Judith Warren Little (1981) offers coaches insight into four specific behaviors that characterize the conditions of collegial work. First, she emphasizes that adults in the school must have frequent, continuous, concrete, and precise talk about their teaching practice. Second, she emphasizes the importance of adults in schools observing each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration and serving as critical friends to each other as they talk about those observations. Third, she describes the importance of teachers collaboratively working on curriculum by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating their curriculum work. Finally, Little discusses that adults in schools must become comfortable sharing their new craft knowledge by teaching each other what they have learned. Each of these activities is key to the work of inquiry-oriented PLCs and requires explicit attention by both the coach and the PLC members.

As a coach, you must realize that early PLC work requires establishing ways of being together that are often quite different than the typical cultural milieu of the school, as the opening quote to this chapter and our discussion of congeniality verses collegiality reminds us. You most likely will run up against challenges that will cause you to reflect, ponder, wonder if you should retreat, and eventually resolve and move forward. Establishing collegiality will rest on not only your ability but also the groups’ ability to create a context that includes ten essential elements. The ten essential elements of healthy PLCs we describe in this chapter will help you determine the extent of collegiality that is present in your group, assess your existing learning culture, and intentionally select and introduce activities that can encourage a shift away from cultural norms that might inhibit collegiality and inquiry-driven PLC work. We illustrate each essential element through the work of Terry Campanella, an educator with many years of teaching experience, as well as a wealth of experience coaching PLCs and organizing PLC work in Broward County, Florida.

**TEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF HEALTHY INQUIRY-ORIENTED PLCs**

**Essential Element #1**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs establish a vision that creates momentum for their work.

According to Thomas Sergiovanni (1994), “Community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort. . . . It requires us to think community, believe in community, and practice community” (p. 95).
From the beginning, your job as an inquiry-oriented PLC coach is to help the group establish and maintain a school improvement vision for the work that they are about to begin. How do you begin this effort when the group doesn’t have a shared understanding of what the process of PLC work is in the first place? As a coach, you will need to help the members of your group create a vision that includes two components—a vision for the process that emphasizes how the community will use inquiry-oriented PLCs to work toward school improvement, and an identification of the school improvement goals or dilemmas that they will share. Both of these components are essential to establishing a collegial context for shared work to unfold.

Let’s get a glimpse of Terry helping her PLC group create a vision for its work by first developing members’ understanding of a PLC. Knowing that PLCs were new to the teachers she was working with, Terry began her first learning community meeting by helping members become familiar with how a PLC works. She selected an article titled “Building Professional Community in Schools” by Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis, and Anthony Bryk (1994) and used a text-based discussion protocol titled “Three Levels of Text” to help the group process the article.

The text-based discussion protocol was created by the NSRF, a group of educators committed to creating networks that support professional development focused on “developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and rethinking leadership in restructuring schools—all in support of increased student achievement” (NSRF, 2007). Terry has found the Web site (http://www.harmonyschool.org/nsrf/default.html) and other NSRF resources invaluable to her work as an inquiry-oriented learning community coach.

Terry had become very skilled in selecting specific protocols to structure these text-based discussions and other PLC activities that used protocols throughout the year. She believes that when the right protocol is selected these protocols focus and deepen the reflection, dialogue, and processing that occurs within and between the group members. They help teachers within the learning community collaboratively construct the knowledge that is needed to begin working together.

Terry began the meeting, “I wanted to find an article that might provide us with an image of what an inquiry-oriented professional learning community might look like and I found this piece that looked like it could help us. It is called ‘Building Professional Community in Schools.’”

Terry had wrestled with whether she should have the seven group members read the article ahead of time or if she should devote time during the meeting to read the article. She believed it would take about fifteen minutes for the group to read this article and decided that she would have them read the article at the meeting so everyone would be prepared.

Before they began reading, she also distributed the “Three Levels of Text” protocol to each teacher. She noted that the protocol would help them focus their reading and that part of the protocol asked the members...
to identify passages in the text as they read that they believed had important implications for defining the PLC's work. She then gave the group about fifteen minutes to read the article.

Once they finished reading, Terry reviewed the protocol instructions. The group would sit in a circle and engage in "rounds." A round consisted of group members taking turns sharing one of their highlighted excerpts from the article and reflecting on what that excerpt meant to them, followed by the group responding (for a total of up to two minutes) to what has been said. Sandra was the first volunteer. Sandra began her three minutes of reflection by reading the passage she had selected and sharing how she interpreted the passage, as well as how her interpretations connected and disconnected with her own past professional development activities. She then described the implications she believed the passage had for defining the PLC's work. After listening carefully, the group spent two minutes responding to her reflection. This process continued until all group members had shared using the same processing format. As the group was sharing, Terry charted the key ideas of the discussion on poster paper. This process continued until all seven group members had a chance to share.

Once everyone in the group had shared, the group took about five minutes to synthesize what they had learned, and then they debriefed the protocol process.

This activity allowed the group to create some key understandings about PLCs through focused dialogue. The debriefing process also allowed the group to critique the protocol process. By the time they had finished the text-based discussion, they had begun to chip away at answering the following questions: "What is an inquiry-oriented professional learning community?" "What are some of the structures, practices, and activities of inquiry-oriented learning communities?" And "Why should we create inquiry-oriented learning communities in our school?"

During each of the following meetings, Terry worked to deepen the group's answers to these questions. Terry realized that revisiting the PLC's goals and deepening members' understanding of the PLC work was critical if she was truly going to help them shift their work toward the inquiry-orientation she believed could lead to school improvement. A few weeks later Terry led the group in another protocol titled, "Chalk Talk." This protocol focused on all group members reflecting on their experiences and understanding of a committee, a PLC, and traditional professional development. As the protocol name, "Chalk Talk," alludes to, the "conversation" was not oral. The "chalk talk" was carried out in silence by each group member writing comments on a blackboard (in older schools), a whiteboard, or a big piece of chart paper hung on the wall. An example of the types of distinctions the group made between committee work and PLC work that were generated through Terry's "Chalk Talk" appear in Figure 2.1.
Terry realized how important it was for her PLC members to generate a clear distinction between the activities of PLCs and committee work. She knew from experience that creating this understanding is often what sets successful groups apart from less successful groups. By engaging in the “Chalk Talk,” they created a shared vision for collegial interaction and new ways of learning together within community.

Although developing a strong understanding of what an inquiry-oriented PLC does is essential, Terry’s experiences coaching throughout the school year remind us that creating an understanding of PLCs is not enough to generate sustained commitment to teacher learning and school improvement. The second aspect of vision development requires creating a set of shared school improvement goals for the group’s collective work. Terry has watched many PLCs focus on the development of the learning community roles, rituals, and responsibilities without delineating a clear, shared vision for how their work will connect to school improvement. Without a strong vision for school improvement, PLCs often lost steam over time and members started questioning, “What are we meeting about?” To avoid this, Terry dedicates time to creating a shared focus at another one of the early PLC meetings.
Terry began the meeting, “Today’s goal is to generate a shared vision for our PLC work by identifying some areas of school improvement that can direct our work.”

