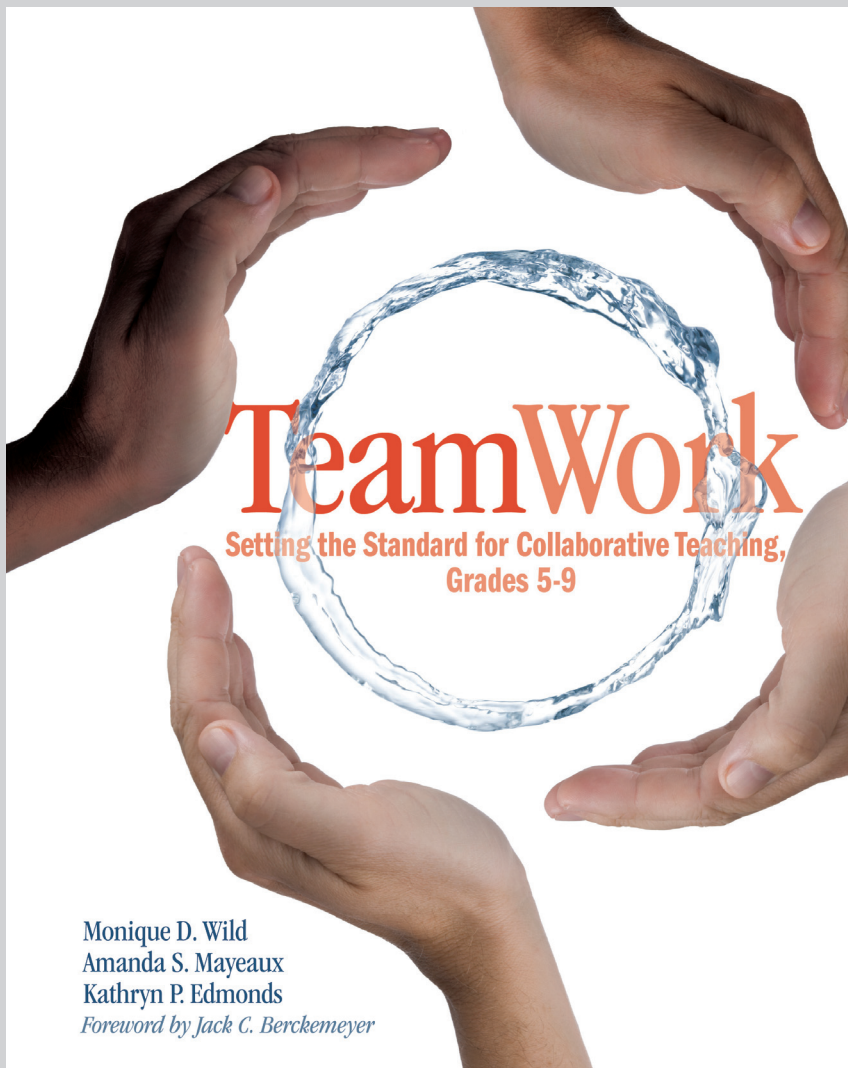


A STUDY GUIDE



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TeamWork

Setting the Standard for Collaborative Teaching, Grades 5–9

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“The longest journey is the journey inward.”

—Dag Hammarskjöld,
Swedish diplomat and United Nations
Secretary-General, 1953-1961

If you have engaged in a deeper exploration of collaborative teaching by reading this book and professional development study guide, you probably don't consider teaching a “job.” Instead, you may think of teaching as your destiny. Guiding young adolescent students gives your life purpose and represents the core of your being. Therefore, you are constantly striving to improve your practices and strengthen your relationships with your colleagues, your students, and their families.

Each of you traveled a different road before reading and studying this book. Your distinctive school experiences, varied classroom challenges, and numerous personal relationships will color the lens through which you view this work. At the same time, your diverse backgrounds and insights will enrich the group's discussions about collaborative teaching. Please be willing to share your thoughts and listen to your colleagues. Don't be afraid to struggle with the ideas in the book. We certainly did! Many nights we cried through painful memories of flawed instruction or laughed over the funny things our students did in class. Sometimes we could not decide what to write in our team reflections or in this book. Our goal was to create a picture of our teaching that would seem tangible as well as challenge readers to wrestle with their own experiences. Reflection is not a bed of roses, and new ideas have plenty of thorns.

In each section of this professional development guide, you will find a brief introduction followed by reflection questions and action steps. You may choose to journal as you read, using the reflection questions as a guide. Or you may want to use the questions as discussion starters. The action steps range from simple to complex. Choose one or all, but we encourage you to complete the process to

achieve the maximum impact. Action steps will put your reflections into practice and press you forward in your journey to becoming an accomplished middle grades teacher.

