Continuing with the theme of this text—differentiated leadership—we must understand that teacher-leaders, as well as administrators, are critical to building and sustaining ongoing PLCs. As Fullan (1997) stated, “Principals can make even more long-lasting contributions, by broadening the base of leadership of those with whom they work—teachers” (p. 46). Other researchers agree: “If dynamic change is to occur in schools, it is essential that we nurture teachers who are leaders of and inquirers into effective practice” (Elmore & Wisenbaker, 2000, p. 281). Similarly, Lambert et al. (2002) called for a redefining of leadership: “**Constructivist**

leadership addresses the need for sensemaking, for coherence, and for seeing educational communities as growth-producing entities. Leadership that is formed around the principles of constructivist learning for adults captures these possibilities for learning” (p. 35). In other writings, the reciprocal processes of learning among the adults in a school take center stage. Lambert et al. (2002) believed reciprocity to be key to a successful PLC. Everyone is both a teacher and a learner.

Think About It

List some tangible ways that both principals and teacher-leaders are able to support PLCs on a school's campus.

Once the shared model of leadership has been established at a school, the principal and school leadership team (see Chapter 3) should work together to create an environment for the successful implementation of PLCs. In their groundbreaking book, *The School Leader's Guide to Professional Learning Communities at Work*, DuFour and DuFour (2012) identified steps that are highly effective for change leaders. These steps include (a) developing a critical mass to support implementation, (b) creating the structures for collaboration, (c) clarifying the work teams must accomplish, and (d) sustaining the work.

Develop a Critical Mass to Support Implementation

Every school reform has individuals who support the change and those who do not. Therefore, it is essential to create a “welcoming” environment for the change among all staff members. Principals and lead teachers can do the following to help bring others on board:

- Build a shared knowledge regarding the elements of the PLC process and the research base.
- Engage in dialogue with staff to identify and address concerns. In this step, it is wise to encourage dissent so that the process is transparent to all. This might take the form of asking some teachers to present contradictory research.
- Seek to truly understand the perspective of those who are opposed by asking them to share their thought processes and any assumptions they may have.
- Once those have been aired, seek to find areas of agreement and acknowledge points of disagreement.
- Demonstrate willingness to compromise on some of the specifics of implementation, with the stipulation that those compromises do not violate the entire PLC process.

Create the Structures for Collaboration

Once consensus for establishing PLCs has been reached, school leaders must ensure that structures are in place to maximize success. Principals and teacher-leaders may share oversight of the following aspects:

- *Organizing people into meaningful teams:* Since the focus should always be on learning, the following kinds of teams are recommended: grade-level teams; same-course teams; vertical teams, linking groups of grade levels; electronic teams, best used when a school is small and willing to collaborate with teachers from other schools; and interdisciplinary teams.
- *Ensuring teams have time to collaborate:* This point may be one of the hardest for school leaders to accomplish. However, without the regular in-school, dedicated time to meet, teachers will not give their full commitment to the PLC process.

Recommended ideas include common prep time, parallel scheduling of specialists to release team members, “banking” time (e.g., extending the school day by 10 minutes each day for 9 days to create a 90-minute block of time for teachers, as students can be released early), or scheduling assemblies so other staff members can supervise them, thus allowing teachers to meet.

- *Helping teachers create norms for working together:* Just because teachers are involved in a PLC does not automatically guarantee that they will all get along. In Chapter 4, we identified Tuckman and Jensen’s (2010) four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. The third stage—that of creating norms—is critical for groups to work productively with one another. Following are some examples of workable norms:
 1. We all agree to be on time and not arrive late for our PLC meetings.
 2. We agree not to make negative comments to one another.
 3. We agree to listen respectfully to the speaker and not hold “sidebar” conversations.
 4. We agree to encourage one another’s growth.

Think About It

What might happen if teachers did not jointly create “norms” or expectations for working together in PLCs?

