

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Authors	xi
Foreword	xv
By Rebecca DuFour	
Introduction	1
A Coaching Framework	2
Clarity	2
Feedback	3
Support	3
Three Reasons	4
Coaching Helps Develop Greater Precision With PLC Practice	4
Coaching Resources Are Available to Every School	5
Coaching Provides the Missing Link Between Learning and Doing	5
About This Book	6
A Comprehensive Approach	7

PART I

CHAPTER I

Combining Collaboration and Coaching	11
Collaboration	12
Coaching	14
Best Practice Versus Next Practice	16
Isolation Versus Collaboration	18
Limited Versus Expanded Access to Resources and Expertise	18
A Deficit Versus an Asset Orientation	19

Perception Versus Results	19
Individual Versus Collective Improvement	19
Resource and Cost Intensive Versus Resource and Cost Efficient	20
A Practical Shift.	20
Achieving a Systemwide Impact	21
Building Capacity With Collaboration.	21
From Fixing to Cultivating	22
Conclusion	24

CHAPTER 2

Coaching Collaborative Teams in a PLC	27
Three Big Ideas of a PLC.	28
A Focus on Learning.	28
A Collaborative Culture	28
A Results Orientation	30
The Four Critical Questions of a PLC.	32
Critical Question One	32
Critical Question Two	33
Critical Question Three.	34
Critical Question Four	35
Tools for Guidance and Support.	36
Case Study: East Detroit Public Schools	37
Conclusion	43

PART II

CHAPTER 3

Amplifying Your Impact With Clarity	47
The Strategy Implementation Guide (SIG)	48
Reason for the SIG.	49
The Original SIG.	52
Content of the SIG.	53
The Process of Creating a SIG	54
Step 1: Identify Elements of the PLC Process	55
Step 2: Write Anchor Statements	55
Step 3: Develop Indicators.	56
The SIG's Field Test.	61

A Cycle of Continuous Improvement	65
Conclusion	66

CHAPTER 4

Amplifying Your Impact With Feedback. 67

Defining Feedback.	68
Defining Good Feedback	69
Committing to Feedback	71
Providing Feedback.	71
Consultant (Task) Feedback	72
Collaborator of Conversational Feedback	74
Coach of Reflective Feedback.	75
Applying Feedback	76
Data Stems	76
Feedback Stems	76
Next Steps.	79
Connecting Feedback to the SIG.	79
Learning From a Case Study on the Impact of Feedback	80
Conclusion	83

CHAPTER 5

Amplifying Your Impact With Support 85

Using Pathways for Coaching Collaborative Teams in a PLC	86
Pathways Tool for Critical Question One	90
Pathways Tool for Critical Question Two	97
Pathways Tool for Critical Question Three	102
Pathways Tool for Critical Question Four	107
Conclusion	108

PART III

CHAPTER 6

Making It Real: Coaching Scenarios 113

A. C. Doyle Elementary School.	114
Description of Inefficient, Ineffective Meeting.	114
Interventions From Coach	119

INTRODUCTION

At some time in our lives, a coach has inspired most of us. It may have been a little league coach, a Girl Scouts leader, or even a family member who encouraged us and helped us focus on a personal goal we were trying to reach. We appreciated the coach's interest and felt special when he or she volunteered his or her time to help us improve. This coach cared about us and our success, which motivated us to try even harder. As professionals, we still need coaches in our corner spurring us on, reminding us of our strengths and helping us overcome our weaknesses.

Coaching is not a new idea in schools. In fact, 21st century coaching models that focus on improving the instructional practice of individual teachers are considered *best practice*. With this book, we seek to move from best practice to *next practice*—from coaching models focused on individual teachers to a coaching framework focused on collaborative teams. We consider this shift the next generation of best practice. We are already seeing schools and districts beginning to shift their coaching efforts from individuals to teams, and in doing so, they *amplify* the positive effects both coaching *and* collaboration have on teaching and learning.

Collaboration is not a new idea in schools either, and the Professional Learning Communities at Work™ (PLC) process—“an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016, p. 10)—creates learning environments in which learning is constant, and innovation and experimentation flourish.

Highly effective collaborative teams have been called the foundation, the fundamental building block, and the engine that drives a PLC (Eaker & Dillard, 2017). In many schools, principals have taken the first step and created time for teams to meet during the regular school day and then encouraged teams to “go forth and collaborate.” Time is a necessary condition for collaboration, but time alone is not enough. If the goal is to build a collaborative culture, it will take more—a lot more—than a dedicated and protected time for teams to meet. Functioning as an effective

member of a collaborative team likely will require new learning on the part of teachers. Team members must become skilled at things like how to create norms and SMART goals, how to use protocols with assessment data, and how to build trust and manage conflict, all while engaging in a process of collective inquiry that has an action orientation and using cycles of continuous improvement with a clear focus on results. As Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman suggest (1999), “In many respects, collaboration needs to be taught.” They continue, “The capacity to be a colleague is different from other capacities of good teaching” (p. 24).

