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DAVID BERLINER ON "50 MYTHS AND LIES THAT THREATEN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS"

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by Peter DeWitt

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How to Rejuvenate in the Eye of a Storm

As administrators, we often feel like we are in the eye of a fierce storm with so many issues swirling around and fires to put out. There are always conflicts to resolve, evaluations to conduct, deadlines that need to be met immediately, and people who need to talk to us now! We all would love to spend more time just enjoying our students but so many obstacles always get in the way. Those daily situations sap our energy, alienate us from positive exchanges, and leave us feeling overwhelmed. However, I am here to say that there are many positive weapons you can use to defeat the negative dragons that constantly try to destroy the "wonderful you" that you were born to be. In this article I will focus on specific strategies and activities that I have used successfully to combat and defeat negative forces and rejuvenate on a daily basis.

Go to Kindergarten/Enjoy Your Students – As an elementary principal, nothing rejuvenates me more than going to visit the kindergarten kids and seeing their joy and enthusiasm for school. They always bring me back to why we are here. They motivate and inspire me to be the best I can be. Maintaining joy, happiness, and fun is essential for a successful school. Our students help us realize this every time we interact with them. I know that every principal does not have daily access to kindergarten students, however we have buildings full of wonderful students. We must take the time every day to interact with them in positive ways in their natural environment. Work with them on projects, help them with a problem, or have them demonstrate what they are learning. Praise them and laugh with them. They are our lifeline for rejuvenation every day!

Get Actively Involved in SAANYS and Professional Organizations – Everyone reading this is already a member of SAANYS but are you an active member? I am so thankful that I became actively involved and joined my regional board. I have met so many wonderful colleagues whom I have learned so much from. As administrators, we often feel isolated and on an island. We need to interact regularly with our colleagues to share ideas and sharpen our saws. I remember the first SAANYS event I went to was on a local cruise called the "Miss Buffalo." Some of my colleagues invited me and I was not going to go at first. I am glad I changed my mind. I met Kevin Casey and Don Nickson and my professional life has never been the same. Interacting with them and the high-level, dedicated professionals I have met across the state rejuvenates me daily. I encourage all of you to reach out to your regional boards and attend a meeting. I guarantee you will be rejuvenated.

Read Biographies – I love reading biographies! I am constantly reading multiple books of various genres but always read a biography before I go to bed. I always choose people I admire or leaders I want to learn more about. They inspire me and it is a great way to end every day on a positive note. I am currently reading *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* by Jon Meacham. It is so motivational to read about the trials and tribulations of great leaders. It helps us to have confidence that we can overcome any obstacle that comes our way.

Exercise Daily – Make sure you make time for physical exercise on a regular basis. We won't be able to lead anyone if we don't have our health. This is hard with our busy schedules and it is easy to get caught up in the daily drama that surrounds us. I used to try to work out after work but that became too difficult because work often does not end until after 9:00 at night. So, I started waking up one hour earlier in the morning and exercising before school. This has been a super positive life changing event for me. At first it was tough but now I look forward to every morning. It invigorates me and helps me start every day off on the right foot.

Participate in Public Service Projects – As school leaders we have wonderful opportunities for ourselves and our schools to get involved in public service projects. I suggest that every school leader pick one charity or public service project to actively participate in every year. For me and my school, we have chosen the "Make A Wish Foundation" as the organization we have partnered with. We have done this for over a decade and now the project has expanded throughout the entire district and city of Tonawanda (where my school is located). Our students and staff have learned important life lessons of caring, giving, and empathy. It has made our school and community a better place and has taught everyone that we have a responsibility to help and serve others.

Make Time For Loved Ones – Sometimes we get so busy with our careers and caught up in the day-to-day situations, that we forget to spend quality time with our families. Every day, we need to spend quality time talking, listening, playing, and enjoying our families. We should try to eat dinner together at the table as much as possible. Some of my best memories as a boy growing up were that we ate dinner every night as a family. We talked about our days, learned about each other, laughed, and cried. Because of our busy lives, this custom has almost become extinct. We need to bring this important family value back into our lives as much as possible. It is a great way for families to connect. We also need to show our spouses or significant others that we love and appreciate them. Making time to do special things together helps you stay connected and always keeps you looking forward to new adventures. We are fortunate in New York State to have so many wonderful places we can enjoy with our spouses, families, and loved ones. But always remember, there's no place like home. We can show our love every day by doing little things that cost nothing yet are worth more than gold. What can be more rejuvenating than that!

I wish I had more time in this article to share more of my ideas with you, but these ideas are my fundamentals for keeping rejuvenated on a daily basis. Our jobs are stressful, difficult, and wonderful all at the same time. Trying to keep balance in the storms that we face every day is not easy. Do your best to use some of the strategies I shared and please write me back if you have any others you would like to add. I am honored to serve as SAANYS president, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time.

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Photo by Deborah Coleman/Pixar

STEPPING OUTSIDE OF OUR COMFORT ZONE AND

Jumping into Pixar in a Box

By Peter DeWitt, EdD

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Comfort zones are places we stay in when we don't want to step outside our boxes. It's scary to veer away from what we know and try something new. In these continued days of mandates, heightened accountability, and evaluation scores, teachers and school leaders may hide behind their comfort zones, which seems counterintuitive given that we live in a time that provides us access to countless innovative resources. There has never been a more important time to show students that learning can be exciting, challenging, and relevant.

One subject that has been under increased scrutiny is math. Social media tools like Facebook have recently been the place where parents and teachers vent their frustration toward the new Common Core math. Too often those frustrated posts of homework examples come from a misunderstanding about how and why to do the new type of math. Maybe Common Core math is just a false attempt to change things around and flip education on its ear. But, is it possible that the new math students have to learn can lead to more creativity?

Let's face it, math has never really had the greatest marketing advisor. Can math really be creative? It's kind of an odd question because math is not often used in the same sentence as creativity. The old image of school doesn't always portray math as a creative art. Images that do come to mind are usually filled with students sitting at their desks writing their facts on a chalkboard, or the teacher standing at the front of the room calling out multiplication facts as a class filled with students answers in unison. Math is boring to some students and exciting to others. If schools change how it's taught, might it lead to more students loving math, or more students becoming disenfranchised with it?

Considering this is a publication for school administrators across New York, you're probably wondering what all of this has to do with school leadership? Over the last few years there has been an increase in focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Even news channels are promoting the focus on STEM like never before. With all of the promotion, and overpromotion, regarding STEM flying at school leaders, it's easy to get lost in the politics of it, as opposed to the importance of getting rid of the fear of math, engineering, and science. Technology, however, seems to be a no-brainer these days because students have more handheld devices than ever before. The real question regarding technology is whether students are consumers or content creators.

Along with the focus on STEM, schools have taken part in such things as an "hour of code" where students learn how to create their own code on computers. Additionally, more and more schools are jumping on board with the maker's movement, which means they dedicate a room and call it a "maker space" where students can design and create. Some schools have even gone as far as setting the ground rule that students can only create something that will make a positive contribution to society. Perhaps math can be creative after all?

Adding to the STEM focus, along with hour of code and the maker movement, is something that is meant to inspire students to see that math (and other subjects as well) can be a necessary creative tool, and it's called

"Pixar in a Box" – a collaboration between Pixar Animation Studios and Khan Academy and sponsored by Disney.

Khan Academy is helping to bring Pixar in a Box into classrooms around the world. Khan Academy has long been a leader in offering online resources to provide "a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere." They offer hundreds of thousands of videos that students, teachers, and parents can use at no cost.

And let's face it, we all know Pixar. Whether we have children, or are children at heart, their movies have touched us in many ways with animated characters that seem to come alive on screen and in toy stores around the world. But, if more students understood the math behind all that Pixar animation, would they give math a fair shake and maybe, just maybe, get a little excited about it?

Pixar and Khan Academy hope so and are trying to help teachers bring education to the 21st century so that schools can truly engage more students, and focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, *Art*, and Math (STEAM), showing students that what they are learning in school has real-life application to some pretty cool stuff. When asked how the relationship began, Elyse Klaidman, director of Pixar University who led the initiative, said,

> "For a number of years, my colleagues here were really thinking about whom we could work with. We had goals to create curriculum around the creative work that we do at Pixar, that matters to the Common Core and to what students have to learn in middle and high school. We

> "We had goals to create curriculum around the creative work that we do at Pixar, that matters to the Common Core and to what students have to learn in middle and high school. We wanted to make it relevant for them."

Environment Modeling

Explore how realistic *blades of grass* are modeled using *parabolic arcs*.

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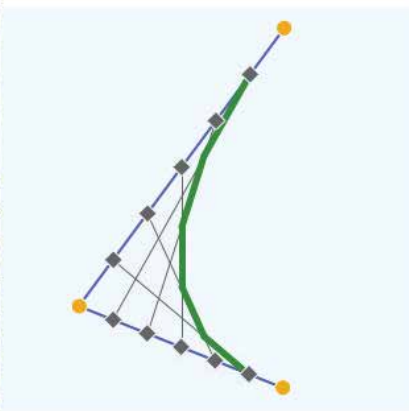
wanted to make it relevant for them. We knew what we wanted to do, and we knew where we had expertise and did not have expertise. And so we knew we wanted to work with someone in the educational space who had deep knowledge of working within the schools, with teachers, with Common Core, with curriculum, etc. And a mechanism to disseminate it online and for free."

Klaidman went on to say,

"We had looked at Khan quite a few years back, and I think they weren't yet in the place where they had any partnerships or that they had much access in the world. So we kind of looked at various options and then we came back to Khan – a former Pixar colleague had been working at Khan and we contacted him, and then it was right. The timing was right for them, the timing was right for us. They had progressed to a place that they really had the audience and the capability, the internal capability, to partner with us, and they were interested in creating a new kind of partnership different from anything they'd done before."

When it came to a starting point, Klaidman said,

"If we add the 'a' into STEM for art, then we were starting with STEAM. My experience with Pixar University is that I have had educators at every level contacting us asking if we could help them incorporate some of what we do into their curriculum; into their learning. They asked how we could help to support their creation of curriculum around animation and around what it takes to do what we do."

