



THE BIG IDEA:

Stop Separating. Start Collaborating.

By Peter DeWitt, EdD



School leaders and teachers are different. We know that. After all, school leaders are considered administrators, and teachers are considered, well, teachers. As time goes on leaders are accused of not understanding the role of teachers because leaders are getting further and further away from being in the classroom. Those leaders who consider themselves instructional leaders do their best to get into classrooms every day, but the division between the two roles has already begun. It's human nature to treat school leaders with a different status than teachers.

Unfortunately, schools often help perpetuate these differences. It happens a great deal when schools are offering professional development opportunities. For the last two years I've had the opportunity to run a lot of workshops and keynotes around North America, the UK, and Australia. Many times I get to visit the schools, talk with teachers and leaders, and get into classrooms to see what students are learning. As much as I loved being a teacher and principal, this opportunity to work with John Hattie, Jim Knight, and do my own work on safeguarding LGBTQ students or collaborative leadership has offered another learning curve in my career.

In Hattie's research, which involves the largest meta-analysis ever done in education and became his first best-selling book called *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, he found 138 influences on learning, and by 2013 after the release of *Visible Learning for Teachers* in 2012, Hattie's research showed 150 influences on learning. In 2016, John has collected over 200 influences on learning.

Hattie's research uses effect size, which has become a popular method among researchers to show the impact an intervention is having on learning. Generally, influences with effect sizes of .40 or higher show a year's worth of growth for a year's input. In *Visible Learning* trainings we refer to that as the hinge point. Out of the 200 influences Hattie's research has found, professional development showed to have an effect size of .51, because what teachers learned, they used in the classroom, and it resulted in higher effects on student learning.

The complicated side of Hattie's research is when we begin looking at one influence and then discovering all of the moderators within them. For example, parental involvement has an effect size of .72 but when we look at just the research around special education, the effect size of parental involvement goes up higher. In Hattie's research, the effect sizes are an average of all of the meta-analyses together. Meaning, some research showed that professional development was well under a .51 and

other research showed a much higher effect.

Professional development may include instructional coaching, traditional PD found in many schools, edcamps, workshops, or even chat sessions that take place through social media. Some of these lack the research to show whether they have a high effect or not. Many leaders and teachers, in the last five years or so, have been forced to sit through professional development that didn't seem professional nor did it add to their development. This happened because of state mandates, unrelated topics to the needs of the participants, or a bad trainer, something I am always conscious of now that I am that face of professional development when I walk into school settings.

"If district and building leadership so believe in the initiative taking place, they should be at the training with teachers."

There are times when teachers and leaders don't care about the topic, nor do they care who the trainer is, but they do care that they have been pulled from their rooms or buildings to attend a one day training. It's incumbent on the trainer to make sure that they follow through and win the naysayers over. It also means the district needs to make sure that they do an effective job getting people to understand why they have to attend the training. Everyone is 100 percent responsible for their 50 percent.

Although professional development, in Hattie's research, has shown to have an effect size of .51, it can get better. Just because something seems to be working doesn't mean it's always working as well as it could. Michael Jordan and Wayne Gretzky wanted to improve in their practice, even when they were at the peak of their performance.

A PROBLEM THAT SURFACED TO THE TOP

A few months after I began running workshops and giving keynotes, I realized something was missing from the equation when districts were adopting a new framework. That missing piece is that when the trainings occurred, principals and teachers were very rarely at the same one. Ultimately, within a few hours questions and comments arise such as, "How will I get administrative support?" "Will my principal be getting the same training?" "My principal doesn't really understand what I do and they put me into positions that don't fall under the job description of the original role."

Even if leaders are invited to the teachers' training, rarely do they ever attend, and then without fail, a few weeks or a month later, I get asked back to give the same training to leaders. And when that training happens, leaders will ask, "What sort of questions came up with the teachers?" "I wish she told me that I wasn't supposed to do that or I wouldn't have in the first place." They leave with a better understanding of the content and purpose, but it could have all been resolved, for a lot less money, if leaders and teachers were all in the same room in the first place.

This issue, which happens about 90 percent of the time that I'm on the road, which is well over 100 days a year, made me realize that we have an easily fixable issue when it comes to professional development. School districts should set up a culture where leaders and teachers are in the same room during professional development, so they can gain the same understanding, and ask questions to provide clarification.

When school districts set up a culture of different trainings for leaders and teachers, when the initiative is supposed to be adopted by all of them, this creates a situation where leaders or teachers have to be reactive rather than proactive. It creates the need for another step where leaders may have to go back

to a faculty and run through the same steps. When questions come up, the facilitator isn't there to help work through it. It becomes piecemeal.

NOT WITHOUT OBSTACLES

There are many obstacles to this issue of bringing everyone in for the same professional development. As a former principal and teacher in New York State I understand the fact that many professional development days may already be earmarked for other state compliance professional development.

Additionally, I understand that principals are very busy blending the roles of being a manager, instructional leader, and student advocate; not to mention working through the flurry of phone calls that come in from parents. However, teachers would tell you that they are just as busy within their own teaching role. That role comes with a lot of responsibilities as well.

