

# LEADING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Empowering Excellence

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Foreword by **JIM KNIGHT** ■ Introduction by **JOHN HATTIE** ■ Afterword by **MICHAEL FULLAN**



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# Introduction

A major argument in *Visible Learning* is that the impact of educators is most powerful when principals lead schools to have debates and engage in critique about what “impact” means across the school, to help develop multiple ways to evaluate the magnitude of this impact, and to search for ways to ensure that all students gain the benefit of attaining this magnitude of impact. This highlights the “instructional” or “impact” power of school leaders but, most important, it also shows the power of the collective nature of our enterprise. Teachers can and should not engage in this debate alone—otherwise it becomes random each time a student meets a new teacher whether the student will make appropriate yearly gain or not.

Recently, Rachel Eells completed a dissertation on teacher collective efficacy (Eells, 2011). This concept relates to ways to empower teachers so that they can determine what changes can be made within their particular context by enhancing their confidence to overcome any limitations and truly make a difference to the learning outcomes of their students. This screams for leadership in the school to develop an organization climate, produce school norms, and create the time and direction to enhance all teachers in the school to share in this sense of confidence to make the difference.

Her work brings together two powerful disciplines. First, social-cognitive theory is based on Bandura’s (1997, p. 3) notion that “perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments,” leading to a powerful sense of agency: “to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). When teachers have efficacy expectations that they can positively influence the outcomes of student learning, then the likelihood of these outcomes increases (Rubie-Davis, 2015).

Second, she explores the notions of collective efficacy. This relates to “a group’s shared belief in the conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). In schools this is less related to the addition or aggregation of individual beliefs about personal efficacies to accomplish group goals, but more to the aggregation of members’ beliefs about the collective’s ability to accomplish group goals (Bandura, 1997, 2000). Eells provides a powerful example: “If the collective activity consists of the sum of independent successes, as it does for a track and field team, then it is preferable to measure and aggregate the personal efficacies of the actors. When an entire group must interact, like a basketball team would, and collective activity is the product of cooperative work, then it makes more sense to measure group members’ beliefs about what the team can accomplish” (2011, p. 66). In schools, collective efficacy is influenced by school organizational features, such as responsiveness of administrators, teacher collaboration, encouragement of innovation, orderly student behavior leaders’ attributes (Newmann, Rutter, & Smith, 1989), and the narrative developed by school leaders (in schools where teachers’ conversations dwell on the insurmountable difficulties of educating students that are likely to undermine teachers’ sense of efficacy but in schools where teachers work together to find ways to address the learning, motivation, and behavior problems of their students that are likely to enhance teachers’ feelings of efficacy; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Eells located 26 studies of the relation between teacher collective efficacy and student outcomes. The average correlation was 0.60, which translates to an effect size of 1.23—making it among the most powerful influences that we know on student achievement (Hattie, 2009, 2015a). This effect was high across all school subjects and at all levels of schooling (elementary, middle, and high). The message is clear: How teachers collectively think about their impact is most relevant to success for their students. But how to develop leaders to engender their group positive think—and then ensure it is operationalized in the classrooms, is shared and esteemed in the staff room, and



that lessons are learned in safe, high trust environments about what worked best and what did not—for whom and about what.

This collective efficacy flies in the face of the fundamental assumption that too many educators have about their profession—the right to teach and think as they want. Hence the importance of this book by Lyn Sharratt and Beate Planche. They not only highlight the power of collaboration, they go further to identify the key narratives to which this collective needs to attend. Their notion of Collaborative Learning involves systems and school leaders building collective capacity, energizing knowledge together, and moving schools from being places of “plans and good intentions” to centers of “purposeful practice” on the part of all teachers who then empower students to do the same. Who does not want to be a part of such a school? It is unfortunate that the answer too often is “many” who prefer to be left alone, supported to do it “their way.” And this is not saying that “their way” is good or bad, but when it is good, what a powerful addition to the collective, what a wonderful role model, what a potentially excellent critique. We have to stop building models where we address one teacher, one school, and one system at a time; stop talking about my students, my class, my school, my system. It is time to learn from each other about what works best, to critique our notions of what impact and learning look like, to build a coalition of the successful to enable all to then make the difference, and to convince each other through evidence of student growth that it *is* possible to make major differences in the learning lives of students. There are so many examples of excellence in this happening throughout the world and so many identified in this book—if only we had greater courage to identify successful schools all around us. And from such success, scale it up to others. It is the collective and Collaborative Learning that needs capturing. This is the power of this book—to provide signposts to collaborative effectiveness, to provide many examples of this in action, and to indicate the underpinnings of Collaborative Learning.