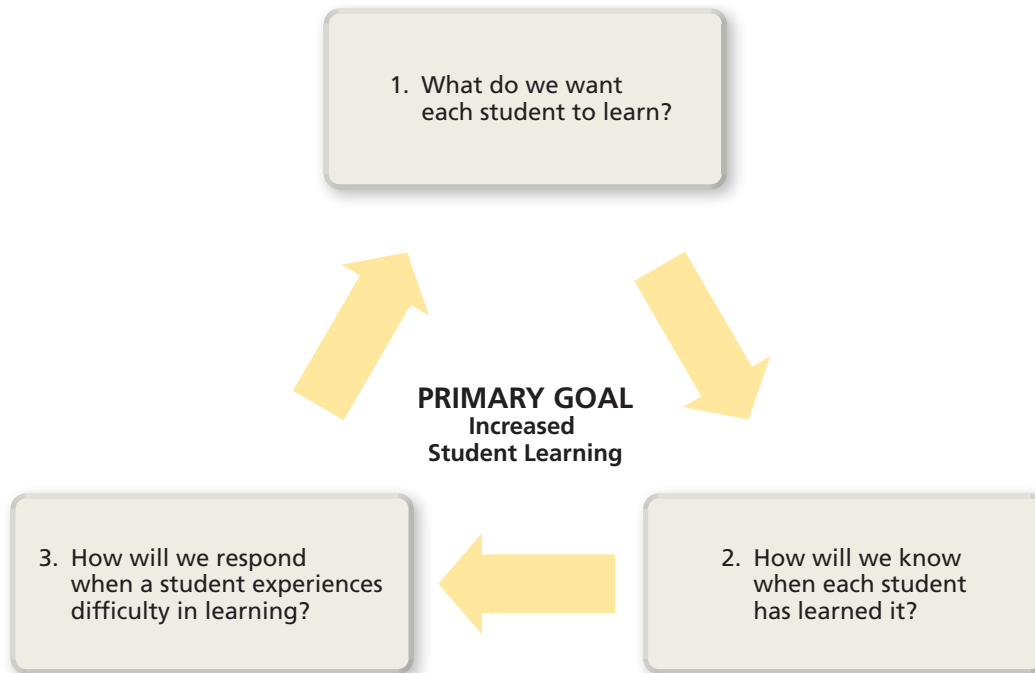
Clarify the Work Teams Must Accomplish

We have said this before, but it bears repeating: The work of a PLC must always center on student learning. Figure 8.2 clearly illustrates this principle, along with the essential questions and teacher protocols for focusing conversations on student work:

1. What do we want each student to learn?
 - Prerequisite concepts or skills the student may need
 - State or Common Core Standards
 - Benchmarks from textbook publishers
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
 - Use same assessment as pre- and post-assessment
 - Benchmarks
 - Reading levels
 - Response to intervention
 - Teacher-created assessments
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?
 - Assess the teaching strategies and use more evidence-based instruction
 - Redesign learning experiences
 - Include more differentiation in instruction

Figure 8.2: The PLC cycle

The primary focus in the PLC cycle should be on increasing student learning.



Source: Adapted from "Professional Learning Communities." (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://schools.shorelineschools.org/instruction/professional-learning-communities/>.

All of the collaboration in the world will not raise student achievement unless teachers focus on the essential work of a PLC—increasing student learning. "Collaboration is morally neutral. It will benefit neither students nor practitioners unless educators demonstrate the discipline to co-labor on the right work" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 83). But what is the *right work*? DuFour and Marzano suggested the following two areas:

- *Clarifying and prioritizing the curriculum:* School leaders must give teachers latitude in matters of curricular decisions. Everyone can read standards. However, for teachers to own the hard work of helping students reach critical benchmarks, they must also have the professional authority to work with one another in making these decisions. This is not to say that a PLC is just about getting together to plan the next topic or unit of instruction. Teachers must also engage in professional discourse about larger curricular issues.
- *Monitoring student learning:* Professional discourse about student learning is the very core of a PLC. Thus, PLC teams should not let other planning tasks move the group away from this primary task.

