



## ABOUT MICHAEL FULLAN AND KEN LEITHWOOD

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Ken and Michael have both achieved prominence and respect here in Ontario and around the world – Michael as an authority on educational change and Ken as one of the most widely cited education leadership researchers in the English-speaking world.

Both have guided our work in Ontario and we are fortunate to have them share their wisdom and insights about the goals, priorities and tactics that we need to consider as we move toward continued success in fulfilling our educational priorities in Ontario.

## HOW THE ROLE IS EVOLVING

**As we look ahead into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how do you think the role of the education leader is evolving?**

**KL:** One shift that I think most people would quickly point to is the increasing accountability that leaders – both school and district – now have. This encompasses the expectation that education leaders are ultimately responsible for how well students are doing and the extent to which achievement is improving. So that's one of the biggest changes, I think, over the past 15 years, this context of accountability, and the need to assess the extent to which goals are being reached.

The second biggest change, especially here in Ontario, is the degree to which education leaders feel responsible for taking action quite directly to a fairly substantial and well-specified set of goals from the ministry. And along with that, the ministry's work over the past eight years has moved away from what is a fairly common approach in western nations – which is to be clear about goals but leave the means to those in the field instead – toward an approach in which it takes upon itself the role of helping to ensure that people are using the best available means to accomplish those goals. So depending on where you sit at any given moment, it may feel quite prescriptive or it may feel very encouraging.

In 'Developing School Leaders,' one chapter in *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012), the authors draw on lessons from around the world to make the following case:

Developing school leaders requires:

- clearly defining their responsibilities
- providing access to appropriate professional development throughout school leaders' careers, and
- acknowledging their pivotal role in improving school and student performance.

This chapter also provides perspectives on the different roles and responsibilities of 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders and how countries have succeeded in developing effective school leaders at scale.

**MF:** And of course very closely tied to those changes is the move toward a more transparent, collaborative, whole-system focused approach. We now see that leaders, wherever they are in the organization, have a system-level responsibility. Certainly, whether you are a school or a district leader, you need to focus on developing the whole organization and developing the capacity of others

to focus on instruction and learning that produces greater engagement and improves achievement.

That's one half of it. The other half is to develop other leaders while you're doing that, so that you are contributing to the continuity of leadership.

But an even bigger change, if I am a school principal, is the responsibility I have not just for my own school, but also to contribute to the improvement of other schools in my district, and to the improvement of the district. If I'm a district leader, I have a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of the province as a whole. So this involves making the smaller picture better and at the same time, identifying with the larger picture and helping to make it better.

“Learning is not workshops and courses and strategic retreats. It is not school improvement plans or individual leadership development. These are inputs. Rather, learning is developing the organization, day after day, within the culture.”

Read more in 'School Leadership's Unfinished Agenda: Integrating Individual and Organizational Development' (Fullan, 2008).

**How can we continue to foster this sense of working collaboratively, and having leaders view their roles and responsibilities and potential influence as extending beyond “their own walls?”**

**MF:** I think that, in part, it comes down to communication, and the way we define the leadership role. What we've tried to do in Ontario in the last eight years is to improve our own system, but we also want to be part of an international network of systems that are getting better. We want to learn from others, and contribute to them, and if we're going to do that, our own leaders at the school and district level must have an awareness that, not only should they be thinking beyond their individual districts to the province, but they should also be extending their thinking beyond – to other provinces, other jurisdictions and other countries.

According to Fullan, “collaborative competition is the yin and yang of successful change. Collaborate and compete.”

Learn more about this concept in *Change Leader: Learning to Do What Matters Most* (Fullan, 2011).

And when you define things that way, there's a greater sense of identity – the leader's commitment gets larger. It's not only your school but also other schools, not only other schools but also your district, not only your district but also the province, and so on.

Collective capacity is when groups get better – school cultures, district cultures and government cultures. The big collective capacity and the one that ultimately counts is when they get better conjointly – collective, collaborative capacity, if you like. Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching... The speed of effective change increases exponentially.

From *All Systems Go* (Fullan, 2010)

And then the other thing that happens, as a result – you start to see what we call “collaborative competition.” The more you work in the open, the more you begin to say in a friendly way, “I can do better than you.” It's a matter of striving for the best, a kind of “moral Olympics” in which you're doing better and better for the good of the students. So in that sense we are competing with Finland and that's a good thing. Because we want to outperform them, not for the sake of surpassing them, but because we want to do better and better and because the world will be better as a result.

And so, I think that's the spirit of collaborative competition. You define it and you communicate about it. And you give people experiences of it. That's also important. For example, in many of our districts a lot of people have visited Finland and

likewise we receive an enormous number of visitors in Ontario now largely because of our success of the last eight years. So we've had a lot of two-way traffic between leaders in Ontario and leaders in the rest of the world.

And the more you increase that two-way traffic, the better people feel about it, and the more they want to be involved. I think that this broader sense of identity is pretty widespread within the province now.

*How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (McKinsey & Company, 2010), which examines 20 systems in action and sorts out pathways to improvement according to starting points and progression, reports that only Finland has so far reached "excellent" globally, though several systems studied are well advanced along the journey towards it.

**KL:** I've had many discussions with directors of education about how they see their role, in providing provincial leadership, taking more initiative in establishing provincial directions and so on, and I see very little resistance to the idea. Of course there's the very practical question: when are they supposed to do this work? Some will find the time now to contribute, and of course a number of directors are already involved in provincial initiatives, as well as in their own communities. So it's a matter of deciding where you're going to invest the time you have, above and beyond what's absolutely required to make sure your own district is well looked after.

But an important piece here is feeling invited to do that. Right now we've had a very successful eight-year run that has been driven largely from the ministry. So I think it's important to encourage district leaders and groups of district leaders to share their perspectives and where possible to provide input on provincial policy and program.

In *Reclaiming Our Teaching Profession: The Power of Educators Learning in Community*, Hord and Tobia (2012) outline what leaders do to generate the favourable conditions for powerful professional learning to occur:

- Create an atmosphere and context for change
- Develop and communicate a shared vision for change
- Plan and provide resources
- Invest in professional development
- Check progress
- Give continuous assistance.

### **Why this evolution in particular, toward greater collaboration to thinking beyond our own schools to the system as a whole?**

**MF:** Well, one of the reasons the principal has to develop the whole school is the big finding that schools do well when teachers work in a purposeful way – focusing on instructional improvement and student achievement and well-being. If teachers are to work together successfully, the leader has to help ensure that they are moving in the right direction. So that's an important change. We've moved away, decade after decade, from the classroom as an autonomous unit toward the school working collectively, and the leader therefore having to pay attention to making that happen.

Professional learning communities need architecture or design if they are going to be productive. They have to be organized and arranged.

From *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012)

**KL:** Yes, I think that under any circumstances, a principal today needs very solid team building skills – skills that build teacher capacity to work together collaboratively. Even more importantly in the context we're in now – building professional learning communities (PLCs); for example, the principal is responsible for establishing, with members of the PLC, a very clear set of expectations for their work.