Those teachers understood the power of making math relevant using a product that students knew. Brit Cruise, content producer at Khan Academy, said Khan also had the mission to motivate students. "The place we

Rendering

Explore how *pixels are painted* by solving systems of *linear equations*.

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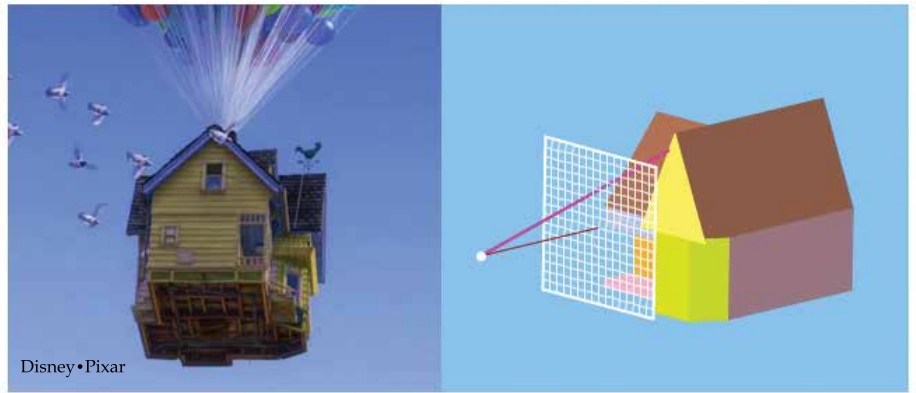
aligned really was, how do we motivate kids to get excited about math," which was partly inspired by Walt Disney's focus on math and animation arts, as he used to do television programs on it, noted Cruise.

Cruise went on to say,

"So that the authentic connection to math is where this really started making sense. From the perspective of Khan Academy, there was a potential to create online modules which are appropriate for a really general audience, so anyone can come and dive in and learn."

Pixar in a Box is designed for students from fifth grade to high school, and a little beyond high school.

Cruise said,

"From the outset here, our guiding principle was to ask what math are we teaching? Our guiding principle was to tell the most authentic story, or the most natural story; whatever feels natural in terms of the context of Pixar. So at a very high level that means we've organized our content around the production pipeline of how a movie gets made. That was an important decision

Disney•Pixar

because at the beginning we had tossed around the idea of having a mathematical view at the highest level. So here's our geometry module, here's our algebra one module, but we quickly threw that away in hopes of, again, always keeping the general audience in mind."

Klaidman added,

"We have often heard things like, 'Why do I have to learn this math anyway?' And had some students learned that math was really creative, maybe they would take a different path and find it fascinating while learning it. At Pixar, we have this gift of this great work we get to do, and we know that it matches up with the content students learn in school. Why not allow them to learn it in context of reality?"

It all needed to be done in a way that would make it accessible and user-friendly to teachers. Cruise said,

"The most practical, obvious thing we did first is that we created one-hour, hands-on extensions of all our initial lessons that could be done alone or in groups, and we optimized it for classrooms and tested it in classrooms. So that at least there is a piece that was very much designed for classrooms. It's up to the teacher how the students go through that lesson, if students do it at home, or if they do it together in class. We tried to create some pieces that provided
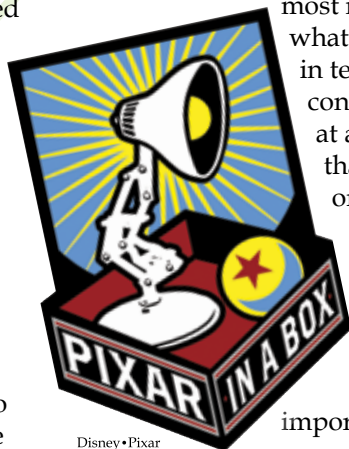
Overview of Pixar in a Box: http://bit.ly/1Kwe4Fb

the opportunity for teachers to take creative actions."

However, math is just the starting point. Klaidman says,

"Our first year is focused on math. However, in our minds our second year is focused on finance and computer science, and our third year is going to be focused on the arts and humanities, which gives us really a wide range of variants that we can go in to."

COLLABORATION IS KEY

According to John Hattie, who has done the largest meta-analysis (Visible Learning, 2009) ever completed in the world, collaboration is one of the most important learning tools that can be used in the classroom. Clearly, this all takes a culture of trust in each teacher's classroom where they can model collaboration in the classroom. One of Hattie's 150 influences on learning that yields a high-effect size is that of teacher-student relationships. This does not mean that teachers need to be the fountain of all knowledge, but that they can learn along with their students, which also

makes Pixar in a Box an exciting tool because Klaidman says that teachers do not have to know it all before they dive in with their students.

According to Klaidman,

"I think that it can be an exciting place for students and teachers to learn together, because there will be new content for all of them. Yet, the teachers will have real expertise in certain areas, and all of them will have creative ideas that can complement each other. We know through a focus on 21st century skills that collaboration and the ability to learn from each other and work together is vitally important, which is certainly what we do at Pixar."

When asked how school leaders can help, Klaidman says,

"I guess it's just really to encourage teachers to see that this is a creative opportunity to get to the same place they need to get. We want to make sure that their students recognize that what they're learning has applicability out in the real world, but it might take them slightly out of their comfort zone."

She continued by suggesting,

"It might involve working with teachers to think up new ways of working with their students or amplifying the content we've made available. School leaders can help teachers encourage the lifelong learning for their students, and see how all of this connects to the real world."

Cruise ended the conversation by saying, "We're always working with teachers in hopes of creating a feedback loop between the consumers of the content and the producers. I always cringe when I know certain educational products or

programs require a whole bunch of training. I tried to simplify this project into a single educator guide, it's just maybe two or three pages long, that should provide all the information a teacher would need to do this. It's all there in one place, and each lesson comes with a briefing."

IN THE END

A friend who is a principal brought his son to a museum in New York City recently. On Facebook the principal posted pictures of his son creating animated characters, and in some of the photos his middle school-age son was controlling the movements of some Pixar characters on the screen.

Many times children accompany their parents to those museums in hopes to gain an experience that they cannot typically get in school.

It would seem as though Pixar and Khan are trying to inspire students and teachers to have that experience in the classroom without ever needing to go on a field trip.

To learn more about Pixar in a Box visit: https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/pixar.

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Hattie, John (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. Routledge: London.

Photo by Deborah Coleman/Pixar

From left to right: Brit Cruise, Elyse Klaidman, Tony DeRose, Sal Khan, Ed Catmull, and James Tynan celebrate the launch of Pixar in a Box.

PETER DEWITT, EdD, is an independent consultant working with schools in the U.S. and internationally as a learning trainer. He is an instructional coach with Jim Knight and student voice with Russ Quaglia. Peter is the author of three education books including *Flipping Leadership Doesn't Mean Reinventing the Wheel* (Corwin Press, 2014) and *School Climate Change* (ASCD, 2014). He is the series editor for the Connected Educators Series (Corwin Press), and is working on a new leadership series with Michael Fullan, Yong Zhao, Pasi Sahlberg, Andy Hargreaves, and Russ Quaglia.
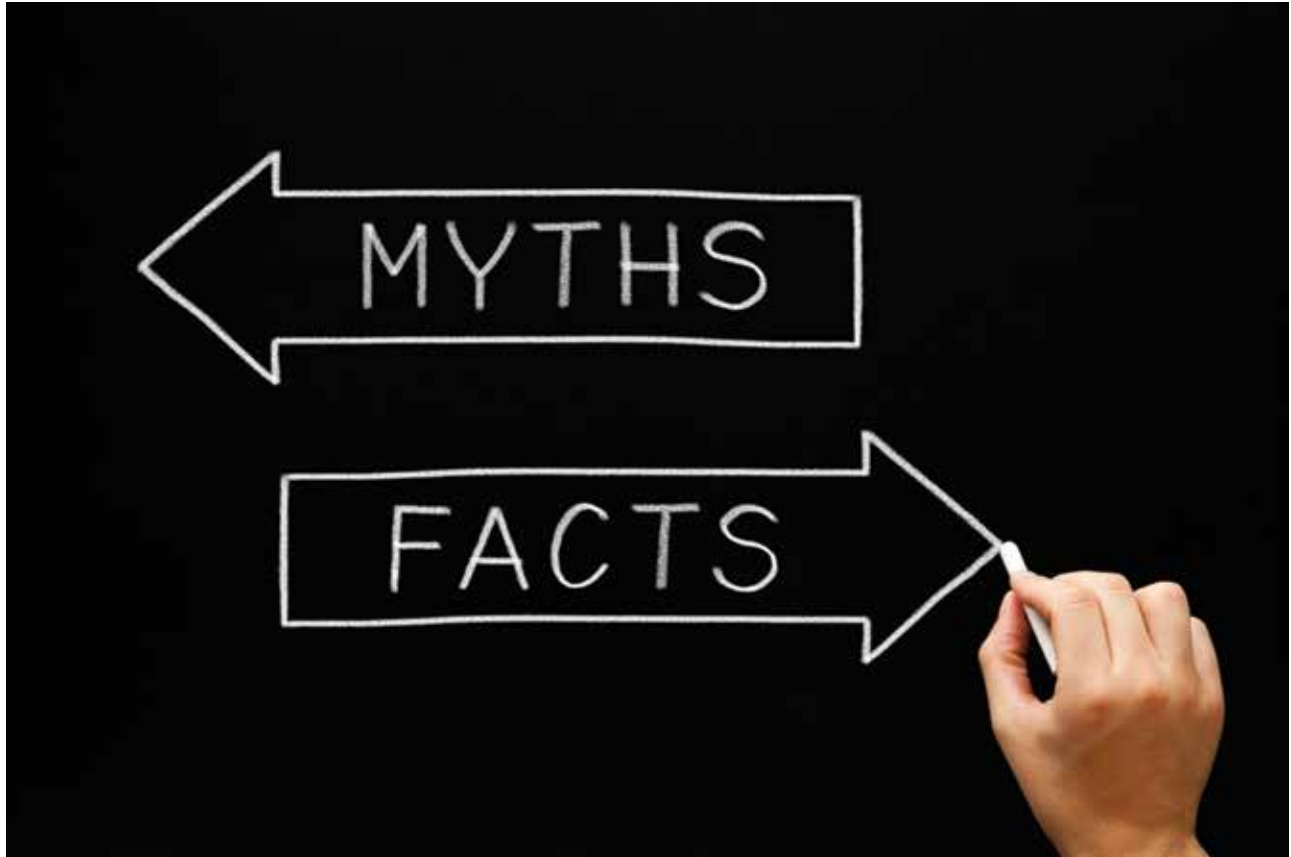
DAVID BERLINER ON

