Chapter 4. How Leaders Strengthen Adult Professional Culture (APC) and Achieve Collective Efficacy
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I have been using the word “role” [in describing the new role of the principal], but what I really have in mind is a trio of parts, the most central of which is learning leader – one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis….So the principal’s role is to lead the school’s teachers to improve their teaching, while learning alongside them about what works and what doesn’t.

--Michael Fullan 2014

It seems like on every level. These [highly effective schools] were organized with teachers professional needs in mind…..teachers constantly work with and learn from each other. The schools are designed to build collective capacity…..]

-Susan Moore Johnson, 2020

Four years of public school teaching…and ten years as a principal…convinces me that the nature of the relationships among adults who inhabit a school has more to do with a school’s quality and character, with the professionalism of its teachers than any other factor.

-Roland Barth 1985

Since Roland Barth’s comment, 35 years of research have proven him correct. This chapter is about that research, and more tellingly, the practical knowledge of how effective leaders build strong Adult Professional Cultures through their daily interactions with others.

I. History

I had an experience in 1982 that forever changed my view on school improvement. I was asked to give a workshop in two schools in the same district on formative assessment.

In the first school, the workshop was warmly received, and when I returned two weeks later, teachers had been trying out many of the strategies enthusiastically. I covertly patted myself on the back.

At the second school, there was lackluster response, and no one was trying out anything as far as I could see two weeks later when I returned. I wracked my brain to see what I had done differently or poorly at the second school, and soon realized that the reaction in neither school had anything to do with me (one of many humbling experiences in my years as a staff developer). It had to do with the adult culture of each school. The second school was a place where teachers were eager for learning, in close and frequent
communication with one another, and constantly experimenting with new techniques to get better. Soon I got some powerful back-up for that perception from another experience.

I was a member of a magazine club that same year with Roland Barth, Kim Marshall, Matt King and Bill Dandridge. We would rotate to each other’s houses once a month and each shared an article in which we thought there was something significant about teaching, learning, or leadership. In the fall of that year, Roland shared Judith Warren Little’s 1982 article in *The American Education Research Journal* titled: “Norms of Collegiality and Experimentation: Workplace Conditions of School Success”. What an eye opener!

Little was a descendent of the Effective School researchers of the 70s, renowned scholars like Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and Wilbur Brookover who had identified schools that did well for children despite seemingly crippling neighborhood and family conditions.

The Effective Schools research came up with “Effectiveness Factors” like high expectations; clean, safe environment; strong leadership; helpful, no doubt, and eye-opening to gainsay the Coleman Report (1966) of the previous decade that indicated schools were helpless in the face of negative socio-economic family and neighborhood conditions.

Similar to those scholars, Little identified schools that succeeded against the odds and compared them to those that did not. She went in, however, with a different question. She didn’t examine aspects of their programs, she asked how the adults treated one another. So, she would hang out in the teachers’ lounge and see what people talked about. She would arrive early and stay late and see what the adults were doing and with whom. What she found was that the schools that did better for children had regular patterns of adult interaction that she could observe:

1. Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice (common language)
2. Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together
3. Teachers regularly teach one another about specific teaching practices
4. Teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful (if potentially frightening) critiques of their teaching by peers as well as administrators

When she was done, she decided she needed a word to define this four-attribute environment, and choose “Collegiality” as the word. Thus, a professionally defined term was born. It has, unfortunately been dissipated in the precision of its meaning, though widely used these days.

In her 1989 study, Susan Rosenholtz added a fifth factor to these behavior patterns of adults in effective schools: teachers’ willingness to ask for and give one another help. (Giving advice can be as risky as asking for it.)

To go back to my magazine club, we were all quite taken with Judith Warren Little’s findings, probably because they reinforced what we’d all observed informally in our own practice. And it became an incentive for me and my colleagues at Research for Better Teaching to study conditions among the adults

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1 “In the relatively successful schools, teachers appear to have built what Lortie (1975) terms a ‘shared technical culture’; their experiences lead us to conclude that the more concrete the language known to and commanded by teachers and others for the description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of teaching practice, the greater the probable utility of the interaction and the greater the potential influence on teachers’ practices.” – Little 1982
2 Professions have common terms for important concepts that are commonly understood by members of the profession. It would be helpful if we honored the original four-attribute definition she provided for us.
in schools where we worked, and to begin formally assisting leaders in developing these conditions. It also led to my first venture into publishing in the culture field with Matt King in *Educational Leadership* Magazine (“Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures,” March 1985).

**Precursors**

Willard Waller (1932), Phillip Jackson (1968), Dan Lortie (1974), and Seymour Sarason (1982) had written about the conditions of teaching in ways that made clear what the obstacles were to strong adult culture: isolation, privatism, individualism, teachers’ social status, the “dailiness” of school life etc... Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller (1979) were the first authors I came across who took on the actual aspects of *positive* adult culture that they saw as healthy and required for school improvement. Next came Judith Warren Little (1982). Simultaneously, two widely-read books on corporate culture, one by Peters and Waterman and the other by Deal and Kennedy, both in 1982, started a cascade of books in the business world about organizational culture and its connection to company success.

Educational studies of adult culture started rolling out more frequently in the 90s (*see bibliography*). So, for at least 25 years, we had major authors advocating for the importance of Adult Professional Culture, for example Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, and also some excellent how-to guides produced for educators by practitioners like Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015.

The argument was simple: it’s a cause and effect chain. Strong Adult Professional Culture (APC) leads to more teaching expertise in more classrooms for more children more of the time, because it creates the kind of deep collaboration and use of data that supports constant learning about teaching practice. Thus, High-Expertise Teaching leads to better learning for students.

Finally, with the Daly et al study (2014) we got direct school-based data on the connection between strong cultures and student achievement. These studies also built a strong foundation for the argument that would come later: that the range and sophistication of teaching expertise is far larger and more complex than the voting public and policy-makers realize. This complexity explained why deeply collaborative cultures were necessary for the kind of problem-solving in which true professionals engage. They help each other analyze the nature of learning issues and respond with the correct choice from their repertoires rather than applying some “best practice” (*see “Nature of Professional Knowledge”, Chapter 15*).

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3 Reading their ground-breaking book and comparing it to current literature on culture brings to mind, “The more things change, the more they remain the same”. Change the 1979 date and their book reads as if it were written yesterday.
II. How Elements of Adult Professional Culture Work Together

Collating these decades of research, my colleagues and I assembled the following list of most frequently cited elements of strong Adult Professional Culture.

### Strong Adult Professional Culture: 12 Norms

#### LEARNING ORGANIZATION
1. Frequent teaching in the presence of other adults (Public Teaching)
2. Safety to take risks, be vulnerable in front of colleagues
3. Constant learning about high-expertise teaching
4. Environment of reflection with habits of mindful inquiry

#### TEAMS & DATA
5. Deep collaboration and deliberate design for interdependent work and joint responsibility for student results
6. Non-defensive self-examination of teaching practice in relation to student results
7. Constant use of data to re-focus teaching

#### PASSION & PRESS
8. Urgency and press to reach all students and do better for our disadvantaged students
9. Commitment to implement “Smart is something you can get” in classroom practice, class structures, and school policies and procedures

#### HUMANE CARING ENVIRONMENT
10. Human environment of caring, appreciation and recognition, getting to know one another, traditions we look forward to

#### CRITICAL FEEDBACK
11. Demanding and high standards for development towards high-expertise teaching for all teachers
12. Honest, open communication and ability to have difficult conversations

In the next section we will examine these norms in detail and their relationship to one another. What we will see is that some of these observable elements are observable practices, but the practices spring from beliefs and attitudes that go side by side with them and make the practices possible.
Learning Organization

1. Frequent teaching in the presence of other adults (Public Teaching)
2. Safety to take risks, be vulnerable in front of colleagues
3. Constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching
4. Environment of reflection with habits of Mindful Inquiry

Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1990) coined the term “public teaching” 30 years ago. It refers to teachers teaching in the presence of peers and having productive conversations afterward.

