



Inspiration for Professional Learning Communities at Work™

A LEADER'S COMPANION

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PREFACE



THE IDEA OF SCHOOLS functioning as professional learning communities strikes a positive cord with most educators. Few disagree with the notion that schools should be built on a solid foundation of collaboratively developed mission, vision, values, and goals. Few contend that schools are better served by a culture of teacher isolation rather than a collaborative culture. Few disagree with the call for schools in which educators work together to engage in collective inquiry, seek out “best practices,” and implement those practices within their own classrooms, teams, and schools. And importantly, in this age of increased accountability, few oppose the premise that schools should develop a culture of continuous improvement and a focus on results—with “results” being defined as improved student learning.

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In fact, never before has there been such widespread agreement about the best path to creating such schools. Researchers, practitioners, and major educational organizations have sounded the clarion call for the reculturing of schools into professional learning communities. So, the goal is clear. The challenges are straightforward: First, how do we create such schools? And second, can we demonstrate the collective will to sustain the reculturing process inherent in the PLC journey?

We remain convinced that strong, widely dispersed leadership is essential to the successful implementation of PLC concepts. Those concepts are indeed powerful, but they will not compensate for weak and ineffective leadership.

In our previous books we have attempted to help school leaders understand not only the “why” of professional learning community practices, but also the “how.” A common theme present throughout our work is a call to action: “Get started, do the work.”

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We recognize, however, that even those who respond enthusiastically to professional learning community concepts and practices may still consider the implementation challenges to be daunting. It has been said that “even the grandest design eventually degenerates into hard work.” Furthermore, the creation of a professional learning community is the result of a process rather than a prescribed program—there is no easy recipe to which one can refer for detailed, step-by-step instructions. Thus, while many educators respond to the PLC premise with initial enthusiasm, the crush of their myriad daily duties, the demands they confront on a routine basis, and the complexity of transforming a school can make it difficult to sustain that enthusiasm.

We created this book to help school leaders return their attention to the major concepts that drive the work of a PLC, recommit to those concepts, and sustain the effort needed to bring them to life in their schools. *A Leader’s Companion* is a

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collection of the “big ideas” from each of our previous books, a quick reference to the essentials.

We hope this book will not only serve as a guide, but that it will motivate and inspire as well. Creating professional learning communities will require both passion and persistence, and it is our sincere hope this little “companion” will offer help, comfort, and inspiration to school leaders who are undertaking this important journey. We wish them Godspeed.

—*Robert Eaker*

Rebecca DuFour

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ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CULTURAL SHIFTS that must take place if schools are to perform as professional learning communities involves a shift from a primary focus on *teaching* to placing the primary focus on *learning*.

—*Getting Started*

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Collaborative Teams



SCHOOLS THAT FUNCTION as professional learning communities are *always* characterized by a collaborative culture. Teacher isolation is replaced with collaborative processes that are deeply embedded into the daily life of the school. Members of a PLC are not “invited” to work with colleagues: They are called upon to be contributing members of a collective effort to improve the school’s capacity to help all students learn at high levels.

—*Getting Started*



A Focus on Results



MEMBERS OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY continually assess their effectiveness on the basis of results: tangible evidence their students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to their future success.

—Learning by Doing



Appealing to the Heart



IF SCHOOLS ARE TO IMPROVE, they need educators who believe in the possibility of a better future—and in themselves.

—*PLC at Work*

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