



Leaders of Learning:

How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement*, by Richard DuFour and Robert J. Marzano. *Leaders of Learning* argues that no single person has all the knowledge, skills, and talent to lead a district, improve a school, or meet all the needs of every child. The authors assert that it will take a collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership to meet the challenges confronting our schools, and stress that virtually everyone who has elected to enter the field of education has the potential to lead. The book addresses not only district, principal, and team leadership but also how individual teachers can be most effective in leading their students by learning with their colleagues how to implement the most promising pedagogy in their classrooms.

This study guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular

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chapter. It is designed to help you benefit from and apply the ideas presented in *Leaders of Learning*. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire faculty.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope that this guide proves to be a useful tool in your efforts to inspire effective leaders.

Introduction

1. What is your reaction to the authors' assertion that "no single person has all the knowledge, skills, and talent to lead a district, improve a school, or meet all the needs of every child in his or her classroom. . . . It will take a collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership to meet the challenges confronting our schools, and . . . virtually everyone who has elected to enter the field of education has the potential to lead."
2. Do you agree with the premise that "great teaching is leadership" and that the qualities of great leaders and great teachers are similar? Can you point to examples from your own experience that support your position?

Chapter 1

School Improvement Means People Improvement

1. Describe some of the challenges contemporary American educators are facing. What are some of the ways educators might respond to this reality?
2. What are some of the failed strategies for education reform in the United States presented in the chapter? What assumptions have these strategies reflected?
3. Describe the strategies presented for developing the capacity of educators to become more effective, and the authors' assessments of them.

4. List the assumptions for creating the conditions for continuous school improvement that drive this book.
5. The authors attempt to clarify what a professional learning community (PLC) is as well as what it is not. Is there a clear understanding of what represents a PLC in your school?
6. Describe the three big ideas that drive the PLC process.

Chapter 2

The District's Role in Supporting the PLC Process

1. Describe the site-based school improvement model in education and why it proved faulty.
2. What are the concepts of “defined autonomy” and “simultaneous loose-tight leadership,” and what do they involve?
3. What is your reaction to the idea that effective districts articulate certain nondiscretionary goals and conditions that must be evident in every school?
4. List some powerful strategies for giving principals the tools and support they need to succeed in leading a PLC.
5. Why is it so important for superintendents to limit school improvement initiatives while creating a PLC?

6. How can superintendents effectively communicate priorities during PLC implementation?
7. Apply the communications audit presented in this chapter to your own district. How clearly are priorities being articulated throughout the district?

Chapter 3

The Principal's Role in Leading a Professional Learning Community

1. What has research shown about the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement?
2. Do you agree with the authors' assumption that it is unrealistic for a single individual to effectively address each of the twenty-one responsibilities of principals that have been cited in research? Explain the premise presented by the authors that the PLC process provides principals with a more realistic framework for addressing these responsibilities.
3. Describe the culture of professional isolation that is common in k–12 education. How have principals responded to it, and how do the PLC process and its collaborative team structure affect it?
4. Why is it so important for principals to share leadership of the PLC process, and what are some factors for principals to consider when selecting team leaders?

5. What is the most effective kind of training for PLC team leaders?
6. Why do the authors recommend principals assign greater priority to working with team leaders and collaborative teams than to the traditional classroom observation and evaluation process?
7. Why is effective principal leadership so essential for schools to transform from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration?

Chapter 4

Creating the Collaborative Culture of a Professional Learning Community

1. In what way do the authors resolve the apparent contradiction of the importance of focusing on student *learning* as a driving force of the PLC process with the research citing the importance of a focus on quality *teaching*?
2. How does research support both teams and collaboration? Why is the transformation from a culture in which individual educators work in isolation to one in which they work as members of interdependent collaborative teams such a formidable challenge?
3. In what ways are educators asked to change long-standing assumptions, expectations, and habits regarding schooling during the PLC process?
4. Describe the concept of reciprocal accountability? Can you cite examples of reciprocal accountability that are evident in your school or district?
5. What strategy do the authors offer to help collaborative teams stay focused on the right work as members co-labor on the PLC process?

