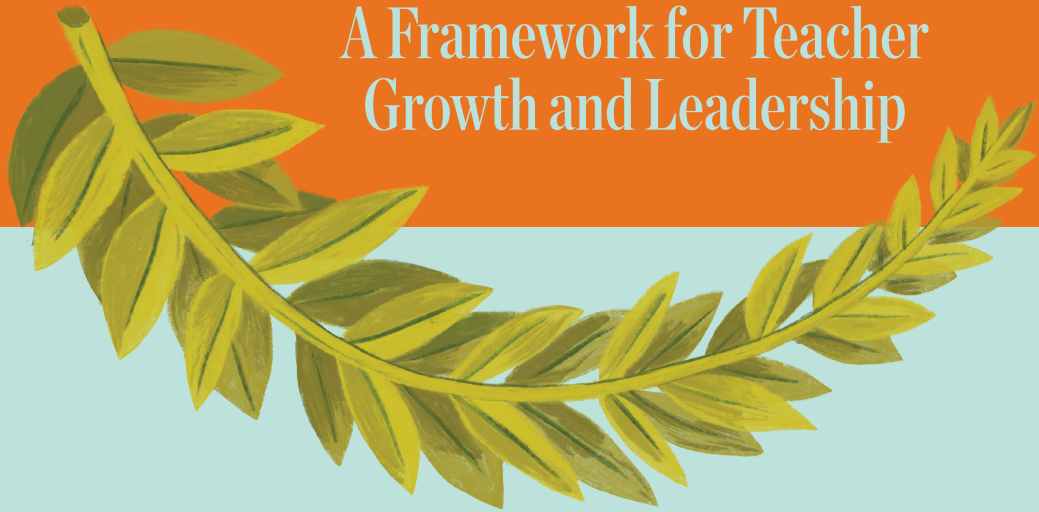


THE FIT TEACHING APPROACH



# Intentional and Targeted Teaching

A Framework for Teacher Growth and Leadership



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# Intentional and Targeted Teaching

## A Framework for Teacher Growth and Leadership



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# Introduction

## Becoming a FIT Teacher

Recently we hosted a guest speaker for an evening gathering at a local hotel. It was a great event, with stimulating conversations about teaching and learning, and hors d'oeuvres for the 160 or so people who attended. The speaker had used Nancy's computer and cables to share his stories, and one of the participants helped pack up at the end of the evening so that we could thank our guest. When we got to the car, Nancy realized that she did not have the connector that allows her computer to communicate with the projector. We went back inside the hotel to retrieve it.

When we entered the room, we saw the catering manager, the banquet manager, and a person wearing a chef's hat standing at the food table. One was literally counting tomatoes that had been left on a tray, while another counted fruit sticks. They stopped when they saw us, but Nancy had to ask what they were doing.

The banquet manager responded first, saying, "We always do a postmortem after an event like yours. We have different things we look for so that we can make changes for future events. I'm looking at the places trash was left and the number of remaining utensils. See right here, there's a pile of trash. That tells me that we need to put some sort of receptacle there, because that's where people are going to put their trash. We didn't make it obvious enough where they could dispose of things."

The catering manager added, "We're also counting leftover food. We look for trends and then make decisions about how much of what to offer groups. Your group didn't eat much of the desserts, but they demolished the hummus

and finger sandwiches. There are more than 20 tomatoes left. We used them for decoration, but obviously there were too many, and we don't need to waste money on extra tomatoes in the future."

The person in the chef's hat chimed in, "It's all part of our self-evaluation process. We learn from every group we host, and we make it better for the next time. If people leave hungry, they tell other people, who then don't want to have their events here. When our boss comes around, he wants to see a clean environment, so this little pile of trash is a problem, and we can address it the next time we set up the room this way. And see the utensils? There aren't any forks left, so some people probably had to use a spoon instead. That's a problem. The silverware plan wasn't matched very well to the type of food served. We will definitely fix that for next time."

We looked at one another, silently making the same connections. Although not having a fork for one's hors d'oeuvres isn't too a big problem in the larger scheme of things, not reaching students is. Not getting them to grasp algebra is. Not engaging them in the subject matter you love is. Not preparing them to be critical thinkers and strong citizens is. You get the point.

