

Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF PLC JOURNALS ■

Journals as Frameworks for Professional Learning Communities is designed as a resource for focusing and facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs). Districts and schools have a collection of professional structures such as site leadership teams, district leadership teams, school site councils, grade-level teams, subject matter instructional teams, professional development council, and principal’s roundtable. They meet on a scheduled basis to accomplish an identified scope of work around a shared purpose and/or agreement. These networks, committees, and teams provide the structure and forum for professional work. Each time they meet, they have the opportunity to convene as a PLC. The following structured journals are tools that can focus and facilitate targeted work that could be in the scope of work for a given PLC:

- PLC journal—facilitating school reform
- Action research journal—teacher as researcher
- School portfolios—our school and its benefits
- Professional performance portfolio—highly qualified teacher
- PLC instructional planning—aligning professional development with instructional priorities

Each of these structured journals serves as a framework to focus and inform collaboration and learning and, ultimately, to improve student achievement. Journals are essential tools designed to focus and enhance learning for professional educators as they are utilized to support the work of PLCs. The real power is in the collection of PLCs working as a coherent and dynamic system to support student achievement. As educators and school community members come together, they share in a purpose and pursue deeper and broader understandings of their work. Working in PLCs and using the structured journal process, as outlined in this book, provides opportunities for learning community participants to reflect on and consider research and new practices that will impact student learning.

Senge (1990), who pioneered the concept of the learning community, invited educators to assist school communities in becoming learning organizations where they can encourage and support learning as part of their professional work. If knowledge is the capacity for effective action, educators have to ask how they can facilitate learning communities to support systemic change in their schools—by use of structured *Journals as Frameworks for Professional Learning Communities*.

