
Section I

Creating a Professional Learning Community

Welcome to an adventure! If you are a teacher who is interested in developing your classroom repertoire and increasing your students' achievement and motivation, you are in for a treat. Professional learning communities are a vehicle for connecting and improving teacher practice and student outcomes. Formative assessment is an approach to assessment and instruction that increases both students' motivation and achievement. Before we launch into the logistics, the how-to's, and the work involved in professional learning communities, it's important to focus on this promise of adventure. Joining this adventure is why you are here and part of this professional learning community. Welcome!

How is a professional learning community defined? In this workbook, a professional learning community (or PLC) is defined as a group of four to six teachers or administrators who do the following:

- Meet regularly
- Work on shared goals and related tasks between meetings
- Accomplish shared goals

For this workbook, the shared goals will be

- Increasing teacher knowledge and skill in formative assessment
- Increasing student motivation and achievement

Let's begin our discussion by looking at each component of a PLC.

Why should a PLC include only four to six participants? The number of participants in a PLC can be flexible; however, the group needs to be large enough so that group members can contribute a variety of perspectives and experiences and small enough to allow each group member's work to be discussed. If your group includes an even number of participants, colleagues can work in pairs between sessions. Working in pairs has added benefits for the group because it will decrease the number of projects that are discussed at any one time, and it will increase the options available for working on the projects. For example, two teachers can try the same strategy in their classrooms, observe each other, and reflect on the strategy in the context of two different teachers and groups of students.

- **Allow group members to ask questions.** If a group member asks “Why?” or “How do you know that?,” you should not view it as a personal challenge. Questioning is the hallmark of an inquiry approach. There is no learning without wondering.
- **Invite other teachers into the classroom.** Peer observation will give you a second pair of eyes to look at what you are doing. Peer observation will help verify your successes and provide feedback for practices that could be improved. Peer observation should be done in a nonjudgmental fashion.
- **Do not say “I already do that” as a first response.** For example, teachers often say they already share their learning targets with students or give clear feedback. It is a matter of inquiry to discover how students understand learning targets and feedback and how such practices can be improved or tailored to specific student needs. The first response to any topic should be “Let’s see what we can find out about that.”

Creating Effective Agendas

Most meetings will have an agenda similar to the agenda shown in Figure 2. The first meeting agenda (see Sessions 1A and 1B on pp. 12–23) will be different. Each meeting should end with setting the agenda for the next meeting and a “What did I learn today?” wrap-up session.

FIGURE 2

Sample Meeting Agenda

- **Introduction** (The facilitator leads this section.)
 - The facilitator reviews the roles and expectations for the meeting.
 - The facilitator reviews the agenda for the day.
- **Previous Topic Homework** (All group members participate.)
 - Discussion of readings
 - Sharing and reflecting on classroom experiences and reviewing student work (The discussion leader presents information and leads discussion.)
- **New Topic** (The facilitator leads this section.)
 - Introduction of new topic (facilitator responsible)
 - Shared language: Discussion of a new term (facilitator leads, optional except for Session 1A)
 - Identify what to read and reflect on before next meeting
 - Make commitments about classroom activities all will try and who will be responsible for presenting and leading the discussion at the next meeting
 - If pairs are not permanent features of your group, identify who will work with whom for classroom trials
- **Wrap-up** (The facilitator leads this section.)
 - What did I learn?

FIGURE 3
Pre-Assessment Questionnaire

Before you begin your PLC work in formative assessment, circle the choice that best represents how you feel about each of the topics. There are no right or wrong answers. Keep this questionnaire. You will use it for reflection at the end of the sessions.

