Part I

Inspiring to Grow

A Culture of Strong Relationships

"If you hear a voice within you say, 'you can't paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced."

—Van Gogh

Our strengths come to bear when we are thriving within a school culture, among a group of educators who are fully committed to their own growth and who seek out opportunities to become better. Passionate educators take full responsibility for their own development, and they seek to learn and grow each day for the betterment of their students. They embrace the mantra that *Today I will grow by challenging myself to be the best I can*. They know that within a diverse and challenging environment, every single day holds new situations with the promise that they truly can make a difference in the lives of children. Challenging ourselves means seeking out new horizons, reaching for new ideas, uncovering greater possibilities for discovery and development. This runs counter to a culture that stifles new meaning and which fails to recognize our infinite potential to experience growth. Because the ultimate goal is for all students to succeed, all educators must be willing to master their craft, pursuing their expertise with a fervor to excel and to implement the best

teaching practices in a supportive, growth-oriented culture. It's the stories we tell, like the one about Principal Cynthia Jewell, that reinforce our work and remind us that change is difficult but achievable. When a passionate group of committed adults rally behind a noble purpose, success is inevitable.

Results Through Passionate Leadership

Inspiring Change and Reaching Goals Through Data Consciousness and Difficult Conversations

Principal Cynthia Jewell, Stockbridge Elementary
Stockbridge, Georgia

We live in a society that relies mostly on using assessments and test scores to measure and report how well our schools are doing. Whether we are looking at state, national, or international assessments, they all are commonly used to rate, compare, and assign a grade to our schools. Much of the standardized assessment narrative is that schools aren't doing well, and Stockbridge Elementary found itself in this same boat. Interestingly, at one time, the school was performing very well and receiving tremendous accolades. However, as the state test changed, and rigor increased, scores did not. Stockbridge was left in need of revitalization with the ultimate demand to overhaul their practices.

Even though state assessments are only one indicator of performance and aren't always the right reason to react with sweeping changes, they do indicate student performance on the standards and can't be ignored over time. For Stockbridge, the numbers were low and stagnant. As administration changed, the new principal, Cynthia Jewell, came to the school with a fresh outlook. She wanted Stockbridge to excel academically, in all areas, and she was eager to build a community obsessed with student achievement.

Quickly in her tenure, Principal Jewell identified groups of students who were not doing well. She dug into the data and realized that her response to intervention (RTI) Tier 2 and Tier 3 students stood out as not making the necessary gains toward proficiency. Knowing these students were already receiving assistance within the school, she questioned what else they might be able to do to solve the problem. Identifying the students who are in need is actually the easy part; figuring out what to

do to solve the student achievement puzzle is the true challenge. As a result, she realized that to make a difference, the faculty had to accept that the scores weren't necessarily a student issue, but rather one that everyone needed to own. The staff had to take full responsibility for student learning. She asked the question, "Are we satisfied with our current practices and how poorly our students are doing?" One major conclusion they made was about lesson planning. Although efficient, the grade-level teams used group-made lesson plans that divided up the subjects by content area and then shared them prior to teaching the particular lesson. The lessons were aligned to the standards, but this divide-and-conquer approach left teachers without clarity on what they were teaching and the lessons were not instructionally responsive to all students' needs. The plans were too generic and lacked input.

As a result, Stockbridge embarked on a new journey to improve how teachers collaborated, to institute formalized professional learning communities (PLCs), and to implement an aggressive reading initiative. Principal Jewell emphasized to everyone, "If the students cannot read, they simply cannot learn." They underwent intensive professional development, which was then reinforced in PLCs and during walkthroughs. Frequent visits to classrooms were conducted by the administration and the instructional coach, specifically designed to see the initiative in action and how well the teachers were doing. The first year had its challenges, but they knew going in that change always takes place after conflict.

During the second year, the initiative started to take hold, and teacher buy-in spiked. They began to take real ownership of the new student learning targets. They reimagined the importance of their instruction, their ability to connect with kids, and their enthusiasm for the work. Of course, as with all change initiatives, it wasn't easy, but the only alternative was accepting failure. Instead, they pushed forward; formative assessments were used throughout lessons and within units, aligned to benchmarks to determine ongoing progress. They saw results. Students who were once unsuccessful were growing and, and in some cases, exceeding their goals.