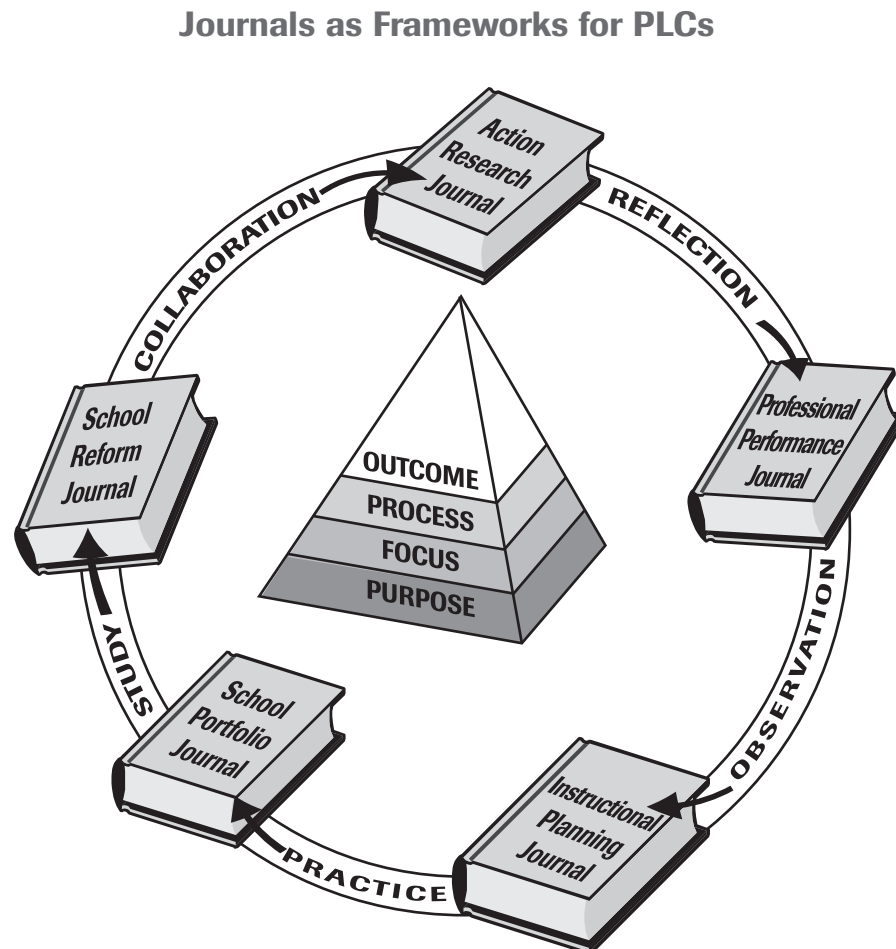
■ HOW TO USE THIS BOOK AND CD

Journals as Frameworks for Professional Learning Communities begins with a chapter on journals and learning communities. This chapter describes the role of structured journals in supporting the process of building and sustaining learning communities. Subsequent chapters offer coaching guides for using the journaling process to facilitate each professional tool for addressing accountability mandates. These later chapters also help in enhancing teachers' repertoire for improved instructional practices through the collaborative and reflective processes structured in the journals for each of the professional activities (School Reform, Action Research, School Portfolio, Professional Performance, and Instructional Planning Journals).

Chapters begin with background on each journal and an explanation of *how* to use the structured journal to facilitate the process. See Figure 0.1 as a graphic representation of how journals can be used as frameworks for PLCs.

Featured in each chapter is a case study/sample journal illustrating the four-phase journaling process (purpose, focus, process, and outcome) that is applied for each journal.

Figure 0.1



The case study constitutes an overview of the journaling process and offers completed journal pages and activities that are drawn from actual experiences with educators and school communities across the nation. The case study reveals how the journaling process is applied to facilitate thoughtful reflection, observation, study, practice, and collaboration. Following the case study is a wrap-up, which summarizes how to use the particular structured journal for the particular framework. Each chapter concludes with a wrap-up and helpful hints for implementation, a list of questions, and sentence stems that provide opportunities for discussion.

A resource section after Chapter 6 offers templates, implementation tools, strategies, and guides designed to assist learning community members in using the structured journal process. These resources are also found on the accompanying CD in addition to an MS Word® document file for each of the PLC Journals. The resource section concludes with a glossary of key terms, a bibliography that lists references and suggested readings on professional development as well as on building learning communities, and finally an index.

Before beginning this book and participating in the journaling, it is helpful to review the four principles on which this approach to professional learning is based. These principles form a backdrop for professional growth and collaboration as a learning community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional Learning Needs to Be Job Embedded—We Learn Through Our Work by Continually Expanding Our Repertoire

Professional development activities are most effective when professionals set their own goals, determine a preferred method for learning, and make decisions about how to best integrate new learnings (Krupp, 1991).

Professionals Learn by Experience and Opportunities to Engage in Reflective Collaborations With Peers

Professionals will engage in learning if they are involved in the process of discovering staff development (and collegial sharing) as a structure for change. This means that professionals will be empowered to build a plan that will support their goals as well as be encouraged to question current assumptions and explore new findings while gaining expertise and being responsible for agreed-upon outcomes (Glasser, 1993).

Collaboration Supports the Restructuring of Thinking and the Emergence of Professional Development

Professional growth is critical to the process of change in our schools (Joyce, 1990). Change is a process of resocialization that takes place over time and requires interaction. Partner meetings, peer with peer interaction, observation, and reflection are the most effective methods for initiating substantive change (Dietz, 1993).

Professionals Learn by Their Interactions With Colleagues, Observations, and New Ideas

The notion that we learn best when we are able to construct our own knowledge (constructivism) is a learning theory that has validity for adult learners. A school system can put this theory to practice and impact student learning by providing a) opportunities for coaching and expert assistance, b) an organizational structure that encourages teacher exchanges and observations, c) and has a performance system that acknowledges the principles of human development (M. G. Brooks & J. Grennon-Brooks, 1987).

■ **THE LEARNING CYCLE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Use the “Learning Cycle” process to guide and deepen your level of engagement for peer-to-peer collaborations in the collection of journals found in this book.