At the last meeting, the group had collectively identified resources that could help them with today’s conversation. As a result, Terry had invited the principal, curriculum resource teacher (CRT), and the exceptional student education (ESE) teacher to the meeting to share student data that the group believed would be important to defining its work.

Terry asked each guest to share the data and emerging questions that he or she had about the school as the group looked at the data. As the group listened, the members noted the kinds of questions that were emerging and noted their own thoughts related to the data presented. Once each of the guests had shared, the group added their own insights to the list of wonderings based on their own classroom experiences. Terry took copious notes along the way, recording both the data and the group’s emerging questions.

After hearing all the presenters and reviewing the data, Terry’s group decided that the overarching question that would structure their PLC work would be, “How can we use differentiated instruction within our newly established inclusive classrooms to target and document the learning of our bottom quartile students?”

This question generated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm as it attended to the wonderings that emerged during the principal’s, CRT’s, and ESE teacher’s presentations, as well as the felt difficulties or wonderings of the group members. The group had now identified a shared question that they felt passionate about collectively exploring during the school year. As a result, Terry facilitated a variety of activities that helped the members of her PLC explore this wondering. For example, members of the group engaged in a book study of differentiated instruction, used NSRF protocols to examine student work, and engaged in a variety of action research studies targeted at better understanding the needs of these bottom quartile students. By building the knowledge of what PLCs are and determining a shared focus for her PLC’s work, Terry was able to cultivate a vision for PLC work, as well as create the momentum for focused inquiry around a shared goal for school improvement.

**Essential Element #2**

**Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs build trust among group members.**

Educational scholars have long noted the critical importance of building trust among the adults within the school building and the correlation between trusting relationships and successful school improvement efforts. For example, Bryk and Schneider (2002) state:
Relational trust does not directly affect student learning. Rather, trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological, that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain the kinds of activities necessary to affect productivity improvements. (p. 116)

Michael Fullan (1999) also notes, “The quality of relationships is central to success [of school improvement efforts]. Success is only possible if organizational members develop trust and compassion for each other” (p. 37). As a result, building trust within the group becomes a critical component of a PLC coach’s work.

The degree of trust the group members feel for each other will influence the depth of their collaborative inquiry work. It is important to note that the amount of trust individual group members have for each other and for you as their coach is directly related to your school’s existing culture. Therefore, we cannot overemphasize the importance of understanding your school’s existing culture as you ascertain how much PLC time you wish to spend on trust-building activities, and which type of trust-building activities would be most productive for your group. For example, if you are coaching in an underresourced school or an environment that is unforgiving, and/or working under high-stakes accountability pressures, the teachers in your group may feel less trusting and need more time to develop a sense of safety and build relationships. As a result, the coach will need to be sensitive to the amount of time the group needs to create congenial relationships and safety, and even to boost morale. In other schools, where morale is high and teachers are used to working collaboratively, PLCs will position themselves more quickly to begin the collegial inquiry work.

Terry offers some insights into how you can explicitly develop a more trusting and safe environment. One way that Terry sets the stage for trust to develop is by collaboratively establishing norms or ground rules for the group. She once again draws on the NSRF work by selecting a protocol to guide one of her group’s early PLC meetings. The protocol is titled “Forming Ground Rules.” Terry believes that norms are guidelines that establish parameters for the members’ behavior. These guidelines can create a safe space for the group members to make themselves professionally vulnerable. In the following description of the group’s “Forming Ground Rules” meeting, Terry leads the group in setting norms.

Terry began by explaining to her PLC the need for norms and how norms can support their collegial work together. To provide an example for the group, Terry shared that one example of a norm might be, “to start and end our meetings when we say we will.” Next, Terry asked her group members to take a few minutes to respond to the question, “What conditions do I need to do my best learning in this group?”

After five minutes devoted to group members silently making an individual list, Terry asked each participant to name one thing from his or her
Establishing and Maintaining a Healthy Inquiry-Oriented PLC

list, going around in a circle, with no repeats. They were to complete as many circuits as necessary to exhaust all group rules individuals had put on their list. As group members shared responses, such as, “We need to respect each other,” “Confidentiality is important,” “We need to be willing to take risks,” “It is important to respect discomfort and ambiguity as these feelings can lead to growth,” and “We must not only allow but embrace mistakes,” Terry listed all responses on chart paper, asking for clarification when needed. When the group was finished, Terry led the group in looking at the list as a whole, combining some items on the list and asking if everyone could abide by the final list of ground rules. She noted that if anyone disliked or didn’t want to comply with one of them, they should discuss it and make a decision to keep it on the list with a notation of objection, remove it, or try it for a specified amount of time and check it again. All group members felt comfortable with the list of ground rules they had developed.

Terry saved the piece of chart paper stating the group’s norms and brought that to each subsequent PLC meeting that was held throughout the duration of the school year. The chart paper was hung in the front of the room each time the PLC met.

These norms established by her group became a living document that would be revised as her group worked together. Terry made sure that the norms were reviewed at the beginning of each meeting and often drew on resources from the NSRF Web site for norm-setting protocols and advice.

Although Terry was committed to making public the group’s norms for interacting with each other, she also was cognizant that whether a group became a safe place for collaboration would rest on the integrity, responsibility, and professionalism of each group member. As a coach, Terry made sure to keep a pulse on the level of integrity, responsibility, and professionalism that existed within her group and when she detected that work needed to be done to ensure the health of the PLC she would return the group to its norms.

Beyond establishing norms, Terry also led the PLC toward establishing deeper trust in their colleagues by making their concerns about the learning community process public. One excellent protocol for helping PLC members voice and discuss concerns is the NSRF’s “Fears and Hopes Activity.”

Following this protocol, Terry began a PLC meeting with, “What I would like you to do now is independently jot down two things—your greatest fear of participating in our PLC work this year as well as your greatest hope for participating in our PLC work this year.”

After about five minutes, she asked group members to share their hopes and fears, and as they shared she generated a collective list of those hopes and fears on the chart for the group to review. Upon completing the list of group hopes and fears, Terry debriefed the activity by asking if members noticed anything surprising. She also asked them what they felt
was the impact of expressing negative thoughts, as well as what policies and practices would be needed to reach their hoped-for outcomes.

By using this protocol and engaging in this dialogue, the group members identified how they wanted their group to be. As a coach, you will need to be open to all responses and seek input as to how the group might respond to these concerns. This type of checking in can be useful throughout the year as new hopes and fears are encountered.

