

The "Black Box" of Collective Efficacy

By Jon Saphier

About the best leaders the people say. "We did it ourselves." --Lao Tzu

There are excellent books about "collective efficacy" and other terms given to the concept: collaborative culture, collegial relationships, interdependent workplaces.¹ 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), and 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, 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?

Peter Senge is widely regarded as a seer whose work has deeply influenced those who want to improve the performance of organizations and of those within them. He coined the term "learning organization" over three decades ago to capture the essence of his discoveries. Then when he turned his attention to successful schools in 1994, he used the term again and accompanied it with a 500- page book (Senge 1994). Richard Elmore (2006) and Michael Fullan (2011) had the same insight, nicely captured in Fullan's title "Learning is the Work."

A learning organization is one where the organization is always learning how to perform better. And so are the individuals within it. It is designed that way. I will make the case here that underneath the structures of that design are the beliefs of the individuals that *they can, they should, and they must continuously get better*. I will further argue that *leaders spread this belief throughout the school as an organization by their behaviors in daily school life*. All the structures and practices associated with very successful schools will spring from that belief and depend on that solid foundation as the nurturing force that continues to feed the adult culture.

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.

¹ See Donohoo 2017; Hargreaves and Fullan 2010; Newmann and Wehlage 1995



John Hattie's new finding, a 1.57 effect 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; we don't yet know what is inside. Besides great student results, we do know quite a bit about the output of the black box. The output isn't just great student results; it's a particular kind of school organization. Elsewhere I've called it a strong Adult Professional Culture (APC) (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 (see Appendix A). 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 Ends

12 Strong Norms of Organizational Culture

Since Judith Warren Little published her benchmark study in 1982, a copious amount of literature has accumulated over the decades about the significance of Adult Professional Culture (APC). Our learning and research, supported solidly by 40 years of school improvement work and by the research in the attached bibliography, indicates that there will be no sustainable improvement in student results and no elimination of the achievement gap until leaders and teachers succeed in building a particular organizational culture. The literature is very consistent and quite deep about the way the professionals act with one another in such a school. Appendix A summarizes the practices that characterize strong, effective school cultures.

We also know that these practices won't be created or function well without good leaders.

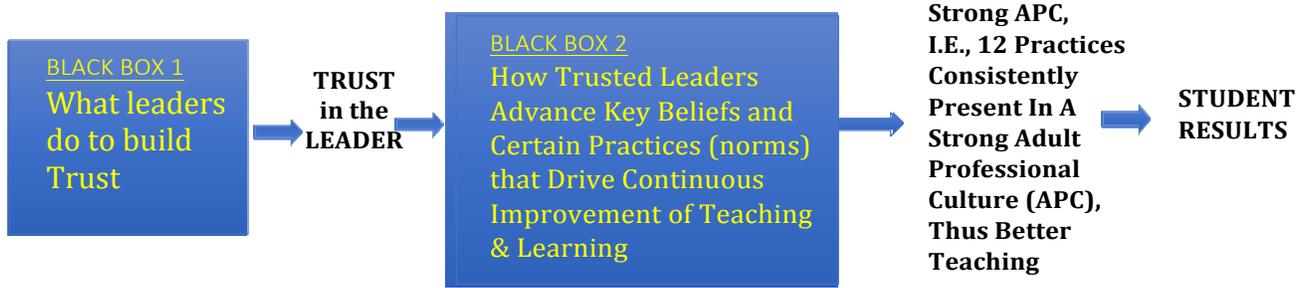
"We have never seen a school that achieved anything significant for students without a good leader." -- McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006

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 dovetails consistently with these twelve observable patterns of behavior. These patterns lead to more good teaching for more children in more classrooms more of the time. High expertise teaching² 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?

