

Introduction

Tools That Get Results

Four years of public school teaching—and ten years as a principal—convinces me the nature of relationships among adults who inhabit a school has more to do with a school's quality and character, with the accomplishments of its pupils and the professionalism of its teachers than any other factor.

—Roland Barth (2001, p. 105)

PURPOSE FOR THIS BOOK

For years, staff development was something we gave or did to teachers instead of actively engaging them. We did not get the sustained results or behavior changes that really affect student learning. As well, we failed to satisfy adult learning principles and what we know about how the brain operates. We know these things are best for learning with our students. Why won't we model them with educators so that they too learn optimally?

Dialogue matters. Teachers who have the opportunity to reflect and perfect their practices get better student results. Teachers often say they need more time to talk with colleagues, but fewer than half (46%) say that their overall professional development often or very often promotes collaboration. Teachers (36%) report that their staff development often recognizes and builds on their knowledge and experience. Only 26% of California teachers report that their professional development is often sustained over time, with ample participant follow-up and teacher support (Shields et al., 1999). Teachers and administrators who develop teams that support their learning needs as professionals find the stresses of change and accountability easier to manage. We tend to accomplish what we commit to, what we are clear about, what we value, and what we create. Therefore, the more we engage teachers in creating and deciding on actions, the more commitment they have to improve student growth. Thus, we are seeing results from teams who have taken on the ownership and leadership in our buildings. We can't mandate what matters. Teachers must own the changes. Thus it is essential that we come together to focus our attention on student learning. Whether we call it collaboration, teacher teams, or professional learning communities, the importance is the quest for student success in our schools. Throughout this book, we use the terms synonymously.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ADULT LEARNING

Professional learning teams should tap into the brain's five natural learning systems (Given, 2002).

Social Learning System

"All of us prefer to interact with those whose presence increases the brain's feel-good neurotransmitter brain levels, resulting from feelings of comfort, trust, respect, and affection" (Panksepp, 1998). A system in place at birth relates to paired relationships. The other system progresses toward group relationships (Harris, 1998). It is a human basic need to feel that we belong and are accepted and included. The feelings of comfort, trust, respect, and affection increase the brain's feel-good neurotransmitter brain levels (Panksepp, 1998). As a member of a team that influences our natural tendencies and responses, we create more fertile conditions for our own learning and risk taking. Michael Fullan (2002) suggests that information only becomes knowledge through dialogue and meaning making. The use of cooperative group learning is essential in a classroom not only to allow the social system to flourish but also to help students achieve academic goals as well as social skills. It would provide the same for adults. Also, modeling and engaging in cooperative group learning will help teachers design successful group work in the classroom.

Emotional Learning System

People need to feel safe and supported to take risks. Adults also need challenging tasks with a minimal level of threat or risk to learn new skills. Emotions have a huge effect on the ability to focus and learn. It is endorphins and norepinephrine (the feel-good neurotransmitters released in the brain during positive experiences) that contribute to learning as well as good health (Pert, 1993).

The emotional system is embellished in schools

- Where educators and students believe all students will learn
- Where teacher differences are honored
- Where teachers connect the learning to students' lives
- Where teachers provide multiple ways for students to show what they know
- Where teachers continue to challenge students appropriately at their level
- Where the climate is supportive, inclusive, and predictable
- Where students and teachers celebrate the gains toward targeted standards
- Where students and teacher can laugh and celebrate together
- Where intrinsic motivation and pride in a job well done is fostered
- Where teachers celebrate incremental gains toward purposeful goals
- Where teachers' intrinsic motivation is fostered through goal setting and reflection

Physical Learning System

Active problem solving supports our physical needs. Interaction, movement, and creation of products are ways to develop a problem-solving orientation to learning. The physical system also demands movement to lower stress (adrenalin and cortisol, stress hormones in the bloodstream) and supply more oxygen and glucose to the brain. Adults feel purposeful when they are empowered to find or create solutions to problems and situations

that matter to them. Physically being involved in learning new skills and practicing them taps into the physical learning system. Being actively involved in new experiences and models of teaching, assessment increases retention of the processes and greater increases the understanding and transfer into the classroom setting.

Cognitive Learning System

Conscious language development and focused attention increase memory. People need to use all senses to process new information. Facilitating learning by providing information in a novel way that stimulates all senses including the visual, auditory, and tactile senses, as well as taste and smell if appropriate, is what good teachers do. No less is necessary for adults. The emotional, social, and physical systems seem more greedy for attention, and if their needs are not met, people will not be able to focus on the learning, thus the cognitive system cannot work optimally. If all system needs are met, people tend to be more attentive and engaged in the learning process and ultimately are more successful in their learning. Allowing adults to read, view, process, and dialogue about new knowledge and skills creates multiple conditions for diverse learners to continue learning.

Reflective Learning System

This intelligence includes “thinking strategies, positive attitudes toward investing oneself in good thinking, and metacognition—awareness and management of one’s own mind” (Perkins, 1995, p. 234). Damasio (1999) notes that the reflective system involves the interdependence of memory systems, communication systems, reason, attention, emotion, social awareness, physical experiences, and sensory modalities.

