


Bringing PLCs to K-20:

Student Learning Communities as a Pivotal Practice for Talented Youth

Angela Novak, Ph.D.

College of Education, East Carolina University

Author Note

Angela Novak  0000-0002-8257-4731

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Abstract

This chapter describes how professional learning communities, an educator practice, can be brought to K–20 classrooms as a pivotal practice for talented youth as Student Learning Communities (SLCs). Several research–based models are used as the theoretical framework, including Professional Learning Communities (PLCs; DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2010), Culturally Relevant Intentional Literacy Communities (CRILCs; Parker, 2022), and Learner–Centered Classrooms (Tomlinson, 2021). The SLC Model is composed of three levels; the first two parts lay the groundwork of the learning environment (Community Space and Place) and curriculum (Progress–Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content) for the successful implementation of the SLCs (Student Learning Communities) in the third level. The chapter concludes with examples of operationalizing the pivotal practice.

Keywords: professional learning communities, student learning communities, individualized instruction, learner–centered, mixed methods research

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Introduction

Tatanka Yotanka, Wichasa Wakan of the Teton Dakota People said “Let’s put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.” More commonly known as Sitting Bull, Yotanka was a Chief and Holy Man, revered for his leadership in uniting the Sioux nation against the colonizers stealing their lands (History.com, 2019). Ideally, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) follow Yotanka’s advice, engaging in collective thought and action to make informed decisions that will benefit students. Student Learning Communities (SLCs) are a pivotal practice through which educators engage talented youth in authentic, collaborative meaning– and decision–making.

Editors Nyberg and Manzone (2023) distinguish a pivotal practice from a strategy for talented youth in both its application and transferability. A pivotal practice is sustained over time and emphasizes pedagogical knowledge across both disciplines and instructional contexts. These practices promote innovation in the classroom, and individuality and agency in learners. Pivotal practices incorporate talented youths’ funds of knowledge, metacognitive development, and social and emotional contributions with learning experiences that promote problem–solving, inquiry, critical thinking, and creative thinking.

A Research–Based Framework for Student Learning Communities: A Pivotal Practice

Student learning communities are authentic learning practices similar to professional learning communities but in K–20 education spaces. Several research–based practices make up

the framework for SLCs as a pivotal practice for talented youth. PLCs are frequently used in schools, DuFour (2004) and DuFour et al.'s (2010) work on the practice is the research that supports SLCs. Dr. Kimberly Parker's Culturally Relevant Intentional Literacy Communities (CRILCs) is a second research frame that greatly informs SLC. Lastly, the importance of student-focused learning is essential in this pivotal practice; this research base is Tomlinson's (2021) Learner-Centered Classrooms. The following section introduces each of these research-based models and connects the research to the definition of pivotal practices.

DuFour's Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities require an ideological shift from teaching to learning, where teachers hold themselves accountable for results, rather than environmental circumstances, parents, students, and so on: if we don't see results, we don't say "these kids can't learn", we listen to the kids, collaboratively plan, adjust, and try again. DuFour (2004) provides three principles of PLCs: a goal of student learning, a culture of collaboration, and a results-based approach.

Ensuring That Students Learn

The first of DuFour's (2004) principles of PLCs is to shift from a goal of teaching to ensuring that students learn. There is a subtle difference in wording—students aren't taught, rather, students must learn—but when words truly matter and this turn of phrase is profound. Acquisition is the goal, outcomes, and student attainment, not that teachers delivered the content. Along with this dynamic shift in thinking, DuFour and colleagues created four main questions to discuss during meetings; a central focus with this goal in mind. The questions are:

- What is it we want our students to learn?
- How will we know if each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
- How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency? (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 119)

The third PLC question garners significant attention from policymakers, parents, administrators, and educators. DuFour (2004) suggests immediate directed intervention over remediation. This recommendation uses assessment data by identifying students that need support as soon as possible, reteaching, and providing assistance until the concepts are mastered. The fourth question, however, is the crux of education for talented youth: *How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?* This is something that the chapters in this book endeavor to answer.

Culture of Collaboration

Professional learning communities—noting this third word, communities—have a purpose of collectivity. The goal of PLCs is to work together, fostering a culture of collaboration, to better education for students. The rub in education is that the culture of collaboration too often shutters when the classroom door closes. In the realms of talented youth, social justice, and equity education, teachers are often silos, so much so that there's an expression "I just close my door and teach". Meaning— to do what I know is right for my kiddos, I have to shut my door; close it to the standards, to the supervision, to the administration, to the onlookers, to my peers, to other students, to the testing, to the world... But by closing the

door, we can lose out on collaboration, on collectivity. Change happens through collectivity, and progress starts at the meeting of minds.

Results-based Approach

Where are we now, where do we need to be next, and how do we get there? Continual improvement is the goal of a results-based approach; the indicator will shift based on the level of student achievement, and the new target shifts with periodic evidence of progress. With this approach, educators employ data as a tool for planning and discussion. This requires a change of perspective– the deficit approach “the students don’t get it” or “they need more discipline” is faulty and rooted in master narratives. The results-based approach requires a keen eye on the success of each student rather than a class average: what progress has been made on this goal, what else can we try to meet this goal? The results-based approach works in tandem with collectivity and collaboration, as educators must open their doors and work together in PLCs to come up with ideas to meet all the needs of their students. The collaborative approach from DuFour et al. (2010) and moving away from deficit thinking link to the culturally relevant practices in Parker’s (2022) model.

Parker’s Culturally Relevant Intentional Literacy Communities (CRILCs)

Parker (2022) brings a new practice to the table: culturally relevant intentional literacy communities (CRILCs). This research-based best practice is grounded in the foundations of community and culturally relevant pedagogy. The literacy communities in practice consist of values and actions.

Foundations: Community

CRILCs incorporate three fundamental aspects of community: connection, necessity, and interdependence. Lack of connection was felt by students, teachers, and parents alike during the pandemic; this is what defines community: connection with others, a sense of inclusion, and belongingness, particularly regarding cultural relevance and authentic experiences. Needs feed the community, members come together around a common shared mission, vision, or purpose, and work together to create and maintain relationships, policies, conditions, or processes to realize these community goals. Communities are also interdependent: spaces in which individuals both need from others and provide to others.

Foundations: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The second foundation of CRILCs is culturally relevant pedagogy of which there are three elements: student learning and achievement, increasing cultural competence and developing their sociopolitical and critical awareness. Student learning and achievement focus on creating a balance in which students can negotiate their personality or identities within the educational space in such a way to feel academic success. This happens when educators welcome student expression and representation of their identities and incorporate texts beyond heterogeneous or Eurocentric representations of life. Parker (2022) states, “We do not punish them for showing emotion or for expressing developmentally appropriate behavior. Instead we realize that brilliance can show up in all kinds of ways, and we make space” (p. 33). To do this, Parker (2022) stipulates that culturally relevant educators are “evaluating and reevaluating our curriculum, materials, and expectations to make sure that we see children’s inherent brilliance” (p. 34).

Given that CRILCs are CR-culturally relevant—an integral component of the foundation is educators' need to increase their cultural competence; Parker (2022) focuses on two areas, whiteness and linguistic justice. "Given the whiteness of the teaching force, cultural competence means, specifically, that white teachers must understand their own white identity, the ways that whiteness has worked in their lives, and the ways that whiteness continues to work in their lives" (Parker, 2022, p. 38). White educators must fully understand their whiteness and the impact of whiteness and white supremacy on students as an integral part of cultural competency, yet many white educators see their whiteness as standard and struggle to see the cultural impact of what is in front of them, seeing only the cultural impact of the otherness surrounding them.

Otherness, for example, such as students' languages. The refusal to name racist systems that invalidate students' languages causes substantial harm (Parker, 2022), this is a form of linguistic violence. However, we can become culturally competent when we teach about linguistic justice when we teach about ending anti-Black linguistic racism and ensure the belongingness of students who do not speak white mainstream English (WME). In this way, we are also engaging students in their development of a sociopolitical and critical consciousness. This is linked to agency: "we guide students so they can realize how much power they have. Eventually, too, we can get out of their way and let them lead (or continue leading) because we've intentionally supported the growth of their critical consciousness" (Parker, 2022, p 43). Educators must believe that our students have a crucial voice and that it is our responsibility to nurture and elevate those voices.

CRILCs Values

With this foundation of community and culturally relevant pedagogy, the three values of CRILCs include that groups are: based on assets, nurturing and encouraging vulnerabilities, and are fueled by collectivism and working towards challenging injustice (Parker, 2022).