Richard Elmore (2008) wrote some years ago that “it is virtually impossible for teachers to improve their practice if they can’t watch each other teach”. There are many echoes of that sentiment back over the decades. For example, Heibert, Gallimore and Stigler wrote in 2003 (Ed Week, Nov 6, 2003);

*The process starts by learning to analyze the details of ordinary classroom instruction, with all its warts and foibles, and then learning to see more effective ways of teaching. But to do this, to even begin down this path, teachers must be willing to open their doors. They must be willing to allow others to use their lessons as data that can be examined and discussed… a professional activity open to collective observations, study, and improvement.*

In our files we have numerous re-statements of these positions going back 34 years. Moreover, there is evidence that when peer observation is frequent, student achievement rises beyond expectations (see the decades-long track record of Elmont Jr.-Sr. High school in Nassau County, N.Y. featured on the Ed, Trust website).

In order to support frequent peer observation, however, teachers must believe they can be vulnerable in front of colleagues without being judged or disdained (#2, safety to take risks). They know that some lessons will not go as planned. That is inevitable; mistakes are opportunities for learning, and surprises are routine!

Safety to be vulnerable is probably the liberator. Up to that point, it’s the leader’s competence that is basic. If my leader does not have basic competence to keep the wheels turning (student entry and dismissal, cafeteria behavior) then I won’t have trust, to say nothing of respect. The same goes for having my back with parent complaints. But the take-off point for the improvement of teaching in a building is willingness to be vulnerable in front of one another so we can go deeply into problem-solving and the inventive thinking and sharing among staff that goes with that.

In addition, staff members must jointly acknowledge the complexity of teaching and the huge range of knowledge and skills that are continually learned over one’s career. Learning is never done (#3, constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching).

So, 1, 2, and 3 above are interactive and mutually supportive. They are, in fact, necessary conditions for one another.

#4, environment of reflection with habits of Mindful Inquiry, is a rare commodity and hard to come by these days in American schools. Hargreaves and Fullan have a wonderful section in *Professional Capital* (2012) in which they review the literature on reflection starting with Donald Schoen’s books in
the 1980s. Schoen distinguished between “reflection on action” and “reflection in action” while making the point that both types are characteristic of true professions.

**Teams and Data**

5. Deep collaboration and deliberate design for interdependent work and joint responsibility for student results
6. Non-defensive self-examination of teaching practice in relation to student results
7. Constant use of data to re-focus teaching

5, 6 and 7 have similar symbiotic relationships as 1–4 above. #5, **deep collaboration and deliberate design of educator work groups** (PLCs) for interdependent work and joint responsibility for student results, requires the structure and time for such interdependent work. But as Hargreaves and Fullan point out, structures do not inherently induce new behavior among adults. One finds strong evidence for this point in “A Study of School Re-Structuring” (1995). Newman and Wehlage’s data bears witness to the inadequacy of structural changes by themselves—in this case, small high schools which at the time were believed to produce better student results. What matters is how the adults relate to one another and to students within those new structures. Many schools achieve quality relations among staff members and with students without changing structure, for example Brockton High School in Massachusetts which has 4,300 students.

The rubber meets the road on deep collaboration when teachers share student work openly and do error analysis (Saphier 2003). An English department chair friend of mine once said that sharing student work was like being transparent about all your shortcomings: your colleagues might at any minute see your deficiencies through what your students couldn’t yet do, especially if their students could. So, one must be **non-defensive in the manner of #6** above to do this with colleagues, and unrestrained by a first worry like: “But what if it’s mostly my kids who cannot yet write with voice?”

#7, **constant use of data to re-focus teaching**, means being skilled at error analysis for student stumbling blocks, misconceptions, knowledge gaps. And it means commitment to design re-teaching loops for groups of students who didn’t get it the first time around. This is **collaborative design of re-teaching**, which is why teachers learn from and stretch one another more in a Common Planning Time meeting where their talk shows the commitment and non-defensiveness of a strong Adult Professional Culture.

Hargreaves and Fullan’s main point, however, is that a truly **professional** environment prizes time to analyze and ponder choices, and it deliberately structures adult interactions to create that reflection. That is why teachers in countries with advanced education systems like Finland and Singapore have less required face-to-face instruction time with students. American schools have teachers in a rat race of activity and testing that makes it very difficult for a teacher to reflect on choices and practice.

“Reflection-in-action” morphed into “action research” in the language of the 80s and 90s (Sagor, 1993). Hargreaves and Fullan add the word “mindfulness” to their analysis because reflection that leads to good decisions that are matched to students requires the ability (and the mental space) to be mindful of what one is doing and why…as well as ask oneself what other choices might be possible.

The connection to culture builders is this: it is incumbent upon culture builders to create a climate and the habits of practice for “inquiry” between and among the adults.
Our point is that mindfulness must be cultivated and that the norms and conditions of work must deliberately foster it. So, it’s important that teachers and leaders also engage in a third kind of reflection…reflection about the things in their environment that distract them from what’s important, that get them so immersed in busy activities there is no time left to think, and that are an endless set of responses and reactions to other people’s agendas instead of actions driven by purposes that are teachers’ own. Reflection about action drive you to change the context and conditions of what you practice, so that your practice can improve a lot more.

Reflective practice isn’t just an act of will or the result of encouragement. You have to build it into people’s practice, make it part of their day. When reflection becomes more structured and systematic, it turns into what German émigré Kurt Lewin first termed action research in 1946. ....Action research and inquiry are part of the job, integral to teaching, a stance that teachers take, a key part of what it means to be a professional and to improve practice on a continuing basis. [Emphasis not in original.]

-Hargreaves and Fullan, Professional Capital

And that is the challenge for leaders: to make it so.

Passion and Press

8. Urgency and press to reach all students and particularly do better for our disadvantaged students
9. Commitment to “Smart is something you can get” and bringing that commitment alive in classroom teaching practice, class structures, and school policies and procedures

#8, urgency and the press to reach all students and do better for our disadvantaged students, is a commitment that drives constant teacher learning when it is widely felt throughout a staff. This urgency is built through a combination of data and persistent moral stances by leaders. Data properly parsed can reveal starkly that children of color and children living in poverty are performing well below advantaged children. (See Capper and Frattura equity audit, 2008.) The default position of teachers who are not challenged is that this performance gap is normal, given these children’s “lower ability and social disadvantages. So, there’s really nothing we can do about it”. So how does a leader build urgency about the need to reach these students and accelerate their learning?

First there is the class roster, class grade book, and identifying students who are falling through the cracks. “What are you doing about Imelda?” Then there is tactfully challenging the assumptions of such teachers as individuals as well as challenging the goals of the whole staff repeatedly. “We can accelerate these kids learning. And if we use data and each other’s ideas, we can achieve more for disadvantaged students than we ever believed before!”

Urgency and ownership by teachers is a pivot point for closing the achievement gap. Without it, teachers can easily default to blaming society, families, and students themselves. So how can we engage our faculties in this belief that it is within our capacity and is our obligation to accelerate the learning of our lagging students, especially those of color and of poverty?
One entry point is **#9, explicit professional development** for teachers on the “myth of the bell curve” which includes self-examination of one’s belief system as the starting point. This self-examination can support and push the urgency.


“Smart is something you can get” then becomes the strategy for implementing that urgency through changes in classroom practice, class structures, and school policies and procedures (see “Expectations” chapter of *The Skillful Teacher*, 2018 and *High Expectations Teaching*, 2017). That chapter profiles the specific teacher behaviors, use of language, and classroom practices and routines one strives to learn in order to implement this stance. It is quite a different skill set, but a skill set nonetheless. To pursue #8, passion and press, we act specifically in known arenas of classroom life to convince students they can grow their ability, and to show them how.

**Caring and Consideration**

10. Human environment of caring, appreciation and recognition, getting to know one another, traditions we look forward to

**Appreciation and Recognition (#10)** are not bound up with a cluster like the other elements of strong culture, but are important nevertheless. Management literature as well as reader’s personal experience will be clear that one gets significant return on employee productivity if their efforts are noticed and explicitly recognized by others.

