



COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP:

Six Influences That Matter Most

By Peter DeWitt, EdD



Mindset. It's a word that comes up often in education. We have all heard, read, and researched the growth mindset (Dweck). Some of us have even explored the work of George Couros where he focused on the innovator's mindset. John Hattie, someone I work with as a visible learning trainer, has ten mindframes, which educators need to approach in their own learning so they can inspire students to do the same.

Mindframes and mindsets are profoundly important to our profession.

What about a collaborative mindset? We hear so much these days about collaboration. We want our students and teachers to do it, and the word *collaboration* is part of the four Cs in those 21st century skills we have all been focusing on for well over a decade. A collaborative mindset is necessary if we are truly going to delve into collaboration with teachers and students, which means we need collaborative leaders.

Collaborative leadership includes the purposeful actions we take as leaders to enhance the instruction of teachers, build deep relationships with all stakeholders and deepen our learning together. It includes the managerial side, as well as instructional and transformational leadership, and is the greater whole of all of those parts (DeWitt, 2016).

Unfortunately, just like with the growth mindset and the innovator's mindset, we can truly believe that we are collaborating when in reality we are just trying to push our own agenda. A criticism of any mindset is that we often want the people around us to do it, without exploring whether we are doing it ourselves. When leaders do that they put themselves, and their initiatives, at risk of failure. As Instructional Coaching expert Jim Knight has written, "If you insist they will resist."

DO WE PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH

Last year I wrote a blog for Finding Common Ground (*Education Week*) called *Why the Growth Mindset Won't Work*. The inspiration came from sitting in the front row as Hattie gave a keynote about his research, which is the largest meta-analysis ever done in education.

In the keynote Hattie said that the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset has a .19 effect size, which is well below its hinge point of .40, which equates to a year's worth of growth for a year's input. It was not the first time I heard Hattie reference Dweck's work, so I wanted to cover the topic in my blog. It went viral, and two months later Dweck wrote a blog for *Education Week's* commentary

clarifying her work. The growth mindset is hugely popular around the world, but what Dweck researched and how it's used in schools are two different things.

What Hattie's research found is that we talk about the growth mindset but we treat our students in very fixed ways, which is why it doesn't have a large positive influence on learning. Teachers tell students to have a growth mindset but they put them in ability groups that may not be right for them, and those groups become a place that students have to remain in all year as their teacher is touting the need to have a growth mindset. It was at that moment when I heard Hattie speak about the growth mindset that I thought about the idea of collaboration. Do we talk about it in a different way than we approach it?

Over the last 2½ years I have worked closely with Hattie. I have done his work in Australia three times in the last year, and worked with him in New Zealand and the UK. I edit his papers and he sends me his research when it's published. I have dissected his work into bite-size chunks of 1,100 words at a time for my Finding Common Ground blog, which is no easy feat because it involves over 300 million students. And every time I came back to the idea of collaboration and whether we really practice what we preach when we use this very well-used buzzword.

IT BEGINS WITH LEADERSHIP

Unfortunately, not all school leaders want to collaborate as much as they want teachers to collaborate around the idea provided by the leader. It's like the old days of shared decision making. You are fine to be a part of the group as long as you are sharing in the decision I'm making.

Instructional leadership is important, but collaborative leadership addresses bringing all the stakeholders in the school community together.

In my experience as a teacher, leader and educational consultant, I have found that there are four types of leaders. In *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most* (Corwin & Learning Forward) I describe the four types of leaders as:

1. **Bystander** – This leader doesn't define any positive goals and they don't inspire stakeholders to collaborate. They have low growth performance and have low partnership qualities. Teachers work in silos and the principal remains in their office more than they make attempts to be visible.
2. **Regulator** – This leader defines the goal for the teacher and the school. Although they have high performance, they control the whole environment. These leaders know what idea they want to walk out of a meeting with well before they ever walk into the meeting. Unfortunately, they do not inspire true partnerships around the school as much as they promote compliance, which ultimately creates a hostile school climate where teachers wait to be told what to do.
3. **Negotiator** – Negotiators seem as though they are inspiring collaboration but what they do is define the goal behind closed doors, and then slowly make their way around the school or district and get people on board with their ideas. They create coalitions. This works just as long as stakeholders believe in the goal, rather than feel they have to achieve it because it's coming from the top.
4. **Collaborator** – This leader finds the perfect balance between inspiring stakeholders to collaborate and co-constructing building and classroom-level goals. They believe in a high level of transparency and honesty, and have a high level of performance because stakeholders feel as though they have a voice in the process.

As leaders, we have all spent our time as each one of the four. However, we need to make sure we spend as much time as possible in the role of collaborator. In order for all of us to effectively collaborate, we must have school climates that foster risk-taking, teacher and student voice, and we must try to include everyone within our school. As any leader with experience knows, that is not easy because not all teachers want to take a place at the table. However, what I have learned from Hattie is that some of that resistance comes down to self-efficacy. Hattie defines self-efficacy as “the confidence or strength of belief that we have in ourselves that we can make our learning happen.”