Asset-based circles back to the work of Moll et al. (1992) and the funds of knowledge, as Parker (2022) cites. Asset-based is contrary to deficit-based, learning from the strengths rather than the stereotypes or the assumptions that educators may have about people or groups of people. “We see the world through our own racialized, gendered, complicated lenses. We also must acknowledge that our lenses are biased and that we don’t always have a complete understanding of something because of that bias” (Parker, 2022, p. 53). Asset-based instruction involves gathering information about students, families, and communities—all while withholding assumptions and actively confronting our biases (Moll et al., 1992; Parker, 2022)—and then using this knowledge to plan content and instructional strategies.

The second value of CRILCs is nurturing and encouraging vulnerabilities. Discomfort and vulnerability are to be expected when we are our most honest selves. These feelings can erupt in our beliefs, words, deeds, and curriculum, but Parker indicates that we can mitigate the discomfort “if we are willing ourselves to be vulnerable first and then to support our students’ vulnerabilities, too— but not exploit those vulnerabilities” (Parker, 2002, p. 57–58). Our own mistakes create vulnerabilities, as will the attrition and corrective action of fixing mistakes—but it is crucial to acknowledge mistakes as an educator, even with the vulnerability caused.

Finally, CRILCs are driven by collectivism and socio-political change. The literacy communities are a collectivist space, we belong to one another, and the group as a whole takes precedence over the needs of the individual. This idea of social change is a grounding point within the literacy circles; it is incumbent upon all participants to work towards social change as an embedded component of CRILCs as a core value. As a grounding point, social change is a north star, a point of return, of encouragement or inspiration when educators or students might feel disillusioned. Parker explains:

We have many models of collectivist social change, including powerful examples of young people leading the way, that can provide us with necessary jolts of encouragement along the way. We should regularly draw on those examples for inspiration and direction. We should be especially intentional, too, of making sure all the examples of BIPOC students see are of BIPOC organizers doing the work. White students also need to see these examples so they can have an expanded understanding of solidarity and the work BIPOC young people are doing to impact social change. (2022, p.62-63)

The value of collectivism and sociopolitical change strongly pushes the content focus of the CRILCs, particularly with social change within organizations.

CRILCs Actions

As a balance to the three values, the three actions of CRILCs are to eliminate traditional barriers to literacy, address and heal reading trauma and curriculum violence, and deliberately teach habits, skills, and dispositions required to be a high literacy achiever (Parker, 2022).

Literacy assessment is meant to be a meaningful and social process, but it has traditionally been a barrier. In addition, the assessment process has been marred by trauma, such as high-stakes testing, relentless shaming of readers for choices from comics to romance to fantasy, and a concomitant focus on the literary classics.

Curriculum and education itself have been responsible for trauma and violence for students; we must acknowledge these past and potential harms. While children are not their trauma, the harm can be ongoing, and vulnerabilities may arise in our classroom. If/when students share with us, this significant act of trust should be honored. One step that educators can take is to practice language acceptance. “When we condemn Black students’ language—and other students who speak a broad variety of languages, too—we condemn students. We practice another form of curriculum violence, this time in linguistic form” (Parker, 2022, p. 68). Educators can also utilize trauma-informed practices as equity-centered instructional strategies (Venet, 2021).

The third action of CRILCs is to intentionally teach skills, habits, and dispositions that are needed to continue achieving high levels of content literacy. An important skill is to plan for success, considering measurable and achievable goals. Understanding the importance of failure in the scope of life, and how it is important for growth, is another key skill and habit in content literacy. Educators and students working in CRILCs benefit from using routines in their literacy communities in addition to structured spaces in which to engage in their work (Parker, 2022).

Tomlinson’s Learner-Centered Classrooms

Student Learning Communities (SLCs) are intentionally structured to be student-focused which, using Tomlinson's (2021) components of the learner-centered classroom, include:

- the areas of focus: the learner, the content, progress, and community;
- a balance in power relationships with regards to curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, and learning environment;
- honoring the learner by accepting and affirming students, believing in students' capacity for success, expanding their knowledge about students, and teaching by maximizing students' growth; and
- unifying concepts-teaching for equity and excellence, expectations, challenge, and teaching up, and flexibility and differentiation.

Learner-centered research is incorporated into SLCs, connecting to, and extending the content standards by identifying non-negotiables, ensuring student understanding of the content in their SLCs, and building in pulse-taking so that teachers know what students know, understand, and can do in relation to the non-negotiables, and making "learning joyful whenever possible-and satisfying always" (Tomlinson, 2021, p. 2).

Areas of Focus

The learner-centered classroom has four integral and interdependent areas of focus: the learner, the content, the progress, and the community (Tomlinson, 2021). In focusing on the learner, educators understand each student as an individual, responding to individual strengths, interests, and experiences. Educators provide appropriate challenges by understanding entry-level knowledge, agency, culture, and language, and monitoring ongoing

progress. With a content focus, educators make clear plans that engage students in authentic experiences, providing active and relevant learning activities for them to apply and/or transfer content knowledge using appropriate tools for depth and breadth in areas of student interest. By focusing on progress, learner-centered educators use authentic formative assessment and quality feedback that clearly represents learner understanding and thinking for both teacher and student; this qualitative and quantitative data serves as a catalyst for growth for both student and teacher through classroom conversations and reporting on learner progress and as a tool for planning and lesson development. Finally, the focus on community is crucial in establishing an environment that supports student growth, balanced power relationships (see the next section), and connectedness between the teacher and students and between students. This focus establishes the learning community as a collective system with a common ground of intellectual pursuit. Within this community, all participants, modeled by the teacher, show respect for and belongingness with the cultures and talents within the classroom, and those outside of the class, as well as an appreciation of diversity in culture, talent, and perspective, through making connections to the broader community (Tomlinson, 2021).

Power Relationships are Balanced

Learner-focused classrooms are collaborative with a balance in power between students and educators. Teachers share the responsibility of decision-making with regards to curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, and learning environment. Educators retain legal responsibility for the safety/environment of the classroom and for student's growth and

progress. Thus, learner-centered teaching requires educators to embrace ethics such as empathy, fairness, equity, accountability, and humanity (Tomlinson, 2021).

Honor the Learner

In honoring the learner, the teacher's focus starts small, with the students themselves, and grows, with a student focus, to encompass aspects of the students' community. The primary goal of the teacher is to focus on the student, outside of the content, and outside of the teacher themselves. This starts with a belief in the student's ability; an environment that is "affirming, encouraging, challenging, and supportive is likely to help a young person come to believe in his or her capacity, make productive decisions about engaging with learning, develop skills and resources that support success, and ultimately identify as a learner" (Tomlinson, 2021, p. 61). The educator teaches and models skills for success, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. By accepting and affirming students, getting to know their students through a multi-dimensional process, and fostering a growth mindset, educators consistently scaffold students for success. Educators build trust and community with students, the three Rs, relationships, relevance, and rigor, "until we establish trust with each student, know each student well enough to know what's relevant to him or her, and have a sense of what rigor looks like for that student" (Tomlinson, 2021, p. 68). Even at the community of learners stage, it is still about honoring the learner, the individual student.

Unifying Concepts

Tomlinson outlines groups of concepts that build the foundation for learner-centered instruction: teaching for equity and excellence; expectations, challenge, and teaching up; and

flexibility and differentiation (2021). Teaching for equity and excellence requires championing equity in the learning environment, curriculum, assessments, and instruction while “tackling inequity through the universal pursuit of excellence, arguing that ‘deep learning’ is necessary for all students but that it may be even more advantageous for students who have been previously alienated and underserved in school” (Tomlinson, 2021, p. 207). Deep learning refers to components that define pivotal practices: creative and critical thinkers, global thinkers, and collaborative learners and producers.

Holding high expectations for students and providing appropriate challenge work together; teaching up is a concept where the educator builds “a baseline of rich, meaningful, ‘deep’ learning experiences for all students...form[ing] a conceptual understanding of the disciplines” (Tomlinson, 2021, p. 211). Similar to funds of knowledge, teaching up involves connecting essential knowledge and skills to the learners’ lives and encouraging collaboration with peers that have varying, and similar, experiences. Finally, scaffolding is an essential component to teaching up, in which temporary supports are provided to ensure all learners have access to the authentic, rigorous, and culturally relevant curriculum developed by the learners and educator.

All the previously discussed unifying concepts, as well as the other aspects of learner-centered classrooms, require the final unifying concepts: flexibility and differentiation. Both teachers and students need to embrace planned and unplanned flexibility; this is essential when engaging in equitable learning communities that honor each member. Differentiation takes place in many forms, typically framed as through content, process, product, and/or learning

environment, and by/due to readiness, learning profile, or interests. The learner-centered classroom describes differentiation through a learning journey metaphor with highways—educators engaging students by teaching up, learners digging into concepts with their shared learning community through collaboration and/or engaging in critical thinking, reasoning, and discussion—and exit ramps—opportunities for exploration and/or extension, pulse-taking, frontloading content or vocabulary, scaffolding, skill development, small group instruction, conferencing, and/or feedback.