"50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools"

By Paul Grondahl

David C. Berliner is an educational myth buster with a raspy, nasal accent courtesy of the Bronx. When he gets passionate about refuting what he considers an affront to public education – which is often – he speaks in blunt, profane language. He's an iconoclast, whose clear-eyed assessment of public schools is gleaned from decades of sifting data for his books and research, visiting dozens of schools across the country, and tracking the latest scholarship as a past president of the American Educational Research Association and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association.
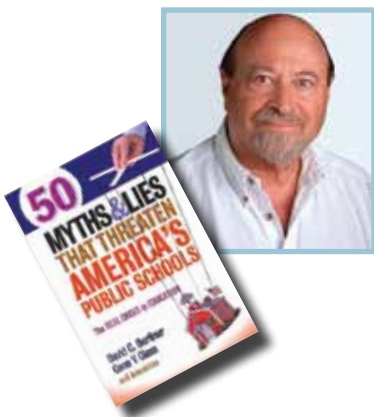
Berliner is Regents Professor of Education Emeritus at Arizona State University and he's been a faculty member at the University of Arizona, University of Massachusetts, and Stanford University. He has also taught at universities in Canada, Australia, and several European countries.

> "If we raise the poverty rate to 25 percent, which includes 13 million American kids, the U.S. students are still among the highest scoring students in the world."

"The nation is caught up in a furious battle trying to figure out why not all our schools are working well and I'm explaining how remarkably good our schools are," Berliner said by phone from his home in Tempe, Arizona. "The reality is that almost all of our schools that are not doing well are schools where poverty is endemic. I am also pointing out that there's an awful lot of BS out there when it comes to educational policy that is based on myths and lies." He considers it his job to serve as a BS detector and to wade through a swamp of falsehoods, faulty logic, and flat-out misinformation and to call out the hogwash, bunk, and hokum perpetuated by what he sees as a Machiavellian mix of political special interests and corporate opportunists.

Berliner delivered the keynote address at the SAANYS annual conference on October 18, where he encouraged his allies – principals, and building supervisors – in their ongoing efforts for excellence in public schools and he aimed his fierce brand of truth-telling at the special interest myth-perpetuating targets in his most recent book, *50 Myths and Lies About Public Schools* (Teachers College Press, 2014), co-authored with Gene V. Glass, a research professor at the University of Colorado Boulder's School of Education and a senior researcher at the National Education Policy Center.

The purpose of the *50 Myths and Lies* book was to launch a thousand conversations, which it has done, not to mention generating brisk sales and bringing Berliner invitations to speak from Montana to Texas. It has also stoked passions and spurred spirited arguments across the blogosphere, at school board meetings, and in newspaper editorial pages.

Among the myths the book busts are these:

– **International tests show that the United States has a second-rate education system.**
"It is a bald-faced lie," Berliner said. "I have irrefutable data that shows if you attend a public school where poverty rates were below 10 percent and you combine reading, math, and science scores, the U.S. is the top nation in the world. If we raise the poverty rate to 25 percent, which includes 13 million American kids, the U.S. students are still among the highest scoring students in the world. Even where poverty rates were 25-50 percent, U.S. students scored above the international average."

– **Teachers are the most important influence in a child's education.**
"New York and a lot of other states are using systems and standardized achievement test scores to evaluate teachers that are sensitive to social class, neighborhood quality of life and family income, but not to teachers,"

> "I have irrefutable data that shows if you attend a public school where poverty rates were below 10% and you combine reading, math, and science scores, the U.S. is the top nation in the world."

Berliner said. "It is almost impossible to move those metrics by instruction alone. In only rare instances does a teacher or a school break the pattern. I have extensive data that clearly shows about 60 percent of test scores' variation is determined by out-of-school factors and only 10 percent on the teacher. Teachers do make a big difference on individual kids. Good teachers change lives and influence students, but they do not significantly change the metrics."

– **Firing the bottom 5 to 8 percent of teachers will move the U.S. to the top of international science and math rankings.**
"Economist Eric Hanushek has been touting this idea for years, but there's absolutely no evidence it would have that effect," Berliner said. "Microsoft tried firing the bottom 5 percent of its employees and it just alienated people, drove the place crazy, and created a lot of paranoia and stress
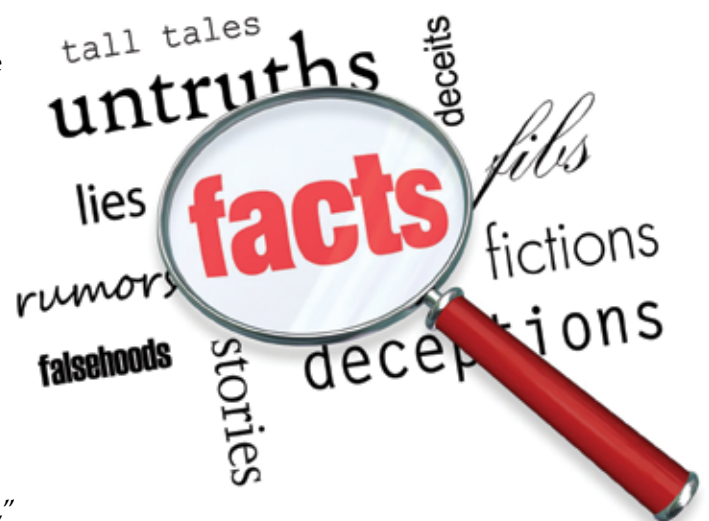
without measurably improving the company's results. Microsoft ended up ending the practice because it was a horrible system that created many problems.

– Schools need to increase STEM courses to make our students more competitive and to guarantee that they find jobs.

"There are 11 million Americans with STEM degrees who are not working in a STEM field," Berliner said. "Each year we produce 100,000 more people with STEM degrees than there are STEM jobs. There is no national shortage of STEM graduates. I get really crazy over all the STEM BS."

– Holding a child back who is not doing well academically is good for the child.

"Holding kids back if they are not reading well in third grade, which Arizona and Florida passed, is a stupid policy," Berliner said. "We have a lot of data that shows that holding a child back is a mistake that significantly increases the child's chance of dropping out of school. Those students not reading well by third grade require attention, not retention. Tutoring is cheaper and more humane than flunking a child."

Berliner's type of aggressive debunking has earned him enemies and he's no stranger to controversy. His 1996 book, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*, co-authored with Bruce J. Biddle, raised public outrage over their arguments that legislators and Presidents Reagan and both Bushes manufactured an assault on American public schools based on misleading data that spawned misguided reforms. The real problems in our schools run much deeper and are caused by fundamental societal and economic failures, they argued. The themes explored in *The Manufactured Crisis* are extended and broadened in *50 Myths and Lies*.

"We have a long history of anti-intellectualism that runs really deep in the American psyche that comes and goes in waves," Berliner said. "It just takes a few declines in test scores to bring it all to the surface again and we pin it all on the teachers. Our poor schools are not working because of poverty in those neighborhoods, not because of poor teachers. It's a misattribution. I've studied and written about public versus private schools for a long time. When you adjust for social class and poverty, in every case the public schools do better than the privates. Don't give me the BS that private schools are better. They're skimming kids and it's only higher social class, not a better school."

Berliner has a simple formula for improving schools: address the underlying social problems and invest in failing neighborhoods if you want the quality of the public schools there to rise.

"My bottom line message to administrators and school boards is that if you expect to improve education without improving communities, it cannot be done," Berliner said. "Administrators who have schools with many low-achieving kids have to figure out how to get them jobs and to find more money for drug prevention, adult education, and effective social programs for their communities. They need to increase funding for breakfast and lunch programs because poor kids can't learn if they're hungry. If school administrators do not engage the community and they just work on what goes on inside the school, they will never achieve the academic success they dream of for their students."

In the past six months or so, Berliner has actually become more of an optimist when it comes to the contentious education debate. "I thought we had lost the battle and I was losing faith, but the things I've seen recently are encouraging. Nearly 200,000 students opted out of standardized tests in New York. People are saying we've had enough testing, just teach our kids some useful things that will help them learn and grow. Teachers are fighting back in the state of Washington and striking for more pay because of additional requirements being demanded of them. I see these things happening all over the country. I say it's about time and I like to think our books are playing a part."

> "My bottom line message to administrators and school boards is that if you expect to improve education without improving communities, it cannot be done."

MYTH **FACTS**

PAUL GRONDAHL is an award-winning reporter at the *Albany Times Union*. A paperback edition of his political biography, *Mayor Corning: Albany Icon, Albany Enigma,* was recently published by SUNY Press.
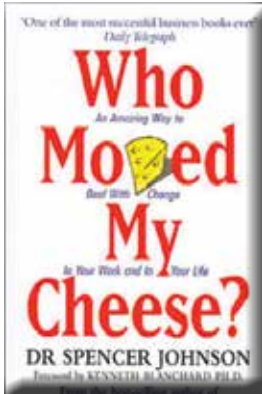
Who Moved My Cheese?
Spencer Johnson

This issue of *Vanguard* asks us to consider new ideas for teaching and learning. Since this column began, we've used the space to share information from current professional books that we hope have enhanced your practice in some way. This issue's book review presents a different idea around professional reading for administrators to consider.

