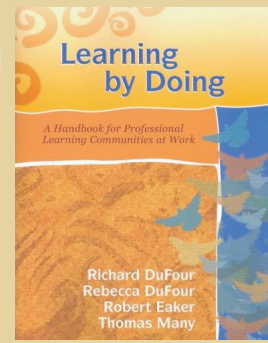


THE MAIN IDEA

current education book summaries



FILE:
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES

Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work

By Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas Many (Solution Tree, 2006)

S.O.S. (A summary of the summary)

THE MAIN IDEAS of the book are:

- Professional Learning Communities benefit your school by both raising student achievement and improving the professional lives of teachers.
- While many educators might know what to do to improve their schools, they often don't carry out their ideas. This book shows you how to *implement* Professional Learning Communities to actually improve your school.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are teams of teachers that work collaboratively to continuously improve their practice and student achievement. The authors of this book have written about the powerful impact of PLCs for years. You can bring PLC concepts to your school even if you have not read their previous work. In fact, this book will give you a leg up by helping you avoid some of the pitfalls and challenges other schools have faced in implementing PLCs at their schools. This way, you can introduce a cycle of continuous school improvement in your school and be more effective from the start.

This book does not promote a specific program, instead it is a *framework* to help you change your school's culture. Some of the shifts your school will experience are...

From a focus on teaching...	to a focus on learning
From infrequent summative assessments...	to frequent common formative assessments
From individual teachers responding to students who fail...	to a systematic response that ensures support for every student
From isolation...	to collaboration
From each teacher clarifying what students must learn...	to collaborative teams building shared knowledge about essential learning
From goals related to completion of projects and activities...	to SMART goals demanding evidence of student learning
From external training (workshops and courses)...	to job-embedded learning

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ *How to clarify learning goals for students and better assess that learning* (Chapter 3, pp.2-3)
Teachers need to know what students must learn and how to tell when they've learned it.
- ✓ *How to respond systematically when students don't learn* (Chapter 4, pp.3-4)
Rather than relying on varying teacher responses when students fail, create a school-wide system to handle this problem.
- ✓ *How to organize effective teacher teams to promote learning* (Chapter 5, pp.4-5)
Do your teachers discuss disruptive students and plan field trips? Learn how to focus teams on improving student achievement.
- ✓ *How to create concrete goals to focus everyone on results* (Chapter 6, pp.5-6)
Instead of focusing on what teachers will do (improve groupwork, introduce technology), learn to focus on student results.
- ✓ *How to use common formative assessments to improve teaching and learning* (Chapter 7, pp.6-7)
The best data-driven decision-making comes from the results of common interim assessments created by teacher teams.
- ✓ *Effective leadership strategies to deal with challenges inherent in changing your school* (Chapter 9, p.8)
- ✓ *Concrete suggestions to use the book's ideas with teachers* (Professional Development page)

Chapter 1: A Guide to Action for Professional Learning Communities at Work

Main ideas of the chapter: The chapter gives an overview of what "professional learning communities" are. This is needed because the rest of the book focuses on implementing a professional learning community.

Professional Learning Communities

Since 1998, the authors have emphasized that to truly help all students learn, the staff needs to function as a professional learning community (PLC). This handbook not only provides educators with the tools to create PLCs, but it gives a jump-start to that process by showing how to overcome the difficulties of actually implementing a PLC.

In a professional learning community there is:

1. **A focus on learning** -- a shift from the current focus on what students are *taught* to what they learn
2. **A collaborative culture** -- teachers work interdependently to increase student achievement
3. **A shared knowledge of the school's current reality** -- both its challenges and successes
4. **An action orientation** -- learning by doing rather than spending a lot of time planning and thinking
5. **Continuous improvement** -- gathering evidence of learning, trying new strategies, and analyzing results
6. **A results orientation** -- PLC members focus on results rather than intentions

Structure of the book

Each chapter contains the following parts: (NOTE: All parts do not appear in the summary due to space limitations)

Case Study -- Highlights a real challenge of a school that has attempted to implement PLC ideas

Here's How -- Shows how to better address the above challenge and successfully implement the PLC concept

Here's Why -- Provides the research to show teachers why it is important to implement this PLC idea

Assessing Your Place -- Provides rubrics to help you see the reality of your school's current situation

Tips & Questions -- Includes concrete suggestions and questions to help improve implementation

Chapter 2: A Clear and Compelling Purpose

Main ideas of the chapter: Developing and implementing a mission with high expectations for student achievement is a key component of developing a Professional Learning Community. This chapter provides suggestions for creating consensus around the mission and ensuring that the mission results in real changes.

Case Study: Failing to Develop Consensus Around a Mission Focused on Learning for All

On the first day of school, Principal Dion presented her faculty with her new mission to ensure all students learn to their full potential. Teachers challenged this, claiming that learning depends on student ability and effort. After some debate, a watered down version of the mission was chosen. As the year progressed, it became clear that this mission never materialized into improved student achievement or teacher practice. Nothing changed as a result of this new mission.

