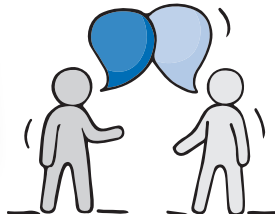


INTRODUCTION



Before we move into the work of an *activator*, let's look in on a sixth grade social studies PLC meeting. Although this particular team meets on a regular basis, today's extended planning meeting will be devoted to the analysis of its members' common formative assessment results. Over the past semester, a district-wide group of teachers devoted much time to developing these common assessments and making sure they align with the state standards in social studies. The common assessments place a heavy emphasis on the analysis of primary and secondary sources and/or text rather than the proficiency of learners in recalling and memorizing historical facts. Let's take a look at the conversation amongst the teachers in this team.

Mr. Vance:

I just cannot believe how *bad these assessment results are*. I mean, seriously, this isn't the first time our kids were ever asked to read and answer questions. We went over this again and again in class. Now what are we supposed to do with this? I'm not a reading teacher. *I don't know what to do about the reading problem. With all of the content we are expected to cover, I don't have time to teach reading.*

Mr. Vance folds his arms and reclines back in his seat.

Mrs. Hearten:

I know. These results sure are rough to see. I can't believe we have so many Grade 6 students who still struggle so much with reading. I mean, look, most kids missed questions that required any type of synthesizing information from multiple sources. I mean *what happened in elementary school?*

Mr. Vance unfolds his arms to grab his cell phone and begin scrolling.

Ms. Lee:

I wonder what Mrs. Leary [the principal] is going to think when *she* reviews these results. Do you think she'll come and have a talk with us? I don't see how we are going to have them ready by the end of the year. Plus, we have to move on.

(Continued)



(Continued)

Mr. Vance puts his cell phone down long enough to make a couple more comments.

Mr. Vance:

Do we have to put these in the grade book as a summative? So many of my students' grades are going to drop if this counts as a summative assessment. Then they won't be motivated to do anything from this point forward. Some of them just fail one thing after another. This is frustrating for both them and me.

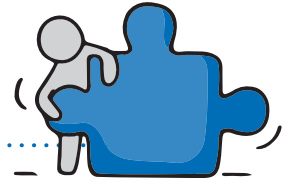
Mr. Luis:

Team, I get it and I feel the same way, but I think we can focus on what's ahead of us. The common assessment is done. The results are what they are. Now we have to use them to make adjustments. These results prompt me to do something about the apparent gaps in learning. Where do we need to go next? I think we have three more post-assessments we have to administer before the school year ends. Let's talk about what we see in these results that we can act and build upon. For example, I noticed that many kids did well with items where they had to find information to support their choices. That wasn't the case first semester at all. Actually, let's look at the first semester results.

The team members all acknowledge with their facial expressions and mannerisms that he is right, and the tone of the meeting moves from what seemed to be contentious complaining into problem-solving mode.

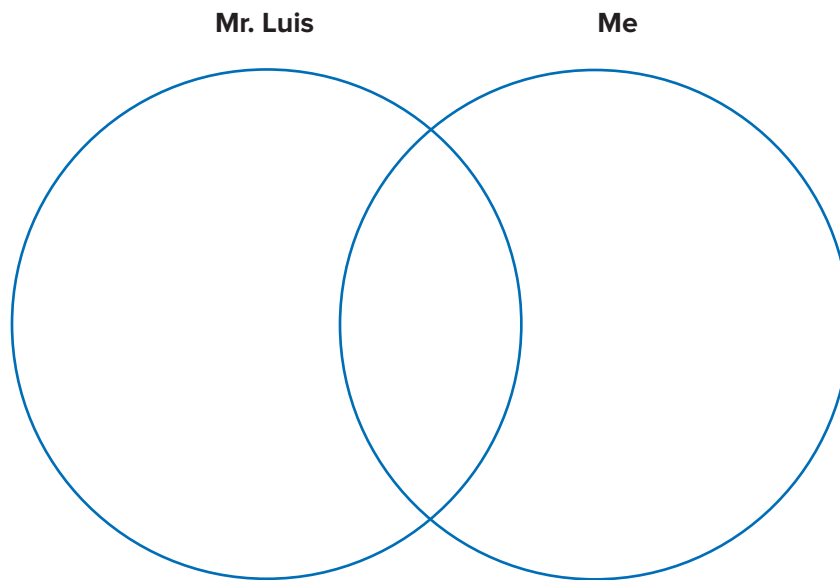
As you read through the above scenario, you likely could relate to it or easily picture this exact conversation occurring during your PLC meeting. In fact, we have shared this scenario or similar ones with groups of teachers. Without exception, someone in the room asks, "Did you come watch our PLC meeting last week and record us . . . I mean except for the last statement by Mr. Luis?"