The role of an administrator always includes modeling learning no matter the level or department you are in. One way to model learning and share in the celebration of literacy is by coordinating a book club.

Dr. Donald Gately, principal of Jericho Middle School in Long Island, NY, has written about how he uses the reading of literature meant for his students as a means to connect to his families. In a blog post from last year, "About Booktalks, A Sure Thing," Don describes how he led a book talk with parents and students. Johnson used the book, *Who Moved My Cheese?* Johnson wrote: "Our goal for the book talk is twofold. First, we want to develop adolescent literacy, there are few goals more important than this. Secondly, we want to give adults a role in the school that is tied to both our academic mission and our efforts to build social emotional literacy." According to Dr. Gately, this book can be considered the children's version of *Mindset* (by Dr. Carol Dweck) as it deals with the same themes about moving beyond our comfort zones and embracing failure.

Dennis Schug, principal of Hampton Bays Middle School in Long Island, NY, hosted a book talk around the book *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio for his incoming fifth graders last year. *Wonder* is the endearing story of a young man with a facial deformity and the challenges he faces navigating a new school. Mr. Schug explains that a copy of the book was provided to each student. They were invited to read with him. He even hosted four summer meetings to discuss the book. The final meeting about the book took place in September. He also used eighth grade mentors to read the book and attend the meetings as a way of mentoring the younger students. Mr. Schug found his book study to be meaningful and an authentic reading experience for students. He was able to use the theme of empathy present in the book to springboard many conversations. Students' parents also commented it was a great way to get students into the building before the start of the year!

Wonder
R.J. Palacio

I was able to host a similar book talk with the same book, *Wonder*, during the school year with students who volunteered to be part of a principal's book club. We met during lunch periods and discussed the book over a few weeks. My students connected so closely with the story of acceptance in the book that they recommended that it become required reading for all incoming sixth graders. I found the reading of literature intended for the middle school age group refreshed some of my understanding of what it must be like to be an adolescent. I enjoyed learning from the reflections students shared and I think it helped me further develop empathy and a younger perspective.

It is not uncommon for administrators to host book studies with teachers but that idea can be extended. Use book studies with parents and students to make powerful connections on an academic level and on an interpersonal level. Learning and growing together presents opportunities for everyone. Plus, you'll be surprised how enjoyable reading children's literature for the level you lead really can be!
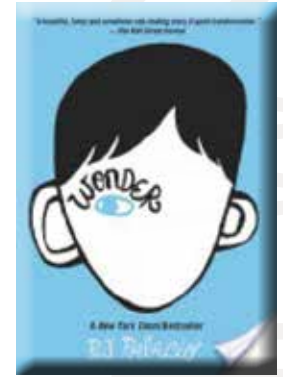
Dennis Schug

Dr. Donald Gately

BOOK REVIEW BY LISA MEADE

Lisa Meade is middle school principal at Corinth CSD. You can find her on Twitter at @LisaMeade23.

FYI

NSPRA PARENT COMMUNICATION SURVEY

HOW WELL INFORMED ARE OUR PARENTS?

40%
OF ELEMENTARY PARENTS FEEL "VERY WELL INFORMED" AT CHILD'S SCHOOL

25%
OF SECONDARY PARENTS FEEL "VERY WELL INFORMED" AT CHILD'S SCHOOL

HOW OFTEN DO THEY WANT UPDATES?

47%	37%	13%
AS SOON AS MAJOR DECISIONS ARE MADE	MONTHLY	QUARTERLY

WHAT INFO DO PARENTS WANT?

- UPDATES ON CHILD'S PROGRESS/INSIGHT ON HOW THEY CAN IMPROVE
- TIMELY NOTICE WHEN PERFORMANCE IS SLIPPING
- WHAT CHILD IS EXPECTED TO LEARN DURING THE YEAR
- HOMEWORK AND GRADING POLICIES

www.nspra.org

OPINIONS

"…no single assessment should ever be the sole factor in making an educational decision about a student, an educator or a school."

– Obama Administration on New School Testing Guidelines

"The role of a creative leader is not to have all the ideas; it's to create a culture where everyone can have ideas and feel that they're valued."

– Sir Ken Robinson

TRENDING IN ED

TRENDING ON... TWITTER
School Hackers
at East Greenwich High School, East Greenwich, RI

Scan or visit: http://bit.ly/1QoMRcq

TRENDING ON... TWITTER
Google Expeditions: Pioneer Program

Scan or visit: http://bit.ly/1KCsdTg

TRENDING ON... YOUTUBE
Flash Mob "One Day More"

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TRENDING ON... EDUCATION WEEK
Carol Dweck Revisits the "Growth Mindset"

Scan or visit: http://bit.ly/1KTarxQ

WHAT'S THIS?

Download a QR code reader app on your smart phone or tablet to launch these videos.

Culture of
F
R
Learning

By Suzanne Gray

It's two o'clock in the morning and there is still sand between my toes. This is my annual middle of the night journey from summer's waves to September's hallways, and the only thing that's swimming is my head. How will staff be greeted that very first day back? Where will I host the first faculty conference? What will my main message encompass? Should I play music? Create a PowerPoint of fun summer photographs staff members shared with me?

Should an icebreaker activity be planned to create some energy within the room? That very first meeting with staff is an opportunity to engage and excite key members of our teams about the upcoming year's work. It's a tricky balance between delivering a positive message and discussing the realities associated with the APPR evaluation system. For some it's an internal battle between delivering their child-centered vision and informing staff of district policies that may not always easily align with their message.

In my tenth year as a principal I sit here tonight with those very same questions I had when I first began this journey. I continue to ask myself, "How does the culture of a building influence learning? What does culture do FOR learning?" Minus its political implications, I guess what it boils down to is that I'm a firm believer in trickle-down economics – our culture becomes our children's culture; our team love becomes our children's love.

A few months back I was corresponding with another principal on Twitter and said, "I can't stop thinking about culture." He replied, "Me too." But in a day and age where everything is measurable (or it is at least supposed to be), the actions that lead to strong culture aren't. The results may be found in the mouths of babes: teachers may retire knowing they were part of something incredible, but in the end, the term *measurement* is an insult. As school leaders we should all be cultivating cultures that communicate vision with transparency. We need to inspire curiosity, create and sustain a growth mindset, and encourage fringe thinking while igniting passion in the staff members we lead. We need to see, hear, and feel the culture of our buildings and react to the things we learn.

I have strategic plans for district goals, needy staff members, helicopter parents, and students who require additional services for academic, behavioral, and emotional challenges.

But what I believe is just as important are the goals I set for promoting a culture of celebrating, risk taking, sharing, and a little bit of rock and roll. If a certain percentage of good teaching is theater, I want to build closets big enough to hang their costumes. Those are costumes we pull out often throughout the year. Those are costumes that make a difference to the children we serve and the staff we lead.

Our schools are not institutions with rows of children working on tasks to be completed in isolation. And that means that we certainly aren't the supervisors of such. We are young and old, energized and sometimes deflated, talented and carved out of pure effort. We are master cooks, caring sisters, awesome dads, guitar players (air and real), crochet ninjas, mourners, chauffeurs of teenagers, writers, Star Trek/Star Wars nerds, closet scientists (sometimes with disastrous results), tithers, husbands, co-teachers, bird-watchers, campers, introverts, jugglers, and superheroes… always superheroes. And if I have to go into the books with one mantra, it's this:

What do I have to do to get all of you into the classroom? I don't want just the "teacher" part of you. I want all of you. Maybe that's exactly what makes a strong culture. It's when leaders build a stage that accepts all that makes up their teachers, and actually engages all of those pieces.

Mundane is easy and easy doesn't build anything. I create culture tasks that address the current state of the building and schedule them into my day. Filming goofy songs/dances for special occasions such as snow days, tossing a fish from staff member to staff member in our hallways (keeping our FISH philosophy alive), assigning silly days such as mustache day or backwards day, random props for the moment, setting up photo booths with Hawaiian scenery in the faculty room for those long winter months and posting pictures on the walls, or simply scheduling time to talk about what staff did over the weekend will change the climate of any building!

If we are to cultivate schools where students are asked to think creatively,

collaborate with peers, and act compassionately, then we must model that with our own staff. Kids are always watching. It is in this mutual realm that we create "US," which in my book is synonymous with CULTURE. And when WE take the stage, we take the stage together. The children know it and the feeling in our building is an energy that is alive.

SUZANNE GRAY is the principal of Old Bethpage Elementary School.

Developing Programming for At Risk Students:

Reenergizing Through a Program Data Cycle

By Robert Messia

Over the past several years schools across the nation have been working to increase their focus on data-driven decision making. At Algonquin Middle School in the Averill Park Central School District we have taken this focus to work on increasing the use of data in focusing our student progress monitoring, particularly with students who struggle. In doing so, **we are using data on a building level to help ensure student success** and make major program changes to support our most at risk students.

USING DATA TO MONITOR SCHOOLWIDE STUDENT PROGRESS

Three years ago our instructional data coach inspired this work by demonstrating just how easy it is to run a report from our student management system that shows students' current course averages. The principal and assistant principal now share these lists with school counselors and team teachers, asking that they check in with students who have grades that fall below 70 percent.

With this tremendous resource and the desire to provide a greater level of monitoring to our most struggling learners, our school embraced a culture of success for all. This process has helped to create a data-driven focus to our team meetings, support services meetings, and individual student meetings, and has helped encourage students to earn higher averages.

These discussions initiated a data-cycle process that ultimately led to the creation of a highly effective integrated alternative education program.

ANALYSIS: DISCOVERING AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

Beginning this process was a recognition in our analysis of student performance data that particular students consistently appeared on the "below 70 percent" list and the need was present to reengage these

students in their school experience.

We also understood that studies consistently showed that the middle school years are critical to student career and college success. By the end of eighth grade, students who have low grades and a high number of discipline issues are more likely to be at risk of dropping out of high school.

