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## Book Review: Mathematics Coaching & Collaboration in a PLC at Work™. Every Student Can Learn Mathematics

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# **Book Review: Kanold, Toncheff, Larson, Kanold-McIntyre, and Schuhl: Mathematics Coaching Collaboration in a PLC at Work<sup>TM</sup>. Every Student Can Learn Mathematics**

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## **Review**

There are a lot of leaders and educational critics in the educational world with opinions on what instructional coaching should look like. Each stakeholder comes armed with a set of data to back up their thoughts, but instructional coaching is a relatively new practice and the research-based evidence for what is most effective, is shallow. This leads to the question about instructional coaching, “where should instructional coaches be focusing their time and energy?”. Whether you are a teacher, instructional coach, or a principal, if you believe that the sole priority of an instructional coach should be one on one coaching, then this book is not for you. Instead this book is an instruction manual for coaches and leaders to use to build teams of teachers and future leaders that foster teamwork and help to create a culture of learning within their careers. This book is one of four in a series about coaching teams in the best practices of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) with a specific focus on mathematics teams.

This book highlights the structures that must be put in place to lead teams toward effective collaboration. If the data set that speaks to you is one that places equal priority on individual and team coaching cycles, this book can be utilized as a resource guided by an experienced mentor to lead you on a journey to building transformational teams that empower teachers to coach each other. Author Timothy Kanold uses his personal experience as a proponent of PLC in his various roles as a teacher, principal, and superintendent to guide readers through the process of building high functioning learning teams. He employs a variety of supplemental authors of varying

backgrounds to add personal stories throughout the content. This allows the reader to connect with the lessons and tools that are recommended and see ways it might apply to their own school site.

The reader does not have to be a “math person” to follow this book. In fact, if you are not a “math person,” but you are leading a math team, this book is filled with strategies for how to navigate content-specific conversations. If you are a principal that employs a math coach, this book has collaboration tools that are meant to be done in tandem between coach and principal. This would make an excellent book study for a principal and coach to do together to create a shared vision. This is not a book that is meant to be read once and then be put on the shelf; it is meant to be read and re-read as you work through its systems.

Initially, this book may seem like an easy read since it has very few pages, has a wider workbook feel than most books, and utilizes a large font. However, readers should not take the structure of the book too lightly. Kanold has an interesting writing style; in true teacher form, he does not let readers leave a chapter without some perfectly crafted thinking questions. Readers may find that they need to read a few pages a day and then process what has been read and decide how to use it. By employing this style, he is purposefully working to change the readers mindset, and it is effective. The book is 117 pages long, and is highly engaging if you follow the prompts and read as the author has intended. Additionally, tools meant to be used with teams are embedded throughout the content and all of them are available digitally so the reader can download the tools as they progress -through the book. The resources and examples are math specific, and with so few resources this specific in existence, it is an excellent tool to be utilized.. The examples include both secondary and elementary scenarios.

Another key feature in this book are the continuous citations found throughout. They are prominent and are meant to allow the reader to explore specific concepts more deeply. For example, in Chapter 2, a team activity on core values is referenced. Tracking down the citation for that activity leads to another in-depth resource with a plethora of digital tools for helping teams create collective commitments. This type of scavenger hunt for more resources is consistent throughout the book.

The first half of the book is focused on setting PLC teams up for success. Many teams, when prompted by a leader to get together and collaborate in the form of a PLC, struggle with what to talk about and report that the meetings do not feel meaningful. Based on the information provided in the book, the teachers and leaders have not set themselves up for success and failed to clearly define the purpose of their meetings. Kanold teaches leaders how to create a trusting team by going through a set of activities to establish trust within the team and create open communication. These activities take time so schools or leaders that are not willing to invest and truly commit to the process may find the lessons in this book to be difficult to implement. You will need your faculty and staff on board while implementing and utilizing this book, along with someone responsible for troubleshooting.

Kanold begins Part 1 by sharing an activity that engages teachers in creating a vision statement for their team and their work. To do this, he has teachers explore their core values around teaching and learning and use their thoughts to define what they want for their students, together. This

allows for teachers to have a common purpose during meetings and sets the stage for creating a mission statement. The mission statement will guide the work of the team for the year and creates clarity for everyone on the team about the direction they should go during meetings. This eliminates, or at least attempts to, participants feeling as though the meetings are useless or unproductive.

In Part 2, Kanold dives deeper into creating and clarifying specific goals with a team, but not before training readers on how to write both short-term and long-term SMART goals that are related to the team's vision and mission statement. The acronym SMART is a tool used in both the business and educational world to build common team goals. The acronym asks teams to reflect on goals to make sure they are S-Specific, M-Measurable, A- Attainable, R- Realistic, and T- Time based. Once teachers and leaders start to dig into the real work of solving problems together, the next big obstacle is shifting from simply sharing what is happening in other classrooms, to looking at the evidence of student learning. This can be a difficult shift and a culture of transparency must be carefully crafted. Kanold lays out discussion tools and resources to aid the discussion through this shift. From there, protocols can be laid out and utilized to aid in the comfort of each participant throughout the process. He takes time to emphasize the responsibility of the coach or leader in facilitating these critical conversations. Protocols create safety, let all participants know what to expect, and make sure all team members are contributing. Kanold provides a range of scaffolding protocols that tackle looking at student work, creating shared rubrics, participating in lesson study, and engaging in purposeful instructional rounds.

Collective efficacy is a new popular buzz word in education. Collective efficacy is the idea that collaboratively, we can and will improve student achievement together. Kanold's systems and processes are the vehicle to get staff to collective efficacy. Right now, there is a strong linear movement in the direction of training instructional coaches in one to one coaching cycles that mirror the evaluation process. Kanold's book provides a different systematic approach for coaches to leverage PLC to improve student achievement and expand their reach as a coach. If you are a principal, this book will help you make decisions about expectations for your instructional coach and how they spend their time. If you are an instructional coach, this is a thorough resource on how to build math teams that you can start implementing tomorrow.

Instructional coaches need to be purposeful with the training they provide to their teams and have a plan laid out so that they know what they will spend their time on. Educational thought leader Dr. Vern Minor, warns rooms full of principals, superintendents, coaches and central office personnel in all of his presentations to take this responsibility with the seriousness that it deserves, noting, "if you are going to lead, you better be leading in the right direction, you better know what you are doing and be ready to do it." If you want to leverage PLC to improve instruction at your school, and create transformational teams, this book will accomplish that objective. It is a strong push toward building PLC teams, and an even more effective guidebook of how to do it with math teams.

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