

## COURSE SYLLABUS

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

**Presenters:** Rebecca DuFour and Richard DuFour

**Credits:** 3 Graduate Credits

**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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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)
- Readings
- 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)
- Discussion forum (prompts after each unit that engage participants in online dialogue with their cohorts)
- Midterm (a project intended to get teachers to begin to develop their practice by putting to work in the classroom what they have learned)
- Final (a project that enables educators to reflect on their practice and assess their students’ work through the lens of what they have learned)

### **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](http://plagiarism.org).

### **Percentage of Course Credit**

- Reflection questions 25%
- Quizzes 15%
- Midterm 25%
- Final 35%



In order to complete the requirements of the course, the participant must complete all course work (e.g., reflections, quizzes, and any midterm and/or final), including watching all videos and participating in all discussion forums. We do not award partial credit.

### Grading Policy

- A: 3.4 – 4.0
- B: 2.7 – 3.3
- C: 2.0 – 2.6
- F: >2.0

### Reflection/Quiz Rubric

Activity	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<b>Quizzes</b>	90-100%	80-89%	70-79%	69% or below
<b>Reflection Question</b>	<p>Participant has provided rich detail and supporting examples from the course content.</p> <p>Participant has made responses to prompts personally meaningful and relevant to his or her teaching practice.</p>	<p>Participant has included appropriate content from the course content.</p> <p>Participant has made thoughtful comments in direct response to the prompts.</p>	<p>Participant has included little that indicates consideration and comprehension of course content.</p> <p>Participant has answered most questions directly but some too briefly.</p>	<p>Participant has included little to no content indicating consideration and comprehension of course content.</p> <p>Participant has not addressed the specific questions posed.</p> <p>Participant has not responded to all reflection questions.</p> <p>Participant has copied from the course transcript without synthesis or analysis.</p>

### Midterm

For this midterm you will watch a video clip called “PLC in Action.” You will also download the transcript of the video and annotate it, identifying specific components of a PLC.

**Please do the following:**

1. Download “The Stevenson Playbook” from the Resources section of the eClassroom. This resource will provide context while you watch the video.



2. Print out the Transcript for the video “PLC in Action.”
3. Click on the video clip in the Midterm section of the eClassroom.
4. As you watch the PLC video clip annotate the transcript for all of the following key indicators. Choose one section of your annotated transcript to include in your midterm submission. This segment should demonstrate your annotation process and be a representative sample of your work.
  - a) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of a continuous process of collaboration.
  - b) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of addressing collective responsibility and inquiry.
  - c) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of addressing shared mission and vision.
  - d) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of addressing an action plan.
  - e) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of addressing collective commitments.
  - f) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of addressing setting long- and short-term goals.
  - g) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of the group addressing structural issues (i.e., policies, procedures, rules, roles, and schedules) and to what effect.
  - h) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of the group addressing cultural issues (i.e., assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits) and to what effect.
  - i) Any evidence (explicit or implicit) of loose and tight culture (i.e. a culture that establishes “clear parameters and priorities that enable individuals to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way...characterized by ‘direct empowerment’ or what Marzano and Waters refer to as ‘defined autonomy’—freedom to act and to lead within clearly articulated boundaries”).
5. Write a summary of your findings from each of the 9 key indicators from the list above.
6. Write a 3-4 paragraph reflection addressing each of the following:
  - a. To what degree do you think this PLC is functioning effectively?
  - b. Where do you see room for change?
  - c. What do you think the team’s next steps should be?

### Midterm Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Choose one section of your annotated transcript to include in your midterm submission. This segment should demonstrate your annotation process and be a	Participant has uploaded a segment of the transcript that comprehensively demonstrates the process by which he or she noted important tenants of a PLC within the	Participant has uploaded a segment of the transcript that adequately demonstrates the process by which he or she noted important tenants of a PLC within the	Participant has uploaded a segment of the transcript that partially demonstrates the process by which he or she noted important tenants of a PLC within the	Participant has not uploaded a segment of the transcript.