**Critical Feedback**

11. Demanding and high standards for teaching expertise for all teachers

12. Honest, open communication and ability to have difficult conversations

**#11, demanding and high standards for teaching expertise for all teachers** requires common agreement about what high standards of good teaching look and sound like. Achieving this clarity does not fall only on the shoulders of administrators and that of instructional coaches. To administrators and coaches, however, *does* fall the obligation to bring to teachers’ attention the impact of their skills and their skill gaps on student learning. One can’t shy away from **honest feedback (#12)** which will sometimes provoke difficult conversations. And to be capable of exercising this honesty, administrators and coaches must first develop their capacity to notice important teaching and learning events, develop common language and concept systems for doing so, and skill for capturing evidence of the behaviors and the impact on student learning they wish to bring to a teacher’s attention. The paucity of this expertise and the training to acquire it is a significant problem.

This problem is a great shame, because in every decade (Bellon and Bellon in the 90s, Marzano in the 2000s, and Hattie in the 2010s) published meta-analyses of the research on teaching always comes up with the same constellations of skills. Over and over again, the effect size of “feedback”, “student climate”, “formative assessment”, and on and on…are confirmed and re-affirmed. Yet, somehow the popular press keeps repeating that “educators cannot agree on what good teaching is.”

In our own detailed exposition of known and validated teaching skills (*The Skillful Teacher: 7th Edition*, 2018), we have never eliminated anything, only added nuances and the occasional new skills (e.g.,
“Making Students’ Thinking Visible” in 2008). “Feedback” was present in the 1979 edition and is obviously not outdated. It shows up again just as powerfully in John Hattie’s 2008 synthesis.

John Hattie (2017) has used the term “collective efficacy” to refer to how adults act when they get outstanding results. What we want to do here is get inside the “black box” of collective efficacy. We have traced the history of APC as an indispensable companion of school improvement. Collective efficacy is what results when one has such a culture.

There are excellent books about “collective efficacy” and other terms given to the concept; collaborative culture, collegial relationships, interdependent workplaces. These books highlight practices found in school organizations that focus the energy and commitment of educators in the most productive directions to such a degree that they get extraordinary results for children. But where did that energy come from?

It has always seemed to me that something was missing in these books. Dozens of excellent practices like interim assessments (Marshall, 2006), a hierarchy of interventions (DuFour et al, 2010), high functioning PLCs (DuFour and DuFour, 2012), and systematic use of improvement science (Bryk et al, 2015), don’t spring into being and operate successfully because we name them or even if we describe the behaviors within them in detail. The structures that support these practices do, of course, require the right set-up, that is, the time and place for them to function. But most of all, they require educators to operate within them in ways not called for previously in the workplace; being non-defensive, being vulnerable, being extremely curious, setting egos aside to act collectively as a team, doing deep analysis of student errors and difficulties, and being determined to close the achievement gap. Somehow leaders made it safe to act in these ways and issued irresistible invitations to join. How did they do that? What they do is way beyond structures and protocols. It is about understanding emotions, developing values and commitments, and carefully cultivating relationships.

III. What Leaders Do

About the best leaders the people say, ‘We did it ourselves’. 

-Lao Tzu

To add to Lao Tzu’s statement above, the people also did it because someone convinced them they should and they could. It is the leaders who do the convincing. It is the leaders who create the conditions that lead to collective efficacy and continuous improvement. That is our topic here—a drill-down examination of how skillful leaders build a strong Adult Professional Culture (APC) of collective efficacy. But first, let us look at the behaviors and structures that foundation brings forth. Hattie’s finding, of a 1.57 effect

See Donahoo, 2017; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2010; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995
size in student gains that schools can achieve when they possess collective efficacy means gains far beyond anything produced by other variables. Twenty years before, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) gave us the image of a mysterious black box inside of which was a dynamic power for advancing student achievement. They opened the box and found “formative assessment” inside.

I’d like to borrow Black and Wiliam’s image here, because “collective efficacy” is just such a black box, but we do know what is inside. The output of the black box isn’t just great student results, it’s a particular kind of school organization. Elsewhere I’ve called it a strong Adult Professional Culture (Saphier and King, 1985; Saphier, 2014). But that culture has been a bit of a black box as well. We know what it looks like when it is strong. It has behaviors and practices that make the school a powerful engine for constant improvement. We can describe in considerable detail what each of these practices looks like in operation. But what did leaders do in their daily conduct of business to move from here to there? That is the new black box.

The Means

*We have never seen a school that achieved anything significant for students without a good leader.*

-McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006

Leaders make the key difference in successful schools (Fink and Resnick, 2000; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008; Bryk et al, 2009; Louis et al, 2010; Daly et al, 2015; Ingersoll and Doherty and Sirinides, 2017) and the difference is that the adult culture is strong. That culture leads to more good teaching for more children in more classrooms more of the time. High-Expertise Teaching\(^5\) in all its range and complexity leads to better student results. But what behaviors did the leaders execute in their everyday practice to make all that happen?

School leadership literature repeatedly identifies relational trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002) as the *sine qua non* for high-gain schools. Not coincidently, these qualities lead to feelings of safety and trust for students as well (LaCour et al, 2017). But in between trust and the practices of strong APC is the mystery of what leaders do to build the trust and set those practices.

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5 We define High-Expertise Teaching quite broadly here as anything a teacher does to improve the probability of intended learning. This includes such widely different skills as climate and community building amongst students, deep collaboration with colleagues, error analysis of student work, and teaching students to act out of the Growth Mindset (Saphier, Haley-Speca, and Gower, 2018).
What is inside the mysterious black box of what leaders do so the school develops the ability to secure breakthrough results for students? We think it goes like this:

**How it Works: What Leaders do to Build Strong Adult Professional Culture (APC)**

Leaders build trust with their faculty. This trust enables them to advance key beliefs among faculty members. There are three such key beliefs. The first we have already mentioned.

Everyone us can get better. (I can. I must.)

That belief is enabled by seeing there is, in fact, quite a bit more to learn no matter how experienced or competent a teacher already is. Thus:

The knowledge and skills base for High-Expertise Teaching is very large, and no matter how experienced or competent I am, I haven’t been prepared in significant parts of it. And some items in this knowledge base are more important than others.

Finally, a third belief gives us a sense of urgency and obligation to reach all the students, not just some.

“Smart is something you can get.” The bell curve of ability as innate and fixed is wrong. We can accelerate the learning of students who are behind. It’s my job to get students to believe the above, act from that belief, and I can acquire the tools to do so.
Thus, we can wind up with a craving to learn more and a rationale for collaboration because of the recognition that “I can’t do all this learning alone”. Deep collaboration is necessary, but that collaboration derives from the preceding beliefs.

These three beliefs are crucial because they generate the drive, the humility, the confidence plus the moral obligation to engage in all the practices we already know high-gain faculties do; e.g., frequent formative assessments, excellent use of data, re-teaching to students who don’t get it the first time around, the relentless pursuit of learning for all students, deep collaboration, a rigorous curriculum, getting students to believe in themselves, and so on. Staff members won’t be willing to do all these things unless they believe they should, they can, and that they will get results. They also need to believe it will be safe to make mistakes along the way. And finally, they need access to skills in our professional knowledge base beyond what they have learned in teacher prep programs or local hit-or-miss PD.

**Here’s a summary of the logic:** Trust gives the leader the respect and the credibility to be listened to and followed when he/she advances the beliefs above and the twelve practices of strong Adult Professional Culture. And we know that when such a culture is present, students do better. They do better because the teaching and learning in each classroom is always improving.

I’d like to acknowledge first that there are many strategies and skills associated with initiating and managing improvement projects that are examined effectively by other authors, like building a guiding coalition (Kotter, 2012). Here, we are delving into the foundation of adult relationships that empower all the excellent skills of change management, not the details of change management itself. These relationships are, indeed, the *sine qua non* of implementing the instructional improvements advocated in recent decades.