Here's How to Use the Mission of the School to Improve School Results

1. Build Consensus Around the Mission

a. *Meet with smaller groups* -- It is impossible to begin an improvement effort without some staff support. The principal could have developed a task force to grapple with the issues before approaching the entire staff.

b. *Develop shared knowledge* -- The teachers didn't have access to the same information the principal had when she decided to create a new mission. She could have presented the staff with data about the current status of the school. She could have used the worksheet on pp.17-18 to present data on student achievement results (tests), engagement (attendance, dropout rates), discipline (suspensions, parent conferences), etc. Anecdotes about unsuccessful students are also powerful.

2. Define Actual Commitments

a. *Specific goals* -- The principal could have asked her staff to come up with specific goals they'd like to achieve (such as: a safe environment, extra help for struggling students, high expectations, and frequent monitoring of progress).

b. *Specific practices* -- Then she could have asked staff to imagine the specific practices needed to achieve these goals (systems to monitor student learning every four weeks, a schedule with time allotted to support struggling students, etc.)

c. *Commitments* -- Next, the principal could have discussed the commitments each staff member would need to make.

d. *Benchmarks and timeline* -- Finally, faculty could have chosen benchmarks to achieve by the end of the first 6 months.

Here's Why to Develop Consensus Around the Purpose of the School

Focusing staff discussion on the purpose of the school is an essential first step for an organization that wants to improve results. However, articulating the mission isn't enough. Educators must be clear about and buy into the vision, values and goals of the school. By building consensus around the questions below, there is a much greater likelihood that reform efforts will succeed:

MISSION	VISION	VALUES	GOALS
Why do we exist? <i>(Clarifies the school's priorities and sharpens focus)</i>	What must the school become to accomplish our purpose? <i>(Gives directions for achieving the mission)</i>	How must we behave to achieve our vision? <i>(Guides the adults' behavior and their collective commitments)</i>	How will we mark our progress? <i>(Provides more specific targets and timelines)</i>

Assessing *the Clarity of Your School's Purpose*

On pages 34-35 there is a rubric you can use to assess how far along your school is in developing clarity of purpose. See the excerpt below. There is a continuum (that is the same for each chapter) to describe where your school might be:

- (1) Pre-Initiation Stage - the school hasn't begun to address this aspect of a PLC
- (2) Initiation Stage - an effort has been made, but there is not yet much impact
- (3) Developing Stage - a significant number of staff have begun to change their thinking and practices
- (4) Sustaining Stage - the PLC concept has become an essential part of the school

For this chapter, assess whether the mission is learning-focused and if the vision, values, and goals are clear. Here is an excerpt:

ELEMENT OF A PLC	PRE-INITIATION STATE	INITIATION STAGE	DEVELOPING STAGE	SUSTAINING STAGE
Is it clear that learning for all is the mission?	No effort to identify what students should learn. Focus is on teaching not learning.	Central office determines what is to be learned.	Teachers are clear about student outcomes and assess these.	Learning outcomes are clear and monitored and every aspect of the school is assessed based on student learning.
Are our priorities a clear reflection of our goals?	Staff have not created school improvement goals.	Staff create goals, but they are not measurable and don't impact instruction.	Staff create clear short- and long-term goals which are regularly assessed.	Staff work toward measurable goals linked to the vision. Attainment is celebrated.

After assessing the current reality of the school (using the complete rubric in the book), each chapter has an action plan to help staff develop the next steps for implementing the PLC concept. In this chapter, the plan helps staff think about what needs to be done to ensure the focus of the school is on learning (see the excerpt below and a template for the entire action plan on p. 36).

Describe one aspect of a PLC you'd like at your school.	What are the next steps?	Who is responsible?	What is a realistic timetable?	How will you determine the effectiveness?
The school clearly and consistently communicates its focus on learning.				
The school celebrates learning.				

Tips & Questions to Help Clarify Your School's Purpose - See pp. 37-39 (more tips) and 40-42 (more questions)

1. Act quickly - it is more important to begin implementation *within a few weeks* than have a perfect plan.
2. Build shared knowledge - make sure everyone has the same information about the current reality in the school.
3. After clarifying the purpose of the school, make sure all decisions and practices are consistent with this purpose.
4. Write value statements as behaviors and commitments rather than beliefs. For example, instead of writing, "We believe all children can learn," write what you are prepared to *do*, "We will monitor student learning every four weeks..."
5. If you had 60 seconds to explain the vision of your school, what would you say?

Chapter 3: Creating a Focus on Learning

Main ideas of the chapter: As a PLC, the school must decide: (1) What do we want our students to learn? and (2) How do we know when they've learned it? The chapter describes how to begin to address the above two questions.

Case Study: *Failing to Clarify What Students Should Learn and How They Should be Assessed*

Principal Matthews asked teachers to work collaboratively to determine what students should learn and to create common formative assessments based on this. Teachers resisted both parts of this request. Some felt the state standards already outlined student learning and others felt coming to consensus would mean giving up favorite units. They rejected the idea of common assessments because they claimed textbooks already had chapter tests and it would take attention away from the state test.

Here's How to Clarify What Students Should Learn and Develop Common Formative Assessments

Principal Matthews faced a dilemma: How to have teachers create a common, challenging curriculum, and yet allow for individual autonomy and help the staff feel empowered in the process?