The three people in this hotel spent time collecting and analyzing data because they wanted to improve the experience their guests had. The same should be true for teachers, coaches, and administrators. We certainly care as much about our students' learning as the catering manager, the banquet manager, and the chef care about the food they serve and the environment they create. But do we routinely invest in the same kind of analysis of our practices, situations, and outcomes? Are these based in the same kind collaborative and dialogic problem solving? The hotel team's process wasn't about filling out forms; it was about communicating with one another to reach solutions. But, as we saw, what made this possible was a conversation and a set of processes that helped the hotel staff resolve missteps and identify successes.

In this spirit, we embarked on defining the centerpiece of this book: the FIT Teaching Growth and Leadership Tool, which harnesses the FIT Teaching process and presents a detailed continuum of teacher growth and leadership. We offer it to teachers as guidance they can use to self-assess and chart a path forward. We also share this with those who support and lead teachers as a way to highlight the effectiveness of teachers' work and ground conversations in helping teachers achieve even greater success. After all, teachers are lifelong learners, dedicated to continually improving their craft.

## What Is FIT Teaching?

The Framework for Intentional and Targeted Teaching®, or FIT Teaching™, is a process that evolved over the past 15 years. It began as a way of identifying the fundamental components that make up a productive educational environment for facilitating literacy development. We wanted to know: What did the most effective teachers do in order to promote successful learning? How did they plan, how did they instruct, how did they assess? What specific practices could we isolate as making the most difference?

Let's start with the words we selected as the name for this approach. The first is *framework*. We do not believe that exceedingly scripted or highly prescriptive approaches are the way to go because they de-skill the teacher and assume that a curriculum can teach. They typically leave little room for differentiation or adjustment to the learning environment as teachers march through lessons one after another. We remember meeting a teacher who got a red card from her principal for not being on the same page in the textbook as the other 4th grade teachers. As she explained it, "We have fidelity checks every few days, and if we're behind, we're in trouble. But I had to stop because the lesson was confusing and my students didn't get it. There just isn't much wiggle room, and the district requires us to move on, even if some students don't get it."

Having said that, we're not advocating for an "anything goes" approach to curriculum and instruction. We do believe that teachers should have a *framework* for their lessons. As you will read in the chapters ahead, we are interested in instructional approaches that shift the responsibility for learning from teachers to students in an ongoing and iterative cycle. The framework we propose includes clear learning intentions, teacher modeling, guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent learning tasks. Importantly, teachers mix and match these components in an instructional sequence designed to impact learning. They may model several times in a given lesson, or they may start a lesson with collaborative learning and then move on to modeling. The order doesn't matter, but the components of the framework do. We see a difference between teachers internalizing a framework for their lessons and them being told what to teach every minute of the day.

*Intentional* is the second word in this model, and we selected it because teachers' actions matter. The planning teachers do as well as the instructional

decisions they make should be purposeful. High-quality instruction starts with knowing what students need to learn, then moves on to creating a wide range of learning situations in which students can engage. *Intentional* says that teachers are deliberate and that learning is expected.

*Targeted*, the third word, is there to stress that teachers must consider the current performance of students as well as how these students respond to the instruction. There is no reason to teach things students already know. At the same time, it's important to monitor students' learning to determine if the class needs to accelerate or slow down. When teaching is *targeted*, that means teachers are working to close the gap between what students already know and what they are expected to learn.

Two of us (Doug and Nancy) are teachers and leaders, researchers and practitioners, and we subjected the components of FIT Teaching to the best test we know: teaching them in our own classrooms and collaborating with talented colleagues in their classrooms. The framework developed further through trial and revision. As we learned more about what worked and what didn't, we honed and improved the components until they defined a coherent process that includes the essentials of effective teaching while avoiding a restrictive prescription or formula. After all, a healthy organization must be free to adapt processes to meet the needs of its particular context.