Another exercise that Terry uses to promote trust-building is the “Community Agreements” protocol, also developed by NSRE. The community agreement establishes four principles that are critical to collegial study group work. These principles include show up and choose to be present, pay attention to heart and meaning, tell the truth without blame or judgment, and be open to the outcome but not attached to the outcome. These principles set the stage for both congeniality and collegiality. Terry introduces these community agreements as text to discuss by using a think/pair/share activity to help the group process these agreements.

She begins the process by first asking each participant to jot down one image of what each agreement would look like in action. Next, Terry pairs the participants and asks them to share their images with their partner. Finally, each pair reports out one image for each of the four agreements. At the end of the session, Terry would ask the group to discuss the degree to which these agreements connected to the work that they envisioned doing together. By integrating activities intended to build trust among PLC members and monitoring the pulse of trust within the group, Terry can move the group one step closer to engaging in inquiry-oriented PLC work.

**Essential Element #3**

**Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs pay attention to the ways power can influence group dynamics.**

Defining, analyzing, and building power is a vital part of coaching in an inquiry-oriented PLC. Power is both dynamic and multidimensional. Power can get good work done or keep good work from getting done. Power is influenced by context, circumstance, and interest. As a coach, you will need to be cognizant of the way that power is used within your PLC to accomplish the vision your group has set.

One way to create a collegial professional learning environment is to make sure that the study group members understand the use and misuse of power. According to Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor (1995), five kinds of power exist. *Positional power* occurs when a person has a more powerful position than the other group members. For example, when a principal
becomes a member of the PLC, members of the group might feel threatened due to the evaluative power a principal holds over his or her teachers. This does not necessarily mean that the principal should not join the group. However, group participants, the principal, and the coach need to be cognizant of the influence of a member with positional power. Within learning communities, positional power should not be used as the tipping point for decision making as the goal of the PLC is to develop shared understanding and equalize participant voices so that all members are heard and understood.

Assigned power occurs when the group assigns a person within the group a particular role. For example, as a coach, your position offers you assigned power and as a result you must constantly self-assess your own use of power. Knowledge power occurs when a group member has more specialized knowledge and experience in an area the group is exploring. For example, if the reading coach is a member of the group and the group has decided on a schoolwide reading focus, the reading coach would typically possess knowledge power within the group. Members who possess knowledge power are uniquely positioned to deepen the PLC’s work. However, the coach, as well as the group members who possess that knowledge power, must self-monitor their participation, embrace members’ questions, and include the concerns of others in the group.

Another influential form of power that can emerge within PLCs is personal power. Personal power results from the skills and qualities an individual possesses that makes others in the group look to this person as a leader. Recognizing and involving the teachers within the group who possess this type of power helps the coach jump-start the development of trust and deepen the group’s work. There are always a few teachers who are the pioneers of innovation and more easily embrace the learning community work. By developing these members as cofacilitators and teacher-leaders you can begin distributing the PLC’s facilitation across the group membership.

The most potentially divisive and unproductive form of power that sometimes emerges within a PLC is factional power. Factional power occurs when several people within the group act together to influence or dominate the group process. As indicated, power can be expressed in forms ranging from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation.

Since the goal of PLC work is to bring all members along within an inquiry community rather than leave a portion of the group behind, your job as a coach is to help group members understand these sources of power. Throughout the year, Terry encouraged the individual group members to talk about power openly, and self-assess how the power structure influenced the group and how power could be more evenly shared within the group to enhance the group’s effectiveness.

One of the exercises Terry led her group through focused on initiating reflection about power by focusing on personal assumptions and experiences. In this exercise, Terry encouraged the PLC participants to identify their
own sources of power as well as challenges groups can face as a result of power.

Terry began, "This activity introduces the concept of power and helps us recognize our own power and potential." She handed out a copy of the different sources of power (Figure 2.2) and asked the group to read the handout. She asked them to think about their personal and professional experiences with these various types of power while reading and identify examples of each type of power with which they were personally familiar. She also asked them to note the positive (strengths) and negative (limitations) impact that different kinds of power could have on learning community work.

Once the group had completed the sources of power exercise, Terry continued the exploration of power by breaking the group up into triads and giving each group a large sheet of paper and markers. Working in groups of three, on one side of the paper they drew situations that made

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**Figure 2.2 Types of Power Handout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Power</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positional power occurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>when a person has a more</td>
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<td>powerful position than the</td>
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<tr>
<td>other group members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assigned power occurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>when the group assigns a</td>
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<tr>
<td>person within the study</td>
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<tr>
<td>group a particular role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge power occurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>when a group member has</td>
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<tr>
<td>more specialized knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>and experience in an area</td>
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<tr>
<td>the group is exploring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal power results from</td>
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<td>the skills and qualities an</td>
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<td>individual possesses that</td>
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<tr>
<td>makes others in the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>look to this person as a</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>leader.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Factional power occurs</td>
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<td>when several people within</td>
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<td>the group act together to</td>
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<td>influence or dominate the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>group process.</td>
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</table>
them feel powerful within the school and on the other side of the paper they drew situations that made them feel powerless.

Once each group had finished, they presented their posters to the rest of the group. Terry took notes about the themes that were emerging as the groups presented. After all the groups had presented, Terry pointed out the words the members used to describe experiences that illustrated discomfort with power. Group members responded with words such as disrespect, putdowns, being ignored, denied opportunities, and isolation. She then highlighted the words the members used to describe experiences where they felt empowerment. Group members often noted words such as overcoming fear, being recognized by others, creatively solving a problem, caring for or helping others, and pushing myself to take action. In an effort to summarize their collective wisdom about power, group members reflected on how the collegial PLC could help them feel more empowered to make school improvement, as well as what types of barriers they would need to avoid in order to engage in inquiry-oriented PLC work together.

**Essential Element #4**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs understand and embrace collaboration.

Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor (1995) suggest that when it comes to collaboration “one + one + one + one = five” (p. 26). This unconventional mathematics is what happens when a group of teachers work together toward a common objective. When people work together they create synergy that helps move the group toward fulfilling the shared purpose. To date, teachers’ work has been fairly autonomous, as classroom teachers have typically worked independently in their individual classrooms. Cushman (1999) describes the importance of collaboration to creating a culture of inquiry:

Cultures of inquiry depend on adults and students collaborating in teams and networks, and they set up critically reflective processes and norms that guide them. These structures—grade-level or cross-grade teams, critical friends groups, school-university teams, leadership teams—include professional interactions among teachers, but also involve other people important to the work, inside or outside the school and community. To support this characteristic, the larger system, too, must replace its hierarchy with multiple networks of this sort.

A part of the coach’s responsibility is to help create this mind-set toward more collaborative learning. By helping teachers see that working
together yields greater results than working alone, the PLC can begin to create a culture of collaboration.

The goal of the inquiry-oriented PLC is to create a collaborative learning space within the school that focuses on teacher and student learning. Throughout the year, the coach must identify ways to inspire group members to work as a team, as well as encourage them to assume leadership roles within the group. As the group develops, the coach needs to include all group members in critically evaluating their progress toward effectively creating a collaborative learning space.

