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INTRODUCTION

As an educator and leader of schools with over 35 years of experience, I have seen a myriad of initiatives, programs, policies, directives and strategies aimed at improving student learning come and go. Some of these were imposed and some self-inflected, but most were the latest fad or hope that, while initially embraced with enthusiasm and optimism, disappeared with little sustained impact on student learning outcomes. Each new idea quickly led to "initiative overload", and generated a "this too shall pass" mindset not only in myself, but also the educators that I served.

It was in the mid 2000s that a fellow educator asked for my opinion of a book written by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker and Thomas Many. Reluctantly, I added the book to my growing professional reading pile, hoping that when I had contended with the million other things on my "to do" list, I might get a chance to open it. When a quiet moment did finally present itself, I found that I was unable to put the book down. My love for "Learning by Doing", and the genius of professional learning communities, was born. The more I delved into the book, the more amazed I was at the new view it offered on how we should be conceiving our profession. In fact, as I read each section, I kept muttering to myself, "This just makes sense".

In 2011, I was fortunate enough to attend a professional learning workshop in Adelaide conducted by Rick and Becky DuFour, where their passion and expertise cemented my commitment and determination to transform my school into a professional learning community. One of the key messages they shared about the work was that, while the concept was simple, the implementation process was not easy. But then, what good ideas ever are?

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Over the course of many years, and working collaboratively with my leadership team and the school staff, we continued to build our collective understanding of the practices of a professional learning community, and genuinely adopted the mantra of the book by engaging every member of the school community in "learning by doing". Along the way we had missteps, heading down seductive detours and short cuts, but each one was an opportunity to learn from our mistakes, gain greater clarity of the process and deepen our commitment to achieving a better outcome for the students we served. In 2013 we were proud to be recognised as the first model school of a Professional Learning Community at Work™ in Australia.

While we certainly were "learning by doing", we now know that our school's transformation would have been assisted greatly by having Australian examples and resources to refer to, helping to guide our thinking and shape our practices. It is from that simple idea that this resource has been created.

In my current role of leading learning on professional learning communities across Australia, I have returned to my former school, Pakenham Springs Primary School in Victoria, to interview staff and record team meetings in an attempt to create a resource that will assist other schools wanting to deepen their knowledge of the professional learning community concept. The dedicated staff of Pakenham Springs eagerly volunteered their time and energies to support the creation of the videos which accompany this resource, and I thank them for their willingness to share their thoughts, experiences and passion regarding professional learning communities.

This resource does not claim to highlight exemplars of the process, but rather is an attempt to capture real-life examples of the thinking and practices of educators who are on the journey of transforming their school into a professional learning community. This resource is designed to promote the thinking of leaders and educators as they undertake this journey together, and contains interviews with Australian teachers and leaders discussing what they have learnt throughout the transformation process.

This resource contains videos of leadership and collaborative team meetings so that viewers can get a sense of work of collaborative teams and the manner in which these meetings are conducted. It also contains one-on-one meetings with key school personnel to provide examples of how leaders in the school support team leaders, and each other, to grow their capabilities and work in the way required by a professional learning community. These videos have been designed to be watched individually, in small groups or as a whole staff as a professional learning activity.

In closing, I would like to again thank the dedicated educators of Pakenham Springs Primary School for their support of this project, and their eagerness to share what they have learnt on their journey thus far with a wider audience. We hope that this resource supports your continued understanding of the professional learning community concept, and inspires your ongoing, important and deeply rewarding endeavours to provide your students with the quality education that they deserve.

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HOW TO USE THE VIDEOS

This Facilitator's Guide is accompanied by two USB drives containing the video clips necessary to complete the discussion questions and workshop activities detailed throughout this guide. The video clips are separated into three folders, each pertaining to a different section of the Facilitator's Guide: Vox Pop Interviews (USB HB5985 Section 1), Leadership and Collaborative Team Meetings, and One-on-One Interviews (USB HB5985 Section 2 & 3).

SECTION ONE: VOX POP INTERVIEWS

In these videos, educators from Pakenham Springs Primary School, a large government school in southeast Melbourne, Victoria, and the first school in Australia to be recognised as a model of the PLC at Work™, reflect on their thoughts about the school's journey to become a professional learning community. These educators possess a range of educational experiences and backgrounds, and bring their unique perspectives and insights on their own and the school's journey to become a professional learning community.

Each person interviewed provides their particular view on various issues related to their endeavours in improving the educational outcomes for the students they serve. Topics covered include: defining what a professional learning community is, the benefits educators have found from working as a professional learning community, how SMART goals support and energise the work of collaborative teams, the use of team norms to ensure that critical behaviour commitments of team members are explicitly defined, and more.

For more information on the interviews featured in Section One, turn to page 1.

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SECTION TWO: LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE TEAM MEETINGS

In these videos, several collaborative team meetings held at Pakenham Springs provide clear examples of the real work school teams focus on in a professional learning community. These meetings highlight how teams use learning data to identify the needs of specific groups of students, and use these data to identify and discuss teaching practices that have the greatest impact on student learning. The three meetings included in this guide feature the Foundation Year, Year 3 and Year 4 collaborative teams.

Similarly, a meeting of the school's leadership team has been included to demonstrate how the issues discussed at this meeting, and the work the leadership team has undertaken, complements and supports the work of the collaborative teams.

For more information on the meetings featured in Section Two, turn to page 91.

SECTION THREE: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

In these videos, one-on-one meetings between the principal and assistant principals, and the assistant principals and collaborative team facilitators, allow the audience to delve deeper into how the school guarantees a high level of support for the distributed leadership structures established at the school. These weekly meetings are designed to have the participants reflect on the goals that they are working towards achieving, and to ensure that there is a coordinated approach being taken across the school regarding the implementation of key professional learning community approaches and processes.

For more information on the interviews featured in Section Three, turn to page 105.

The accompanying video clips have been edited in such a way so that each segment can either be viewed in its entirety, with a full discussion of the segment occurring afterwards, or as separate vignettes, allowing for immediate discussion of the point in the preceding video clip.

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