

## READY-TO-USE STRATEGIES MAKE TEXT VALUABLE FOR TEACHING TEAMS

Review by Susan Keiffer-Barone

I read any text on teaching teams with nostalgia. I began my career in 1984 on a strong 7th-grade team in Irvington-on-Hudson (N.Y.). We met every Monday morning to coordinate

our plans for the week and discuss how to help students learn.

As a beginning teacher, I found the support and wisdom of my colleagues invaluable. My belief in teaming grew in Cincinnati in the '90s. We met daily to discuss strategies and design curricula that pulled our subject areas together into meaningful thematic units. One of my fondest memories of teaching was watching 100 9th-grade students in our cafeteria working on science fair projects with their English, science, social studies, and math teachers.

We certainly could have used *Teacher Teams That Get Results* to enhance our work. Gayle Gregory and Lin Kuzmich provide clear guidance to help teachers create and enhance professional learning communities. And when teachers learn and work together, student collaboration

and inquiry improve. I especially like how each of the author's 61 strategies includes purpose, process, examples, and a reproducible chart to use with colleagues. Gregory and Kuzmich know teachers and teaching. They have produced a ready-to-use text that all educators can use at their next team meeting.

The text begins with a brief review of what we know about adult learning and group development. Then the authors launch into strategies to create successful teams. The strategies fall into four key areas:

- Creating a growth-oriented climate;
- Sharing knowledge and skills;
- Building resilience and creating solutions; and
- Determining priorities and creating excellence.



Keiffer-Barone

The book suggests creating a positive climate by developing a sense of team and celebrating successes. In the knowledge section, the authors present methods to expand the teaching tool kit. While seasoned staff developers will be familiar with many of these strategies, it is worth the price of the book to have ready-made handouts for techniques such as Four Corners, Jigsaw, KWL, and Pluses & Wishes. (And if you don't know these, definitely buy the book!).

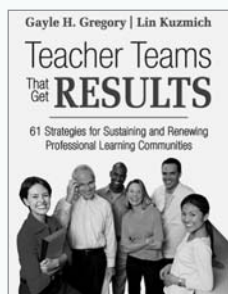
My favorite strategy is #42, Musical Chairs. This strategy appears in the resilience section and pushes every member of a team to converse and to move. In musical chairs, two lines face one another. At each musical break, those in the first line move down one space to face a new partner. This facilitates shared expertise and allows everyone to talk. And it even worked with my 10th graders when they discussed character development in Julius Caesar.

In the last section of this book, on determining priorities, the techniques are less flashy but more effective. The strategies target student results and contain more charting activities to focus the team on what teachers must do to enhance student learning. Examples include the use of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to solve problems, Think Aouts, and Data Chats, which center on student needs and what we can do to meet them.

I do have minor complaints. Some of the research is a little dated, and the overview of learning would benefit from more recent work. However, a more relevant gap in the text is the minuscule space allotted to the argument that professional learning teams get results — or how they do it. Why should we work in teams? Working in teams takes a lot more time (and my headmaster would note it costs more money) than working in isolation. Gregory and Kuzmich list 14 benefits of teaming and cite one study. As this is a book of strategies for teaming, a chapter might have been devoted to why we should consider the book's topic at all. This fine book will not help me convince my headmaster to embrace teaming as a method to help students learn or to "get results," as the title implies. And I think he wants to be convinced.

Nonetheless, I recommend this text as an excellent resource for staff developers working with teaching teams. The book provides creative and ready-to-use strategies to enhance team meetings and grow a sense of community among teachers who work together.

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### Teacher Teams That Get Results

By Gayle H. Gregory and Lin Kuzmich

2007, Corwin Press

Paperback, 262 pages, \$39.95

To order, call 800-233-9936

Fax: 800-417-2466

Web: [www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)

Reviewer's rating: 3 out of 4

**EASY-TO-READ RESOURCE FOR PRINCIPALS IS MISSING KEY ELEMENTS**

*Review by Kenneth C. Williams*

Imagine with me if you will ... and visualize your dream car. Mine is a steel blue 1961 Lincoln Continental convertible, fully restored and in immaculate condition. Now imagine someone handing you the keys to your dream car. You get in, get buckled, and get ready to go. You check the mirrors, turn the key, and — nothing. You open the hood and find the engine is missing. You have a beautiful car with wonderful parts, but no engine to bring it together and make it go.



Williams

That is how I felt after reading Jeffrey Glanz's *What Every Principal Should Know About Instructional Leadership*. The book, one of seven in the "What Every Principal Should Know About Leadership" series, is designed as a ready reference for principals in their efforts to make instructional leadership their first priority. Glanz makes clear that the book is not meant to represent all the reader will need to know as a principal. He says his goal is to gather and present in an easy-to-read manner the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to get started in the principalship. While I appreciate the inability to cover everything in a single volume, the book misses the engine that drives sustained school improvement.