There are many ways to help groups reflect on the power of teamwork. The NSRF Web site offers many team-building activities for coaches to select from. One way that Terry helped her PLC members understand the importance of collaboration is by sharing the tale of the blind man and the elephant used by Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, and Richert (1996) to highlight why collaboration leads to more learning than isolation. During a portion of the PLC meeting, Terry read aloud:

Each of the men tries to describe the elephant by approaching it from a different perspective. One climbs a ladder, touches the elephant’s trunk, and says, “An elephant is long, thin, and round like a rope.” Another touches the elephant’s side and says, “An elephant is hard, smooth, and flat like a wall.” Still another touches the elephant’s leg and says, “An elephant is round, firm, and tall like a tree.” All of them are correct in their assumptions, and yet none of them understands the elephant. If they were to combine their descriptions, they might have a sense of the features of the elephant; yet they would still be lacking the gestalt, the wholeness of the elephant.

After sharing the tale with the group, Terry posed the following questions: (1) How does the tale metaphorically connect to PLCs?, (2) Why is inquiry more powerful when done within a community?, (3) How can we be sure not to function like the blind men within our own PLC?, and (4) How will collaboration make our work more powerful?

One form of collaboration that Terry has consistently noticed requires more support and encouragement is the movement to peer observation. Kruse et al. (1994) note that deprivatization of practice is key to collaboration. Based on Terry’s experience, teachers who collaborate, share, observe, and discuss each other’s teaching methods and philosophies demonstrate one of the deepest forms of collaboration. Terry has learned that peer observation requires the coach to help with both the logistics of arranging the observation as well as helping teachers feel comfortable taking the observation risk. Of course, logistical nightmares exist in finding time to observe a colleague in the classroom. However, resolving logistical barriers is probably the easier piece of the equation to solve. Teachers must feel comfortable sharing a practice if they are going to collectively inquire into that practice.
Preparing teachers for peer observation requires beginning the work within a relationship that they perceive as safe.

Helping teachers understand the importance of this type of collaboration as well as giving them tools that can help them feel comfortable exploring each other's practice is essential coaching work. Terry used the NSRF Web site to find protocols that provide structures that support peer observation targeted at learning from school and classroom visits. Some of these protocols include the "Collaborative Ghost Walk," "First Classroom Visits," "Pre-Conference Protocol," "Observing Students at Work," and "Peer Observation."

During one of the PLC meetings early in the year, Terry introduced eight different observation protocols to the group. She began, "At our last meeting we discussed the importance of peer observation to establishing collegiality within our group. Today I brought eight different protocols that can help us become more comfortable with observing each other and our context."

Terry asked the members to pair up and she gave each of the six pairs one of the eight protocols. She kept one for herself and saved the last protocol for another day.

Next, she asked each pair to take twelve minutes to read through the protocol and be prepared to share the purpose and process of the protocol with the other group members. She also asked them to identify the strengths as well as the barriers that might inhibit the use of this protocol using the graphic organizer found in Figure 2.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Protocol</th>
<th>When would I use this protocol? For what purpose?</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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SOURCE: Terry Campanella, adapted from the work of Debra Smith and Fern Tavalin.
After reading, discussing, and reflecting on the protocol, the pair shared its protocol with the larger group. Each of the PLC members had now become familiar with the protocols to support peer observation. Additionally, each PLC member understood how the protocols differed and how they needed to be purposefully selected for a particular use. Terry asked, “Which of these activities are any of you willing to try between now and the next meeting?”

After a brief discussion, one of the members agreed to pilot a protocol she believed would help her answer a specific question that she had about her bottom quartile students. She identified a colleague to work with and agreed to share with the group the results during the next PLC meeting. Terry also volunteered to pilot one of the protocols with one of the members in her PLC observing her teaching mathematics, an area that Terry believed she was not meeting the needs of her bottom quartile students.

As a coach, you can help other group members feel more comfortable with peer observation and collaboration by sharing these protocols at meetings, as well as modeling the use of these protocols within your own classroom. Peer observation is one of the ultimate acts of collaboration, as it requires teachers to make their actual teaching practice public to their colleagues and open to scrutiny. PLCs that regularly embrace collaboration such as peer observation are typically highly sophisticated groups who have developed trust in each other and an understanding of collective inquiry into a shared goal.

### Essential Element #5

Health inquiry-oriented PLCs encourage, recognize, and appreciate diversity within the group.

Just like the lesson from the blind men and the elephant tale, individual members of a PLC come with diverse values, skills, knowledge, beliefs, philosophies, experiences, expertise, and perspectives. It is this type of diversity that generates energy for change, as well as the disequilibrium necessary for learning (Jacobs, 2007; Lambert et al., 1996). PLC coaches recognize that membership diversity is something to both celebrate and plan for.

Diversity is important to a PLC’s work on multiple levels. First, PLCs function best when comprised of people with different perspectives, knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This diverse group membership is necessary for the group to prompt each member’s thinking, question each other’s assumptions, and engage in critical friendship. Without diversity, study groups can become entrenched in groupthink, which can become highly unproductive and may just perpetuate the status quo rather than move the group forward. Groupthink often results in hasty decisions,
where individual doubts are set aside and ideas are not questioned. Coaches can help group members recognize the importance of diverse group membership to their learning, as well as the importance of allowing members both inside and outside of the group to disrupt the status quo. They acknowledge the importance of both insider and outsider knowledge:

Cultures of inquiry are highly strategic and purposeful about seeking and using outside information, resources, expertise, and collaborations. Ideas, information, and people constantly move across their boundaries with the “outside.” The larger system must provide access to information and support, networks for sharing and building knowledge, and non-hierarchical, ongoing partnerships, interactions, and critical friendships. (Cushman, 1999)

Coaches seek to make sure that diverse voices are heard within the group and that diverse perspectives are garnered from outside sources when the group lacks diverse knowledge and perspective.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of diverse knowledge bases to a PLC’s learning, coaches can help members recognize the diverse ways that they approach learning. Effective PLC coaches, like Terry, not only consider the diverse ways participants approach learning, they also consider the diverse expertise of the group members and identify ways to best use the internal expertise. Good coaches identify critical junctures where bringing external expertise to the group will benefit teacher learning and the direction of the group’s work. For example, the coach needs to systematically plan how the group will gain access to knowledge related to the school achieving the group’s vision for improvement. This may mean that teachers read research-based articles from educational journals, observe teachers in other schools, visit a specialist, or listen to a guest speaker from the district who has strong knowledge in a particular area.

Each week, Terry works with the group members to identify when the professional knowledge found inside the group is not enough to maximize the group’s learning and, when needed, Terry secures help from external sources. The goal of bringing in external knowledge is not to value external knowledge over internal knowledge but rather to provide opportunities for developing diverse perspective taking that allows the members to critically examine their own teaching practice. A healthy inquiry-oriented PLC is strengthened by the presence of a diverse set of perspectives brought to the group and inquired into through professional dialogue.