Sustain the Work

Every experienced teacher has seen reform measures come and go. In this culture of constant educational change, how can school leaders help PLCs sustain this critically important school improvement effort? First of all, we must recognize that success breeds success. When teachers begin to see that their hard work and collaboration efforts produce increased student learning, they receive the strongest kind of motivation—that of intrinsic motivation. This involves the following ideas:

- *Plan for short-term wins:* Many leadership researchers know the power on team motivation of celebrating short-term wins (Fullan, 2011; Elmore and City, 2007; Blanchard, 2007). We stated earlier that the biggest factor in anyone being willing to sustain effort is the ability to see results. This is as true for those trying to lose weight as for those involved in sustaining the work in PLCs. Principals and teacher-leaders who are able to examine school and district reports need to cull them for any signs of improvement, no matter how incremental.
- *Persevere:* All groups experience setbacks, and PLCs are no exception. The school's leadership team needs to constantly praise efforts of teacher work in PLCs and support the process when challenges occur.
- *Build the capacity of people throughout the school to contribute to the leadership of the PLC process:* In Chapter 3, we examined the many roles of distributed leadership on a school's campus. For sustaining the forward movement of PLCs, the wider the distribution of leadership at a school, the better. Building the capacity of all to lead helps distribute the work when difficulties arise.

8.4 Peer-to-Peer Coaching

We now move from the structure of PLCs to another peer-to-peer structure for teachers in schools today—coaching. Several important sets of professional standards allude to teachers being willing to take on coaching roles. One example is detailed by Standard 10 of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), which states, “The teacher takes an active role on the instructional team, *giving and receiving feedback on practice*, examining learner work, analyzing data from multiple sources, and sharing responsibility for decision making and accountability for each student’s learning” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011).



Jack Hollingsworth/Digital Vision/Thinkstock

▲ In a coaching situation, teaching extends to fellow peers and adults. How does coaching benefit both parties involved?

A second organization, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), has outlined standards for effective professional development based on its analysis of the research. In NSDC's standards, coaching is aligned with many of the standards. In particular, coaching is centered on authentic student work, is connected to a specific school's or district's curriculum, takes place on a regular basis, and relies on research.

When teachers work with each other as coaches, they begin to experience a different way of relating. They take on interchangeable roles of learner and teacher, in addition to the traditional collegial role, as they facilitate each other's growth.

However, teachers rarely receive any train-

ing in how to be a coach. This training is critical, because the way teachers interact with each other when coaching will make or break the burgeoning relationship.

Principles of Coaching

Two of the leaders of the coaching movement are Art Costa and Robert Garmston. Their book, *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools* (2002), revolutionized the way coaching was done in schools. The original principles of their cognitive coaching model were as follows:

1. Build trust by developing physical and verbal rapport.
2. Facilitate thinking through questioning and developing greater precision in language.
3. Develop people's autonomy and sense of community by increasing their sense of efficacy and self-awareness.
4. Distinguish between coaching and evaluation.
5. Rehearse coaching interactions that are congruent with a variety of styles. (Refer to the research on learning styles presented at the beginning of this chapter.)
6. Apply coaching skills that enhance the intellectual processes of performance.

