LEADING FOR POWERFUL LEARNING

A Guide for Instructional Leaders

Angela Breidenstein
Kevin Fahey
Carl Glickman
Frances Hensley

Teachers College
Columbia University
New York and London

CHAPTER 1

Why Leadership for Adult Learning Is Crucial

It is not hard to imagine this scenario. It is 30 minutes before school starts for the day. Teachers are walking toward their rooms, chatting about the weather, their own children, the local news, or the traffic. Some are speculating about this weekend's high school football game, others wondering about possible budget cuts or next week's field trip. Some stop to say good morning to old friends, others check in with the teacher in the next room. There's a lot to talk about.

Before long, a bell rings and students swarm into the halls, banging lockers, getting books, chatting with friends, and waiting until the last minute to enter their classroom. As quickly as the noise began, it ends. The doors to the classrooms close and the day begins. As you imagine this typical school scene you also might wonder: But what goes on behind those closed doors? What is happening between students and teachers? How is what is occurring in one classroom connected to what is taking place in other classrooms?

It is also not hard to imagine that behind these closed doors the teachers have a variety of experience, expertise, and interests, and are at very different stages of their careers. In our imagined hall in our imagined school, there might be teachers fresh out of a graduate program who are knowledgeable about the district's standards-based social studies curriculum but have a tough time getting their students to the cafeteria without disrupting other classes. Across from them there might be a teacher who is wonderful at helping most students become better writers but struggles with students who speak another language at home. Next to him might be a veteran who is a brilliant math teacher, but is challenged by the district's new emphasis on writing across the curriculum. At the very end of the hall might be two experienced teachers—both former special education teachers—who are very skilled practitioners, but who worry whether their professional practice is serving the needs of students of color who are leaving school at increasingly high rates. So what do these very different teachers have in common? They all have something to learn.

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Schools are complex places and teachers are complicated people. Yet in our imaginary hallway in our imaginary school, every teacher has something to learn. The new teacher needs to learn about classroom management, the brilliant writing teacher needs to learn about working with second language students, and the talented math teacher needs to learn about supporting content-area writing. The veteran teachers want to learn about the connections between their practice and the students of color who never finish school. Teachers need (and want) to learn.

TEACHERS AS LEARNERS

Our scenario suggests not only that teachers need to be learners, but also that much of the learning they need, can be found in their own school or hallway. The new teacher might learn a lot about classroom management from the brilliant math teacher. The brilliant math teacher might learn about writing in content areas from the recent grads who are steeped in the latest research and current literacy practice. The successful writing teacher might learn about helping second language students from the teacher who is a former special education teacher. The two most senior teachers might learn about the connection between the school's teaching practice and the increasing district dropout rates by talking to teachers who graduated from the district's schools.

In most schools, there are teachers who are gifted math teachers or who work well with diverse populations or who understand how to engage reluctant learners, yet because the doors in schools typically are closed, the knowledge teachers possess often is lost. Because teachers work in isolation, and because their conversations frequently are limited to unstructured talk about sports, their children, budgets, the weather, and the traffic, the practice-related knowledge that exists in schools is not always communicated. The teacher who struggles with using the district's new math program might

> There is no other way than collaboration, collegiality, and collective responsibility. This is what we do. We look at our practice and we figure out how to make it better. Because you know what? You don't have it all figured out.
>
> —Jennifer Flewelling, Principal,
> North Beverly Elementary School,
> Beverly, Massachusetts

work in the same hall as a teacher who has a deep understanding of the program, but the struggling teacher never has a chance to access his colleague's expertise. The accomplished science teacher who is concerned about her students' ability to read text may never interact with the former special education teacher who understands adolescent literacy. Sadly, schools are often places full of powerful learning, great expertise, and good practice that are not taken advantage of—and that affects students.