Unfortunately, new endeavors are often riddled with challenges and resistance. For many, change is difficult and creates discomfort, which in Stockbridge's case, led to a 40 percent teacher turnover by the end of Cynthia's second year with the program. This exodus could easily be misconstrued by placing blame on Cynthia for

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alienating her staff, ignoring the need for strong relationships, and demonstrating poor leadership. Cynthia herself could have doubted her decisions, questioning her actions. However, the reality was that the changes were making a difference, and some of the turnover was a good thing. PLCs were starting to function well, and teacher leaders were stepping forward to make contributions to the changes with a revived sense of purpose and passion. Those who weren't willing to change felt the pressure of what it means to hold onto the past when everything around you is transforming. Fortunately, the turnover was an opportunity for new people to shine, and it gave liberty to Cynthia to hire teachers, fully committed to student success, with the mindset that as professionals they too will learn and grow every day.

Teachers who know that their impact is making a difference coupled with improved student outcomes creates a culture where everyone is learning together. With energy, passion, and excitement, the teachers were now willing to be coached, visited by other teachers, and engaged in a cycle of growth. The school continues to experience gains, and the teachers are now leading the way. Cynthia's new goals take into consideration even higher levels of student performance, and she knows that it means doing even more than they have so far, in new and different ways, with growth opportunities for everyone.

Cynthia is intent that Stockbridge will continue to succeed, and as the community continues to change, they will be ready to meet the needs of everyone who walks through their doors. She is creating a culture that champions the students and their success, regardless of their background or economic status. She ended the interview with resolve. She said that despite the school being high poverty, "how a child eats [free-and-reduced lunch] will not determine how well they learn." What we love about this story is Cynthia's commitment to building a learning culture for both students and staff. It's clear that under Cynthia's leadership everyone came to accept the importance of their own growth. A committed staff who takes ownership of student success through unique contributions and a strong commitment to learn and grow is the essence of passionate leadership.

1 A Learning Culture, Not a Teaching Culture

"The culture of a workplace—an organization's values, norms, and practices—has a huge impact on our happiness and success."

—Adam Grant, *Originals*, 2016

EVERYONE WORKS TO LEARN

A model learning environment is a space of contentment, comfort, and value with an extreme focus on learning. It's vibrant and radiates positive activity grounded in an emotional connection between the students and teachers. When students are actively engaged with the content, one another, and the teacher, it's literally palpable. A model learning environment is one where the students direct their own learning within the context that the teacher created, and the teacher facilitates as a guide and a coach. In classrooms where learning is taking place at the highest level, teachers move around purposefully, offering feedback to students, clarifying misconceptions, checking for understanding, and asking students to think deeply. Perhaps a

supervisor is even in the room, observing the nuances of the class, identifying high-leverage strategies that should be praised and reinforced, uncovering opportunities for tweaks and adjustments to the lesson with specific feedback to improve performance. Everyone is working to support the learning that is clearly taking place.

The classroom described above is a model to support a culture of learning. It is alive and filled with passion that can be felt by everyone in the room, and it distinguishes the various roles that each person plays, whether they are a student, teacher, or supervisor. Although the roles among those in the classroom may differ—students learning, teachers teaching, and supervisors observing—each individual contributes to the overall achievement taking place. The student, teacher, and supervisor each focus on learning, growing, and using best practices in various ways to support one another. It means that students are taking responsibility for their own learning and growth, teachers are working toward student mastery, and supervisors are supporting the learning process for everyone. This is how great classrooms function and it's what the larger school community recognizes as excellence from their schools. We all want classrooms where student learning is recognizable, where risk-taking among students and teachers is encouraged and rewarded, and where expectations are rooted in accountability and support. Just like the classroom we describe, schools and school systems need to operate in this type of ongoing support and collaboration among all involved to develop the "collective capacity" for improved student achievement and increased levels of learning (Fullan, 2011b). It has to be true for the students, true for the teachers, and true for the leaders.

The reality, though, is that it takes many different people and organizations within the broader context of education to work to achieve our desired results in schools. The first question, then, becomes whether or not we know and understand the "best practices" necessary for success and even whether or not we fundamentally agree on them as practitioners. And, when we're not reaching our desired outcomes for students, the second question simply becomes: why aren't these agreed upon best practices a more common occurrence? To understand the reasons why these questions arise, we need to explore how education gets muddy and how many viable practices are slowed down and rendered ineffective. One reason

is that education gets messy when we become entangled in what we call the instructional-*ations*—stipulations, articulations, regulations, and legislation. On the surface, these teaching and learning efforts are not a bad thing, and many are well meaning, intended to solve real problems, but too often they interfere with our focus.