It takes deliberate action by school leaders to build collective efficacy and work together. Sharratt and Planche see this as co-laboring—we are responsible to and accountable for our own learning while supporting the learning of other co-laborers (collaborators). Co-laboring fosters

interdependence as we negotiate meaning and relevance together. This leads to a sense of joint-ownership of the success or not of what we do. They show examples of how they have implemented these notions in schools, and thence the powerful and consequential impact on student learning. They note the critical ways to build leaders who have the courage to create narratives about collective impact, how leaders can best work collaboratively with teachers, and teachers with other teachers, and teachers with students. It never loses the key focus of this collaboration (hint: it is a precise, focused daily devotion to learning linked to results).

What a wonderful contribution this book makes to the current debates about how to move the basic premise for most educators away from “my class/school is my kingdom” and away from “I need to be supported and left alone by my leaders”—to a basic premise that my major mission is to work collaboratively with other educators and students to collectively maximize our impact on students. As Jim Knight says in the Foreword, this book is rich in examples, it is timely, and the authors write what they truly believe and have experienced as researchers and practitioners. Michael Fullan in the Afterword notes that there are many crystal clear concepts, co-learning galore, guided by research, grounded in practice—all devoted to deep learning by students and adults alike. I endorse Michael’s noting how this book complements his own recent book *Coherence: Putting the Right Drivers in Action* (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Similarly, it provides the flesh, the examples, and the drivers of the major messages underlying the Visible Learning research—how educators can work together to understand and critique what they mean by impact, what acceptable levels of magnitude are, and how to ensure that *all* in the system gain acceptable levels of impact.

**John Hattie**

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the learning emanating from the network inquiry—is a clear and vital leadership challenge. Learning as a part of the everyday work in systems and schools *is* the leadership imperative. The benefits and challenges of networked learning communities are further described in Appendix E. The vignette below describes the power of learning from and with each other when researchers as “knowledgeable others” keep the network participants focused on the data, essential questions, and taking action.

### The Power of Forming Clusters and Networks to Learn Together

The Eastern Learning Network (ELN) was established in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2013 within a cluster of 10 schools and colleges with students ranging from K–13. An initiative independent of the Ministry of Education arose from self-managing schools realizing like-needs in the area of Professional Learning and an appreciation for the value of working within a collaborative network.

The New Zealand Government’s recent Investing in Educational Success (Ministry of Education, 2014) initiative to increase student achievement further raises the importance of sustainability across a network of schools. Schools are expected to maintain change, not only within themselves but also across the system, by forming networks. At the time of this writing, the ELN schools participate in a contracted Professional Learning program facilitated by Senior Consultant Maggie Ogram and three Auckland University of Technology academic staff, Dr. Howard Youngs, Dr. Leon Benade, and Dr. Patricia Stringer, who are researching the impact of this learning network on building teacher-leader instructional capacity and increasing student achievement.

The collaborative Professional Learning program is developed through regular sessions that provide support for those in school leadership roles and for classroom teachers as they meet together to:

- grow their expertise in understanding collaborative, critical **reflective practice**;
- consider how, through supporting each other schools, they might share expertise in teaching and learning to raise student achievement; and
- better understand strategic leadership processes and school systems in sustaining both Professional Learning and critical inquiry.

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

Figure 3.1, on the facing page, outlines the contextual levels of the ELN in accomplishing collaborative, critical reflective practice that relates to each school's inquiry focus that is driven by data. The 10 schools are shown as School A, School B, to School J in the figure.