Using formative assessment in my regular classroom practice			
How much do I know about this?	a lot	a little	not much
How skilled am I at doing this?	very	somewhat	not very
How often do I do this?	routinely	sometimes	not often
How important is this to me?	very	somewhat	not very
How interested am I in learning more about this?	very	somewhat	not very
Setting and sharing goals for students' learning			
How much do I know about this?	a lot	a little	not much
How skilled am I at doing this?	very	somewhat	not very
How often do I do this?	routinely	sometimes	not often
How important is this to me?	very	somewhat	not very
How interested am I in learning more about this?	very	somewhat	not very
Soliciting and listening to students' comments, answers, questions, or problems related to learning goals			
How much do I know about this?	a lot	a little	not much
How skilled am I at doing this?	very	somewhat	not very
How often do I do this?	routinely	sometimes	not often
How important is this to me?	very	somewhat	not very
How interested am I in learning more about this?	very	somewhat	not very
Providing effective feedback on student work			
How much do I know about this?	a lot	a little	not much
How skilled am I at doing this?	very	somewhat	not very
How often do I do this?	routinely	sometimes	not often
How important is this to me?	very	somewhat	not very
How interested am I in learning more about this?	very	somewhat	not very
Asking questions that encourage students to think			
How much do I know about this?	a lot	a little	not much
How skilled am I at doing this?	very	somewhat	not very
How often do I do this?	routinely	sometimes	not often
How important is this to me?	very	somewhat	not very
How interested am I in learning more about this?	very	somewhat	not very

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Handout 3.2

Listening to Students

Ask students to give you information about what they understand and where they get stuck during an assignment. Use this information to affirm students' understanding and clarify misconceptions in a just-in-time fashion (i.e., the student gets the information just when he or she is thinking about it and needs it). Teachers can help students identify their understanding by using the following tools:

- **Happy/sad face or red/green light cards.** Students can have a set of these cards at their desks and use them to indicate their understanding.
- **Multiple-choice questions.** Students can have a set of cards at their desk with the letters A, B, C, and D. The students can hold up cards to allow teachers to check their understanding on multiple-choice items. Follow-up activities can include calling on students to explain the reason for their choice or grouping students to try to “convince” others of their answer. For younger children, a variation of this strategy is to use true/false or yes/no questions and hand-raising or standing by the desk (e.g., “Stand up if you think the cork will float.”)
- **Whiteboards.** Students can use whiteboards to write down their answers.
- **Recipe boxes.** For memory facts like alphabet, color, and math facts, students can keep 3x5 index cards in a recipe box. The recipe box can help students organize their facts into different sections (e.g., fast, slow; easy, medium, hard) and track their understanding (e.g., students can have separate sections for known and unknown facts, and students can see how their knowledge progresses over time as they move the cards). Students own and use the box for their own enrichment. The box should not be used for grading.
- **Most and least clear cards.** Students can use these cards to identify their most and least clear points after a lesson. Collect the cards and use the information to adjust your instruction. You can also call the cards “The sticking point” or “One thing I’m sure I know” or “One thing I’d like to know more about.”
- **Notes organizers or concept maps.** Students can use visual organizers to identify main and subordinate points in a chapter.

Help students give you information about their progress and understanding during a project. Use this information to affirm students' understanding, clarify misconceptions, and keep student work on track. Teachers can track students' understanding by using the following tools:

- **Work planners or logs.** Use work planners or logs with your students and help them track their progress by using a timeframe or counting the number of steps required for a particular report or project.
- **Mini-assessments.** Build in mini-assessments along the way for a large project. For example, for a big report, students can turn in a plan, an outline, or a brief essay based on their thesis. Provide an ungraded review and feedback to help students make the final product better.

Worksheet 6.3
Classroom Connections: Self-Regulation
Introductory Level

1. Select an assignment that requires students to perform. Distribute and use a rubric to score the assignment. When students have finished a draft of the assignment, ask them to assess their own work using the rubric. For each criterion on the rubric, ask students to select which level of quality they think describes their performance and explain why. If the assignment is a writing assignment, students can use highlighters to point out aspects of their text they think match the rubric descriptions. Then, ask students to revise their work based on their own evaluations. Explain what you will do here.

2. Collect evidence on what happens and appropriately document (a) what the students learned and (b) how they used information from their self-evaluation to improve their performance. Evidence from your lesson can be student work samples, observations of student learning behavior (e.g., Are students focused? Are they staying on task?), student reflections or comments, or peer observation. What evidence did you collect, and what did it show?

3. What did you learn about your teaching? What do you still want to know?