One of the major challenges that school systems face is in how the typical changes trickle down to the people on the frontlines—teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators. Too often, by the time the "new ideas" are presented to the staff, even with a solid rationale, it is often perceived as just "one more thing," and it's reduced to a directive from on high. We recognize that change is common and should be positive, with many efforts designed to improve conditions, but that change initiatives in schools are generally negatively received. This perception isn't wrong or even unique to education. The health care industry is a great example of a system that has significant oversight from government regulators, including agencies such as the Department of Justice, the Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, all of which are in place to "protect the public." As a result, the health care industry, and its various components, are constantly subject to regulations and change initiatives beyond the immediate control of the people doing the work within the industry.

Many of the intended reforms fall into what Fullan (2011b) described as "wrong drivers." These reforms include "punitive accountability versus capacity building . . . or ad hoc versus systemic policies" (Fullan, 2011b). To break this down further, the issue that schools often face is that the "regulatory" changes directly impact the classroom without additional support or resources for implementation. Over time, increased mandates without support, along with a negative narrative that schools are failing, can reduce the excitement and passion among those in the field. To exacerbate the problem, these changes are piled on top of one another so rapidly that the people in the trenches don't have time to fully grasp the true intent of the reform efforts and, therefore, cannot successfully implement the new ideas with fidelity. In an industry where the practitioners rely on passion, combined with expertise, the changes inadvertently restrict and constrain the work. The real detriment when this happens is that the passion and fire within the educator

can slowly extinguish. The teacher becomes someone who dreads meetings and visits from district office personnel because the information and messaging are essentially the same: "What we're doing is never enough." Whether it's introducing new regulations and mandates, unpacking new or additional state assessments, reworking how the school can improve to meet new targets, or affirming additional responsibilities beyond the classroom, the changes blur together and feed a level of hopelessness that reduces the commitment toward the changes to compliance and an attitude of just "tell me what I need to do." At their worst, the instructional-*ations* erode educators' sense of professionalism to the point that they devolve into automatons, delivering a program while feeling personally devalued. The fact is, the opposite should be true. Educators should be passionate people who are held in high regard because of their unique expertise to teach children and shape the future generations of our workforce. And when we're all not working together to support the learning culture in our schools, students suffer.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

So much work among well-intended reformers has been done to elevate expectations, increase rigor, and provide guidance throughout all of our schools. These efforts illuminate areas of need and increase the cry for all children to receive the very best education that can be provided. In the wake of these efforts, though, exist people who don't perceive themselves as part of the equation in their creation, the success they boast, or the solutions they propose, but rather a part of the systemic educational problems that they highlight. We don't foresee this style of reform changing—nor will its consequences. Actually, it's better to be accepted as the new normal and for educational influencers and school leaders to do everything in their power to instill passion as the fuel for fervor and commitment to a learning culture so that we can thrive in a system that is constantly changing. When combined with technical expertise, passionate leaders create incredible learning environments for teachers and students to reach new heights. Outside the walls of the school, there are also a number of efforts designed to create a better system, but both internal and external efforts need to be in sync for either to be successful.

Unfortunately, this is too often not the case. However, to realize the desired results, schools must be empowered and given a solid foundation of support through professional learning experiences and quality feedback to improve practice. In a learning culture, growth is the only mechanism to battle constant change, and many school systems are beginning to get it right. The unintended consequences of the outside-in reform efforts can only be mitigated through professional growth and a desire to improve the system from the inside out to meet each and every new demand placed on schools.

Due to competing efforts and initiatives, school leaders must view leading their school system through bifocal lenses. The first, an internal lens, drives progress and change based on key data that the school and district leaders have available and know they must act upon. Especially where equity is questionable, leaders have to confront and alter current scenarios. This information drives professional learning and growth experiences to make the necessary improvements internally. The second, an external lens, anticipates influences from outside the immediate school system that may also drive change. These "outside the school" changes also require extensive professional development and growth opportunities so that our capacity for the work deepens and our ability to manage change increases. Skilled leaders must learn how to manage both types of change to equip their systems by aligning all of the moving internal and external parts. This alignment reframes change as a holistic approach and seeks to reduce burdens through meaningful opportunities for professional learning and growth. Ensuring that every aspect of the organization operates in harmony through the two-lens approach will fight the belief that educators are the casualties of constant change; it will anticipate needs before they arise and it will increase the awareness of the necessity for professional growth. Through systems thinking, the unintended consequences of reform efforts can be alleviated for a unified approach to a learning culture.