Outlining what students should learn at the school level does not have to mean giving up state or district goals or giving up individual teacher decision-making about what they teach. It can be a *combination of both*. Deciding what students should learn and how to assess them cannot be relegated to outsiders. Nor can these issues be decided on an individual basis if all students are to have access to the same challenging, common curriculum. Instead, teams need to *work together* to decide what students must learn and how to assess them. This will create a common curriculum that also allows for individual teacher choices.

I. Clarifying What Students Must Learn

The principal should have told the teachers that all essential learning *needs* to be aligned with state and district standards, local curriculum guides, and any required tests. He could have provided them with the necessary resources to accomplish this: the state standards, district curriculum guides, state tests, etc. Then teachers need to decide what is essential for students to learn and what content they can *eliminate*. To help decide what learning is essential, teachers should ask the following (this criteria is from Doug Reeves):

1. Will the knowledge endure? Will students retain it over time?
2. Does it have leverage? Will it help students in other academic areas?
3. Does it prepare students for the next level of learning (the next unit, course or grade)?

II. Determining if Students Are Learning

The principal should have *required* that teachers work together to create common formative assessments, and given them clear expectations to do so. Here are some sample guidelines to give teachers:

- Decide on a minimum number of common assessments you will use.
- Show how the assessments are aligned with high-stakes tests and the essential learnings teachers have outlined.
- Choose a few concepts to assess frequently rather than a large number infrequently.

Here's Why Teachers Need to Work Together to Clarify Learning and Assessments

School improvement efforts will only succeed if teachers clearly know what students must learn. Research shows that in successful schools teachers know what to teach and what students should learn. So, how can school leaders best ensure that teachers know what to teach? The answer is not simply to hand them a copy of the standards or a curriculum, because there is often an enormous gap between the *intended* curriculum and the *implemented* curriculum. Instead, school leaders need to involve every teacher in the collaborative process of studying, clarifying, and committing to teach the curriculum.

COLLABORATIVELY OUTLINING STUDENT LEARNING WILL LEAD TO:

1. Clarification of what should be learned
2. Agreement about curricular priorities
3. A realistic curriculum that can be taught in the allotted time
4. Common pacing which is necessary for common formative assessments

Why Work Together to Create Common Assessments

Research has shown that effective common formative assessments is one of the most powerful instruments for improving student learning. They are different from *summative* national/state/local tests which measure learning *after* it occurs. Instead, common *formative* assessments measure learning along the way and can actually motivate students and improve learning.

COMMON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS WILL LEAD TO:

1. More *equity* because students will need to meet the same expectations regardless of their current teacher
2. More *accountability* because these assessments will reveal what is actually being learned
3. More *information* about the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and teacher practice
4. Better *identification of students* requiring additional support

Assessing the Clarity of Your School's Curriculum and Alignment of Assessments - See pp. 60-61 for the full rubric.

ELEMENT OF A PLC	PRE-INITIATION STATE	INITIATION STAGE	DEVELOPING STAGE	SUSTAINING STAGE
Clarity about what students should know and be able to do	Little effort to establish a common curriculum. Teachers teach whatever they want.	District leaders, with representative teachers, have established the curriculum.	Teachers have worked with colleagues to attempt to clarify the curriculum.	Teachers have worked collaboratively in teams to outline essential learning for each unit.
Assess whether students have learned the agreed-upon curriculum	No common assessments. Teachers decide individually how to assess.	Districts analyze results of state/local tests. Teachers pay little attention.	Teachers analyze state/local tests and attempt to improve teaching. There may be some common final exams.	All teachers create common formative assessments and analyze the results in teams.

Tips for Moving Forward to Clarify and Assess What Students Should Learn - See pp. 65-67 for more tips.

1. Less is more. Focus on approximately 8-10 learning outcomes per semester in each course.
2. Focus on proficiency of essential skills rather than coverage of content. Teachers should still be able to spend time on favorite units.
3. Understand that common assessments might lead to teacher anxiety that their weaknesses will be exposed. Leaders can promise anonymity of results and that those results will not be used to officially evaluate teachers.
4. Create a shared understanding of "common assessments" as collaboratively created, implemented and analyzed by teacher teams.

Chapter 4: How Will We Respond When Some Students Don't Learn?

Main ideas of the chapter: As a PLC, after clarifying what students will learn and how they'll be assessed, the team needs to decide how to respond when students don't learn. Rather than providing an uneven experience based on different teacher reactions to failing students, a PLC needs to develop a systematic response to struggling students.

Case Study: When Teachers Do Whatever They Want for Students Who Don't Learn

Principal Mathers deals with a wide variety of math teachers each of whom has a different solution when their students fail to learn. While one teacher is willing to tutor both before and after school, another feels students need to show more of their own responsibility. The principal found that students'

experiences varied widely. This chapter describes how to create a systematic approach to dealing with struggling students rather than relying on varying, individual teacher responses.

Here's How to Develop a School-wide Approach to Dealing with Students Who Don't Learn

This chapter deals with a common problem: given limited resources, how can we help students who don't learn? Usually individual teachers are left to confront this problem on their own. However, if there is no school-wide approach, students who struggle will be subject to a wide range of teacher responses. Instead, the response should be *timely, mandated for students, and systematic*, no matter who the teacher is. In order to do this, the principal could have:

- First:** Shown the teachers that their approach was not effective, equitable or efficient.
- Second:** He could have presented them with what the research says about dealing with struggling students. It overwhelmingly says that a timely, directive, and systematic response is needed.
- Third:** Teachers could have brainstormed interventions during the school day that were timely, directive, and systematic. Then the staff could make commitments, create goals, implement the new system, and monitor it.