6. How do the authors address the debate over who should determine how collaborative teams will use the time they have been provided for collaboration?

Chapter 5

Developing a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

1. Why is it not unusual to see a gap between the *intended* curriculum established by the state or district and the *implemented* curriculum that is taught?
2. What is a guaranteed and viable curriculum? How is the PLC process designed to ensure students have access to a guaranteed and viable curriculum?
3. Describe the considerations involved in creating a guaranteed and viable curriculum in a PLC: identifying the nature of objectives, identifying the appropriate grain size of objectives, identifying the appropriate number of objectives, articulating levels of knowledge, and designing proficiency scales.
4. How has the traditional approach to curriculum in the United States resulted in curriculum overload? How can collaborative teams in a PLC approach a large list of curricular topics?

Chapter 6

Ongoing Monitoring of Student Learning

1. How must students, teachers, and administrators undergo a conceptual shift in their approach to assessment if the potential of formative assessment is to be realized, according to the authors?
2. Describe current practices in classroom assessment. What is the challenge inherent in using multidimensional assessments to monitor students learning?
3. Describe the scoring system presented that codes items as completely correct, completely incorrect, low partial correct, and high partial correct. What are the benefits of such a system?
4. What is the importance of unidimensionality to the theory base for effective testing? What do the authors recommend for assessments, given this importance?
5. What are three alternate forms of assessment made possible by proficiency scales?
6. How can proficiency scales make the process of designing and interpreting common assessments more efficient?
7. How can new report cards be created when proficiency scales are used?
8. Explain how the assessment process in a PLC is not used simply to *prove* what a student has learned, but to *improve* that learning.

Chapter 7

Ensuring Effective Instruction

1. What is the most important criterion in assessing the success of a lesson, according to the authors?
2. When engaged in lesson study, collaborative teams should think in terms of what three different types of lessons for each scale they have created? Describe each type of lesson and the scoring and instruction involved in each.
3. How can collaborative teams in a PLC use instructional rounds as a tool to examine the impact of instructional practices developed through the lesson study process?

Chapter 8

Responding When Kids Don't Learn

1. List some of the ideas that have been implemented in different schools in an effort to raise student achievement. Why, according to the authors, do schools so often invest effort and energy into structural changes that have little impact on student achievement?
2. What is your reaction to the authors' assertion in this chapter that "any school or district that claims its mission is to help all students learn at high levels—as most do—must certainly be prepared to address the questions of what do we want our students to learn and how will we know when they have learned. It is equally

- imperative, however, for those schools and districts to address the crucial questions of how will we respond when students don't learn and how can we enrich and extend the learning for those who are proficient.”
3. What is the basic idea of response to intervention (RTI), and how does it reflect the big ideas that drive the PLC process?
 4. List ten common mistakes schools and districts make when providing response to intervention.
 5. Describe the ten recommendations the authors make for any school attempting to create a systematic process to respond to students who experience difficulty in their learning. To what extent are these conditions present in your school?
 6. What are seven strategies being used by schools to address the fourth critical question that members of a PLC consider, “How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient”?
 7. What advice do the authors give to educators who say their current schedule does not allow extra time and support for learning?

Chapter 9

Leadership Is an Affair of the Heart

1. What is one of the ways effective leaders can appeal to the hearts of those they lead?

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2. Describe some of the real-life examples of effective system-wide school improvement presented in the chapter. What were the remarkable leaders of these schools driven by?
3. What are some of the authors' recommendations for becoming the best leader you can be? What are the defining skills of an effective leader presented in the chapter?
4. What are the conditions effective leaders create to help people succeed?
5. What did Robert Greenleaf (1970) mean by “leader-first leaders” and “servant-first leaders”?