Connecting Research Foundations to the Pivotal Practice Definition

Student Learning Communities (SLCs) can be incorporated as a classroom practice for talented youth throughout the duration of the school year. Flexible grouping can be used with SLCs in multiple short-run options, as well as long-run options. While CRILCs are based on literacy instruction, literacy itself is cross-disciplinary and foundational to pedagogical knowledge in all instructional contexts (Muhammad, 2020). Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) is a culturally and historically responsive framework (Muhammad, 2020) that can be applied to the SLCs that emphasizes pedagogical knowledge across time, disciplines, and contexts; this framework includes five elements: identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy. The next section discusses HRL in depth as an example of operationalizing SLCs. Learner-centered classrooms (Tomlinson, 2021) focus on balancing the power relationship between the teacher and the learner regarding different instructional contexts: curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Student Learning Communities are an innovative pivotal practice for K–20 classes that develop individuality and agency in learners using learner–centered instruction (Tomlinson, 2021). SLCs for talented youth promote student voice and choice in learning, building in what matters to the participants through student–directed topics, the creation of goals, and completion of discussions, assignments, or even long–term projects within the communities. SLCs foster agency through student initiation of ideas based on the topics of the class, where they take the reins and make plans, and the teachers support by providing additional materials to help students achieve their goals.

CRILC’s actions and values (Parker, 2022) provide further support for this aspect of the pivotal practice definition and make the facilitation of SLCs successful. For example, addressing and healing trauma caused by prior curriculum violence (action) through collectivist work (value) is an innovative practice accomplished through SLCs. This helps educators to focus on the individual student, promoting their agency in learning.

DuFour’s (2004) PLC’s principles align with the pivotal practice definition components of metacognitive development. These are echoed in Parker’s CRILCs (2022) while this model also explicitly incorporates funds of knowledge research (Moll et al., 1992). This can be seen in the asset–based value, as well as social and emotional contributions to the learning experiences through the value of nurturing and encouraging vulnerabilities and the connection and interdependence aspects of the community. Cognitive development exists in both traditional PLCs’ and CRILCs’ focus on student learning goals, while in the student–driven SLCs’, metacognitive development is at the forefront. The learner–centered classroom (Tomlinson,

2021) strongly features students' funds of knowledge, metacognitive development, and social and emotional contributions to the learning experience.

SLCs Promote Problem-Solving, Inquiry, Critical Thinking, and Creative Thinking

Within the Student Learning Communities, talented youth have opportunities to rethink, reshape, reimagine, and reapply concepts that they've learned to new and different situations, authentic contexts, and real-world problems and issues. CRILCs are driven by the world around us—the need for sociopolitical change—and by us—collectivism (Parker, 2022). SLCs are natural environments for the Osborn–Parnes creative problem–solving (CPS) method of mess–finding, fact–finding, problem–finding, idea–finding, solution–finding, and action–finding. CPS uses a process of divergent and then convergent thinking; SLCs are well positioned for student–focused group problem–solving with teachers supporting, mentoring, and coaching. CPS enables talented youth to engage in collectivism while digging into avenues of sociopolitical change, elements of the CRILC framework of SLCs.

Because of the learner–centered nature of SLCs, inquiry–based models fit within the learning communities. The four dimensions of informed inquiry are in alignment with community aspects (connection, necessity, and interdependence) highlighted in CRILC (Parker, 2022) and PLC principles (a goal of student learning, a culture of collaboration, and a results–based approach, DuFour, 2004) of the SLCs frameworks: develop questions and plan inquiry, apply disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluate sources and use evidence, and communicate conclusions and taking action (Lintner & Puryear, 2015). The chapter frames critical thinking through Muhammad's criticality, one of the five elements of the historically responsive literacy

framework. “Criticality is the capacity to read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice, and oppression, particularly for populations who have been historically marginalized in the world” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 120). This is reflected in the three aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy central to CRILCs: student learning and achievement, increasing cultural competence and developing their sociopolitical and critical awareness.

For talented students, “the learning environment that does not acknowledge their needs will undermine their creative achievement whereas, in the atmosphere that supports their enjoyment, motivation, and acceptance, they will be encouraged to learn and think more” (Ngiamsunthorn, 2020, p. 14). An essential component of SLCs as a pivotal practice is the learning environment. The learning environment reinforces the community component of CRILCs and the values of asset-based and caring for vulnerabilities. It is also a central component in the learner-centered classroom (Tomlinson, 2021), as it is in this learning environment that creative thinking is nourished. In the following section, we move from the theoretical to the operational: looking at the SLCs in practice through examples in K-20 education.

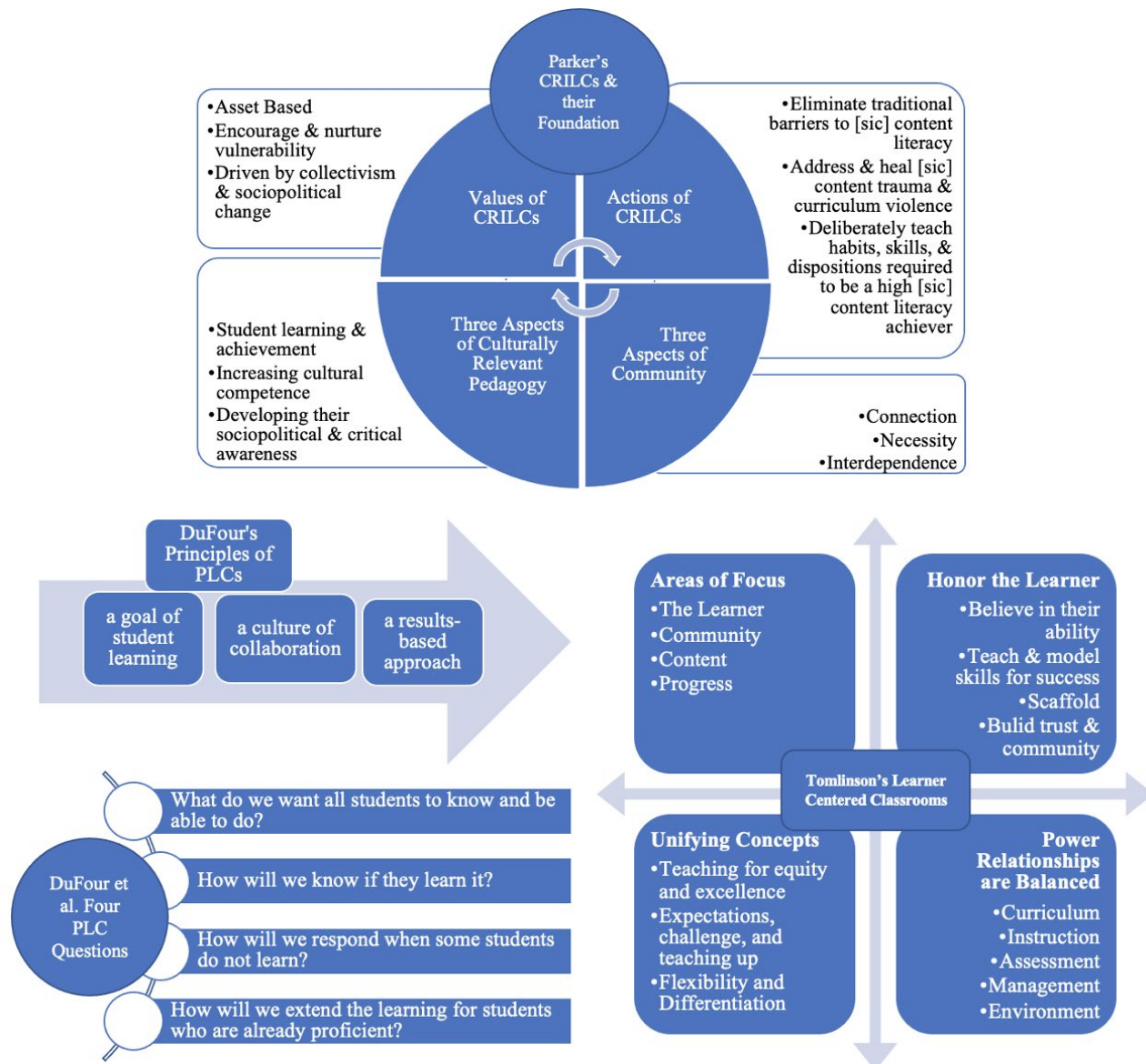
Student Learning Communities

The traditional PLCs, the CRILCs, and learner-centered classrooms are the framework for the Student Learning Communities as a pivotal practice for talented youth. Using these three research-based best practice models as a base, PLCs, CRILCs, and learner-centered classrooms (see Figure 1), I suggest that SLCs are a valid practice for youth, K-20. In the final section of this chapter, I provide examples of their use in the classroom, including my own use as an

instructor of elementary assessment with pre-service teachers. Figure 1 provides a graphical overview of the research outlined in the sections above.