<p>representative sample of your work.</p>	<p>meeting.</p> <p>It is clear from the annotation included that participant was thorough and purposeful in his or her notations.</p>	<p>meeting.</p> <p>It is clear from the annotation included that the participant took careful note of all evidence.</p>	<p>meeting.</p> <p>It is not clear from the annotation included that the participant took careful note of all evidence.</p>	
<p>Write a summary of your findings from each of the 9 key indicators.</p>	<p>Participant has illuminated with specific examples and evidence (or lack thereof) for all 9 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A continuous process of collaboration</li> <li>• Collective responsibility and inquiry</li> <li>• Shared mission and vision</li> <li>• An action plan</li> <li>• Collective commitments</li> <li>• Short- and long-term goals</li> <li>• Structural issues</li> <li>• Cultural issues</li> <li>• A simultaneously loose and tight culture.</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has summarized his or her findings for all 9 of the following though sometimes without clearly identifying the evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A continuous process of collaboration</li> <li>• Collective responsibility and inquiry</li> <li>• Shared mission and vision</li> <li>• An action plan</li> <li>• Collective commitments</li> <li>• Short- and long-term goals</li> <li>• Structural issues</li> <li>• Cultural issues</li> <li>• A simultaneously loose and tight culture.</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has summarized his or her findings for 6-8 of the following: A continuous process of collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective responsibility and inquiry</li> <li>• Shared mission and vision</li> <li>• An action plan</li> <li>• Collective commitments</li> <li>• Short- and long-term goals</li> <li>• Structural issues</li> <li>• Cultural issues</li> <li>• A simultaneously loose and tight culture.</li> </ul> <p>Participant has not cited specific evidence to support his or her findings.</p>	<p>Participant has summarized his or her findings for some (less than 6) but not most of the bullets.</p> <p>Participant's cited evidence does not support his or her conclusions.</p> <p>Or: Participant has not cited evidence.</p>
<p>Write a 3-4 paragraph reflection addressing each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree do you think this PLC is functioning effectively?</li> <li>• Where do you see room for change?</li> <li>• What do you think the team's next steps should be?</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has written 3-4 paragraphs, illustrated with rich and specific detail, addressing <b>all</b> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree he or she thinks this PLC is functioning effectively?</li> <li>• Where does he or</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has written 3-4 paragraphs—with some detail—addressing <b>all</b> of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree does he or she think this PLC is functioning effectively?</li> <li>• Where does he or she see room</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has written 1-2 paragraphs, or 3-4 undeveloped paragraphs, addressing 2 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree does he or she think this PLC is functioning effectively?</li> <li>• Where does he or</li> </ul>	<p>Participant has written 0-1 paragraphs, or more but incomplete, addressing 0-1 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree does he or she think this PLC is functioning effectively?</li> <li>• Where does he or she see room for</li> </ul>



<b>Formal issues</b>	<p>she see room for change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does he or she thinks the team's next steps should be?</li> </ul>	<p>for change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does he or she thinks the team's next steps should be?</li> </ul>	<p>she see room for change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does he or she thinks the team's next steps should be?</li> </ul>	<p>change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does he or she thinks the team's next steps should be?</li> </ul>
	Participant has made no grammatical errors.	Participant has made a few grammatical errors.	Participant has provided little detail to support his or her assertions.	Participant has provided no detail to support his or her assertions.
	Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.	Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.	Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.	Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.
Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.	Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.	Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.	Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.	Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.

**Final**

For your final, you will approach an upcoming unit of study with members of your grade level or subject area team. Please allow at least two weeks for the completion of this project, as it requires you to meet as a team before and after teaching a lesson or series of lessons. *If you are not currently working as part of a professional learning community, please enlist the help of a colleague as you complete each step.*

STEP 1. Identify what you expect your students to learn. Analyze, understand, and deconstruct the standards. Then list them in student-friendly language below.

GRADE LEVEL OR COURSE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 UNIT OF STUDY: \_\_\_\_\_

STANDARDS (List one or more below):  
 (1)  
 (2)  
 (3)



STEP 2. With the members of your team, create an original high quality common assessment that addresses the standards. Upload the assessment.

STEP 3. Provide instruction based on the agreed-upon standards and assessment. Describe what went well, and note any misconceptions or confusion you observed among your students, below. *If you're not currently in the classroom, please describe concepts you believe students will struggle with, and describe how you will assist them in understanding these concepts.*

STEP 4. Administer the assessment. Share the results with your colleagues. Then answer the questions below.