How do schools become better places for kids? The answer is not so complicated. Schools become better places for kids when teachers become better teachers, when they relentlessly improve their practice, when they are learners. Moreover, teachers (or any other educators, for that matter) cannot improve their craft in isolation from others. How do teachers improve their practice if they receive no feedback from students or colleagues, if they never observe other adults teach, if other adults never watch them teach, if teachers never look at students' work with colleagues, or if they never struggle to understand complex pedagogical practices with others?

We now have now a substantial professional knowledge base that highlights a strong connection between student and adult learning. Student learning increases in schools where there are educator communities that are reflective, collaborative, and focused on issues of teaching and learning (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Donaldson, 2008; Guskey, 2000; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Stoll & Louis, 2007). When adults learn from one another, student learning increases. Adult learning makes a difference.

More specifically, the literature also suggests that adult learning in schools is best supported when teachers, principals, and superintendents regularly engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues about improving their practice (Guskey, 1995; Hoffmann & Johnston, 2005; Johnson & the Next Generation of Teachers Project, 2004; Kegan & Lahey, 2009;

> Are kids learning or are we just teaching? You have to create that culture where you can have conversations around instruction. It is far better for us to sit in a meeting and peel the onion about a kid's learning problem than to talk about how we don't have the right books or complain about the parents in the building or about how kids don't do homework. That is so gone now.
>
> —Sue Charochak, Principal,
> Ayers Ryal Side Elementary School,
> Beverly, Massachusetts

McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Teitel, 2006). The adult learning that supports improved practice and student achievement often does not happen when adults work in isolation.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Despite the hope that the research around the relationship between teacher and student learning holds out for school improvement, the literature also suggests that collaborative, practice-focused, adult learning is not common (Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Schmoker, 2006; Wagner, 2004; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), for example, suggest that schools are still characterized by the isolationism, conservatism and presentism that Lortie originally described in 1975. The literature on the context of teaching describes how teachers often work by themselves, on only the most pressing, immediate problems, and in ways that reinforce how they have always done things. Learning about practice often gets pushed aside by parent phone calls, paperwork that needs to be filled out, tomorrow's lesson plans, or field trip planning. For lots of very good reasons, sustaining adult learning is not a focus in many schools. Moreover, adults in schools often do not necessarily have the knowledge, expertise, experience, or opportunity to build such learning-focused professional communities. Teacher learning just doesn't happen on its own. It takes leadership.

The leadership that it takes to encourage more learning about practice can be either formal or informal. Certainly principals and superintendents need to be instructional leaders who work tirelessly to create the conditions that support teachers' examining, reflecting on, and improving their practice (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Mitgang & Maeroff, 2008; Waters & Cameron, 2007). However, less formal leaders—department heads, curriculum coaches, mentors, and teachers themselves—play an essential role in this work (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2010; Spillane, 2005). Successful schools understand that the direct improvement of teaching and learning in every classroom comes via a constellation of instructional leaders who undertake a myriad of activities and initiatives that have one goal: improving teaching and learning.

PRACTITIONER LEARNING

Teachers easily accept the idea that children learn in a variety of ways. They also know that as children learn, how they learn also changes. Over time, our students become more abstract, more complex thinkers; they move from struggling with the meaning of a specific word to considering abstract

concepts and constructing meaning in a variety of complicated ways. Teachers understand that their students' learning is developmental, and that effectively supporting that learning should take into account the many ways students know and learn. The complex, developmental nature of learning is an idea that is accepted easily when educators think about their students, but just as easily overlooked when they think about what they themselves need to learn in order to improve their professional practice.

CONSTRUCTIVE-DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

One way of understanding the intricate ways that adult know and learn is by using constructive-developmental theory of adult development (Kegan, 1998). Constructive-developmental theory suggests that much of what we already know about student learning is also relevant to adult learning. The two fundamental premises upon which the theory rests are: (1) adults continually work to make sense of their experiences and (2) the ways that adults make sense of their world can change and grow more complex over time. In a school, this means that adults, depending on a variety of factors, will understand their experiences in very different ways.