In the 21st century, other writers are continuing to expand on Costa and Garmston's original principles. Killion, Harrison, Bryan, and Clifton (2012) wrote a contemporary book on coaching, *Coaching Matters*. This publication discusses the many coaching roles that may exist, including resource provider, data coach, curriculum specialist, and instructional specialist. Additional theorists include Knight (2011), who stated that the construct of partnership is key to any coaching relationship. Knight wove together themes from the fields of education, business, psychology, philosophy of science, and cultural anthropology into seven principles that describe a theory for effective coaching. These principles include the following characteristics:

1. *Equality*. Equality is a necessary condition of any partnership. In true partnerships, one partner does not tell the others what to do; all partners share ideas and make decisions together as equals. For coaching to work, the one who is coached must not be considered to be in the inferior position. Strong coaching relationships thrive when each partner feels a full sense of equality in the relationship.
2. *Choice*. Coaches who act on the principle of choice tend to position teachers as the final decision makers, or as partners who choose their coaching goals and decide which practices to adopt and how to interpret data. Partners don't choose for each other. Violating the principle of choice often increases the likelihood that teachers will resist change initiatives. To maintain the principle of equality, the partner who is being coached must feel that he or she has the final decision.
3. *Voice*. Conversation with a coach should be as open and candid as conversation with a trusted friend. When coaches follow the principle of voice, teachers feel free to express their enthusiasms and concerns. All of us know what being talked "down to" feels like. Successful coaches make sure that their efforts to help are not construed as coming from a superior position.
4. *Reflection*. Much of the pleasure of professional growth comes from reflecting on what you're learning. When professionals are told what to do and when and how to do it—with no room for their own individual thought—there's a good chance that they are not learning at all. All authentic learning must be "owned." Ownership cannot happen without taking the information in and reflecting upon how it will fit within one's philosophy of teaching.

5. *Dialogue*. When a coach and teacher engage in dialogue, they let go of the notion that they must push for a particular point of view. The goal is for the best idea to win—not for *my* idea to win. The best idea wins most frequently when all partners think their way together through a discussion. True dialogue is not easy, as any of us may know. It can only happen in a trusting environment where one is able to “try out” and take risks and talk openly about the change process.
6. *Reciprocity*. Reciprocity is the belief that each learning interaction is an opportunity for everyone to learn—an embodiment of the saying, “When one teaches, two learn.” When we look at everyone else as a learner *and* a teacher, regardless of their credentials or years of experience, we’re often delightfully surprised by new ideas, concepts, strategies, and passions. Reciprocity is the inevitable outcome of a true partnership. Seeing our partners as equals means we come into a conversation respecting and valuing them. Freeing our partners to make choices means they’re free to surprise us with new ideas. Encouraging them to say what they think means we’ll have an opportunity to learn what’s important for them to share.

Think About It

In coaching situations, why do you think the research suggests that there must be the feeling of equality between partners?

Bearwald (2011) delved deeper into the fifth principle (dialogue) from Knight. Bearwald stated that coaching is mainly about skill in questioning: “Effective coaching thrives not on quick fixes and ready answers, but on questioning and listening” (2011, p. 74). This idea about questioning being at the heart of coaching relates back to Senge et al. (2000), who remind us that coaching is not about the answers; it’s about the questions. Teachers can build powerful relationships with one another through all aspects of questioning—reflecting, exploring, analyzing, and digging deeper into good practice. Good questions elevate the importance of self-reflection, higher-level thinking, dialogue, and building on people’s strengths (Hunter, 2004). The most meaningful mentoring moments are based on carefully designed questions (Maxwell, 2008). So, how can a coach ensure that his or her questions are effective? The answer to this question may be in creating the well-crafted questions that are so pivotal to ongoing growth during the coaching process. Bearwald (2011) offered the following ideas:

1. *Ask questions about essential issues and behavior*. Effective education involves planning, data analysis, assessment, decision making, instructional leadership, and professional development. Questions that explore these themes, instead of exploring day-to-day minutiae, give insights into how your mentee is evolving. Questions such as, “In what ways did your planning succeed or fail?” or “What were some of your specific contributions to its success or failure?” will provide insights into your mentee’s thinking and progress.
2. *Ask precise and incisive questions*. Questions that prompt probing and higher-level thinking will help you and your mentee identify issues that need to be addressed. The more precise the question, the greater the resulting clarity. “Do you feel that you are part of the team?” is a far less useful inquiry than “In what specific ways are you contributing to the team’s success?” Precise questions lead to clarity, which enables the mentee to identify and own the problem and develop a specific action plan.
3. *Ask questions that generate specific and relevant information*. When your mentee raises concerns, pose questions that lead to more in-depth examination. When a mentee exclaims, “I feel isolated!” you can help him or her explore professional relationships and

communication by asking, “When do you feel most isolated?” or “What opportunities do you have to communicate with colleagues?” or “Who are some of the colleagues with whom you have a positive relationship that you can build on?”