**Essential Element #6**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs promote the development of critical friends.
According to the Society for Organizational Learning (Senge, 2007), developing capabilities for real conversation is not easy.

Most of what passes for conversation in contemporary society is more like a Ping-Pong game than true talking and thinking together. Each individual tosses his or her view at the other. Each then responds. Often, we are preparing our response before we have even heard the other person’s view. In effect, we are “taking our shot” before we have even received the other’s ball. “Learningful” conversations require individuals capable of reflecting on their own thinking.

The challenge for coaches is figuring out how to make these kinds of “learningful” conversations happen within their PLC. Meaningful and practice-changing PLC work requires teachers to communicate with each other in ways that promote collegiality and result in teacher learning. The type of communication is referred to as critical friendship. The critical in critical friends means engaging in important, key, and necessary talk that carefully confronts and inquires into the issues being explored. This type of friendship is essential within an inquiry-oriented PLC. Trust is a prerequisite for this movement toward becoming critical friends. Once a foundation of trust is built, teachers can solicit and provide feedback that generates reflective thinking.

One way that Terry develops critical friends communication skills is by using a protocol developed by NSRF titled “Feedback Nightmares.” Terry stated at a PLC meeting, “You have five to ten minutes to write about a bad experience you have had receiving feedback.” Once the group had finished, Terry paired the participants to share their writing and generate a list of five dos and don’ts about giving and receiving feedback.

After completing the work in pairs, Terry asked the pairs to share with the larger group the list that they compiled and add any new ideas to the group’s norms. Once they had all shared, Terry debriefed the activity by asking the group to discuss the value of this activity.

After exploring the group’s experiences receiving feedback, Terry introduced the idea of “learningful communication” as providing each other with constructive warm and cool feedback when working together. She began, “Constructive feedback is a critical component of collaboration that moves people beyond congeniality to embrace collegiality. Warm feedback refers to supportive and appreciative statements about the work presented. Cool feedback refers to offering different ways to think about the work presented or raising questions.”

Terry had found that if her group had not worked together frequently and the teachers in her school were not used to giving each other warm and cool feedback on their work, she needed to do feedback work with the group. Given that conversation is the heart of the PLC’s work and the vehicle
that drives changes in teacher practice, Terry attends to the nature of the conversation within the PLC as she cultivates critical friendship. She often incorporates two tools described on the NSRF Web site, “Feedback Principles” and “Feedback Carousel,” to deepen each member’s ability to engage in critical friendship. Feedback principles contain guidelines for giving feedback that include such statements as, “Give feedback with care,” “Let the recipient invite it,” “Be specific,” and “Avoid evaluative judgments.” Feedback principles also include guidelines for receiving feedback that include statements such as “Specify the behavior about which you want feedback,” “Clarify your understanding of the feedback,” and “Take time to sort out what you heard.” By reviewing this document from time to time with her PLC group members, Terry keeps the notion of critical friendship fresh in their minds as they engage in PLC work together.

The “Feedback Carousel” involves all members of the PLC creating a display on a piece of chart paper depicting the significant elements of their plan for teaching an upcoming lesson, for action research, or for some other plan for work related to the PLC vision they will be doing in their classroom during the upcoming week. The coach encourages the use of color and creativity in the creation of the display. Next to each display, the coach hangs another piece of chart paper that is divided into four quadrants, each designated for a particular purpose—one for clarifying questions, one for probing questions, one for recommendations, and one for resources that might be helpful. The coach distributes a pack of small Post-it notes to every group member and asks them to rotate through as many plans as possible in an allotted time period, writing feedback on the Post-its and placing the feedback in the appropriate quadrant. The group then debriefs the entire process.

Terry believes this critical friendship will contribute to the degree to which the members inquire, as well as the sophistication of the learning achieved. She considers many feedback tools and activities such as the ones described above, in order to create the relationships that can move the conversations of her PLC group members from congenial to collegial, which allows the inquiry to deepen and the school improvement to occur.

**Essential Element #7**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs hold the group accountable for and document learning.

As a PLC coach, one of your roles will be to document the group’s collective work, support individual teachers in the documentation of their
own work, and maintain the pulse of the health of the group itself. Documentation is essential as the data allows the members and coach to share their work with those outside of the PLC. By documenting success in terms of changes for students, you will be better positioned to acquire outside funds, compete for scarce internal resources, and perhaps even influence education policy. One of the best ways to document an inquiry-oriented PLC’s work is through engaging in action research. This book describes in detail the way that coaches can help groups of teachers collaborate around the action research process. As will be demonstrated, the action research process requires the systematic and intentional documentation of teacher and student learning.

In addition to the action research process, another way Terry documents participation at PLC meetings is to ask the members to provide feedback at the end of a meeting using a reflection sheet. The sheet asks: (1) To what degree do you believe the PLC is improving teaching and learning? (2) To what degree did you feel involved in the day’s session? (3) What will you take back to your classroom from today’s session? And (4) What could have helped you learn better today? This data informs Terry’s planning for the next group meeting and provides a trail of teacher learning from one session to the next. Another tool Terry uses for gaining quick feedback at the end of a study group session is the “Aha’s” and “questions” response sheet (Figure 2.4). Group members jot down questions that arise for them based on the meeting, as well as “Aha” moments that occurred during the meeting. This sheet documents what new insights and new questions the group members are generating as a result of their work.

Given that ongoing assessment of the PLC’s progress is essential, another tool Terry often uses to capture the group’s progress is the “Vessel Activity.” In this activity, the group or each individual within the group is asked to select a vessel that best represents the nature of the PLC progress being made. Some might pick a tugboat if they feel like they are dragging along, others might feel like they are on a cruise ship with all the resources they need close at hand, and still others may feel like they are paddling a kayak but that the journey is worth it.

Whatever vessel they metaphorically connect with at that time, they explain why they selected the vessel and place the vessel on a long piece of chart paper that represents a metaphorical river. Terry then asks the group to write on the river what barriers and facilitators exist that are influencing how the vessel is moving, as well as what participants have individually and collectively learned along the way. Sometimes this is done on sticky notes that are added to the river and boat. By having insight into the group’s barriers and facilitators, you can make important decisions that can remove some of these inhibitors to inquiry. This activity provides your PLC the opportunity to reflect on its lived experiences and
Figure 2.5  River Activity Example I

Figure 2.6  River Activity Example II
provide an honest picture of members’ work as they progress through the year. Two rivers constructed by different PLCs Terry facilitated appear in Figures 2.5 and 2.6.

**Essential Element #8**

**Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs understand change and acknowledge the discomfort it may bring to some PLC members.**

Coaches must be aware that change will cause some PLC members a great deal of discomfort. Change is full of uncertainty. “Change is a process of coming to grips with new personal meaning, and so it is a learning process” (Fullan & Miles, 1995, p. 408). One activity Terry has used to help her PLC members explore feelings about change is engaging in a book study using the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson (1998).