A teacher who is worried about lining up his kids for lunch without any disruptive behavior—never mind doing his very best for the second language, gifted, special education, minority, privileged, and so on, kids in his class—is very likely to understand his practice very differently from the master teacher who has an established repertoire and is wondering about how a specific aspect of her literacy practice might be improved. Some teachers can be eager for a right answer to hold on to, while other teachers might resist a prescriptive answer and be more comfortable with an inquiry-like stance toward improving their practice.

While there is no strict timetable for adult development, Kegan does suggest that there are some identifiable stages that leaders interested in supporting teacher development might take into account (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kegan, 1998). However, he also suggests that these stages move along a complex path of adult learning, and that adults move along that path in a variety of ways. Constructive-developmental theory calls the three ways of knowing that are most typical in adults instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring (see Table 1.1. for a summary).

Instrumental Knowers

Instrumental knowers are drawn to specific answers and concrete processes. The teacher struggling with lining up his kids for lunch wants a clear procedure. He wants some concrete steps and specific advice about how to

Table 1.1. Ways of Knowing

Instrumental Knowers	Socializing Knowers	Self-Authoring Knowers
• have concrete needs • believe that rules are important and always search for the "right way" • are most comfortable with concrete, specific processes • have limited interest in reflection or collaboration when their own needs are not met	• focus on others • believe that group needs are important • can put a group's needs before their own • can be collaborative and reflective • are uncomfortable with conflicting opinions, values, and behaviors	• are reflective about themselves and their context • can live with ambiguity • evaluate their own actions according to internal standards; expect and accept conflict • consider their personal goals and ideas very important • are able to stand in opposition to a group

get kids to the lunchroom. "Instrumental knowers orient toward following rules and feel supported when others provide specific advice and explicit procedures so that they can accomplish their goals" (Drago-Severson, 2008, p. 61). The opinions and perspectives of others are important to instrumental knowers, but only after their own interests are looked after.

Socializing Knowers

Socializing knowers are interested in the perspectives of others and very much able to take them into account. Teachers who thrive when working in teams, who can think abstractly about their practice and even sacrifice their own interest to benefit the group are socializing knowers. "These adults are most concerned with understanding other people's feelings and judgments about them and their work" (Drago-Severson, 2008, p. 61). Socializing knowers have substantial capacity for reflection; however, the perspectives of others can be too important. Thus while socializing knowers thrive on teams, they can struggle with having an identity apart from the group. It can be difficult for socializing knowers to challenge their team, department, or group.

Self-Authoring Knowers

Self-authoring knowers have the capacity to think not only about their practice, but also about who they are. Self-authoring knowers "have the developmental capacity to generate their own internal value system, and

they take responsibility for and ownership of their own internal authority" (Drago-Severson, 2008, p. 61). Effective school leaders, both informal and formal, are often self-authoring knowers. They can be clear about who they are and what they stand for and, at the same time, expose and explore their fundamental assumptions in a public way. Self-authoring knowers understand that there are tensions associated with the implementation of any professional practice, and they both expect and accept the ambiguity associated with those tensions. Self-authoring knowers understand that there are no easy answers and are suspicious of them when they hear them.

In every school, there are instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring knowers who will experience different learning opportunities in different ways. An instrumental knower might experience an opportunity to complete a collaborative inquiry project with other teachers as a waste of time until she figures out how to get her classroom organized or learns the school's new math program. A socializing knower who thrives on teamwork might be uncomfortable when that work starts to uncover issues of race and class that require her to take a stand independent of her grade-level team or department. The self-authoring knower might find a PowerPoint presentation on bullying too prescriptive and a mechanism to avoid difficult questions. Adult- learning theory suggests that instructional leaders who support adult learning in schools need to understand not only different ways of knowing, but also how the different structures, approaches, and formats that they might use, will be experienced by the different learners who exist in every school.