4. *Avoid asking questions that can be answered with yes and no.* Yes-or-no questions are dialogue dead ends. Rather than asking, “Do you think the staff respects you?” try asking, “What are some of the specific qualities for which the staff respects you?” Don’t confuse thought-provoking, open-ended questions with generalized questions that stifle meaningful reflection. Asking the mentee, “What do you want to talk about?” or “How are things going?” rarely provides useful data.
5. *Ask questions that connect the past, present, and future.* Coaching is about growth and development. Throughout the partnership, keep ongoing themes alive by recalling past discussions. Starting where you left off in your last session, as well as refocusing on previously addressed issues and themes, helps your mentee uncover how to apply previously successful approaches to current situations and to refine those approaches. Along the same lines, you serve your mentees well when you lead them to understand how they can use a specific solution or strategy in the future. For example, one of the keys to improved productivity and performance is building systematic approaches to ongoing and repeating tasks. Asking “How can you use the experience of working with colleagues on this project to streamline future endeavors of a similar nature?” guides mentees to examine successful practices and pitfalls and to create a systematic approach to future challenges.
6. *Ask questions that explore values.* Presumably, mentees have qualifications, knowledge, skills, and competencies that provide the basis for their current assignment. Although you need to determine what they know and suggest improvements, learning what’s in their heart is also essential. Asking questions that explore what they believe and what they value helps move the focus from the head to the heart. Asking mentees to explore and articulate their values and beliefs will help you understand how they behave in various situations. When, for example, a mentee complains about not being heard, this provides an opportunity to examine underlying values and beliefs. Asking the mentee, “What is your view of collaboration?” or “In what specific ways would you like to contribute more?” can provide essential clarity on which to build. Evoking meaning from the mentee’s own beliefs is essential to mentoring (Shenkman, 2008).
7. *Occasionally, ask for permission.* When interacting with a mentee over time, it’s important not to take things for granted as the partnership develops into a comfortable and sharing relationship. Take care of the process and the dynamic by checking in with questions that ask permission and check boundaries, such as “Would you like some feedback on what you just shared?” or “Are you comfortable continuing this analysis?” Questions of this nature help maintain a foundation of mutual respect.
8. *Avoid asking why.* It’s wise to avoid asking “Why?” when conversing with the mentee. Even if you are seeking nothing more than broader understanding or a rationale for behavior, asking “Why?” implies that you have already made judgments about the mentee’s actions, which may put him or her on the defensive. Coaches should develop skill in posing questions that elicit explanations without asking “Why?” For example, “Can you tell me more about the thinking process that led to your decision?” and “Help me understand your decision” are more likely to generate useful responses than bluntly asking, “Why did you do that?” (Bearwald, 2011).

Think About It

What questions do you feel are the most powerful to use in a peer coaching situation?