Discussions in our student support services meetings, which include school counselors, the school psychologist, a social worker, CSE chair, assistant principal, and principal, focused on what the common needs were of these students and what types of programming might benefit these persistently struggling students.

PROGRAM DESIGN: FILLING A NEED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES

Work then developed into an integrated alternative education program that we call "Warrior Fundamentals" to help promote the success of our most struggling students. The name of this course draws on our school mascot and recognizes that we are working on foundational skills to promote student success.

Using existing staff, the Warrior Fundamentals program utilizes a small group mentoring approach to support our most struggling general education students in seventh and eighth grades. Students are admitted into this program based on student grades and through teacher team recommendations.

Limiting the group size to eight students provides for a high degree of student feedback and support.

Finally, we decided we would use our building's end of year student placement process to help identify which students would be strong candidates for this program.

EMPOWERING: IMPLEMENTATION

The Warrior Fundamentals program takes place every

other day during an 80-minute block. As a part of this program, students participate in executive functioning and organization support. Students work in small groups with their teacher to study for upcoming tests and quizzes.

Recognizing the struggles these students face navigating their education experience, we made social work consultation a critical component, helping to foster student connections to adults in the building and viewing school more positively. Our school social worker participated as a co-teacher, facilitating problem solving and helping students connect with their teachers.

Flexibility also became a key in this program's success, particularly as we made our way into the second marking period. Initially the program was going to include remedial computer assisted instruction to provide additional contact time in math and English language arts. However, it was evident from feedback from teachers and performance on formative and summative assessments that students in the program needed more attention in areas of executive functioning and homework assistance.

ASSESSMENT: REJUVENATED RELUCTANT LEARNERS

The results of implementing this program have been very positive both academically and behaviorally.

Course failure rates dropped dramatically for students who participated in the Warrior Fundamentals program. In the year prior to enrolling in Warriors, the students failed a combined 21 courses for the school year. Then during their Warrior year, the students had a combined six course failures. And in the courses they did fail, their grades were much closer to our 65 percent passing average than they were the year prior.

Students involved in the Warrior Fundamentals program also experienced a dramatic decrease in office referrals. In fact, during the school year prior to participation in the Warrior program, these students had 26 combined office referrals.

Program Data Cycle

Analyze · Design · Implement · Assess
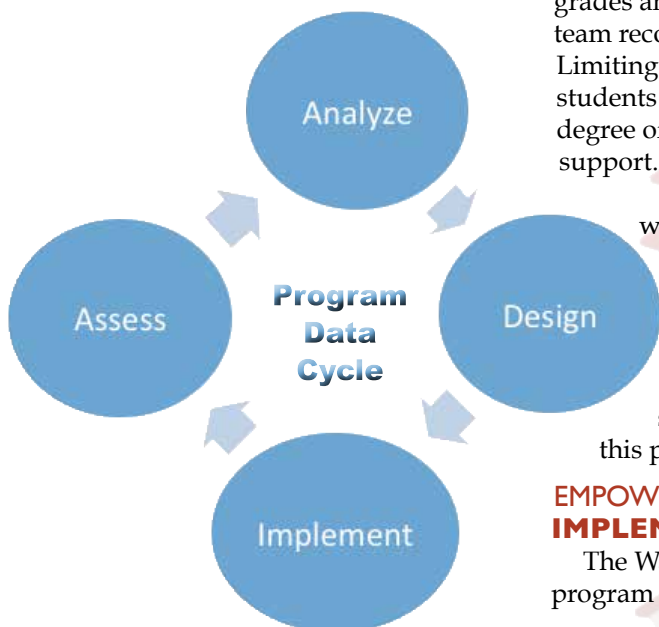
During the year they were enrolled in the Warrior program they had a combined five office referrals.

Ultimately this program's success will be measured by these students maintaining their success in the coming school year and then graduating from high school, but there is no doubt that this successful school year for these students will help them recognize that they each have the potential to achieve.

DATA CYCLE: LESSONS LEARNED

Our school's experience in using data-driven decision making has demonstrated several important lessons.

First, a schoolwide approach to progress monitoring of at risk students can have a transformative impact on engagement and achievement as our Warrior Fundamentals program has changed the academic lives of its participants.

Second, using data is a powerful agent for professional discussion and needs identification. As a school, if we did not engage in progress monitoring the way we did, the need for an integrated alternative education program would not have been recognized. Nor would we have been able to support student success in the same way we were able to this past school year.

Finally, data-based decision making and the use of a program planning cycle have the ability to reenergize school communities and reengage all of us in viewing education differently.

ROBERT MESSIA is the principal of Algonquin Middle School in the Averill Park Central School District.

Warrior Fundamentals 7 & 8 Participants

	Full Year Courses Failed	Office Discipline Referrals
2013-14	21	26
2014-15	6	5

STEM Team Mentors Lead
Project Based Learning (PBL)
Competitions

Figure 1: STEM team mentor working with his STEM-9 team to construct their catapult

By Linda Rae Markert, EdD
    Carol Burch
    and Dawn Battles

"Without question, the Hannibal Central School District (HCSD) has a rich history of rowing the boat together, recruiting colleagues as 'rowers' from its county-wide school partners and SUNY Oswego's School of Education. Collaborative partnerships were key to Hannibal's ability to reconfigure the course and move forward with renewed focus and enthusiasm" (Markert and Schmitt, 2011, p. 8).

During the intervening years since the "Hannibal Story" was featured in the article where this statement was published, the HCSD hired a new superintendent (2012), middle school principal (2013), and high school principal (2014). In June 2014, the district released a comprehensive Strategic Plan to its students, faculty, staff, and community members. Hannibal's desire to foster a RejuvenatED climate for academic high performance, student engagement, and collaborative solutions was clearly defined in a series of strategic intents and myriad action plans.

A small team of high school teachers worked closely with a SUNY Oswego educational administration faculty member to zero in on three of these action plans as they sought to rejuvenate themselves, build leadership capacity in their upperclassmen, and energize their ninth grade science students. The selected action plans included:

- Developing mentor relationships between freshmen and upperclassmen;
- Providing engaging, relevant, and rigorous instruction; and
- Offering professional development focused on project based learning.

Throughout the 2014-2015 academic year, the team focused specifically on creating and differentiating instructional strategies
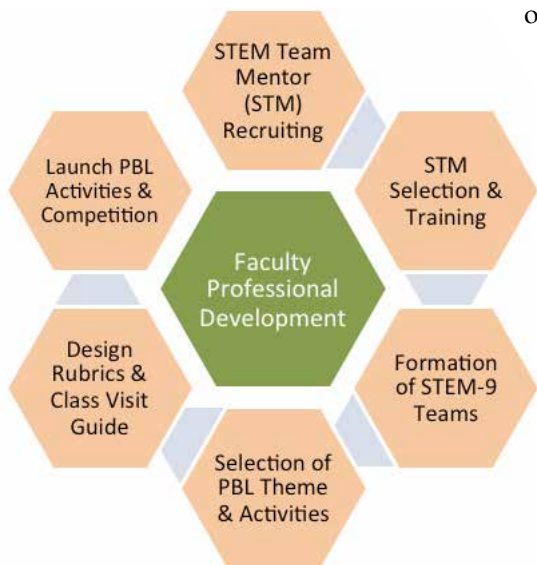

Figure 2: Sequence of events – STEM team mentors assist teachers with PBL competitions

to work effectively with ninth grade students who were enrolled in a STEM-9 class. Approximately 40 freshmen were placed in this course to prepare for success in the Living Environment Regents science course that follows. STEM-9 uses a curriculum designed to provide an applied orientation to scientific studies and science in general, and to heighten students' interest and engagement in their own learning outcomes. We utilized a multifaceted model to select and gradually implement several project based learning (PBL) exercises in the three STEM-9 classes during the second half of the year (Figure 2).

Prior to fall 2014, the title of this course had been Regents Science Prep, and had been offered primarily by one teacher who also taught physics for college credit. In August 2014, she received support to attend a summer conference at Syracuse University titled "Leadership for Inclusive Schooling." This professional development, coupled with Causton and Theoharis's (2014) compelling insights regarding inclusion, inspired us to change the name of the ninth grade introductory science course to STEM-9. With this revision, we sought to minimize the labeling effect and/or stereotyping that seemed to adversely impact these freshman students early in their high school tenure. Another change came with the addition of the Regents chemistry teacher to our team who was assigned to teach a section of STEM-9 for the first time. We also kept the newly appointed high school principal fully apprised of our intentions as we developed recruitment strategies and a PBL focus to bring a team of STEM Team Mentors (STMs) on board.

STM applications were solicited from the upperclassmen enrolled in physics (n = 13) and Regents chemistry (n = 20). We ultimately selected and trained nine individuals to serve as STMs for the second half of the year. Here are a few of the expectations we delineated in the application package. STMs will:

- Assist instructors with review and selection of PBL activities;
- Create lists of materials/ supplies required for each PBL investigation with a budget if possible;
- Be assigned to work with and provide guidance for a STEM-9 team created by the instructors;
- Monitor their team's progress on the PBL activities via weekly check-ins, either during class or in alternative venues during or after the regular school day; and
- Assist instructors with evaluating the final artifacts of the experience, as they prepare to give a brief presentation to the board of education to summarize their PBL work and instructional leadership experience.

Our training for the STMs focused largely on what it means to be a mentor, and how they might want to think differently about effective teaching strategies. During a series of interactive after school meetings, we eventually crafted a Classroom Visit Guide for PBL (Figure 3). The STMs were encouraged to use this form to practice observing instruction in their own classes; and we distributed the tool to other science and special education teachers, thereby inviting them to visit the STEM-9 classes to survey the types of differentiation and formative assessment approaches being tried in these laboratory settings. Nine STEM-9 teams were assembled, to which the STMs were assigned, and our work began in earnest near the end of the third quarter.