BEYOND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

Constructive-developmental theory explains how the ways in which adults make sense out of their experiences can change over time. It gives us a language and conceptual framework that help educators who support adult learning in schools understand a very complex leadership task. Recognizing that adults make meaning in instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring ways helps instructional leaders understand that adults learn in instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring ways (Drago-Severson, 2009). However, in schools it is not just individuals who need to learn. Schools are intricately constructed places, and while a student might have a very productive experience in one classroom, that experience can be undone when the student walks to a classroom across the hall or down the street. Teams, departments, committees, and the wide variety of groups of educators that work in schools also need to learn, and the categories of instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring learning can be applied usefully to the even more complicated and daunting leadership task of supporting group learning.

Schools are places where not only individual educators but also the teams, groups, committees, and departments in which they work, need to learn. A wealth of scholarship and theory argues that effective leadership needs to think not only about individuals but also about the teams in which individuals work and learn (Argyris, 1999; Senge, 2006). Peter Senge's question, "How can a team of committed managers with individual IQs about 120 have a collective IQ of 63?" can be asked of the many teams, departments, and groups in our educational system (Senge, 2006, p. 9). Leading adult learning is not simply a matter of leading individual learning.

Schools are full of hard-working, intelligent, thoughtful, well-educated individuals who are devoted to improving their professional practice for the benefit of their students. Districts typically support educator learning by sending teachers and principals to conferences, offering inservice professional development days, encouraging teachers to pursue graduate study, and a host of other mechanisms. So what's the problem? Senge and many others would argue that it is not just that individuals need to learn, or even that school teams need to learn, but that schools and districts also need to learn (Argyris, 1999; Schein, 2010; Senge, 2006).

Unless a school can learn, the knowledge, insight, and good judgment of each teacher will remain in that teacher's classroom. Even if groups of teachers can learn at high levels, their learning will be confined to their team or department. The school itself needs to learn. Senge describes schools that learn by saying

> It is becoming clear that schools can be re-created, made vital, and sustainably renewed not by fiat or command, and not by regulation, but by taking a *learning orientation*. This means involving everyone in the system in expressing their capabilities together. In a school that learns, people who traditionally may have been suspicious of one another—parents and teachers, educators and local business people, administrators and union members, people inside and outside the school walls, students and adults—recognize their common stake in the future of the school system and the things they can learn from each other. (Senge, McCabe, Lucas, Kleiner, Dutton, & Smith, 2000, p. 5, emphasis in the original)

If organizations—and schools and school districts in particular—do not learn, then they cannot improve.

The need to support the learning not only of individual educators but also of the teams, groups, departments, schools, and districts in which they work complicates the work of instructional leaders. Instructional leaders need to build the learning of every individual in every school, as well as the learning of the teams, departments, and groups found in those schools, and also the school and district themselves. In the supervision process, an

elementary principal, for example, needs to think about the learning of individuals in the school. However, that principal also might be concerned that the 2nd-grade team needs to learn more about building classroom communities and the 4th-grade team needs to learn more about working with second language learners. The principal also might think that the whole school needs to learn more about authentic assessment. Learning leaders need to think at many levels about the adult learning it takes to improve teacher practice and increase student learning.

Supporting all this learning is a critical and complicated leadership task; however, it can be useful for learning leaders to apply constructive-developmental theory to make sense of these levels of learning that happen in schools (see Table 1.2). Schools—and the individuals, departments, groups, and teams that are found in them—require different learning at different times. Moreover, considerable literature suggests that a school's capacity for learning is very much connected to its capacity for improvement and for increasing student learning (Bryk et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbot, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Instrumental Learning in Schools

Some schools—and teams, departments, and districts—demand instrumental learning. They are places and groups where answers, expert knowledge, or technical support are needed. They need to know about managing guided reading groups or teaching in longer blocks of time or implementing an

Table 1.2. Leadership Stance and School Learning Needs

School Learning Needs	Leadership Stance
Instrumental Learning	Leaders understand issues of teaching and learning; they have considerable knowledge about "best practice" and know how to help teachers find necessary expertise.
Socializing Learning	Leaders understand how to build collaborative groups, support reflective practice, and build school cultures that are focused on issues of teaching and learning.
Self-Authoring Learning	Leaders not only understand instructional issues and how to build reflective, collaborative cultures but also take an inquiry stance toward their own practice. Leaders become self-authoring learners themselves.

inquiry-based science program. Leaders who support instrumental learning need to understand learning issues and have expertise about instruction, or they need to be able to easily access that expertise.