Another networked community is currently happening in Ontario, where some system leaders are involved in the Leading From the Middle (LFTM) project, funded by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Council of Directors of Education (CODE), Ontario, with researchers Drs. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley from Boston College, USA. It is a *purposeful network* of 10 large and small school districts that have come together to define LFTM and take action. Thus far, LFTM is defined by where your location is within an organization with the bottom line being that, through engagement, collaboration, and innovation, every educator can influence system and school direction and coherence—upwards, downwards, and sideways—building on each other's capacity for improvement through knowledge creation and dissemination. The core focus is on applying what we learn in increasing all students' achievement and well-being across the globe. This network or cluster has developed a purposeful design and a robust theory of action to examine impact of LFTM. Stay tuned!

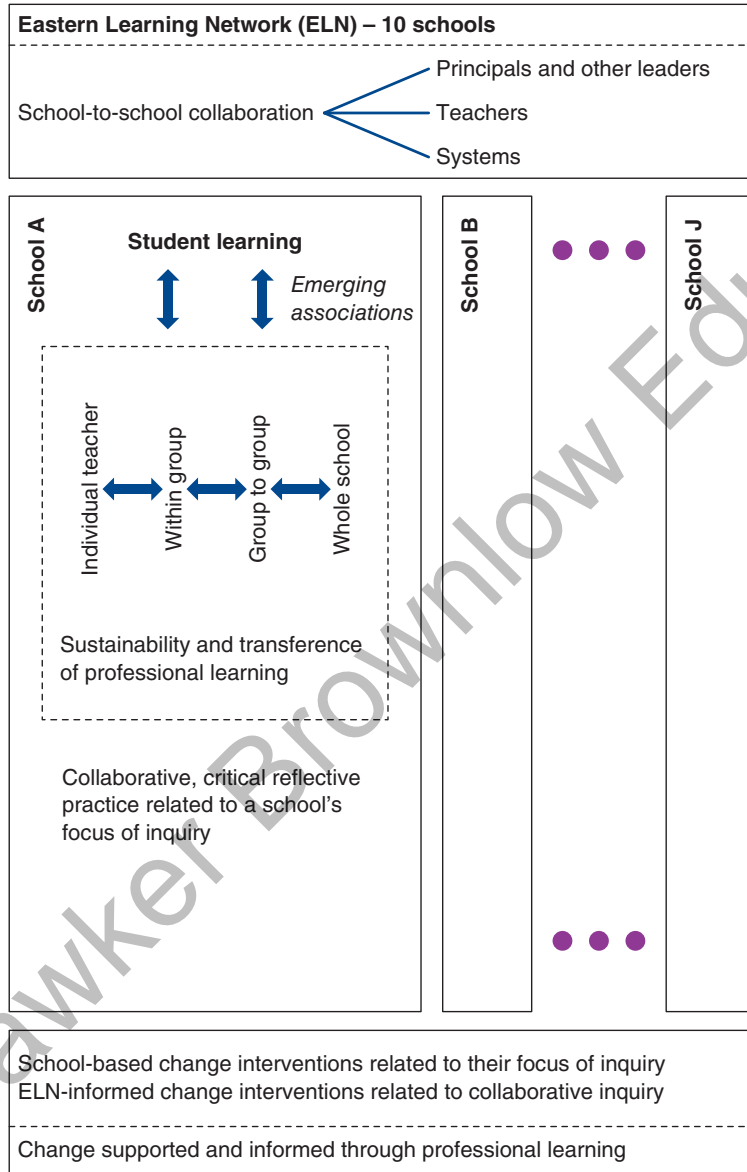
Another system and school structure and strategy to engage leaders of learning at all levels is having a system Case Management approach (Parameter 6).

## 2. The Case Management Approach

The Case Management approach has two elements: Data Walls and Case Management Meetings. System-level Data Walls and Case Management Meetings are as important to compiling and acting on evidence as are those at the school level. Living these strategies at the system level models them as critically important to school leaders and demonstrates the power in gathering data and taking action at every level.