*Who Moved My Cheese?* is a metaphorical story of four characters who live in a maze and look for cheese to nourish them and make them happy. Two of the characters are mice named Sniff and Scurry and two are “little-people” the size of mice, who look and act a lot like people. Their names are Hem and Haw. The reactions of these characters vary from quick adjustment to change to waiting for the situation to change by itself to suit their needs. This story is about adjusting attitudes toward change in life, especially at work. Change occurs whether or not a person is ready, but the author affirms that it can be positive. The overarching principles illustrated in the book are to anticipate change, let go of the old, and act as if you were not afraid.

Terry began her early learning community work by having her group read *Who Moved My Cheese?* before coming to the first PLC meeting. After reading the text, the group engaged in discussion around the following prompts:

- Describe the four characters’ personalities or social styles.
- What does the cheese represent?
- What does the maze represent?
- What does the book say to you in relation to change?
- Which character do you resemble?
- What do you feel is the main message from the book?

Through the dialogue that transpired in response to the above prompts, Terry believed that group members became more self-aware as to how they respond to change and more sensitive of how their colleagues approach change.
Another activity that Terry uses to help PLCs she has coached explore their inclination to change is an adaptation of the NSRF's "Zones of Comfort, Risk, and Danger" protocol. In this activity, Terry instructed her group members:

I'd like you to draw a diagram of concentric circles that looks like a target. Label the center circle "Comfort," the next circle "Risk," and the outer circle "Danger." The comfort circle represents the times when you feel most at ease, with no stress, and have a good grip on the topic. The risk circle represents the best opportunities for learning. It is where you are willing to take some risks, not know everything, and want to learn and take the risks necessary to do so. Finally, the danger circle represents times when you feel defensive or fearful. The danger zone is the least productive and desirable zone to work from. When you find yourself in the danger zone, it's best to work on some strategies to move yourself into the risk zone.

Decide on what size you want to draw each of your circles depending on the quantity of time you usually work in that zone. Then, in each circle you are to note the various aspects or expectations of your work that make you feel really comfortable, that make you feel like there is some risk involved, and that get you worried and make you want to retreat. Write these work expectations in the comfort, risk, and danger zones respectively.

After PLC members complete their diagrams, Terry continues, "Once you have identified your comfort, risk, and danger zones, you will have greater insight into the areas in which you will experience more difficulty changing. By making this explicit, you will be better able to seek out support as you engage in that change." The activity ends with all individuals sharing what they learned about themselves through constructing their "Zone Maps."

A third activity that Terry uses is "Compass Points," also developed by NSRF. This is a protocol that Terry believes helps group members understand how each member approaches the change experiences differently. To lead this activity, Terry arrives to the PLC meeting early, and hangs four signs on each wall—North, South, East, and West. When PLC members arrive to the meeting, Terry explains the signs and the meaning they hold for understanding group work preferences:

In this simulation, north represents the need to get moving on the change as quickly as possible. If you are inclined toward North, then just like the Nike commercial, your motto is "Just do it!" You love to act, try things, and plunge in. Now, South is quite different from North. If you are a "South" person, you need to have all
members of the group share their thoughts and be sure that everyone feels supported as they engage in the change. You are the caring direction, wanting to assure that everyone’s feelings have been taken into account and that all voices have been heard before acting. Let’s move over to the East now. East represents the need to understand the big idea or vision for the change. Before doing anything associated with a change, you want to understand the big picture and all the possibilities. Finally, West represents the need to have questions answered in detail. Before proceeding with any change, a "West" person likes to know the who, what, when, where, and why.

After reviewing each of the four directions, Terry asks each group member to reflect on the ways he or she typically responds to change, and physically move to the sign on the wall (North, South, East, or West) that best represents that person’s response to change. Once all group members have placed themselves by a sign, Terry continues, “Now, within your group, I would like you to answer the following four questions and be prepared to report out to the larger group in about fifteen minutes. The questions are:

1. What are four strengths of your style?
2. What are four weaknesses of your style?
3. What is the style you have most difficulty working with?
4. What would you want others to know about your style?”

After each “Direction” group generates answers to the four questions, Terry asks each group to share its responses to the questions. As they speak, she has one of the group members chart the key ideas related to change that are expressed. Upon completing the protocol, Terry asks, “What did we learn about the diverse ways we can approach working and changing together?” The group notes that by engaging in this self-assessment and discussing the implications of the group members’ different orientations to change, the group better understands and appreciates the diversity of its membership, as well as how members might be experiencing the change brought on by the PLC work.

**Essential Element #9**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs have a comprehensive view of what constitutes data, and are willing to consider all forms and types of data throughout the PLC work.
Given the context of accountability in which educators work today, the goal that we seek as we work together in our PLCs is improved teaching with an eye on student learning. By inquiring together, we can discover ways to improve student learning and help one another improve teaching practices along the way. The coach can maintain this vision by insisting that student data is a regular artifact of the PLC group meetings. Data includes, but is not limited to, standardized test data, formative assessment, summative assessment, authentic assessment, performance-based assessment, student work, and attitude/surveys. By using multiple forms of data to drive our conversations and decisions, we keep the focus of our conversations on our students and their learning.

The type of data teachers bring to the PLC and examine as a part of their inquiry is important. As noted by Taylor (2002), teachers not only need to bring data but they need to bring all data—the good, the bad, and the ugly. A part of the PLC’s culture must be the willingness to take risks and share the “ugly” data as well as the more successful examples of student learning. It is often effective for PLC coaches to share their own ugly data to model data selection for PLC members, as well as demonstrate their own vulnerabilities. For when all types of data are shared, PLC conversations will focus on student learning and teacher learning will occur.

Terry again uses the NSRF Web site to find and select numerous protocols that legitimize student work as data. For example, Terry uses the “Student Work Gallery” protocol adapted from the NSRF Web site as a tool for helping one group she worked with move from its PLC school improvement vision to improve writing instruction in their school to more specific questions about how to go about improving writing that each teacher can bring to the PLC conversations. Terry begins,

In order for us to become more familiar with the kind of writing being done by our students, become aware of what we value about writing, and identify what we are concerned about, we are going to create a student work gallery during our next meeting. To do this, for our next meeting, everyone needs to bring at least one piece of your students’ work in writing. In addition, I would like you to bring a question that the piece or pieces of student work you selected to bring to the meeting is creating for you.

As the next session began, Terry had PLC members hang the student work they brought to share and their accompanying question around the room. She then shared:

Today I would like you to identify the progressions, holes in the progression, spiraling, repetition, and differences in approaches that will help us become familiar with the “whole” of the students’ writing experiences in our school. To do this, we will do a walk
through the student gallery. Your goal is to notice the questions being posed about the work and respond to those questions using nonjudgmental statements by focusing on what the student is trying to do and what the teacher believes or wants for her students.