Angry Birds© was the theme we collaboratively selected for the first PBL exercise where all STEM-9 students and their STMs watched videos of the game, and then played the actual game to observe various laws of physics. They next progressed through the engineering design process to create a mini-catapult device to solve a specific problem. By requiring each ninth grader to individually design, build, revise, test, and evaluate her/his own

Figure 3: Classroom visit guide for Project Based Learning (PBL) in STEM-9

mini-device, we enabled all students to acquire personal knowledge they could bring to the team collaboration phase of the project. Several STMs built their own mini-catapults as they modeled effective skills for their individual teams. Each STM team ultimately designed and built a larger catapult or Angry Birds© style launching device, and then competed against the other teams (Figure 1). In each portion of the project, students reflected on their own work, applied their hands-on experiences to understand theoretical concepts related to the project, and developed many additional skills they could apply beyond the classroom. The STEM-9 students were asked to complete a peer review form, which enabled them to communicate confidentially with their instructors about their perceptions regarding individual team members' contributions to the work they completed, and they were also able to provide an assessment of the STMs' leadership for their team.

We all know how much high school students love competition, so we were not surprised to witness their energy and enthusiasm for this aspect of the PBL assignments. On the other hand, we were cautiously optimistic about learning outcomes as we required them to complete data charts, self-assessment rubrics, and regular reflections in their class journal. Knowing some of these tasks can become tedious, or even appear superficial to some students, as an instructional team we were RejuvenatED to discover the following:

- The project nature of the challenge engaged most of the STEM-9 students early on, and they remained enthusiastic over the course of the PBL activities.
- Small teams eagerly welcomed their mentors and responded positively to their presence during those class times they could spend together – many asked when the STMs would be coming back again.
- Pairing male STMs with a couple of the more resistant teams of female ninth graders had the consequential effect of motivating the girls to perform the tasks to completion.
- Several of the STEM-9 students who seemed most challenged earlier in the year essentially emerged to become leaders themselves for their teams.
- This comprehensive project allowed all students to show off skills, strengths, and talents that may not commonly occur in traditional science classroom settings. (For example, one student who is quiet, reclusive, and has difficulty expressing her thinking actually spent many days after school working on building and refining her mini-device, and contributed significantly to the construction of the team's larger device. Her material processing, craftsmanship, and design skills were among the very best across all nine of our STEM-9 teams! She was clearly proud of her work and happy to be immersed in it.)
- The STMs who worked most effectively with their teams, and demonstrated professional leadership capacity, were those who helped the ninth grade students come up with their own ideas, assisted them in refining them, and nudged them forward when necessary. The STMs who didn't go ahead and simply 'do it for them' (including using power tools) had more highly engaged students overall.

During our exit interviews with the nine STMs near the end of the year, all expressed delight with having had this opportunity to work with (and develop relationships with) freshman students with whom they normally would not interact. Because they were fully involved with identifying the thematic focus for the PBL work, their complete commitment to the initiative was apparent. They commented on how this experience helped to increase their confidence, leadership capacity and communication abilities. Each described several "Aha!" moments he/she experienced while attempting to become the "teacher" for some very diverse groups of students. The STEM-9 students were RejuvenatED by virtue of these teaching and learning experiences. We therefore plan to continue the STM model and infuse PBL activities into the sophomore level Living Environment class during the upcoming year. We also envision using a revised version of the Classroom Visit Guide as we foster the use of instructional rounds within a cross-disciplinary professional learning community at Hannibal High School.

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LINDA RAE MARKERT is a professor in educational administration at SUNY Oswego.

CAROL BURCH is a physics teacher at Hannibal High School.

DAWN BATTLES is a chemistry teacher at Hannibal High School.

Just Breathe:

An Introduction to Mindfulness for School Leaders

By Joseph Sapienza

The average workday for a school leader usually begins well before students arrive and ends hours after they've left. Days are consumed by a combination of managerial and leadership duties. Meetings are inevitable. Meals are scarce. Multitasking is paramount.

The abundance of responsibilities has created a culture in school leadership where we are always two steps ahead in the planning and execution of daily, weekly, monthly, and annual tasks. Ironically, we are really good at it too. Or are we? Mindful leadership challenges the reality that many school leaders find themselves in on a daily basis.

Moreover, it opens the door to increased passion for one's work, compassion for stakeholders, and the empowerment of others.

Mindfulness is defined by John Kabat-Zin (1994) as "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." It is about being in the here and now, being curious and open. As school leaders we are always physically present in the moment, but are we mentally? For instance, what is the first thing you think about upon waking up on Monday morning? How about in the shower or on the commute to your school building? Have you ever had the experience of being in a meeting about "Topic A" while responding to an email or planning your action in regard to "Topics B through Z"? Mindfulness wants school leaders to slow down and focus in order to make thoughtful decisions. It attempts to free school leaders from the control of past decisions and future fears through careful and compassionate attention.

Mindfulness encourages individuals to let go of the past and refrain from worrying about the future. It motivates individuals to focus on the present and live in the now. In order to do this, mindful leaders need to avoid the grasp of cognitive overload. In the time it takes to read this article, hundreds of emails, text messages, and social media updates have been sent. The compulsive and simultaneous planning of a response to each and every one of those messages is cognitive overload. It is manifested in an inability to focus, forgetfulness, and hair-trigger decision making; all are detriments to effective school leadership. Often school leaders function in a state of continuous partial attention and operate on autopilot. In order to bring clarity to our minds and our responses to environmental and emotional stimuli, the answer is simple to understand yet difficult to practice.

A major component to the practice of mindfulness is attention training. Self-awareness and regulation are key components to teaching your mind to be calm and clear on demand. The best way to begin training your attention is to practice pause. Pay particular attention to the hectic times when you are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Press the pause button and experience what that emotion feels like. Do your shoulders tighten? Do your palms sweat? By pausing and experiencing the physical manifestations of an emotion, we are training our minds to consistently press pause at the onset of similar feelings. As

we continue to practice, we strengthen our self-awareness and the process becomes somewhat automatic. Once we can control our attention, we can begin making decisions with a clear and focused mind. Additionally, we can begin picking up on the emotions and physical manifestations of those emotions in others. For school leaders, this means sharpening our ability to identify when staff need a break or a breather. Mindful leadership is a fantastic burnout radar.

Attention training has additional applications for school leaders. By training our attention, we strengthen our ability to concentrate on one item at a time and address that item with complete and undivided focus. Such a commitment yields increased efficiency and effectiveness in decision making and task completion for school leaders. In order to be successful, however, we need to train our minds to downshift from the breakneck speeds that we are accustomed to operating under. Can you recall a recent professional conversation that you had with a colleague? As they spoke to you, what were you thinking about? How many times do we listen with the intent to reply rather than the intent to understand? Again cognitive overload rears its ugly head and flips on the autopilot switch. Mindful listening and conversation are techniques that can assist school leaders in this area.

The first step to mindful listening is to silence or turn off all media devices. Right now I am imagining the shrieks of horror as many colleagues read this statement. Mindful conversation demands a distraction-free environment in order to truly be effective. Precious emails and text messages will await you at the end of the conversation; and who doesn't love a surprise? The second step is to listen with your entire body. Pay close attention to your posture, the direction and orientation of your body and eye contact. These sometimes overlooked and seemingly minute considerations set the stage for a focused, mindful conversation. Make efforts to quiet your mind and resist the urge to interrupt the speaker. It is okay for your mind to wander. Notice the wandering and gently bring your attention back to the speaker and the present moment. Make attempts to truly understand what the person is saying; without judgment, criticism, or defensiveness. This is the most difficult aspect of mindful conversation. Finally, when the speaker is done, take a breath and respond rather than react. When we respond, we

are focused on what the other person is trying to communicate. When we react, we are focused on what we are trying to communicate. A response continues toward the goal of the conversation while reaction changes the goal. Mindful conversation is another contribution to effective, efficient school leadership.

Emotional intelligence is a second major element of mindful leadership. In their book *Primal Leadership* (2002), Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee conclude that emotions are essentially contagious. Furthermore, a leader's attitude and energy can affect the workplace either for better or for worse. The connection to mindfulness lies in the importance of a leader's self-awareness – the ability to identify and understand one's own emotions at any given moment. Once school leaders are self-aware, they can begin to see the impact of their emotions on others. As mindfulness teaches us to train our attention and focus on the here and now, emotional intelligence calls on us to evaluate our current emotions and take the next step in analyzing their impact on those around us.

Here are a few suggestions to begin your own journey into mindful leadership.

1) **Take a break. Stop. Pause. Breathe.** Take a moment for yourself to reflect, recharge, and evaluate the status quo.
2) **Practice listening.** Set aside your desire to fix, solve, or judge. Listen not only with your ears, but also with your eyes, your heart, and your undivided attention. Notice how that feels and try to replicate that connection with all of the people you encounter during the school day.
3) **Try eating lunch and only eating lunch.** Do not read, text, email, or make phone calls. When engaged in one activity, attempt to remain engaged solely in that activity. Be attentive to the mental and physical sensations occurring during that time in an attempt to make a connection to the here and now.

Mindful school leaders can bring a breath of fresh air to teaching, learning, and leading. Moreover, they can contribute to the social and emotional intelligence of all staff and students alike. It starts with one breath. Are you ready to stop and take it?

JOSEPH SAPIENZA is the principal of Jericho High School.

Strategies for

Personal and Professional Success

By Paul M. Fanuele

Do you feel ready to start each day? Do you take the time necessary to rejuvenate yourself during demanding times? **Do you set yourself up for personal and professional success and optimal performance?** There is much written on how to achieve success. Five simple strategies emerge from current literature that can enhance your chances of having a great workday, week, month, year, and life.

The first strategy is to be a lifelong learner and read often. Next, find your purpose in life. Third, build relationships and be a giver, not a taker. Fourth, make your own well-being a priority. The final strategy is to simplify your goals.

READ AND **LEARN**

Stay current. Reading will help you keep up on present-day practices and invigorate you with new ideas. You will be able to spark the interests of teachers and colleagues by speaking about emerging trends. Developing your brain is important in all stages of your life, not just childhood. Dweck (2006) reported that scientists believe that people have a greater capacity for lifelong learning and brain development than previously thought. Dweck also championed the idea of a growth mindset, which is the belief that you can expand your knowledge and abilities. Reading and learning will help you continue to develop your mind and intelligence. The people who are the smartest in youth are not always the smartest later in life (Dweck, 2006).