If a new initiative or framework is being adopted by a district, and it's that important that it takes district funds, shouldn't we ask that leaders and teachers attend the same training, which will be much more impactful and cut through some of the time it takes to get everyone on board?

On the teacher side of things, it has come up in conversation that teachers may be scared to ask questions that they believe will upset their leaders. As a consultant, I believe the person running the workshop should be sensitive to the roles of everyone in the room, and set up enough dialogue time in small and large groups that this issue can be alleviated. However, when a teacher is afraid to ask a question in front of their leader, I believe this is also a school climate issue. In an age when we want students to ask more questions in classrooms, why is it still OK for teachers to not be able to ask questions in professional development settings?

IT'S ABOUT COLLABORATION

New initiatives are at risk of failing, especially in a school

climate that hasn't focused on true collaboration. If any initiative is going to be successful, it needs the collective work of all stakeholders. One way of doing this is through building collective teacher efficacy, which needs collaborative leadership.

Recently, Hattie has explored collective teacher efficacy, which has an effect size of 1.57, which is almost quadruple the hinge point. Collective teacher efficacy means that leaders help find the strengths of all teachers and help build those strengths together. The reason why this is so important is that Ashton et al. found,

Teachers with low teaching efficacy don't feel that teachers, in general, can make much of a difference in the lives of students, while teachers with low personal teaching efficacy don't feel that they, personally, affect the lives of the students (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Every school, no matter how good it might be, has teachers with a low level of self-efficacy. Through the collaboration that takes place among leaders and teachers in professional development sessions, leaders can help build the self-efficacy of teachers, which will help lead to the greater good of the district.

The days of teachers and leaders learning about different things that have nothing to do with a district mission are in the past, but in order to get there, school leaders must find ways to build the human capital (Hargreaves) of the collective group. The reality is that, if a district has a stakeholder group that truly represents all the different groups within a school community, then the mission that is chosen should be representative of all of their needs. Therefore, the professional development, and the goals among individual teachers, should focus on that mission or initiative as well.

This does not mean that everyone loses their voice for the collective voice of the district. It means that everyone can retain their voice, at the same time they all work in their unique ways, with their individual creative ways of

thinking, toward that mission. The only way to really understand those collective voices is by getting them in the same room to open up the dialogue and bring about a better understanding. Teachers dislike when they feel manipulated into feeling as if they have a voice, and then when the professional development day happens, none of the leaders who told them they would work with them are in the room to work through the learning.

We all want our students to collaborate, but as adults we do not collaborate all that well. If district and building leadership so believe in the initiative taking place, they should be at the training with teachers. When they aren't at the training, we create segmentation among groups. It helps to perpetuate that leaders make the decisions and teachers have to follow them, and that's not collaboration.

Although training leaders and teachers in different rooms on different days provides comfort, it doesn't always provide deep conversations and action steps to move forward, because the teachers being trained separately begin thinking about how they have to ask the leader for permission to move forward, so they never get to a clear action step. Teachers end up feeling as though they have to go back to the building to ask for permission before they can take the action step. This, of course, can result in more questions, and a lack of movement or chaos.



Separate trainings can contribute to the dysfunctional relationship between leaders and teachers,

especially if it already existed before the new initiative. This is not a secret. In many districts there are teachers who do not trust leaders, and in those districts leaders talk negatively about teachers. Often, leaders don't make the commitment to be at the training because they "don't have the time." We seem to always find the time to commit to the things we want to and make excuses not to commit to the things we don't. If this new initiative is that important, everyone should make time.

IN THE END

Leaders wouldn't start moving toward another initiative unless they believed it was important. Hopefully, they believed it was important because they had a stakeholder group involving teachers who felt as though they could be open and honest. Let's face it, any of us who have been in education long enough have begun to hate certain words that popped up in conversations, and *professional development* and *initiatives* are probably

among those words.

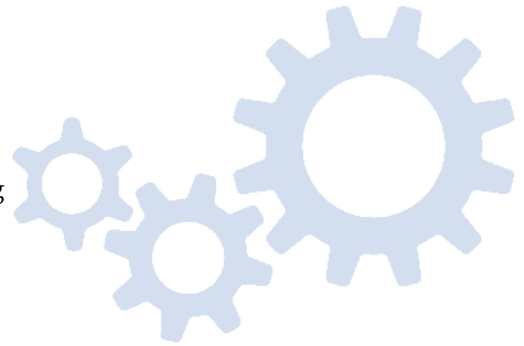
It would be better for all involved, if leaders and teachers were able to sit in the same room and have open dialogue about how to move forward. In the long run this will help build the collective efficacy of the group and lead to stronger professional development, which will hopefully lead to a stronger initiative.

In my experience over the last two years, the school districts that brought together district and building level leaders, along with teachers, and encouraged them to have truthful dialogue, were the ones who were most successful in the long run. The districts that had separate trainings for leaders and separate trainings for teachers were the ones that struggled to get the initiative moving. Being successful means we have to look at doing things differently, and bringing teachers and leaders together for professional development around a new initiative is a good place to start.

REFERENCE

Hattie, John (2012). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge: London.

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