Lessons from Research

Instructional coaching is grounded in current research and clinical knowledge on leadership and schools as professional communities of practice. The positive effects of coaching include the following:

- *Effective coaching encourages collaborative, reflective practice.* Most studies indicate that coaching leads to improvements in instructional capacity. For instance, teachers in coaching relationships apply their learning more deeply, frequently, and consistently than teachers working alone; improve their capacity to reflect; and apply their learning not only to their work with students, but also to their work with each other (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).
- *Effective embedded professional learning promotes positive cultural change.* The conditions, behaviors, and practices required by an effective coaching program can affect the culture of a school or system, thus embedding instructional change within broader efforts to improve school-based culture and conditions (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).
- *A focus on content encourages the use of data analysis to inform practice.* Effective coaching programs respond to particular needs suggested by data, allowing improvement efforts to target issues such as closing achievement gaps, supporting teachers across career stages, and advocating for equity (e.g., through differentiated instruction). A coaching program guided by data helps both create coherence within a school and bridge different levels of the system (Barr, Simmons, & Zarrow, 2003).
- *Coaching promotes the implementation of learning and reciprocal accountability.* The likelihood of using new learning and sharing responsibility rises when colleagues, guided by a coach, work together and hold each other accountable for improved teaching and learning (Barr, Simmons, & Zarrow, 2003; Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003; Western Regional Educational Laboratory, 2000).
- *Coaching supports collective, interconnected leadership across a school system.* An essential feature of coaching is that it uses the relationships among coaches, principals, and teachers to create the conversation that leads to behavioral, pedagogical, and content knowledge change. Effective coaching distributes leadership, supporting the goals of effective principals through the coaches by keeping the focus on teaching and learning. This focus promotes the development of leadership skills, professional learning, and support for teachers, all of which target ways to improve student outcomes (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

Source: West Virginia Department of Education, 2012.

8.5 Case Study in Educational Leadership

Mr. Tordoff has been the principal at Sopris Middle School for 20 years. He chartered the school through a number of changes. He understands that the learning environment is healthy when it is evolving, but he also knows that too much change without the right support can create discord and burn out his teachers, staff, students, and the community. This year had been no different, with some new faculty and staff, changes in the tax base for funding, higher state testing standards in math and science, and updates on federal laws relating to students with special learning needs. He was sensing that his school was on the brink of burn out.

When it was his turn to present to the board the year's accomplishments and his proposals for funding, he took a deep breath and began a proposal like none the board had heard before.

Mr. Tordoff carefully outlined the accomplishments for the year and the areas for improvement. The school's math and science test scores were beyond commendable; therefore, he didn't think his teachers should attend the district-approved professional development for that year. He feared it would insult and demean them. He proposed that the monies allotted for his school's professional development be redirected to his teachers and staff for more appropriate professional development. He was ready for the question that came next: "What would they do with the money?"

Mr. Tordoff responded that earlier in the year, he had held a full school meeting to identify the needs of the teachers, staff, students, and families. From that meeting, teachers and staff created teams to address future needs. A total of 10 teams were formed, ranging from 3–5 persons each. The members of each team outlined what they wanted to do with their own professional development goals for the next year.

One of the most crucial areas identified in that meeting was the desire/need for better skills in working with students who had psychological or mental health challenges. In the past year, the number of students involved in cutting, depression, and other challenges had increased exponentially. Tragically, one student had committed suicide. This event shook the entire school to its core.

One of the teams included Marianna, the school counselor and psychologist; Hiro, a seventh-grade teacher; and Trevor, the special education teacher. They all wanted to see how other professionals in the district and state worked with students with mental health issues. Instead of going to conferences for short-term presentations by individuals who lived outside their community or attending one-day "sit and get" presentations, they wanted to use their money to learn from others in the same situation as theirs. They also wanted to visit other schools, meet regularly to review student progress, read and research the topic, interview mental health professionals, and start a school team devoted to reaching out to students before real trouble could begin.

Mr. Tordoff shared with the board this team's plan:

Site Visits

The team would interview the principal, teachers, and school psychologist or counselor of other schools in their district or surrounding districts to see if they were experiencing the same issues and, if so, how they were addressing the problems. Four schools, each within a two-hour drive, had programs of interest to the team. They planned to make arrangements to visit each school site for a full day. After each school visit, the team would write a summary of what they learned and present it at the faculty or staff meeting. The summary would also be provided to parents through the Web portal or via hard copy for families that did not use the Internet. The team would then take any new questions from faculty, staff, or parents and research and respond.

