



PLC/Book Study Guide for *The Thinking Teacher*

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This guide is designed as a professional development resource and can be used to facilitate a book study or as a learning experience for a professional learning community (PLC). Facilitator notes are provided for additional support and explanation in facilitating your groups' sessions. We recommend that the facilitator read the entire guide and the book before beginning the study.

For each session, participants will be asked to read a chapter of the book. They may also be asked to complete reproducibles *prior* to attending a session. Please note that the preparation work is noted at the beginning of each lesson. Before participants depart from each session, review and clarify the preparation work for the next session.

Facilitator Note: *Although the guide covers chapters in the order they appear in the book, feel free to use as fits your group. For example, you may want to use two sessions to cover one chapter or combine chapters in which there is less interest. You can mix up the order if you feel it builds more participation. Also, while the guide offers a range of discussion topics, many more could be covered. At each session, be sure to assess what participants most want to discuss and allow time to focus on those topics.*

Introduction and Chapter 1: Teaching Is a Journey

To be completed before this study session:

- *Note:* The first two chapters, Part 1, lay the foundation for the book. The first chapter explores the importance of understanding how you began teaching, stages of teacher development, and core beliefs. In the next chapter, definitions of intentional teaching and discussions of how change increases intentionality help you connect these concepts to your own teaching.
- Read the Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Write a paragraph on how you began teaching. (See “Reflections on Beginning My Teaching Journey” on pages 22–23 for questions to elicit memories.)

Facilitator Note: *This guide asks teachers to share very personal information about their teaching. It is important to emphasize to all group members that they can decide not to share if it is too difficult. Encourage participants to share by asking that all responses be kept confidential. This creates a feeling of safety. Sometimes, just sitting and listening for a while will help participants share more.*

1. Share your paragraphs on how you began teaching, either in pairs or small groups.
2. Read pages 14–16 explaining Lillian Katz’s stages of teacher development. Discuss the following questions:
 - What stage are you in now?
 - Why did you select this particular stage?
 - What are your struggles and joys in this stage?
3. Fill out the form “My Core Beliefs” on pages 25–26. In small groups or pairs, discuss the following questions:
 - What was your experience in filling out this questionnaire?
 - Which of your core beliefs are most important to your experience of teaching?
 - Are there any beliefs you are questioning? If so, which ones?

Chapter 2: Moving Toward Intentionality

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 2.
- Refer to the chart Examples of Intentionality on pages 32–33. Fill out the “Intentionality Scale” on pages 43–44.

1. As a group, discuss what you think intentional teaching is. Give examples from your experience. Discuss:
 - How has your intentionality changed as you gained more experience as a teacher?
 - Are there areas in the classroom where you are more intentional? Why do you think this is?
2. Consider your results on the Intentionality Scale. Discuss the following questions:
 - In which areas were you particularly strong?
 - Did this result confirm what you thought about your intentionality? Why or why not?
 - Where are your opportunities for growth?
 - Name one area you want to address in the coming year.
3. Consider the six processes of learning: relationship, engagement, direction, reflection, ownership, and evaluation (see pages 30–35). Discuss:
 - Which of these processes is most important to you as you work with children and families?
 - How do you utilize reflection in your teaching?
 - How do you engage children when you are teaching a new concept?

Chapter 3: Change Happens in Phases

To be completed before this study session:

- *Note:* The following four chapters, Part 2, lay out the phases that teachers experience as they learn new concepts and strategies.
- Read Chapter 3.
- Think about a recent change in your career, such as developing a new teaching technique, curriculum, or structure.

Facilitator Note: Chapter 3 is a short description of Chapters 4, 5, and 6. For this reason, it may work better for your discussion group to combine Chapters 3 and 4 into one session.

1. Refer to the chart Three Phases of Teacher Learning on page 55. Discuss the following questions:
 - What changes have you been asked to make in the last few years?
 - What has been your experience moving through these changes?
 - How are the descriptions in this chart similar to or different from your experience?

Chapter 4: Teachers Learn

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 4.
- Complete the form “Challenges and Overcoming Obstacles” on pages 83–84.

1. Discuss questions about phase one: Teachers Learn. Refer back to the previous discussion about recent changes you have been asked to make in your teaching practices.
 - When reading the chapter, what descriptions resonated with your experience?
 - Give one example of what you learned about yourself in phase one.
 - What was most challenging about the new content and strategies?
 - How did the changes in phase one affect how you worked with others?
 - What feelings did you experience during this phase?
2. Review the challenges and obstacles on the form on pages 83–84. How do you anticipate addressing these challenges? What new ideas do you have?

Chapter 5:

Teachers Practice

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 5.
- See the “What? So What? Now What?” model on page 92. Think about a new strategy, room arrangement, or activity you would like to try with your students.

Facilitator Note: You may want to have copies of the form “Trying a New Strategy” (page 105) available for participants.

1. Take a few minutes to write down a lesson or strategy you used with children that did not go as you expected. What occurred? What did you do? How did you process it (for example, with colleagues, by yourself, with friends and family)? Discuss:
 - Did you try again?
 - If so, what did you change and why?
 - If not, what would you do differently?
2. Think about a time you had to learn a new technique (such as new read-aloud strategies, setting up a writing center, or leading a large group) that is now part of your teaching practice. Discuss:
 - What was hard at first about learning the new strategy?
 - How did you learn to do it more naturally?
 - What would be your advice to a teacher who is just learning a new strategy?
3. Fill out the first part of the handout “Trying a New Strategy” on page 105, describing the new strategy you are going to try in your setting. Share your strategy with the group. During the next week, try the strategy and write down the results on the handout. Bring it to the next group meeting.