Finding time for reading and learning has become easier with the advent of mobile devices. Although I will discuss a disadvantage to smartphone use later, educators should take advantage of the access to learning that smartphones provide. Be it Twitter, electronic journals, or a good book on a tablet, accessibility to learning is at our fingertips.

FIND YOUR **PURPOSE**

One of the best ways to find your purpose is to focus on the question, why? Why do you do what you do? Why do you get up in the morning? Sinek (2009) stated that a focus on why will give you the purpose you need for success. He further explained that most people and organizations know what they do and some even know how they do it, but few can state why they do what they do. The ones who can articulate why experience success. Sinek cited Apple as a company that focuses on the why; Apple does not have to convince others of their value through manipulation. Customers are usually inspired to buy Apple products and are often able to detail why they bought an Apple product.

Pink (2009) discussed purpose in his book *Drive*. He demonstrated how those who focus on the profit motive are at a disadvantage in comparison to those who find meaning and purpose in their work. Certainly money is important but pursuing a goal bigger than oneself will provide you with intrinsic motivation. Pink cited TOMS as a business that focuses on purpose, rather than profit, by donating a pair of shoes for every pair they sell. Henry Ford stated, "A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business." People or organizations that focus on extrinsic rewards usually only experience success in the short term and actually decrease their motivation in the long term. Pink agreed and added that intrinsically motivated people outperform their extrinsic counterparts in the long run. Luckily, educators do not have to look far to discover at least one purpose: children. Most of us chose the field of education out of a desire to develop students' minds. Administrators who do not work in a school building often schedule meetings in schools. They are often overheard saying that they needed to be around students to remind them of why they are in the business.
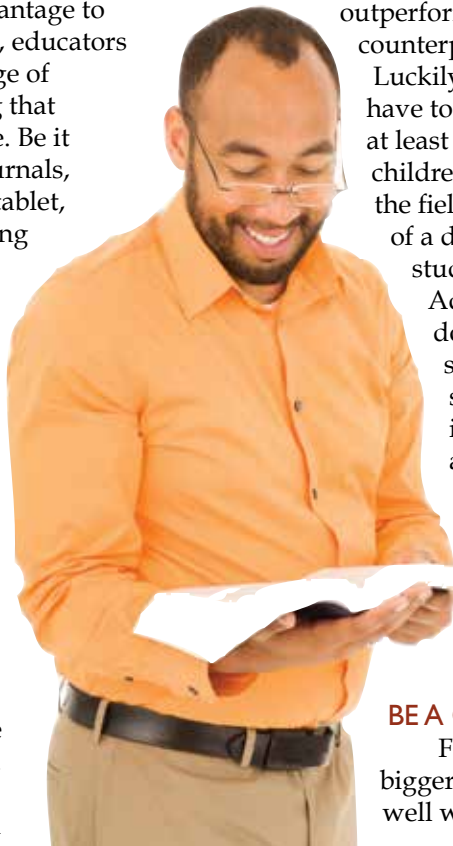
BE A **GIVER**

Focusing on a bigger purpose aligns well with the concept of being a giver. Grant (2013) stated that people are either givers, takers, or matchers. Givers tend to think of others first, takers think of themselves first, and matchers seek an equal balance of giving and taking in their relationships. Being a giver enriches your relationships with others. It takes longer to build a relationship when you focus on giving, but you will eventually establish reputations and relationships that will enhance your success (Grant, 2013). Grant used a quote to sum up being a giver: "Being a giver is not good for the 100-yard dash, but it's valuable in a marathon" (p. 15). Simply put, take the time needed to build relationships in your building. Schedule time out of the office to interact with others. Try an in-person meeting or phone call instead of an email, especially if the subject matter has reached an emotional level. A simple way to build relationships is to do something for another person. Try buying a cup of coffee for someone else next time you visit your neighborhood coffee shop. You will actually experience more satisfaction than just buying one for yourself (Rath, 2015).

Another way to build your relationships is by exhibiting humility. Be open and admit your mistakes to show your human side. Do not be afraid to laugh at yourself with others. Rath (2015) believed this builds the trust needed to grow your relationships.

Rath (2015) also discussed the effects of smartphone use on relationships. A smartphone that is visible during a meeting will negatively influence the quality of your conversation even if it is not in use. A person's concentration is broken by the mere sight of a smartphone, so imagine the effects if you check it. Although smartphones are necessary in our work lives, we need to recognize their impact on our relationships. Reports indicate that people have higher levels of empathy when phones are not seen (Rath, 2015). Next time you are engaged in a conversation, try keeping the phone out of sight.

FOCUS ON
YOUR OWN WELL-BEING

While being a giver is important, so is taking care of yourself. One way to stay healthy is to remain optimistic even during difficult times. Gordon (2012) reported 11 benefits of being positive. Some included living longer, outperforming negative people, remaining in your relationship or marriage, having more friends, and having the ability to be resilient while dealing with challenges. Rath (2015) discussed the benefit of surrounding yourself with positive people; if you have a friend who is positive, it can increase your level of happiness and ultimately your well-being. It seems simple, positive people will elevate your spirits while negative ones will drag you down. Negative people will hurt your production.

Rath also discussed getting proper rest and eating right. Lack of sleep decreases productivity and can have an impact similar to being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Eating right is also important. In an educator's life, breakfast or lunch often gets skipped. Educators rationalize their choice to skip a meal, such as lunch, to help students or staff in their building. This is false thinking. Lunch can make you more productive

and can give you a much-needed break, albeit short, to recharge your engine.

Also, remember to exercise. Exercise reduces stress and keeps you in shape both physically and mentally. Make sure you schedule time for exercise. Administrators often find themselves sitting in many meetings during a given day. Remember to walk around your building or simply stand during meetings. The American Heart Association calls sitting the new smoking. That is a powerful statement.

SIMPLIFY YOUR GOALS

Goals are important in your personal and professional life. Consider utilizing the points in this article to enact a plan. Be careful of setting goals that can become cumbersome and easily forgotten. Britton, Page, and Gordon (2013) discussed the power of focusing on one word as a method of simplifying your goals. They cited that 87 percent of adults or over 206 million people create new goals and resolutions every year. Unfortunately, half of these resolutions are broken within the first month, meaning that 50 percent of New Year's resolutions do not last until the end of January. Why not utilize one word instead of a resolution? Have your staff choose one word for the school year. This is a meaningful reflective experience for them and also important for your own well-being. Our staff chose words such as *balance*, *strength*, *persistence*, and *present* to help keep focused. Your one word will keep you focused all year and help you find your purpose.

You may also consider selecting a word for the day, week, or month. This can refocus you on newly arrived tasks and increase your productivity. Short-term goals will provide short-term wins. These wins will allow you to build momentum and achieve more substantial goals.

CONCLUSION

The five strategies discussed are simple to apply individually and can also overlap. Finding your purpose and having a disposition for giving work well together. Simplifying your goals can lead to finding your purpose

and vice versa. Reading and learning can enable you to find a worthwhile goal. A focus on your own well-being can provide you with the energy to build relationships and be a giver. However you choose to utilize the five strategies, the first step is integrating them into your daily life. Reading and learning, finding a purpose, being a giver, focusing on your own well-being, and simplifying your goals can provide the tools needed to rejuvenate yourself to have a successful day and, more importantly, a successful school year.

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PAUL FANUELE is executive principal of Arlington High School.

Building a School Culture of
Performance

By Bruce H. Crowder, EdD

Let me begin by putting forth the proverbial question: "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Stated another way: How do we get our students to Carnegie Hall?

Culture is typically defined as the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols of a group. Its influence is so powerful that those affected by it behave without thinking about it.

DEFINITIONS

A school culture of performance is defined as an institution that supports and prizes the importance of constant opportunity of doing what is valued.

Education is grounded in the value of performance. If you want a student to write or reason, then the student needs many and varied opportunities to do so.

CURRENT STATUS

Our schools are in the midst of a performance quandary. State testing results have barely moved since the first round of Common Core testing in 2013. There are a number of events and actions that impacted teaching and learning during this period, beginning with the advent of APPR, which has sucked most of the oxygen out of our schools. Time for making the curricular shifts for English language arts and mathematics to address new levels of rigor is diminished. While teacher observations, test scores, and student learning objectives (SLOs) dominate the school landscape, the need for a new curriculum withers. Aside from school safety, student learning and growth, based on NYS standards, are the primary targets and that is not happening.

It is a dark day in education when tangential elements of education take over, and its essence is left further in the dark. Earnest attempts to supplant district curricula with state-sponsored curriculum have done little to help the improvement of student performance. This is particularly evident when examining the results of student performance test items (i.e., short and extended responses) on grades 3-8 ELA and math tests. Educators were told to expect low results with the advent of Common Core Learning Standards. That was yesterday. Today, little has changed. Why might this be so? What may be done to change it?

SHIFTING TO A NEW STATUS OF PERFORMANCE

The movement out of the old into the new demands time for study and development. New expectations and actions often take years to fully implement without interference. We have the school leaders and teachers to achieve a new status for performance.

Now we need the time to begin the shift.

A CURRICULUM OF PERFORMANCE

It should begin with a performance-based curriculum in which learning and doing reside squarely at the heart of it. New standards provide the platform from which to launch a new curriculum. They set both vertical and horizontal articulation. When speaking about a new curriculum, this is not to imply that schools *throw the baby out with the bath water*. Rather, keep what is valuable, and embed what is needed and missing. While textbook publishers are trying to keep up with new expectations and changes, their products may not be perfect. In all likelihood, no textbook will ever be perfect. However, nothing prevents educators from using a textbook as a valuable resource while inserting additional dimensions to the course of study under development. Many of the topical and thematic units developed in the past still contain the potential to influence higher performance with appropriate modification. Units of this nature often contain fiction and nonfiction texts that support the rigor exhibited in the new standards. So, the rule for selection of content for ELA and math must address its potential for rigor.