At this point, Terry asked the group to take the next thirty minutes to walk around the room and look in detail at the student work shared. During this time, Terry asked the group members to write their thoughts on Post-it Notes and stick them to the student work. She suggested that they might share questions they have about the work or what questions that they might have for the student.

Finally, Terry asked each group member to engage in a personal piece of reflective writing that focuses on the question, "What does looking at this work by these students make me think about my writing practice?" The gallery walk ends when these reflections are shared with the larger group. As a result of looking at this student data (writing samples from across the school), this PLC could identify strengths and weaknesses of the school's writing program.

This is just one example of how a PLC can use data to drive inquiry-oriented PLC discussions. As a coach, it is important to remember that the data that is useful to teachers comes in many forms. At times, useful data may be quantitative and in the form of test scores. However, useful data can also take the form of student work, teaching artifacts, and teacher dilemmas. The NSRF Web site has many protocols that facilitate discussion around different types of data. Data is an essential component of a healthy PLC as the data allows educators to identify important problems of practice that are deserving of their attention.

**Essential Element #10**

Healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs work with building administrators.

According to DuFour (1999), principals have been called on to: (1) celebrate the success of their schools and to perpetuate discontent with the status quo; (2) convey urgency regarding the need for school improvement and to demonstrate the patience that sustains improvement efforts over the long haul; (3) encourage individual autonomy and to insist on adherence to the school’s mission, vision, values, and goals; and (4) build widespread support for change and to push forward with improvement despite resisters, and approach improvement incrementally and to promote the aggressive, comprehensive shakeup necessary to escape the bonds of traditional school cultures. For these reasons, principal support is critical to
inquiry-oriented PLC work and inquiry-oriented PLC work is critical to the effective leadership of the principal.

For principals to truly understand and support the inquiry-oriented PLC work, the principals must possess a lived understanding of the nature and purpose of the work. PLC participation by principals develops their understanding of PLC work beyond what they can read in a text and also familiarizes themselves with faculty concerns about student learning needs within the school. This enables the principal to become a more informed instructional leader.

Although each of the previously mentioned essential elements of a healthy PLC is critical for successful PLC work, Terry has found that without a strong working relationship and support from the principal, PLC groups will not reach their potential. Those engaged in facilitating a PLC must recognize the importance of the school administrator and plan for his or her involvement. The principal must not only understand the process of PLC work, but must question, investigate, and seek school improvement solutions alongside the teachers. Whether or not the principal is a member of your PLC, the school administrator needs to provide the organizational and structural supports for this collaborative work to take place. For example, coaches engaged in PLC work sometimes encounter negative participants or those who refuse to do “extra duty” without extra pay. By working closely with the principal and other district administrators, coaches can identify organizational incentives that can support and integrate inquiry-oriented PLC work into the existing structures. For example, some districts have been able to integrate participation in an inquiry-oriented PLC into the teacher’s professional development plan (see, for example, Chapter 6) and other districts have allowed teachers to use the PLC work toward the teacher’s recertification credits. In addition to these creative incentives, some districts have recognized the value of utilizing their National Board Teachers as coaches for inquiry-oriented PLCs.

In addition to identifying incentives to participate, some principals who believe in the power of inquiry-oriented PLCs dedicate time to the work as well. For example, some principals we have worked with identified and scheduled a planning period each week to make it possible for grade-level teams (in elementary schools and middle schools) and departments (in high schools) to engage in PLC work focused on a shared goal during the school day. Others have used weekly early release days or dedicated weekly team meetings or monthly faculty meetings to this form of professional learning. Still others have used innovative scheduling options to free up teachers across their buildings to collaborate during the day, and a few principals have begun infusing online tools for PLC work.

When coaches, like Terry, take time to collaborate with district and building level administrators, they can identify organizational structures that can naturally support the work, making it “a part of” rather than “apart from” what is expected of teachers in today’s classroom. Teacher
professional learning is a part of what good teachers should be engaged in as a part of their daily work. When school administrators are on board, they can help with dedicating time, establishing communication procedures, finding meeting sites, accessing data, and providing resources that can support the work.

Although structural and organizational supports are important, the principal must be the “keeper” of the school’s vision and demonstrate visible commitment to teacher learning through inquiry-oriented PLCs. A part of Terry’s work is to help the principal she works with realize that when teachers perceive that authority and power are invested exclusively in the hierarchy of administration and that shared leadership isn’t a goal, there is little interest in collaboration. When there is little interest in collaboration, teachers will retreat to the classrooms and close their doors. By keeping the focus on this shared purpose, continuous improvement is possible. Terry’s work helps facilitate the vision as she works with the principal to enhance relationships “between the principal and teachers, among the teachers, and between the teachers and the students that enable risk taking, coaching, and giving and receiving feedback, and reflection to guide improvement” (Taylor, 2002, p. 43).

One way Terry helps the principal maintain a connection with the group is by frequently communicating the successes and progress that the PLC is making. By keeping these lines of communication open, the principal can help a coach acknowledge the important work that is going on within the PLC. We know that what gets rewarded and acknowledged is what gets done. By acknowledging the group’s efforts, the PLC work is not something that is just taken for granted by the administrator, and the administrator seeks ways to make PLCs a part of the daily work of teachers, rather than an add-on to their already full days.

In addition to these reasons to collaborate with the principal, coaches also need to be able to secure the necessary resources to support the group’s inquiry process. They may need resources for development, implementation, and/or data analysis. If the principal understands the power of healthy PLCs, the coach has communicated the focus of the inquiry to the principal along the way, and the work ties to student learning, securing necessary resources for PLC work is much more likely to happen.

**ASSESSING THE HEALTH OF YOUR PLC**

The job of a doctor is twofold. First, doctors provide well-patient care by seeing patients for regular check-ups and assessing that all systems in the body are functioning properly and working together to ensure the overall health of the patient. Second, doctors see patients when they are ill, diagnose the problem, and prescribe a course of treatment to bring the patient back to good health again.
Similar to the doctor, your job as a coach of an inquiry-oriented PLC is to use the ten essential elements we discuss in this chapter to regularly reflect on the PLC you are coaching to be sure “all systems are healthy.” To review, these “systems” include: establishing and maintaining a vision, building trust, understanding power, enhancing collaboration, appreciating diversity, becoming critical friends, documenting learning and keeping group accountable for shared goal, gaining comfort with change, using multiple forms and types of data, and working with the school leadership. These systems are not mutually exclusive but build on and influence each other. Figure 2.7 provides a summary of the essential elements of a healthy PLC that were explored in this chapter, and it can be used as a handy guide to regularly assess how your PLC is functioning and make decisions about areas that need more attention.