When teachers come from a school where they have been micromanaged because the school climate focuses on compliance, teachers are less likely to have a voice and they often feel a low level of self-efficacy. Ashton and Webb define low self-efficacy as,

“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” (1986).

This can have an enormous impact on our school climate and focus on student learning. Collaboration, and building what Hattie refers to as collective teacher efficacy, which has an effect size of 1.57, is a way for leaders to help bring up those teachers with a low level of self-efficacy. That’s not easy because we are often focusing on the wrong issues. Often in our school districts we are comparing one school against another, as opposed to giving leaders the autonomy to look within their school to build capacity among their teachers.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), best known for their role in the International Student Assessment (PISA), which ranks national education systems, we should not be comparing schools across districts or states as much as

we need to be looking at the variance between our teachers in need of the most growth and our teachers who are our high flyers.

Hattie cites PISA in *The Politics of Distraction* (2015) by writing, “The 2009 PISA results for reading across all OECD countries show that the variability between schools is 36 percent, while the variance within schools is 64 percent (OECD, 2010).” And this is one of the major reasons we have to have collaborative leadership as well as look at our collaborative practices and mindsets. Leaders need to help support a school climate where teachers can learn from one another, and not feel as though they’re in competition with one another. This means that no longer can leaders spend most of their time in their offices or having faculty meetings that are often one-sided because they want to further their own messages.

In my research and training I have found that there are six of Hattie’s influences where leaders should be spending a great deal of their time. Hattie started off his research with 138 influences on learning, and then two years ago added another 12 influences, and now he has found 195 influences on learning. Some of those influences have negative effects, and others have enormous positive effects on student learning.

6 OF HATTIE'S INFLUENCES THAT ALL SCHOOLS CAN BENEFIT FROM:

1. Instructional Leadership (.42) – Overall, in Hattie's research he has found that leadership has a .39 effect size (mixing together instructional and transformational), which just falls short of the .40 hinge point that has been found to represent a year's worth of growth for a year's input. However, when we look at just instructional leadership, the effect size goes up to .42. Instructional leadership seems to mean everything that goes on within the school building, and there is plenty leaders can do to take the structures they already have in place and use them as a format to focus

on learning and teaching. Instructional leadership is important, but collaborative leadership addresses bringing all the stakeholders in the school community together.

2. Collective Teacher Efficacy (1.57)

We have learned a lot over the years about low levels of teacher self-efficacy, which means that we have adults in the school who do not believe they can make a positive impact on students. What we know about teacher-student relationships is that they have a .72 effect size which is well over the hinge point, so having teachers work through their low level of efficacy (which can be a result of their personal or professional experiences) is important. Collective teacher efficacy, which has an effect size of 1.57, is when we bring teachers together to focus on learning so they can all maximize that teacher-student relationship influence that matters so much.

3. Professional Development (.51) –

We know that a lot of professional development has been compliance based, which has been a direct result of the accountability and mandates I mentioned earlier. We seem to have gone from a time when teachers could attend the PD they wanted without it having much of an impact on learning (Knight found we lose about 90 percent of what we learn in sit-and-get PD), to going to a time when every hour of PD was about a new initiative. We have plenty of opportunities to co-construct PD with staff and use some of our structures like faculty meetings to focus on a co-established goal to help make PD more effective, but we don't always take those opportunities.

4. Feedback (.75) –

There has been a lot of research done around the power of effective feedback, and although some leaders are getting better at it, most don't give it their all, and we have teacher observation results to prove that. Hattie has three levels of feedback teachers can use with students,

and we can certainly take the lessons learned from the feedback research and use those levels with teachers. We need teacher observations and walkthroughs to be more powerful than they are, and it takes effective feedback to get us there.

- 5. Assessment Capable Learners (1.44)** - Hattie has changed the language around assessment capable learners a few times. It started out as student expectations and then evolved into assessment capable learners. Some schools call these students self-directed learners. The bottom line is that, no matter the ability level of our students, we need to help them understand where they are, how they got there and where they're going to next (Hattie) so that they know what to do when they don't know what to do.
- 6. Family Engagement (.49)** - What makes collaborative leadership a bit more effective is that parents are included in the dialogue around school, and feel as though they can work in partnership with the leader and school community. Too often we give parents the message we want them to have after the decision is made. Instead we have to do a better job of bringing them in and giving them opportunities to share their voices (2016).

IN THE END

Collaboration is important because it can help elevate those teachers with a low level of self-efficacy and help build a sense of collective teacher efficacy that Hattie's research shows is so important. As leaders, we need to stop thinking that collaboration is about teachers and students working together or that it means that stakeholders must comply with our goals. Collaboration is much deeper than that, and it begins with a unified definition of what it means. There are six areas where leaders can start, and they most likely already have the structure in place to where the conversations can begin.

Scan or visit to view the SAANYS webinar with DeWitt on collaborative leadership.



<http://bit.ly/2fxGMOR>

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