While all schools face the reality of various constraints -- union contracts, district guidelines - successful schools *still* find a way to provide a system of interventions for struggling students. Read about systematic responses in four different schools in *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (2004) by some of the same authors.

Here's Why We Need to Respond to Students Who Don't Learn

Effective schools set high expectations for all students. A measure of their success is how they handle students who struggle. Traditionally in schools, the focus has been on *time*, not *learning*. We teach a certain concept in, let's say, three weeks, and those who don't learn it lose out. *Time* is the constant and *student learning* becomes the variable. In a PLC, the learning must be the constant, and time, the variable. We need to change the paradigm. Instead of asking, "Was it taught?" we need to ask, "Was it learned?" We must provide extra opportunities *within the school day* for struggling students.

Assessing How Well Your School Responds When Students Don't Learn - See the full rubric on p. 79.

ELEMENT OF A PLC	PRE-INITIATION STATE	INITIATION STAGE	DEVELOPING STAGE	SUSTAINING STAGE
A system of interventions provides additional time and support when needed	There is no systematic plan to monitor or respond to student achievement	Voluntary before and after school help is provided. Many students choose not to attend.	There is some support during the day, but staff wants to keep the traditional schedule and students are monitored only every 9 weeks.	There is a sequential, proactive, and mandated system to identify, monitor and support struggling students.

Tips & Questions to Help Create Systematic Interventions for Students Who Struggle - See pp. 81-87 for more ideas.

1. Don't be confined by your schedule or people who don't want change. Share the research that it is impossible for all students to learn at a high level with the same amount of time. Explain that extra time *outside* of school will mean some students cannot or won't attend.
2. The intervention should be *temporary*. Once students have mastered a difficult area they should stop the intervention.
3. Make sure everyone understands that a "system of interventions" is: systematic, practical, effective, essential, and directive.
4. Who oversees the intervention system? What if interventions don't work? How do we know when to move a student in or out?

Chapter 5: Building the Collaborative Culture of a PLC

Main ideas of the chapter: In a PLC it is essential that teams work *collaboratively* to ensure high levels of student learning. This chapter describes how to organize *effective* teacher teams so they truly impact student achievement.

Case Study: When Teacher Teams Don't Focus Directly on Student Achievement

Principal McDonald set up interdisciplinary teams, trained them in collaborative skills, and created a schedule with time for them to meet. After three years, he was surprised that while collaboration led to stronger teacher bonds, it did *not* improve student achievement. When he observed team meetings he found different activities: at one, the team discussed a disruptive student, at another, they planned a grade field trip. He realized the teams weren't focusing as directly on student learning as they could.

Here's How to Organize Teacher Teams to Promote Learning

While many teachers have come to enjoy collaborating, this, in and of itself, does not guarantee improved student learning. Collaboration should not be an end itself, but rather a means to improve student learning. Collaborative teams need to focus on:

1. What should our students learn? (Chapter 3)
2. How do we know if they've learned it? (Chapter 3)
3. What do we do if students fail to learn? (Chapter 4)

Below are four questions that need to be addressed in developing effective teams.

1. How do we organize the teams to promote a focus on learning?

Each team should create a large *curricular* goal which they can work together interdependently to achieve. For example, Principal McDonald could have shared research on the effectiveness of *nonfiction writing* across the curriculum to improve student learning and asked each team to improve

the instruction of nonfiction writing. Another idea to focus teams on *academics* is to create other structures so teachers can meet with others who share their content area. There are a variety of team structures to choose from:

- (1) Vertical teams - teachers who teach the same content (these are usually "departments")
- (2) Electronic teams - teachers form teams across different schools
- (3) Logical links - teachers join together based on outcomes they are trying to achieve

2. How do we find the time during the school day for teams to function?

- (1) Common preparation - organize the schedule so teams are free at the same time
- (2) Parallel scheduling - schedule specials (such as art/music) for an entire grade at the same time
- (3) Group activities, events, and testing - nonteaching staff supervise at this time
- (4) Banking time - teaching more minutes now to have the instructional day end earlier at a later point
- (5) Staff meetings or staff development time - shift the focus from administrative issues to team meeting time

3. How do we focus teams on issues that impact student learning?

In many schools, staff collaborate about many issues - dress codes, disciplinary issues, holiday parties - but classroom practice remains the same. However, in a PLC, the goal of creating teams is to increase student achievement. Principals can require that teams create *products* focused on improving academics. Imagine if the principal in the case study had asked for these goals:

- > By week 2 - create a list of team norms (described below)
- > By week 4 - come up with the team SMART goal (described in Chapter 6)
- > By week 6 - list the knowledge, skills and dispositions our students will learn this semester
- > By week 8 - create the first common assessment
- > By week 10 - examine the results of this assessment and list the areas of strength and areas to improve

4. How do we create team norms?

It's hard for a team to have deep discussions around learning and teaching if team members do not trust each other. A team that hasn't developed trust tends to stay superficial, avoid conflict, avoid accountability, and not to confront colleagues. These attributes usually prevent the team from focusing on student achievement. To help, a principal can:

Model functional team behavior - Model vulnerability, model productive disagreeing, model the willingness to hold people accountable for results, and model an unrelenting focus on student achievement.

