

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: Creating a Professional Learning Community at Work: Foundational Concepts and Practices

Presenters: Rebecca DuFour and Richard DuFour

Hours: 45

Required eBook: DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker: *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools* (Solution Tree Press, 2008)

Course Overview

Members of professional learning communities (PLCs) take as their primary purpose enhancing their own learning in order to enhance, in turn, all their students' achievement. Toward that end, educators in PLCs engage in authentic collaboration to develop a shared mission and vision, to create structural and cultural change to support that mission and vision, to articulate collective commitments based on consensus, to determine specific goals, and to develop plans to pursue and achieve those goals. In this course, presenters Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour, among the initiators of the PLC concept, take a group of educators embarking on a new school deeply into why and how to structure their school to support the PLC process. Participants will explore what essential questions members of PLCs need to ask and answer, how to engage in authentic collaboration and collective inquiry, and how to organize themselves around a results orientation. The course engages online participants in the processes that result in effective PLCs and illustrates these processes through PLCs in action.

Presenters' Bios

Richard DuFour, Ed.D., was a public school educator for 34 years, serving as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. He was principal of Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, from 1983 to 1991 and superintendent of the district from 1991 to 2002. During his tenure, Stevenson became what the United States Department of Education has described as one of "the most recognized and celebrated schools in America." Stevenson has been repeatedly cited in the popular press as one of America's best schools and referenced in professional literature as an exemplar of best practices in education. The author of a quarterly column for the *Journal of Staff Development* for almost a decade, Dr. DuFour is the recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award from Illinois State University, the distinguished Scholar Practitioner Award from the University of Illinois, and the Distinguished Service Award from the National Staff Development Council.

Rebecca DuFour, M.Ed., has served as a teacher, school administrator, and central office coordinator. As a former elementary principal, she helped her school earn state and national recognition as a model professional learning community. She was the lead consultant and featured principal in the Video Journal of Education program *Elementary Principals as Leaders of Learning* and is one of the featured principals in *Leadership in an Age of Standards and High Stakes*. Ms. DuFour has written for numerous professional journals, reviewed books for the *Journal of Staff Development*, and authored a quarterly column for *Leadership Compass*, published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.



Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour are the authors, with Robert Eaker, of the book upon which this course is based, as well as *A Leader's Companion: Inspiration for Professional Learning communities at Work*; *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work, 2nd Edition*; *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*; *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*; *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*; and *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes*, among others.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, educators will know:

- The essential components and processes of PLCs
- The benefits of the PLC process in promoting higher levels of learning for students and the educators who serve them

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, educators will apply the following skills:

- Collaborate authentically to develop missions and visions
- Contribute to structural and cultural change
- Articulate collective commitments
- Develop SMART goals and plans to achieve them
- Employ the PLC process to enhance all students' achievement

Unit 1: New Insights into Professional Learning Communities

In this unit, the presenters help participants define PLCs, consider the big ideas that drive the PLC process, and review the historical challenges educators confront when transforming traditional schools into PLCs. Participants also view a PLC in action.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- A working definition of PLCs
- The evolution of PLCs
- Historical challenges to PLCs

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:



- Contribute to the implementation of a PLC

eBook: “Chapter 1: New Insights into Professional Learning Communities at Work”

Participants read “Chapter 1: New Insights into Professional Learning Communities at Work” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 2: The Rise and Fall of School Reform

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- Liberal and conservative approaches to school reform
- Current conditions in US schools

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Recognize the need for schools to function as PLCs
- Articulate the current reality of schools in the US

eBook: “Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of School Reform”

Participants read “Chapter 2: The Rise and Fall of School Reform” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 3: The Challenge of Cultural Change

In this unit, the presenters explain the need for both structural and cultural changes in schools that implement the PLC process. They discuss the need for a culture they characterize as both “loose and tight,” wherein all participants should experience “the freedom to act and to lead within clearly articulated boundaries.” Participants work through action steps designed to bring a school’s mission to life by engaging all students in high levels of learning.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- Necessary structural and cultural changes to support PLCs
- What constitutes a “loose and tight” culture



- Action steps that lead to high levels of learning

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skill:

- Contribute to structural and cultural change in their schools

eBook: “Chapter 4: The Challenge of Cultural Change”

Participants read “Chapter 4: The Challenge of Cultural Change” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 4: Clear Mission and Shared Vision

In this unit, participants study the research on characteristics of effective schools, how to develop a shared vision, and strategies for improving schools.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- Research supporting the benefits of PLCs for all learners
- What makes schools effective
- Strategies for improving schools

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Contribute to a shared vision by identifying characteristics of effective schools
- Learn how to build consensus
- Employ strategies for improving their schools

eBook: “Chapter 5: Clear Mission and Shared Vision”

Participants read “Chapter 5: Clear Mission and Shared Vision” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.



Unit 5: Collective Commitments and Common Goals

In this unit, the presenters assist participants in articulating collective commitments from both teachers and school leaders and developing appropriate SMART goals to improve student learning. Participants also consider media representations of teachers and compare those portrayals to the research regarding effective school practices.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- The construct of collective commitments
- SMART goals
- Media representations of the teaching profession

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Assist in the development of collective commitments
- Develop SMART goals in relation to student learning

eBook: “Chapter 6: Shared Values (Collective Commitments) and Common Goals”

Participants read “Chapter 6: Shared Values (Collective Commitments) and Common Goals” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.

Unit 6: Teaching in a Professional Learning Community

In this unit, the presenters and workshop participants define authentic collaboration and consider how collaborative teams—the foundations of PLCs—should function. They explore additional key concepts that facilitate the implementation of effective collaborative teams and discuss teachers’ roles as leaders.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, educators will know:

- A working definition of “collaborative teams”
- A common vocabulary for other PLC concepts
- Teachers’ dual roles as teachers and leaders



Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, educators will apply the following skills:

- Build their PLC-related vocabulary in order to facilitate implementation
- Participate in authentically collaborative teams
- Exercise leadership

eBook: “Chapter 7: Teaching in a Professional Learning Community”

Participants read “Chapter 7: Teaching in a Professional Learning Community” in their eBooks and respond to reflection prompts.

Methods of Instruction

- Videos (presentations consisting of lecture, interviews, and classroom footage)
- eBook (chapters and exercises from the eBook)
- Reflection questions (open-ended questions at intervals throughout the video presentations where participants are asked to reflect on the course content, their own practice, and their intentions for their practice)
- Quizzes (selected-response quizzes to assess understanding of the video presentations and eBook content)

Plagiarism Policy

KDS recognizes plagiarism as a serious academic offense. Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else’s work as one’s own and includes failing to cite sources for others’ ideas, copying material from books or the Internet (including lesson plans and rubrics), and handing in work written by someone other than the participant. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and may have additional consequences. For more information about plagiarism and guidelines for appropriate citation, consult plagiarism.org.

Passing Requirements:

In order to complete the requirements of the course, the participant must complete all course work. We do not award partial credit.

- Quizzes 40% of total grade
- Reflection Questions 60% of total grade



KDS Self-Assessment Rubric:

	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory
Quizzes	100% Correct	80% Correct	60% Correct	0-40% Correct

	Distinguished	Proficient	Basic	Unsatisfactory
Reflection Questions	Participant provides rich detail from the content of the course in his or her responses Participant makes his or her responses to the questions personally meaningful	Participant includes appropriate content from the course in his or her responses Participant makes thoughtful comments in direct response to the questions	Participant includes some content from the course, usually appropriate, in his or her responses Participant answers the questions directly, not always fully	Participant includes no content from the course in his or her responses Participant does not address the questions posed