AN ALIGNED SYSTEM OF IMPROVEMENT

Student achievement has become synonymous with reform and standardization. Name the reform, and not too far down the line, you'll find how it is designed to lead to student success through clearer

standards. The goal of reform is to make improvements; to ensure that these improvements have a chance to stick, it is necessary to align all of the pieces and parts together in harmony. Alignment among interdependent parts is critical for effectiveness and overall success. The term *alignment*, within education, typically focuses on the *Big Four*—standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments—with standards serving as the primary guiding force. The belief is that the alignment of these components is critical if we desire to make educationally informed decisions, improve the overall system, and educate toward mastery. For the most part, this is accurate and serves as much of the foundational premise behind the standards-based movement. As Resnick, Rothman, Slattery, and Vranick (2002) indicate, "the theory behind standards-based education holds that standards should be rigorous and challenging, and that they should be specific enough to guide both teachers' and students' day-to-day work and the development of tests." Although this movement has evolved over the years, raising questions about depth of knowledge, grade-level placement, and teacher efficacy, the goal remains the same. The core of the work is to identify clear standards and align the key areas of learning within the system to achieve them. In fact, one of the guiding principles for the Common Core State Standards was to establish a baseline of proficiency, clarified for each grade level and within each state (Common Core State Standards, 2018).

Unfortunately, overall alignment within the educational system is complex, and coordinating efforts to maximize effectiveness of any alignment effort is challenging. One reason, as Martone and Sireci (2009) point out, is that alignment refers to different areas within education and "assessment, standards, and instruction are all integral to student achievement, but they have each been enacted at multiple levels of the educational structure." And, at times, their enactment within the system is done with a lack of consideration for one another. These various structures create unique circumstances because the change initiatives, whether through policy, legislative reform, or even district informed decision-making, may not fully calculate the distinct influence they have over the classroom environment or, most importantly, the supports that are needed for actual advancements to take place. Change requires realignment of the processes, but too often the realignment doesn't delve into the human

side of the equation. It focuses on the processes but not the people. We tend to take for granted the instructor side of the instructional equation, assuming that if standards, curriculum, and assessments are aligned, so too will be the instruction. That's simply not the case unless we professionally develop the people and provide frequent measures of feedback for their growth. It may sound strange but education isn't generally considered to be a "people business" as often as it should. If we want passion, we have to think about the people and how they fit into every change effort within a learning culture. If the system is not aligned, improvements will not stick.

Businesses and schools, or any organization for that matter, are really no different in terms of making changes and supporting the people. Organizations are made up of many moving parts that all serve specific and necessary functions. If one part is misaligned, the entire organization suffers. The alignment among the Big Four is critical, however, so that educators fully understand the changes needed and that they're reflected in practice. That's precisely why the alignment process is crucial to success. Stakeholders don't have a problem identifying the failing parts and then legislating, influencing, or implementing new ideas or policies. The challenge is in seeing to it that true reform takes hold at the classroom level. The alignment has to take hold for the people doing the work, the ones who will actually transfer the change into a deliverable experience for students. This is why professional learning and feedback systems are needed because they are the primary methods we have to bolster understanding and expertise, and they need to be done in new and different ways with greater frequency and a stronger sense of urgency. Change initiatives require extensive follow through with ongoing and sustainable support to fully equip teachers and administrators on the frontlines.

For alignment to occur, and for it to truly galvanize all of the components of the organization, it cannot stop with just the structures and systems. It must encompass the people, the educators, in a culture of learning and support. To fully implement any change initiative involving the Big Four, we must combine them with what we call the *Powerful Two*—professional development and instructional feedback. The first is about creating powerful learning experiences for educators, and the second is about cranking up the frequency and

quality of feedback and coaching to harness the power that comes with praise and criticism. Anything short of this simply creates what we call a *teaching culture,* which is not the same as a *learning culture*. A culture whereby teachers are not at the helm of the teaching and learning, delivering instruction without fully understanding or embracing the power or intent behind any given reform or change, is what we deem a *teaching culture*. This limits their ownership, their connectedness with the profession, and the passion that ignites their creativity and inspires students. A *learning culture* is much different; it's a place where we grow as teachers and leaders from the inside out. It's a system that is truly aligned and ready for change.

GROWTH FROM THE INSIDE OUT

The good news is that growth, albeit seemingly put upon educators, can happen from within the school system (Elmore, 2004) if we're willing to look at things differently than we have in the past. We somehow arrived at a time when professional development and feedback aren't exciting and fun, which is what we need to change if we're going to become a real learning culture. There are a number of reasons for this but one is that even though "instruction" is commonly discussed during reform efforts, it tends to take a back seat to the alignment of standards with curriculum. What ends up happening is that we lose focus on developing teachers and enabling them to perfect their craft during the change. Instead of growing the people, we deliver a new program to them.