Figure 1

Graphical Representation of Theoretical Frameworks of Student Learning Committees



SLCs in practice may incorporate all aspects of these theoretical frameworks but depending on the form and function of the SLC, they may not all apply. For example, when I used SLCs with

preservice teachers, it was a natural fit to introduce the four PLC questions (DuFour et al., 2010) as-is, but in a first-grade SLC, these questions will more likely serve as a framework of support for teacher planning, with potential to be modified for student reflection/feedback, rather than at the forefront for student use. Table 2 shows the model for Student Learning Communities as a pivotal practice, based on these frameworks.

Figure 2

A Model of Student Learning Communities

	Community Space and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Build a foundation of trust between learners and educator •Create a community within the walls of the classroom that extends beyond the classroom, foregrounding equity, inclusion and belongingness •Integrate Balance of Power (Structure and Environment; Tomlinson, 2021) •Develop a culturally responsive and equitable environment for learning with, not just for, learners
	Progress-Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Use ongoing informal and formal formative assessment & funds of knowledge to adjust content to learner needs while blending cultural and community assets •Integrate Balance of Power (Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment; Tomlinson, 2021); Unifying Concepts (Tomlinson, 2021); DuFour Principles (2010) •Ensure curriculum is not just academically rigorous but culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and equitably relevant
	Student Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Prior 'layers' laid the groundwork, providing needed curricular structure and learning environment for successful SLCs •Integrate Values & Actions of CRILCs (Parker, 2022); DuFour Questions (2010) •Students take initiative and lead while teacher supports, providing ongoing feedback scaffolding by age and need

Community Space and Place

Based on the theoretical models presented, Student Learning Communities are a pivotal practice built on trust, learner-centered classrooms, equity, and a balance of power between the educator and the student. Thus, SLCs are not an opening day of class activity. The tiered shape of the model is intentional; it is essential to build a relationship with students and to build trust through the curriculum, before the student learning communities are established.

The first phase is called Community Space and Place. These words are sometimes used as synonyms, other times they are distinct with varying definitions. In geospatial analysis, for

example, space refers to physical descriptors of geography (e.g., how much time will it take to travel, what is the distance between the two points) while the place is the characteristics people assign that provide meaning (e.g., at a corner near a familiar spot; Cobb, 2020). Almjeld writes, “places might be positioned as geographical, physical, and contextual, while space may productively be thought of as ephemeral, aspirational, and transformative” (2021, p. 60). It is in this way that Community Space and Place are contextualized for this model. Place can be narrow or broad: the room itself, the school, but also the rural or urban context. The small corner where the school sits, the stretch of road, the bodega, the hair stylist, the pizza shop, the apartment building, and the park on the corner. The stores each child in the school knows, where they get their hair cut, where the pizza is delivered from on field trip Fridays, and where they stop by after school for a soda, bag of chips, piece of candy, or a hug. Space is the culture and environment created by the people and the events that take place in the places. Within our memories, and our realities, space, and place have the potential to overlap.

The goal of the educator and students is to first create a community within the walls of the classroom, building a foundation of trust. This community should extend beyond the four walls of the classroom, using community and cultural assets (funds of knowledge) to enrich and expand the classroom community (Moll et al., 1992). Moreover, it is important to foreground equity, inclusion, and belongingness; not just make sure everyone has a seat at the classroom table (inclusion), but that they have an equal voice, that they feel their voice is important, heard, and respected (belongingness). Lastly, in this stage, educators set the groundwork for SLCs by establishing a culturally responsive and equitable environment for learning with, not just for,

learners. This is a team effort: a learning environment is not established by an educator alone, however, given that the traditional power structure in the classroom is held by the educator, this step requires educators to re-balance that power, in class structure and learning environment (Tomlinson, 2021). This is just the start, the other aspects of the balance of power discussed earlier in this chapter are in the next phase.

Progress-Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content

Twenty or so years ago, I thought I was the first to say “you have to take care of the Maslow before you take care of the Bloom’s” It seems to be everywhere now, it’s even a meme! I either started an educational trend, or a bunch of people had the same idea. Probably the latter. But the order of the phases follows the basic principle. We have to know our students. We have to build a foundation of trust and respect. We have to Maslow first, then we Bloom.

In the second phase—again, before we get to the SLCs—of the SLC model, we focus on the learner again, but this time with a content lens. First up is pulse-taking: informal and formal formative assessment (note: this does not mean test!) using different measures to understand where your learners are in the curriculum, where they want to go, and why. This may involve looking at content standards and then moving beyond. We will also go back to the personal, cultural, and community assets (funds of knowledge) and other knowledge that we have about the learners, working with them to develop goals regarding the content. This is the next area of balancing power (Tomlinson, 2021): curriculum, instruction, and assessment. What do we want to know? How will we learn it? How will we know when we’ve learned it?

Throughout this phase, educators should keep in mind the unifying concepts from learner-centered classrooms discussed earlier in this chapter: teaching for equity and excellence, expectations, challenge, teaching up, and flexibility and differentiation (Tomlinson, 2021). The goal is to ensure the curriculum is not just academically relevant but culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and equitably relevant. DuFour's principles of PLCs are integral as well (2004). The goal is student learning, not teacher output of content, and the methods are collaboration and using outcomes and results to inform future directions. I recommend two curricular models for meeting the needs of talented learners: the Blooms-Banks model (Ford, 2013) and/or the windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors approach (Bishop, 1990).

In the first two phases, the groundwork for the SLCs is established. The community and the curriculum base are important areas in which understanding and trust need to be genuinely forged for meaning-making to occur in phase three, Student Learning Communities. Note on Figure 2, the circles in front of the first two phases have an exterior circle; these first two phases can overlap as needed, and they can repeat on one another until a solid foundation is set.

Student Learning Communities

When the groundwork is established after a few weeks, Student Learning Communities are ready to fully engage. Early work can start in SLCs if a grouping structure is already set. For example, in the SLCs in my undergraduate assessment class, we use grade level groups to mimic the PLCs of the elementary schools- since those are set groups, we could start in known groups early on. However, if the phase one and two groundwork isn't set yet, we wouldn't want

to start the full groups—there is a method to the process, and we want to establish the full class community of learners, and the comfort level with the curriculum, and this will likely take a week or two—however because of course schedules and meeting times and so on, if it is important to set up the consistency of times and schedules, initial meetings could take place, discussing group norms, assigning roles, and/or using the time for groups but with a slightly different format.

A key aspect of SLCs is the student initiative in topics and leadership of the groups. The teacher takes a back seat and supports, providing structure and scaffolding as needed for individuals and groups, and feedback for all students. CRILCs are led by the assets of the students, they encourage and nurture learners' vulnerabilities, and are driven by collectivism and sociopolitical change (Parker, 2022) and these values should be core to planning SLCs. Similarly, educators should consider the actions of CRILCs in planning for SLCs: eliminating traditional barriers to content literacy, addressing and healing prior content trauma and curriculum violence, and intentionally teaching the skills, habits, and dispositions needed to continue to achieve at high levels (Parker, 2022).

Educators can begin by scaffolding SLCs with discussion guides, practice sessions, and note catchers at the start. Ongoing educator structure can be provided as needed through tiered agendas, questions, debriefing, and group visitation, scaffolded by age and need by the group. In the final section, I'll describe a few different tools to use in operationalizing SLCs. I'll close with an example of SLCs in practice that I used over the past year, in my undergraduate assessment classroom.

SLCs as a Pivotal Practice in K–20 Education

Operationalizing SLCs

In putting this pivotal practice into play, there are several frameworks and/or tools that are helpful in realizing the full scope of the SLCs: historical responsive literacy (HRL), flexible grouping, and asset mapping. This section will provide an overview of these tools, and then provide a full example of SLC as a pivotal practice in play: PLCs in an undergraduate teacher preparation assessment course.