To add to Michael's comment about teachers working in a purposeful way, we also know that teachers' commitment to their work, teachers' feelings of cohesion among themselves including positive school climate, really depend on having clarity about the focus of their work and their role in it.

**MF:** Absolutely. And then moving out from there to the big picture – in the same way, but on a bigger scale – we've also realized that we can't depend on changing one school here or one school there. We need what we've come to call "whole system reform," which is at least the whole district, but ideally the whole province. And if you're going to get whole system reform then you need more than just system leaders working on it. You also need system leaders to be mobilizing the contributions of those at every level to identify with and contribute to the big picture.

In *All Systems Go* Fullan (2010) argues that every vital part of the whole system contributes individually and in concert to forward movement and success and offers these seven interrelated "big ideas" for whole-system reform:

1. All children can learn
2. A small number of key priorities
3. Resolute leadership/stay on message
4. Collective capacity
5. Strategies with precision
6. Intelligent accountability
7. All means all.

## COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES: THE LEADER AS CATALYST

**Is it difficult to move people in that direction – toward greater transparency and increased collaboration?**

**MF:** Well, people do rise to the occasion. They like it when other people are working on the same agenda. Their sense of making a contribution is activated because they become less focused on themselves and feel that they are part of a bigger enterprise, which is a good thing – provided the leader has set the tone for that.

In *Building and Connecting Learning Communities*, Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009) argue that "joint work" (Little, 1990), which they say includes deprivatization and a collective commitment to change, may be at the heart of the power of networks and other forms of teacher collaboration. These structures can provide the opportunity for colleagues to address genuinely new and often difficult ideas in a safe environment, away from risk of censure. Once the ideas are more fully developed and stabilized, these colleagues can stimulate and lead the same discussions in schools with confidence and make the ideas practical and personal so that they are more likely to be considered for action in the school.

Certainly there have been struggles in making the transition from classroom and school autonomy toward transparency. One difficulty centres on the fact that teachers may be unsure about how their contributions will be judged, and the other is that they simply may not feel they have the experience or capacity to work as part of a team. So our work in Ontario has been to show teachers that if they step outside the classroom and work collaboratively with other teachers – and if the process is effectively-led and focused – they can actually gain a great deal as well as contribute a great deal. Sometimes people have to experience this kind of collaboration to believe in it. But once they have some successful experiences with good collaboration it soon becomes the new norm.

**This brings us to the current emphasis on the principal as instructional leader. How do principals effectively balance this role with what some describe as organizational leadership?**

**KL:** It's important to say upfront that there has been a preoccupation in the language with the term "instructional leadership." I actually think it would be a step forward to stop using the term because the role of the school leader involves so much more than that term would suggest.

In the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF), we have embedded what some people call an integrated model of leadership – one that combines

leadership practices that are often referred to as “transformational” with those that have been termed “instructional.” And I think above and beyond those two we also have organizational leadership. Because of course we appreciate that principals are running organizations. And they face the same challenges that any leader running an organization would face.

So clearly, principals have all the demands of budgets and timetables and other operational tasks to manage in ways that contribute to growth within the organization.

But in the final analysis, whether a principal or a director of education, leaders have responsibility for improving student learning. So I would say whatever it is leaders do that results in greater learning we can call instructional leadership if that’s the term of the day. But in fact we know that both school and system leaders are doing a lot of other things that are indirectly – but importantly – linked to the improvement of student achievement and well-being.

...one defining attribute of effective leaders is their ability to carry out even the most routine and seemingly trivial tasks in such a way as to nudge their organizations toward their purposes. This is one of the ways in which the separate parts of their especially effective organizations come to be productively aligned.

Read more in *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a Discussion of the Research Foundations* (Leithwood, 2012).

The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF) is the foundation of the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) and guides leadership development programs in the ministry. The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) is leading the launch, distribution, and implementation of OLF 2012 in the sector. The OLF 2012 is now available on the IEL website at [www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca).

...school leaders not only need to provide fairly direct assistance to the instructional improvement efforts of their staffs, they also need to build organizational contexts which support and enable such efforts.

From *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a Discussion of the Research Foundations* (Leithwood, 2012)

**MF:** Well in some ways I’d be more worried, if there were less attention on instruction than on the broader question of running the organization. I would rather err on the side of too much instruction than on too much running of the organization.

But in terms of making sure both are done, I think it is the case that we do want instructional leadership to be the primary focus. And on an operational level, principals often get drawn into the nuts and bolts of running the school, and what can get lost in the shuffle is the focus on student learning.

So we need to address this. For one thing, as I alluded to before, principals need not be – and should not be – doing all this alone. They need to be mobilizing staff so that a lot of the work is done by the staff collectively, and not solely by the leader. So one role of the principal is to facilitate this and make it possible.

And of course there are many other things that impinge on the learning agenda such as the climate or culture of the school, behavioural management –

A positive school climate may be defined as the sum total of all of the personal relationships in a school. When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modelled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm.

Visit the “Safe and Accepting Schools” section of the Ministry’s website at [www.ontario.ca/acceptingschools](http://www.ontario.ca/acceptingschools) to learn more about safe, inclusive and accepting schools.

the norms for how students behave, and what should be occurring in the classroom. So we must see these things as connected.

“Most important in staying focused is constantly reminding ourselves of what really matters and asking how we can spend less time on the things that don’t.”

Read *More High School Graduates* (Levin, 2012) for more strategies on focussing on what matters most.

But then you have what I would truly label “distractions,” things like bureaucratic reporting, too many innovations coming at you, an undue sense of urgency about something that may be happening right now at the school. So there are quite a few things that do get in the way and that principals do need to deal with, and so one of the things we try to do is help them minimize distractions.

If it’s bureaucracy, we say “do less paperwork” – especially paperwork that doesn’t have a useful purpose. Consolidate your requests so that you don’t ask for the same information in four different ways. And where administration is concerned, I don’t think the principal should be doing much of that work at all. Rather, the principal should be figuring out how to delegate that work to others in the school, so that the focus of the principal’s work remains determinedly on student learning, including developing relationships with parents and the community around the instructional agenda, and so on.

According to researchers Amabile and Kramer (2011), authors of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*, “of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work.”

Read this book to find out more about the power of catalysts (actions directly supporting work) and nourishers (events that show respect and words of encouragement).

**KL:** Yes, and we know that there are a number of things that contribute to student achievement, perhaps not as directly and not as forcefully as instruction, but in very important ways. For example, positive school climate, as Michael alluded to, includes building teacher commitment to the work in the school, creating a cohesive sense of direction and creating an organization in which people have high levels of job satisfaction.

So again, as we begin to point out the other things – as well as instruction – that all have to be brought together to enable improvement and growth in student achievement, we can move toward valuing all of the things leaders have to address, in addition to their influence on instruction.