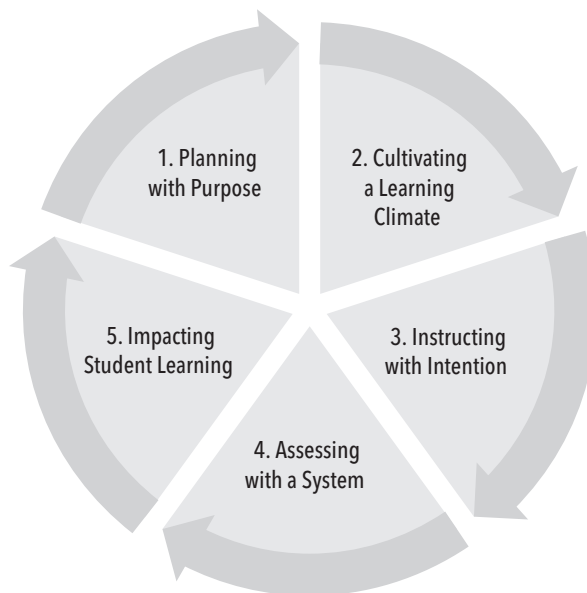
As FIT Teaching evolved, it became clear that these components can have great value to both individual teachers and teams of teachers, particularly in organizations that are inundated with multiple (and often competing) initiatives. The overarching philosophy of FIT Teaching is that it is *not* "one more thing" for teachers and leaders to do but a method for creating coherence and improvements to the complex jobs that schools undertake. Together, purposeful planning, a well-designed assessment system, and strong instruction make a difference.

Overall, FIT Teaching is a process that organizes and refines the hard work of professional growth that school leaders and dedicated teachers already seek. We all know that we can get better, no matter how good our lessons already are. As we have noted many times in our careers, there is no perfect lesson, and there is no one "right way" to teach. (There are wrong ways, but not one right way.) The FIT Teaching model is designed to keep student learning central while ensuring that teachers are empowered to make professional decisions in the best interests of their students.

## The Five Interrelated Components of the FIT Teaching Tool

The FIT Teaching Growth and Leadership Tool—the FIT Teaching Tool, for short—is based on decades of research and practice. It relies on a thoughtful and intentional implementation of the work of teachers and of students, as well as the collaborative work necessary for deep learning. The instructional process it captures represents the tangible interactions of teachers and students in their learning environment, whether it consists of brick-and-mortar classrooms, a blend of virtual and face-to-face instruction, or instruction offered completely online. Irrespective of the instructional mode, teachers should plan lessons, create a productive learning climate, provide learning opportunities, assess student performance, and monitor student learning. These five components are illustrated in Figure I.1.

**Figure I.1** | Components of the FIT Teaching Tool



The first component, *Planning with Purpose*, highlights the work that teachers do to prepare lessons as they analyze the standards for their grade level or content area, identify learning targets and success criteria, and sequence learning. *Cultivating a Learning Climate* involves creating a welcoming classroom that also is efficient and allows for students' continuous growth and

development. *Instructing with Intention* highlights the experiences that students have in the classroom as they learn. The fourth component, *Assessing with a System*, targets the formative assessment work that teachers do as they collect information about students' understandings and then take action to close any gaps that exist. And finally, the fifth component, *Impacting Student Learning*, focuses on the short- and long-term outcomes from the instruction—namely, whether or not students learned anything.

We include evidence of student learning in the FIT Teaching Tool because we think that it is important to recognize that teachers' efforts should have an influence on students' understanding. As we explain further in Chapter 5, with our tool, "student performance" is not limited to results on standardized or standards-based formal assessments. It includes evidence of student learning in the short term—as might be the case when a group of kindergarten students have mastered naming all of the letters in the alphabet or students in a chemistry class can successfully balance molar equations—and evidence of student learning in the long term, which could be measured on formal assessments, including state exams or other end-of-course and end-of-semester measures. Teachers can assess students' long-term learning in a number of ways, so this aspect needs to be negotiated, either at the state, district, or site level, depending on where the FIT Teaching Tool is used. In other words, we should not be afraid of considering student performance—the impact or outcomes of teaching—as we learn and grow as teachers.

## The Structure of the FIT Teaching Tool

The full FIT Teaching Tool is presented in this book's Appendix and is also available online at [www.ascd.org/XXX](http://www.ascd.org/XXX). Each of the tool's five components includes a number of factors (see Figure I.2), and most of the factors, in turn, include a number of ingredients. It is at the ingredient level that we provide rubrics for teachers and others to use to identify areas of success as well as areas for growth.

The last part of the preceding sentence is such an important point that we need to say it again. This tool is about identifying *areas of success as well as areas for growth*. If we, as teachers, don't highlight our successes, how will our administrators and colleagues know we're capable of providing mentoring support to our colleagues? If we don't seek frequent feedback, how will we know where to focus our future learning?