FIGURE 3.1

**A Very Successful Networked Learning Community in New Zealand**



Source: Maggie Ogram, Senior Consultant, Osprey Consulting, New Zealand; personal communication, May 18, 2015

# The Book Study

We suggest that Book Study facilitators consider asking participants the following questions, leaving plenty of time for each participant to respond to a question before moving on to the next question. Asked in series, the questions should produce rich discussions about the impact of Collaborative Learning that will strengthen each participant's classroom practice and increase all students' growth and achievement. Facilitators, remember to introduce and maintain group norms (Appendix B) to optimize discussion and learning. Feeding back the notes from the discussions will further enrich the learning for each participant.

## Chapter 1

1. How closely does our definition of collaboration align with your own definition?
2. How closely does our definition of Collaborative Learning align with your experience?
3. How is collaborative leadership shared in your work setting?
4. What are the attributes of a collaborative leader in your opinion?
5. What do you think your students consider engaging and empowering school work?
6. What does student-centered, deeper learning look like in your opinion?

## Chapter 2

1. What has been your own experience regarding inquiry processes?
2. What part of our four-element Theory of Action Framework do you think collaborators would find the most challenging and why?
3. What parts of the Theory of Action do you think require some intentional learning? What would you suggest?

4. How does our Theory of Action align with improvement processes best known to you?
5. What parts of the Theory of Action do you think make the biggest difference to sustaining learning and student success?
6. As a system, school, or teacher-leader, how will you put into practice the five guiding principles for leaders?

### Chapter 3

1. How do system leaders best assist principals in creating strong school learning cultures?
2. How closely linked are staff learning conversations to improving classroom practice in your school or system?
3. What evidence do senior leaders need to look for in a school that indicates that school staff have worked collaboratively in their school planning processes?
4. How can system leaders best support the goals of school leaders regarding personal growth and renewal?
5. What policies, procedures, and/or practices are in place that enable the development of collaborative school learning cultures?
6. Which policies, procedures, and/or practices are in place that inhibit the development of Collaborative Learning cultures?

### Chapter 4

1. Why is it so important that leaders continuously articulate a clear vision and a path forward?
2. What is the leader's role in breaking down Learning Goals into reasonable, doable actions?
3. What is the leader's role in monitoring goals as part of Collaborative Learning?
4. How does a leader best include those on staff who prefer to sit on the sidelines?
5. What are some further strategies for finding time for Collaborative Learning that can be reasonably explored?

6. How does reflecting on classroom practice move Collaborative Learning forward?
7. What beginning points are you considering to deepen the culture of Collaborative Learning in your context?
8. How might the integration of technology foster collaboration and interdependence?

## Chapter 5

1. How do classroom practitioners best demonstrate a willingness to work with others?
2. What is tangible evidence of a growth mindset?
3. How do we model a sincere belief in the capability of our colleagues and students to learn and improve?
4. What do you find personally motivating about Collaborative Learning?
5. What do you find personally challenging about Collaborative Learning?
6. What suggestions would you offer to overcome the inhibiting or challenging factors that influence Collaborative Learning?
7. Collaborative Learning does not mean that individual learning is less important. What does a balance of individual and collective learning look like in the classroom or on a staff?
8. What supports do teachers need in becoming facilitators and designers of learning that empowers students?
9. How might the integration of technology help teachers to work collaboratively and foster interdependence?

## Chapter 6

1. What are the characteristics of a student-centered classroom?
2. What skill sets need to be developed so that students can work together collaboratively?
3. How can we best assess the skills of learning collaboratively?
4. How can students be more involved in self-assessment and peer assessment as a critical component of collaborative work?



5. How can the co-construction of Success Criteria assist students in developing their culminating event?
6. What role might students play in the planning of Collaborative Learning and its outcomes?
7. How can students be more in control of their own learning and be of more help to each other in learning collaboratively?
8. How might integrating technology help students become both independent and collaborative learners?

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