As DuFour and his colleagues (2016) explain, becoming a PLC is a journey, not a destination. The PLC journey is a transformation because it constitutes a complete shift in how educators and school leaders do their everyday business. This book is about *coaching* the PLC process. It is intended to serve as a resource for those schools and districts that are beginning or are already on their journey to becoming a PLC and want to accelerate that transformation.

If the goal is to improve teaching and learning in our schools, and if the PLC process is the strategy school and district leaders choose to reach that goal, then leaders must help teacher teams improve their PLC practices. Robert Eaker and Heather Dillard (2017) suggest that, “Just as it is generally recognized that districts must work to close learning gaps between subgroups, it is also district leaders’ responsibility to close the effectiveness gap between collaborative teams within each school” (p. 46). By combining the most effective aspects of coaching and collaboration, we believe teams can develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become fully functioning and highly successful within their larger PLC. This book serves as a guide for schools and districts that are committed to the development of highly effective collaborative teams.

A Coaching Framework

In order to coach collaborative teams in PLCs, we combine the latest research on coaching and collaboration to offer a coaching framework that improves the effectiveness of collaborative teams in diverse school settings. Three important concepts—(1) clarity, (2) feedback, and (3) support—are the cornerstones of the coaching framework we describe in this book.

Clarity

Before teachers can benefit from the power of collaboration, they must understand what it takes to fully implement the PLC model. As Mike Schmoker (2004) states, “Clarity precedes competence” (p. 10). Our experience shows that one of the differences between teams operating as either *PLC lite* or *PLC right* is a thorough

understanding of the PLC process. An excellent way to build shared knowledge about PLCs is to involve teachers in creating a strategy implementation guide (SIG) that describes the specific behaviors we associate with successful PLCs. Engaging the faculty and staff in the process of developing a SIG promotes clarity, builds shared knowledge, creates ownership, and encourages the development of a common vocabulary. It also establishes a standard of best PLC practice and allows teams to measure their progress toward becoming high-performing collaborative teams. Clarity is the first cornerstone of a framework for coaching collaborative teams.

Feedback

The second cornerstone, feedback, is vital for teams to improve. As Grant Wiggins (2010) writes, feedback is “how learning occurs” (p. 1). This coaching framework takes great care to emphasize the importance of providing teams with frequent opportunities for effective feedback. Not all teams learn new skills at the same time or in the same ways, so when working with collaborative teams, coaches provide differentiated levels of feedback depending on each individual team’s needs. Feedback anchored in an agreed-on standard and described in a SIG allows teams and coaches to hold data-driven conversations, chart next steps, and launch action plans.

Support

The third cornerstone of this coaching framework is support. Teams thrive when clarity and feedback become the basis for specific support. We argue that improved PLC practices require clarity around expectations, differentiated feedback anchored in an agreed-on standard of best practice, and specific strategies that support collaborative teams.

The coaching framework described in the remainder of this book is grounded in the cornerstone concepts of clarity, feedback, and support. Individually, each of these can contribute to a team’s effectiveness, but when clarity is combined with the kind of effective feedback that identifies specific support a team needs to succeed, the productivity of collaborative teams is amplified.

Figure I.1 (page 4) shows the framework for coaching we explore in this book.

Becoming a high-functioning collaborative team is a process. However, the process is not linear, and the path looks different for each team. Like collaboration, the coaching process is recursive, and factors like team member composition, skill sets, content, and other outside influences may interrupt the cycle. Veterans of the PLC process know that diversions are normal and that leaders must proactively plan for them. However, getting teams that do take a wrong turn back on track and remaining focused can be a challenge. We advocate the intentional coaching of collaborative teams as a way to sustain the PLC process.

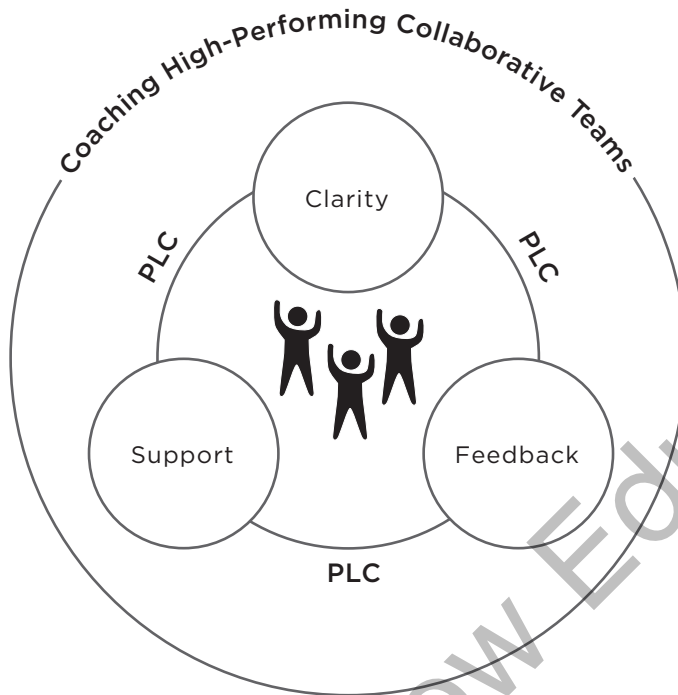


Figure I.1: A framework for coaching in a PLC.

