

New Insights on How PLCs Improve Schools

Presented by
Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour
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Today's Moderator

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Today's Presenter

Dr. Richard DuFour

- Public school educator for 34 years, serving as a teacher, principal, and superintendent
- Served as the principal of Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, from 1983 to 1991
- Superintendent of the district from 1991 to 2002
- Department of Education described Stevenson as "the most recognized and celebrated school in America"
- One of three schools in the nation to win the USDE Blue Ribbon Award on four occasions
- One of the first comprehensive schools designated a New America High School by USDE as a model of successful school reform

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Today's Presenter

Rebecca DuFour

- Served as a teacher, school administrator, and central office coordinator
- As an elementary principal, helped her school earn state and national recognition as a model professional learning community
- One of the featured principals in the *Video Journal of Education* program "Leadership in an Age of Standards and High Stakes" (2001)
- Lead consultant and featured principal in the *Video Journal of Education* program "Elementary Principals as Leaders of Learning" (2003)
- Coauthor of many books and video series on the topic of professional learning communities

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An Overarching Assertion

There is growing consensus that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.

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What Do We Know About the World's Best School Systems?

- The best school systems in the world recognize that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction.
- So, high-performing systems use the professional learning community process to support powerful professional development through teacher collaboration (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

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What Is a PLC?

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Professional Learning Community (PLC) Defined

The professional learning community is 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.

PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.

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The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

We accept ***learning*** as the fundamental purpose of our school and therefore are willing to examine ***all*** practices in light of their impact on learning.

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Ideas Have Consequences

Because we accept *learning* as the fundamental purpose of our school, our collective effort must focus around four critical questions:

1. What is it we want all students to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned?
3. How will we respond when some students experience difficulty in their learning?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?

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The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We cultivate a *collaborative culture* through development of high-performing teams.

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Ideas Have Consequences

Because we are committed to working collaboratively to achieve our collective purpose...

- The collaborative team is the fundamental building block and engine of improvement for our school.
- We work together interdependently to achieve common goals that are directly related to improved student learning.
- We are mutually accountable for achieving those goals.
- Teams are provided with the time, resources, and support essential to their effectiveness.

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The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

We assess our effectiveness on the basis of **results** rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and the school seek relevant evidence and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

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Ideas Have Consequences

Because we assess our effectiveness on the basis of **results** rather than intentions, we are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to:

- Inform and improve the professional practice of individuals
- Inform and improve the professional practice of the collaborative team
- Respond to students who are experiencing difficulty
- Respond to students who need enrichment

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The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

- We accept **learning** as the fundamental purpose of our school and therefore are willing to examine **all** practices in light of their impact on learning.
- We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We cultivate a **collaborative culture** through development of high-performing teams.
- We assess our effectiveness on the basis of **results** rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and schools seek relevant data and information, and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

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If We Implemented What We Know to Be Best Practice...

Schools would be organized into collaborative teams in which members work together interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable.

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If We Implemented What We Know to Be Best Practice...

Teacher-developed ***common formative assessments*** would be the cornerstone of the assessment process in every school.

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Common Assessments...

- Monitor the learning of students who are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills.
- The assessment uses the same instrument or a common process that use same criteria for assessing the quality of student work.

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The Case for Common Assessments

- Common assessments are consistently used by schools with the greatest achievement.
- They represent a powerful, proven structure for improved results.
- They enable educators to diagnose student learning needs in time to make instructional modifications.
- They form the basis of professional dialogue in schools that double student achievement (p.194-95).

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The Case for Formative Assessments

- When developed through teacher learning communities, formative assessments promise the largest potential gains in student achievement.
- Few initiatives in education have had such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards.
- They are one of the most powerful, high-leverage strategies for improving student learning.
- They are one of the most powerful weapons in a teacher's arsenal (p.193).

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Keys to a Formative Assessment Process

To determine if an assessment process is formative, ask:

- Is it used to identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning?
- Are students who are having difficulty provided with additional time and support for learning?
- Are students given an additional opportunity to demonstrate their learning?