Practical Research

In addition, the team suggested a three-hour research block, once per week, for the first four months of school devoted to the following:

1. Researching and reviewing strategies for use in school
2. Meeting with mental health professionals to learn through case studies
3. Developing and implementing plans for classroom and school-wide methods to address mental health issues in their school
4. Assessing student needs

5. Developing professional development training to provide to the teachers in their school during the second part of the school year

The team plans to keep detailed notes from each research block and to present their findings to the faculty and staff at monthly meetings. As their knowledge grows, they will develop a plan that includes input from the teachers and staff for how much and what type of skill development is needed in the second half of the year.

Academic Focus

To ensure that academic focus is not lost while they are on these visits or conducting research, they will train two substitute teachers to cover for Trevor and Hiro. Before the team starts making site visits, the substitute teachers would be paid to come into the classrooms and shadow Trevor and Hiro for two days so they could familiarize themselves with the students and the content, as well as each teacher's routine. These same substitute teachers will be used during the research blocks to provide consistency for students.

Marianna also made an agreement with a fellow counselor to be "back up buddies" so that when she is off the campus, another counselor will be just a quick phone call away to step in to support the school.

Training Others

The team wanted to develop specific sessions for their colleagues at the middle school based on the site visits, research, case study work, and feedback from the faculty, staff, students, and parents. Hiro, Marianna, and Trevor offered to provide the professional development as the experts in their school. Their goal is to develop a long-term team that can provide support on mental health needs for all in the school related.

Cost Estimates

The team estimated that the cost for travel to the four schools, substitutes, and collection of some professional materials would be less than the estimated cost of attending national or regional conferences and state-mandated training.

Mr. Tordoff finished his presentation of this team's plans by stating that if the team ran out of funds early, he would step in and work as a substitute for any of the team members to save money.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. This team presented an unusual professional development plan. Using information from the chapter, would you promote this team's plan for professional development? Explain why or why not.
2. Teachers are taught to teach to the learning styles of their students. How does this professional development model show attention to the learning styles of the teachers and psychologist? Describe which learning style(s) would most likely match the team of Marianna, Hiro, and Trevor? Provide facts from their plan to support your answer.
3. Administrators often face paradoxes in education. They see brilliant ideas that stretch our concepts of education but also have to answer to the constraints of an organization that has limited funding and community expectations. How did the team and Mr. Tordoff prepare ahead of time for the potential paradox of the plan presented? If the board asked Mr. Tordoff how this plan met best practices of professional development for adults, what should his answer be?

Summary

One of the most important school reforms of the 21st century is the movement toward peer-to-peer leadership in schools. Even though the focus rests squarely on student learning, teachers in such relationships are surprised to discover their own self-renewal through continued learning. In Chapter 3, we discussed the many differentiated leadership roles for teacher-leaders. In this chapter, we explored more deeply one of the most important of those differentiated roles—that of peer-to-peer leadership. We examined two structures of peer-to-peer leadership: professional learning communities and coaching. We also examined adult-learning theory and learning styles to assist principals and teacher-leaders in collaborating with other adults for the ultimate goal of student learning.

Post-Test

1. The art and science of teaching adults is known as
 - a. pedagogy.
 - b. polygamy.
 - c. androgynous.
 - d. andragogy.
2. Unlike regular teacher meetings, professional learning communities have a sense of
 - a. collaboration.
 - b. community.
 - c. communication.
 - d. professionalism.
3. Principal Hunnan has a “kick-off” welcome party for his faculty and staff for the district’s changes to incentive pay. This gathering fits the step of
 - a. creating structures for collaboration.
 - b. developing critical mass to support implementation.
 - c. sustaining the work.
 - d. clarifying the work for teams to accomplish.
4. Carla finds herself “talking down” to her mentee, Jorge. This practice violates Knight’s (2011) characteristic of
 - a. equality.
 - b. voice.
 - c. choice.
 - d. praxis.