The limits of instrumental learning become apparent when educators attempt to put their new learning about formative assessment or differentiated instruction or guided reading or writing across the curriculum into practice. Figuring out what instrumental learning looks like in a real classroom with real students often requires more than knowledge of a concrete process or possession of a specific answer. Instrumental learning helps teachers learn *about* a new practice or strategy but not necessarily *how* to integrate that new practice into their teaching. Instrumental learning does not readily transform practice. Learning a new practice, as opposed to learning *about* the new practice, requires lots of discussion, feedback from colleagues, classroom learning experiments, and collaborative work (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Senge, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007). It requires socializing learning.

Socializing Learning in Schools

In schools that require socializing learning, leaders also need expertise, but not only in the content areas. These leaders need expertise in building groups, teams, and schools that are collaborative, reflective, and focused on issues of teaching and learning. Powerful forces—lack of resources, insufficient time, district mandates, and bureaucratic necessities—all conspire against schools becoming collaborative, reflective places. Building such places is an intricate and demanding leadership task. Yet substantial research argues that when schools are reflective, collaborative, learning-focused places, then very good things happen for students (Bryk et al., 2010; Donaldson, 2008; Guskey, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stoll & Louis, 2007). Socializing learning is worth the trouble.

There are limits to socializing learning as well. Because socializing knowers care very deeply about others, and about the perspective and the wisdom of the group, it can be very difficult for them to challenge the group. Both organizational theory and group theory support the idea that schools, districts, teams, and departments are essentially conservative (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Schein, 2010; Senge, 2006). Simply put, they don't like change and do not always welcome data, conversations, or questions that disturb their equilibrium (Schein, 2010). The result is that socializing learners sometimes can avoid difficult questions about race, class, dropouts, student failure, and equitable educational practice. In schools, the most difficult learning is different from socializing learning. It is a learning that is able to both understand and value the reflective, collaborative strengths of the group and at the same time to maintain a position that challenges the group. This is self-authoring learning.

Self-Authoring Learning in Schools

Supporting self-authoring learning in schools makes even more demands on leadership practice. Self-authoring learners are willing to take the biggest risks, tackle the most difficult questions, and challenge themselves and others the most. To support this learning, a leader needs to not only understand how collaborative, reflective groups are built, but also take the risk to be a self-authoring learning herself—and in a public and transparent way. It seems unlikely that teachers will take the risk to be self-authoring learners, and tackle the most difficult and troubling issues of their practice, unless leaders are also willing to do this. Leaders model self-authoring learning by asking difficult questions, by presenting disconfirming data, and by exposing and exploring their fundamental assumptions in public.

Self-authoring learning is limited by the fact that it can be very risky. Schools and school districts do not always welcome hard questions or disconfirming data. Moreover, because school leaders typically work in organizational cultures that expect school leaders to be problem-solvers who have a good answer to every question, leaders who lead by asking difficult questions and being learners themselves can seem different, unclear, and even weak (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

ALONG THE LEARNING CONTINUUM

A useful way to understand the complex demands that supporting adult learning makes on a leader's professional practice is to consider the notion of a "holding environment" (Drago-Severson, 2008; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

> A holding environment consists of all those ties that bind people together and enable them to maintain their collective focus on what they are trying to do. All the human sources of cohesion that offset the forces of division and dissolution provide a sort of constraining vessel in work can be done. (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 155)

In this view, it is the responsibility of leaders—or a teacher or parent, for that matter—to create an environment in which there is enough challenge so that that people will take a learning risk, but also enough safety for the learning risk to be manageable.