Trust is in the Black Box

School leadership literature repeatedly identifies **trust in the leader** (Bryk and Schneider 2002) and **trust among staff members** as the *sine qua non* for high-gain schools. Not coincidentally, 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





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 to Build a Strong Professional Culture

Ends

12 NORMS



Means

- **Hiring**
- **Access**
- **Five Point Advocacy**
- **Where Leaders Show Up**

Foundations



² 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).



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:

1. *I have to learn more and 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:

2. *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.

3. *"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 learn 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.

Preview

We are **not** going to say leaders should wait until the beliefs above are strong to begin changing the structures and practices one sees in a high-functioning school. We can't afford to wait, and neither can our children and their families. It is true we can act our way into new beliefs (Fullan 1999). But leaders will fail and the changes they do effect will not be sustainable unless they build the trust and explicitly work on the beliefs. That is how this article fits into the complex movement to improve teaching and learning.

We will also lay out how leaders use 1) their hiring practices and 2) a 5-point advocacy strategy



we describe later to build the number and strength of their allies to make their school a reliable engine of constant adult learning. 3) They ensure access to learning high-expertise teaching practices, and 4) they know where to show up in daily practice to exert a positive influence on improving classroom teaching and learning and what to do once they get there. Finally, 5) the best leaders are vulnerable and strong at the same time.

Let's now look inside these black boxes... what leaders do to build trust, to advance the key beliefs, and to get their teachers engaged in the practices of a strong adult culture.³

Acknowledgement: 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.

The Foundations

Trust

John Hattie (Donohoo 2016) cites Collective Efficacy as the variable with the highest effect size on student achievement, which makes sense. Here 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 poverty and of color. How on earth do they get that to happen, especially if the culture of the school already has a history of isolation, or artistic independence, or cliques, or 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.

³ In the background of this roadmap is the axiom that leaders have to stay in the job long enough. It usually takes five years or more to significantly improve a school culture, especially if there are negative elements to turn around. We also have to ensure leaders do not have their energy siphoned away by misplaced central office diversions. In addition, for a powerful school culture to endure beyond the leaders who establish it, central office also needs to play a proactive role that we will discuss in another piece.



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 things 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** and can keep the wheels turning by:

- staying on top of essential operations
- handling crises

2. I trust that you think I am a **worthwhile person** because you:

- consistently notice and comment on the things I am doing well
- are interested in my life outside of school

3. I trust that you will make it **safe** for us to make mistakes by:

- *making yourself vulnerable*
- 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 bad-mouthing anyone behind their backs
- holding yourself accountable and sharing how you'll communicate how you're doing
- *being a constant learner with us and visibly so*

4. I trust that you'll be **honest**, meaning you:

- 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
- clarify expectations, discuss, validate, don't assume they are clear, renegotiate if necessary

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:

- protecting us from initiative overload
- keeping us safe from 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:

- listening first and not assuming you know what matters most to others
- doing active listening
- hearing out different points of view
- valuing my time
- having my back
- sharing difficult information because you think I can get better and deserve the chance

10. I trust that you will act in a caring and compassionate way by:

- showing kindness in little things
- being generous
- going the extra mile to show consideration to individuals beyond formal requirements

Assembled from writings of Tony Bryk 2010; Stephen. M.R. Covey 2014; Jon Saphier 2017.

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 list above into concrete focus, and thus brings it alive. Ask your participants to take each bullet point above 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.

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.

3 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.

Widespread Shared Beliefs



No ego, no preciousness, no know-it-all, deep collaboration, high commitment, constant use of data, true learning organization

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 of 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 *High Expectations Teaching* book (Saphier 2016) 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 for High-Expertise Teaching is huge and complex

The knowledge and skill for successful reaching 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.

Our national priorities and education policy have neglected to create a cohesive personnel pipeline so we could all learn the treasure trove of knowledge available (see Appendix B), and thus many children, tragically our least-advantaged students, work with teachers who don't have this high- expertise capacity through no fault of their own. *But it is within the reach of all of us to make our own school a reliable engine of constant learning by the professionals for the benefit of the children.*

The diagram below, Figure 1.2, 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.

