

Study Guide

Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning

by Anne Conzemius and Jan O'Neill

Chapter 1 - A Framework for Building Shared Responsibility

1. What is meant by, "Leadership becomes a matter of shared responsibility, not positional authority?"
2. What three elements are essential for shared responsibility for the ongoing improvement of student learning?
3. Why is focus important to ongoing improvement? What are examples of questions a school should be asking to demonstrate focus? What evidence is there that your school is demonstrating focus?
4. Give examples of questions that demonstrate reflection. Why is reflection important to the school improvement process?
5. How do the authors define collaboration? Identify examples of collaboration in your school. Does this collaboration meet the criteria suggested by the authors?
6. Do you agree that all elements of the framework—focus, reflection, and collaboration—are necessary for ongoing improvement? Why or why not? Are all three present in your school? Cite an example that would support the presence or absence of these three elements in your school.

Chapter 2 - Focus

1. What core values and beliefs guide the decision making and priorities of your school? Are these core values implicit or explicit? How do these core values contribute to student learning?
2. Would you characterize your organization's beliefs as "life-liberating" or "life-limiting"? Give examples to justify your answer.
3. How does the collaborative formulation of core values benefit an organization and its efforts to continue to improve?
4. What are some of the reasons why schools today need a compelling mission statement?
5. Analyze and evaluate the mission statement of your school. What are the underlying beliefs and values inherent in the mission statement? Are curriculum, instruction, and assessment in your school aligned with the mission statement? Give examples to support your response.
6. What are the characteristics of a compelling vision?
7. The authors present five vision design tools. Which one of these do you believe would work most effectively in your organization or would you feel most comfortable facilitating? Explain why you chose this tool.

8. Engage colleagues in the development of a "Historygram" and storyboards of each era. How did this process assist in preparing the group for visioning for the future?
9. What is the Pareto principal and how does it assist in prioritizing strategies?
10. Does your school/organization have a vision statement? How was it developed? Would you characterize this vision as a living document that guides strategic planning and actions? Why or why not?

Chapter 3 - Reflection

1. Do you believe that educators want to be accountable? What experiences have you had to support your belief?
2. The authors discuss "distorting the system" to show improved results. What examples are used to explain this phenomenon? What effect does this have on the educational system? Are there examples of this happening in your school?
3. What do the authors mean by "failing forward?"
4. How are data used in your school? Are data used as incentives (or disincentives) for change or as learning tools?
5. How does inquiry related to the use of data help improve student learning?
6. How does the data-logic chain support the improvement process?
7. Define and give examples of quantitative, qualitative, and intuitive data that you and your school use. Suggest ways you might improve how your school uses one of these data types so that you might inform instruction more effectively.
8. What is involved in the process of reflection and how is this related to the improvement process?
9. Do you believe that intuition is a useful source of information for guiding improvement? Explain your response.
10. What role do data play in promoting reflective practice?
11. How do "snapshot" and "moving picture" data contribute to instructional improvement? Give examples of how you have or could use each of these in your classroom.
12. Describe an action research project that you and your colleagues might engage in to improve a curriculum area in your school. What data would be useful for assessing current levels of student learning?
13. The authors share stories of teachers who have used reflective practice to improve student learning. What are some of the important things these teachers learned as a result of their efforts?
14. Differentiate between common and special cause variation. How should a school react to each of these types of variation?
15. What are some of the challenges for schools faced with self-imposed or other-imposed accountability systems? How can building a genuine culture of data address these challenges?

16. The authors suggest three common mistakes schools make when initiating data driven improvement. Has your school fallen victim to any of these mistakes? How has this impacted your school's efforts to achieve continuous improvement?
17. What are some productive uses of standardized, norm-referenced tests? What are unproductive uses of these tests?

Chapter 4 - Collaboration

1. What characterizes a collaborative environment? Which of these characteristics do you believe are the most difficult to achieve?
2. Describe the role the principal of Forest Dale Elementary School played in developing a culture of collaboration.
3. What are examples of "tribal" behaviors in your school setting?
4. How is dialogue different from debate and discussion? Why is dialogue more likely to result in new and shared understandings?
5. How might an understanding of the predictable stages of development assist groups in moving to a more collaborative environment? Think of a group or team with which you are currently working. At what stage of development is this group functioning? Give examples to support your answer.

Chapter 5 - SMART Goals

1. Differentiate between process goals and results goals. Do you agree with the authors that to be useful for measuring performance and progress, goals should be results-oriented rather than process-oriented?
2. What components are necessary to make a goal SMART?
3. Write SMART goals for your district, school, and classroom.
4. What is a Pareto analysis? How does a Pareto analysis help identify goals? Give an example of an area in which Pareto analysis might be used in your school.
5. What are limitations of using standardized tests to determine classroom SMART goals?
6. Describe the 30+ Minute Meeting process. Would this process work effectively in your school?
7. How does the use of SMART goals influence professional development practices?

Chapter 6 - Leadership

1. How are focus, reflection, and collaboration reflected in the statement by Hartland/Lakeside teacher Wendy Lombard?
2. What are the components of Linda Lambert's definition of leadership?
3. The authors describe a "Quadrant 4" school (Roosevelt Elementary) and a "Quadrant 1" school (Eagle Ridge Elementary). Describe the differences in these two schools. How has the principal of each of these schools contributed to the school environment?
4. Do you agree with the statement, "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture?"

5. What symbols have a place of prominence in your school? What do these symbols tell a visitor about what is important in your school?
6. Summarize the role of the teachers, the principal, and the central office in Savanna Oaks Elementary School. How did each demonstrate focus, reflection, and collaboration?
7. What role does the district office play in creating the systematic support mechanisms that encourage and facilitate the change process? Evaluate your district office's role in supporting these mechanisms.

Summary

Work with a group of colleagues to complete the Self-Assessment in Appendix D. Which attributes indicate that your school is characterized by shared responsibility for learning? In which attributes is improvement needed? Suggest actions your school could take to move toward a culture of shared responsibility for learning.