PART 1: Building Relationships

CHAPTER 1: Learning to Work with Colleagues

To reach the point where we can authentically collaborate for students' benefit, we must build our team focus through open and honest dialogue. Through these discussions one opinion isn't necessarily better than another, but deeper understanding of what drives a person leads to mutual compassion and compatibility. Such knowledge also helps us to consider multiple perspectives as we work together throughout the school year.

Learning to work together is an essential part of teaming, and teachers must model the unity they expect students to develop. In this chapter, we discuss three critical activities that team members should engage in as they strive to build collegial bonds: developing common goals, examining each other's core beliefs, and identifying the strengths each person brings to the team.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the beliefs about education that you hold most dear? What do you believe is the ultimate purpose of education?
2. What strengths do you have that might benefit a collegial team? What weaknesses do you have that could be minimized by your teammates' skills?
3. What are the benefits of shared responsibilities? What can be seen as frightening?

ACTION STEPS:

- Read the list of questions on page 12 and discuss your responses as a team. List your core beliefs. Explore and share different experiences throughout your teaching career.
- Develop a list of “nonnegotiables” (see page 13). Chart the alignment. Make a separate list of issues in conflict. Agree to research the practices and decide

on the most defensible position, wherever there are conflicts.

- Reexamine your individual core beliefs and restate those you agree on as essential principles for the team in the coming school year. Be specific.
- Use your discussions to develop common procedures for the team. Share these with students and post the list where everyone can see it. Use the topic headings on pages 23–25 as a guide. Revisit your team procedures at least monthly to evaluate progress for both teachers and students.
- Create a team meeting agenda for the week (if you meet daily) or month (if you meet less often). Share the agenda with the principal or other administrators. Invite them to your team meetings. Document your activities and keep these notes in a binder for review.

CHAPTER 2: Show Them How Much You Care

Some might argue that these relationship-building and team-naming activities take precious time away from the curriculum. . . . But year after year we have found that the time and effort we spend getting acquainted with students save us time in the long run. Because students learn to trust us and develop a better understanding of the purpose of learning, they are more willing to engage in deeper educational inquiry.

To teach middle school students effectively, educators must build rapport with them. Young adolescents want to know that we genuinely care about them before they will engage, academically and emotionally. In this chapter, we discuss the significant achievements that are possible when teaching teams develop strong positive relationships with students, parents, and administrators.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What meaningful school experiences do students encounter in your classroom? How do these meaningful experiences enhance and support academics?
2. How do you assess your students' academic and emotional progress at various points in the year?
3. How do you communicate/correspond with parents and administrators about students' behavior and academic progress? How often? Do you have a system in place to encourage and receive two-way communications? Do you contact families only when there is trouble, or do you reach out to share good news as well? Does your communication with parents and administrators

help or hinder your students? How do you know?

ACTION STEPS:

- In preparation for using the team identity process with your students at the beginning of the school year, work with your colleagues to create a name, motto, and qualities that demonstrate your group ethic. Use the Sample Team Concept Memo (page 40) as a guide. Ask colleagues from another team to evaluate your proposal.
- Discuss your current strategies for creating a positive classroom climate. What will you do this year to improve your relationships and the learning environment?
- Interview or survey students about how they prefer to learn. Ask them to reflect on the teaching strategies, group structures, test formats, projects, and other activities that have been particularly effective or ineffective for them in the past. Share this information with your colleagues and determine specific ways that you will collectively and individually address students' needs and interests throughout the year.
- Develop a plan for using dialogue journals (see pages 35-38) to open the lines of communication among students, teachers, and parents.

CHAPTER 3: Let's Get Acquainted

The relationships we build with families go beyond notes and phone calls. Our students' families are welcome additions to our team, and we want to see and hear from them regularly. The best way we've found to involve families and to connect them to our team activities is to invite them to our classrooms.

Although we'd love to claim responsibility for every positive aspect of our teaching relationships, the truth is that we wouldn't be as successful without our school administrators' support. They create so many opportunities to build rapport with students and their families.

Wouldn't it be a dream to have a large team of role models and influential adults to fill your students with knowledge and guidance? Start thinking of administrators and parents as part of your team, and this dream will become a reality! In this chapter, we discuss the critical role that parents and administrators play in teamwork.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What specific communication tools do you use on the first day/week of school, throughout the year, and as the year concludes? Are there opportunities for parents to come to school and interact with their children?
2. Do you find that some parents want to keep school and home separate from each other? What can we do as teachers to change this mind-set?

