Professional Learning Communities

Course Outline

Course Description

This course is designed to assist teachers and administrators in public and private schools to create and implement a strategic organizational plan to align rigorous curriculum and relevant assessment to promote highest student achievement amongst all students within a school setting. Members of Professional Learning Communities use results-oriented action steps to clarify exactly what each student must learn, monitor each student's learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions, and use collective inquiry/feedback to create a collaborative atmosphere of continual improvement. The self-assessments and reflective exercises contained in the book, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker and Thomas Many, will form the foundation for the course.

Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the history of educational reform and how past approaches have been unsuccessful in addressing student achievement
- Evaluate the conceptual characteristics (Six Big Ideas) of a Professional Learning Community and how these characteristics can be translated to classroom practices (ie. Dufour's Six Components of a Professional Learning Community from course text)
- Investigate research regarding the efficacy of professional learning community implementation on student achievement
- Relate and communicate the four building blocks of Learning Communities and how to apply them in their schools and classrooms
- Investigate and evaluate how systems thinking theory and constructivist teaching practices influence the identification of essential learning within schools
- Consider the Ladder of Inference concept and how preconceptions can impede or promote progress and change
- Analyze and evaluate how systems thinking theory and constructivist teaching practices influences how the professional learning community functions
- Evaluate the importance of Systems Thinking within the schools
- The participants will understand the importance of meshing personal leaning styles to create a safe environment for effective communication in a Professional Learning Community
- The participants will understand how thinking styles affect student learning in the classroom and how these styles influence professional collaboration amongst adults on a PLC
- The participant will understand and evaluate how Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning promote or hinder a Professional Learning Community's ability to meet its mission, vision, values and goals
- Communicate the four characteristics of a learning team in a PLC and differentiate PLC team learning and collaboration from group work
- Investigate the benefits of interdependence, versus independence, for working in teams in a Professional Learning Community

- Experience and evaluate team-building strategies to achieve effective team organization (structures), communication and problem solving within the PLC and classroom
- Distinguish effective skills demonstrated by high functioning teams in a PLC
- Identify and explain strategies for effective communication and team building (Discover the protocols for effective advocacy and inquiry)
- The participants will investigate and discover that common formative assessment is greatly enhanced by collaboration with peers and encouraging students to begin to take steps toward self-assessment
- Clarify and reach consensus on what the students must learn (Essential Learning)
- Establish guidelines for creating common formative assessments
- Create the protocols for both developing and translating the vision and/or mission statement of your school into concrete action
- Investigate the stories behind the structure and culture of their schools and understand how to begin the process of re-culturing
- Anticipate and manage issues related to creating consensus, changing minds, and handling conflict within their professional learning communities
- Develop a greater understanding of team building and the importance of and guidelines for creating team norms
- Discover how the framework for systematic academic interventions are created, put into action and reviewed and maintained
- Initiate goal-creation and goal-setting as it relates to Professional Learning Communities
- Discover how other schools and districts create, collect and manage data

Curriculum Design & Time Requirements

This course will outline the parameters of Professional Learning Communities and the importance of educator essential learning on student achievement while providing participants the opportunity of developing a school action plan specific to their school site and classroom or area of expertise. The following methodologies will be used during the course: lectures, readings, group and individual discussions, applied practice assignments, and papers. This is a sixty-hour, three credit graduate level course completed over a thirteen-week period.

Hardware & Computer Skill Requirements

Computer and Internet access required. Students must have regular access to a computer and be able to use computer skills to successfully complete this course. Many problems instructors and students run into stem from mis-configured browsers, incorrect software versions, pop-up blockers, and other issues. Most of these issues can be prevented by performing the browser tune up before ses. Often students find it easier to use Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, or Safari rather than Internet for some applications Internet Explorer may work well. Explorer;

Course Materials

The required text for this course is *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* 4th ed., by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker and Thomas Many. In this text, educators will learn to embrace Professional Learning Communities as an integral part of school reform and organizational management for both the organization and classroom setting. This comprehensive resource discusses the changing role of school restructuring and learning practices, as well as the conceptual framework and research behind implementing programs and practices that lead to highest student achievement and staff development in the most progressive educational settings.