In a PLC+ meeting, all questions, anxieties, and perspectives are valued. Credibility and collective efficacy are rooted in the professional trust of the team. Mr. Vance, Mrs. Hearten, and Ms. Lee should not have their questions, anxieties, or perspectives squashed for the sole purpose of keeping the room "happy." When student growth and achievement is on the line, a certain level of anxiety is expected. A PLC+ can visit those anxieties, but it should not live there. The catalyst for moving this dialogue from defensiveness and avoidance to decisions and actions that improve teaching and learning is a person who can validate and still challenge, someone who can allow *venting* but prevent *lamenting*, and someone who can ensure a problem-solving and solution-based focus. We call these individuals *activators*. These are the members of the team that ensure the core value of activation is lived out consistently within the PLC+ team.



REFLECTION

Revisit the conversation amongst the members of the sixth grade social studies PLC. How would or have you contributed to the conversation? How would that contribution be similar to or different from that of Mr. Luis? In other words, which teacher are you in the above scenario? Use the Venn diagram to record your reflection.



Let's review. The five guiding questions of a PLC+ are a compass for teams to follow. As a refresher, here are those five questions:

1. Where are we going?
2. Where are we now?
3. How do we move learning forward?
4. What did we learn today?
5. Who benefited and who did not benefit?



See *The PLC+ Playbook* (Module 1, page 8) and *PLC+: Better Decisions and Greater Impact by Design* (pages 8 and 9).

Over the course of a school year, teams will engage in focused attention to all five of these questions, both in specific individual meetings and throughout the entire inquiry cycle. The PLC+ framework is steeped in the four crosscutting values. These values reflect the recent research on how to ensure that the diverse needs of all students are met by the teachers who serve them.

1. We must keep the **equity** of access and opportunity for learning at the forefront of each PLC+ collaborative team meeting.



See *The PLC+ Playbook* (Module 2, pages 13 and 14) and *PLC+: Better Decisions and Greater Impact by Design* (pages 9–11).

2. We must ensure that **activation** of the dialogue is provoked by the five questions and is carried out in such a way that the work of the PLC+ is accelerated, not hindered or impeded.
3. We must develop learning experiences that make our **expectations** for learning clear to all students.
4. And finally, the collaborative work of the PLC+ should leverage our **individual efficacy** into **collective teacher efficacy**.



REFLECTION

Using a dictionary, laptop, tablet, or other device, look up the word *activator*. Jot down the definitions of that word here. Just out of curiosity, and for our own professional learning, we also looked up the definition of an *activator*. In addition to the expected definition of a person or thing that activates, the word is defined on dictionary.com as a catalyst in biochemistry or chemistry and as an agent that renders another substance active or accelerates a process or reaction. But those three definitions are not even the most interesting ones. The definition that really stood out for us is “an impurity in a mineral that causes luminescence” (www.dictionary.com).

In the previous sentences, circle the words in the definitions of an *activator* that stand out to you. List them below in the first box, the box on the left:

WORDS	EXPLANATION

In the box on the right, explain why you circled those specific words. What about those words grabbed your attention?

Finally, as we have articulated in *PLC+: Better Decisions and Greater Impact by Design* and *The PLC+ Playbook, Grades K–12: A Hands-On Guide to Collectively Improving Student Learning* (Fisher, Frey, Almarode, Flories, & Nagel, 2020a, 2020b, Corwin) the **plus** in the PLC+ is *you*, the teacher. We, the teachers, have been missing in many PLC models. Each teacher brings a wide range of experiences, specific expertise, skills, understandings, and knowledge about teaching and learning that augments the sum of the parts in a PLC. Your contributions allow your PLC+ to be greater as a whole than any of us would be individually. We, collectively and collaboratively, focus on *both* teacher and student learning. This is part of what sets the PLC+ model apart from others, and it is also what provides the foundation for collaborative efforts that truly impact the learning of all students at the highest levels . . . not by chance but by design. We fully acknowledge that strong activation is a must for any PLC team to thrive.

