

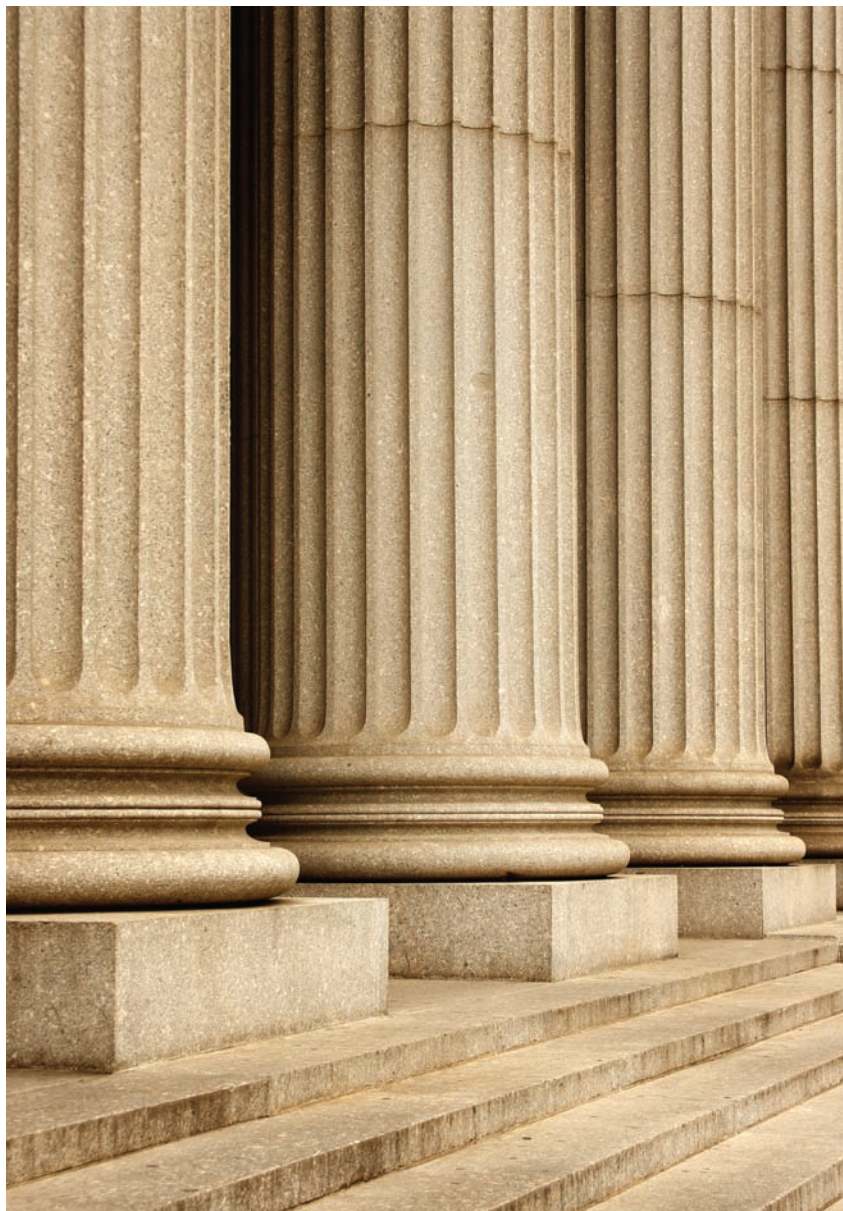
*4 practices serve as*  
**PILLARS**  
*for* **ADULT**  
**LEARNING**

**Learning-oriented leadership  
offers a promising way  
to support growth**

BY ELLIE DRAGO-SEVERSON

**A**t a recent workshop I delivered on practices that support adult growth, John, a New York City principal for more than 20 years, captured the others' experiences. "I have a master's degree in educational administration and have taken many courses and workshops on leadership and administration since earning my degree," he said. "None of my coursework focused on understanding how adults learn. I need more knowledge about how I can support adult learning and growth in my school and with the newer principals I mentor." How can we create high-quality learning opportunities for adults with different needs, preferences, and developmental orientations?

Here, I present a new learning-oriented model to support adult



development. This model emerged from my research that explored how 25 principals from diverse U.S. schools shape positive school climates and employ practices that support teachers' growth.

**WHAT ADULT DEVELOPMENT  
MEANS**

Before introducing four pillar

practices that support adult development, I'll share what I mean by adult growth or transformational learning and briefly introduce the theory that informs the pillar practices. Drawing on adult developmental theory, I define growth as "increases in our cognitive, affective (emotional), interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the

complex demands of teaching, learning, leadership, and life” (Drago-Severson, 2004a). An increase in these capacities enables us to take broader perspectives on others and ourselves. The four pillar practices support transformational learning.

### CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-developmental theory informs the learning-oriented model and centers on two fundamental premises: a) We actively make sense of our experiences (constructivism); and b) The ways we make meaning of our experiences can change — grow more complex — over time (developmentalism). Research suggests that in any school or team, it is likely that adults will be making sense of their experiences in developmentally different ways (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1994). Therefore, we need to attend to developmental diversity in order to understand and attend to our different ways of knowing.

A person’s way of knowing shapes how she understands her role and responsibilities as a teacher, leader, and learner, and how she thinks about what makes a good teacher, what makes a good leader, what constitutes effective teaching practice, and the types of supports and developmental challenges she needs from colleagues to grow from professional learning opportunities. Three different ways of knowing are most common in adulthood: the instrumental, the socializing, and the self-authoring way of knowing.

### THE INSTRUMENTAL WAY OF KNOWING

A person who has an instrumental way of knowing has a very concrete orientation to life. Adults who make meaning in this way have a “What do you have that can help me? What do I

have that can help you?” perspective and orientation to teaching, learning, and leadership. Instrumental knowers understand that events, processes, and situations have a reality separate from their own point of view, though they understand the world in very concrete terms. Instrumental knowers orient toward following rules and feel supported when others provide specific advice and explicit procedures so that they can accomplish their goals. In general, another person’s interests are important only if they interfere with or positively influence one’s own. These learners cannot yet fully consider or acknowledge another person’s perspective. Principals and teachers can help instrumental knowers grow by creating situations where they must consider multiple perspectives. For example, participating in teams or mentoring relationships — or any pillar practice — can support their growth.

### THE SOCIALIZING WAY OF KNOWING

A person who makes meaning mostly with a socializing way of knowing has an enhanced capacity for reflection. Unlike instrumental knowers, socializing knowers have the capacity to think abstractly and to consider other people’s opinions and expectations of them. In other words, a socializing knower will subordinate her own needs and desires to the needs and desires of others. These adults are most concerned with understanding other people’s feelings and judgments about them and their work. However, she is not yet able to

have a perspective on her relationships — the relationships compose her sense of self. Others’ approval and acceptance is of utmost importance to socializing knowers. An authority’s expectations, for example, become one’s own expectations. Interpersonal conflict is almost always experienced as a threat to a socializing knower’s self. Colleagues and supervisors can support socializing knowers’ growth by encouraging them to share their perspectives about pedagogy, student work, and policies in pairs or small groups before sharing them with a larger group. This will help them to clarify their own beliefs and, over time, to construct their own values and standards, rather than adopting those of others.

### THE SELF-AUTHORING WAY OF KNOWING

Adults with a self-authoring way of knowing have the developmental capacity to generate their own internal value system, and they take responsibility for and ownership of their own internal authority. They can identify abstract values, principles, and longer-term purposes and are able to prioritize and integrate competing values. Self-authoring knowers can assess other people’s expectations and demands and compare them to their own internal standards and judgment. The self-authoring knower has grown to have the capacity to reflect on and manage her interpersonal relationships, but is limited by an inability to recognize that other people can legitimately hold completely opposing perspectives that can inform her own. Principals and colleagues can support self-authoring knowers’ growth by

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gently challenging them to let go of their own perspectives and embrace alternative, diametrically opposing points of view that can inform her own.

### PILLAR PRACTICES TO SUPPORT GROWTH

Principals who participated in my research used four practices to support transformational learning or growth: teaming, providing others with leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. These pillar practices support adults with different ways of knowing. Each practice centers on adult collaboration and creates opportunities to engage in reflective practice as a tool for professional and personal growth.

#### 1. TEAMING

All of these principals used teaming to promote personal and organizational learning and capacity building through adult collaboration. Many organized their schools for teamwork and created curriculum, literacy, technology, teaching, and diversity teams to support adult development. They described how teaming opens communication, decreases isolation, enables them to share leadership, helps to overcome adults' resistance to change, and enhances implementation of changes. In teams, adults

questioned their own and other people's assumptions about evaluating curricula and student work, shared philosophies of teaching and learning, discussed schools' missions, and made decisions collaboratively. Working in teams creates a safe place for adults to share perspectives and challenge each other's thinking and provides a context for growth.

Voicing opinions can be risky for

individuals with different ways of knowing. Adults with different ways of knowing will experience teaming differently and will benefit from team members offering different kinds of supports and challenges for growth. For example, instrumental knowers will need supports and developmentally appropriate challenges to be able to consider multiple perspectives. Adults who are socializing knowers can find teaming uncomfortable initially, especially when conflict around ideas emerges. They will need encouragement to understand that conflict can be a means to developing more effective solutions to dilemmas. In contrast, learning from dialogue and conflict is stimulating and growth-enhancing to self-authoring knowers. Encouraging these adults to consider perspectives that oppose their own supports their growth.