**IV. The Foundations**

**Trust**

When collective efficacy is present, we have a whole faculty feeling effective, that is, able to accomplish something they want for students, and aiming at the same thing they want, presumably better student achievement for all and equity for students of color and students living in poverty. How on earth do they get that to happen, especially if the culture of the school already has a history of isolation, artistic independence, cliques, low-expectations, or preciousness, (“We’re already great”)?

We know that successful schools, especially for children of poverty, play out this deep collaboration and non-defensiveness by doing many things in common: having common curriculum targets; common analysis of student data from recent work (formative assessments) frequently—meaning daily or weekly—not just of big assessments every 6 weeks: re-teaching to the students who didn’t get it the first time around; common planning time; common benchmarks assessments.

These common practices do, indeed, rely on setting up the time, the schedules, and the assessments and the protocols associated with them. But successful collaboration calls for far more than that. To do all this work in common and in close collaboration, teachers need to live out two beliefs: 1) it is safe to be vulnerable in front of their colleagues (and vulnerable we will be, indeed, when we put our students’ work on the table in front of one another), and 2) we have to work collaboratively because we all need to get better…and we need each other for that.
In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2005), Lencioni highlights this safety to be vulnerable as the *sine qua non* for effective teams. “I trust simply that I won’t be humiliated or lose respect of colleagues if I present problems, ask for help or acknowledge my struggles.”

Principals can only create this environment if they can employ the soft skills for establishing trust, first in themselves as the leader, and then amongst members of the organization. Like “common vision”, “trust” is widely acknowledged in the literature of leadership (e.g., Bryk and Schneider, 2002).

But two items are missing from this literature:

1. Trust that what?
2. What leaders do in daily practice to build it

We often do this as an exercise with school leaders. We ask them to finish the sentence stem “trust that what?” in groups and make a list of what they expect a trusted leader to do. Here is what we usually get:

**Trust that what?**

1. I trust that you are competent:
   - by staying on top of essential operations
   - by handling crises effectively
   - as an instructional leader

2. I trust that you think I am a worthwhile person because:
   - you consistently notice and comment on the things I am doing well
   - you acknowledge my effort and contributions

3. I trust that you will make it safe for us by:
   - making yourself vulnerable
   - creating an environment where it is safe to be vulnerable in front of other, make mistakes and ask for help
   - acknowledging what you don’t know and where you need help
   - righting wrongs, apologizing, making restitution
   - acknowledging mistakes
   - showing loyalty by giving credit freely, acknowledging others, not gossiping about anyone behind their back
   - holding yourself accountable and sharing how you’ll communicate how you’re doing
   - being a constant learner with us and in front of us
   - protecting us from toxic behavior

4. I trust that you’ll be honest, meaning you will:
   - give me honest feedback about my performance
   - talk straight, let people know where you stand, use simple language, call things as they are and not leave false impressions
   - create transparency, err on the side of disclosure
   - confront reality, take issues head on, even undiscussables, lead courageously in conversations
   - assume agreements are clear, renegotiate if necessary
   - be transparent and forthcoming with information about what’s going on, how processes work and how decisions are made
5. I trust your integrity, that is, that your motives are for the interest of the children, not your own career advancement because you:
   • stand up for important values
   • keep your moral compass
   • maintain urgency for what needs to be done
   • keep your promises and follow-through on your commitments

6. I trust that you will act courageously by:
   • holding yourself and us all accountable
   • protecting us from initiative overload
   • dealing with toxic behavior

7. I trust that you make legitimate decisions because you:
   • solicit input
   • explain how our input was used and why
   • can set limits and say “no”
   • make decisions for the good of the school

8. I trust that you will deliver results:
   • by highlighting small victories
   • by getting the right things done

9. I trust you will show me respect by:
   • doing active listening
   • hearing out different points of view
   • valuing my time
   • having my back
   • keeping confidences
   • sharing difficult information because you think I can get better and deserve the chance
   • not making inferences about my intent without checking them out with me

10. I trust that you will act in a caring and compassionate way by:
    • being generous
    • going the extra mile to show consideration to individuals beyond formal requirements
    • being interested in my life outside of school

   -Assembled from writings of Bryk, 2010; Covey, 2014; Saphier, 2017

Number 7 above, clarity and legitimacy in decision-making, is an important element of Adult Professional Culture, because if it is not present, that is, if teachers do not believe that decision-making in the school is legitimate, then trust in the leader is impossible and the whole culture teeters.

Legitimate decision-making (Saphier, Pierson, and Bigda-Peyton, 2020) does not mean democratic voting or teacher input to every decision. Teachers don’t want to be involved in every decision; they want to focus on their classrooms. But they do want a say in decisions that impact the conditions of their work.
“Legitimacy” is a term borrowed from political science. It means that citizens/members of the organization believe that the process for arriving at decisions is fair, known, and appropriate.

More than legitimate decision-making goes into building trust; but trust in leaders is the well-spring for developing a culture of trust among colleagues. Therefore, legitimate decision-making is the starting point for a leader who wants to build a thriving Adult Professional Culture. (See Chapter 5, How to Make Decisions that Stay Made.)

The pillars of trust above indicate specific behaviors, like keeping one’s promises. A leader could self-assess on these metrics, or ask faculty members to provide their confidence ratings on the items. That could be useful (and sometimes startling) data for goal-setting. But in addition, there are some behaviors that successful trust builders do beyond the basics listed above.

- Ensures staff gets to know one other as people
- Is present very frequently in halls and classrooms
- Shows vulnerability himself/herself, apologizes when appropriate, and makes it safe for others to make mistakes
- The leader participates visibly as a learner in all professional development (Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C., 2009)
- Teachers experience conversations after class visits as productive and helpful because they contain evidence and questions rather than judgments

Let’s go into these a bit more deeply.

**Ensures staff gets to know one other as people**

It is more difficult to be impatient with people whom you know and with whom you have some shared experiences or interests. Thus many “ice breakers” that leaders use in beginning-of-the-year kickoff meetings and regular faculty meetings inherently build community among staff members.

Some leaders give the Myers-Briggs instrument with deep processing of the results so staff members get to know not only their own cognitive and emotional style, but that of their colleagues. When done well, this investment builds understanding and tolerance of the behaviors of teammates that might otherwise just be seen as irritating. Acknowledgement and laughter replace sighs and tension.

*Oh, there’s Jon being an FP*6 again. Gotta’ hear all the possibilities before making up his mind! Jon how about just leaping on board with my idea?

*Jon responds with a smile, ‘C’mon, put aside that FJ of yours for a second and let’s really look inside your idea’.*

Even without this alphabet soup of insider abbreviations showing up in dialog, we can work together more effectively with more awareness and acceptance of differences after a shared experience like that afforded by Myers-Briggs.

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6 FP and FJ are categories of thinking style in the Myers-Briggs typology system. When Myers Briggs or any other personality assessment system is used well, its language stays in currency among the participants. It gets used humorously when people sense their buttons being pushed by another’s behavior.
Is present very frequently in halls and classrooms

Being present and visible is a sign to staff members that a leader is immersed in the “real” work of building relationships with students and getting the pulse of the building. Every day, certain students who have difficult home situations come through the door radiating signals of where they are in life that morning. Sensitive building leaders want to read those signals, make contact, and when possible, forestall tumultuous confrontations for these students.

