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INTRODUCTION

The PLC+ model relies upon catalysts. These catalysts are people who can successfully move the dialogue from defensiveness and avoidance to decisions and actions that measurably improve teaching and learning: people who can validate and still challenge, who can allow venting but prevent lamenting, and who can ensure a problem-solving and solution-based focus on improving student learning as well as teacher effectiveness and expertise. We call these individuals *activators*, and though they may seem like superhumans, or even superheroes, the leadership they provide is not only possible, but also critical to the success of each team in a PLC+ school. Activators facilitate, but they are far more than facilitators. Activators are true leaders. They press the PLC+ journey forward each step of the way—from establishing goals to taking stock of the current situation—so that *all* students benefit over time.

We encourage you to think about the PLC+ experience as the journey it is. As an activator, you'll be leading that journey. You'll assess needs, note and leverage team members' strengths, design and refine the PLC+ journey, support your colleagues (your fellow travelers) along the way, and adjust the itinerary as needed throughout your journey. Note our emphasis on refining and adjusting. We've never met the perfect PLC+ team or observed a PLC+ journey that didn't have to confront some sort of change during its journey. Let's agree right now that your team, too, will face new challenges, reprioritize outcomes, welcome newly hired team members, and navigate your way through any number of unexpected circumstances. Responsive teams allow for course corrections from the original plan. As an activator, you'll come to expect it, embrace it, exploit it, and share your excitement about it.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been a transformative force in education since their inception several decades ago, when they were originally established. The intention was to address the widespread issue of teacher isolation prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. The foundational idea was that by fostering collaboration among teachers, not only would the educational experience of students be enhanced, but also educators themselves would benefit from being part of a supportive and like-minded network. This collaborative approach has proven to be effective, with robust evidence indicating that well-implemented PLCs significantly enhance teacher practices and student outcomes (e.g., Prenger et al., 2019; Wang & An, 2023).



**Welcome to
Activating PLC+**

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The success of PLCs hinges on their proper implementation. Over the years, ongoing research and practical experiences have shaped our understanding of what constitutes an effective PLC. This has led to continuous updates in the processes, procedures, and protocols of PLCs, with outdated methods being phased out in favor of new, evidence-based practices. The latest advancement in this evolution is PLC+, a next-generation framework that builds on the legacy of previous models while integrating recent insights into the dynamics of learning communities.

You're likely reading this guide because you've been called upon, selected, or volunteered to fulfill an activator role for your school's PLC+. First, thank you for your leadership! Your contributions will be many, and they will be critical to the PLC+ journey. This guide is the activator's companion to the core PLC+ guide, *Your Introduction to PLC+* (Fisher & Frey, 2025). Together, these resources will support you and your team as you prepare for what lies ahead.

But how will all of this happen? How do you ensure that the PLC+ team and its efforts are intentional, relevant, and successful? And how, over time, will you make sure the effort evolves, improves, and exacts to achieve the transformative promise that the research indicates a PLC+ is capable of achieving? Reaching these outcomes relies on leadership. That is the role you've been called to fill: the role of PLC+ activator.

Strong activation is essential for success in all PLC+ settings. Many previous PLC models and frameworks disregarded the role human behavior plays when it comes to collaborative efforts to impact student learning at high levels. The PLC+ framework considers this critical element of human behavior on a deep level, with activation as one of its crosscutting values. Through their intentional and informed leadership, activators move the PLC+ team from chaos and dysfunction into impactful action—from where team members are stagnant to where they thrive. Activators ensure that their teams' PLC+ journeys are focused on the learning and development of the adults involved and the students they teach. In doing so, activators lead their teams to weather the storms that may appear, to overcome the inevitable challenges they will face, and to celebrate their individual and collective successes.

We wrote this guide to support the activators on whom PLC+ relies. Likely, you're reading this book in preparation for this critical role. Mark Lawrence (2017), in his book *Red Sister*, observed, "A book is as dangerous as any journey you might take. The person who closes the back cover may not be the same one that opened the front one. Treat them with respect" (p. 103). When readers implement the tools presented throughout **50 Strategies for Activating Your PLC+**, the experience can be life changing; we have witnessed this happen in PLC+ teams more times than we can count. With that in mind, we encourage you to treat this journey with the respect it requires, as you anticipate the amazing transformations that can result for yourself, your colleagues, and your students.