Approximately every ten years there is a meta-analysis of the research on effective teaching (Bellon, Bellon and Blank in the 90s, Marzano in the 2000s, Hattie in the 2010s). Every decade, the same practices rise to the top in effect size, e.g., quality feedback to students; clear communication of objectives; clear criteria for success. Yet it is astonishing how infrequently one sees these skills in action with fidelity to their design. The knowledge and skill available for fully developed professional practice in teaching is far larger and more complex than our voting public, our policy makers, or our own profession recognizes. 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.



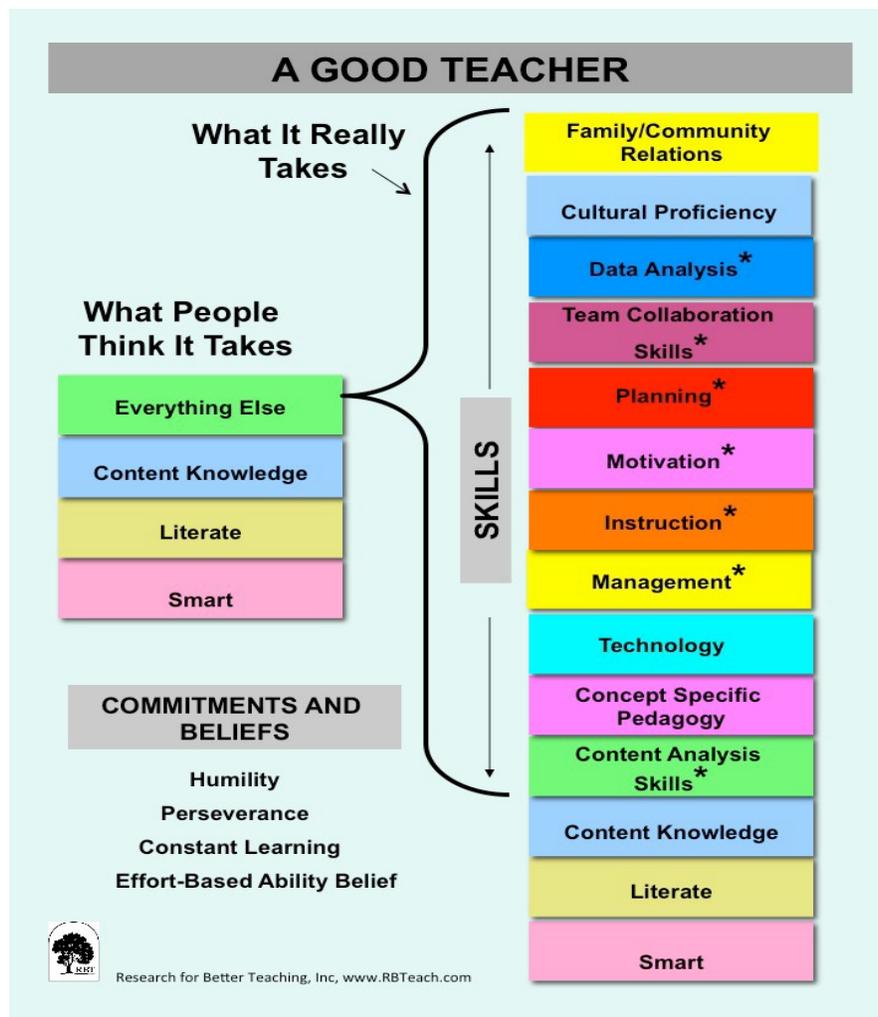
It is neither shame nor blame to acknowledge one needs to learn more about, for example,

- 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.

Fig. 1.2



Belief 3 -- We all need to 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 Appendix B).

Summary of Key Beliefs

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.

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.

I have to 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 or 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.

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 classrooms K-12 in about 1000 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*, 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>] “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.