Leaders create "instrumental" holding environments not only by providing enough expertise, technical support, and content knowledge to reassure learners, but also by challenging adults to work together to take advantage of the knowledge and learning that exists in the schools. Leaders challenge instrumental learners to become socializing learners.

Leaders build "socializing" holding environments both by creating intentional structures that encourage group collaboration and reflection, and also by encouraging the learners to take up difficult questions of practice and take responsibility for the process they use to explore the questions.

Leaders fashion "self-authoring" holding environments for learners by creating structures in which the learners have responsibility both for their learning and for the process. A leader challenges and supports self-authoring learners by becoming one himself, by asking the hard questions, and by resisting the easy answers.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Lately, we have been reading books about how students learn, about how they should learn in authentic ways or for deep understanding or by equitable means. We read books about improving student learning by taking into account cognitive science, by planning backwards, by being culturally competent, by teaching in longer blocks of time, by implementing standards-based curricula, and by developing formative assessments. Surely, improving student learning is the right focus. Yet, despite all this emphasis on student learning, in this book we ask how it is possible for students to achieve more and learn in more authentic, equitable ways if teachers, principals, team leaders, superintendents, department chairs—all the adults in schools— also do not learn new ways to teach, to work together, and to think about their profession. How can we reform and even transform schools unless the adults in schools can reform and transform their own practice—unless they can learn?

This book argues that the work of school reform—or improving student learning—is inextricably connected to the learning of the adults who work in schools. No matter how good the new practices, policies, structures, programs, initiatives, curricula, and methods are, they still have to be learned by educators. There is no other way. And it turns out that adults in our schools, like the students, learn in a variety of ways and those ways can change over time. It is not easy.

In the following chapters we explore a simple question that has a complicated answer: How do leaders help teachers learn? This question recognizes that (1) schools get better only when teachers are continually learning about their practice, (2) instructional leadership has a unique responsibility for supporting teacher learning, and (3) instructional leaders need to learn about the work of helping teachers learn. This book attends to the learning that instructional leaders need in order to do their work. It explores the practices, structures, and approaches that leaders can use to support teacher learning as well as the decision making and facilitation needed to make these learning structures effective.

In this chapter, we have described constructive-developmental theory and explained how focusing on adult learning often goes "against the grain" of how schools operate. Chapter 2, "Instrumental Learning in Schools," introduces learning structures and practices that are the least "against the grain" and consequently are often good places to begin to build learning capacity. The learning structures discussed in this chapter can be characterized as particularly supportive of instrumental learners. These structures are a good place to start; they have concrete processes, specific content, and require little experience with reflective practice.

Chapter 3, "Socializing Learning in Schools," examines a series of structures and practices that are more challenging, but also increase the possibility of impacting teacher practice. This chapter on socializing learning in schools describes learning structures that develop reflective, collaborative capacity and require the ability to understand a variety of perspectives. The purpose of these socializing structures is to encourage educators to collaboratively examine their professional practice as a way to improve that practice.

In Chapter 4, "Self-Authoring Learning in Schools," we consider some structures and practices that can be very powerful engines for teacher learning, particularly because they help surface and challenge fundamental notions of teaching and learning. The structures can be characterized as "self-authoring" because they build capacity for reflection on practice, the skills of collaboration, and the ability to take an inquiry stance toward our own fundamental assumptions and beliefs. They are the most powerful learning structures, but they also can be the most challenging to implement. They are rarely a good place to start.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we focus on the learning that leaders need in order build, deepen, and maximize teacher learning. Chapter 5, "How Leaders Facilitate for Learning," discusses the notion of facilitative leadership and offers some concrete approaches to the work of leading learning. Chapter 6, "How Leaders Design for Learning," takes up a series of questions that leaders need to answer in order to make good design decisions about the structures and practices that they use to promote teacher and school learning.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, "Leading for Learning," argues that the notion of schools as places where adults are necessarily learners leads to a very different, more purposeful, and transformative understanding of a leader's work.