STEPPING INTO THE ACTIVATOR ROLE

Successful leaders begin by understanding their role and responsibilities. They also take in the current situation as a starting point, while scanning the horizon for needs and opportunities—essentially exploring various destinations that could become the

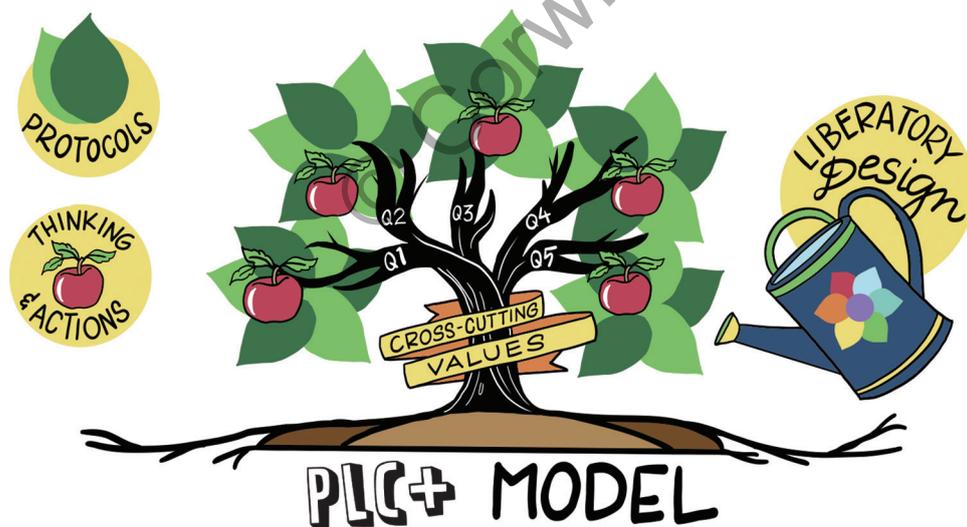
PLC+ focus. This guide will support you in your leadership role and responsibility for implementing PLC+ with your team. Although this guide is designed specifically to support you in the activator’s role, *Your Introduction to PLC+* contains additional resources to support each member’s contributions to the PLC+.

If you’re unfamiliar with the PLC+ concept, start by reading *Your Introduction to PLC+* (Fisher & Frey, 2025). Then, keep that book close for easy reference as you continue with this guide. We encourage you to take notes, mark up pages and passages, or grab a pad of sticky notes to accomplish the same. Your background knowledge should include the following key concepts from the PLC+ model:

- The five guiding questions
- The four crosscutting values
- The role of the common challenge
- Liberatory design

The exploration of the five guiding questions prompts action, and teams use specific protocols to implement their plan (see Figure i.1). Essentially, as PLC+ teams collaborate to find solutions to these questions, they create a sophisticated network of thoughts and actions that enhance the entire educational experience—for teachers and students alike. The following PLC+ model illustrates this vision.

Figure i.1: The PLC+ Model



Source: Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2025). *Your introduction to PLC+*. Corwin.

ACTIVATORS MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

We have described and begun to define the term *activator* as applied to PLC+. As an activator, you’re the lead planner, lead implementer, lead motivator and cheerleader, and lead celebrant when goals are met and impact is realized. Let’s dive a bit deeper into the activator role and your calling to walk in activator shoes.

Activation is more than facilitation. Facilitating a meeting suggests a hierarchy and places the responsibility on a single individual. Whether intentional or not, this arrangement opens the door for divesting other PLC+ members of ownership. That, in most ways, is the exact opposite of what a PLC+ should be.

Beginning with the end in mind, and informed by the thousands of PLC+ teams we've led and observed, we suggest that effective activators possess and act on the following:

- High credibility among their colleagues and students
- An ability to lead adults in their learning process
- The desire to effectively support and challenge the team members, their colleagues, and themselves
- The belief that all students and all teachers can learn at high levels
- The commitment to demonstrate resilience in times of challenge
- An ability to lead the PLC+ work, monitoring and adjusting it along the way

Many of the strategies we will share serve to foster and support these skills, abilities, and aptitudes. But the last point—the ability to monitor and adjust—begs elaboration. PLC+ activators serve as leaders for a systematic effort in which the outputs of one element become inputs for the next. It's systematic because teams use the answers to the first guiding question (your “output”) as an “input” toward answering the next guiding question, and so on across the full set of five guiding questions to inform the work and answers to the questions that follow. It's also systemic because the work and impact of one PLC+ investigation cycle is designed to support the next cycle. The PLC+ effort is defined, in part, through the activator's leadership. But it should also involve a collaboratively developed plan with input and agreement among all PLC+ team members. Additionally, the activator monitors and advocates for adjustments to the plan, when required, to heighten the team's functioning and its impact on students and PLC+ team members.