But check-ins with teachers about students and short conversations about teaching practices also happen at these moments. The quality and usefulness of these conversations build trust that the leader is interested in instruction, and can also be a helpful thought partner with teachers in advancing their practice.

\[\text{You know, that graphic organizer you used yesterday to illustrate checks and balances in the government was a great invention. I hadn’t seen anything like it before. How are you going to check up today to see what your kids understand now?}\]

Shows vulnerability him/herself and makes it safe to make mistakes

\[\text{I’m going to try something different at this faculty meeting, folks, and I hope you find it useful. I trust you’ll tell me if it isn’t. [Soft laughter from the faculty.] I’d like us to get into groups across grades this time and share vignettes of your most difficult student and how you respond when there is a confrontational or defiant behavior. I’ve heard more stories than usual about these incidents this year, and I think we can help each other out if we get a forum to share ideas more widely.}\]

The leader participates visibly as a learner in all professional development

“Vulnerability” by no means indicates weakness. It means being transparent and open about what one does not know, and it means being a learner and being also seen as a learner by your faculty (Robinson ep. cit.) Think of the effect of a school leader who engages in new learning about instruction or about student learning, side-by-side with staff, with humility and gusto. This is modeling exactly how we want staff to interact with one another with or without a leader present.

School leaders accomplish this by participating fully and non-defensively in professional development with staff members. They also do such things as ask their instructional math coach to co-observe with them to teach them fine points of modern math instruction. Then they share their learning openly at a faculty meeting.

Teachers experience conversations after class visits as productive and helpful because they contain mainly evidence and questions

This happens when the leader is a skillful observer and when the conversation is based on evidence of impact of teaching decisions on student learning without judgment. The leader takes a stance of inquiry with the teacher, using literal observational data as the starting point.
Will this keep us safe from the behavior of toxic people

I’ve skipped explaining this item about toxic behavior up to now and saved it for last in order to concentrate on it here. It’s a big one.

Many faculties have individuals who shut down discussions of new ideas or intimidate colleagues from speaking by body language and/or caustic remarks.

- “Oh please, not another innovation!”
- “I was doing this when you were in diapers.”
- “I’m sorry, I just don’t do that!”
- “Here we go, another swing of the pendulum.”

Body language manifestations of toxic behavior include eye-rolling, crossed arms and eyes on the ceiling, deep sighs with heads down, lip-smacking, and outright inattentive rudeness like reading newspapers or correcting papers.

These behaviors directly affect those in proximity and contaminate the whole room at a meeting if not addressed. Leaders who directly take on these behaviors in public or in private establish credibility and respect from their staffs. When these behaviors are not addressed, everybody sees it. Making no response means tacit permission. Leaders lose credibility and respect when they let toxic behaviors pass. In addition, faculty members want the behaviors addressed. Most are embarrassed by unprofessional behavior of colleagues, though this unprofessional behavior may attract a small coterie of followers who then become a small gang of resistors.

Most faculty members will usually not speak up themselves, especially if the leader doesn’t. So, it is essential these behaviors be addressed and if necessary handled as disciplinary matters. See how one outstanding principal handled toxic behavior in this video on our website: [http://rbteach.com/products-resources/video/sue-szachowicz-responding-toxic-behavior].

Useful books on the topic are:


From the Abstract to the Concrete – Vignettes of What It Looks and Sounds Like

Now comes the turning point. There is an exercise that brings the “trust that what” list above into concrete focus, and thus brings it alive. Ask your participants to take each bullet point in the section on “trust that what”, and write a vignette—something they would see, hear, or experience that would serve as evidence that the abstraction in the bullet point is true of an individual leader. These vignettes are like mini screenplays of a lived experience. (See examples in Appendix B.)

The vignettes become a playbook for any leader who wants to build trust and respect. Anyone who sets out on this course has to get feedback about where they are at the beginning of the journey and check in as time goes by. Therefore, we suggest that you make this list of “trust that what” into an anonymous rating instrument by putting a 1 to 5 rating scale next to each bullet in the list above. Give it to your staff
and tell them why. Tell them that your ability to build trust is a key variable in generating the kind of APC that leads to better student results. Tally the results into a histogram and present it to the faculty. Describe what was surprising, pleasing, and what goals you are going to set as a result. Thank them for being honest and pledge to improve where it is needed.

Voila! If you complete the steps above, you have just modeled making yourself vulnerable. And the first step in being strong (“vulnerable and strong at the same time”) has been displayed as well, if you take the position that strong APC is necessary for this school to be a high-gain school, and that you are determined this school can be.

V. Beliefs

Three Beliefs

The trust and respect generated by the behaviors above put the principal and other leaders in position to advance beliefs that are essential to becoming a high-gain school. We have listed these previously.

Belief 1: “Smart is something you can get”

This sentence was Jeff Howard’s translation 35 years ago of what we now call the “Growth Mindset” into language children could understand. Carol Dweck’s groundbreaking 2007 book was the culmination of a generation of work from Alfred Bandura, Jerome Weiner, Madeline Hunter, and Jeff Howard debunking the myth of the bell curve of ability as innate and fixed.
Successful school leaders believe that ability can be grown. They also believe that students are not blocked from academic proficiency because they come from families living in poverty and stressed neighborhoods. Thus, they engage their faculty members in a deep study of the Growth Mindset, the history of the idea of “intelligence” in this country (a shocking and consequential history unique to our shores) and the evidence that ability can be grown. They then study the daily school practices and teacher behaviors that can change students’ minds about their own capacity (Saphier, 2016). They begin to build into teaching practices the explicit teaching of effective effort and the structures and routines that embed three key messages “This is important; you can do it; and I won’t give up on you” to low performing, low confidence students.

In summary, such leaders act as teachers of their staff. They use personal advocacy and data on student achievement to create a sense of urgency and efficacy for low performing students. They use book studies, consultants, speakers, and redesign of policies and procedures (such as student placement, assignment of teachers, expectations of how common planning time is used) to move teachers’ beliefs and create learning environments congruent with the Growth Mindset.

When my colleagues and I partner with a school, we take all the material in the book, High Expectations Teaching (Saphier, 2017), and ask participants in study groups or courses to pick a particular low-performing, low-confidence student, and bring to bear all the tools at their command. They are to get that student to believe in him/herself and teach the student how to exert effective effort. They are to surround the student with an environment that sends the three key messages above at every turn and keep a weekly log of the student’s progress.

We now have 25 years of case studies that show teachers changing their own belief about fixed ability because the case study got results. Nothing convinces like results. Sometimes the results are dramatic, sometimes they are painfully incremental, but enough faculty members get results so that disbelief in teacher efficacy begins to melt away. Talk about “those kids” and “these parents” fades out. Conversation about “what we have to do and can do” replaces the old dialogue.

Belief 2: The knowledge and skills base for High-Expertise Teaching is huge and complex

The knowledge and skill for successful teaching and learning is huge, wide-ranging, and complex. High-level performance in teaching doesn’t come from personal traits or inherent ability; it’s about accumulated expertise. It takes career-long learning to get to an expert level of practice. As a field, we know what expert practice is, and we can lay out in drill-down detail what it looks like and sounds like. Like all knowledge in a true profession, it consists of repertoires for handling specific tasks and skill at matching what one picks from one’s repertoire to match the student, the curriculum, or the situation.

The diagram below, Figure 1.2 introduced in Chapter 2, represents all the types of skill that successful teaching calls for if we really want to reach all students. There is quite a span between these and what most of us have learned. “Content analysis” and “error analysis” are not typically part of teacher preparation or professional development. The same is true for the skill of collaborating effectively in teams. Yet all three are needed if we want to truly leave no student behind.

Getting our staff members to understand this fact would go a long way towards generating a desire to learn more about high-level skills by our senior and experienced people. But it can still be a hard sell in communities where the teachers have an overly complacent or precious view of their capacity because their children are high achievers. In some cases, the students do well because they come from advantaged homes and come to school prepared.
It is neither shame nor blame to acknowledge one needs to learn more about, for example;

- creating robust student talk at high levels of thinking
- motivating students
- inventing re-teaching strategies for students who didn’t get it the first time around

All of us are in that boat because of the dysfunctional personnel system in education that places beginning teachers who are competent novices at best in full charge of teaching second graders to read. It then leaves them to advance in skill through episodic professional development rather than a systematic career path of learning.