The Means

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

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
- Model it
- Organize for it
- Protect it
- Reward it

“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 it. The educational options for “Smart is something you can get” and digging into the Growth Mindset described on pages 8 and 9 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 opportunities for leadership or to visit and represent the school at other sites and meetings.

Access

A district based Teaching and Learning Academy such as has existed for 20 years in Montgomery County MD (“The Center for Skillful Teaching”) 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 SSTs, 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.

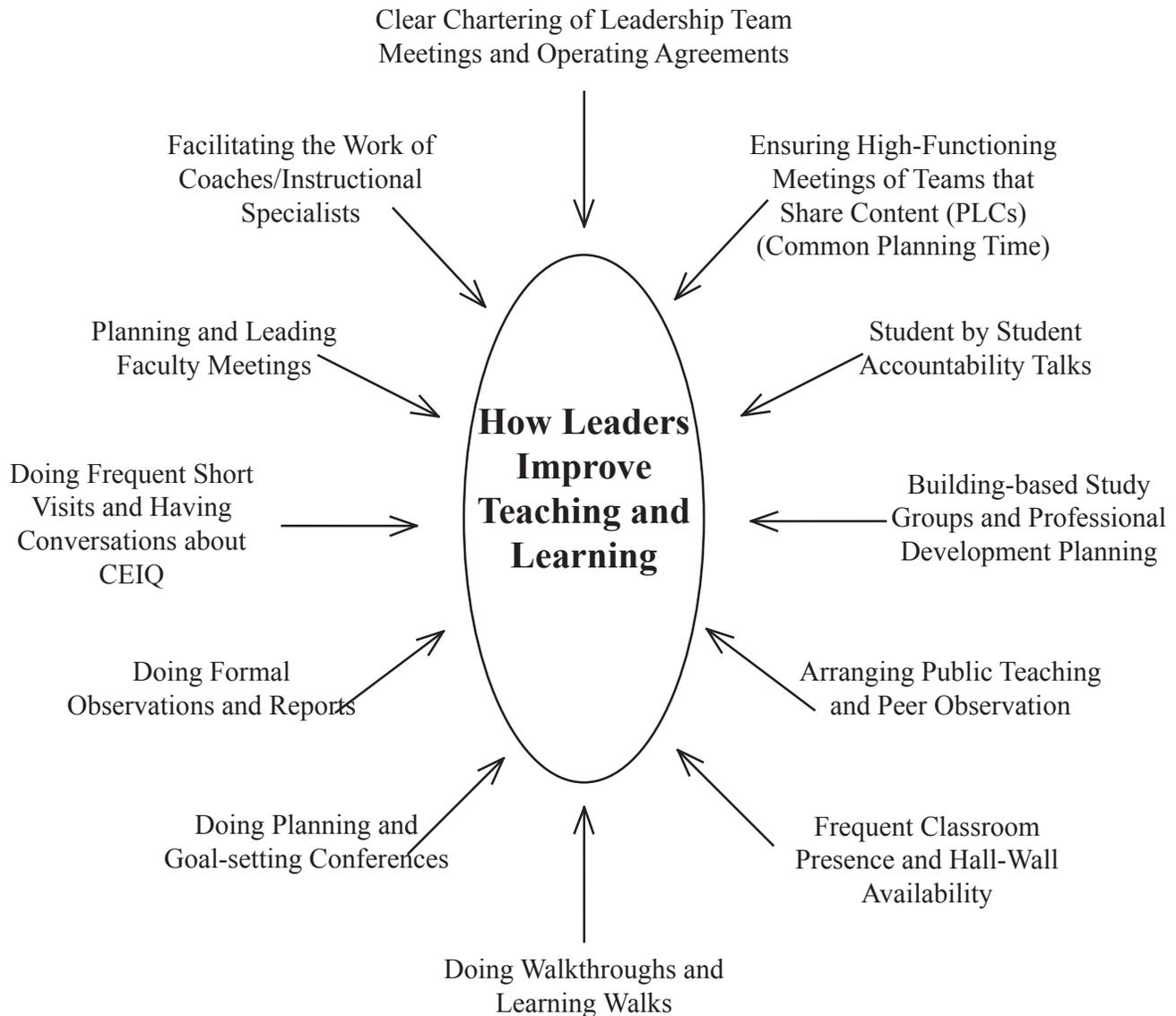
Hiring

Martin Habermann’s interview training 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

The diagram below is 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, for example, doing error analysis of recent student work and planning how to reteach to the students who didn't get it the first time around.