Chapter 6: Teachers Share and Model

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 6.
- Bring your completed handout “Trying a New Strategy” (page 105).

1. Share the results of your new strategy, either in pairs or small groups. As a large group, discuss:
 - What was the new strategy?
 - How did it go?
 - What did you observe?
 - How did the children respond?
 - What would you like to change next time?
2. Refer to the list of ways you share with others on pages 107–108. Discuss:
 - How do you share with your colleagues? With parents?
 - As you look at the list, are there other activities you would like to try?
3. Teachers often prefer to learn from other teachers. Discuss why this might be and how you learn from other teachers in your setting.

Chapter 7: Getting Supports on Your Journey

To be completed before this study session:

- *Note:* The final three chapters, Part 3, help you discover how supports help you gain the most from new learning experiences and how to solve the roadblocks you may encounter. The last chapter summarizes the concepts from the book and asks you to reflect on your own teaching journey.
- Read Chapter 7.
- Fill out the form “Training Preferences” on pages 153–154.

1. Discuss your answers on the form “Training Preferences.” Discuss the following questions:
 - What did you discover about how you learn best in trainings?
 - Did anything surprise you?
 - What would you like to see more of?
2. Teachers often form learning communities to help each other implement intentional strategies in their setting. As a group, brainstorm ways your program or organization could help you form a learning community.
3. This chapter discusses cultural ways of learning. Discuss:
 - How does your culture influence how you learn? For example, some families and cultures learn through oral traditions and stories, while some families and cultures are book-oriented.
4. Take time to fill out the form “Circles of Support” on pages 159–160. Discuss:
 - What did you learn from completing this form?
 - What other supports would you like? Why?

Facilitator Note: *If you supervise or work with the participants in your group, it will be important to listen to responses about supports they would like, rather than try to problem-solve or go on the defensive (which may be your natural reaction). If the discussion raises some organizational issues for you to address, set aside a time to work on an action plan that improves supports in your organization.*

Chapter 8:

Navigating the Detours on the Journey

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 8.
- Fill out the form “How Do You Approach a Problem?” on pages 176–177 and bring it to the session.

1. Discuss the form “How Do You Approach a Problem?” and the following questions:
 - What did you learn from filling out this form?
 - What is your preferred way of handling a problem?
 - Is there anything you would like to change about how you approach a problem?
 - If so, what kind of support do you need?
2. Look at the problem-solving steps on page 164. Discuss:
 - Have you tried this method of problem solving?
 - What was hard about it?
 - Where did it break down?
3. Split into pairs and choose one question or concern from this chapter you would like to discuss. To begin the discussion, share your chosen question or concern and answer with the group. Discuss:
 - What interested you about this question or concern?
 - What was your reaction to the answers suggested?
 - How are the suggestions helpful?
 - What else would you like to explore about this question or concern?

Chapter 9: Reflecting on Your Journey

To be completed before this study session:

- Read Chapter 9.
- Think about your journey and jot down any thoughts you have.

1. This final chapter discusses the cycle of continuous improvement. Study the graphic on page 182. Discuss how you use this cycle in your own work:
 - When does it work best?
 - What problems do you encounter as you implement the cycle of continuous improvement in your setting?
 - How do you implement the cycle of continuous improvement for individual children while also implementing it for the whole group?
2. The successful implementation of the cycle of continuous improvement requires reflection throughout. Discuss:
 - How do you reflect on your teaching?
 - Do you set aside a time? Or do you reflect “on the go”? Which works best for you?
 - What is most difficult about doing reflection as a teacher?
 - What is one action you could take to give yourself more reflection time as a teacher?
3. Take time to fill out the form “My Journey” on page 191. After you are done, share your journey with the group. Discuss:
 - What did you learn about your journey?
 - What surprised you?
 - Where do you think you would like your journey to lead you next?

About the Authors



Sandra Heidemann, M.S., is a decades-long veteran of early childhood education who has been dedicated to helping all children feel included and valued. During her career, she has been a teacher, infant home visitor, director, trainer, author, and past board president of the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC). She currently serves on the board of Southside Family Nurturing Center. Sandra has published articles in the journal *Young Children* and the magazine *Exchange* and is the coauthor of the book *Play: The Pathway from Theory to Practice* and two related workbooks, *When Play Isn't Fun* and *When Play Isn't Easy*, published by Redleaf Press.



Beth Menninga, M.A.Ed., is inspired by the dedication and creativity of early childhood practitioners. As project coordinator for the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota, she focuses her work on design and delivery of training, promotion of coaching, and reflective practice in infant and toddler development, early mathematics, and literacy. Her own journey began as a child care teacher. She has coordinated professional development initiatives on infant and toddler caregiving, early literacy, and math. Beth sees her work with young children, families, and early childhood educators as a commitment to social justice. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband, daughter, and dog.



Claire Chang, M.A., has worked to increase family stability and vitality through services benefiting parents and children by improving child outcomes through high-quality early childhood programs. She has served on the governing board of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and chaired the Accreditation Council. Recognized as a leader in her community on issues of equity and access, Claire serves on the board of Hope Community and Luther Seminary. Claire has a B.S. in child development and family life from the University of Wisconsin–Stout and an M.A. in philanthropy and development from Saint Mary's University of Winona, Minnesota.

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