### **What can be done at the provincial level to support this kind of leadership?**

**MF:** At the provincial level, what needs to be done – and this is certainly what we’ve tried to do in Ontario – is to make sure that there is coherence at the ministry. For example, alignment so that the student achievement agenda is prominent, so that strategies such as the ones being carried out by the Student Achievement Division (SAD) are focused on helping people learn from each other. It’s clear there are a number of things the system can do that the individual school can’t do.

The School Support Initiative is just one of many examples of the ways in which the Student Achievement Division has provided leadership at the provincial level to bring about improved student achievement. It is designed to support secondary school principals and enhance their role as instructional leaders.

This unique initiative, offered in partnership with Ontario Principals’ Council, and the Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario, was introduced in 2008 in 27 secondary schools and three school boards and now includes 124 schools in 17 school boards. It demonstrates clearly how to leverage resources and not only foster professional growth but also facilitate opportunities for principals and teachers to learn together.

And then of course, the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS), in which the province has invested significantly and Ken has been instrumental in developing, is another very important source of alignment and support that helps focus the work of school leaders around effective practices. We've had a number of province-wide events around the framework with teams from all 72 districts, which is another way the province can mobilize strategies and resources to support implementation.

The Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) is a comprehensive plan of action designed to support student achievement and well-being through a coordinated and strategic approach to leadership development based on research and consultation with education partners.

Visit [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/strategy.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/strategy.html) to learn more about the OLS.

**KL:** I think we also need to look at professional development strategies – whether in preparation for the role or in the role. The Principal's Qualification Program (PQP), over the past seven or eight years, has been criticized for unduly emphasizing those aspects of leadership that have a direct effect on instruction. And many of those graduates – when they actually find themselves in the role of school leader – will say, “I was very well prepared for working with my staff on instructional improvement, but I don't feel prepared for the other things I need to be doing.” So one way forward would involve being more comprehensive in the capacities we build, in preparation for leadership.

#### **And at the district level?**

**KL:** Well, principal learning teams (PLTs) which are a defining feature of the Leading Student Achievement (LSA) project are potentially powerful sources of principal support. Principal learning teams are intended to be authentic communities of people with similar responsibilities who come together to learn from one another in a community context. In the LSA project evaluation that we do each year, principals' responses to the experiences they have had in their PLTs are rated as high as any of the other elements that the LSA project

advocates. So it's clear to me that principals see these collaborative experiences as important aspects of support. Because they focus on the real work being done by principals in their schools, they encompass the kind of enabling conditions that support instructional improvement as well.

The Leading Student Achievement (LSA) project is based on a tri-level approach providing support to district and school leaders as they:

- improve achievement for all students
- collaborate in principal learning teams (PLTs) to improve instructional leadership
- build effective professional learning communities within schools and across districts and the province
- use evidence-based inquiry to improve instructional practice
- share promising practices
- develop leadership networks at school, district and provincial levels, and
- contribute to educational research.

As part of the OLS, each district in the province is provided with funding and support to develop and implement a Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS). The BLDS targets school leaders, system leaders, and all those within the district who aspire to take on leadership roles of any kind, whether on the academic or the business side of the organization.

From *The Board Leadership Development Strategy Manual*, 2012 available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/strategy.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/strategy.html).

The only coherence that counts is in the minds and hearts of members of the organization.

From *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2001)



**MF:** On a big-picture scale, the district is a replica of the province in terms of needing alignment and coherence. And certainly alignment at the provincial level is necessary to support district alignment. At both levels, we need to have the same student achievement agenda, the same focus on how we help principals get better at their work, how we help them learn from each other as Ken mentioned, how we provide professional learning, and so on.

Another element at the district level though, and it's important that this not be lost in the shuffle, is what I would describe as personnel policies. These are the job descriptions of principals and others, the criteria for promotion into those positions, the way in which the selection process is carried out, the help people receive once they are appointed to those positions, and so on.

The nurturing of leaders is a critical part of the recruitment process. Succession planning:

- is contextual and structured, but also needs to be innovative;
- starts well before there is a vacancy to be filled;
- should be based on data about the current and future needs of the organization;
- pertains to all professional roles at both the school and system levels.

“The best succession planning practices are proactive ... Talented individuals are identified early and nurtured throughout their careers through professional development that is integrated into human resource management.”  
(The Learning Partnership, 2008)

From *The Board Leadership Development Strategy Manual*, 2012

Sometimes people implement the personnel policies effectively, in the belief that this will lead to better results. We say it doesn't work that way. You have to have two things interacting: the first is that you're trying to get better every day – what I refer to as “the learning is the work” – and then personnel policies have to be aligned with that. The two need to be moving in concert.

When you have those two working together, you have a culture. And in that culture, for example, it's hard for a given principal not to focus on student achievement. It's hard when all of the other schools in your cluster are doing something, and you aren't. You stand out like a sore thumb. You know that you should be doing things differently. It's hard for you to opt out. The norms bring you in. And then of course, in line with that, the selection process reflects that culture and reinforces it.

And so you have a culture that essentially says, “This is what leadership looks like in this district. If this is not your vision of leadership, don't bother applying for the principalship. We'll help you build a track record, but if you don't take advantage of it, don't expect to move up in the system.”

## FINDING A BALANCE: PRESCRIPTION VERSUS AUTONOMY

**As Ken mentioned earlier, in the past eight years the province has moved toward what might be described as supportive and encouraging and at the same time as prescriptive. What are some pros and cons of prescriptive approaches and those that allow for more autonomy and self-direction?**

**MF:** I would begin answering that question by saying that the big goal here is widespread ownership – intrinsic motivation to put in the effort to get better results through shared ownership. Having framed it that way, I think you can make observations about prescriptive versus more autonomous approaches.

First, prescription. There are two problems with that. One is that if people do what they're told, they don't learn very much. They end up saying “tell me what to do next.” So there's a dependency that occurs. They become less creative. The second problem is that some in the system won't do what is prescribed in any event. So you get very uneven implementation.

On the other hand, if you loosen up too much and say “let a thousand flowers bloom,” then people don't necessarily know what to do, or they do good things but it doesn't stick – it doesn't get embedded in the system.

The way we've dealt with it is consistent with the research, and with the highest performing systems like Singapore and Finland. What we've been saying is, "okay, we have certain ideas that are going to be the core emphasis from the ministry, but we're not going to prescribe them. Instead, we're going to approach them by forming a two-way partnership with the sector. And we're going to have interactive processes in place between the ministry, the districts and the schools." And the point of those processes is to identify and define best practices, and to retain those that have a proven track record. As a part of

#### Prescribe adequacy, unleash greatness...

There is a strong correlation between a school system's improvement journey stage and the tightness of central control over individual school's activities and performance. Systems on the poor to fair journey, characterized by lower skill educators, exercise tight, central control over teaching and learning in order to minimize the degree of variation between individual classes and across schools.

Systems moving from good to great, characterized by higher skill educators, provide loose, central guidelines for teaching and learning, in order to encourage peer-led creativity and innovation inside schools, the core driver for raising performance at this stage."