Glanz begins with the evolution of the principalship from 15 years ago, when principals were largely responsible for ensuring a safe school building, managing bus schedules, enforcing district policies, dealing with parents, and other logistical tasks, to today's age of school improvement. Principals now are responsible for providing top-quality instructional leadership that promotes best practices in teaching.

Current and overwhelming research supports school leaders working to create purposeful collaboration among teams of teachers for professional learning — the engine that drives school improvement. So much of what Glanz identifies as best practices is born out of the work of the collaborative team. Yet his approach is about working with the teacher as an individual. While there is a definite place for that approach, the goal of learning for all students can be accomplished only when principals, as instructional leaders, provide teachers with the time, support, expectations, and structures for purposeful collaboration. Collaborative teams, according to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (*Learning by Doing*, Solution Tree, 2006), are expected to work interdependently to:

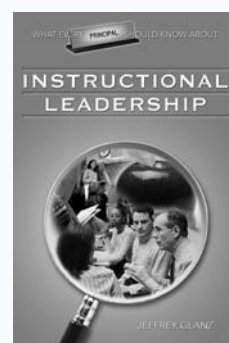
- Develop and pursue results-oriented goals that are aligned to school and district goals;
- Identify and agree on what students are expected to know and be able to do;
- Analyze common data in an effort to identify concerns regarding student learning and teacher instruction;
- Work together on how to best address learning concerns; and
- Assess results and begin the cycle all again.

Through this learning communities approach, many of the practices that Glanz identifies are addressed. The difference is that when addressed through collaborative teams, results often are compounded because of the combined talents and synergy of a group of teachers working with aligned goals, objectives, and data.

Glanz divides the book into three distinct areas: facilitating best practices in teaching, in curriculum, and in supervision and professional development. For each area, the author offers his view, research, and examples to support why they are integral best practices in teaching and important for principals to know. He presents ideas concisely for quick reference. Each chapter begins with a box summarizing the ideas presented in the chapter and offering a few reflective questions to encourage deeper thinking on the topic.

As a reference for specific areas and components of leadership, this book is a useful and easy-to-read resource for principals. As a stand-alone resource for instructional leadership, the book falls short in not emphasizing the principal's critical role in developing and facilitating the work of teachers in collaborative teams. While Glanz again and again offers the disclaimer that each chapter will not cover every bit of information there is to know about a given topic, he misses the collaborative team as the engine for school improvement.

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 By Jeffrey Glanz  
 2006, Corwin Press  
 Paperback, 114 pages, \$22.95  
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 Fax: 800-417-2466  
 Web: [www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)  
 Reviewer's rating: 2.5 out of 4



**ELMORE DIGS DEEP TO UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL REFORM**

*Review by Francis M. Duffy*

**R**ichard Elmore has contributed much to our understanding of why and how school reform succeeds or fails. This book adds depth and breadth to that knowledge.

The book is a collection of seven essays written by Elmore, a Harvard University professor of education. Each focuses on an important aspect of school reform. In these essays, he meticulously guides readers through his analysis of various difficulties that educators face when working to improve schooling in their districts, and he provides a historical context for understanding those difficulties. For example, in the first essay he writes in depth about the challenges of scaling up classroom-focused or school building-focused improvements to create and sustain systemwide improvement. His assessment of these efforts, however, leaves the reader with little hope that such large-scale changes will succeed unless change leaders in school districts apply principles of systemic change that inform them about how their districts perform as systems and about how to improve them as systems. I enthusiastically concur with his assessment.

One problem I encountered while reading his book is

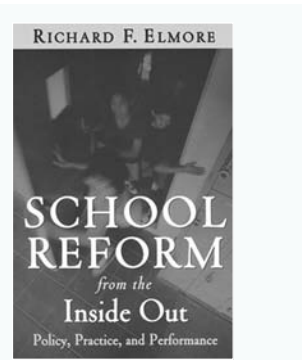


Duffy

the density of his prose. Elmore packs a lot of conceptual complexity onto his pages, and that density requires slow reading — sometimes a second or third reading of sentences. The essays also are quite academic and better suited to those with a scholarly interest in making school reform more effective. I didn't find much in the essays for staff development specialists.

However, for readers deeply interested in a thorough analysis of the failures and successes of school reform, or those especially interested in the historical foundation of school reform, I highly recommend this book. For me, with a strong interest in whole-system reform, I value Elmore's book and his analyses.

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**School Reform From the Inside Out: Policy, Practice, and Performance**

By Richard F. Elmore  
 2004, Harvard Education Press  
 Hardback, 277 pages, \$29.95  
 To order, call 888-437-1437  
 Fax: 978-348-1233  
 Web: [www.hepg.org](http://www.hepg.org)

Reviewer's rating: 3 out of 4

