



## **Collaborative Action Research for Professional Learning Communities**

*By Richard Sagor*

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### **Study Guide**

This study guide is a companion to the book *Collaborative Action Research for Professional Learning Communities*, by Richard Sagor. This book assists individual teachers, groups of teachers, and school leaders who work with professional learning community (PLC) teams to become disciplined and deliberative with data as they design and implement program improvements to enhance student learning.

*Collaborative Action Research for Professional Learning Communities* is designed so that readers can either work through the entire book step by step or focus on specific topics in each chapter.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a strong professional culture in your school or district.

**Habit of Inquiry 1:**  
**Clarifying a Shared Vision of Success**

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1. How is *shared vision* defined in *Collaborative Action Research*? Why is it important to articulate a shared vision and how can it be used to produce universal student success?
2. What are the three phases of the shared-vision process?
3. What is backwards planning? What is the backwards planning process for educators?  
Why is this approach significant?
4. How can you identify the targets for student achievement? What are some of the targets you'd like to achieve in your classroom?
5. How can a chart such as the Target Comparison Worksheet help to build a shared vision?  
Use the reproducible from page 27 to create a draft of the targets you'd like to meet. How does your chart compare to the one on page 18?
6. Why are the achievement targets dependent variables? How can a *graphic rating scale* be used to set assessment criteria for each dependent variable?

## **Habit of Inquiry 2:**

### **Articulating Theories of Action**

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1. How does *Collaborative Action Research* define an *independent variable*? What is the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable?
  
2. What three steps does *Collaborative Action Research* recommend for identifying independent variables? Consider what independent variables might be relevant to achieving the targets you identified in the preceding section. Use the reproducible on page 50 to organize and prioritize these variables.
  
3. What is the purpose of a visual theory of action? Why is it important?
  
4. Describe the ten-step process of constructing a visual theory of action for a macro-level project.
  
5. What strategy can be used when PLC team members are unable to reach consensus on a particular theory of action? Why does *Collaborative Action Research* say that such disagreement is not only understandable and normal but something to be welcomed?
  
6. Describe the nine-step process of preparing a micro-level visual action plan.

7. Do any of the goals you identified in the preceding section call for a micro-level improvement project? Use the reproducibles on pages 51 and 52 to help plan a micro-level improvement project. Does this project have *face validity*?
  
8. What benefits and challenges does the micro-level process present that the macro-level process does not? Do you think one is necessarily easier to implement than the other?

### **Habit of Inquiry 3**

#### **Acting Purposefully While Collecting Data**

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1. What are the three impact questions? Why are they an important part of collaborative action research?
2. Compare and contrast *qualitative data* and *quantitative data*. How can they complement one another?
3. What are *summative assessments* and *formative assessments*?
4. Are state-mandated standardized tests formative or summative assessments, and do they provide qualitative or quantitative data? Why does *Collaborative Action Research* say that these tests are of limited use to individual teachers, and how does it recommend supplementing them?
5. What is *triangulation*? Why is it important in the context of educational, collaborative action research? (Consider the anecdotes on page 58.)
6. Briefly describe the following:
  - a. The three data collection strategies for evaluating Impact Question 1

- b. The four data collection strategies for evaluating Impact Question 2
  - c. The five data collection strategies for evaluating Impact Question 3
7. Choose one data collection strategy for evaluating Impact Question 1 to consider in greater detail. Use the reproducibles at the end of the chapter (pages 81–92) to plan a data collection strategy for the improvement plan you described in the preceding section. Why is this a good strategy to use with this improvement plan?
8. Choose one data collection strategy for evaluating Impact Question 2 to consider in greater detail. What are some of this strategy’s strengths and shortcomings? What steps could you take to implement it immediately along with instructional strategies already in use?
9. Choose one data collection strategy for evaluating Impact Question 3 to consider in greater detail. Describe the steps involved in this strategy. What challenges might this strategy present, and how could they be overcome?

## **Habit of Inquiry 4**

### **Analyzing Data Collaboratively**

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1. What is *trend analysis*? Why is it an important part of educational action research?
2. Describe the six-step process of trend analysis for Impact Question 1.
3. How have you been keeping track of your *instructional actions*? How well did the record of your instructional actions match your plans or expectations?
4. Consider the two categories of student growth described on page 99. What objectives are you most concerned about? How have you been assessing and gathering data on these objectives?
5. Describe the process of trend analysis for Impact Question 2. Which measures of growth and what demographic variables are you most interested in?
6. Describe the process of trend analysis for Impact Question 3. Do you see or anticipate a strong relationship between your instructional actions and student performance like that depicted in Figure 4.8 on page 107? What other variables might affect student performance?

7. Summarize the six-step process of sorting and analyzing qualitative data (such as that obtained from exit slips or student interviews). What sources and categories of qualitative data will you use?



## **Habit of Inquiry 5**

### **Informed Team Action Planning**

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1. Describe the three-step process of team action planning.
2. Describe the six-step process of revising an operant theory of action.
3. What does *Collaborative Action Research* suggest should be done if PLC team members cannot come to consensus around a revised theory of action? Is this consistent with the attitude toward disagreement found in previous chapters?
4. Summarize the five suggested strategies for sharing action research within a PLC. Which of these do you think would be the most effective or the most practical to implement? Why?
5. Consider the five habits of inquiry described in *Collaborative Action Research*. How could you begin to put this model of action research into practice? What resources (material, human, cultural) exist in your school and community that could assist in the process? What challenges might arise?