



16th Annual  
Hawker Brownlow  
**Thinking &  
Learning**  
Conference

*the teacher's conference*

**ANTHONY MUHAMMAD**

**SUNDAY 19 MAY**

**Session 2**

**Trapped at the Bottom: The Impact  
of the Superiority and Victim Mindsets**

**MELBOURNE**



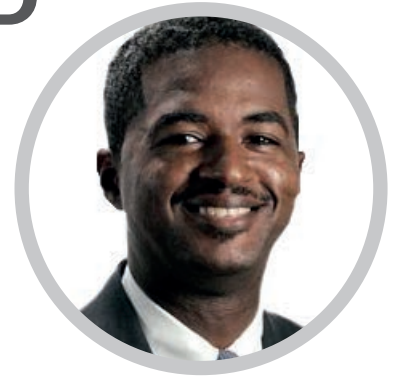
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# ANTHONY MUHAMMAD

Dr Anthony Muhammad is a much sought-after educational consultant, having served as principal for a middle and high school and as a middle school teacher and assistant principal. His tenure as a practitioner has earned him several awards as both a teacher and a principal. As a researcher, Anthony has published multiple books and articles, and he regularly gives seminars on the subject of transforming school culture. Anthony's most notable accomplishment came as principal of Levey Middle School in Michigan, a National School of Excellence, where student proficiency on state assessments more than doubled in five years.



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Trapped at the Bottom: The Impact of Victim and Superiority Mindsets  
Anthony S. Muhammad, Ph.D.

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The Achievement Gap Is a Product of Our Thinking!



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Two Forms of Organizational Change

- Technical
  
- Cultural

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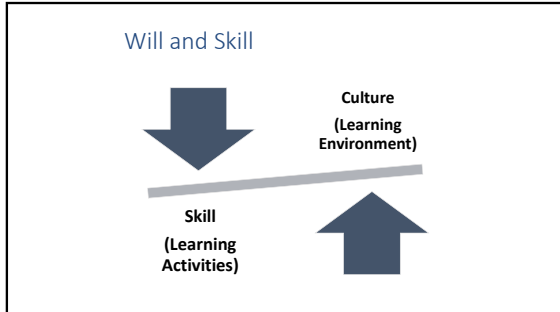
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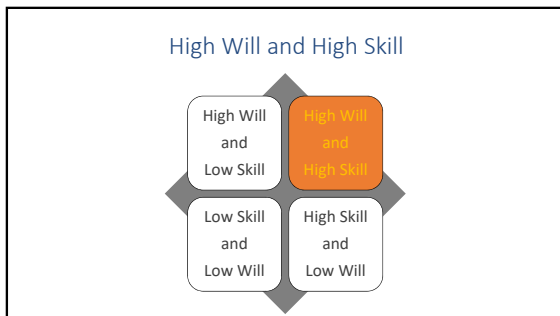
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**Technical vs. Cultural**

- Both forms of change are essential to improving organizations.
- Schools tend to focus heavily on technical changes and spend little time on cultural change.
- Deep change cannot be accomplished without cultural change.

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### The Task at Hand

"If schools are to be transformed into learning communities, educators must be prepared first of all to acknowledge that the traditional guiding model of education is no longer relevant in a post-industrial, knowledge-based society.

"Second, they must embrace ideas and assumptions that are radically different than those that have guided schools in the past."

—DuFour & Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* 1998, p. 34

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### Critical Tipping Point

"Discontent by itself does not invariably create a desire for change. Other factors have to be present before discontent turns into dissatisfaction. One of these is a sense of power.

"Those who are awed by their surroundings do not think of change, no matter how miserable their condition.

"When our mode of life is so precarious as to make it patent that we cannot control the circumstances of our existence, we tend to stick to the proven and the familiar."

—Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (1951), p. 7

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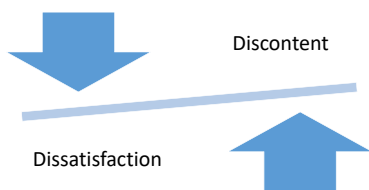
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*Mindset*

The established set of attitudes held by someone

*—Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

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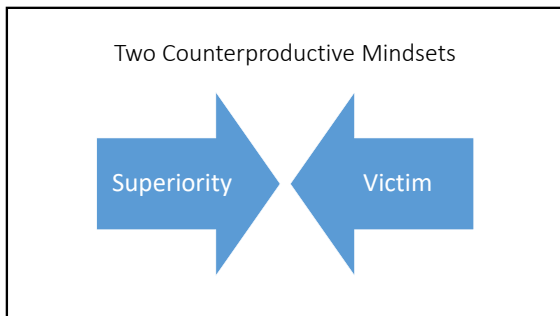
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Superiority Mindset

"I contend that the time, scholarship, effort, and resources put forth to address the achievement gap were doomed to fail from their inception because there are people with a **superiority mindset** who have a vested interest in being defined as superior to others, and they will seek to protect it" (p. 63).

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Components of the Superiority Mindset

- 1. **Paternalism:** needing to feel superior to regular human folly
- 2. **Competition:** basing personal and group value on the ability to be better than others
- 3. **Standard bearing:** believing my construct is the best and only construct and defining myself and others through that lens

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Pause to Think!

- How did these photos make you feel?
- Did you find yourself angry or offended?  
Did you find yourself unaffected?
- Rank these photos in order of their level of offensiveness from most offensive to least offensive.

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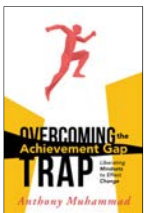
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Victim Mindset



Individual and collective responsibility to change conditions is difficult.

There is a sense of comfort that comes from framing others as predators and oneself as a victim.

I call this the **victim mindset**.

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### Learned Helplessness

“Learned helplessness is a mental state in which an organism forced to endure aversive stimuli, or stimuli that are painful or otherwise unpleasant, becomes unable or unwilling to avoid subsequent encounters with those stimuli, even if they are escapable, presumably because it has learned that it cannot control the situation.”

(Seligman, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death*, 1975)

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### Components of the Victim Mindset

1. **Irresponsibility:** maintaining that others are responsible for one’s failures and successes
2. **Low motivation:** being pacified by comfort rather than accepting discomfort that comes with change
3. **Low expectations:** avoiding disappointment by accepting an inferior status and believing disparities are normal

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In one school year  
a child spends:  
7800 hours at home  
&  
900 hours at school  
which teacher should be  
the most accountable?

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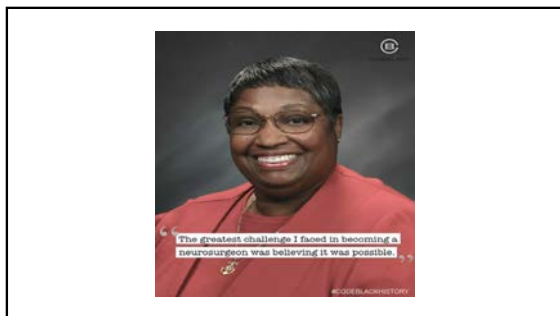
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Pause to Think!

- How did these photos make you feel?
- Did you find yourself angry or offended?  
Did you find yourself unaffected?
- Rank these photos in order of their level of offensiveness from most offensive to least offensive.

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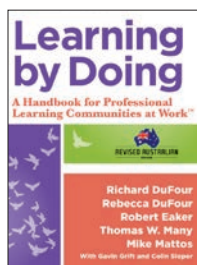




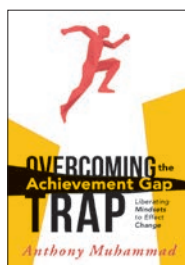


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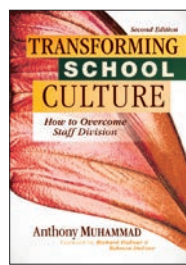
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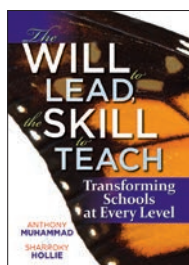
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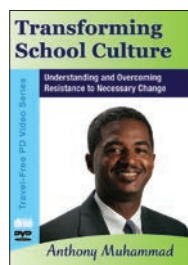
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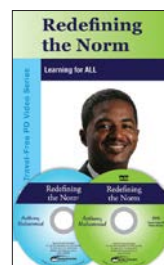
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