For more on this question, refer to *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010)

What is PISA? PISA refers to Programme for International Student Assessment conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that measures the knowledge, skills and other characteristics of 15-year-olds in the principal industrialized countries around the world. PISA assesses literacy in reading, mathematics and science, and also asks students about their attitudes and approaches to learning.

Visit [www.oecd.org/edu/pisa/2009](http://www.oecd.org/edu/pisa/2009) for the most recent PISA survey.

that, we have processes in place in which people learn laterally – within schools, within clusters of schools, across districts and so on.

So that's what we've done. What the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) recommends is that a certain degree of autonomy is essential, because people need to have ownership, and the creativity that goes with it. But as I mentioned earlier, too much autonomy and you're left alone. There aren't enough checks and balances. There isn't enough stimulation. And there isn't enough accountability.

So essentially what we've said is, "there will be a lot of autonomy, we will not be judgmental, and we will not be ordering you around. But in exchange for autonomy, we want two things: transparency of practice, and results." And we've also said, "we want you to contribute, not just to your narrow piece of the system, but outward from wherever you are."

When you can achieve that balance, a healthy level of autonomy, some central direction, but not prescription around how to do it – rather, the identification of good practice through transparency – then I think people come to an increased sense of identity in the system. They identify with the larger enterprise and therefore they contribute, and want to contribute.

The following is a sampling of comments about prescription versus autonomy made by Ontario leaders at a Ministry of Education Leadership Expert Think Tank (2012):

- "Develop high-level strategies based on evidence, then hold districts accountable to contextualize and implement them and make them work at the local level by engaging our communities in appropriate ways."
- "We won't 'unleash greatness' if we mandate everything, because people who have a passion to make things better will spend time fighting the system rather than embracing it."
- "Rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, consider different intervention approaches – more flexibility and discretion for those who are successful in achieving results, and more direction for those who are not."

**KL:** I agree, and if you think about what Michael is saying you'll notice that there is a false dichotomy here between autonomy and prescription. What I think we want our leaders and teachers to be doing is to have a careful understanding of the best evidence in the field informing their practice, and using that as the starting point for working out what practice might look like in their own schools and classrooms.

To argue the pros and cons of prescription and autonomy makes no difference in the sense that no one outside of the school or district is capable of prescribing all the decisions that someone on the ground, in the classroom or school, has to make. It's not possible. Principals, for example, make as many as 150 decisions in the course of a day. Are we going to try and prescribe what those 150 decisions might be, keeping in mind that they change from day to day? It's not possible to have what I would describe as a fully prescribed set of leadership practices. And prescription becomes even more impossible at the level of the teacher.

"If leaders want teachers to respond creatively and constructively to the pressures for collaborative improvement in their practices, they need to model the courage it takes to face the emotional discomfort associated with such an imperative."

Read *Leading with Teacher Emotions in Mind* to discover specific practices to positively influence teacher perspectives.

So the best we can do is to say, in effect, "we want you to practice based on your understanding of what the evidence says, and to use that as the starting point for working out what to do in your own classroom or school context." Is that prescriptive? Well maybe, but it's prescriptive in a positive way.

In a profession like education, when we have evidence about a practice that works very well and accomplishes the goals we have in mind, it is actually unethical for people to ignore that practice. It's a bit like a surgeon saying, "well I know there's a way of doing this operation that works better, but it doesn't suit my style." If we know there's a strategy for teaching reading that is closely associated with

improvement, and we ignore it, then we are saying that "we're not here to do the best for our students" and that's simply not acceptable.

### **Are there specific circumstances in which more or less prescription is called for?**

**MF:** Yes, there's a general rule which Michael Barber and his group formed. The rule is that intervention is inversely proportional to how well you're doing – the less well you're doing over time the more intervention you need. And if you take our non-judgmental approach – which is important, because being non-judgmental means that you give people a chance to grow without assessing what they do every step of the way – if you give people a chance to grow, and you see that there is no improvement over a year or two or three or four, then of course that's a call for more support.

"Our school was in a district review a few years ago and it was a great balance of pressure with support. I welcomed it. The way I presented it to staff was, 'Why wouldn't we want to become better? Why wouldn't we want to know what we didn't know and why wouldn't we want to learn?'. So I think, with this approach, it was actually a very good experience."

Source: Ontario elementary principal

Now, because of our shift to transparency and because of the support that's being provided in the system, the culture has changed. If a particular school district is performing poorly, it is likely that the ministry would say, "we want a meeting with you to review what you're doing." And whereas the response in the past might have been, "you need a search warrant to do that," in our current culture that kind of intervention would not be seen as intrusive. It's viewed as "how we do things" and it's seen as appropriate, by both parties, to have a conversation about issues when they arise.

**KL:** The turnaround schools are a good example of that. We have high performing schools in the province. In the past, we've had schools that needed to be "turned around," so to speak, and now we have schools "in the middle." And you might say, "well, there needs to be more prescription the

further you move away from high performance” but I would say that really, the issue here is simply the amount of support you’re going to provide those organizations. Does that support look like prescription? I’m not sure it does.

Instead, it may look like more opportunities for those in the school to learn more about what the evidence says about good practice, and it may require more coaching in the school or the classroom, and it may look like more support to help people work out how to adapt what the evidence says to their own circumstances. That doesn’t look like prescription to me. It looks more like support for the work they want to do in the school.

## THE EFFECTIVE LEADER: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

**As we connect this debate about prescription and autonomy to the realities of leadership, there are some experts who tell us that the “politics of leading” in schools and districts is an essential part of creating the conditions for success. What does this concept mean to you and why does it matter?**

**KL:** For me the notion of the politics of leadership says something important about the contested and negotiated order that eventually gets realized in a school or district. Politics with a small ‘p’ is all about negotiation and influence. And I think it’s important to appreciate how every part of the system is in the business of doing that. Probably no part of the system is more political than the classroom. A teacher in a classroom is negotiating the curriculum with kids. The teacher is starting with a platform to stand on, but the teacher can only take that platform forward if the kids agree.

Module three in *Motion Leadership: The SKINNY on Becoming Change Savvy* (Fullan, 2010) examines how the cluster of factors “love, trust, and resistance” is intertwined. It reveals why resistance can be necessary and helpful.

Visit [www.michaelfullan.ca](http://www.michaelfullan.ca) to learn more about this and other *Motion Leadership* modules.

And so every day, in every lesson the teacher is working on, the teacher has to be asking, “what can we do here that the kids will find meaningful, that they’ll agree to go along with, and that at the end of the day will accomplish some shared goals we have in mind?”.

And you know, I think we quite dramatically fail to appreciate the political mastery required to be a really good teacher.

