

# Foreword

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**I**n a few days, I will be leading a workshop on professional learning communities (PLCs) for a school district here along the Maine coast. I find that the pages I have just read—and the pages you are about to read—have admirably “staff developed” me for the task.

Why? Because in this tidy little volume I have found a valuable companion piece to the authors’ earlier *Leading Professional Learning Communities*. You will find here a resource and workbook for those who would both create and strengthen their PLCs. Unlike most resource books, this one offers not only precisely-targeted readings but also an abundance of detailed and inventive activity plans that can take school leaders a long way toward constructing staff development activities low on “sit ’n git” and high on involvement, engagement, and learning. With these plans, staff members will simultaneously engage in their own learning and contribute to the learning of others.

In short, using the tools offered here, leaders of adult learning will model and demonstrate as well as teach what a professional learning community is all about. The activities promise to help embed in schools a culture of continuous professional learning.

But the skeptical part of me, born from years within the schoolhouse, reacts differently to this PLC business. Whoa! Is the professional learning community concept yet another “bandwagon”? During my half century as an educator, I have been around, been aboard (not to mention run over by), and led what seems like a never ending wagon train of new ideas and solutions to the knotty, recurring issues confronting schools: SMSG Mathematics, open education, team teaching, non-graded instruction, total quality management, principal centers. Remember them? Many turned out to be fads and were abandoned by the wayside. Others took root and continue to flourish. But the plethora of bandwagons has left all too many education professionals feeling betrayed, cynical, and wary of what will come down the pike next. No one wants to be run over again.

And now, along come professional learning communities, or PLCs as they are popularly known. Educators have seized upon the tenets of PLCs— or had them inflicted upon them—and have jumped aboard this latest bandwagon.

Or is it a bandwagon?

There are probably as many different conceptions of PLCs as there are advocates and opponents. As I understand the concept, and as the authors so elegantly present it, a PLC is a school culture that enhances teacher quality through the intentional, collegial instruction of all educators for the purpose of promoting student learning. The compelling belief is that profound learning for teachers begets profound learning for students.

Researchers have long sought the holy grail of school characteristics that are positively correlated with exceptional student learning. And they have identified many candidates for consideration, including class size, rigorous curriculum, educational background of teachers, new buildings and facilities, and the leadership of the principal, among others. Yet no characteristic has more influence on pupil learning and has proved, through research, more durable over time than quality of teaching. I suspect it will in the future as well.

A laser-like focus on quality teaching for the purpose of promoting student learning is the hallmark of professional learning communities. Skeptical as I may be, I am confident that *this* “new idea” is not really new at all. Nor will it become an abandoned fad. To be sure, the nomenclature may change over the years, but the links between a culture of professional learning for educators, quality teaching, and profound learning for youngsters will endure. If PLCs constitute the latest bandwagon, I say, “It’s about time.”

So how do we, as a profession, move from the worthy goals driving PLCs to powerful adult and student learning? Here lies the contribution of this book, which focuses in great detail on *how* to pull it off. Here you will find abundant “learning opportunities” for educators, which closely link this incontrovertibly good idea with practice. Providing explicit, vivid activities hospitable to teachers’ and administrators’ learning alike, this book is a kind of user’s guide to professional learning communities. I am confident that a good read will admirably prepare you, as it has me, to lead the way. Enjoy!