HIRING	INDUCTION	WORKPLACE STRUCTURE AND WORKPLACE CULTURE
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I have written elsewhere at some length about the other eleven “places to show up” and what the agenda of the leader would be in each place (Saphier, 2012). The point I wish to make here is that there are active means like these through which the leaders(s) 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 article.

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.

“Trust can be defined as an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open,” say the authors. “Trust plays a key role in whether people at different levels of an organization interact productively with one another. Where there is a low level of trust, there is less collaboration and less chance for positive outcomes.”



APPENDIX A

Visible Practices of a Strong Adult Professional Culture

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
-

Teams & Data

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

Passion And Press

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

Humane Caring Environment

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

Critical Feedback

10. Demanding and high standards for development *towards* high expertise teaching for all teachers
11. Honest, open communication and the ability to have difficult conversations
12. Environment of Reflection with Habits of Mindful Inquiry



APPENDIX B

The Big Rocks of High-Expertise Teaching

Every decade a “meta-analysis” of the research on teaching is published summarizing the findings on effective teaching (Bellon, Bellon and Blank 90’s, Bob Marzano 2000s, John Hattie 2010s.) Each time the same clusters of teaching skill show up. Below is a consolidated list.

1. Identification of the most worthwhile objective, making sure the students understand it, and using it as the focus of the lesson
2. Error analysis of student work to deliver re-teaching to those who need it
3. Feedback and Criteria for Success
4. Making Students’ Thinking Visible
5. Using a variety of cognitive strategies matched to content and students*
6. High Expectations Teaching: 50 Ways used to do Attribution Re-Training and Generate Student agency, thus a surround-sound environment that communicate the 3 critical messages re: effort-based ability [teachers and students act from the “Growth Mindset”]
 - This is important;
 - You can do it;
 - and I won’t give up on you.
7. Effective Effort is what makes the difference.
8. Building a classroom climate of community, risk-taking, and ownership
9. Cultural Proficiency and Relationship Building that make students feel known and valued
10. High volume of student reading/writing and explicit embedded literacy instruction including non-fiction writing with complex sentences**
11. Direct vocabulary and language instruction and practice from a stance that acknowledges and respects students’ language tradition and origin (S.E.L.)

* Appropriately using Activators, Summarizers, Checking for Understanding, Explanatory Devices like Modeling Thinking Aloud, Mental Imagery, Graphic Organizers, Visual Representations...

** “Conjunctions for the Common Core”

Students use “although, nevertheless, however, unless, if, because, in spite of, depending on, despite,” etc. with fluency and accuracy in speaking, writing, and making arguments.



Skills Pertaining to Planning

1. Identification Of The Most Worthwhile Objective

High Expertise Teachers *dig deeply* into their content as they are planning lessons. Thus they identify the most worthwhile learning targets (objectives) in the materials and make sure the students know what they are. The hierarchy of concepts within the content is outlined. Student misconceptions and points of difficulty are anticipated and provided for in the lesson because the teacher did the student tasks him/herself. They also make sure the learning experiences the students do are logically aligned with the learning targets (objectives) and that the assessment will give good data about student mastery. The criteria for success are carefully thought out and understood and used by the students. The objective is communicated to the students in student-friendly language that also makes the learning seem relevant, and then it is unpacked with them to make sure the students understand the objective. Finally, the teacher makes the objective the focus of the lesson and returns frequently to it.