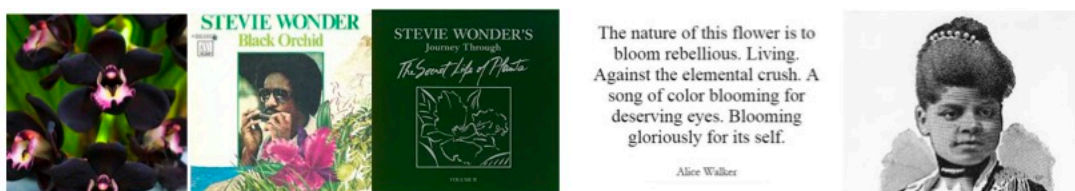
Historically Responsive Literacy

Historically responsive literacy (HRL) is a five-part equity framework established to cultivate the genius in students. Lessons are comprised of Identity, Skills, Intellect, Criticality, and Joy (Muhammad, 2020). Identity is the discovery of the self, but also of others, while skills are the proficiencies and the standards of the discipline. Intellect moves beyond the content; it is the concepts, paradigms, and connections combined with mental culture, emotional intelligence, self-, and social-awareness or representation and the critique and extension of thoughts and ideas. Criticality is a buzzword of late, not to be confused with critical thinking or critical race theory. Muhammad writes, “When youth have criticality, they are able to see, name, and interrogate the world not only to make sense of injustice but to work toward social transformation” (2020, p. 120). To help distinguish between the ideal of critical thinking and criticality, Muhammad (2020) uses a lowercase *c* and capital *C*, “while *critical* means to think deeply about something, *Critical* is connected to an understanding of power, oppression, entitlement, and equity” (p. 120). Criticality embodies the use of reading, writing, and/or

thinking skills to understand, reason, and actively work through and against systems of power, advantage, oppression, and inequity, especially in consideration for historically minoritized and marginalized groups. Finally, Joy is a gift that animates the soul, that shares the love and hope we have for ourselves and for humanity.

Figure 3

Sample of Historically Responsive Literacy Lessons by Muhammad (2020)



Black Orchid (1979)-Stevie Wonder

Theme- Identity

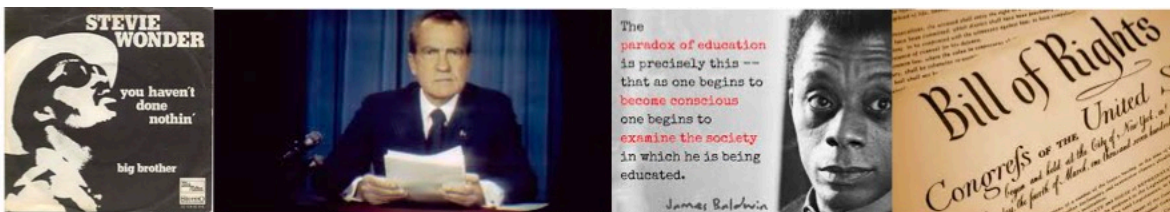
Identity: Students will learn about the beauty, complexity and delicacy of Black women.

Skills: Students will analyze language and study the metaphor of the black orchid flower.

Intellectualism: Students will learn about selected moments and movements led by Black women.

Criticality: Students will learn the theory of about Black Feminist Thought and why we need to understand BFT to understand the history of society.

Joy: Students will study the line in the song, “Her Freedom Makes Us Free” and compare the line to the needs and joys of humanity.



You Haven't Done Nothin' (1974)-Stevie Wonder

Theme- Resistance

1. **Identity:** Students will think of themselves as activists and consider things that are in urgent need for change.
2. **Skills:** Students will compare and contrast multiple forms of activism.
3. **Intellectualism:** Students will learn the concept and meaning of activism.
4. **Criticality:** Students will learn who Stevie Wonder “is talking to” in the song and who “hasn’t done anything” for people who have been marginalized.
5. **Joy:** Students will listen closely to the musicality of Stevie Wonder to determine how a song about resistance still gives joy. *Which parts of the song feel joyful?*

In writing the lessons/goals for the Student Learning Communities, HRL is a framework that spans ages and grades, content and standards. Consider Figure 3, HRL lessons using Stevie Wonder songs and the themes of identity and resistance. The values of CRILCs (Parker, 2022) are evident in the HRL lessons: building upon students’ assets as they consider themselves activists, encouraging and nurturing vulnerabilities as they contemplate identity in Black women, either themselves or others, and in the who Stevie Wonder is talking to in “You Haven’t Done Nothin’”. The theme of resistance is driven by collectivism and sociopolitical change, and so too is identity through the eyes of a Black woman, sung by a Black man. The actions of the CRILCS, which are encouraged in the SLC model clearly emerge in these sample lessons as well. HRL is a clear, concise planning framework that can be utilized by both students and/or teachers driving the content.

Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping is not a new tool for educators of talented youth. In the context of this chapter, it requires little explanation—adjusting group membership by skill, need, or interest—more so it requires direction as to its applicability with SLCs. In the case of the example of college seniors in an educator prep program (described in more detail in the next section), I adjusted the SLCs for an assignment based on a request from a student.

In a survey response, a student wrote “If we were able to switch around our PLC groups to learn from people in other grades so that way, I will be more prepared if I end up teaching a different grade than I am interning with”, thus I organized a class activity using the JIGSAW strategy. In this activity, their home groups were their PLC groups—students start and end the activity in these home groups—but for their expert groups, the bulk of the activity, I rearranged them into mixed grade levels. The students had a task to complete in their home group (commenting on a video), were divided into expert groups to become experts on an aspect needed to solve the task (learning about feedback), and came together again at the end of the class to complete the initial task (discussing as a group and providing written comments as a group about the feedback the teacher was giving in the video, using their combined expert knowledge).

After this activity, several students stayed after class, and several others emailed: please don’t change up our SLC groups again! The change-up had completely interrupted their working flow, as the SLCs had working jobs and thus existing comfort zones. Students said that new group members would barely communicate, or they’d have issues because there would be

two group leaders in the same group or two recorders. They weren't prepared to be as flexible with the process.

Thus, while flexible grouping is an important tool for teaching talented youth, it should be built into the process of the SLCs early into the process. For example, an A group and a B group— each having its own purpose, and depending on the goal of the SLC, that is the group that meets. Or adjust the groups frequently enough so the groups do not have a dependency on group cohesiveness. Another limitation with the potential for flexible groups in the higher education setting is twice-weekly meetings as a course rather than daily class meetings which are more frequent for K–12. As such, the SLCs met once a week, thus switching membership frequently wasn't an ideal proposition. Regular use of SLCs in K–12 classrooms would likely benefit from flexible grouping and adjustment of SLCs throughout the school year.

Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping is based on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory and Moll et al.'s (1992) funds of knowledge. Students track what they observe, hear, and read about topics under study in relation to assets in their community. Based on the topic under discussion, related to the content standard in the classroom, students use a template to collect data, about assets in their local community related to the topic. Skills such as asset mapping promote inquiry among the students, as well as encourage strength-based rather than deficit mindsets.

Asset Mapping does not require an in-depth set of supplies or directions. The general steps are defining the boundaries of the area, determining the kinds of assets to include, researching and listing the assets (by group/individual), and then organizing these assets on a

map. Ideally, the endeavor will be more successful if conducted with partners or a group. That said, there is a helpful guide that I have used from elementary to higher education:

<https://communityscience.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf>

Why asset mapping as a tool to use with and/or for SLCs? The first two phases of the SLC model are building connections and a relationship with students and the community. Asset mapping is a tool to help educators gain knowledge and build relationships with students. In the 13–20 classrooms, both educators and talented youth can asset map to learn about, and engage in community with, the world that they are inhabiting beyond the dormitory and classroom walls.

SLC in Action: College Seniors in an Educator Prep Program

Setting the Groundwork: Establishing Community Space and Place

In the first few weeks of an assessment course for elementary education majors, I worked to build a classroom community with students. The first semester, both courses were online, one was a synchronous DE course, in which students had a face-to-face (F2F), but the online course, which they attended via Webex. The second section was a traditional distance education (DE) course, in an asynchronous format. Students were not required to attend online meetings; all content was provided through readings. They were always invited to come to F2F sessions if they wished, and I would occasionally share with them a recording of the class for a concept that I found particularly challenging (e.g., disaggregating data). In the second semester, all students were synchronous DE (traditionally F2F students moved to a synchronous DE format).

I share my class norms on the first day of class and on my syllabus: *Health– mental and physical– and family first, always. Give and receive grace and courtesy.* I used equitable grading policies (e.g., standards–based grading, 0–4 grading, no late penalties, revising and resubmitting for credit) and I make every effort to get to know my students on a personal level through conversations, online check–ins, and emails.

Setting the Groundwork: Progress–Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content

I use a variety of informal and formal formative assessments in the first few weeks of class to determine where my students are in the understanding of assessment, equity, and lesson planning in general. Major assignments for both courses are the same, but I differentiate as needed throughout the course. In the second semester, several students were taking the class for the second time, which meant that they did not have an internship placement. This caused a wrinkle in the SLC placement as these were grade–based.