Teachers Constructing Conceptual Understandings

Using a constructivist approach to teacher development allows teachers to experience the type of learning environment they are expected to create for their students. Two tools are helpful in focusing and facilitating this process: the Learning Cycle for Teacher Development and the Learner-Centered Coaching Model, both organized and facilitated by the professional development portfolio process.

The combination of these models allows teacher-learners to

1. clarify the purpose, meaning, and function of their work;
2. focus their learnings based on interests, concerns, and needs;
3. identify their current level of expertise regarding their focus for learning;
4. select an entry point for learning;
5. seek the appropriate coaching (collaboration) activities to support and facilitate their professional growth;
6. continually reflect on and self-assess their learnings;
7. describe, demonstrate, illustrate, or exhibit their refinements and learning outcomes.

This process can be used for beginning teachers and their mentors/coaches, or to support, in general, the professional development program for all teachers and their supervisors.

The Learning Cycle Model

The translation of learning theory into cycles of professional development is the foundation for the Learning Cycle Model. This model describes the pathway for continuous learning as teachers expand and deepen their understanding of the concepts and practices used in their profession. It

helps teachers make informed decisions about appropriate learning plans for desired outcomes. Focusing learning in an effort to build conceptual understanding, the Learning Cycle Model assists teacher-learners in making connections among theories, practices, and their teaching experiences.

Judging by observation, research, and experience, it appears that teachers do pass through continuous learning cycles. These cycles are defined by four basic levels of development:

- **Exploration.** Teacher-learners are initially explorers, inquiring about a specific focus or priority. They are learning the territory, assessing information, observing students, listening to others, reading about theories, discovering new ideas, and exploring options and professional learning opportunities. Working with a mentor or coach, teacher-learners mediate their exploration by providing suggestions about professional development activities, asking questions, and sharing experiences.
- **Organization.** Teacher-learners observe as they (a) label things; (b) practice routines, procedures, and strategies; (c) clarify responses; and (d) recognize pedagogy and learning theories in their teaching environment. Representing what they have been observing and striving for, teacher-learners are prompted to place ideas in a sequence, accommodating and assimilating the data they have collected.
- **Connection.** Teacher-learners, having taken the initial exploration, organization, identification, and classification steps, transfer new ideas from one teaching-learning situation to another. The teacher-learners experiment with taking parts out of a neat, sequential order of lesson plans and modifying, altering, and integrating ideas. Ready to use for designing thematic units and facilitating collaboration regarding new ideas, these professional design plans feature strategies, techniques, and concepts from other lessons and/or content areas.
- **Reflection.** The teacher and the teaching profession are one. Teachers often make informed decisions without conscious thought, intuitively reflecting and responding. Teacher-learners in the Learning Cycle Model are in a reflective action mode while teaching, having learned to listen to the student and respond. What teacher-learners do consciously as connectors, they do naturally as reflectors.

The rate and sequence that teacher-learners move through this cycle is dependent on prior experiences and the motivational energy invested in learning. Learning is dependent on how prior experiences relate to the current set of circumstances. Learning is situational or contextual; therefore, the process, the plan, and the learner needs vary from individual to individual and from situation to situation.

The teachers and their mentors/coaches or colleagues engage in a structured interview (see the next section for model interview questions), which helps identify their current repertoire of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in the context of their priority area for learning. They then

can move to the Learner-Centered Coaching Model, in which the teacher-learner and coach identify the most appropriate type of support and mediation for learning.

The Learner-Centered Coaching Model

Developing teachers need support, an infusion of knowledge, and opportunities to integrate learnings. They are dependent on their work (their colleagues, their students, and themselves) to provide the feedback necessary to become continual learners in their profession. The Learner-Centered Coaching Model is designed to assist these teacher-learners and their mentor/coaches, peers, or supervisors in determining where they are in their learning cycle, as well as what coaching behaviors would be most effective in facilitating continuous learning.