Session Outline

Session 1: Introduction and Overview
Objectives:

- The participants will understand a brief history of educational reform and how these approaches have been unsuccessful in addressing student achievement
- The participants will understand and evaluate the conceptual characteristics (Six Big Ideas) of a Professional Learning Community and how these characteristics can be translated to classroom practices (ie. Dufour's Six Components of a Professional Learning Community from course text)
- Investigate research regarding the efficacy of professional learning community implementation on student achievement

Contents:
1. Course registration, requirements, and expectations
2. Introductions of class members
3. General Course Overview
4. Exploring the concept of school reform and how it has evolved over the past thirty years
5. Defining the who, what, when and where of Professional Learning Communities: PLC's Six Characteristics
6. Developing a common vocabulary and a consistent understanding of key concepts
7. Setting personal goals for the course
8. Table-group team building exercise

Session 2: A Sense of Purpose and Mission
Objective:
- Clarifying our purpose as educators and developing an action-based mission statement.

Contents:
1. Building consensus from the start, a case study reflection
2. Good is the enemy of great
3. Confronting the issue of time and time management
4. Rediscovering your own purpose in education
5. Creating and living an action-based Mission Statement
6. How your school's educational mission incorporates vision, values and goals
7. Assignment

Session 3: Systems Thinking and Constructivist Teaching
Objectives:
- Investigate and evaluate how systems thinking theory and constructivist teaching practices influence the identification of essential learning within schools
- Consider the Ladder of Inference concept and how preconceptions can impede or promote progress and change
- Analyze and evaluate how systems thinking theory and constructivist teaching practices influences how the professional learning community functions
- Evaluate the importance of Systems Thinking within the schools

Contents:
1. Defining Systems Thinking/Constructivism
2. Why Systems Thinking is important to classroom and school culture
3. Strategies for Systems Thinking
4. The Ladder of Inference
5. Constructivist teaching in theory and practice
6. Assignments

Session 4: Personal Mastery: Tools for Understanding our Perceptions of the PLC Journey
Objectives:

- The participants will understand the importance of meshing personal leaning styles to create a safe environment for effective communication in a Professional Learning Community
- The participants will understand how thinking styles affect student learning in the classroom and how these styles influence professional collaboration amongst adults on a PLC
- The participant will understand and evaluate how Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning promote or hinder a Professional Learning Community's ability to meet its mission, vision, values and goals

Contents:

1. An Introduction to Personal Learning and Communication Styles- Identifying Our Personal Tools in Our Toolboxes
2. Tools in Our Toolbox's
3. Tool #1- Maslow's Hierarchy, Tool #2- Gregorc Mind Styles Delineator
4. Strategies for traveling with different drivers: How to communicate and work with different styles
5. Tool #3- Kohlberg's Moral Reasoning: How Our Reasoning Affects Our Ability to communicate and problem solve
6. Summary of Tools in the Toolbox
7. What this Means for the Classroom: How We Apply What We Know
8. Assignments

Session 5: Personal Learning and Communication Styles
Objectives:
- Communicate the four characteristics of a learning team in a PLC and differentiate PLC team learning and collaboration from "group work"
- Investigate the benefits of interdependence, versus independence, for working in teams in a Professional Learning Community
- Experience and evaluate team-building strategies to achieve effective team organization (structures), communication and problem solving within the PLC and classroom
- Distinguish effective skills demonstrated by high functioning teams in a PLC
- Identify and explain strategies for effective communication and team building (Discover the protocols for effective advocacy and inquiry)

Contents:

1. Identify personal learning and communication styles using the Gregoric Indicator
2. How different learning styles affect group performance
3. Maslow's Hierarchy and Professional Learning Communities
4. Protocols for effective inquiry and advocacy
5. The Four Keys for Incorporating Celebration
6. The risk/reward emotional component of a PLC
7. Strategies for creating cohesive group structure
8. Assignments

Session 6: Establishing Essential Learning in the School Culture
Objectives:
- The participants will investigate and discover that common formative assessment is greatly enhanced by collaboration with peers and encouraging students to begin to take steps toward self-assessment
- Clarify and reach consensus on what the students must learn (Essential Learning)
- Establish guidelines for creating common formative assessments

Contents:
1. An introduction to Essential Learning
   2. Clarifying questions regarding Essential Learning
   3. How to create PLC's that focus on student learning
   4. Identifying roadblocks to student learning
   5. Clarifying questions regarding monitoring student learning
   6. Guidelines for and creating common formative assessments
   7. The power of common assessments
   8. Assignments

Session 7: Shared Vision
Objectives:
- Create the protocols for both developing and translating the vision and/or mission statement of your school into concrete action
- Investigate the stories behind the structure and culture of their schools and understand how to begin the process of re-culturing

Contents:
1. The logistics of how to build the foundation of a PLC
2. Assessing the current reality of each school/district
3. Linking the Change Initiative to current practices and assumptions
4. Co-creating a new educational environment
5. Establishing a results-based orientation in a PLC
6. Addressing necessary cultural shifts
7. Assignments

Session 8: Addressing Consensus and Conflict in a PLC
Objectives:
- Anticipate and manage issues related to creating consensus, changing minds, and handling conflict within their professional learning communities
- Develop a greater understanding of team building and the importance of and guidelines for creating team norms

Contents:
1. Reaching consensus on the concept of consensus
2. Elements of crucial conversations
3. Gardner's 7 factors of changing thought patterns
4. The inner conflict of knowing and doing
5. The importance of team norms
6. How to create explicit team norms
7. Assignments

Session 9: Systematic Interventions to Keep All Students on Pace
Objective:
- Discover how the framework for systematic academic interventions are created, put into action and reviewed and maintained

Contents:
1. Case study: Systematic Interventions versus an Educational Lottery
2. Brainstorming ideas for the creation of an intervention system
3. Clarifying questions to guide the development of Systematic Interventions
4. Assessing intervention strategies
5. Overcoming the barriers of existing culture and/or precedent
6. S.P.E.E.D. intervention criteria
7. How to support and sustain systematic interventions (no teachers left behind)

8. Assignments

Session 10: Your Personal Growth Plan and PLC Action Plan
Objectives:
- Initiate goal-creation and goal-setting as it relates to Professional Learning Communities
- Discover how other schools and districts create, collect and manage data

Contents:
1. Creating short term goals to serve as benchmarks
2. Developing S.M.A.R.T. goals
3. Attainable goals and Stretch goals and why both are important
4. Using relevant information to improve results
5. Moving beyond the DRIP syndrome of being data rich, but information poor
6. Course Evaluation

Grading

Assignment	Points	Grading Scale	
Talking Points	20	100 – 93	**A**
Class Assignments	50	92 – 85	**B**
Final Integration Project	30	84 – 77	**C**
Total Points	**100**		

Student Requirements
1. Participation: Actively participate in all activities.
2. Reading assignments: Complete all readings and reflection assignments.
3. Complete Personal Vision Statement.
4. Complete Ladder of Inference activity.
5. Complete Personal Code of Ethics and Values project.
6. Complete contemporary website research review project.
7. Students are required to synthesize and construct a final project using the methods and protocols outlined in this course in creating a professional learning development plan that specifically addresses key issues in their school and/or workplace. The project will be due by the end of the Module 10 assignment period.

Student Academic Integrity
Participants guarantee that all academic class work is original. Any academic dishonesty or plagiarism (to take ideas, writings, etc. from another and offer them as one's own), is a violation of student academic behavior standards as outlined by our partnering colleges and universities and is subject to academic disciplinary action.