The biggest difference in the curriculum (first semester only) is that students in the F2F class were provided class time to conduct their SLCs– called PLCs in the context of this class because they are meant to be authentic learning experiences for PLCs in elementary school settings. In the DE section, other DE sections typically submit online discussion boards, which were omitted from my section due to the requirement of the PLCs. Additionally, the DE sections had to come up with their own meeting time, which added a layer to their group dynamic; this was built into the F2F section as our meetings occurred during class time.

Student Learning Communities in Action: PLCs

In the 4th week of the semester (first semester) I introduced the concept of PLCs. I gave the students the choice of selecting their own groups or using grade-level groups. By this point (senior year), students have people that they prefer to work with—that they know they can work well with and turn into a successful product. In keeping with the balance of power, I left as much as possible open to student preference regarding the PLCs. They voted overwhelmingly for grade-level groups to mirror PLCs in the elementary school setting. In the second semester, I started the PLCs in week two, but as we had not established the groundwork as thoroughly, they were not content driven until week four. Second-semester students also voted for grade level PLCs.

Students were placed into groups and asked to read a chapter about PLCs prior to the first PLC meeting day. Figure 4 was provided as a guiding document for the PLCs.

Figure 4

Guiding Document Used for PLCs

ELEM 4400 Professional Learning Community

PLCs, or professional learning communities, are real-world experiences that you will engage in as a teacher— you may have the opportunity to join your Clinical Teacher in their PLC— please do so if you have this chance (and read this chapter for an overview; https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/27683_Roberts_Chapter_1.pdf). PLCs are ongoing professional learning opportunities that should have the following five essential elements: (1) reflective dialogue, (2) focus on student learning, (3) interaction among teacher colleagues, (4) collaboration, and (5) shared values and norms. In the real world, your PLCs are likely going to be grade-level based, but Doc will give you the opportunity to choose your groups. PLCs will likely be 3–4 members, as we want to keep the meeting time to about 35 minutes.

We are going to use a short check-in, long meeting approach, and meet at a minimum twice per module with provided class time. The short check-in will be about 10 minutes of class time, the long meeting will be approximately 35 minutes of class time.

Short Check-ins are for quick planning for the long meeting, checking to see if everyone is on track, and seeing if anyone is in crisis. You should also use this time to set your monthly goal that aligns with one of the two provided class objectives (below).

Long Meetings are the “monthly” in the world of PLCs– but for us, per Module. During these meetings, PLCs will discuss 2 provided questions and have their own goal (question) to discuss. You may keep the same goal for the entire semester, or you may change it for each meeting.

The PLC objective-aligned goals should be created by the PLCs, but you are welcome to obtain assistance from the instructor. They should be aligned to one of the following course objectives:

- Communicate assessment results to students, families, and other interested individuals.
- Recognize unethical, illegal, and inappropriate assessment methods.

The two standard PLC questions discussed at each meeting are:

1. What assessments have you seen in play since your last meeting? (Macro level)
2. What assessments are you preparing to administer, or have you recently administered? (Micro level)

In addition, the PLC should be prepared to discuss a third, agreed-upon question related to their group objective-aligned goal. Doc may also provide guiding question(s) related to the content/reading for you to discuss.

For each long meeting, each PLC member, should bring at least two artifacts for the group discussion, one at the micro level, and one at the goal level. A macro artifact is preferred, but optional. Artifacts include (but are not limited to):

- videos of yourself teaching/administering an assessment
- de-identified student data gathered from an administered assessment
- an assessment you created and/or administered
- a teacher/district assessment (macro level)
- individual items from an assessment about which you have questions.

To facilitate a successful PLC meeting in which all group members share, the following timeline is suggested for the long PLC meetings:

- Macro Level Discussion: 5–7 minutes
- Micro Level Discussion: 13–15 minutes
- Objective-Aligned Group Goal Discussion: 13–15 minutes

Please use the templates below for your PLC Notes. Keep all notes on *ONE shared google document* with *commenting/editing permissions enabled*. Please copy/paste the template for

each meeting. Note that there are *two templates for the two types of meetings*. This way we have ongoing communication– if you want to respond to a comment that I made, you can! Most of the time, however, I will not be looking for a response, I am more providing comments for y'all to think about and discuss.

You will turn in a link to the google doc after each PLC meeting (short or long), thus the copy/paste will follow the “*newest on top*” rule, or reverse time order. Your oldest PLC will be the last in your document, and your newest will be posted first, but all reports will be in the same document. (This saves your instructor’s scrolling fingers while reading each week!)

Notes on completing the templates:

- Be sure to complete each highlighted section.
- Purple is for short meetings. Gold is the long meeting template.
- *If you are absent, you need to read the notes and add your response to the google doc as an “addendum”.*
- Only one person needs to submit the completed template after your meeting– that’s the benefit of being set up in groups. Be sure to establish who is responsible. I suggest the following roles, though this can be established in your first meeting: Facilitator, Recorder, Timekeeper, and Reporter. This document (https://www.browardschools.com/cms/lib/FL01803656/Centricity/Domain/12273/Establishing_PLC_Roles.pdf) has details.
- I highly suggest either deleting/cutting this page or moving it to the bottom of your document. If you’d like to keep it for reference (which is a good idea) you can house it wherever you are keeping your group files or keep it at the bottom of your document. But this way it doesn’t have to be constantly scrolled through every time you open the document! Remember that you have access to this information on the Canvas course as well!

ELEM 4400 Professional Learning Community

Group Name:

Group Members:

Grade Level(s):

Schools Represented:

School Counties Represented:

Additional Context:

Group Norms:

Roles:

SHORT PLC Meeting Notes Template

PLC Short Meeting for Grade Level/Group:

Members Present:

Members Absent:

Addendum Added on:

Date:

Objective–Aligned Module Goal (Question/Topic) that the PLC has decided on:

Aligns to Objective: (check appropriate objective)

- Communicate assessment results to students, families, and other interested individuals.
- Recognize unethical, illegal, and inappropriate assessment methods.

Briefly Explain Alignment to the Objective:

In this meeting, we discussed (check all that apply):

- General plans for a long PLC meeting
- Setting the goal for a long PLC meeting
- Discussing potential artifacts for the long PLC Meeting
- Questions to ask your instructor (ask below)
- Shared values/norms
- Checking to see if everyone is on track
- A PLC member in crisis (explain below)
- Other (explain below)

Explanations, as needed:

Doc's Prompts/Questions (if provided, if none, enter n/a):

Response:

LONG PLC Meeting Notes Template

PLC Long Meeting for Grade Level/Group:

Members Present:

Members Absent:

Addendum Added on:

Date:

Question 1: What assessments have you seen in play since your last meeting?

Artifacts (check all that apply): *Note that artifacts are optional for this question.*

- a teacher/district assessment (macro level)
- individual items from an assessment about which you have questions.
- Other (explain below)

Explanations, as needed:

Question 2: What assessments are you preparing to administer, or have you recently administered?

Artifacts (check all that apply):

- videos of yourself teaching/administering an assessment
- de-identified student data gathered from an administered assessment
- an assessment you created and/or administered
- individual items from an assessment about which you have questions.
- Other (explain below)

Explanations, as needed:

Question 3, please write your third, agreed-upon question related to your group goal here:

Aligns to Objective: (check appropriate objective)

- Communicate assessment results to students, families, and other interested individuals.
- Recognize unethical, illegal, and inappropriate assessment methods.

Briefly Explain Alignment to the Objective (you may copy/paste from your previous notes):

Response:

Artifacts (check all that apply):

- videos of yourself teaching/administering an assessment
- de-identified student data gathered from an administered assessment
- an assessment you created and/or administered
- a teacher/district assessment (macro level)
- individual items from an assessment about which you have questions.
- Other (explain below)

Explanations, as needed:

Doc's Prompts/Questions (if provided, if none, enter n/a):

Response:

One student in each group turned in the appropriate minutes' document (short or long) weekly, and I would respond before the next meeting. I remained in the main online room so that groups could use the contact feature and I could go to the groups with questions during the short meetings, as I would not have the time to visit each group. In long meetings, I would try to visit each group to check in, while at the same time, making sure they knew that this was their group, and that they were in charge. Students frequently utilized the call for questions feature with questions as needed and were not timid about asking for a review of directions or clarification as needed.