## Figure I.2 | Components and Factors of the FIT Teaching Tool

### 1. Planning with Purpose

- 1.1: Learning Intentions and Progressions
- 1.2: Evidence of Learning
- 1.3: Meaningful Learning

### 2. Cultivating a Learning Climate

- 2.1: Welcoming
- 2.2: Growth Producing
- 2.3: Efficient

### 3. Instructing with Intention

- 3.1: Focused Instruction
- 3.2: Guided Instruction
- 3.3: Collaborative Learning

### 4. Assessing with a System

- 4.1: Assessment to Support Learners
- 4.2: Assessment to Monitor Learning
- 4.3: Assessment to Inform Learning

### 5. Impacting Student Learning

- 5.1: Short-Term Evidence of Learning
- 5.2: Long-Term Evidence of Learning

Using any tool for infrequent classroom observations and a once-a-year summative conference is woefully inadequate and will not likely provide the growth opportunities all teachers deserve. Imagine if we all ran our classrooms in a similar fashion, with a single hour of testing serving as the only guide we had to assess an entire year of learning. Yet too often, the results of a single observation are the only information school leaders rely on to evaluate teachers, or worse, student performance on a summative test is the only thing used to determine the success of the teacher.

## The Purpose of the FIT Teaching Tool

The FIT Teaching Tool is designed to foster discussion among educators about our practices and to strengthen those practices through collaborative interactions. It is meant to be used by teachers for self-assessment, by teachers' trusted peers for collegial feedback, and by instructional coaches and leaders to develop the skills teachers need both onstage and offstage. Formative assessment of teachers has a significant effect on student learning at .90. It's high on the list of Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis of effective practices, yet it is frequently overlooked in favor of other classroom teaching practices and behaviors.

We have identified key behaviors and practices that, collectively, are manageable without being reductive. After all, no one is going to use these criteria routinely if the instrument is too cumbersome. Many of the criteria require

conversation and discussion. You won't find a checklist, as we have learned that checking off boxes limits the focus to obvious items while overlooking those that are better determined through discussion, such as what the teacher noticed about a specific student or how the teacher planned to modify learning for another student.

We think that the more often educators use and reference the tool—during professional learning, for coaching conversations, and in professional learning communities (PLCs)—the more likely it is that teachers will internalize the items within the tool and continue to grow and develop as professional educators. For example, a group of 4th grade teachers focused on one ingredient, checking for understanding. They read various articles and information on websites to find ideas, and they planned opportunities to integrate checking for understanding in their classrooms. They also observed one another and provided feedback about the ways in which checks for understanding were used. Over time, their repertoires of strategies and techniques for checking for understanding expanded significantly, and their principal noted that they had developed a level of expertise in this area.

## Assumptions Underlying the FIT Teaching Tool

The most important assumption we made in creating the FIT Teaching Tool relates to the rating scale. The tool has four levels, with a *Not Applicable* option for those rare situations in which an indicator (which we call an ingredient) could not possibly be demonstrated by a given teacher. For example, one ingredient focuses on the classroom environment. Teachers who travel from room to room each period may not have an opportunity to influence the physical aspects of the various rooms they use throughout the day. Having said that, we realize that some traveling teachers have created amazing spaces for their students' learning. For example, a fitness teacher we know brings her own supplies, including mats, battery-operated candles, and lavender spray, to create a conducive environment in any room she uses. We caution users of the FIT Teaching Tool to reserve *Not Applicable* for very rare situations.

The four performance levels are as follows:

- *Not Yet Apparent (NYA)*—This level is indicated only when there is a *complete lack of evidence* that the teacher has considered a necessary aspect of instruction and incorporated it into practice. This level should be

differentiated from *Not Applicable*, which indicates the very rare situation when the ingredient is not expected as part of the teacher’s practice.

- *Developing*—Most typical with teachers new to the profession or new to a grade level, subject area, or curriculum implementation, this level is marked by inconsistency of practice. It is selected when it is clear that a teacher understands the criteria, but implementation is falling short of a desired level of success.

- *Teaching*—Most typical with teachers experienced in implementing criteria with fidelity, this level is selected when it is clear that the teacher’s practice is intentional, solidly implemented, and resulting in success for students.

- *Leading*—Most typical with seasoned teachers, this level is selected for an individual who has embraced a particular aspect of the criterion at its highest level and is providing support, guidance, and resources for colleagues. *Leading* teachers develop learning opportunities for adults that respect individual levels of personal practice and focus on extending collective growth. Teachers at this level have classrooms with open doors and consider themselves continuous learners, thereby affecting classrooms outside their own.