ACTION STEPS:

- Examine individual and team experiences with reaching out to students' families. Discuss strengths and weaknesses. Brainstorm new ways to connect.
- Research ways to facilitate student-led conferences, including talking to colleagues in other schools about their experiences and reading articles on the topic online. Generate a list of best practices to share and model your own practices.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Are administrators a welcomed presence in your classroom? Even when they arrive unannounced? Have you ever taken the initiative to invite them to your classroom?
2. In your classroom, how can you further support the schoolwide initiatives set up by your administrators?

ACTION STEPS:

- At the end of each grading period, ask your students to write a letter to the administrators describing what they have learned in your classroom.
- Send an invitation or a save-the-date card to the administrators inviting them to join or observe an exciting event in your classroom.

CHAPTER 4: Creating a Culture of Achievement

One of our team's formative goals is establishing an insatiable hunger for learning. We believe the best way to stimulate students' academic appetites is by providing a rich intellectual diet. But first, we have to persuade them to try things they may have found distasteful in the past.

How do you measure the success of a school year? By the number of students with A's in language arts, or by the number of students you've turned on to reading? By the number of perfectly crafted and painted projects, or by the number of students who now have the intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and background knowledge to independently complete a project from start to finish? In this chapter, we discuss the necessity of teaching students how to learn and that the solid foundation for any learner begins with the desire to become a better reader.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. No matter which subject you teach, how do you encourage, value, and model reading in your class?
2. What are some specific strategies you could implement throughout the school year to teach students how to “do” school?
3. How do you motivate students to achieve success inside and outside the classroom? How do your students encourage and motivate each other?

ACTION STEPS:

- Interview students and survey parents to review the learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses of your students. Look for common denominators. Don't settle for easy answers: “Oh, he comes from a broken home.” “Oh, she lives in a public housing project.”
- Use the list of questions on page 75 as a guide to develop a self-evaluation tool for students to track their progress and success in your class and on your team.
- Set an ambitious yet achievable reading goal for your team. Plan for when and how data will be collected, along with the rewards and incentives for reaching the goal.
- Model positive and encouraging dialogue for your students so they will develop the habit of helping and supporting one another. Practice and

discuss your cues with your colleagues and ask for their counsel.

Part II: Connected Content

CHAPTER 5: Cutting the Fluff

We could not fathom how specific standards could unite our teaching practices or guide our instructional planning. As we struggled through the transition period to the standards era, our team meetings provided a forum for examining the mandates professionally and responsibly.

The standards movement has caused many educators to reassess instructional goals and pedagogy. Teaming provides a structure for planning and implementing strategies that immerse students in cross-curricular learning throughout the school day. Meaningful integrated units require attention to detail. In this chapter we discuss the evolution of our interdisciplinary efforts and how the standards movement became the catalyst for improving our collaborative instruction.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What has been the most challenging roadblock in implementing a standards-based curriculum? What have you done to overcome this obstacle?
2. How has the push for higher academic standards benefited you and your students?
3. How could your team integrate instruction to make clear and relevant connections for students and to support learning in each other's classrooms?

ACTION STEPS:

- Discuss curriculum integration experiences on your current team or with previous groups. In your discussion, focus on the advantages and disadvantages of integrated units. In planning for future integration activities, what would you do again? What would you do differently?
- Thinking about your previous integration experiences, which activities were more “fluffy” than substantive? What essential understandings was your unit meant to address? How could you make the fluffy assignments more rigorous

next time? Change one part of the lesson at a time until you are confident that the rigor of the lesson matches the intention of the standard.

- Take some time to map your curriculum (see pages 85–88 for suggestions). Prepare an estimated timeline of the units and, possibly, specific lessons you will be teaching each month. Pencil the units on a yearly calendar. Ask your teammates to do the same, and then compare your calendars. What opportunities for integration leap out at you? Determine how you could plan for rigorous, meaningful integration of these common themes.
- Choose one of the integration opportunities suggested by your curriculum map and plan and implement a brief unit. Afterward, analyze the unit with your teammates, and look for evidence of effectiveness in meeting the standards for each content area.

CHAPTER 6: Unifying the Curriculum

Perhaps our students had always been capable of making deep connections among the concepts they were learning, but we had not provided them with the right focus. The same standards movement we originally rebelled against had helped us improve our practices and provide a stronger foundation for student achievement. In the process, we discovered that effective interdisciplinary teaching is more messy than neat.