#### 2. PROVIDING LEADERSHIP ROLES

In many of these schools, teachers, staff, and administrators were invited to embrace leadership roles. The principals reported that leadership roles provided teachers — and themselves — with opportunities for transformational learning. Principals understood this practice as inviting teachers to share authority and ideas as teachers, curriculum developers, or administrators worked toward building community, sharing leadership, and promoting change. Working with others in a leadership role helps adults uncover their assumptions and test out new ways of working as professionals.

As with teaming, assuming leadership roles is experienced differently by teachers — and all adults, for that matter — with different ways of knowing. While those who are challenged by assuming their own authority — instrumental and socializing knowers — will initially require considerable support as they take on new leadership roles, self-authoring know-

ers will appreciate the opportunity to put their ideas into action and to offer their ideas for improving school initiatives.

#### 3. COLLEGIAL INQUIRY

Collegial inquiry is shared dialogue with the purpose of helping people becoming more aware of their assumptions, beliefs, and convictions about their work and those of colleagues. Principals used this practice to engage adults in conflict resolution, goal setting, decision making, and learning about key educational issues, such as diversity. Creating situations for adults to regularly think and talk about practice encourages self-analysis and can improve individual and school or systemwide practices.

Collegial inquiry provides adults with opportunities to develop more complex perspectives through listening to and learning from their own and others' perspectives. Examples include: (1) reflecting privately in writing in response to probing questions, followed by discussion; (2) collaborating in the process of goal setting and evaluation with others; (3) responding to questions related to a school's mission and instructional practices; and (4) reflecting collectively in conflict-resolution meetings.

Adults with different ways of knowing will need different supports and challenges in order to engage in collegial inquiry as a growth-enhancing practice. Let's look at one common example — the goal-setting process — and consider how adults with different ways of knowing will need different kinds of supports and challenges. Instrumental knowers will assume that a supervisor knows what the right goals are and should tell them. Leaders can support growth by offering example goals and encouraging adults to move toward more abstract goals. Providing step-by-step directions to achieve goals will be a support. Socializing knowers expect

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that someone in a position of authority knows what the best goals are for them. While these knowers generate some goals internally, they need to be encouraged to voice them, and eventually, to separate them from those of others. Self-authoring knowers, on the other hand, will form their own goals. Such knowers can be challenged to grow through a process that helps them become less invested in their own goals and able to look at a variety of alternatives.

#### 4. MENTORING

Mentoring or coaching creates an opportunity for broadening perspectives, examining assumptions, and sharing expertise and leadership and can be a more private way to support adult development. It takes many forms, including pairing experienced teachers with new teachers or university interns, pairing teachers who have deep knowledge of school mission with other teachers, and group mentoring. Principals talked about how mentoring program purposes varied from “mission spreading” to exchanging information to providing emotional support to new and experienced teachers and/or staff. One essential element in structuring mentoring relationships is to consider the fit between the mentor and mentee and the fit between the principal’s expectations for teachers and teachers’ developmental capacities to engage in this practice.

Our ways of knowing will influence what we expect of and need from mentors and influence the kinds of supports and challenges that will help us grow. For example, instrumental knowers will feel supported by mentors who help them meet their concrete needs and goals with step-by-step procedures. Over time, however, a mentor can support growth by encouraging her mentee to move beyond what he sees as the right goals or right way to do things and toward

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engaging in open-ended discussion about alternative and perhaps more abstract goals.

A socializing knower, on the other hand, will feel best supported by a mentor’s explicit acknowledgment of the importance of his beliefs and ideas. Feeling supported by mentors will enable these adults to take greater learning risks. Mentors can gently support a mentee’s growth by encouraging her to voice her own perspective before learning about other people’s perspectives. Self-authoring knowers will feel best supported by mentors who enable them to learn about diverse perspectives, critique and analyze their own and their mentor’s perspectives, goals, and practices. Mentors can encourage these adults to move away from their investment in their own philosophy without feeling internally conflicted (Drago-Severson, in press).

The way in which adult learners engage in these practices or any from of collaborative work will vary according to how we make sense of our experiences — our ways of knowing. With appropriate supports and challenges, though, we can grow and participate in these processes and the life of schools even more effectively.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

Learning-oriented school leadership assists adults in developing capacities to manage the complexities of teaching and leadership in 21st-century schools. This work offers four key lessons:

- A developmental perspective helps with understanding that adults will experience learning opportu-

nities in different ways.

- A developmental vocabulary helps us to move away from labeling adults based on behaviors.
- Implementing any one of the pillar practices can support adult development.
- Adults need different supports and challenges, which can be embedded in the four pillar practices, in order to grow.

The pillar practices take into account how a person makes meaning of her experience in order to grow from participation in them. While there might be different reasons for adults’ preferences for particular practices (e.g. age, career phase), leaders would be wise to consider adults’ ways of knowing. Learning-oriented leadership offers a promising way to support adult growth and, in turn, improvement of practice.

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