Help teams create norms - A principal can help the team develop norms, or rules, that will dictate how the team will operate. These norms can be useful in clarifying procedures, responsibilities, and roles. If teams devise their own norms, they will function more effectively. More information about norms is on pp.102-107, and 210-212, but below are a few examples:

- Team members consider other points of view
- The team regularly evaluates its effectiveness
- Team members seek feedback
- Team members assume positive intentions
- Team members acknowledge uncertainty ("I don't know why...")
- Team members check for understanding ("I think you're saying...")

Here's Why It's Important to Organize Staff into Collaborative Teams Focused on Common Goals

Why organize collaborative teams rather than rely on the traditional mode of teachers working alone? The authors found, in their review of organizational literature, that the *team* is the most important aspect of an effective organization. The literature shows how profoundly collaboration is tied to school success. On p. 110 there is a list of 17 sources that confirm this point. In fact, the authors have not found a single example in the literature that shows that collaborative team work is ineffective.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Your School's Collaborative Teams - See p. 112 for the full rubric.

ELEMENT OF A PLC	PRE-INITIATION STATE	INITIATION STAGE	DEVELOPING STAGE	SUSTAINING STAGE
Collaborative teams of teachers focus on issues that relate directly to student learning	Teachers work in isolation. There are no planned teams.	Some structures are in place for teachers who choose to collaborate. Topics are often not about learning.	Team time has been provided during the day, guidelines have been set to focus on instruction. Effectiveness is unknown.	Teams form the basis of school improvement. Members hold each other accountable, focus on, and monitor achievement.

After completing the rubric, create an action plan such as the one excerpted below (see p.113 for a full reproducible template).

Describe one aspect of a PLC you'd like at your school.	What are the next steps?	Who is responsible?	What is a realistic timetable?	How will you determine the effectiveness?
Collaborative teams work toward common learning-focused goals.				
Teams follow protocols and norms.				
Teams generate products.				

Tips for Building a Collaborative Culture Through High-Performing Teams - See p. 114 for more tips.

1. Identify team leaders for each team and meet with them regularly.
2. Provide teams with the necessary tools: research, templates, goals, timelines, etc.
3. Monitor each team's work by overseeing the products they produce. Respond quickly to any difficulties.
4. Create ways for teams to learn from each other.
5. Recognize and celebrate teams.

Chapter 6: Creating a Results Orientation in a PLC

Main ideas of the chapter: In a PLC the school needs to have a results orientation: a focus on outcomes, not activities. This chapter describes how to accomplish this by translating district and school goals into specific team goals that get results (SMART goals).

Case Study: *Failing to Create a Results Orientation at the School Level*

Every five years one Board of Education involved stakeholders in creating a district-wide strategic plan. Then each school created an annual school improvement plan aligned with the district's strategic plan. When Superintendent Ross visited schools, she found that many people did not know the goals of the strategic plan and she found no evidence of improved practice as a result of it.

Here's How to Create a Results Orientation

While a lot of time was put into creating the strategic plan, there was little focus on the results the district hoped to achieve. No school creates a results orientation by chance. Instead, it depends on whether the leader can develop the procedures to change the focus from activities to outcomes. Below are five important strategies leaders can follow to focus everyone on results.

1. Limit the number of goals you focus on

No one can remember the enormous quantity of goals in a strategic plan. Instead, choose a few larger goals.

2. Translate district goals into school goals

District goals will be implemented only if schools create specific goals that support the district-wide ones. Furthermore, a school's goals need to be strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and timebound (SMART).

S	M	A	R	T
Strategic & Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Results-Oriented	Timebound

For example, if the district has a larger goal to eliminate the achievement gap, the school goal might look like this:

Our school's reality: 14% of our students received failing grades last year.

Our goal: This year our goal is to reduce that percentage to 7% or less.

3. Translate school goals into team goals

To further ensure that school goals are implemented, teams should create SMART goals based on the school's goals. Examples of sample team SMART goals are on pp. 127 - 132. An excerpt of one is below. There is also a blank template on p. 133.

SMART Goal Worksheet: Eighth-Grade Math

School: ABC Middle School Team: 8th Grade Math Team Leader: Chris Rauch Team Members: Chris Carter, Dolores Lay, Mary Fisk

District Goal(s): To close the achievement gap in middle and secondary schools.

School Goal(s): 1. Reduce the failure rate in our school. 2. Increase the # of proficient students on state assessment in all areas.

Team SMART Goal	Action Steps	Responsibility	Timeline	Effectiveness
Our Reality: 24% of students failed math and 31% were not proficient on the state test last year.	Align units to state standards, identify weaknesses and develop strategies to address them.	Entire team	We will complete this analysis before the school year starts. We'll review findings at the beginning of each new unit.	Written analysis of state assessment and strategies to address weaknesses.
Our Goal: Reduce failures to 10% and reduce #s not proficient on the test to 15%.	Develop common formative assessments and administer them every 3 weeks. (NOTE: see more strategies p.130)	Entire team	Formative assessments will be created before the start of each unit of instruction throughout the year.	Student performance on team-developed common assessments.