Kirsch, Bildner, and Walker (2016) tell *Harvard Business Review* readers that for solutions to organizational issues to work, "systems entrepreneurs must have a deep understanding of the system or systems they are trying to change and all the factors that shape it." In other words, leaders need a deep understanding of their systems to implement new solutions to problems that may, in fact, be caused by the system itself. Education is no different and to develop a learning culture, the changes must confront the causes of the problem, be sustainable, and supported. This creates a culture where the educators can take full ownership of their performance, learning, and outcomes. In addition, school leaders must incorporate methodologies to

fully calculate the toll that the change will take on the school and its staff. Educational leaders can benefit from neurosurgeon McLaughlin's (2018) advice, who suggests three strategies when facing fear and stress: "1. Always place a drain; 2. Never cut what you can't see; and 3. Get a second opinion." Although the language is tailored for a doctor, it is applicable to all organizational leaders who face stress. From an educational viewpoint, these three suggestions are designed to properly manage situations when experiencing large degrees of change that tax and stress the system. Placing a drain in Dr. McLaughlin's example refers to a way to "relieve intracranial pressure" during surgery. The drain is vital in the operating room. Within education, it is critical to institute a release valve, as in to not overburden the school community, including the teaching staff and the students. Great leaders are situationally aware and know when the stress is bending the community versus breaking it. Change is needed but it only works when people are supported through a deepening of their capacity, skills, and abilities.

Even though educators aren't operating on the brain, "never cut what you can't see" implies that the problem must be fully understood before working to move or eliminate something. The implementation process must account for all of the various elements that are going to be impacted, before, during, and after the decision. And lastly, getting "additional opinions" is critical for perspective (McLaughlin, 2018). Successful school leaders understand the importance of hearing from a cross section of the staff, giving them a voice, before rolling out a new idea. This approach allows for the magnitude of the change to be calculated and measured against the current school community and what they can bear. Handled well, change can be woven into the structure of the school and implemented with fidelity. This helps to create the change and reach the goals that are desired. When teachers understand the *why* and are included in the *how*, the *what* almost never matters. When leaders obtain a 360° view of a situation, they can successfully eliminate the perception that this new thing is "one more thing," which only whittles away at passion and professionalism. What we don't want from any programmatic change is to boil the profession down to script and deliver. Educational leaders could benefit by incorporating these simple surgical strategies to manage change in a way that

complements and reinforces the system without breaking the people within it.

In turn, when change management strategies are maximized, the aligned system offers ongoing high-quality professional development as the norm with frequent quality feedback, aligned to the overall goals and what is newly expected. School leaders, and others who influence what happens in the classroom, need to steer clear of the trap of believing that success is the result of initiatives and reform efforts alone. The truth is that real change always lies with the people, not the policy or the program.

School systems cannot be stifled by policies and rules that don't account for the human element of the educational system. Recognizing that passionate educators make the difference is what reframes the narrative around school reform. We fully understand the need for reforming the work to meet the demands of the future way in which we must educate young people, and this is in no way an attempt to deregulate schools or pontificate on local control. Nor is this a bash-the-standards movement. In fact, improvements are desperately needed and rigorous standards are a must in getting us there. Rather, this is a call to action that at the heart of policies there are people who need support in executing them. If the goal of the policy is to fix a problem, we contend that the policy itself will fall short every time if we don't fully equip teachers and administrators with differentiated learning experiences and quality feedback on their implementation. The growth has to happen from the inside and it requires quality level of support for the people doing the work.

QUALITY LEVELS OF SUPPORT

Once a clear understanding of the moving parts is in place, quality levels of support allow new processes to take hold for the people who are executing the initiative. As previously mentioned, many of the standards-based reforms attempt to focus on instruction by addressing alignment between standards, curriculum, and assessment but too often the instructional improvements seem prescriptive and the real learning around the new program of work is cursory. It's also important that what we call *prescriptive teaching* is not confused with

resources. For example, giving teachers a new reading series, aligned to the standards, and offering a one-day training on the program that the teachers may not even fully buy into, is a recipe for mediocrity. Although the resource (reading program) may be of quality, the implementation will suffer from prescriptive teaching due to a lack of teacher development for using the program. When teachers accuse a resource as being prescribed in nature, it's often due to a lack of training. Again, the result is a *teaching* culture and not a *learning* culture. The changes must occur with an environment that views teacher development as important as student achievement. Schools that are passionate about student achievement invest in their teachers and build a culture where professional learning is expected and rewarded. One critical disclaimer is that this type of development is not the typical trainings that many of us have experienced. We're calling for a new push that requires professional learning to be differentiated so that educators are moving toward mastery in the art and science of teaching and learning.