*We can make every school into a reliable engine for continuous learning about High-Expertise Teaching if the leaders work to make it so and our faculty can enter into humble, energetic and mission driven learning together. That is how we will get the results for students that will establish our feeling of collective efficacy.*

**Belief 3: We all can get better.**

This belief calls for humility. It also calls for recognition of the huge size and wide range of knowledge and skill for High-Expertise Teaching. Leaders who get us there will join their faculty as enthusiastic learners during any professional development. They attempt the new learning with students, visibly stumble through the fits and starts of complex skills along with their teachers, and persist until they get to proficiency (Robinson et al, op. cit.).

Each year they work with the faculty to select an area of skill they will all work on in common. This does not prevent individual goal-setting by teachers, but it does create at least one pedagogical focus that unites...
the faculty as a whole. Since some things are more important than others, the choice will often come from the Big Rocks of successful teaching (See Chapter 1, Appendix A.

**Summary of Key Beliefs**

1. Smart is something you can get
   - The bell curve of ability is wrong
   - I have to get my students to believe in themselves
   - Thus, I need to design the learning environment and manage my language to communicate at every turn: “What we’re doing is important; you can do it; and I won’t give up on you”
   - I also have to teach my students what effective effort is and how to exert it
   - All of the above is doable, and it is my job to do it

2. The knowledge and skills for High-Expertise Teaching is huge and complex
   - The knowledge and skills for High-Expertise Teaching is large and far-ranging beyond what policy makers, teacher prep, and the voting public realizes.
   - We know at a drill-down detail what the elements of this knowledge and skill look and sound like in action.
   - Large parts of it are missing from the repertoires of a great many of our teachers, through no fault of their own.

3. I can get better
   - Students who are behind, disadvantaged and low in confidence need teaching of the highest expertise. Then they can make amazing progress.
   - The personnel pipeline and career path for me as a teacher omits opportunity to learn many of the treasures in this knowledge base.
   - No matter how experienced of competent I think I am, there’s a lot more for me to learn about High-Expertise Teaching.
   - Since the school-as-workplace is the prime place where teaching expertise improves, we can and must make our school a reliable engine for doing so.

**VI. Vulnerable and Strong at the Same Time**

Over the last 40 years, I have been working directly with instructional leaders, principals, instructional coaches, and the central office personnel who supervise principals, on their roles in improving classroom teaching and learning. This has brought me into over 6,000 k-12 classrooms in about 1,000 schools from Alaska to Maine. When I form continuing relationships with districts, I get to know the leaders there pretty well. Looking back over all this experience, there is one lesson about leadership that has emerged above all the others: the greatest leaders are vulnerable and strong at the same time. And they use those qualities to mobilize irresistible collective action.

Vulnerable does not mean weak; and strong does not mean loud or even charismatic. As Jim Collins found in *Good to Great* (2001), leaders of many different personality types can be extraordinary. You can’t tell in the first meeting, or by the feel of the handshake, or the level of knowledge they display in their talk, who will turn out to be one of these great educational leaders. You can only tell when you see them in action in a variety of settings.
“Vulnerable” means they don’t pretend to know all the answers. They are open about what they don’t know and clear that they need to mobilize collective action because they can’t do it alone. They are willing to be seen as learners; in fact, they plunge in with faculty members in learning new strategies and programs. They try out with students whatever they expect the faculty to try. They share both successes and struggles openly with other staff members. Their learning stance and vulnerability make it safe for others to risk, learn, and struggle. They admit their mistakes, and they acknowledge when they are not sure what to do. But they do know which goals need to be met, and they are up-front and persistent about working on these most important goals no matter what. That is the “strong” part.

“Strong” means the leaders have core values and goals that drive all their behavior. They are public and persistent about these goals. Quietly or loudly, and usually with compelling data, they continually put the work in front of staff members and raise a sense of urgency.

Sue Szachowicz was such a leader. When Brockton High School went from dismal student test scores and graduation rates to national awards and a front-page story in the New York Times, analysts gave all kinds of reasons. This was a school, after all, of 4,300 students that didn’t break itself up according to the “small high school movement”. It was 77% students of color and 81% FARMS. The city of Brockton is as urban as you can find with all the problems of poverty and crime that urban America has. So why the great results?

Analysts said;

*They focused so intently on data.*

*They adopted a laser like focus faculty-wide on literacy skills, no matter what academic discipline you taught.*

*They practiced distributed leadership with intense teacher participation.*

*They did professional development from within.*

These statements are true; but they are not the basic reason for their success. Other turn-around stories have quite different lists. Their success was due to a particular kind of leadership. Sue was vulnerable and strong at the same time, she elevated others who were the same, and together they mobilized irresistible collective action.

The start was small. Fifteen years ago, at a meeting of 300 staff members, the faculty was first presented with systematic data about how poorly their students were doing. One teacher said, “But what about the students’ right to fail?” Sue, who was the associate principal and not presenting at the time, rose and took the microphone and stated, “You know, I just have to respond to that. NO, THEY DON’T. They have no such right. I was a social studies teacher and I never saw that in any constitution I know of. They do not have a right to fail!”

In subsequent days, she single-handedly embarked on a crusade to elevate one very accessible and public aspect of low-performance: students tuning out and having their heads down in class. Go to this link to hear the rest of this episode. [http://rbteach.com/products-resources/video/sue-szachowicz-being-vulnerable-and-strong-same-time](http://rbteach.com/products-resources/video/sue-szachowicz-being-vulnerable-and-strong-same-time)

“We weren’t very sophisticated at the time,” she says, “but it was the start of everything”. When you listen to her tell the story, look for evidence of vulnerability and strength at the same time.
Anyone reading more detailed accounts of the Phoenix-like rise of Brockton High School and hearing about the literacy initiative and the Restructuring Team of eventually 25 teachers who met on Saturdays and made decisions for the whole school every year (Kennedy, 2011) should look between the lines for leadership moves that came from being “vulnerable and strong at the same time”.

Sue is not alone. There are others out there. Some are energetic and funny; some are quiet and introverted; some are old; some are young. This ability is independent of gender, race, age, or personality. But it is consistent, and I would argue fundamental, to what our schools need. And it can be learned (Saphier, 2010).

The implication of these arguments is that the education, certification, ongoing evaluation and professional development of school leaders must include acquiring expertise in trust building, culture building, and the buttressing of beliefs that could make every school a constant engine for increasing teaching and learning expertise and deep collaboration. This is a worthy target for public policy debates and foundation support.

VII. 5-Point Advocacy

Say it, Model it, Organize for it, Protect it, Reward it (5-Point Advocacy)

1. Say it

2. Model it

3. Organize for it

4. Protect it

5. Reward it

There are no formulas for successful culture building, but the following guidelines have proved useful to practitioners who are successful. If you want to build or strengthen any norm of culture in a group, the leader will:

- “Say it” means being explicit with one’s staff that you value and want to strengthen the norm. You say why it is important and explain what it creates or enables. And you don’t just say it once; you take every ceremonial occasion (the opening of the year speech to faculty) as well as mundane opportunities (the header of meeting agendas) to repeat the message.
- “Model it” means being a consistent living practitioner of the norm, plain and simple.
- “Organize for it” means creating events, forums, structures, groups whose existence and framing embed learning about the norm or using the norm. The educational options for “Smart is
something you can get” and digging into the Growth Mindset described are examples of “Organize for it”.

- “Protect it” means shielding from criticism and consequences the people who are the first to step up to practice the norm. This requires vigilance on behalf of the brave and directly addressing those who sneer.
- “Reward it” means recognizing those who act from a commitment to the norm in a way that is appropriate to the culture of the setting (which may mean privately). Those who practice the norm may be recognized by giving them opportunities for leadership such as visiting other schools where good things are going on and reporting to the faculty and representing the school at conferences and meetings.

**Access**

A district-based Teaching and Learning Academy such as “The Center for Skillful Teaching” in Montgomery County, MD has existed for 20 years. It would be the ideal vehicle for this access. It could be permanent, part of new teacher induction, and above all, offer in any given year all the Big Rocks of Successful Teaching regardless of what the fads of the year were. It could grow into an in-house Teaching and Learning Academy. But small districts can’t support institutional mechanisms of that size. District regional collaboratives such as New York’s BOCES, Ohio’s ESCs, or Oregon’s ESDs could host such academies. Every state has these organizations.