**MF:** The same could be said of principals. Certainly small ‘p’ politics crop up when you get strong teacher resistance to a given direction. In our training modules, we have some work around resistance, around how to deal with it effectively. One of the insights we share, and I’ll share with you now, is that leaders have to develop what we call “impressive empathy.” What is “impressive” empathy? Well, you have impressive empathy when you have compassion for people who are in your way. That’s why it is impressive. And yet, your understanding isn’t a case of “I agree with that person,” but rather “I understand where that point of view is coming from, as if I were in their shoes.” So with impressive empathy you have a chance to re-position the relationship.

The term *politics* today refers to the influence of various vested interests, groups, or individuals who wish to put forth a particular agenda. Your work as principal inevitably involves interacting with various parties who hold a particular viewpoint and wish to influence some aspect of the school as an organization.

Principals today must be equipped to confront political realities and utilize them as agents to create more effective schools...

Principals, as politicians, then, think about coalitions, enduring differences, allocation of scarce resources, conflict and power, and bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position. Understanding power in its various forms is critical to our success as principals.

From *What Every Principal Should Know about Strategic Leadership* (Glanz, 2006)

**KL:** Yes, and I'd add to this the fact that it's possible, in a school of 20 teachers, for every one of them to have a slightly different version of what we should really be focusing our attention on. That has to be negotiated. The most established forum for that, in a school, is around school improvement processes and school improvement planning. At the district level, it's around board improvement planning. Those are structures designed to accommodate the exercise of influence, and the negotiation of influence.

What we do know about highly successful districts is that they engage their principals and school staffs in that process. They don't simply lay on their agenda. They create their agenda by negotiating what's important with folks in the trenches – the people who actually have to deliver on the agenda. So in that sense, a highly political approach to school and board improvement planning is also an example of very effective leadership. In other words, collaboration may be a different word for “politics.”

**MF:** Of course there are bigger ‘p’ politics at play, at the district level – relationships with school trustees, for example, and issues around the appropriate role of a trustee. Certainly there are labour relations issues, locally as well as provincially. But those are not in the realm of this conversation.

I agree with Ken that, for the purpose of this conversation, what good leaders do is to mobilize the power of the organization and relationships between the people in it, and the addition of individuals when they're hiring. My assumption is that, if leaders use power effectively to improve student learning, they will also have a healthier organization, and they are less likely to face negative

At its core, organizational health is about integrity, but not integrity in the ethical and moral way that integrity is defined so often today. An organization has integrity – is healthy – when it is whole, consistent, and complete, that is when its management, operations, strategies and culture fit together and make sense.

From *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (Lencioni, 2012)

politics. So I think of politics as the power of the leader to have a healthy organizational climate, and to deal with the resistance they may encounter.

**Your comments about the challenges of leading change and the inevitable resistance that results bring us to the question of the attributes that are essential to effective leadership. In the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF) these are identified as “personal leadership resources.” Can these traits, especially those referred to as psychological resources, be learned?**

**KL:** The OLF 2012 identifies three psychological resources that are embedded in the framework, referred to as optimism, resilience and efficacy. And they're there because they are supported by considerable evidence. There are others that could also have been included, but they are supported by less evidence. And so yes, one question we need to ask is, to what extent can these be learned, or do we simply have to select people who already possess these attributes, if they are as important as we think they are.

The OLF describes characteristics of effective leaders which the research indicates create the variation among leaders in how well they are able to enact leadership practices. School leader and system leader practices are enacted most effectively when using these personal leadership resources:

Cognitive resources, including:

- problem-solving expertise
- knowledge of school and classroom conditions that directly affect student learning

Social resources, including the ability to:

- perceive emotions
- manage emotions
- act in emotionally appropriate ways

Psychological resources, including:

- optimism
- self-efficacy
- resilience.

The OLF 2012 and related resource documents including school-level and system-level placemats are available at:

[www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/content/home](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/content/home).

And I think the answer is that they are learnable, but not as quickly and not as easily as more obvious skills and knowledge.

**MF:** Yes, I agree that they are learnable. People are not necessarily born with those qualities. But in the first 20 years of life they may well develop them. So in that sense, in your criteria for selection, you're looking for people who have those qualities.

But then I think you can also train those qualities through role modelling and mentoring – and through working with other leaders who have those traits. You can role model what I would call “true grit.” It's about not giving up. It's about staying on a problem, not being too rigid in how you approach the problem, looking for creative ways to deal with it. And certainly we can role model that, we can see leaders who are effective, who have worked their way through very difficult circumstances, through their persistence, through their optimism, through their sense of efficacy.

And this goes back again to the role of the leader in developing other leaders. I am a leader, and I have those qualities, and I see my role as training other leaders in the school to be effective. And of course, I'm also role modelling day to day for my vice-principal and my teacher leaders, and all teachers for that matter. I'm going to role model, naturally, because that's who I am. I'm also going to be conscious of how to cultivate those traits in others, by giving feedback, by supporting others when they are having difficulty, by making explicit what we're doing in the school, and so forth. And so our job is to look for, identify, role model, develop and reinforce those qualities. Our job is to develop leaders as we develop as leaders ourselves.

In *The Truth about Leadership* Kouzes and Posner (2010) point to current research to argue that leaders need to “get gritty.” They define grit as “that firmness of spirit, that unyielding courage that is essential in dealing with challenge” and suggest that it plays an essential role in attaining difficult goals.

**KL:** One of the features of these qualities, also, is that in my view they are mutually reinforcing. That is, they are sides of a three-sided coin. Develop one and you are simultaneously developing the others. Right now, we know the most about how to develop self-efficacy on the part of leaders. There is a very well-developed theory of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Albert Bandura is the person who has done the most work on this, and we know that mastery experiences, for example, are among the most powerful ways to build efficacy.

So we can certainly develop efficacy on the part of aspiring or active school leaders by putting them in circumstances that give them lots of learning opportunities, without undue risk of failure. That means, as Michael mentioned, working on the job with someone who becomes a mentor whether officially or unofficially, working with somebody who models good leadership practices and models confidence, moving forward in the job, without much self-doubt. And as people begin to acquire more of those capacities, their sense of efficacy about what they will be able to accomplish down the road begins to grow.

Efficacy is a belief about one's own ability – self-efficacy – or the ability of one's colleagues collectively – collective efficacy – to perform a task or achieve a goal. It is a belief about ability, not actual ability.

From *Linking Leadership to Student Learning* (Leithwood and Louis, 2012)

Now you can see how building a sense of confidence about being able to solve as-yet-unidentified problems down the road will also contribute to a leader's resilience and optimism. Optimism is an overall sense that things are going to turn out right. But if you have a lot of confidence in your own ability to get things right, at least things that are under your control, then the chances are good that you'll generally be more optimistic. If you think you're going to have the ability to solve those challenges in future, and you know that they may be big, messy challenges – challenges that will take some time, and won't be solved on the first attempt –

then that confidence is what makes you resilient. So optimism, resilience and efficacy are all part of the same package.