As students wrote questions for consideration, if I felt that they needed more direction to be on topic, I wrote suggestions or guiding questions, but refrained from "this is the wrong idea", to keep to the goals of the student-centered classroom. I shared that the minutes were not a reporting document for me, but a way for them to share with me when they needed more resources or support in their discussion points. My goal was to keep my comments supportive, and I would try to join a group or speak to the group about any concerns. The assessment for the minutes was based on completion and I followed up with students that were absent, regarding reviewing the minutes and writing their addendums, though in future courses, I would like to make that a task of a group member.

Evaluating the SLCs

Ongoing communication between the students and the instructor is essential for the success of SLCs. Beyond the use of the PLC, minutes passed through google docs, as described earlier, I kept my finger on the pulse of student engagement throughout the semester through formative assessment. For example, each quiz I assign has a final (no credit) question that asks for feedback (see Figure 5). I also use a quick one-item survey after the first few weeks to check in and see if any changes need to be made in groups, directions, protocol, or scaffolding. This is still in the pilot phase, at the time of this writing implemented with two semesters of students; it is always important to me that I work with my students and be responsive to their needs, but this is even more true as we engage in SLCs, which are grounded in learner-centered research.

Figure 5

Examples of Formative Assessments Used to Gather Feedback and Progress

No Credit Quiz Feedback Question

OPTIONAL

What feedback do you have for Doc?

Consider the following:

- * What has really resonated with you so far?
- * Is there anything you are struggling with? (ex., content, how the course works, etc.)
- * How can I better help you succeed? For example, have you done something differently in another online course that you could suggest that would help?

I ask for student feedback regularly so I can work to improve your class experience and continue to grow as a professor. I guarantee I will listen, but I can't promise that I will act on every suggestion. I weigh many factors, and I have requirements to fulfill for my department and college. However, I will always listen and do what I can to improve your experience. I appreciate any and all feedback and ideas!

Note: This question is not worth any points. It is simply formative feedback for me.

What do you think of the PLCs? Formative Survey

Worth the typical 4 points– which you automatically receive upon completion. Thus, your opinion isn't "graded" just fill this out!

Also, there's just one question:

What do you think of the PLCs?

Give me the Strengths, the areas for Growth, a funny (but good) story where y'all learned something and lay it all out there.

The caveat– try not to tell me something 'doesn't work' without some kind of idea for how to make it better... We work better as a team!

Data from these, along with other informal measures, was used in planning and providing suggestions to the students on an ongoing basis.

In addition to formative measures throughout the semester, I wanted to gauge students' overall feelings regarding the PLCs. There was a final reflection assignment on the PLCs, which was a direct method, as they were specifically asked about their perceptions regarding the teaching method. However, for the past several years, I have used the MUSIC Model of Academic

Motivation Inventory (MUSIC Inventory; Jones, 2022) in my class as part of an ongoing study of academic motivation in eastern North Carolina. I find this instrument more helpful than the university-administered end-of-course survey, particularly because I can administer it myself at the middle of the semester and again at the end of the semester to measure their responses, and potential change, on the 5 constructs: eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring. I then use this feedback as another point of formative data, to help serve my students more efficiently.

The instrument has items that participants are asked to rate on a Likert-style scale from 1 (low) to 6 that are assigned to each of the 5 constructs. For example, a Usefulness item is *I find the coursework to be relevant to my future*, while a Caring item is *The instructor cares about how well I do in this course*. Using excel, I averaged the data from the Likert-style items for each subscale, as well as for the pre-test (mid-way through the semester) and post-test (the end of the semester), and analyzed the data using a paired two-sample t-test. I controlled for missing data by running the analysis pairwise, which left the total sample size to 31 (starting $n=43$), across two semesters of students. The full data analysis from the t-test is in Table 1. On all facets of the scale except for Caring, students showed a significant ($p<.05$, one-tailed) growth from mid-semester to the end of the year, with effect sizes ranging from the high end of small (eMpowerment) to medium (Interest, Total), to large (Usefulness, Success). Of note, the Caring subscale has the highest mean out of the initial administration; out of a possible 6, the mid-semester $M=5.66$, and the end of semester $M=5.76$.

Table 1

Analysis of the MUSIC Inventory Using Paired Two Sample T-Test

Variable	<i>M</i> Pre	<i>SD</i> Pre	<i>M</i> Post	<i>SD</i> Post	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Total	5.28	.51	5.51	.50	2.41	.01*	.41+
eMpowerment	5.08	.67	5.45	.55	2.80	.004*	.295^
Usefulness	5.48	.50	5.64	.51	1.86	.04*	.58**
Success	5.18	.71	5.39	.56	1.93	.03*	.56**
Interest	4.93	.64	5.28	.72	2.59	.007*	.39+
Caring	5.68	.44	5.76	.47	.80	.22	.30

Note: *M*- Mean, *SD*- Standard Deviation calculated for the pre-and the post-measures on the survey; *t*- calculated in excel, pairwise using a 95% confidence interval, *df*=30; *p* ($T \leq t$) one-tail- was calculated for significance, *signifying $p < .05$, a significant result; Pearson's *r* was calculated for effect size, ^signifying a small effect size, + medium, and **large.

The second component of the MUSIC Inventory is the open-ended response section.

While statistical analysis certainly has its value, this is where I was particularly interested in gathering data, as the questions did not ask about the PLCs. Rather, these questions focus on the 5 subscales of the MUSIC Inventory, with two open-ended questions for each area. I felt that extemporaneous references to the PLCs, rather than the directed reflection as in the previously mentioned assignment, were an indicator of the impact of the pivotal practice. For example, for eMpowerment, the two questions are: *Which aspects of this course gave you control over your course participation and learning?* and *What could be changed in this course to make you feel you had more control over your learning?* The additional questions ask about any changes students might make that haven't already been mentioned, anything they like that hasn't

already been mentioned, in what ways covid has affected their motivation, and how the course/instructor has helped develop leadership skills as an educator if any. For the typical use of the MUSIC inventory, I qualitatively analyze all responses, however, in this case, I only pulled responses with references to PLCs. I conducted open coding of the responses (Saldaña, 2016), and looked for a thematic pattern across the responses. In reviewing the codes for themes, I first arranged the codes by an open-ended question, noting similar responses and patterns (e.g., enjoying the PLCs, authentic experience, practicing for the future, grading for equity). In rereading the words from my students, I realized I was reading examples or explanations of the characteristics of the SLC Model from the previous section. I kept a codebook, as a reliability measure, and for future potential replication potential (Roberts et al., 2019; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, I reviewed the existing codes from the data analysis, collapsing as needed, and used the three aspects of the SLC Model as a priori themes: community space and place, progress-based learning goals with relevant content, and student learning communities (see Figure 1). Table 2 shows the results of this thematic coding process, with a sample of qualitative responses with the corresponding code, arranged by aspects of the SLC model.

Table 2.

Responses from Music Inventory

SLC Model Aspect	Codes	Sample Responses from MUSIC Inventory
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<p>Community Space and Place Build a foundation of trust between learners and educator; Balance of Power (Structure and Environment; Tomlinson, 2021); Create a community within the walls of the classroom that extends beyond the classroom, foregrounding equity, inclusion and belongingness; Develop a culturally responsive and equitable environment for learning with, not just for, learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning environment • Self-efficacy • Peer support • Appreciation of PLCs 	Doc never calls on anyone in particular during the class to answer a question. She wants people to participate on their own terms. I get very nervous when called on especially if I don't know the answer. Doc will provide us with time to think. With our group work, it is up to us how we complete it. During our PLCs we get to come up with the questions and topics and feel like we have control over what we get to learn and discuss within our groups.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Instructor • Appreciation of PLCs • Peer support 	I knew I had the support of Doc in all aspects of this course. She made me feel like I was capable of completing all of the work and would provide any assistance or help as needed. I also liked the PLCs we were in, and being able to work with peers made me feel like I could be successful.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative Instructor • Peer support 	Doc was always prepared to help us. Her class meetings were always informative. She grouped us into PLC meetings, and it helped to have peers to work with.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Instructor 	I enjoy my classmates, our PLC setup, and our professor's positive energy.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of PLCs 	I love the way she gives instruction and the use of PLCs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency- assignments 	I have control over the conversations in my PLC groups. I also have control over my partners on assignments and how I complete my readings. I also like that the assignments have due dates but are not set to that date only.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Instructor 	She shows us different ways to show motivation and encouragement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control due to PLC 	I feel that by having PLC meetings we had a lot of control over participation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer more time in PLCs 	To make me feel as if I had more control over my learning, I would think that more time with our small groups (PLC/project groups), more time with our groups during class means more time for us to understand what is expected of us.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer change in PLC members 	If we were able to switch around our PLC groups to learn from people in other grades so that way, I will be more prepared if I end up teaching a different grade than I am interning with.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLCs change dynamic 	I'm not sure, online delivery can be hard, but I think the PLC groups help to change it up and keep class interesting and enjoyable.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLCs were personable • PLCs facilitate learning 	I enjoyed the PLCs and our class meetings. They were personable and made it easier to complete the course materials because of the content we learned, and the ability to complete assignments with my PLC group. Doc is hilarious and very down-to-earth in her teaching style, which was a breath of fresh air for this semester.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLC facilitate communication 	Also, we complete PLCs sometimes during our meetings which helps me communicate with my peers.
<p>Progress-Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content</p> <p>Use ongoing informal and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLCs facilitate learning 	The short and long PLCs group meetings after every class period of main instruction from the professor. I feel like I've learned the most from talking and brainstorming thoughts, ideas, and/or opinions about the education system, as well as how to be a better teacher.