Too often, the school environment artificially departmentalizes learning. As adults we realize that the concepts we teach in our assigned subject areas can be applied to other content areas and to daily life. However, our students may not always know why they are learning a concept, much less how it relates to anything they care about. This chapter shows the importance of helping students make connections beyond our individual classrooms.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the global concepts, the big-picture ideas, that you believe your students should know when they leave your class? What knowledge will benefit them well into their adult lives?
2. Which standards in each core curriculum guide seem to overlap traditional content barriers?
3. How might your team weave these cross-content standards into lessons throughout the school year?

ACTION STEPS:

- Examine grade-level and subject standards to identify universal themes that could link interdisciplinary units.
- Revisit your team curriculum maps to determine how these themes might be revisited throughout the school year through ongoing investigations.
- Once you have identified three to four global themes, start a team binder of artifacts that relate to the major themes. Collect newspaper articles, fiction titles, word problems, science experiments, music, poems, cartoons, or any reference materials that might be useful when teaching the concept in any subject area. Continue to add to this collection throughout the year, and note how each piece of the collection could be used in your lessons.
- Search curriculum guides for specific learning objectives that can be reinforced during integrated activities. Discuss and plan ways to incorporate these learning objectives.
- Set aside time in your team’s weekly agenda to plan for cross-curricular integration. Keep notes of your ideas for integration and connect new ideas to previous ones until a well-rounded unit of study is formed.

CHAPTER 7: “Everything Is Related”

Teaming helps us maintain our focus and assist our students in realizing that the concepts we study in class now will benefit them when they become adults. Unless we make the connections for our students in every class, they will not see how the themes they are studying relate to one another, and they will not grasp the abstract ideas that unify these topics. When our students begin to see the connections for themselves, we are satisfied that our teamwork has truly benefited them.

In this chapter, we share the positive impact that curriculum integration can have on classroom management and on students with special needs. When students begin to view learning as more than a series of activities designed to meet the requirements of a specific class, they become curious, engaged learners who notice academic connections everywhere.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you determine whether you have met the individual needs of your

students? Who is responsible for monitoring the progress of each student?

2. Describe your team's system for addressing the various learning needs of each student. What part of the system is working? What needs to be improved?
3. How can your team plan instruction that is interesting, engaging, and relevant to all students in all subject areas?

ACTION STEPS:

- Keep anecdotal notes of comments students make during class, which provide evidence that their learning is crossing the traditional boundaries of content classes (such as the conversation between Porter and Andrew on pages 120–121). During your team meetings, reflect with your colleagues about the implications of the students' remarks. Celebrate successes and plan future interdisciplinary integration efforts based on the most effective approaches.
- Collect and review samples of students' work, seeking evidence of their understanding of interdisciplinary connections and thematic concepts.
- Review your team's assessments for evidence of connected content.
- Create activities, assignments, and assessments together to ensure that content standards and objectives from each content area are covered in your integrated units.
- Review your school's policies and procedures for including special needs students in regular classes. For example, do the special education teachers in your school assist students as Kathryn does, teaching them specific strategies for learning and managing information? Or do your special education teachers work with small groups independent of the core classrooms? There are many possibilities. Create an action plan for deeper inclusion so all students will be supported as they move toward academic independence and can reach the standards required of your courses.

PART III: Reflective Teaching

CHAPTER 8: Looking in the Mirror

As educators, we do not dictate all the circumstances of our professional lives. We can't control our students' family backgrounds. We can't mandate the curricula. We can't always choose our room assignments or our

schedules. The only thing we can truly control is the quality of our teaching.

Reflective teaching is similar to entering a department store dressing room in the middle of May to buy a bathing suit for a dream beach trip in June. In our minds we are thinking about all the fun we are going to have, when suddenly we see bulges and dimples in our mirror image. The sand and surf that seemed so inviting moments before now scratch and pinch with irritation. We are tempted to turn away from the view.

Celebrating our students' successes is easy and rewarding. As teachers we live for those "aha!" moments, but what about classroom experiences that fall flat? Are we brave enough to confront those images too? Reflective teaching gives us the confidence to gaze into the mirror of our instruction and examine our imperfections, knowing that our students will be the beneficiaries of our honest appraisals.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. You may fear judgment if you share "the good, the bad, and the ugly." However, deep reflection depends on honesty and trust. Before sharing your experiences, consider the parts you are most concerned about revealing. You may wish to set some ground rules with your colleagues to guide your discussions. Talk about how reflection will benefit each of you and your students.
2. Discuss what "mastery" looks like in your subject area. How does your teaching take students to a deeper level of understanding, moving beyond superficial knowledge?
3. Maintaining a balanced life is vital for teachers who want to be effective throughout their careers. How does your family view your career? How does your professional life impact your personal relationships? If you were to make one change in your life, what would it be?