But in any event, as a building-based leader, I need to figure a way for my teachers to have access to high-quality continuous learning about successful teaching any-which-way I can; on-line courses, book studies, local study groups, deals with universities, alliances with other schools.

**Hiring**

Martin Habermann’s interview training (https://habermanfoundation.org) was designed to identify teacher candidates who are willing and committed to being persistent with students who struggle because the teacher believes all students really can learn to proficiency, and they think it is their job to get them there. Skillful leaders use the hiring process to ensure a pipeline of incoming professionals who are amenable to high expectations teaching and deep collaboration.

**Where to Show Up and What to Do**

In Chapter 10, Where to Show Up and What to Do, we will examine a roadmap for school leaders on the move, leaders who are not stuck in their offices and are out and about frequently interacting with teachers. For example, they show up frequently at grade level meetings in elementary school or at meetings of teachers who teach the same content in secondary schools. They have a clear image of what good use of time together would be for such meetings and intervene as necessary to help those teams build capacity to operate effectively. An example is doing error analysis of recent student work and planning how to reteach to the students who didn’t get it the first time around.

In addition to CPT meetings, we will take up, at some length, the other eleven “places to show up” (Chapter 10) and what the agenda of the leader would be in each place. The point I wish to make here is that there are active means like these through which the leaders pursue their agenda of improving classroom teaching and learning. The receptivity of their staff members to their appearance and action in these arenas, however, depends on what I’ve been writing about in the rest of this chapter, that is, how much they trust our motives and intentions.
Endnote on Authority and Incentives

School leaders do not have the range of authority of industry CEOs. CEOs can declare new operating routines and schedules, quickly hire/fire, offer incentives, and give promotions and raises. Principals are also not at the head of a pyramid where supervision is in a ratio of 1 to 5 or 1 to 8. They are in charge of workers (teachers) who often work individually and see themselves as artistic, solo practitioners rather than working in side-by-side teams and being members of an organization. It is no wonder that success as a principal hinges on the ability to unite and focus rather than command and control.

VIII. The Future of Adult Professional Culture

We could use a lot more ethnographic research on how leaders effectively build strong Adult Professional Culture. Such research, however, would be icing on the cake when we haven’t even put the cake in the oven. In fact, we haven’t even laid out the cake ingredients on the kitchen table!

Each of the “Obstacles” described in Chapter 1 is, indeed, a problem to be solved. In addition, structures and protocols for development of and evaluation of principals by central office personnel through supervision and coaching are needed for principal skill development in,

- Analyzing Teaching for Student Results
- Differential Conferencing
- Improving the functioning of PLCs (See Chapter 3)
- Systems thinking undergirding annual improvement plans
- Simplifying bureaucratic barriers to clear decisions and efficient implementation
- Rapidly changing leadership in so many school districts
- Short-sighted annual budget cycles from local governance

Looming over all these issues, however, is the elephant in the room, and the obstacle to solving any of those problems listed above. Three power-constituencies; 1) our policy makers at all levels of government, 2) legislators state and federal, and 3) the voting public are not aware of or motivated to respond to the need to create a true, knowledge-based profession of teaching (Saphier, 1994). As long as these three constituencies continue to believe that teaching is easy work requiring only good management and quality employees, rather than a profession requiring high expertise of both teachers and leaders, there will not be sufficient resources available to elevate the performance of our schools as a system, that is, all our schools. Nor will there be a focus of national and state leadership on the “right stuff”. Policy makers need to understand; 1) the range and complexity of teaching knowledge and skill that our children need, and 2) the working conditions that support deep collaborative work. For decades, literally dozens of organizations producing piles of well-written and well-documented reports annually, and hundreds of scholars and practitioners individually have been speaking and writing forcefully for this agenda all the time. I have been one of them for 30 years. And we are talking to ourselves.

Identifying the right problem is axiom #1 in problem-solving lore. The problem is not uncovering the knowledge for good teaching, and is not revealing the components of a knowledge-based profession. The problem here is a political one -- how to mobilize collective action of those to whom the power-constituencies listen. Educators, researchers, and teacher educators can, of course, focus on educating the three power-constituencies at assemblies and convocations where their members go (Aspen Institute; Gates Foundation forums and those of other large players in the funding world; Council of Chief State School Officers; annual conventions of House and Senate Education Committee chairs of the 50
states). That would be a good start. But the issue is fundamentally a political one. It is to mobilize collective action by those whom actors in the power constituencies report to and are beholden: to grass roots voter organizations, big-audience media outlets, billionaire donors like the Koch Brothers and George Soros (imagine those two in the same camp!).

The problem is also a moral and philosophical one. To the degree that individualism, not-in-my-backyard, it’s-not-my responsibility thinking dominate political decision-making in the U.S. (or your province or my state); the chances for change are slim. To the degree that the social contract and the interest of the common good captivate public imagination, we have a chance to make our educational system the envy of the world, as it once was. True “public” education, meaning a guarantee by the state for a fair chance at a good life through education, was a hallmark of our democracy for the first 70 years of the 20th century.

The issues of income inequality, unequal access to health care, and unequal access to fair treatment in the criminal justice system have the same roots as our unequal public education system--an erosion of commitment for government to serve the common good.

With all these other issues of equity roiling our society, it seems that equity in educational opportunities is a way off; but the commitment to get it underlies all the changes education reformers have been proposing for decades.

IX. Conclusion

This chapter has been about a pivotal aspect of school improvement; Adult Professional Culture (APC). Strong APC is, indeed, a sine qua non for empowering schools to raise achievement for all students including children living in poverty and of color. It provides the energy for deep collaboration and constant learning about High-Expertise Teaching. But APC is not the only element to focus on. An energized culture where adults problem-solve together and teach and learn from one another is wonderful, but it is inadequate if the inhabitants of that culture don’t have enough knowledge and skill in their own repertoires to share. There must be accessible outside sources to acquire some of the knowledge and skills of High-Expertise Teaching, which includes some skills that are absent from teacher education and usually missing from professional development. (See Chapter 1).

Likewise, a data flow to teachers (and students) is necessary that continually illuminates which students have mastered what. The data flow comes when there is common curriculum and common quizzes and interim assessments created by teachers for analysis by high-functioning Common Planning Time Teams. But neither outside professional development or a data flow from interim assessments are enough without the fire and fertility of a strong culture.

APC is the foundation of school improvement. Individual schools can use the rich 40-year history of research and practitioner invention to transform their schools. Right now, whole school districts with stable and committed leadership could use this information to guide the professional development of leaders and secure long-term support through education of their school boards. But the frustrating experience of ups and downs that so many of us have witnessed, the every-decade issue of Time Magazine about our “failing schools” (the first in my collection goes back to the 60s), the continued low quality of education for our most needy students will continue until we as educators enter the political arena.

Avanti!
Appendix A

The evolution of a strong APC is not linear. Look at the complicated relationships of these items:

Norms – Trust – Beliefs – Strategies – Vulnerability & Strength – Where to Show Up

Norms

When these 12 norms are strong, the teaching and learning improves and students do much better. But strong norms and high functioning interaction of the adults on each norm are an end-state. How did the norms get strong? It was the leaders who got them there.

Now, these norms usually have structures inside of which they operate. For example, the “non-defensive examination of teaching practice in relation to student results” happens in teams of teachers who teach the same content. So, there are certain structures, schedules and expectations for people being together that have been evolving. But having the structures without the willingness to be vulnerable in front of one another would only produce superficial meetings.

Trust

Building trust give the leaders the base to do everything related to strengthening adult culture. Without this trust, the leaders cannot get followers to follow. That’s not the only requirement, but it is the *sine qua non*.

Beliefs

When widespread, these beliefs give the faculty the passion and press to put themselves into the faithful practice of the 12 norms, the urgency to feel the need to reach all the students not just some, and the faith they actually can reach them.