For learning to take place, several factors must be considered. The factors that influence learning are

- psychosocial/emotional development and well-being;
- experiential background—what has been observed and experienced;
- cognitive development—one's level of conceptual understanding and knowledge base.

These factors form a *learner profile* or frame of reference for an individual, profiling the interaction with the teacher's learning environment, which consists of

- the cognitive demands of the learning situation;
- the potential for emotional and/or aesthetic response; and
- the organization or structure for learning.

This *learning environment* provides the context or situation for development.

How the Learner-Centered Coaching Model Works

The Learner-Centered Coaching Model helps the coach (mentor) and teacher-learner collaborate to determine their needs in the professional growth process. The coach and the teacher-learner can then decide on the most effective coaching role or style for building the competence and commitment of the teacher. Using appropriate guidance and support should lead to teacher autonomy and efficacy.

Key contributors to determining where the learner is in terms of his or her learning cycle are

- levels of competence (experience and ability), and
- commitment (enthusiasm and willingness) in regard to the priority area for learning.

These key contributors should be explored in the context of factors that form the learner profile and learning environment. In the context of learning priority, these contributors can be determined by asking questions

aimed at identifying the current knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes of the teacher-learners.

Suggested Interview Questions

The interviewer should supply the individual's selected portfolio priority or focus (represented by the blanks) as he or she poses these questions:

1. Describe how you _____.
2. How do you know if _____ is working?
3. What have you heard about or seen in regard to _____ that you would like to try?
4. What would you like to do, or do differently, as far as _____ is concerned?
5. How do you feel about where you are _____?

After exploring the individual's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, the teacher-learner, together with the coach, can decide where they are in their cycle and develop an appropriate learning plan. The level of direction for developing and implementing the plan can be determined by learning needs, facilitated by the portfolio journal process.

The coaches, peers, and/or supervisors can define their roles in response to the teacher-learner needs. The roles for coaching or guidance are advisor, planner, collaborator, and resource person.

- **Advisor.** This role is compatible with learners who are in the explorer phase of their cycle. They are beginning to discover, identify, observe, and gather experiences that will help them identify a priority for learning. The mentor/coach offers support and direction by making suggestions for discovery and exploration activities. He or she helps the teacher-learner identify and clarify issues that have emerged from experiences and observations.
- **Planner.** This role is compatible with teacher-learners who are moving into the organization phase of their learning cycle. They are starting to focus and identify a specific area for learning. As the teachers learn the terms, techniques, and successful practices related to their identified priority, the mentor/coaches help them clarify their focus and build a plan for organizing and implementing their learnings.
- **Collaborator.** This role is compatible with teacher-learners who are in the connection phase of their learning cycle. They have tried new practices and are at the point where they begin to modify, adapt, and transfer learnings into other areas of their professional practice. The mentor/coach works side by side with the teacher in planning, observing, implementing, and adapting new practices. Often new ideas and suggestions emerge from these two-way, collaborative conversations.
- **Resource person.** This role is compatible with teacher-learners who are at the reflection phase of their learning cycle, that is, in a targeted area of learning. Teacher-learners have internalized new ideas and made decisions to use these new practices while actively

teaching. The coach is a resource, available for support, guidance, or feedback when the teacher calls for it.