ACTION STEPS:

- Compare and contrast two samples of student work. One sample should demonstrate mastery to you, and the other should demonstrate average learning. How are these samples alike? How are they different? What elements of your instruction led to the mastery? What could you have done differently so the average sample would reach the mastery level? For more reflection, use the four questions at the bottom of page 140.
- Share the work samples with peers. Ask if they consider the samples mastery

level. If so, ask for one suggestion to push the work to the next level. If not, ask for suggestions for improvement.

- Read the section on page 140 about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification focus on evidentiary learning. There are six questions to consider before designing a lesson. Plan a lesson and then videotape it in action. Watch the lesson several times. During the first viewing, jot down instant impressions. During the second viewing, revisit the questions on page 140. Did you meet your goals? What evidence do you find of mastery? Did students gain a deeper knowledge of the subject content and standards? What is your evidence? Did students relate the content to prior learning and other subjects? What is your evidence? What would you do differently if you repeated this lesson? Why? Consider sharing the video with your colleagues and asking for their feedback.
- Pair up with a colleague and visit each other's classroom. Choose one student to observe during the entire class period. Consider time on task, level of engagement, mastery of material, student's rapport with the teacher and with peers, etc. Afterward, discuss your impressions with your colleague. If you are very brave, ask the students who were observed to share their opinions about the lesson.
- Plan for rejuvenation. Take some time to relax, have fun, and forget about school. Laugh. Hug the people who are important to you.

CHAPTER 9: Catch Them Before They Fall

When all of us in education consider ourselves members of a team, we will be able to stop focusing solely on our individual classrooms and start understanding our roles in shaping the education of the whole child. We must work together if we want to improve the productivity and culture of our nation twenty, fifty, or one hundred years from now. The future is in our hands.

When we begin to understand that our teaching directly impacts the future of our country and our world, we may begin to view each child differently. We often hear the story of an adult whose life was changed profoundly by a teacher. You are that teacher! Of course you are exhausted; teaching is hard work. However, when teachers work together, they can lighten the load. Each teacher brings ideas to the table that could be the answer a child needs.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about a former student who slipped through the cracks at your school. What interventions did you try? What would you do differently? How did you process the pain of the experience?
2. What elements of your team would directly benefit a current child in crisis? What types of things could your team set up to prevent future problems?

ACTION STEPS:

- Draw a T-chart. On one side, write the name of a child in crisis whom you helped succeed. List all the characteristics you remember about this student and all the intervention strategies you tried. On the other side of the chart, write the name of a child in crisis who slipped through the cracks despite your efforts. List all the characteristics you remember about this student and all the intervention strategies you tried.

With a peer, discuss the two situations and determine what you would do differently today. Ask your colleague for advice about related professional development you could pursue. Consult other teaching colleagues and administrators as necessary.

- With your team members, compile a list of up to five students who need intervention. For each child, write down all the barriers to success. Next to each barrier, list suggestions of specific strategies that the team could try to help the student overcome the identified obstacles. If there are barriers you can't overcome as a team, consider other people or organizations you could contact for assistance. Create an intervention plan for these five students. Reflect each week about the progress the students are making.

CHAPTER 10: Final Thoughts

Teamwork taught us to appreciate differences and deepened our understanding of how every teacher and student can contribute to the academic, social, and emotional development of other team members. Teamwork showed us the wisdom of continually probing our practices for evidence of success. It required us to be vulnerable, to change ineffective habits, and to challenge our assumptions about students, their families, and our colleagues.

We are ever reflective of our practice—and now our writing. We do not have all of the answers. Our failures far outnumber our successes, but we still press forward believing that no child should be left behind. We believe that dream is possible when we work together.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Read the vignette about Angela and Gloria on pages 150–160. Who is the successful student, Angela or Gloria? Explain your answer.
2. Ponder the quote by Robert Kennedy on page 160. Then ask yourself, Why not?
3. Answer a question from the list on page 160. Write a letter to a student who would fit this question. Consider how your answer should impact your teaching.

ACTION STEPS:

- Write yourself a letter. Date the letter one year from today's date. In the letter, set three professional goals: (1) as a teacher, (2) as a team member, and (3) as a learner. Write specific action steps for each goal. Seal the letter. In a year, read the letter and reflect on what you have achieved.
- Consider sending us a reflection about the book. We would love to hear from you and your team. What would you like to discuss? What did you try? How did it go? What did you like? What did you dislike? Do you have ideas about how we could improve our practices and reflections? You can contact us at 3teamers@gmail.com.

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