Like Terry, you can select activities and protocols to guide discussion that help your PLC grow in the area diagnosed as needing more attention. For, according to DuFour (2004):

The professional learning community model has now reached a critical juncture, one well known to those who have witnessed the fate of other well-intentioned school reform efforts. In this all-too-familiar cycle, initial enthusiasm gives way to confusion about the fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and

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**Figure 2.7 Essential Elements of a Healthy PLC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Ten List: Essential Elements of a Healthy PLC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Healthy PLCs . . .</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish and maintain a vision for their work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Build trust among group members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Pay attention to the ways power can influence group dynamics.</td>
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<td>4. Understand and embrace collaboration.</td>
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<td>5. Encourage, recognize, and appreciate diversity within the group.</td>
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<td>6. Promote the development of critical friends.</td>
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<td>7. Hold the group accountable for and document their learning.</td>
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<td>8. Understand change and acknowledge the discomfort it may bring to some PLC members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Have a comprehensive view of what constitutes data, and are willing to consider all forms and types of data throughout their PLC work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Work with their building administrators.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative. Another reform movement has come and gone, reinforcing the conventional education wisdom that promises, “This too shall pass.” (p. 6)

The success of your PLC depends not on the merits of the “concept but on the most important element in the improvement of the school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within the group” (DuFour, 2004) and the coach who leads them. Your role as an inquiry-oriented PLC coach can make or break the authenticity and impact of the work you facilitate.

For this reason, we recommend you visit the NSRF Web site (http://www.harmonyschool.org/nsrf/default.html) for clear instructions on each of the protocols that Terry used with her PLCs, as well as a large selection of additional protocols and activities you can use to keep your PLC healthy and moving forward in its important work! In addition, if you have not already participated in NSRF training, we encourage you to learn more about the foundation of PLC work and strategies for coaches by attending one of NSRF’s Critical Friends Training Sessions.

We must also note that in this chapter, we list the top ten essential elements of healthy PLCs. These essential elements are our top ten picks based on our own coaching work and focus on the “dos” of coaching PLC work. However, these top ten essential elements of healthy PLCs do not exhaust all of the many factors that contribute to an effective and highly functioning PLC. For example, the NSRF also shares a list of five things not to do as a new coach. This list includes: (1) Don’t set yourself up as the expert, (2) don’t facilitate every protocol session yourself, (3) don’t spend any whole meeting on team building, (4) don’t stay in everyone’s comfort zone, and (5) don’t allow your group to become alienated from the rest of the faculty. While not exhaustive, our “Essential Elements of a Healthy PLC” list is certainly enough to get you started in the process of continuously reflecting on the state of your PLC, and ascertaining the next best steps in moving the work of your PLC forward.

### USING ACTION RESEARCH TO ADVANCE INQUIRY-ORIENTED PLC WORK

One way to move your inquiry-oriented PLC forward, deepen your documentation, and help connect the learning to the classroom is through weaving the process of action research into the regular meetings and agreed-upon work that your PLC has decided to engage in. To review, action research is defined as systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own classroom practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Action researchers seek out change and reflect on their practice by posing questions or “wonderings,” collecting data to gain insights into their wonderings, analyzing the data along with
reading relevant literature, making changes in practice based on new understandings developed during inquiry, and sharing findings with others (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003).

By carefully studying our own and other PLC coaches’ facilitation of action research, we have learned that there are four critical junctures in the action research process that strengthen the inquiry process. Critical junctures are places in the inquiry process where decisions that are made during this phase of the process greatly enhance or inhibit the depth of learning that can occur throughout the course of the inquiry. Critical junctures are also places that often cause teachers some discomfort or uncertainty. These junctures include: (1) locating an action research question or wondering, (2) developing a plan for research, (3) analyzing data, and (4) sharing work with others.

To help you develop a vision for how the process of action research can be intricately intertwined with the work of a new or established PLC, in the next four chapters we explore each of these critical junctures in depth, sharing stories of PLC coaches as they facilitate group members’ development of questions or wonderings for study, develop an action research plan, analyze their data, and share their work with others.
**Figure 3.5 Learning Community Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Name:</th>
<th>Date Completed:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do we know about this community?</td>
<td>What do we want to know?</td>
<td>What is our plan for finding out what we want to know?</td>
<td>What have we learned? (This is to be completed after we analyze data.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**SOURCE:** Terry Campanella, adapted from the work of Debra Smith and Fern Tavalin.

wondering for teacher inquiry is worthy of exploration, and if it is articulated in such a way that exploration of the wondering will be the most valuable it can be for the classroom teacher(s) undertaking the inquiry journey. The wondering litmus test consists of a series of questions facilitators can pose to themselves or to the group about the wondering under consideration, and through dialogue and discussion, reframe and refine a wondering until the individual or group has clearly and concisely articulated a question that generates excitement, enthusiasm, and intrigue.

When a teacher articulates a wondering for the first time, it may be helpful to write the question on a whiteboard or chart paper to begin discussion. Some of the questions a wondering litmus test might include are illustrated in Figure 3.6 and listed below, followed by stories of how
Figure 3.8 Probing Questions

Sample Probing Questions

- What might you learn about your students as a result of exploring this wondering?
- What difference might exploring this wondering make in your classroom practice?
- What potential impact will the insights you gain from this inquiry have on you?
- What potential impact will the insights you gain from this inquiry have on your students?
- What potential impact will the insights you gain from this inquiry have on your pedagogy?
- What potential impact will the insights you gain from this inquiry have on the school?

When a coach makes a declarative statement, the teacher-inquirer has the option of accepting or rejecting the coach’s declaration, and often speaks elaboratively in acceptance or rejection of that statement. As the teacher speaks, he or she often brings clarity to the proposed inquiry. In the FCAT Explorer case, in response to Debbi’s declarative statement, Pam realized she was interested in more than the connection between her students’ use of FCAT Explorer and their confidence in taking the test. Rather, she wanted to measure the time she was spending on FCAT review and the time she spent on new learning activities during FCAT season. She wished to discover the value of a number of different FCAT preparation materials she used and ascertain what (and how much of each) contributed to better test performance. She wished to systematically explore how to balance FCAT prep with normal teaching activities. As Pam responded to Debbi’s declarative statement, her inquiry was taken to a deeper level.

A reflective statement occurs when the coach rephrases something the teacher-inquirer has just said, giving it an exact and economical sense. A coach forms a reflective statement with such beginning clauses as “I get from what you are saying that . . .” or “So you think that . . .” Returning to the Interwrite Pad Inquiry, Jack used a reflective statement to summarize Lynn’s talk:

So what I hear you saying is that you have recently begun using the Interwrite Pad to teach reading, and all of the students in your class are finding it to be very motivating. You’re observing that this tool keeps all learners engaged during reading, and you want to document how well it’s working.

When a coach paraphrases what a teacher-inquirer has just shared, the reflective statement becomes a mirror for the inquirer to examine his or her