We operate from an assumption that teachers show up to work every day intending to do the best that they know how to do. That does not mean we believe problematic classroom instruction or interactions are acceptable; it just means we believe that people have good intentions. In other words, we trust them. It is worth noting that trust is an important factor in teacher (and school) improvement efforts (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). When an organization has high levels of trust, people feel comfortable taking risks and stretching their practices. Without trust, people play it safe and avoid situations that may expose their misunderstandings. As Tschannen-Moran notes, when “well-intentioned principals fail to earn the trust of their faculty and their larger school community, their vision is doomed to frustration and failure” (2014, p. 1).

The language in the FIT Teaching Tool reflects these positive presuppositions about teachers and teaching. As noted, the tool includes a rating of *Not Yet Apparent* based on the assumption that the aspect of instruction in question is not yet happening because the person is not clear about expectations or needs

support, in the form of coaching or professional learning, to start developing a given habit.

For example, one of the indicators that we look for, referred to as 3.1b in the tool, states that “relevance is established and maintained throughout the lesson as students are reminded about why they are learning the specific content.” We assume that teachers want their instruction to be relevant. We also assume that relevance can be lost in the details of the tasks that students complete, which requires teachers to remind students of it regularly.

If a given teacher is observed not ensuring that the instruction is relevant, the teacher him- or herself can reflect on that, or an observer should ask about that. When there is no agreed-upon understanding of the importance of relevance, the conversation goes one way. If a concern emerges about how to make content relevant, the conversation goes another way. And if there is a misunderstanding about the need to remind students about relevance, the conversation goes yet another way. The positive presupposition is that the teacher who did not make learning relevant is trying his or her best and needs support to develop this habit. Having honest, open, humane, and growth-producing conversations about this will help more than punishing, berating, or humiliating someone. And talking about it with colleagues and coaches is more likely to result in change, compared with an administrator circling a low score on an annual evaluation and then moving on.

Having said that, we recognize that a small number of people may refuse to change, even with excellent coaching and support. In these cases, we still assume that they are doing their best, but that they are not interested in the agreed-upon practices in the school or district. We recommend spending some time talking with these people to figure out why, exploring beliefs and experiences that may be influencing practices.

In addition, we assume that all teachers are leaders—leaders of classrooms and leaders of learning. In creating the FIT Teaching Growth and Leadership Tool, we wanted to recognize this fact about teachers and teaching, and thus we reserve the highest level of performance for teachers who lead their peers. This feature makes the FIT Teaching Tool unique, because it recognizes the value of collaboration. Rather than include a single indicator on collaboration or leadership, every indicator in this tool recognizes teacher leadership. It is important to note that teachers can be leaders on some indicators and perform at the *Teaching* level on others. There is nothing wrong with being a great teacher.

We also assume that teachers are reflective about their practices. In fact, we take this as a given and do not include a factor about reflection in the FIT Teaching Tool. We all think about our work lives (and every other aspect of our lives) and make decisions about what could improve the quality of our lives. Naturally, this assumption is related to the positive presuppositions that drive our work. But realistically, we cannot imagine scaling reflections. We are not sure that there are “exceptional” versus “good” versus “adequate” reflections, in part because they are very personal, and in part because reflection is best facilitated in collaboration with others. We do not think it is fair to evaluate a teacher’s personal reflections or to evaluate performance based on the quality of interactions afforded to that person by peers and administrators. Thus we have chosen to assume that teachers are reflective and that the people around a given teacher will provide honest, growth-producing feedback on which the person can reflect.

Another assumption we make relates to teachers’ own learning. We do not include an ingredient for professional development because the very nature of the FIT Teaching Tool requires learning. Teachers who are performing at the *Not Yet Apparent* level will have to learn something in order to improve. Teachers who are performing at the *Developing* level need to learn to refine a practice or increase their consistency in using the practice. Teachers who are performing at the *Teaching* level—again, the level we expect from everyone involved with providing learning opportunities for students—can learn to engage their colleagues. We agree with the notion that you really know something when you can teach it to another person; this is why we advocate for collaborative learning in the classroom and why we believe that the highest level of performance should be reserved for people who can teach what they know to others. And those who are performing at the *Leading* level already know that learning is lifelong. Thus, we do not think it is necessary to include an indicator about lifelong learning.

