

An ASCD Study Guide for Improving Instruction Together: Leading Achievement Teams and PLCs

This ASCD Study Guide is meant to enhance your understanding of the concepts and practical ideas presented in *Improving Instruction Together*, an ASCD book written by Steve Ventura. You are encouraged to use this study guide as you finish each chapter. The questions are designed to help you make connections between the text and your professional situations and experiences, plus apply what you learn. Although you may think about these questions and tasks on your own, you might consider pairing with a colleague or forming a study group with others who are reading *Improving Instruction Together*. The study questions and tasks provided are not meant to cover all aspects of the book but, rather, to address specific ideas for implementation and discussion.

Chapter 1. The Collective Mindset

1. What does the term *the collective* mean in the context of educational leadership, and how does it go beyond the traditional definition? (*Hint: Think about how it includes all members of the educational community and aligns vision across teams.*)
2. What are the three pillars of a robust collective, and how do they

contribute to effective leadership? (*Hint: Consider the traits that make collectives thrive: clarity, consistency, and accountability.*)

3. Why is clarity such an essential trait for leaders, and what are the risks when it is lacking?
4. How can leaders balance the need to guide PLCs while also promoting teacher autonomy and leadership? (*Hint: Consider the section on participating authentically in collaborative work without micromanaging.*)
5. What components should be included in an instructional leadership vision to ensure alignment with community needs and long-term goals?

Chapter 2. Highly Effective Instructional Leadership

1. How does instructional leadership differ from traditional school management, and what mindset shifts are required?
2. What were the four key initiatives implemented in the Edison School District, and how did they contribute to raising achievement? (*Hint: Think about the superintendent's story and the strategies used for improving student outcomes.*)
3. What are the five dimensions of effective school leadership identified by Viviane Robinson, and how are they ranked by effect size?

4. Why is it essential for leaders to engage in professional learning with teachers, rather than just facilitating it? *(Hint: Consider the impact of visible leadership and shared learning on teacher efficacy and school culture.)*
5. What is the purpose of aligning instructional leadership practices with organizational structures, and what risks arise when these structures are missing? *(Hint: Reflect on the leadership framework diagram and its emphasis on sustainable collaboration.)*

Chapter 3. The Leader's Role in Instructional Strategy Selection

1. Why is it important for instructional leaders to support strategy selection even if they are not content experts in every subject? *(Hint: Consider the idea of strategies that are not content specific and can be applied to several different instructional scenarios and leadership's role in aligning instruction with student needs.)*
2. What is the difference between surface, deep, and transfer learning, and how can leaders help teachers move instruction across these phases? *(Hint: Reference the Engagement Matrix and the phases of learning discussed in the chapter.)*
3. How can leaders use assessment data to support teacher teams in selecting instructional strategies that close learning gaps? *(Hint: Think about Steps 1 and 3 of the Achievement Teams protocol and the role of root cause analysis.)*

4. What are the five instructional strategy domains outlined in the Flipbook, and how can leaders use these to guide teacher planning?
5. How do the Three Cs (conditions, collaboration, and challenge) contribute to student engagement and motivation? *(Hint: Think about how each C influences the learning environment and supports student growth.)*

Chapter 4. The Instructional Coach's Role in Teacher Teams and PLCs

1. What common pitfalls do ineffective PLCs face, and what leadership and coaching strategies can help avoid them? *(Hint: Look at the four listed pitfalls and their corresponding leadership antidotes.)*
2. What does the research say about the impact of instructional coaching, and which areas of teaching practice are most affected? *(Hint: Reference effect sizes, especially in areas such as self-efficacy, skill acquisition, and teaching practice.)*
3. What are the three stages of coaching, and how can they be applied to support teacher growth?
4. Why is co-creating learning intentions and success criteria with teachers a high-impact coaching move?
5. How can instructional coaches use questioning techniques to improve teacher reflection and decision making in collaborative teams? *(Hint: Consider the four types of questions and how they*

reduce passive participation in PLCs.)