Contained in the eight parts of this guide are concrete structures and actions *activators* and other team members can use to serve as a catalyst for your PLC+ meetings. As an *activator*, your role is as an agent that moves the substance of the dialogue actively toward effective teaching and learning; you accelerate that dialogue into action through the PLC+ framework. You may find, as did Mr. Luis in the sixth grade social studies PLC meeting, that you are alone in your perspective, maybe even considered an impurity in the PLC structure. However, as an *activator*, you have the role of shining a light on the wide range of experiences, specific expertise, skills, understandings, and knowledge about teaching and learning that are greater than the sum of the parts in a PLC. Remember, the *plus* is all about building capacity in our colleagues.

THE PATH FORWARD

This process is a journey. There are many challenges and obstacles PLC+ teams will face throughout their journey. Some of them are structural and are beyond the scope of influence or control of PLC+ team members. Two examples are the contractual time available to collaborate and how members of the PLC+ team are configured. This activator's guide and the other two books in this series cannot solve all of those challenges and obstacles. Other challenges are more affective and relational, and these are the challenges we will focus on in the eight parts of this book. These challenges include how the team

- Develops and utilizes norms and protocols
- Determines foci for its meetings (and what to do when these do not fit with all team members' desires)
- Engages in some of the hard conversations on topics such as race, equity, and other issues of justice and conscience

These are not easy conversations to have, as they often will shed light on some larger challenges our team is facing with the students its members serve. Yet these

difficulties can be opportunities for our team to develop efficacy and thrive over time as we collectively address and overcome them. Without *activators*, these discussions will either not occur or, when they do, they may derail PLC+ teams, causing them to flounder at best or implode at worst. These hurdles and challenges provide opportunities for our PLC+ to overcome challenges and increase our collective efficacy as well as our self-efficacy.

HOW THE GUIDE IS DESIGNED

This activator's guide was designed to support PLC+ teams at all levels, specifically from the lens of the *activator*. While we believe the *activator* will be the individual leading the team, it's an important distinction within the PLC+ framework that *everyone* on the team can serve as the *activator* at certain times to ensure learning is moving forward for both the adults and our students. We are also aware that teams will engage in the PLC+ framework at different stages and have different needs based on their experience collaborating, the time and resources they have available, and so on, but we are all moving toward a common goal: an effective PLC+.

THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLC

Background Work: Together, we will engage in an interactive exploration and analysis of the why, how, and what of PLC+ through the eyes of an *activator*.

1. Find Module 1, pages 5–7 in *The PLC+ Playbook*. As an *activator*, engage in a self-assessment about your current PLC.
2. Find the narrative in the core book that unpacks these characteristics (*PLC+: Better Decisions and Better Impact by Design*, pages 6–7). Use that section as an additional resource.
3. At this point in our journey, this should be an individual task. Later, as you begin your work with your PLC+, you might also engage in this task with your colleagues. However, for now, use it for yourself as foundational work for what comes next.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PLC	CURRENT RATING
<p>1. Structural Conditions: Does our PLC have established times that we are able to meet? Are there schedules in place that support collaboration and diminish isolation? Is there availability of needed resources?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	4 3 2 1
<p>2. Supportive Relational Conditions: Is there trust and respect in place within our PLC that provides the basis for giving and accepting feedback in order to work toward improvement?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	4 3 2 1
<p>3. Shared Values and Vision: Do members of the team have the same goal? Do they have shared beliefs about student learning and the ability of team members to impact student learning?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	4 3 2 1

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PLC	CURRENT RATING
<p>4. Intentional Collective Learning: Does our PLC engage in discourse and reflection around sharing practices, knowledge, and skills to impact the growth and achievement of our students? Do we find ways to learn from each other or learn together?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	
<p>5. Peers Supporting Peers: Does our PLC support lifting each other up? Do we celebrate individual and group successes? Do we observe one another while engaged in practice to help others strengthen their practice?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	
<p>6. Shared and Supportive Leadership: Are power, authority, and decision making shared and encouraged between teachers and building leaders? Is there a positive relationship among administrators and teachers in the school, where all staff members grow professionally as they work toward the same goal?</p> <p>Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic</p>	4 3 2 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDE

The following summary (Table I.1) provides an overview of each part of this guide so that you can use it as a flexible tool tailored to your particular situation.