A successful activator orchestrates the wide range of experiences, specific expertise, skills, understandings, and knowledge about teaching and learning of members to achieve a high-functioning PLC+ team. You will not find a high-functioning PLC+ team—one driving the learning of its members and the learning of their students to high levels—that simply has meetings facilitated by an appointed or nominated facilitator. Activation is fundamentally different: as an activator, you are crucial in making sure your group is successful. Having a plan to collaboratively manage the structural elements of your PLC+ is critical.

Ultimately, as the leader, you want the team to benefit from each team member's contributions. Successful activators not only lead the PLC+ team and effort, but also bring out the leadership abilities of their team members. We've suggested that successful activators are extraordinary in certain ways. Yet it is far from necessary to be superhuman to qualify for the role. To serve in this critical leadership role, you just need the skills, abilities, and dispositions outlined in this guide.

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDE

This guide contains the concrete structures and actions activators can use to lead the PLC+ journey. As an activator, your leadership role is as an agent who moves the substance of the dialogue purposefully toward more effective teaching and learning. Although we believe the activator will be the individual leading the team, it's an important feature of the PLC+ framework that everyone on the team can serve as the activator at certain times to ensure that learning is moving forward for the adults and for our students. We are also aware that teams will engage in the PLC+ framework at different stages and have different leadership needs based on their experience collaborating, the time and resources they have available, and so on. Ultimately, however, we are all moving toward a common goal: effective PLC+ teams that impact teaching and learning.

We have organized the fifty strategies useful for activators into eight categories. These categories are presented as follows:

1. **Activating Questions 1–5.** The strategies in this first section focus on the PLC+ questions themselves and strategies activators can use to engage team members in robust conversations. The five guiding questions can be used in any order based on what the team needs to accomplish in a given session; often, several questions are discussed in the same meeting. The strategies in this section provide activators with potential responses to challenges that may arise as teams interact.
2. **Activator Skills and Abilities.** There are specific skills activators need to support their teams to engage in the work of a PLC+. These skills range from self-assessing your personal fitness for activation to defining your role as an activator to basic facilitation skills. Yes, activators do facilitate, but they do much more than that. This section provides the foundation for activators as they engage in their work.
3. **Continuous Improvement.** As activators engage in supporting their teams, they are on the lookout for opportunities to make improvements in their systems and organization. The strategies in this section provide support for activators to recognize the need to improve and to make course corrections in real time. In addition, the strategies in this section help activators build stronger and stronger teams.
4. **Function and Impact.** This section includes tools and strategies that activators can use to assess their team's readiness for PLC+ work as well as the current performance of their teams. In addition, there are strategies that allow teams to recognize their wins and systematically increase their impact. The goal of this section is to create high-functioning teams that have a strong impact on teachers and students.
5. **Meeting Moves.** This section focuses on the implementation of the meeting discussions themselves. Of course, PLCs are more than meetings. Yet meetings, and effective discussions during those sessions, are a critical dimension of the PLC+ model. Activators need tools that support the discussions that team members have, from establishing norms to using protocols to documenting their conversations.

6. **Norms of Collaborative Work.** As part of the conversations that teams have, activators play a special role in creating the norms for conversations. The strategies in this section, adopted and adapted from *Cognitive Coaching* (Costa & Garmston, 2015), have been tested for decades. They provide activators with tools they can use to support effective collaborative work that PLC+ teams do each time they meet.
7. **Team Dynamics.** As humans, we have social relations—thus, various dynamics operate as we interact. Activators recognize these dynamics and use tools to ensure that team members experience psychological safety and relational trust. In addition, activators focus on team members’ strengths and foster interdependence within their teams. In fact, strong team dynamics allow members to focus on the work because they develop a strong sense of belonging to the team.
8. **Time Matters.** The final section focuses on some of the logistics that activators must attend to, such as developing an assessment calendar or scheduling times for teams to meet. These logistics ensure that teams have the organizational support they need to complete their work. Without these supports, teams start to focus their time on logistics rather than impacting learning.

We have also indicated the point or points in your PLC+ effort when each strategy is most likely to be used. We encourage you to be informed by that designation, but certainly not entrapped. You may find a particular strategy is useful at points beyond our “most likely” designation.

Here are some suggestions about how you might best use this guide based on your current understanding of PLC+ and the activator role, as well as your point in the PLC+ journey.