4. Focus on results and not activities

Traditionally we write goals for evidence of what *teachers* will do, not what students will achieve. For example, "We will increase our use of cooperative learning strategies," or "We will increase the use of technology into our instruction."

5. Come up with short-term goals

While districts can focus on overarching goals for several years, it is important for teams to develop short-term goals both to provide feedback about students and to help sustain the effort to continue to pursue the goals.

Here's Why We Should Focus on Results by Creating SMART Goals

There is no evidence in the literature that strategic planning improves student achievement. Mike Schmoker has frequently argued for collaborative, short-term goals instead, "Without explicit learning goals, we are simply not set up and organized for improvement, for results. Only such goals will allow us to analyze, monitor and adjust practice toward improvement." (p. 135)

There is a false conception that in organizations the leaders do the thinking and planning while the others (the teachers) take care of the implementation. Instead, teams of teachers need to be held responsible for coming up with SMART goals *and* implementing them. It is here that the principal is *vital*: by helping teams of teachers translate larger goals into SMART goals, and helping them develop the skills to achieve these goals, a leader can increase the effectiveness of these teams.

Chapter 7: Using Relevant Information to Improve Results

Main ideas of the chapter: Teachers need timely information about student achievement to monitor their progress. A focus on *results*, as was outlined in Chapter 6, is essential to a PLC. Powerful, frequent, and timely feedback - via common formative assessments created by their own team - can truly improve teaching and learning.

Case Study: *The Reluctance to Use Information*

In this case study, the teachers absolutely agreed with many of the aspects of creating a PLC: working collaboratively, helping struggling students, and focusing on learning. However, they were resistant to creating common formative assessments because the results could be used unfairly to blame teachers when other factors, such as student effort and ability, affect those results.

Here's How to Provide Useful Feedback to Teachers to Improve Teaching and Learning

The best way to provide teachers with data to improve teaching and learning is through common formative assessments that are created and analyzed by the team itself. It is only by looking at the actual evidence of student progress that teachers stop sharing *opinions* about best practices and begin to develop shared *knowledge*. Looking at these results collaboratively helps teams learn where they are on the path to achieving their SMART goals, and it allows teachers to compare their work with other teachers. This is more effective in improving teaching than supervision because the feedback is more timely and frequent.

This is particularly important at a time when schools are encouraged to be more "data-driven." In fact, teachers have plenty of data: they can use any classroom assessment to derive a mean, mode, percentage passing, etc. What is missing is a point of *comparison* so teachers can begin to learn where their strengths and weaknesses lie. When teachers hear that their students are failing state assessments, they are not convinced about the power of data. They can argue that other students who passed had more privilege or preparation. However, when they've created their own assessments, and the other students taking the assessments are similar to their own, they begin to respect the power and usefulness of these results.

Here's Why Schools Need to Focus on Results - A Focus on Results...

1. Leads to organizational effectiveness -- The difference between effective and ineffective schools is in their use of data. "Teachers in gap-closing schools use assessments more often, use data more frequently, and work collaboratively to analyze and act upon the data." (p. 150)

2. Leads to team effectiveness -- Teams can accomplish most when they are clear about where they are going.

3. Serves as a powerful motivator -- Results allow teams to see when they have achieved "small wins." This motivates them to continue with the initiative and it encourages those who were skeptical to come on board.

4. Is essential for continuous improvement -- Improvement comes from ongoing learning which centers on results. Leaders can help teachers create clear goals, assessments of those goals, and analyze results, to develop a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Chapter 8: Consensus and Conflict in a PLC

Main ideas of the chapter: In a PLC individuals must understand exactly what consensus means and know how to handle conflict. In this chapter, the authors define consensus, how to arrive at one, and how to deal with conflict.

Case Study: *Failing to Build Consensus and Respond to Resistance*

Principal Roth believed he had done a complete job of building consensus. He asked teams to work together to clarify learning outcomes and create common formative assessments. However, within a month, the 10th grade English team asked to excuse one member, Fred, from this process because he ridiculed the team's efforts and called the initiative "top-down."

Here's How to Arrive at Consensus and Respond to Disagreement

Principal Roth had problems because he had no clear definition of consensus. He thought everyone agreed, while Fred did not.

There is a wide range in what staff members consider to be consensus. Here are some sample definitions:

1. We all embrace/endorse the proposal.
2. We can all live with the proposal.
3. We all agree not to sabotage the proposal.
4. At least 51% of us (a majority) are in support of the proposal.

The authors suggest rejecting *all* of these definitions. In example 4 it is hard to ignore 49% of the group. In the other definitions it is almost impossible to get everyone to agree. Unanimity and consensus are different things. If you wait for unanimity, you will never be able to act. Instead, the authors suggest adopting the following definition.

The group has arrived at consensus when:

- All points of view have been heard.
- The will of the group is evident even to those who most oppose it.

A Process to Move Toward Consensus

The principal could have moved forward in the following way:

Step One: Present a proposal to the group. For example, "To improve learning and teaching we will work collaboratively to identify learning outcomes, create common assessments, and analyze the results of those assessments."

Step Two: Divide the staff randomly into two groups. One lists the pros of the proposal and the other lists the cons. The two groups present their results to each other adding any additional thoughts that come up.