Metacognition, questioning, analysis, reaction, and goal setting all help us reflect on what we do and the results we get. It has been said that we learn from experience only if we reflect on the experience. We will not be able to sustain new learning without this type of reflective practice and dialogue. Teachers are making in excess of 2,500 decisions a day and need to reflect on what went well, should be changed, and done differently next time. We hone our craft and improve learning for students through considering our practice and making the changes necessary.

The reflective system allows us to

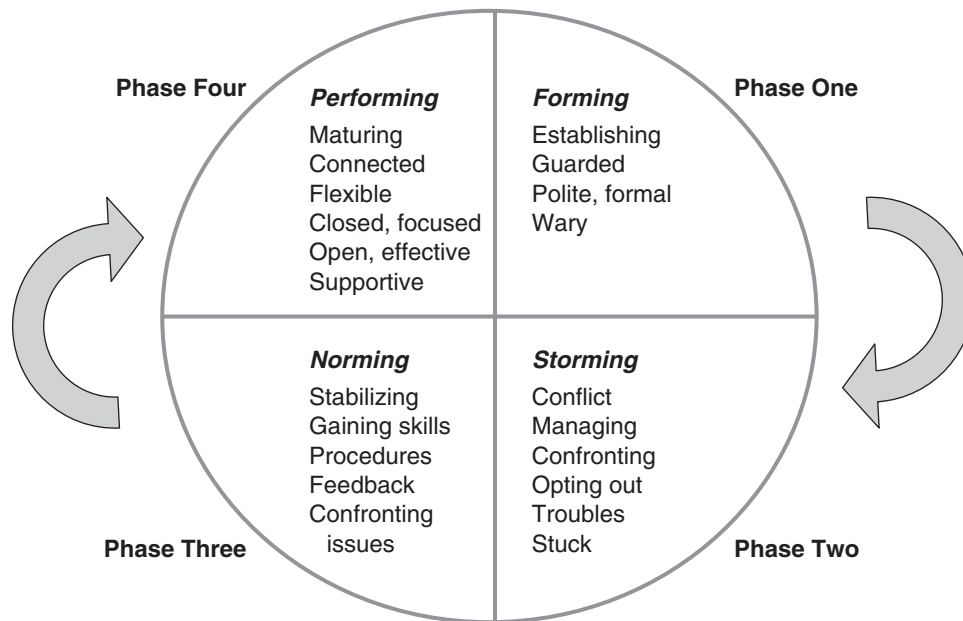
- Revisit and analyze situations
- Explore and react
- Create plans
- Facilitate progress toward goals

Teams who tap into all five “theaters of the mind” engage more diverse learners and increase the active processing of new information and skills in a variety of ways, thus increasing the chances of improving practice and behavior.

BRAIN BITS

If we advocate brain-compatible learning for students and then do not model the same strategies with adults, we send conflicting messages. Over the past 20 years, the emerging

TEAM ADVANCEMENT WHEEL



Relating Turnball to Strategies

Once we determine the phase a newly formed or existing group is at, we can select the strategies that help us move the group forward to the next stage. At each stage of the wheel, there are things the team members and leaders can do to help the evolution process in a positive way with less frustration and less time lost (Arbuckle & Murray, 1989).

PHASES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIORS

<p>Establishing: Forming</p> <p>Strategies to use: Building Climate and Sharing Knowledge</p>	<p>Members may be very positive or very apprehensive as the group begins to work together. They need to feel connected and included. This is done through team building activities and ice breakers. Members need opportunities get to know one another and build trust and relationships.</p>
<p>Dissatisfaction: Storming</p> <p>Strategies to use: Building Climate, Problem Solving, and Determining Priorities</p>	<p>It is during this time that members become more frustrated because of the need for clarification, purpose, and roles. People need strategies for conflict resolution and methods of making decisions and solving problems. This is also the conscious process of discussing openly what the team needs to succeed and sometimes redefining the tasks.</p>
<p>Stabilizing: Norming</p> <p>Strategies to use: Determining Priorities, Creating Excellence, and Building Resilience</p>	<p>Clarity helps the team move forward. Skill development helps members feel more competent and efficacious. Personal satisfaction increases, and team feels like it is beginning to jell.</p>
<p>Production: Performing</p> <p>Strategies to use: Sharing Knowledge and Skills, Creating Excellence, and Sustaining Change</p>	<p>The team is working well together and demonstrates creativity and resilience. There is autonomy and interdependence. Leadership is shared, and the best of each individual is used by the team to help more students succeed.</p>

3-2-1 Warm-up

3	<p>List three changes you noticed in staff dialogue or conversations in the last year or two:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
2	<p>List two things you may hear (or see) that might tell you the learning networks in your building or department are shifting their conversations so that more students will be successful (use your book and handouts to help you):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
1	<p>List one question you have about leading your learning networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

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