There are a few different ways to achieve this environment, but it begins with empowerment and ends with accountability. Passionate leaders possess the courage to put teachers in charge of their learning, and they inspire teachers to solicit feedback on the risks that they are taking and the new practices that they are using in the classroom to engage students. Teachers all have various needs and require different levels of support. Three major mistakes that schools often make are (1) overlooking the talent within the school as a resource for professional development, (2) failing to differentiate professional development based on the experience and expertise of the teachers, and (3) forgetting to reteach and reinforce new practices for teachers who recently underwent a new training. Consider a high school with a major literacy initiative. The school's data reveals that students are underperforming with about 30 percent of the incoming freshmen reading on a sixth-grade level. This reality calls for several internal changes that are orchestrated by the administration, such as extensive professional development (PD), restructuring the master schedule to offer tiered ninth-grade ELA classes, and additional resources. To successfully address the issue, the professional development that the school offers must tap into the expertise of the current teachers. Too often, schools will look outside when

the answers might be already on staff. It's always best to empower the staff to lead whenever possible. Ongoing PD throughout the year to build literacy in the content areas, as an example, is a perfect place for teacher leadership. This requires leveraging master teachers who already know how to surgically build literacy into their instruction but do so in isolation. Yes, a program may be necessary, but that would fall into the training bucket, which also requires follow up support and evaluation. Even when the PD is from an outside party, afterward, it must consistently be reinforced by the expertise that the staff can provide and feedback on the new practices. This means that even when outsiders are brought in, on staff training and development experts are appointed as leads. Imagine, in our example, that year one goes smoothly with a few identifiable issues. In year two, as the school continues the initiative, teacher leaders take the lead and offer ongoing professional learning toward mastery, ensuring the growth and sustainability of the efforts.

A school with a learning culture is sensitive to the skills and expertise of each teacher as well as the skills that need to be learned. Imagine that the same high school with the reading program has eighty teachers on staff; it's inevitable that they are all performing at differing levels. A learning-driven culture respects and knows the talents of the teachers and creates a learning environment that leverages their expertise and designs PD to ensure that they are learning the necessary skills to complement their current understanding and execution. This approach empowers teachers, respects their time, and promotes an environment where they are able to grow and develop, based on their needs and skill level.

The accountability piece of this model is that everyone is expected to learn and grow. Everyone. And the learning is directly tied to and embedded in the Powerful Two—professional development and instructional feedback. The first power is in the use of high-quality professional development for everyone. This is where teachers receive PD, based on their skills and expertise. Included in this practice is having teachers lead sessions as often as possible to support each other, using them as experts in their own craft. The second power is in giving and receiving instructional feedback. There are a variety of ways that teachers can receive feedback, both informally and formally. Walkthroughs are common in schools, and

when used well, can help administrators gather critical information on what is actually happening in classes and can be very powerful for decision-making (Protheroe, 2009) not to mention the power they have in coaching teachers for improvements to practice. The powerful aspect of learning through coaching does not have to be done by a supervisor. If the school has well-developed teacher leaders, they can fulfill this role in a non-threatening structured manner. When teachers support one another and guide their own growth and development, they enjoy greater connections with the change efforts, with one another, and with the school goals. This is all about the quality levels of support that teachers need to produce their best results, which really does require feedback as often as possible based on real instructional practices in the classroom.

SUPPORT AND GROWTH THROUGH FEEDBACK

In a learning culture, walkthroughs are a great opportunity for administrators to see what's actually going on in the classroom. In a well-developed aligned system, the walkthrough specifically looks for elements of the instructional focus. In our literacy scenario that we outlined before, the walkthrough would specifically look for evidence of the PD within the lesson planning and instructional delivery. Just as the observer should make the "look-fors" well known to the teachers, the teachers should solicit feedback on specific practices that they are working to hone. If we truly want to assess how well a strategy is being implemented at its best, teachers should feel comfortable asking an administrator or coach for support, telling them what to look for and when they are doing a particular activity to get feedback on it. In addition, this process doesn't have to be evaluative either. In fact, it should always focus on strengths. The goal is to learn and master skills in a risk-taking environment where we all can offer clear and direct feedback to one another to improve practice. This type of feedback focuses on predetermined goals, championing strengths and growth, and building on the professional learning taking place. As one Gallup study found, feedback, focused on strengths, dramatically increases employee engagement and helps create and nurture a culture where the employees matter (Brim & Asplund, 2009).

Ultimately, this approach to feedback and growth flips how internal change normally occurs. It changes the one-size-fits-all method of PD and once-a-year feedback structures to include access to various levels and types of PD, opportunities to learn over time, and an ability to demonstrate learning in an environment where it's safe to try new ideas. This helps teachers reach a greater number of students through a focus on doing things better and differently than before. This level of engagement creates connection, which brings joy and fulfillment. Both of these feelings allow for creative ideas to flourish, and the result is passion.