<p>formal formative assessment & funds of knowledge to adjust content to learner needs while blending cultural and community assets; Balance of Power (Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment; Tomlinson, 2021); Unifying Concepts (Tomlinson, 2021); DuFour Principles (2004); Ensure curriculum is not just academically relevant but culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and equitably relevant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity– Assessment 	I am able to revise and resubmit my work back to Doc.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLC as peer reflection 	I like that while working in our PLC meetings, we are able to see the different experiences of our peers and reflect together.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content– Assessment 	Learning about standardized tests and communicating that with parents. The PLC meetings were always interesting and enjoyable also.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance 	I like that we are interactive and have PLC learning groups with people in our grade level! It's very helpful for group assignments and to be able to talk about things with people my age with the same experiences.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion 	I would like the PLC meeting template to be a little more detailed, as some of my group members and I understood them differently.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion 	Perhaps videos of what successful PLC meetings look like and then answering relevant questions pertaining to the videos.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Equity– Assessment 	The flexible due date made the course feel more manageable. The PLC groups were flexible with the questions that were asked.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance; Equity 	Knowing when to speak up and be equitable in the classroom and how far it goes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory to Practice 	I have been learning a lot about PLCs and how they work. I have started sitting in on them at my internship and feel I can relate a lot of what I am observing to what I am learning in this class. I definitely feel that I will apply what I've taken from this course to my future as an educator.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLC as peer reflection 	I am able to use the PLC meetings to talk with peers about how assessment may look in each of our classrooms since we are all at different schools.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion 	More structured PLC groups. As in, what do YOU want to make sure we talk about in our groups?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance • Equitable assessment 	She taught me a lot of useful information about being equitable, fair, about grades and assessments, and was always open to questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory to Practice 	Throughout the semester, we have had several assignments/tasks that we had to complete in groups and individually that helped align with the expectations we will see in classrooms.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership 	Through the PLC meeting I took on the task of being a leader at some points and being able to direct my peers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory to Practice 	The PLC meetings are the most useful in my life right now because I have been sitting in a few meetings thus far, so it helps me understand more about what's happening and why these meetings take place and their importance. During my recent visit to my intern school, I was able to witness what exactly a PLC meeting looks like in the district that I wish to teach at after graduation. Having the short and long PLC meetings is great preparation for me now and later.
Student Learning Communities Students take initiative and lead while the teacher supports & scaffolds (by age &	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning environment– trust 	The ability to talk in class either over the microphone or in the chat box to eliminate any anxiety to talk or be scared to talk in front of the entire class. Being able to ask and share ideas and/or questions with classmates in our PLC groups made this course way less stressful and made me realize that I have a solid group of

<p>need) providing ongoing feedback and structure.</p> <p>Values & Actions of CRILCs (Parker, 2022); DuFour Questions (2010)</p>		classmates that have my back and is there if I have any questions, before reaching out to the professor.
	• Learning environment–relationships	Definitely the group work. I was able to form relationships with my peers and exchange thoughts regarding our experiences at our internships (through the PLCs).
	• Theory to Practice	Doc provided a path that teaches content and applied it to our future teachings. She did an amazing job of helping us connect ideas and theory to our assignments.
	• Agency–choice	I feel like the PLC meetings with my group members allows me to have some control over the course and how I choose to participate. We were able to choose roles and when we meet together and how we work together. I chose how I learn when I do the course readings as well by using digital textbooks and digital note taking and highlighting because that works best for me.
	• Agency	Working in PLC groups have us flexibility to work together and to decide what we discussed specially under the umbrella of assessment.
	• Self–efficacy	I felt successful in my PLC meeting, and I felt like we were actually getting tasks accomplished.
	• Leadership–Learning	I love how much we have to do group activities. It makes us have to take charge and really discuss the content that we are learning.
	• PLCs as relevant	I really like how we are using PLCs which will help us in the future when we are actually teachers and in PLC groups at our schools.
	• Agency	By allowing us to choose how we learn, what groups we work in, choose roles, and carry them out,

		essentially, we have a large say in our own learning and in our group/whole class learning as well.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Relevance 	Conducting assessments and organizing PLCs definitely helped me practice my leadership skills that I will use in the future.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolding 	Doc would spend time with us in our PLC meetings to make sure that we understood what we were doing and talking about. Whenever my other group members weren't there, she would also talk to me to make sure that I was able to discuss the material.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions 	I would like to attend Kindergarten PLC meetings at my school and take notes and report back to my professor instead of working with group members on pseudo-PLC meetings.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolding 	She encouraged me to ask [questions] and to dig deeper with regards to assessments.

As a mid-year evaluation, the data from the MUSIC inventory provides me the opportunity as the instructor to adjust the PLCs, learning goals, content, procedures, and/or learning environment to best meet the needs of my students. For example, after reviewing the survey results in the first semester, I revised the minutes document for clarity and worked with students that were having some difficulties managing the scheduling for the DE course. I revised the minutes document at the end of the semester, switching to the google doc format. At the mid-way point for the second semester, some groups sought more guidance, and I introduced the structure of DuFour et al.'s (2010) Four PLC Questions as an option for the group data discussions. I also touched base with a few students that had reached out

individually about their group placements. Going into the next semester, I have yet to decide if I will offer the Four PLC Questions at the start of the year, or leave it open to student direction and choice, and build it in like the previous semester if the students seek the additional support. This will be based on the students and their readiness and interests at the start of the semester, but it is helpful to have ideas for this scaffold already prepared.

As an educator myself, I try to model this growth process that I went through over the last year for my students. Also, it is important for them to see that I plan and teach based on the students in front of me, not something out of a (digital) file cabinet that I prepared and have used for the last five years. An essential aspect of a pivotal practice for K–20 educators is examining the truth of our experiences, the environment that we create, and how we model equity in our teaching. In a 1982 interview with Claudia Tate, Audre Lorde—self-described ‘Black lesbian feminist warrior poet mother’—said:

Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. They are chaotic, sometimes painful, sometimes contradictory, but they come from deep within us. We must key into those feelings and begin to extrapolate from them, examine them for new ways of understanding our experience. (Tate, 2004, p. 91)

Using informal and formal formative feedback methods, engaging in critical self–reflection on our emotions, and practicing hearing and listening (without responding) to students’ feedback can help educators at all levels evaluate their student learning communities for growth and change.

Conclusion

Dr. Asa Hilliard III, an educator, activist, and Afro futurist, summarized the secret, or lack thereof, in teaching children. He said, “there is no mystery on how to teach them. The first thing you do is treat them like human beings and the second thing you do is love them” (Williams–Johnson, 2016, p. 10). The theoretical frameworks that provide the grounding for this chapter’s model of Student Learning Communities, Parker’s CRILCS (2022) and Tomlinson’s Learner centered classrooms (2021) embody this humanity and love. While DuFour and DuFour et al., (2004, 2010) aren’t as effusive in their ardor, they center students and learning.

Grounding is essential. We ground our wires, appliances, and light fixtures. If an excess electrical current passes through our system’s wires, grounding ensures that it is directed safely away from us. Community Space and Place and Progress–Based Learning Goals with Relevant Content are the essential grounding. It establishes a shared space of engaged learning, trust, and community in which equity, rigor, and cultural relevance are centered. If an outlet isn’t grounded and excess electrical current zaps the house, stray voltage could start a fire or electrocute a nearby loved one. Taking initiative with curriculum as students can be challenging, so too can be engaging in work that encourages vulnerability. If the educator and students did not have adequate time to develop the grounding on which to build the SLCs, both parties can be susceptible—metaphorically of course—to the same stray voltage and consequences, K–20 style e.g., outbursts, refusal to work, shutting down, critical perfectionism. Thus, above all, in this pivotal practice of SLCs, we center our students’ hearts and voices, we remember that we as educators cannot pour from an empty cup, and we embrace humanity and love.

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