



Table of Contents

About the Authors	xi
Other Resources By or Featuring the Authors	xiii
Print	xiii
Video	xiii
Introduction to the Second Edition	1
What's New	1
The Format	4
A Journey Worth Taking	7
Chapter 1	
A Guide to Action for Professional Learning Communities at Work	9
What Are Professional Learning Communities?	9
Why Don't We Apply What We Know?	14
Taking Action	17
Chapter 2	
A Clear and Compelling Purpose	19
Part One: The Case Study: Clarifying Our Purpose	19
Part Two: Here's How	21
Part Three: Here's Why	29
Part Four: Assessing Your Place on the PLC Journey	42
Part Five: Tips for Moving Forward: Building the Foundation of a PLC	51
Part Six: Questions to Guide the Work of Your Professional Learning Community.	54
Part Seven: Dangerous Detours and Seductive Shortcuts	57



Introduction to the Second Edition

We began the first edition of this book with a simple sentence: “We learn best by doing.” This axiom certainly applies to our own work. Since the publication of the first edition, we have made presentations to tens of thousands of educators, served on dozens of panels to answer their questions, worked with several districts on a long-term ongoing basis to assist with their implementation of the professional learning community (PLC) concept, and participated in ongoing dialogue with educators online at www.allthingsplc.info. This continuing work with teachers, principals, and central office staff from schools and districts throughout North America has given us a deeper understanding of the challenges they face as they attempt to implement the professional learning community process in their organizations. This second edition attempts to draw upon that deeper understanding to provide educators with a more powerful tool for moving forward.

What’s New

This edition makes editorial revisions throughout the book and offers several substantive changes as well, including those that follow.

1. A Focused Exploration of Reciprocal Accountability

Leaders who call upon others to engage in new work, achieve new standards, and accomplish new goals have a responsibility to develop the capacity of those they lead to be successful in meeting these challenges. Richard Elmore (2006) refers to this relationship as “reciprocal accountability—For every increment of performance I demand from you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation. Likewise, for every investment you make in my skill and knowledge, I have a reciprocal responsibility to demonstrate some new increment in performance” (p. 93).

Effective implementation of the concept of reciprocal accountability is vital to the PLC process. Superintendents cannot implement the process throughout a district unless they build the capacity of principals to lead it in their schools. Principals will not develop their schools as high-performing PLCs unless they develop the knowledge and skills of key staff members

Leaders who call upon others to engage in new work, achieve new standards, and accomplish new goals have a responsibility to develop the capacity of those they lead to be successful in meeting these challenges.

A Guide to Action for Professional Learning Communities at Work

We learn best by doing. We have known this to be true for quite some time. More than 2,500 years ago Confucius observed, “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” Most educators acknowledge that our deepest insights and understandings come from action, followed by reflection and the search for improvement. After all, most educators have spent four or five years *preparing* to enter the profession—taking courses on content and pedagogy, observing students and teachers in classrooms, completing student teaching under the tutelage of a veteran teacher, and so on. Yet almost without exception, they admit that they learned more in their first semester of *teaching* than they did in the four or five years they spent *preparing* to enter the profession. This is not an indictment of higher education; it is merely evidence of the power of learning that is embedded in the work.

Our profession also attests to the importance and power of learning by doing when it comes to educating our students. We want students to be *actively engaged in hands-on authentic exercises* that promote *experiential learning*. How odd, then, that a profession that pays such homage to the importance of learning by doing is so reluctant to apply that principle when it comes to developing its collective capacity to meet the needs of students. Why do institutions created for and devoted to learning not call upon the professionals within them to become more proficient in improving the effectiveness of schools by actually doing the work of school improvement? Why have we been so reluctant to learn by doing?

What Are Professional Learning Communities?

Since 1998, we have published multiple books and videos with the same two goals in mind: (1) to persuade educators that the most promising strategy for meeting the challenge of helping all students learn at high levels is to develop their capacity to function as a professional learning community

Part Four

Assessing Your Place on the PLC Journey

The PLC Continuum

In each chapter of this handbook, you will be asked to reflect upon the current conditions in your school or district and assess the alignment of those conditions with the principles and practices of a PLC. The assessment will present a five-point continuum:

- 1. Pre-Initiation Stage.** The school has not yet begun to address this principle or practice of a PLC.
- 2. Initiation Stage.** The school has made an effort to address this principle or practice, but the effort has not yet begun to impact a critical mass of staff members.
- 3. Implementation Stage.** A critical mass of staff members is participating in implementing the principle or practice, but many approach the task with a sense of compliance rather than commitment. There is some uncertainty regarding what needs to be done and why it should be done.
- 4. Developing Stage.** Structures are being altered to support the changes, and resources are being devoted to moving them forward. Members are becoming more receptive to the principle, practice, or process because they have experienced some of its benefits. The focus has shifted from “Why are we doing this?” to “How can we do this more effectively?”
- 5. Sustaining Stage.** The principle or practice is deeply embedded in the culture of the school. It is a driving force in the daily work of staff. It is deeply internalized, and staff would resist attempts to abandon the principle or practice.

This continuum can be administered across a district, school, or team. Many districts have converted it to an electronic format and used simple survey tools such as SurveyMonkey to gather information on staff perceptions. Whatever format is used, we recommend that the process begin by asking each individual to make anonymous, independent, candid assessments and to offer evidence and anecdotes to support his or her conclusions on each characteristic that is presented.

Once individual assessments are completed, the results should be compiled and shared with all participants. Members of the staff can then analyze the results and use them to begin dialogue to clarify the current reality of their team, school, or district. Participants should be particularly attentive

Part Five

Tips for Moving Forward: Building the Foundation of a PLC

1

Move quickly to action. Remember that you will not progress on the PLC continuum or close the knowing-doing gap until people in the school or district begin to “do” differently. We have seen educators devote years to studying, debating, rewording, and revising different elements of the foundation, thereby giving the illusion of meaningful action. In most instances, a staff should be able to consider and resolve all of the questions of the foundation in a matter of weeks. They may need to return to the foundation in the future to make changes as the vision becomes clear, the need for additional commitments arises, or new goals emerge. Perfection is not the objective: action is. Once again, the school or district that actually does the work of a PLC will develop its capacity to help all students learn far more effectively than the school or district that spends years preparing to be a PLC.

2

Build shared knowledge when asking people to make a decision. Asking uninformed people to make decisions is bound to result in uninformed decisions. Members of a PLC resolve issues and answer important questions by asking, “What information do we need to examine together to make a good decision?” and then building shared knowledge regarding that information. Learning together is, by definition, the very essence of a *learning* community. Furthermore, giving people access to the same information increases the likelihood that they will arrive at the same conclusions. All staff should have direct access to user-friendly information on the current reality in their school or district as well as access to summaries of effective practices and best thinking regarding the issue under consideration. School and district leaders must take responsibility for gathering and disseminating this information, but all staff should be invited to present any information for distribution that they feel is relevant.

3

Use the foundation to assist in day-to-day decisions. Addressing the foundation of a PLC will impact the school only if it becomes a tool for making decisions. Posting mission statements in the building or inserting a vision statement or goals into a strategic plan does nothing to improve a school.