LEADERSHIP: CHOOSING YOUR DIRECTION

The art of systems alignment through PD and feedback is in making sure that all of the moving parts flow together well and that everyone is accounted for and on board. Once the system is aligned and a shared understanding has been established, the team can move forward faster, and true gains can be achieved. Great school leaders realize that to develop a passionate staff, devoted to their own growth and development, they must be at the forefront of change. A learning culture is a place where everyone welcomes feedback because they are committed to their own growth. It's the leaders within the organization who champion the movement from a teaching culture to a learning culture, and the resulting relationships that ensue become stronger and deeper because of the important changes that we're making for ourselves and kids. When people can see and feel the results of their labor, when they produce something new, and when outcomes are tangible, they realize that the cycle of improvement is important for the soul. This is where passion palpates from the every corner. It takes leadership, regardless of its genesis, to effectively impact the classroom practices of today and transform the school culture of tomorrow. Everyone must be committed to learning for their own sake and for the sake of everyone else.

CHARTING THE DIFFERENCE

A learning culture, where teachers are actively involved in the process, procedures, and accountability, possesses a certain "look" and

"feel" in schools. Yes, it accounts for the changes that must be made from the outside, but it also creatively blends what the school leaders know needs to be done. The changes include input from the classroom experts on how they can best be achieved. This triangulation of sources is powerful but it needs to be explicit. Consider two of the descriptions below, *dynamic* and *resilient* versus *passive* and *submissive*. Effective school leaders realize that staff members who take ownership of their learning and grow through feedback have a much greater chance at success. This helps foster their individual and collective persistence through change because it deepens their capacity for the work. An environment where the staff feel detached and uninvolved in their own learning process will experience high turnover and low morale.

The learning culture taps into the school's inherent love, passion, and commitment to young people by growing people in new and important ways. We offer language to distinguish the differences between learning cultures and teaching cultures to show that learning has to be authentic and intrinsic for people with a growth mindset. This means changing some of our current conditions and it means offering opportunities to fuel passion in the people.

Figure 1.1 The Difference Between a Learning Culture and a Teaching Culture

Learning Culture	*versus*	Teaching Culture
Dynamic		Passive
Motivated		Uninspired
Courageous		Fearful
Resilient		Submissive
Supportive		Compliant
Authentic		Unreliable
Intrinsic		Extrinsic
Growth		Fixed

FUELING PASSION THROUGH OPPORTUNITY

Instructional technology is one area where schools are experiencing rapid growth, which is very often driven by teachers. In many cases, instructional technology is pursued and desired by teachers who support and lead their own training, professional development, and experiential learning. Whether the PD is concentrated on the uniqueness and potential power of a device or an engaging assessment program, which might allow teachers to quickly check for student understanding, there is a level of ownership by teachers on how technology can and should be used in the classroom. In this regard, many teachers are taking ownership of their own learning and finding creative ways to reach all students. In response to this technological implementation wave, schools have designing full learning labs for teachers to experiment and try new devices and tools to successfully integrate the technology into their classroom. This type of PD and growth is not a one-and-done or full-day sit-and-get experience. It is an ongoing mastery of the tools and techniques that is rapidly changing the profession. It's a clear example, which can be found all over social media, of how teachers are fueling each other's passion for tech integration to leverage the greatest tools to maximize learning. It's a learning culture movement.

The amazing thing is that these tools are not in and of themselves making a difference regarding student achievement. Passionate educators are discovering creative ways to supplement their best practices to enhance their current high levels of instruction. The device itself may be unique but it's real value is that it enables teachers to tailor their instruction in a manner to deliver it effectively to meet students' needs, orchestrating new ways of content delivery and learning. Technological enhancements give the teacher more control and opportunity for all students to master the learning. Interestingly, despite how rapid technology changes, and how, at times, it is frustratingly unreliable, it is embraced by so many. Because the instructional technology movement is organic, igniting passion through curiosity that extinguishes fear, teachers' willingness to grow is authentic, intrinsic, and contagious. In many ways, this movement has brought the pursuit of teaching, and the joy of learning, back into the profession. It's not another series or a new

standard; instead, instructional technology creates the need for learning and even the desire for feedback on its use. More than ever, when it comes to tech advancement in the classroom, teachers are collaborating, working together to solve this new problem, seeking their own professional learning, and soliciting feedback. What we're saying is that should be the norm with everything we do—better professional development and more feedback on practices. The good news is that the technology movement is a perfect example of how it can work to inspire passion.