Chapter 5. Indicators of Effective Collaboration

1. What are the five leadership profiles of focused collaboration, and how does each one contribute to successful PLCs?
2. How does the Achievement Teams protocol structure collaboration, and why is this structure important for instructional improvement?
(Hint: Consider how each step—from data to strategy selection—builds purposeful reflection.)
3. Why is it critical for leaders and teachers to view assessment results as reflections of instructional effort, and how does this mindset shift affect collaboration?
4. What strategies can leaders use to build relational trust within teacher teams, and why is trust essential to school improvement?
(Hint: Reflect on the survey tool and the implications of strong versus weak trust environments.)
5. How can pre-teaching and pre-assessment cycles deepen collaboration and improve instructional alignment across a school?
(Hint: Think about the rationale for pre-assessment data and how it changes the conversation in teacher teams.)

Chapter 6. Research-Driven Microteaching and Learning Labs

1. What is microteaching, and why is it considered such a high-impact practice for accelerating instructional improvement? (*Hint: Reference Hattie's effect size and the role of video and peer feedback.*)
2. How do learning labs differ from traditional lesson observations, and what are the key components of a successful learning lab?
3. What steps should schools follow when setting up a learning lab to ensure both effectiveness and teacher engagement? (*Hint: Look at strategy selection, planning, feedback, and team-based implementation.*)
4. Why is feedback after a learning lab essential, and what practices make feedback most effective for teachers? (*Hint: Consider the structure of effective feedback: commendations, recommendations, and reflection prompts.*)
5. How can leaders and coaches use the Instructional Strategy Flipbook in conjunction with learning labs to build collective efficacy?

Chapter 7. Using Artificial Intelligence to Enhance Teacher Teams

1. How can AI tools, such as ChatGPT, support each step of the Achievement Teams four-step protocol?
2. What are best practices for creating short-cycle assessments using

AI, and what are the limitations of relying solely on AI for assessment design? (*Hint: Think about prompt quality, teacher vetting, and content alignment.*)

3. Why is it important for leaders to promote ethical and responsible use of AI, and what are some concerns educators may have about its implementation? (*Hint: Look at worries about academic dishonesty, job security, and the effect on human connection.*)
4. How can leaders help teachers see AI as a supportive tool rather than a threat to their professional role? (*Hint: Reflect on the recommendation to first build strong PLCs before introducing AI to support collaborative work.*)
5. What strategies can leaders use to introduce AI into collaborative team cycles while maintaining focus on instructional impact and teacher efficacy? (*Hint: Consider the importance of modeling, experimentation, and connecting AI to existing frameworks such as Achievement Teams.*)

Chapter 8. Putting It All Together

1. What are the five components of the adapted Lippitt-Knostr Model for leading change, and what happens when one of them is missing?
2. How does empathetic leadership contribute to a positive school culture and successful implementation of collaborative practices such as Achievement Teams?

3. What is overconfidence bias, and how can it affect leaders' perceptions of team performance and initiative implementation? *(Hint: Consider the impact on decision making and the accuracy of assessing schoolwide collaboration.)*
4. How can the sunk cost fallacy influence leadership decisions, and what strategies can help leaders avoid it? *(Hint: Use the example of investment in an unused software platform to reflect on rational versus emotional decision making.)*
5. What personal leadership actions and qualities are emphasized in this final chapter as essential for sustaining improvement through collaboration? *(Hint: Think about vision, humility, self-reflection, and commitment to implementation.)*

Improving Instruction Together: Leading Achievement Teams and PLCs was written by Steve Ventura. This 145-page, 7" × 10" book (Stock #125034; Print ISBN: 978-1-4166-3376-1; PDF ISBN: 978-1-4166-3377-8; EPUB ISBN: 978-1-4166-3378-5) is available from ASCD. Copyright © 2025 by ASCD. To order a copy, call 800-933-ASCD (2723) or [visit ASCD](#).

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