**MF:** We've seen this at the district level as well. We were working with one director of education who, when he started, had what he called a "clenched" climate – clenched like a fist. It was a stagnant climate. In that kind of climate, you're not going to take any chances. You're going to play it safe. Well this director said, "I'm about unclenching the culture." And so he did that. He said, "I want people to try new things. I'm going to provide some resources. I'm going to be non-judgemental, because I know there will be mistakes. I want people to develop these new practices and behaviours, and we're also going to appoint people who already have these qualities."

And that district went from low performance to very high performance. They changed the culture and they actually built capacity for it as well as selecting for it.

In *Change Leader: Learning to Do What Matters Most*, Fullan (2011) cites Dweck's theory of "two mindsets" to argue the importance of learning from mistakes.

- The first is a "fixed mindset" which sees mistakes as personal flaws and results in leaders getting "stuck."
- The second is a "growth mindset" which views mistakes as learning experiences and results in leadership that gets better and better.

In Fullan's view, change leaders are those who believe that they can change and grow with experience and not only improve their own leadership but also benefit the organization.

**KL:** Yes, and you can actually identify people with those traits in the system. They are the people taking the most initiative. Initiative taking is the supreme indicator of this constellation of qualities. I do think that many of our school and district environments are risk-averse. Taking initiative in school and district contexts is not something a lot of people are prepared to do. So if you see someone

stepping out in front of the band, advocating for something dramatically new to take place, you're probably looking at someone with a lot of psychological resources. Promote them quickly before they leave and go to some other system!

**MF:** The core here, I think, is encouraging and supporting individuals who exemplify learning from their mistakes. That's a trait that is not that difficult to identify. And it comes back, again, to "the learning is the work." We don't say, "make lots of mistakes on purpose" and we don't say, "make the same mistake five times in a row." We say, "every time we try something and it doesn't work, we're going to learn from it, and if we do that for five years in a row, we're going to learn a lot and we're going to make fewer mistakes."

And so, you transform the climate in such a way that the norms of risk taking and support for learning are recognized as "what the organization does." And you find that when people adopt that attitude toward making mistakes and learning, they do better. And they want to do more and more.

## CHANGE FOR IMPROVEMENT: THE WHOLE-SYSTEM IMPERATIVE

**Some experts have argued that system-wide improvement is as or more important than individual school improvement. What is your view of the relationship between these two perspectives?**

**KL:** Well, here again, I think this may be a false dichotomy. You know, the organizational learning literature that's been around for many years frequently advocates for collective learning on the one hand, but acknowledges on the other that organizations don't have brains. Only individuals have brains. And so somehow or other, the collective capacity has to emerge from many individual brains working together over time. And I think what that means is that the district's overall capacity depends fundamentally on the contribution that the individuals within the organization – individual schools, individual people – make to collective capacity.

The following are the key strategies of an “open-to-learning” conversation:

- Disclose the reasoning that leads to your views.
- Provide examples and illustrations of your views.
- Use the “ladder of inference.”
- Treat your own views as hypotheses rather than taken-for-granted truths.
- Seek feedback and disconfirmation.
- Listen deeply, especially when views differ from your own.
- Expect high standards and constantly check to see how you are helping others reach them.
- Share control of the conversation, including the management of emotions.
- Share the problems and the problem-solving process.
- Require accountability for collective decisions.
- Foster public monitoring and review of decisions.

Learn more in *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why* (Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd, 2009)

So what’s different about just adding up the capacity of the individual units in the organization and saying, “we’re contributing to district capacity as a whole?” I think the answer to that question lies in how people – the individual units or people in the organization – relate to one another. And the goal, of course, of organizational learning is to make the whole larger than the sum of its parts.

We’ve all experienced a meeting, for example, where we bounce ideas off one another, and as a result of those ideas bouncing around, a new idea pops out. Sometimes we don’t know where the good idea came from, but it’s likely that no single individual within the group would have thought of it. So there’s something about the pattern of relationships that occur within groups of people that can sometimes be greater than the sum of the parts.

And so when you say you want to build district capacity, I think you want to do two things: you want to build the individual capacity of the people and units within the district and you want to build the capacity of those people to work together productively. I don’t think it’s any more complicated than that.

So when you’re creating professional learning communities or when you’re creating principal learning teams or when you’re networking in some fashion, you’re creating capacity above and beyond the individual. If the people involved are listening to one another, if they’re engaged in a dialogue that allows for learning to take place, if they’re engaged in what Viviane Robinson and her research partners call “open-to-learning” conversations, if they’re listening to one another and thinking about their own ideas in relation to the ideas of others, and they’re being stimulated intellectually by their colleagues, eventually something emerges which is greater than the sum of the parts.

**MF:** And this is an area in which we’ve had many lessons in the past. For example, individual schools in a district have become highly innovative, but they are islands. It’s atomistic. There is excellence, but it’s here and there. So what that means ultimately is that they come and they go. Yes, there is innovation but something changes two years later, or five years later, and things go back to their original state. And then another innovative school pops up elsewhere. So you get a broken front – and you never get a genuine coalescing the whole district.

And that’s why here in Ontario we’ve said that we’re not actually focusing on school culture, we’re focusing on district culture. And by district culture, we include district leadership of course, but also the 200 schools in the district. And so once you define what you’re looking for as change in the culture of the district, in substantive terms, it means that there are different relationships developed between district leadership and school leadership. That’s one dimension of the culture change – it amounts to a shift to a two-way partnership.

Another shift is that there is a fostering of learning from each other. That’s the horizontal, lateral learning that builds up mutual commitment of people to each other, to schools, to principals, and so on. It gives you access to ideas from other people in the system. So you can see what’s happening in this example. Once you change the culture of the district, when you have two-way dialogue between the district and the schools, when schools interact with each other, and when the agenda is improved student achievement through collaboration, once you change that, then that new culture has stability and a continuity of its own.



And of course as new people come in, they become an essential part of that. So I think the distinction between school and system improvement is a very important one because what you're looking for is to have not only individual schools flourish, but also to cause multiple schools to improve simultaneously. That is a change in the culture of the district. And it's more than a change in the culture of a school, because the culture change has to involve the entire district, and all schools need to be changing at the same time.

In a recent study 'How Context Matters in High-Need Schools' Johnson, Kraft and Papay (2012) found that the conditions most important for teacher satisfaction are "the ones that shape the social context of teaching and learning." While typical working conditions such as safe facilities, adequate resources and lesson preparation time, are important, the three most important elements for teacher satisfaction are:

1. collegial relationships or the extent to which teachers have productive working relationships with their colleagues
2. the principal's leadership or the extent to which teachers report that their school leaders are supportive and create school environments conducive to learning, and
3. school culture or the extent to which school environments are characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement.

**KL:** And of course we have to actively support this kind of culture change. We can't assume just bringing people together means they're going to learn from one another. There's a great video I used to use in my leadership development work, called 'The Road to Abilene.' And in the video a family is sitting on a farm outside of the Texas town of Abilene on a Sunday, trying to figure out what they are going to do with themselves. One person says "let's go into the town and have lunch at the cafeteria."