A CULTURE OF JOY AND FULFILLMENT

In the right environment, not only will the desired learning and development take place, but entirely new possibilities for growth will occur. The key is that the culture has to create opportunities and allow for exploration and development. There's no better place for this than a classroom, which should always act as a laboratory where learning creates opportunities for both teachers and students.

CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE BY DESIGN: COMMITMENT AND DESIRE

The following are two primary ways to develop a learning culture fueled by passion:

1. *Build an environment* ***committed*** *to growing and learning.* Passionate educators, in the right situations, embrace the notion that learning is communal and that great ideas thrive and grow among thought leaders. Professional development can take on many forms, but one way we see this is in high-performing professional learning communities (PLCs). High-performing PLCs work within a cycle of development that seeks to understand where their students are performing, how they can best address the needs, and develop their own skills to do so. The growth is made faster through the sharing of best practices. Add in the administrator, and the PLC can be guided with current research and ideas, as well as support

with resources. This level of organic growth and change is completely different than the outside-in, initiative-driven culture that is found with much of the current educational reform. In a PLC-driven environment, there is a shared responsibility among everyone and the impact of the team approach becomes clear. At the heart of the decision-making process, the school personnel are viewed as authorities and supported as professionals. A common notion that we accept as gospel is that learning should be fun for students. We argue that fun is just as important and relevant in professional learning for the teachers. The goal is that professional learning is new, differentiated, provided by experts (internally and externally), and exciting.

2. *Build a space that **desires** feedback.* The learning culture, as veteran English teacher Ry Culver and assistant principal Justin Comegys explain, is truly about creating a space that is free for both teachers and students to develop and grow. These two educators push the instructional boundaries by creating demanding learning environments where the process of learning takes precedence over simply disseminating information. They believe that the classroom should be a space where teachers and students are encouraged to try new things within the scope and goals set by the school. This space doesn't stop inside classrooms. It grows throughout the building as a community of learners get support from colleagues and administrators to take risks and seek feedback. Culver and Comegys are examples to demonstrate that as the efforts grow, and greater needs and support are identified, the learning space goes beyond the classroom and is brought to the attention of people outside of the schoolhouse. This drives passion and success. The more we share, the more we grow, and that harnesses joy, which empowers teachers to own their own learning through development and feedback, and it creates new ideas for the betterment of children. (Check out @twoguysde for more.)

The great news is that we know about and we've learned from wonderful schools and systems that are achieving impressive results in

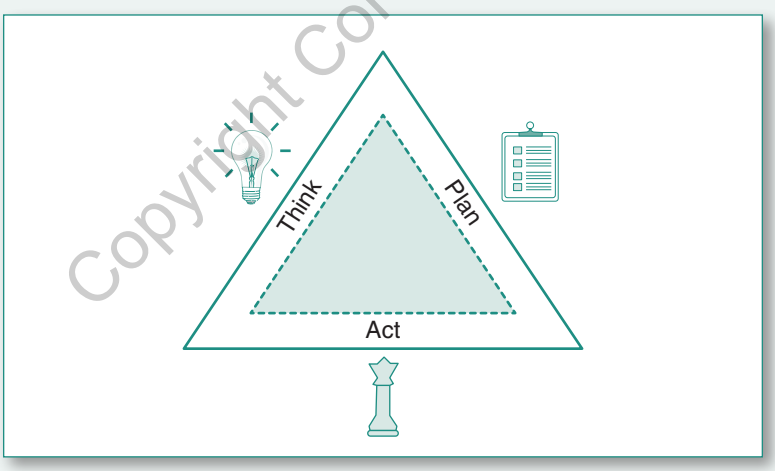
environments that build one another up yet still have high levels of accountability. They are using a learning culture to speed up the growth process for everyone so that we can manage change while striving for excellence with everything we do. In the next chapter, you'll meet extraordinary people who exemplify these efforts through passionate leadership for teaching and learning.

A Framework for Growth Through Reflection

Think: What Did I Learn?

Plan: What Do I Need to Do?

Act: What Will I Begin Today?



- Refer to Figure 1.1, *The Difference Between a Learning Culture and a Teaching Culture*. Using the descriptors, is your organization a learning culture or a teaching culture and what are some of the reasons as to why that may be? *Think*
- How will you shift your mindset to embrace learning and growing to be more effective in your current role? *Plan*

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(Continued)

- What initial action steps do you need to take to design a learning culture in your organization? *Action*
  - Identify your *greatest challenge* regarding the development of a culture committed to growing and learning.
  - Identify your *greatest opportunities* regarding the development of a culture committed to growing and learning.
  - Identify your *greatest challenge* regarding the development of a culture that desires feedback.
  - Identify your *greatest opportunities* regarding the development of a culture that desires feedback.