- A. What skills did your students master?
- B. Note items of confusion. Upload several samples of student work that illustrate this confusion.
- C. Discuss steps to address areas students where students are having trouble, and record your collaborative team's suggestions.

*If you are not currently in the classroom, describe how you would analyze the data provided by your common assessment; then consult your colleague concerning the concepts that might cause your students confusion, and include their suggestions.*

STEP 5.

Write a paragraph in which you describe the process of working as a collaborative team. What worked well? What obstacles did you encounter? What might you do differently in the future?

### Final Rubric

Step	Distinguished (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
<p><b>Identify what you expect your students to learn.</b></p> <p><b>Analyze, understand, and deconstruct the standards.</b></p>	Standards are appropriate to the subject matter, and describe, clearly and succinctly, in student-friendly language what students will know and be able to do in measurable terms.	Standards are appropriate to the subject matter, and describe in student-friendly language what students will know and be able to do.	Standards are appropriate to the subject matter, but somewhat ambiguous or not student-friendly.	Standards are missing or not appropriate to the subject matter.
<p><b>With the members of your team, create an original high quality common assessment that addresses the standards.</b></p>	The common assessment is appropriate for the content area and grade level and includes problems, a project, or performance that will clearly identify	The common assessment includes problems, a project, or performance that will clearly identify whether or not a student has mastered the	The common assessment includes problems, a project, or performance appropriate to the subject matter, but fails to provide clear indication of mastery	The common assessment is missing, or will yield little or no information regarding students' mastery of the standards.



	whether or not a student has mastered the standards identified by the participant, and contains items that will effectively measure sub-skills.	standards and allows for some analysis of skill proficiency.	of the standards.	
<b>Provide instruction based on the agreed-upon standards and assessment. Describe what went well, and note any misconceptions or confusion you observed among your students.</b>	The participant's notes provide information that is useful as formative assessment, and are remarkably in tune with students' strengths and needs	The participant's notes provide information that is useful as formative assessment.	The participant's notes record the activities that took place during instruction, but provide few insights into student's mastery of skills.	The participant's notes are perfunctory or missing
<b>Administer the assessment and share the results with your colleagues.</b>  <b>Answer questions concerning students' mastery of the standards and how to address areas of need.</b>	Students who need additional help are clearly identified, as are the specific skills and/or standards that require additional attention. The team's suggestions for new strategies for re-teaching missing skills are clearly described, appropriate for the student audience, and there is evidence that this collaborative work could serve as model to educators new to PLCs. Participant submitted student work samples that thoroughly illustrate and identify misconceptions or confusion.	Students who need additional help are clearly identified, as are the collaborative team's suggestions for new strategies for re-teaching missing skills.  Student work samples clearly illustrate the identified misconceptions or confusion.  Team members' observations provide insights not available when working individually.	All questions are answered, and student work is provided, but there's little evidence that the team has thoughtfully considered student errors or suggested original or plausible instructional remedies.	Little to no evidence of collaboration is provided.  Student work samples are missing or fail to illustrate student misconceptions or confusion.



<p><b>Write a paragraph in which you describe the process of working as a collaborative team.</b></p>	<p>Paragraph provides thoughtful insights into the merits of and obstacles to working as a collaborative team, and is honest and reflective concerning the participant's role as a team member.</p>	<p>Paragraph provides thoughtful insights into the merits of and obstacles to working as a collaborative team.</p>	<p>Paragraph describing the work of the collaborative team contains few insights into the process.</p>	<p>Paragraph describing the process of working as a collaborative team is missing or incomplete.</p>
<p><b>Formal issues</b></p>	<p>Participant has made no grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure and made careful word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made a few grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized most paragraphs around clearly articulated main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in an effective and eloquent style—i.e., has varied his or her sentence structure though not always found the right word.</p>	<p>Participant has made some distracting grammatical errors.</p> <p>Participant has organized some paragraphs around main ideas but not others.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that communicates his or her thoughts but with no marked eloquence and insufficient attention to word choice.</p>	<p>Participant has made multiple grammatical errors.</p> <p>Paragraphs are not organized around main ideas.</p> <p>Participant has written in a style that does not effectively communicate his or her thoughts.</p>