Understand the hierarchy of concepts in the packages of the content

- Then, look at your materials in depth. Read it; do a few problems; try it out...
- Then, find out where your students are in the hierarchy so you can pick the most worthwhile objective
- Then, communicate it to your students in student-friendly language that also makes the learning seem relevant.

2. Error Analysis

High expertise teachers know how to study student work, all the way from standardized tests to work samples from yesterday's class. They can analyze student errors and identify gaps in student learning. Thus skillful *error analysis leads directly to re-teaching* for those students who didn't get it the first time around.

Skills Pertaining to Instruction

3. Feedback

High Expertise Teachers arrange for a constant flow of *feedback* to students on their performance. The feedback is non-judgmental and keyed to specific criteria the students are clear about. Thus the students can self-evaluate and use techniques they have been taught to set effective goals and plans of action to improve. They have exemplars of good performance to check in with and understand how the criteria are represented in the exemplars.

4. Making Students Thinking Visible

High Expertise Teachers make *students' thinking visible* during class interaction by using a constellation of 24 interactive skills. Thus there is a high degree of student talk both with the teacher and with one another about the content at a high level of thinking. The students are active thinkers with the content and the teacher gets a constant reading on who understands and who doesn't. In turn, the students are required to become good listeners to one another and be active processors of information.



5. Cognitive Strategies (“Clarity”)

High Expertise Teachers have a repertoire of research-based *cognitive strategies* like visual imagery and modeling thinking aloud. These strategies, chosen to match the students, the curriculum and the content, make concepts and ideas clear and accessible to students. Thus when content needs re-teaching for students who didn’t get it the first time around, the teacher has alternative approaches to use. Learning experiences are framed by “activators” and frequent “summarizers.” Checking for understanding is constant.

Skills Pertaining to Motivation

6. Attribution Retraining

High Expertise Teachers convince students to believe in “*effort based ability*” instead of fixed ability. Thus, they are constantly doing “

Attribution Retraining” and consistently sending the messages: “What we’re doing is important; you can do it; and I won’t give up on you” (tenacity and perseverance.) These messages are sent through daily interactive teacher behavior, through class structures and routines, and through policies and procedures. These teachers take it upon themselves to teach the students explicitly *how* to exert effective effort and to welcome error as normative and an opportunity for learning.

7. Class Climate

High Expertise Teachers create a *climate* of community, risk-taking, and ownership among all their students. Thus the students know each other as people and have been taught the skills to cooperate and work as a team. The students feel safe to make mistakes and view errors as feedback, not judgments; thus they take academic risks and challenge themselves to do hard work. And the students have voice and ownership in constructing the “rules of the classroom game.” They have ownership of their learning through self-scoring, self- evaluation, and goal setting with plans of action.

8. Cultural Proficiency and Personal Relationship Building

High Expertise Teachers make students *feel known and valued*. Thus they know about the students’ life and culture and show an interest in their activities and success. Artifacts, books, and curriculum experiences connect to the students’ culture. The unrelenting tenacity and high-expectations of teachers with low-performing students also becomes evidence to the student that the teacher thinks they are worthwhile.

Skills Pertaining to Literacy

9. Reading and Writing

High Expertise Teachers make *literacy* an embedded priority. Thus regardless of their subject or academic discipline, they ensure a high volume of quality reading and writing about their content, and they scaffold the students’ entry into text. Of particular importance, they are assiduous at facilitating “literate conversations” (Allington 2011) about the text and writing with complex sentences (*Writing Revolution*, Atlantic 10/2012.)



10. Vocabulary

High Expertise Teachers become committed and proficient in vocabulary instruction. Regardless of their academic discipline, they understand that the words and the concepts they represent are intimately related and indispensable to student learning, and that we make far too many assumptions about what words students understand. (Beck et al, 2013)



APPENDIX C

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

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 Strategy

These five 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

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.



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