5. Marnie encourages her adult students to spend the last 10 minutes of each class writing a reflection of their learning for that week. This practice relates to which of Gregory and Kuzmich's (2007) characteristics of adult learners?
 - a. Experiential
 - b. Performance centered
 - c. Life applicable
 - d. Self-directed
6. Hord (1997) found that the key for professional learning communities is
 - a. teachers' shared values and vision.
 - b. reflective professional inquiry.
 - c. collaboration promotion.
 - d. focus on student learning.
7. Organizing people into meaningful teams falls within DuFour and DuFour's (2012)
 - a. clarifying the work teams must do.
 - b. understanding the perspective of opposition.
 - c. creating structures for collaboration.
 - d. persevering against setbacks.
8. Francesca and Martin are asked to work together on revising the employee handbook. Their reliance on and responsibility to each other in this process relates to the benefit of coaching defined as
 - a. reciprocal accountability.
 - b. positive cultural change.
 - c. reflective practice.
 - d. data analysis.

Answers

1. d. andragogy. The answer can be found in Section 8.1.
2. b. community. The answer can be found in Section 8.2.
3. b. developing critical mass to support implementation. The answer can be found in Section 8.3.
4. b. voice. The answer can be found in Section 8.4.
5. b. Performance centered. The answer can be found in Section 8.1.
6. d. focus on student learning. The answer can be found in Section 8.2.
7. c. creating structures for collaboration. The answer can be found in Section 8.3.
8. a. reciprocal accountability. The answer can be found in Section 8.4.

Key Ideas

- A professional learning community (PLC) is a powerful school reform effort that has the potential to raise student achievement.
- PLCs need to focus on student learning.
- Supportive leadership is needed for PLCs to be successful.
- Teachers need to agree upon norms of working together.
- Peer-to-peer coaching is best accomplished when there is perceived equality between the partners.
- Those who collaborate with peers in PLCs or in coaching need to be aware of and to employ principles of adult-learning theory.
- When working in peer-to-peer leadership situations, it is wise to understand and use principles of adult-learning theory.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What are some common characteristics of a professional learning community (PLC)?
2. What steps may change leaders use to develop a critical mass for the implementation of PLCs?
3. What are some barriers to PLCs, and how may they be overcome?
4. Name some important principles for successful peer-to-peer coaching. Which do you think is the most important, and why?
5. List some of the principles of adult-learning theory. How do these principles compare to learning theories for children?

Key Terms

andragogy The study of adult-learning processes.

coaching A teaching, training, or development process in which an individual is supported while achieving a specific personal or professional skill or goal.

constructivist leadership A leadership style that addresses the need for sense making, coherence, and seeing educational communities as growth-producing entities

knowledge-for-practice Knowledge originating from outside experts.

knowledge-in-practice Knowledge that is built—often unconsciously—as teachers go about their work.

knowledge-of-practice Deliberate construction of knowledge by communities of teachers drawing on both outside experts and inquiry into daily practice.

learning organization A business or school whose members engage in ongoing study and constant practice, which characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement.

learning style An individual's natural or habitual pattern of acquiring and processing information.

pedagogy The study of children's learning processes.

Additional Resources

Further Readings

DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2012). *The professional leader's guide to professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree

DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. (2011). *Leaders of learning: How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Videos

- Professional learning communities: A conversation with Rick DuFour: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnWDJFxfAKE>
- Professional learning communities: Teachers' Voices: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7YX40bWrCs
- Professional learning community animation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6ZifjWftc8>
- Adult-learning theory: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu_PpkqWJGA

Weblinks

- All Things PLC: <http://annenberginstitute.org/publications?terms=team+development>

Slideshow Presentations

- Adult-learning theory: http://www.slideshare.net/carterfsmith/adult-learning-theories?from_search=1