TABLE I.1

OVERVIEW OF THE PLC+ ACTIVATOR'S GUIDE

<p>Part 1. Activating Your PLC+: Overview Page 9</p>	<p>This part provides an overview of what it means to be an <i>activator</i>. What are some considerations of actions and behaviors for those who will be guiding their PLC+ teams?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activating Your PLC+ ● What Effective Activators Do <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activating Collaborative Maturity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ Nine Ways to Build Collaborative Maturity ○ Ensuring Fidelity to PLC+ Without Rigidity
<p>Part 2. Activation Requires Effective Collaboration Page 23</p>	<p>Part 2 supports <i>activators</i> on a deep level in developing skills to foster, nurture, and sustain collaboration in their PLC+ meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitation Versus Activation ● Five Qualities of a Good Activator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quality Activation Takes Practice: Establishing Habits for Consistency in PLC+ Meetings and Possible Scripts for Activators

(Continued)

TABLE I.1 (Continued)

<p>Part 3. Activating Your PLC+: Establishing Roles and Developing Team Cohesion Page 33</p>	<p>Part 3 addresses the task of assigning roles and responsibilities for members of the PLC+ based on their strengths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Team Cohesion • Establishing PLC+ Roles • Stepping Into Roles Matched to PLC+ Team Member Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring Clarity When Stepping Into Roles (Clarifying Tasks to Be Completed)
<p>Part 4. Activating Your PLC+: Norms and Authentic Instructional Protocols in Your PLC+ Page 49</p>	<p>Part 4 builds upon Part 3 and helps <i>activators</i> lead their PLC+ in developing authentic norms and protocols that become guides for structuring their PLC+ meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing Operating Norms • Social and Emotional Check-Ins • Establishing Process Norms • Operating Norms Versus Process Norms • Utilizing Authentic Instructional Protocols
<p>Part 5. Activating the Five Essential Questions and Four Crosscutting Values Page 63</p>	<p>Part 5 provides structures for <i>activators</i> to lead PLC+ meetings specifically focused on the five guiding questions and four core values of the PLC+ framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activating Guiding Questions: A Review of Each Guiding Question • Possible Challenges When Activating Each Question and Possible Responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suggestions for overcoming specific question-related challenges ○ Questions and sentence starters to guide the learning of the team ○ Specific suggestions for activating discussions on the PLC+ crosscutting values
<p>Part 6. The Nuts and Bolts of Your PLC+ Scheduling PLC+ Meetings and Meeting Cycles Page 95</p>	<p>Part 6 is devoted to providing examples of structures needed for a PLC+ to function on an ongoing basis in your school or district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example of a PLC+ Meeting Cycle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific Meeting Descriptions ○ Sample Calendar and Schedules ○ Sample PLC+ Meeting Agendas • Developing an Assessment Calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sample Assessment Calendar
<p>Part 7. Activating a High-Impact and High-Functioning PLC+ Page 119</p>	<p>How do you monitor your team's promotion of both student and adult learning? Part 7 will help you with this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences Between High-Impact and High-Functioning Teams • Moving Toward a High-Impact and a High-Functioning Team • Navigating the Professional and Personal Dynamics of Your PLC+: Fourteen Common Problems and Solutions
<p>Part 8. Activating Conversations Focused on Equity Page 143</p>	<p>Part 8 was designed to help support <i>activators</i> lead PLC+ teams in discussions related to race and equity with depth and dignity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glenn Singleton's Protocol With Four Guiding Considerations for Conversations About Equity • Sample <i>Activator–Team</i> Dialogues to Illustrate Singleton's Protocol