Step Three: To determine the group's will, use a simple voting procedure such as "fist to five" (a continuum where staff can raise 5 fingers if they love the proposal and 1 to veto it). If the will of the group is not clear (the ones and twos are clearly outweighed), then the proposal does not proceed. However, pilots can be run and the proposal can be presented again.

The Need to Confront

Simply because a school has a definition of consensus and a process to build it does not mean it will avoid conflict. In fact, the strength of a PLC can be defined by its response to disagreements and those who violate their commitments. Ultimately it is the goal of a PLC to use violations as an opportunity to reinforce what is valued through peer pressure which sends the message, "That isn't how we do things here." Until a school has this type of culture, it must be the principal who conveys this message. As the authors contend, "Nothing will destroy the credibility of a leader faster than an unwillingness to address an obvious violation of what the organization contends is vital." (p.168) Below are suggestions for productively confronting conflict:

FOR AN INITIAL CONVERSATION WITH A STAFF MEMBER

1	Create a safe environment for honest dialogue. Be clear about what you both want and don't want in the conversation.
2	Try to find a goal you both agree upon. For example, "I think we both want our school to help all students achieve at high levels."
3	Use facts. Speak tentatively about these and ask, "Are my facts correct?"
4	Share your thoughts that have led up to this conversation. Share some of yourself - your rationale, perspective, and experiences.
5	Listen to the person's thoughts - this may be the only way to learn the person's perspective and keep the conversation constructive.

IF THE INDIVIDUAL STILL REJECTS WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY

1	Continue to work with this individual in a professional manner.	5	Outline the consequences for failing to comply.
2	Acknowledge the existing differences.	6	Create a plan to monitor behavior.
3	Clarify the behaviors you expect of the staff member.	7	Acknowledge and celebrate any efforts by the staff member.
4	Ask him/her for suggestions to comply with the directive.	8	Apply consequences if necessary.

See pp. 169 - 171 to read the dialogue between Principal Roth and Fred (the blocker) in which these strategies are employed.

Here's Why You Need to Deal with Conflict and Continue with Your Improvement Effort

Traditionally, school leaders have avoided conflict. However, *effective* leaders always confront those opposed to the vision, and they move forward with a "critical mass" of people without waiting for unanimous support.

How to Change People's Thinking

Most principals want to know how to change the minds of opposing staff members. However, research has shown that it is more important to change the *school culture* because this will more likely influence people's minds. While changing culture is a long-term process, Howard Gardner has outlined some short-term suggestions to influence staff members' thinking:

- Reason -- appeal to rational thinking
- Real-World Examples of successful application
- Representational Re-descriptions -- change how information is presented (ex. use stories instead of data)
- Resources and Reward -- provide incentives
- Research -- build shared knowledge of the existing research

Assessing How Effectively Your School Responds to Conflict - See p. 178 for the full rubric. Below is a summary.

ELEMENT OF A PLC	PRE-INITIATION STATE	INITIATION STAGE	DEVELOPING STAGE	SUSTAINING STAGE
Responding to conflict in a PLC	People have fight or flight responses. Most avoid conflict and those they disagree with.	Leaders try to resolve conflict quickly. Resolution is seen as the job of the administration.	Norms and protocols have been developed to identify and deal with conflict.	Conflict is used productively to explore thinking. People look at data and are willing to re-think positions. Trust abounds.

Chapter 9: The Complex Challenge of Creating PLCs

Main ideas of the chapter: This concluding chapter says that creating a PLC changes *everything* about your school - expectations, assumptions, habits, relationships - and is therefore very challenging. Real change is so challenging it requires an effective leader. This chapter outlines seven leadership strategies to help with these challenges.

Creating a PLC not only changes everything, but it changes *everyone*. Change inevitably creates conflict and throws our beliefs into question. Few *real* changes come about in a bottom-up approach. For true change, we need effective leaders who take charge.

7 Strategies for More Effective Leadership

1. Link the Change Initiative to Existing Practices -- This way the initiative won't seem like a complete departure.
2. First Focus on "Why" the School Needs the Change, Then "How" -- This will increase staff buy-in.
3. Align Actions With Words -- What a leader does leads to more credibility than what he or she says.
4. Be Flexible About Implementation but Firm on the Core of the Change Initiative -- Be open to varying solutions.
5. Build a Guiding Coalition and Move Forward Without Unanimity
6. Expect to Make Mistakes and Learn From Them -- Allow for mistakes which can be seen as opportunities to learn.
7. Learn by Doing -- Don't spend so much time in preparation for a new initiative. Go ahead and implement.

Passion and Persistence

PLCs actually renew the passion of teachers. Once teachers become exposed to a PLC, they become infused with new energy and a sense of purpose from the benefits of growing as professionals while improving student achievement at the same time.

Professional Development Suggestions - From THE MAIN IDEA

PD Ideas Embedded in the Book - NOTE: The reproducibles below are provided on a CD that comes with the book

A big part of each chapter are actual PD suggestions. Each chapter provides: 1) a reproducible rubric to assess your school's current reality; 2) an action plan to help you think through next steps; 3) questions and tips to guide your implementation.