And eventually everybody agrees to do that. It isn't until they get back from a long, hot trip to town

that they realize not one of them actually wanted to do that. The person who made the suggestion says, "I was just throwing out an idea. I didn't actually want to do it." And another person who agreed to go says, "I didn't want to do it either but I didn't want to insult you by saying no." And, you know, on it goes. So there has to be something within the collaborative conversations that take place to prevent you from going to Abilene, basically, and that allows the partners to learn what each other has to contribute.

Tobia and Hord (2012) argue that the movement called professional learning communities must become the norm in every school and that this can only happen if the leadership of the school supports it and creates working conditions in which professional learning communities can flourish.

Find out more about this assertion in *Reclaiming Our Teaching Profession: The Power of Educators Learning in Community* written by these authors.

So let me add to Michael's comments. Yes, if we were to treat schools one at a time, we would be missing some of the potential fertilization that could occur across schools. But whether or not that fertilization produces new ideas really depends on whether there's enough difference across the schools, and whether they have the capacity to have the whole add up to more than the sum of its parts. If the capacities within all the schools are roughly the same, it's unlikely to occur. So it's not a given. We have to work at that.

**I think we would agree that teachers are central in all this. So, how can we make the leadership role attractive to teachers?**

**MF:** Well, I think that if we build the efficacy of teachers, if we build the quality of the profession, and if we build the satisfaction people get out of being a teacher – and in particular if we build in having the opportunity to make a difference as part of that satisfaction and working collectively – in other words, if schools get healthier and healthier, I think we will be building that attractiveness.

We haven't yet seen teacher leaders who will come out and say, "I'm in favour of developing a collaborative teaching profession." They don't say it that way. Although, actually, some are willing to say it more and more, because of the results from the work we've done.

The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* is completed every two years in the U.S. In 2009, survey results showed that 59 percent of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs. In the survey conducted in 2011, that number dropped to 44 percent. This shows a dramatic decline in teacher satisfaction – the largest drop since the survey first started tracking teacher satisfaction in 1984. These are big numbers for a 24-month period. So that's a time-bomb issue, and I think we need to focus substantially on building a better profession, and greater satisfaction.

*The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy (2012)* examines the views of teachers, parents and students about the teaching profession, parent and community engagement, and effects of the economy on teaching and learning in schools.

To access the full report visit:  
[www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey).

**KL:** There is also a dilemma, I think, as we try and attract teachers to the role. Teachers work in schools right now where the leadership varies enormously in terms of the attractiveness of the model that's on display to them at any given point in time. The evidence about how principals respond to their own roles really calls attention to this. On the one hand, when principals are asked how satisfying their job is, the vast majority respond by saying, "It's the most rewarding job I have ever had and I never want to do anything else." When they're asked how demanding the job is, they will say, on the other hand, "You know, this is wearing me down. There are just so many things to do. I fall into bed at night exhausted, and I'm working 65 hours a week." And yet they still want to do it.

So the question I'm raising is this: what part of the job do your teachers see if you are in your school, doing your work as the principal? Do they see the satisfying part, the part that is making a contribution to their work and to the learning process, or do they see the multitasking, frustrating, demanding, highly accountable part?

So if you're trying to develop other leaders, as Michael has mentioned earlier, and you are trying to encourage new leaders to think about the role, you want to make the satisfying part the most visible part of what you model from day to day. The OLF 2012 brings a balanced perspective to this, I think. It says leadership is mostly about improving learning in the schools.

But let's be clear: when you leave your role as a teacher, most of what you're going to do will have an indirect effect on students and their learning. And the things you will be working on are not only focused on instruction. They also include creating a set of enabling conditions in the school that will help your teaching colleagues do their work better. And so if those things are interesting to you, then you should continue to aspire to the role. If you don't want to have anything to do with those things, then this is a good time to bow out. We need to be clear that the school leader role is a comprehensive role that involves organizational management, transformational leadership and instructional leadership – the whole ball of wax. And making that visible and explicit in the OLF is doing a service to those who aspire to the role.

Leithwood (2012) describes the OLF 2012 as an "integrated model" which aims to capture the relatively direct efforts of successful leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (the primary focus of instructional leadership models) as well as their efforts to create organizational conditions which enable and support those improvement efforts (the primary focus of transformational leadership models).

Read more in *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a Discussion of the Research Foundations* (Leithwood, 2012).

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: INNOVATION IN THE FACE OF CHANGE

**Innovation has a clear role to play in school and system improvement, particularly as we acknowledge that leaders must adapt effective practice to their own unique circumstances. How do we spark and nurture innovation, particularly in challenging economic times?**

**MF:** Well I think we should always be thinking of continuous improvement, and also what's next by way of innovation. I think those two things co-exist in successful organizations. You really want to get high quality implementation around good ideas, but you also want to have your eye on what's next. The use of technology would be a good example.

I don't know that innovation necessarily involves a lot of money. Technology can actually be a money saver, for example. I was talking recently to Peter Whitehouse who's done work on intergenerational learning – grandparents, parents and children that doesn't cost much money. They're out for the learning and valuable interaction. Cross-peer tutoring for youngsters and students taking more responsibility for their own learning – these are all effective strategies that do not cost a lot of new money at all.

Dr Peter Whitehouse and his wife founded The Intergenerational School (TIS) which has for ten years been providing quality education for children aged 5-14 based on a developmentally appropriate curriculum embedded in an experiential learning multi-age community that includes adults and elders.

TIS is a win-win situation for the students and the seniors involved. Volunteering keeps the seniors active, healthy and engaged and the students learn from the seniors' life experience.

Learn more about TIS at [www.tisonline.org](http://www.tisonline.org).

**KL:** I would say that more autonomy for people to work on these issues would certainly help. As we've discussed, the problem with moving to a more prescriptive mode is that the more you prescribe things, the more you're responsible if they fail. That is, "You said this would work and it didn't. It's your problem. I did what you told me to do." If you feel autonomous, that's not your reaction to failure. Your reaction to failure is to make it work, because you feel it's your responsibility. You took it on. It was something you felt needed to be done and something you believed you could do.

So I think we need to create a greater sense of autonomy for this larger mission, using the resources that are available at the ministry. Those resources are very substantial and very sophisticated – as resources, not as sources of prescription. For example, we've invited leaders to use the OLF, which has been developed as a resource for the leader's own, more autonomous work. It's a starting point but not the endpoint. The endpoint is when you've accomplished the goal you have in mind.

And so, I think innovation really does depend on people feeling a strong sense of both autonomy and responsibility for the mission, and for devising ways to accomplish the mission, and a sense of shared ownership in the purposes that are going to be accomplished.

