

Introduction

The Principal as Professional Learning Community Leader is designed to provide principals with hands-on, practical support as they build professional learning communities (PLCs) in their schools. Creating a collaborative culture for action that focuses on improving student achievement is a complex undertaking. Principals need to understand why PLCs provide an effective infrastructure for continuous school improvement. This book provides a convincing rationale for developing the attributes of a PLC that principals can share with their teachers to begin the work of transforming instructional and leadership practice in their schools. And this book supports principals in their role as instructional leaders. A variety of strategies are presented to principals that can be used when introducing the concept of PLCs to staff. These strategies are outlined step-by-step in several Professional Development Modules at the back of the book, which school leaders can use with teachers to do the following:

- Lay the foundations of mission, vision, values, and goals
- Build the pillars of collaborative teamwork, teacher capacity, leadership capacity, and professional development that support teacher learning teams
- Raise the roof of continuous learning and improvement
- Celebrate PLC accomplishments

This handbook offers principals valuable tools, templates, and techniques on how to start building a PLC in a school that can be easily adapted to any particular school context.

Audience

Administrators with a wide variety of experience will find this handbook helpful. Novice principals will find step-by-step plans and practical strategies to use with staff to create the conditions within which PLCs thrive. Principals assuming the role of PLC leader because of their conviction of its value in improving schools can use this handbook as a planning and delivery tool in their goal to develop PLCs in their schools. Experienced principals will find that the book provides a valuable review of PLC knowledge and supplies some new tools that support and sustain PLCs.

Handbook Organization

Building a PLC takes time, expertise, and effort. This handbook is designed to save time by providing principals with ready-made planning templates and professional development modules that they can use with their teachers. A summary of current research about PLCs helps principals to understand the key attributes of PLCs themselves and, more importantly, how to share this knowledge with staff. Much of this handbook is modeled around a graphic organizer, the PLC Edifice, used as an analogy for the construction of a PLC, which will make the stages of developing a PLC clearly evident to you and to staff.

Chapter 1 provides the rationale for building PLCs in schools. It introduces the attributes of a PLC in the form of an edifice, a grand structure, which visually presents the foundations, pillars, and sustaining roof of the analogy that provides a framework for understanding the actions needed to establish a PLC in a school.

Chapter 2 outlines the role of principals in leading a PLC. Of special interest is an explanation of the leadership practices that current research says have the most impact on school improvement: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). This leadership model is applied to the construction of a PLC in a school.

Chapter 3 provides principals with the tools for planning the start-up of a PLC. Principals learn how to set up a PLC Steering Team of school leaders, how to use a PLC Snapshot Assessment as a diagnostic tool, and how to create a PLC Portfolio to track the school's progress in becoming a PLC. The PLC Learning Grid, a

reflection and planning template, is introduced at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 explains the importance of developing a mission, vision, values, and goals statements as the foundation of a PLC. This chapter introduces two Professional Development Modules (found at the back of the book in the Principal's Toolkit), which principals can use at staff meetings to develop these statements. Detailed instructions and templates are provided to facilitate this step. A set of guiding questions that principals can ask themselves about the process and a PLC Learning Grid are provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 5 focuses on how to create the teacher learning teams that are essential to a PLC. The four pillars of collaborative teamwork, teacher capacity, leadership capacity, and professional development are explained. The third Professional Development Module (found at the back of the book) is introduced here for principals to use with staff when introducing learning teams. Guiding questions and a PLC Learning Grid are also provided.

Chapter 6 looks ahead in the PLC process to consider the necessity of building in a process that allows for the continuous learning and improvement that is an essential attribute of a PLC. The Reflection and Action graphic shows the series of steps that the PLC Principal uses to sustain the energy of continuous school improvement in an ongoing cycle. Finally, a variety of ways to celebrate the accomplishments of the school as a PLC is shared.

The Principal's Toolkit

The Principal's Toolkit at the back of the book provides a variety of strategies for administrators through Professional Development Modules, Case Studies, and Reproducibles to support the effort of initiating a collaborative culture for improving student achievement.

Professional Development Modules guide administrators through professional development sessions where principals, teacher leadership teams, and teachers work collaboratively in one-day workshops, half-day training sessions, or one-hour portions of staff meetings devoted to staff development.

Case Studies are detailed examples written by principals who have worked in their schools to create PLCs. Four of these case

studies describe how principals set up PLCs in their schools. These case studies are useful resources for the jigsaw activity to develop learning teams in the first PD Module. The fifth case study supports Chapter 2 on leadership practices of a PLC principal by providing the rationale and a proposal template for establishing a principal/vice principal learning team in a school district.

Reproducibles provide administrators and leadership teams with easy-to-copy, full-page versions of the graphic organizers and templates used in the Professional Development Modules and throughout the text.