5-Point Advocacy

These 5 approaches are what the leader, if trusted, will find successful in moving peoples’ beliefs while urging them to act in congruence with the 12 norms.

Vulnerability & Strength

These two characteristics could be considered elements of what leaders do to build trust, except that the “strength” part suggests relentlessness and a persistence in acting from some core values that animate everything one does. Elsewhere this has been called “vision.” We could say that “vision” consists of core values one wants to attain. Leading with vision to me means pushing for the attainment of these core values strongly. “Strong” doesn’t necessarily mean loud, with charisma, humor and flamboyance—though it could mean all three. It would also happen with modest, quiet, undemonstrative leadership. But it would be happening continuously, with commitment, persistence and obvious caring.
Where to Show Up

Making Every School a Reliable Engine of Constant Adult Learning or Where to Show Up and What To Do

Leaders can act in these twelve places to great effect because they can have direct influence on teacher learning and teaching practice by what they do in these arenas:

- Have frequent, high leverage contacts with individuals
  - Short classroom visits & follow-up conversations within 24 hours of visits
  - Walkthroughs and Learning Walks
  - Planning conferences
  - Formal observations and summative evaluations

- Design and implement a teacher-coaching position as a partnership to strengthen adult professional culture
  - Coaching structure to build from strength
  - Considering coach’s daily schedule, expectations, greasing the skids, and active principal partnership with coach

- Fashion Strong School Leadership teams that focus on Instruction
  - Instructional Leadership Team whose charter in improving teaching and learning in every classroom (the charter, time use, fanning out to content teams, round-table case reviews)
  - Ensure teams that share content do error-analysis and re-teaching
  - And follow Lencioni’s norms

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Break down the walls of privacy and isolation between teachers

- Arrange public teaching and peer observation

Make the analysis of data about student learning a regular feature of teacher teams that leads to re-teaching for those students who need it

- Ensure High-Functioning PLC’s

Plan Faculty Meetings like lessons

- Something instructional on each faculty meeting agenda

Make the High-Expertise Teaching Knowledge accessible, inviting, and required

- Encourage and Support Study Groups
- Plan building based Professional Development

Do quarterly student reviews with each teacher (or in large schools ensure someone does,) student by student, of how each student is doing and what the plan is for their next step in growth

- Student by student Accountability Talks
Appendix B: Sample Vignettes

Vignette 1: Transparency Feedback

The Assistant Superintendent of a medium-size district welcomed the public of hundreds of parents, administrators, community leaders, and even some students to hear about the new Social-Emotional or SEL curriculum that the district would provide for all 16,000 students. As the Supervisor of Social Work Services, I attended this important event to support the efforts and my administrators. When Christine Igoe, the Asst. Supt., concluded, I shared some positive feedback for her speech. She replied back, “Stacy, I appreciate that, but I can’t wait until the time when you can give me some real honest feedback about what I could’ve done better!”

Transparency Feedback

- Value my ideas/thoughts
- Provide constructive criticism
- Care about me as a person
- Support risk-taking
- Walks the walk

Vignette 2: Be willing to admit we don’t know at all.

Principal is talking to the teacher leadership team.

_You are the content specialist and you know more than me about math. As we are redesigning the ‘Hayden’ way to teach math, you are the one who will figure out what the ‘Hayden’ way is. I’ll be here with you, to work and learn along with you. That will inform me on what you need; budget, time, expertise…._

The principal, Dr. Laura, is speaking with one of the AP’s, Mr. Krumkie. Mr. Krumkie failed to meet a deadline for returning a formal observation feedback form to a teacher. Dr. Laura meets with Mr. Krumkie and asks, “I noticed you missed the deadline. Can you tell the circumstances that led to that?” Mr. Krumkie elaborated about his mother’s recent visit to the hospital and being behind on work. He apologized because he felt bad. Dr. Laura said, “I understand and that happens. However, the deadlines for observations are important and if you have a life event take place, all you need to do is let us know so we can help and communicate with the teacher. We care about you and we need to always meet our deadlines.” Dr. Krumkie thanked Dr. Laura for being direct and for understanding.

Vignette 3: I trust that you will be honest and you think I’m a worthwhile person

The principal has the practice of visiting five classrooms a day for brief walk-throughs. By the end of the day, the principal emails all five teachers about what she saw in the classroom. She provides feedback that is specific; identifying teacher and student practice related to their campus initiative on high-level questioning. She offers an example of teacher actions, such as the scaffolding of questions. She provides
feedback on students’ responses to the questions. Then, she poses one “I wonder...” question to help the teacher reflect on and improve their practice.

**Vignette 4: Acknowledge mistakes**

Over conversation from spring to summer, a district administration team made the decision to switch universal screeners. The decision to change was not approved by the board until the July board meeting. Staff were informed a week prior to the start of the school year that they would be asked to screen all students in grades kindergarten through 9th grade. The screening was to occur the second week of school. Many staff were upset that they had not been informed with an adequate amount of time to prepare their rosters and learn about the new tool. When one of the administrators on the district learned that staff were frustrated and upset, she apologized for not providing them with the information that felt they needed to be prepared and offered an explanation of the timeline and understanding of how the decision was made.

**Vignette 5: What empathy from a school leader looks like/sounds like:**

Male Teacher:

*I need to tell you something. I just discovered that my husband is suffering from a rare and untreatable disease. And I don’t know what my future holds with regards to school.*

(Teacher bursts into tears)

Female Principal (passing box of tissues) says:

*Thank you so much for trusting me enough to share this sad news with me. I can’t even imagine what you and your husband are going through.*

(Pause for dramatic effect and to wait for tears to subside).

*What can I do to help you through this situation so that we can support you? And how can we make sure that we also do what is best for the students as you deal with this situation? What is the best plan we can come up with? Additionally, what should I keep confidential and what would you like to share with HR and colleagues? Who else’s support from among the faculty do we need for you and your students?*

**Vignette 6: Acting in a caring and compassionate way:**

On Thursday, Jacqueline wrote a note about a death of a staff member on a daily note to the staff that is posted in the teacher work room. She wrote another note on Monday that let staff know that there was no staff meeting, that there had been flowers sent to the staff member, and that another staff member had done a great job of using a specific teaching strategy with her students, and that anyone who wanted to see it should drop by her room. On Tuesday, Jacqueline stayed home with the flu. Knowing how much the staff appreciated hearing news about their colleagues, the assistant principal took a few minutes when she arrived to craft a new message to staff that included the fact that Jacqueline was out sick today.
Vignette 7: Value my time

The principal writes an email to include the kindergarten team and instructional coordinator for ELA as requested during a PLC to provide supports regarding Writer’s Workshop and to coordinate a time where the ELA expert can come plan with the team. As a part of this email, the principal seeks a few optimal dates, times and lets the team know that a sub can be attained if the time required would be best served as a half day/full day planning.

Vignette 6: Trust and Support when I make a mistake - Failed lesson - Helping the teacher process

A principal observes a lesson and the teacher realizes that the lesson did not meet the level of excellence that was required. He comes to the principal for reflection of the observation. Instead of criticizing the lesson, the principal turns this into a discussion on how to get better by asking questions like…

- What worked?
- What didn’t?
- How can I support you?
- True Coaching of the lesson.

Vignette 8: Be transparent about what’s going on and how processes work

The superintendent, Rob, received a phone call from a principal inquiring about a situation that had occurred outside of a school in another part of town. The incident apparently involved students from multiple schools, multiple school counselors, and law enforcement, specifically the FBI. Instead of ending the call and reacting with demands to his staff to know why he hadn’t been told about this situation, Rob stayed on the line with the principal, was honest and said that he was not aware of the situation or what his staff was doing, but he knew they were doing something. He also said that his staff only brings situations to him when he needs to know, and as law enforcement was involved he was certain that staff were handling it as confidentially as possible. Rob said that when he was apprised about the situation by the staff involved and had accurate information, he would get back to the inquiring principal and alert others.
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**Additional Bibliography for Adult Professional Culture**