**What are some of the future trends you see on the horizon?**

**MF:** Well there is one thing we're working on right now that I think is quite significant. There is strong evidence that, as students move from Kindergarten to Grade 12, there is a higher percentage of students who are not deeply engaged. Even those who are doing well may not be deeply engaged – maybe school is boring, or the program is not challenging enough. Whatever the reason may be, I think it's accurate to say that there's a loss of enthusiasm on the part of students as they move from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

In *Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge* Fullan (2012) holds out four criteria for integrating technology and pedagogy to produce innovative learning experiences for all students – something he says is desperately needed to bring education into the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- Irresistibly engaging
- Elegantly efficient and easy to use
- Technologically ubiquitous 24/7
- Steeped in real-life problem solving.

What I think is converging here, and this is where leadership will be crucial, is that the so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills have been around probably since 1990. They've been talked about – critical communication, problem solving, collaboration, entrepreneurship and so on – but they've had no traction in the last 20 years.

I think that by operationalizing those skills, particularly through the use of technology, we can produce something that's irresistibly engaging for students, and teachers, and something that's elegant and easy to use, and that takes advantage

In thought leader Vijay Govindarajan's three-box approach to strategic thinking and innovation he argues that for an organization to sustain leadership over long periods of time, it must emphasize all three of the following boxes:

- Box 1 = managing the present
- Box 2 = selectively abandoning the past, and
- Box 3 = creating the future.

Box 1 is about improving current initiatives. Boxes 2 and 3 are about innovation, breakout performance, and growth.

Govindarajan believes that many organizations restrict their strategic thinking to Box 1. For him, strategy cannot be just about what an organization needs to do to secure results in the short term. Strategy must include Boxes 2 and 3. It must be about what an organization needs to do to sustain leadership in the long term.

From *Harvard Business Review*, Jan/Feb 2011

of technology 24/7. I think another key here will be to create learning experiences that are steeped in real-life problem solving.

**KL:** I think quite closely connected to that, and something that will be very challenging, is moving beyond what we currently consider to be an important set of outcomes for schooling, and toward more sophisticated expressions of those goals – toward something more ambitious, something that aspires to place our students, when they graduate, in positions of global leadership in the future.

Nobody is quite clear on what those capacities will look like, but it does strike me that this is going to be the next big challenge facing not only school and district leaders but probably provincial leaders as well – working out what those purposes should be, working out what our image in the province is of the educated person in that global environment, and redesigning our schools and districts in a way that holds some possibility of accomplishing that for our students.

In *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*, John Hattie (2012) presents eight mindframes that underpin every action and decision in a school.

For him “it is a belief that we are evaluators, change agents, adaptive learning experts, seekers of feedback about our impact, engaged in dialogue and challenge, and that we see opportunity in error, and are keen to spread the message about the power, fun and impact that we have on learning.”

**MF:** It may well be that we will need to look at what I might describe as, “flipping the roles of students and teachers.” In this scenario, teachers are change agents and facilitators and designers of learning and students do more than learning – they bring the learning issues to the collectivity. John Hattie has done a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses on the effects of teaching practices on student achievement. And he has very clearly concluded that the teacher needs to be a change agent, a facilitator of learning, and that teacher talk and teacher direction need to be less overt.

Again, this connects back to learning that is irresistibly engaging, steeped in real-life problem solving, and connected with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. This will ultimately require a radically different role for teachers and principals and students, which will mean that the leader has to be good at orchestrating the scenario that can support these changing roles. And I think it will change what teachers do and how students learn – in a dramatic way and also in a very exciting way.

In *What Did You Do in School Today?* Willms, Friesen and Milton (2009) identify three dimensions of student engagement:

- **Social Engagement:** A sense of belonging and participation in school life.
- **Academic or Institutional Engagement:** Participation in the formal requirements of schooling.
- **Intellectual Engagement:** A serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher order thinking skills (such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems, or construct new knowledge.

For an in-depth consideration of the links between student engagement and student achievement, see [InConversation: Student Engagement: A Leadership Priority – An Interview with J. Douglas Willms](#)

Educators must master their own set of teaching skills or models to teach students crucial 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. In *Realizing the Promise of 21st-Century Education*, Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun (2012) outline a clear vision for advancing school reform that emphasizes infusing the curriculum with technology.

**KL:** Added to this, as we think about leadership for the future, we need to acknowledge the capacities we have in place at the present time. I've been especially struck by this lately, reviewing the international studies of student achievement that have been done by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the results of the most recent Pan-Canadian tests which compare achievement across provinces throughout Canada. It's very clear from all of those sets of data right now that Ontario likely has the best school system in the world given the circumstances it faces at the present time. Finland always seems to be at the top of the heap when it comes to international tests – and so of course we're interested in what they're doing – but in terms of results, I don't think it's a just comparison because the country is so dramatically different. It's smaller and more homogeneous than we are such that their circumstances just aren't our circumstances.

More to the point, we're trying to make a very good system, maybe the best system in the world, better. And I think, as a result, our work has a serious ceiling effect hovering over it right now. The fact is that it doesn't get much better than this. So we're really trying to find a way to make marginal improvements in a high-performing system. Now, that's the context in which I think we need to think about leadership in future.

What are the challenges facing leaders in our schools and districts going forward? The fact is that they're already high capacity by any reasonable standard. That's true of teachers as well. Can we make them even higher capacity? Well, we know that some of them aren't practising all of the skills that we associate with effective leadership, but a lot of them are practising those skills and capacities at a very high level and it's completely unrealistic to expect 100 percent of anything to happen.

So again, I think we're at the point now where we need to provide more autonomy, more opportunities for people to learn their way forward – more opportunities for them to share expertise, as they do during the Ontario Leadership Congress (OLC). For example, what they're doing to close achievement gaps, what they're doing to accomplish some of the higher-order goals that we have in mind, how they go about turning around their

*Closing the Achievement Gap* (Ministry of Education, 2012) is a resource guide that collects best practices as described in their own words by principals across Ontario working to “close the gap” in achievement, a core priority for education in Ontario. It is designed to be used as a basis for conversation on closing the achievement gap in their schools.

To access this resource visit:

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/closingthegap.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/closingthegap.html)

The theme of the OLC 2012 was ‘Mobilizing Leaders’ Knowledge to Strengthen the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS)’. View video clips from the congress, which include segments with Ken and Michael who provided input and commentary throughout the session.

The links to the url for OLC videos is:

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/2012congress.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/2012congress.html)

Visit Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 at

[www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca).

schools, and building on that knowledge and feeding it back to their colleagues.

I think a big challenge, then, to sum this up, is to capture the good practices that are in place at the present time, make them very explicit, synthesize them the best we can, compare them to the more systematic research evidence that’s available, and make that the basis for the leadership practices at the next stage.

I think it has to be much more synthetic, if you like, than it has been in the past. It’s not simply the research community figuring out what good people are doing and then telling everybody else. That won’t do it. We already know what that looks like and it’s not going to change very much going forward.

So I think leadership right now, as Michael alludes to, is more about taking control over improving your own practices, but in a larger context. Along with this is a sense of responsibility not only for the students in your school but also for the improvement of all the children and youth in your district, and maybe in the province as well. This means expanding our horizons. That, I think, is what the future is about.