I want to	How to Proceed
Build my understanding of the entire PLC+ planning and implementation process	<p>Proceed in the traditional way by reading this guide front to back.</p> <p>Enjoy the many examples to help you picture PLC+ in action.</p> <p>Highlight and make notes about how the guidance and ideas will influence your leadership of your PLC+. Take note of tools you can turn to when the time is right across the implementation journey.</p>
Get support for a particular point in the PLC+ journey	<p>Take stock of your current point in the PLC+ journey. Then, jump into the corresponding part of this guide.</p> <p>As you review the content and guidance, record key things you’ll be especially mindful about and key steps you plan to take.</p> <p>Take time to describe the strengths of your PLC+ team where they intersect with the implementation work you’re leading.</p> <p>Finally, think about any challenges you’re likely to encounter, and plan your approach to avoid, address, or accept them—should they arise.</p>

I want to	How to Proceed
Refresh my memory about a specific task right before implementing it with my team	<p>With the particular task or process in mind, use the Table of Contents or Index to pinpoint the resource or resources available to you for the specific task you face.</p> <p>Spend some time reviewing what you find and envisioning the implementation work with your team.</p> <p>Picture the ideal process and outcome and press yourself to define what is necessary for that ideal to become a reality.</p> <p>Now, anticipate what could get in the way of achieving the same outcome and have a strategy or strategies ready—should they be needed.</p>

To support your use of this guide, we've included a cross-reference table that links each of the 50 strategies to related content in the foundational text, *Your Introduction to PLC+*. This resource makes it easy to locate additional context and guidance for any strategy that piques your interest. You'll find the table beginning on page 9.

This guide was written for currently serving activators and those with aspirations to serve. It will also be used by school leaders in the natural course of supporting the PLC+ and activators in their schools. When you encounter forward-looking strategies, such as strategies for selecting an activator, consider the following:

- If you're an activator, remember there is always room for more. Use the guidance to identify additional, high-potential peers who can prepare for the activator role.
- If you're a leader, use the guidance to inform your search for ideal activators to support your PLC+ effort.

YOUR ACTIVATION GOAL

In the final module of *Your Introduction to PLC+*, we noted the importance of developing collective effervescence for teams. *Collective effervescence* is a term coined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim more than a hundred years ago. It's that feeling of energy, joy, and harmony that comes when people are engaged in a shared purpose. But it starts with collective responsibility. As you recall from *Your Introduction to PLC+*, the key elements of collective responsibility include the following (Hirsch, 2010):

- All staff members share a commitment to the success of each student.
- Educators do not allow any single teacher to fail in their attempt to ensure the success of any one student.

- Students benefit from the wisdom and expertise of all teachers, rather than just of the teachers to whom they are assigned.
- Teachers willingly share with their colleagues what is working in their classrooms.
- Teachers with less experience realize that other teachers are invested in their success and the success of all students.

Collective responsibility can take many forms, but we recognize it when we hear teams talking about their students as *our* students, not as *your* students and *my* students. You will recognize it when you see team members sharing ideas and supporting colleagues, even offering to collaborate in teaching. Activators have the potential to foster collective responsibility as they support team members to make decisions collaboratively, to see *all* the students as their students, and to ensure that all students benefit from all teachers.

Some teams move beyond collective responsibility to collective efficacy. *Collective efficacy*, which has been extensively studied, has a strong influence on learning (Eells, 2011). Collective efficacy is a belief—specifically, a belief that a group of people have the power to achieve their goals. They understand that, together, they can make a difference. Importantly, that belief must be fed by evidence for efficacy to develop. Like collective responsibility, collective efficacy can take many forms, but you recognize it when you hear teams engaged in goal setting through their common challenge and when you see teams taking actions to achieve their goals, collect evidence of their impact, and revise their actions to achieve their goal. We have never encountered a team with high levels of collective efficacy that did not also demonstrate collective responsibility. In fact, collective responsibility is a prerequisite to collective efficacy. Activators can support teams to move from collective responsibility to collective efficacy by helping them set goals, collect evidence, and determine their impact. Celebrating wins and success also fosters collective efficacy.

Some teams move beyond collective efficacy to *collective effervescence* and genuinely experience joy from the work they do together. They look forward to time with their team, and they experience great success in their collaborative efforts. We've never met a team with collective effervescence that did not have collective efficacy. Teams that have collective responsibility, collective efficacy, and collective effervescence have an impact, work in harmony, look forward to their time together, and reap the rewards of teaching. That's why activators aim to help each PLC+ develop these collectives: responsibility, efficacy, and effervescence.