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Linking Formative and Common Assessments

Two strategies seem especially promising for schools. One is to expand the quality and variety of formative assessments; a second is to promote and organize collective inquiry into and discussion of student progress and achievement based on a range of assessments.

—Judith Warren Little, (2006) p. 9.

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The Most Powerful Strategy for Improving Student Learning

- Teachers work together in collaborative teams to:
 - Clarify what students must learn.
 - Gather evidence of student learning.
 - Analyze that evidence.
 - Identify the most powerful teaching strategies.
- Reflective teaching must be based on ***evidence of student learning***, and reflection is most powerful when it is collaborative (John Hattie, 2009).

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Why Common Assessments?

- **Impact on professional practice**—the irrefutable evidence of better results and the positive peer pressure of a collaborative team working interdependently to achieve a common goal provide the most powerful levers for impacting practice.
- **Efficiency**—by sharing the load teachers save time
- **Equity**—promotes a guaranteed curriculum, similar pacing, and consistent standards for assessing student proficiency

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Why Common Assessments?

- **Informs individual teacher practice**—provides teachers with a basis of comparison regarding the achievement of their students so they can see strengths and weaknesses of their teaching
- **Builds team capacity**—collaborative teacher teams identify and address problem areas in their program or teaching
- **Collective response**—helps teams and the school create timely, systematic interventions for students

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What We Know Versus What We Do

In most schools, assessments will continue to be developed and administered by individual teachers and will be used primarily for summative purposes.

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An Important Caution

If we are to realize the potential of assessment to improve schools, we must acknowledge that ***merely helping individual teachers become more skillful in assessing student learning does not guarantee they will improve student learning.***

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Effective Assessment

More skillful assessment will not improve student achievement unless it serves as a catalyst for adult learning and changes in teacher practice.

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It Comes Down to Changes in Behavior

The central challenge and core problem of all substantive change initiatives is ***changing people's behavior***. Change efforts must focus on what people do and the need for significant shifts in what people do (John Kotter and Dan Cohen, 2002).

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What Might Motivate a Teacher to Change Practice?

- Pointing out that students in other classes are earning higher grades?
- Having the principal visit the class to evaluate her teaching and suggest changes?
- Sending her to a workshop on using different teaching strategies?
- Enrolling her in a graduate course to study different teaching strategies?
- Poor student performance on a test?

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FOCUS ON CENTRAL CLAIM	
STUDENT	SCORE
1	4
2	3
3	4
4	1
5	4
6	2
7	4
8	4
9	2
10	4
11	2
12	2
13	4
14	2
15	1
16	4
17	2
18	2
19	2
20	4
MEAN SCORE	2.9
*TARGET SCORE 3/4	

We're Okay...They're Not Okay

- According to the 2009 Metlife survey of teachers in the United States, 84 percent of teachers are “very confident that I have the knowledge and skills to enable all of my students to succeed academically.”
- According to that same survey, only 36 percent of teachers believe all their students have the ability to succeed academically.

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Concrete Evidence of Irrefutably Better Results

- Nothing changes the mind like the hard cold world hitting it with actual real-life data (Patterson, et al., 2008).
- Teachers have to feel there is some compelling reason for them to change practice, with the best direct evidence being that students learn better. The key to enduring change in teacher practice is demonstrable results in terms of student achievement (Richard Elmore, 2003).
- Transparency of results creates an aura of positive pressure—pressure that is actionable in that it points to solutions and pressure that at the end of the day is inescapable (Michael Fullan, 2008).