## **A Note About Teacher Evaluation**

Teaching is a complicated business. It requires passion and perseverance, expertise and effort. There is no one right way to ensure that all students learn. Not all instructional strategies are effective with all students. In fact, most expert teachers we know adjust their instructional repertoires as they encounter

students who learn faster, or slower, than students those teachers worked with in the past.

These facts make deciding “how good” a teacher is right now—whether it’s the teacher doing so for the purpose of pursuing improvement or a supervisor or coach doing it as part of an informal or formal evaluation process—complicated and tricky. So many questions need to be considered to evaluate the performance of a person tasked with changing lives of so many. It is much easier, we think, to evaluate profit and loss or the number of cases won or lost or the percentage of satisfied customers.

As Darling-Hammond (2013) notes, “Existing systems rarely help teachers improve or clearly distinguish those who are succeeding from those who are struggling” (p. 1). Enter the FIT Teaching Tool. It’s designed for teacher growth and teacher leadership, not summative evaluations. Still, we have correlated the FIT Teaching Tool with several of the major summative evaluation tools available (see [www.ascd.org/xxx](http://www.ascd.org/xxx) for these correlations), including

- Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007)
- Marshall Teacher Evaluation Rubrics (Marshall, 2011)
- Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model (Marzano, 2013)
- McREL Teacher Evaluation System (Davis, 2013)
- Stronge Teacher Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System (Stronge & Tucker, 2003)

Along with these five major models, there are state-specific criteria, home-grown rubrics developed by individual districts, and hybrid approaches, particularly in schools that provide blended and fully online options for their students. No matter the model selected, however, there are significant commonalities around teaching expectations. Thus, if teachers need to grow in a specific area of one of the above named summative evaluation tools, they can use the correlations to learn how FIT Teaching supports teachers to improve their practice.

Having acknowledged that teacher evaluation is complicated, we return to the point that we all know that we can get better at our jobs. And getting better requires identifying strengths and areas that need development. Unfortunately, in too many places, formative and summative teacher evaluation tools and “effectiveness models” have been used punitively, resulting in insecurity and fear. We believe these tools should be welcomed, because they provide growth opportunities for the very people charged with leading learning—teachers!

## A Caution Before Continuing

As we have noted, the FIT Teaching Tool is designed to encourage teacher collaboration. Darling-Hammond (2013) states that good evaluation systems “must be designed so that teachers are not discouraged from collaborating with one another or from teaching the students who have the greatest educational needs” (p. 87). We designed this tool to meet that goal. Remember, the tool’s highest level describes teachers who collaborate and share with their colleagues. Too many of the current effectiveness models and evaluation tools force teachers into competitive roles, because a given teacher’s success depends in part on the failure of others. When this situation occurs, our profession suffers. There is simply too much evidence that teacher collaboration is powerful; in fact, it is probably the most powerful predictor of improved student achievement over time (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Competitive teacher evaluations reinforce a hoarding mentality that prevents teachers from sharing lesson ideas with one another, providing honest feedback to their colleagues, and engaging in professional dialogues about ways to respond to groups of students who do, or do not, demonstrate mastery.

Even worse, competitive teacher evaluation tools undermine professional learning communities (PLCs), the very communities that we have worked so hard to establish because they are highly effective in responding to students’ learning needs. As Marzano notes, school and district-level PLCs are “probably the most influential movement with regards to actually changing practices in schools” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. x).

We recognize that teachers need to be evaluated, fairly and honestly. We believe that they deserve to be evaluated so that they can receive appropriate coaching and support. But teacher evaluation in the absence of forums for collaboration will not achieve breakthrough results. Investing in collaborative planning teams that discuss high-quality instruction can lead to improved student achievement. We purposefully included ingredients that can be discussed in the context of a collaborative planning team or an entire professional learning community. The examples we provide in this book often note the ways in which groups of teachers engage with their colleagues, discussing the four essential questions of a PLC (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008):

- What is it we expect our students to learn?
- How will we know when they have learned it?

- How will we respond when some students do not learn?
- How will we respond when some students already know it?

Our hope is that the necessary teacher evaluation process becomes integrated into the professional learning that all teachers do. We encourage teachers to share their best ideas with one another because every child deserves an amazing education. We want teachers to understand that they operate in a microcosm, as their actions and interactions have ripple effects on entire schools, districts, and communities. And we look forward to a time when teachers can engage in honest conversations with their colleagues about providing the very best learning opportunities for students. When that happens, perhaps formal evaluations will no longer be necessary and teachers will lead their own learning and that of their peers, striving for excellence for every student.



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