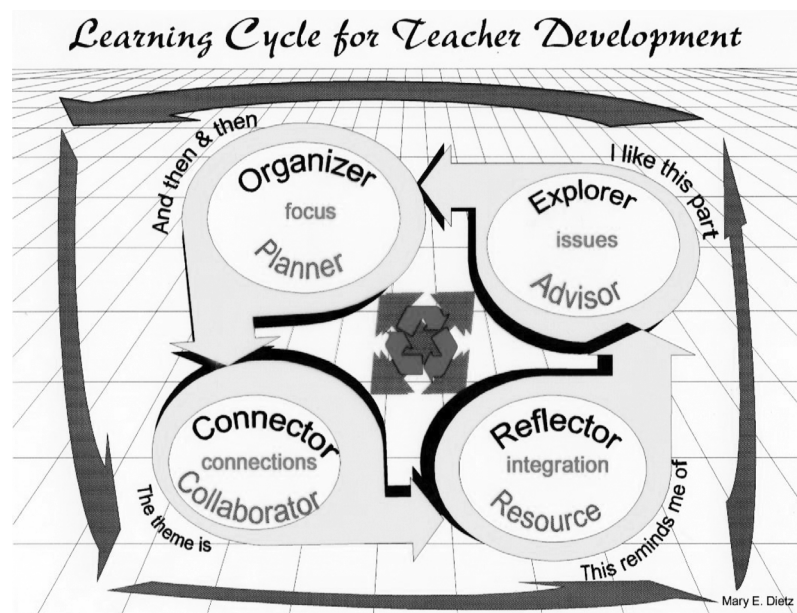
All four roles enlist varying measures of support and direction based on learner needs. Thus the proper amount of psychological support, direction, and knowledge-building experiences necessary to assist the teacher can be identified. Coaches or mentors continually adapt their roles in the learning process to match the needs of the teacher-learners. This methodology facilitates continuous learning and reflection on learnings. Providing closure in the inquiry process as the learner completes the cycle, the Learner-Centered Coaching Model facilitates the professional development portfolio process and identifies a new priority for learning.

Summary of the Learning Cycle

The Learner-Centered Coaching Model has been used successfully with both beginning and veteran teachers. The following benefits have been observed:

- Focused learning—allowing for deeper levels of understanding
- Alignment between the individual teacher's goals and those of the school
- Clear definition of the role of coach, peer, mentor, or supervisor
- Transfer of learning-to-learn principles to the classroom
- Increased impact of professional development activities
- Contribution to building a collegial culture in the school community
- Practicing of collaboration techniques
- Eagerness to learn from experiences
- Integration of learning and assessment models (best practices) in the classroom

Figure 0.2



LEARNING COMMUNITIES READINESS RUBRIC

Knowledge and Abilities

- 1) Leadership is viewed as a behavior and is shared among team members.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 2) Knowledge of the nature of adult learning is understood and applied.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 3) Awareness of constructivist learning theory—that we learn by interacting with people, objects, and ideas—is evidenced in our work.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 4) Understanding of systems, that we are interdependent and part of the evolving big picture, and that we all contribute to our outcomes.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 5) We practice effective communication skills such as active listening to learn, to ask questions, and to understand.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 6) We understand the dynamics of change and consider them in designing and facilitating implementation plans.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 7) We continually expand and refine our knowledge base related to the context of our work.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
- 8) We practice effective facilitation skills to provide structure and enhance the process of focusing and organizing our work.
- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Knowledge and Ability Development Levels

- 16 or less Frustration level
 17 to 23 Awareness and learning
 24 to 27 Partial integration into work environment
 28 to 32 Infused into the work culture

(Lev Vygotsky ZONE of Proximal Development)

Commitments and Attitudes

1) We respect the diversity of others.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

2) There is a willingness to suspend assumptions and avoid jumping to conclusions without first communicating directly.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

3) We honor our history and respect ground rules/norms for working together.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

4) We ask questions to understand the intentionality of actions and comments.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

5) We accept feedback recognizing that learning is a vital contributor to continuous improvement.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

6) We are committed to making learning communities a priority.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

7) We are open minded and pose essential (big idea) questions to stimulate thinking and broaden our scope of possibilities.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

8) We are flexible and accept that certainty is a myth and that in an evolving system there is constant change.

strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
4	3	2	1

Commitment and Attitude Readiness Levels

16 or less Direction to begin process

17 to 23 Coaching and mediation to learn and practice

24 to 27 Support and follow-up to sustain progress

28 to 32 Checkpoints to maintain and continually improve

(Adapted from Situational Leadership: the connection between the leadership and membership in an organization in regard to the ratio of willingness and ability to learn and continually improve)