Clarifying your school's purpose	rubric pp.34-35	action plan p.36	tips & questions pp. 37-42
Clarifying your curriculum and assessments	rubric pp. 60-61	action plan pp.62-64	tips & questions pp. 65-69
Your response to students who don't learn	rubric p. 79	action plan p. 80	tips & questions pp. 81-87
Creating effective collaborative teams	rubric pp. 112	action plan p.113	tips & questions pp. 114-16
Creating a focus on results	rubric p. 139	action plan p. 140	tips & questions pp. 141-43
Using data/results for improvement	rubric p. 156	action plan p. 157	tips & questions pp. 158-62
Responding to conflict	rubric p. 178	action plan p. 179	tips & questions pp. 180-83

Why are we here? Clarifying your school's goals

1. Gather information about the school from the previous year to present to the staff. Ask a few teacher leaders to help with the collection. You can copy, fill out, and distribute "A Data Picture of Our School" (pp.17-18) which provides data on student achievement, engagement and discipline. Brainstorm other data you'd like to distribute to present an accurate picture of your school: % of students who failed two or more classes, % of teachers who tutor before/after school, etc., as well as a few detailed anecdotes.

2. Have the entire staff review the information from part 1. While you may not want to recreate the school's mission, bring the mission to the meeting. Divide the staff into small groups to look at the data and ask what the most surprising and expected pieces of data were. Ask staff to discuss the ways the data *supports* and *conflicts* with the school's mission.

3. One concrete way to highlight the school's goals is through *celebration*. To concretize the staff's discussions about the purpose of your school, ask teachers to come up with one new celebration which reflects the school's goals. Brainstorm a list of possible celebrations (ex. movie passes for students not absent for a month, an honor for a teacher who turns three failing students into passing students, etc.). Divide the teachers into groups to flesh out the details of one celebration, and have the entire staff vote on one new celebration to implement.

How can we most effectively work together?

1. As the principal, familiarize yourself with the reasons collaborative work improves the effectiveness of an organization. Read the quotations on p. 109 (perhaps post some in your office), read the case studies in the summary, and see the lists of benefits of collaboratively outlining learning and common assessments (summary, p. 3). There are also 17 sources linking collaboration to school improvement on p.110.

2. Ask staff to write about their past experiences - both positive and challenging - working in teams. Then in groups of 3, ask them to share their writing. Remember that teachers bring their past group experiences to new team efforts. After this, share some of the results from the literature, perhaps the quotes from p. 109. Expose the effectiveness of the school's current collaborative efforts by using the rubric on pp.60-61.

3. Divide the staff into two groups and ask each to list the pros and cons of *working together* to: 1) outline student learning; 2) create common formative assessments; and 3) respond to students who don't learn. Share these lists as a whole group, add new ideas, and discuss them.

4. Tell staff that they will be working collaboratively throughout the year to improve student achievement. Put the teachers into the groups they'll be working with and have them create 4 -6 team norms they would like to follow to help them operate more effectively. Give them samples of team norms (see the 6 norms listed on p. 5 of the summary or find more on pp. 102-107).

5. Have each team come up with its own team SMART goal. Keep the time frame short to help the team realize some early success and help reluctant team members buy into the group effort. To provide an example, copy a sample SMART goal worksheet (3rd grade, 8th grade math, or HS US history pp.129-32) and give each team a blank template (p. 133). Ask teams to trade goals and to assess whether these goals support the school's mission, whether they are truly SMART, and ask for other structured feedback.

What should our students learn and how should they be assessed?

1. Teachers should decide collaboratively what their students will learn *but* they need to know the requirements with which this learning should be aligned. Gather and distribute all information teachers need to make this decision such as state standards, sample state and national tests, prerequisite skills for the next grade, etc. (see a list of 10 items on p. 47). Then, based on the 3 criteria on p. 3 of the summary (does the knowledge endure, have leverage, and prepare the student for the next level), have teachers work in teams (either by grade or subject area) to choose the 8-10 learning outcomes for the first course. In the book, one suggestion is to use 3 colors of sticky notes and go through last year's lesson plans, as well as other local and state requirements, to decide what to "Keep," (yellow notes) "Drop," (pink) and "Create," (green).

2. Then teachers can create common formative assessments based on these 8-10 learning outcomes. Decide on the frequency of these assessments and emphasize the importance of assessing fewer concepts more frequently. After providing teams with your expectations, give them time to come up with their *first* common assessment. Then have teams share their assessments with other teams (perhaps those who teach the same grade level or subject) to get feedback. You may want to start by requiring common formative assessments in just language arts and math.

What do we do when our students don't learn?

1. Teachers need to see that creating individual responses to students who don't learn is ineffective. Review and share the information in the summary which states that a response to struggling students must be systematic and school-wide. The school needs to come up with a required, systematic and timely response *before* the school doors open. Present the reality of teachers' current approaches to struggling students by having them complete the rubric on p. 79.

2. It might help if teachers could see examples of systematic responses in place. Two examples are in the book (top of p.75 and p.83), four examples are presented in *Whatever It Takes: How PLCs Respond When Kids Don't Learn*, or you might want to bring in a staff member from a local school that has a system of interventions in place for struggling students to share their approach.

3. Have teachers brainstorm a list of *in-school* responses. Choose the top three suggestions and either have a full staff vote or create a task force to flesh out and choose one response. You may also want to choose someone to oversee this system.