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ESSENTIAL WRITING SKILLS: COMMON ASSESSMENT RESULTS (TARGET SCORE 3/4)																
STUDENT	FOCUS ON CENTRAL CLAIM				ORGANIZATION/SUPPORT				SENT. FLUENCY/WORD CHOICE				CONVENTION			
	CLASS #1	CLASS #2	CLASS #3	TOTALS	CLASS #1	CLASS #2	CLASS #3	TOTALS	CLASS #1	CLASS #2	CLASS #3	TOTALS	CLASS #1	CLASS #2	CLASS #3	TOTALS
1	4	3	4		2	2	4		3	2	4		4	4	3	
2	3	4	4		3	4	3		3	4	4		3	4	4	
3	4	4	4		4	3	3		4	3	3		2	4	4	
4	1	3	3		1	2	2		2	3	4		2	4	4	
5	4	2	4		2	2	2		3	2	3		3	3	4	
6	2	4	3		1	3	3		1	4	3		3	4	3	
7	4	3	3		3	4	2		3	4	2		4	3	3	
8	4	2	3		2	2	3		3	2	3		3	3	3	
9	2	2	3		4	1	2		4	1	2		4	3	2	
10	4	4	4		3	3	3		4	3	3		4	3	3	
11	2	3	3		3	2	3		3	2	4		3	3	3	
12	2	3	3		2	3	3		3	3	4		4	4	4	
13	4	2	3		3	2	2		3	2	3		4	3	3	
14	2	4	3		1	4	2		3	4	3		3	4	3	
15	1	3	3		1	3	3		1	4	4		2	4	3	
16	4	3	3		3	2	3		4	3	3		4	3	3	
17	2	3	3		1	3	3		1	3	3		2	4	3	
18	2	3	4		2	2	3		3	2	4		3	4	4	
19	2	3	4		2	3	4		2	4	4		3	4	3	
20	4	2	3		3	1	2		3	1	3		4	3	2	
Average Score	2.9	3	3.4	3.1	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.8	2.8	3.3	3	3.2	3.6	3.2	3.3

The Power of Positive Peer Pressure to Bring About Change

- Positive peer pressure is a powerful and accessible tool to influence the behavior of others. The approval or disapproval of our colleagues can do more to assist or destroy a change effort than any other source (Patterson, 2008).
- There is both peer pressure and peer support in collaborative organizations. People stand out if they are not contributing and therefore are inspired and motivated to contribute (Fullan, 2001).
- Peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague or the team is a powerful motivator (Lencioni, 2005).
- In high-performing teams, members hold each other accountable. Everyone carries his or her own weight (Blanchard, 2007).

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Focusing on the Right Work

- After two years of teachers working in collaborative teams to clarify essential outcomes and discuss preferred instructional strategies, none of the schools in this longitudinal study showed any gains in student achievement.
- In the third year, teams created common assessments and used the results to (1) discuss which strategies were effective and to (2) identify areas and students needing the team's attention. Every school experienced dramatic gains in student achievement for three consecutive years.

—Gallimore, et al. 2009

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Use Common Formative Assessments to Improve Professional Practice

Common formative assessments created by collaborative teams of teachers are uniquely suited to contribute to adult learning, changes in teacher practice, and higher levels of student achievement.

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To Impact Professional Practice, Ensure All Teachers:

- Receive timely and frequent feedback on the achievement of their students
- Meet to agree upon standards
- Agree with valid, team-developed common assessments
- In ***comparison to others***
- Use evidence of student learning to explore effective instructional practice

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How Should a School Respond When Kids Don't Learn?

Ensure a student receives ***increased levels of time and support*** in a manner that is:

- ***Timely***
- Increasingly ***directive*** (not invitational)
- **SYSTEMATIC**

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Systematic Intervention: By Name and By Need

The most effective schools and school systems in the world monitor and intervene at the level of the individual student. The best systems take the process of monitoring student learning and intervention inside schools, constantly evaluating student performance and constructing interventions to assist individual students in order to prevent them from falling behind.

—Barber and Mourshed, 2007

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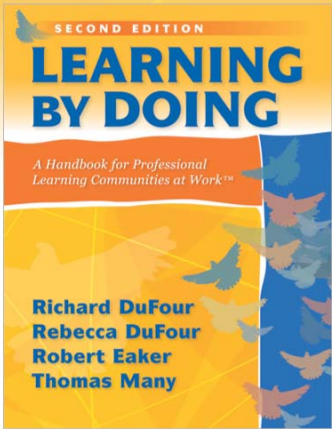
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