Three Reasons

We believe this framework makes sense for three main reasons.

1. Coaching allows collaborative teams to develop a higher level of precision around their PLC practice.
2. The resources (context, content, and coaches) necessary to support the coaching of collaborative teams are well within the reach of every school.
3. Coaching provides collaborative teams within a PLC with the missing link between learning and doing.

Coaching Helps Develop Greater Precision With PLC Practice

We believe coached teams are more likely to implement the new practices they are learning (such as common assessments and schoolwide systems of intervention) more frequently and at a more accelerated rate than uncoached teams are. Clarity allows teams to be more precise in their understanding of the why, how, and what of the PLC process. For example, coached teams better understand why teachers collaborate, how teams use data, and what all students should know and be able to do.

Coached teams—those that regularly receive focused and effective feedback—have a more accurate understanding of where they are, where they need to be, and what they need to do to improve their practice. We believe that coached teams, more so than uncoached teams, are able to clearly articulate the purpose and appropriate use of the new practices they are learning (such as norms, protocols, and SMART goals).

Finally, coached teams benefit from support that is both specific and targeted. Because coaches are able to deploy a range of resources that provide the right people with the right kind of assistance at the right time, we believe that coached teams are more likely than uncoached teams to build the kind of capacity and requisite skills necessary to facilitate their own work.

Coaching Resources Are Available to Every School

According to Joellen Killion and Cindy Harison (2017), “Learning with one’s teammates provides the context for effective learning for teachers” (p. 163); thus, the context for the coaching framework we envision is a collaborative team operating within the larger PLC.

The content coaches should focus on when working within this framework consists of those practices that are most closely aligned with the three big ideas and the four critical questions (DuFour et al., 2016) that are so fundamental to the PLC process.

We also believe that those who use this framework to coach collaborative teams should not be limited to individuals whose job descriptions include the word *coach*. Killion and Harrison (2017) define coaching as, “a process that engages one professional with another to clarify and achieve goals” (p. 6). For the purposes of this framework, we take a more inclusive view of coaching and consider a wide range of roles within PLCs as potential coaches for collaborative teams.

For us it’s about *coaching* not *coaches*, and while not every school employs coaches, most schools likely have some combination of principals, assistant principals, department chairs, PLC leaders, district-level coordinators, curriculum specialists, or teacher leaders who can help teams improve their practice. We believe there are lots of people who can be involved in coaching others to higher levels of performance.

Coaching Provides the Missing Link Between Learning and Doing

We believe the conscious, purposeful, and intentional coaching of collaborative teams within a PLC has tremendous potential for improving schools. The framework we describe provides the missing link between learning and doing.

Principals often ask, “Why hasn’t all the training translated into changes in our practice?” They wonder aloud, “What is preventing us from moving from theory into practice, from learning into doing?” The answer to these questions has been right in front of us all along: the very best way to move a school from PLC lite to PLC right is by coaching collaborative teams.

About This Book

Throughout the rest of this book, we present the framework specifics for coaching collaborative teams. We recognize that calling on schools to shift limited resources from coaching individual teachers to coaching collaborative teams will challenge current thinking and change existing practice. Our hope is that we cause school leaders to pause and consider the possibilities that such a shift would create.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on the *why*, *how*, and *what* of coaching collaborative teams. In chapter 1, we delve into the research around collaboration and coaching to build a rationale in support of a shift from coaching individual teachers to coaching collaborative teams. In chapter 2, we further describe the connection between the PLC model and a framework for coaching teams. The chapter concludes with a case study of two school systems to illustrate the impact that the successful execution of an integrated approach to coaching teams has on student learning.

Part II of the book explores the relationship between the cornerstone concepts of clarity, feedback, and support and provides a practical framework for coaching collaborative teams. In chapter 3, we share our tool for coaching collaborative teams, the SIG, and describe a practical process a school or district can use to develop its own SIG. When coaches regularly use a SIG, they help teams clarify expectations, identify current reality, and pinpoint next steps members will need to take to improve their PLC practice. In chapter 4, we explore the essential role feedback plays in improving a team’s PLC practices. Effective feedback is essential to improvement. We define several types of feedback and offer specific strategies for differentiating feedback. Chapter 5 presents the idea of using a pathways tool for coaching collaborative teams to guide a team’s conversations. While clarity and feedback are critical, nothing will happen without timely and targeted support that aligns with what the team needs to improve its practice.

Part III connects research and practice. Chapter 6 uses two real-life scenarios to illustrate how combining the concepts of clarity, feedback, and support can have a positive impact on collaborative teams’ effectiveness. Finally, the afterword concludes our discussion of coaching collaborative teams in a PLC, identifying the powerful possibilities this kind of a shift can have on teaching and learning.