RIGOR OF PERFORMANCE

It is good to see professional learning options for principals and teachers that introduce them to Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK).[1] This is an important tool in analyzing the cognitive demand (complexity) associated with the standards, curricular tasks, and assessment items. Webb's model creates a new taxonomy of the cognitive domain with four levels, rather than the Bloom's taxonomy, which contains many more.

DOK Level - Title of Level

1 – Recall and Reproduction
2 – Skills and Concepts
3 – Short-term Strategic Thinking
4 – Extended Thinking

Researching DOK produces a wealth of information for application. More than anything, it raises the awareness of the nature and complexity of performance.

NEW FOCUS ON TESTING

Perhaps the most abused term in education is *testing*. Something about it quickly arouses a degree of anger and resentment. Often it is thought to be something we do to our students on Friday, and on Monday we survey the damage. Or today in New York State it is something that we do to our principals and teachers. Testing without adequate preparation is harmful and ludicrous. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We must leave behind this kind of thinking and put testing into a new perspective. First of all, the need to measure acquisition of knowledge and skills may only be accomplished through communication and demonstration. More so, that demonstration must be at the center of a curriculum of performance. A true test is one that is directly tied to student learning and performance and is embedded within the blocks of learning that reside at critical points throughout the school year. Moreover, student performances within the curriculum need to reflect the type and nature of tests that students will encounter.

A review of NYS testing reveals new test designs. From a performance perspective, the new tests present a clear challenge for teachers and students. For example, constructive responses, based on a two-point scoring rubric, continue to show a state average of about 1.0. Reflection on the scoring of these items makes it quite clear that students do not know how to respond appropriately. These are test items that may be answered in as few as three sentences. At the heart of these items is the need to understand inferencing. An inference and two details from the text written in complete sentences are all that is required. The research on inferencing makes clear the need to teach it. It cannot be learned through exposure. However, where in the curriculum will inferencing performances reside and how often will students perform this task? The same is true of the extended response item, often called the essay. From fourth grade

on, students are expected to write a comparative response that references two passages. The link may focus on a common theme or other shared literary element. Where in the curriculum will students have the opportunity to perform such a task, at what level (DOK), and how often? Similar challenges are associated with math.

Our educators have the will to move their schools to a level of performance that honors their work and the performance capability of their students. Their designed cur-riculum needs to reflect this power of performance. Study the type and nature of the new tests. Put scoring rubrics into the hands of students for the purposes of understanding and application. Students need to reflect on self, problem (task), and learning. Do not subordinate process to content, engagement to coverage. Learning is active. So, centrally engage students to personally involve them. In addition, do not take over the problem (task) and ask students to simply learn the result. Students learn what they care about, and they remember what they understand. Create an environment in which students learn to work. Also, learning should require students to withstand confusion and disturbance. You cannot teach anyone anything without engagement and reflection!

Performing well has the positive effect of inspiring performers to do better. If you want to be a good athlete, think like one and bring that thinking into all things you do. In education, it is critical for students to acknowledge where they are and where they want to be on a performance scale. They need to see it to change it. Performance is cumulative and should be recorded as the basis for determining next steps on the way to perfection. As the poet Robert Browning said, "Man's reach should exceed his grasp..." In other words, shoot for the stars. Our students need to know that what is expected of them in their current grades in school will stay before them as they move to the next grade. The new expectations run from elementary into middle and high school, and beyond.
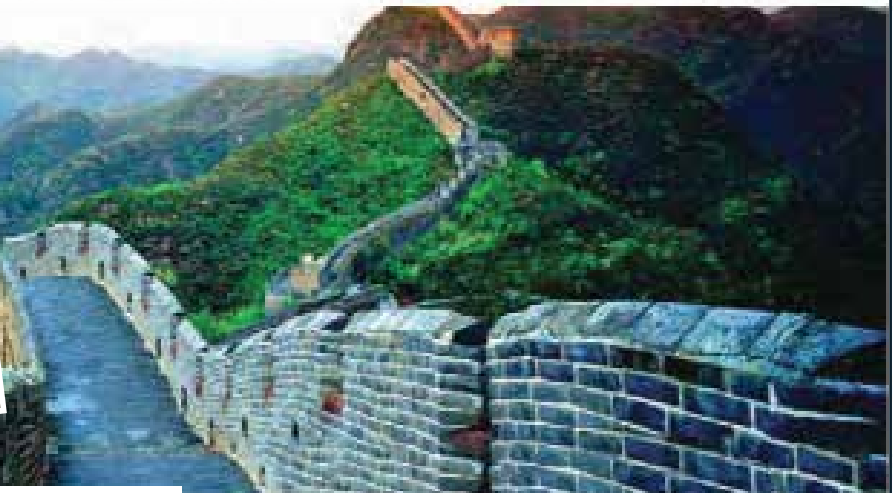
There are indications that the current environment of education in NYS may change. Nonetheless, the importance of teaching and learning in an era of high expectations will not. Good educators are good students. So, when faced with new and greater challenges, they must study them and all their aspects to gain insight, understanding, and application for greater performance. More than anything, celebrate performance – every aspect of it.

[1]Webb, N. (March 28, 2002) "Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for four content areas," unpublished paper.

DR. BRUCE H. CROWDER is a senior researcher for Educational Vistas, Inc. He is a former NYS assistant commissioner for Quality Assurance and the Education and Accountability Program (EAP). Dr. Crowder may be reached at bcrowder@edvistas.com.

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(Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004)

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Reflections from a Mentee

By Trinidad Hernandez

Trinidad (Trini) Hernandez is starting her second year as middle school assistant principal at the Lynch Literacy Academy in Amsterdam. She has two master's degrees and is currently working on her doctorate at Russell Sage. Trini had the support of an outstanding SAANYS mentor for the 2014-2015 school year who has asked to remain anonymous. This is Trini's reflection as the mentorship came to an end...

As a leader, I know I have to take the time to listen to what is being said and more importantly to what is not being said. In my first year on a new job I was able to create an environment that fostered dialogue at all levels. I was able to develop relationships that provided trust, collaboration, and collegiality among my faculty, other administrators, and community members. As a leader, I knew I needed to create an environment that encouraged people to share their opinions. Without demonstrated passion from the leader, there is no hope for the organization to achieve greatness. I understand that the level of success is directly related to the passion of the leader and how she/he promotes it to each member of the organization.

Having a mission and a vision is extremely important. As a leader it is important to know what the vision and the goals of the organization are. As a leader, I know I need to make sure that all stakeholders share the vision and the mission and that this mission and vision are encouraged and supported in all decisionmaking.

Leaders should be able to express themselves clearly, and should be confident and capable of responding in different types of scenarios. A leader also understands how much attitude it can and does take to impact the performance of the team. The skills and knowledge of a team will never be fully realized unless the team has a success-oriented attitude (which will be accomplished by sharing the mission and the vision of the organization). I believe the organization adopts the style of the leader and in turn, the attitude of the leader quickly becomes the attitude of the organization. Therefore, it is imperative for a leader to have clear expectations and be able to effectively communicate those goals and expectations to every stakeholder. (I believe I was able to do this with my sixth grade team this past year.) It is also very important for a leader to embrace a people-oriented, growth attitude within the organization. The

best leaders are great communicators. Their values are clear and solid, and what they say promotes those values. It is clear that when a leader asks in this manner, their faculty and staff admire them and follow their lead. Clear communication is the most important key to a leader's success. I know that to grow as a leader, I must learn how to be an effective, compelling communicator.

Leaders communicate high expectations and provide accurate information to foster understanding and to maintain trust and confidence. Leaders reach out to others for support and assistance, build partnerships, secure resources, and share credit for success and accomplishments. Leaders never underestimate the power of the team and are always drawing

out the best in people through their encouragement and support no matter how big or small the task is. Visual and verbal encouragement that comes from the leadership is a must for the organization to be successful. By creating relationships and collaborating with all stakeholders, I was able to make a lot of gains in the organization this past year.

As a leader, I need to create capacity within the organization to achieve and sustain the school's vision. As a leader, I know I need to help people in all kinds of situations. However, as a leader I also know how

to recognize when not to help (and/or guide my staff) and allow the team and the individuals to achieve the satisfaction of accomplishing the task themselves.

As a leader, I need to encourage initiative, innovation, collaboration, and a strong work ethic. Leaders should expect and provide opportunities for staff to engage in continuous personal and professional growth. This year, I was able to motivate two of my sixth grade staff members to enroll in college to take a few leadership classes. As a leader, I need to be able to understand the personal and professional aspects of my organization, and I also need to understand how both interact with each other. I think it's important to show others what you are made of professionally but also on a more personal level. This creates camaraderie, and allows people to see that you have the same goals they do (and that you are also human). This also allows people to know how to relate to each other, and in turn it shows how the leader relates to the organization. I learned that leaders should be able to celebrate accomplishments, and recognize people's talents, which I try hard to do.

Leaders should embrace and adhere to comprehensive planning that improves the organization. Leaders use data to determine the present state of the organization, identify root cause problems, propose solutions, and validate accomplishments. As a leader this year, I had the opportunity to work and collaborate with the data coaches in the building to improve our practices. However, this is an area that I would love to explore more. Sometimes due to time constraints, it was hard to pay attention to certain areas that needed it, and sometimes it was simply easier to delegate the tasks. I also know that leaders accept responsibility and accountability and manage resources effectively and efficiently. I truly don't do much of this either. This is an area that I need to grow in and explore.

Leaders require staff to establish and meet clear indicators of success. Leaders in education also know and understand good pedagogy and effective classroom practices and support sustained professional development. This year I was able to be part of the implementation of PLCs in the building and this involvement helped collaboration, promoted academics, and allowed people to have instructional conversations on a much deeper level.

I learned that leaders are introspective and reflective. Leaders ask questions and seek answers. Leaders in education are familiar with current research and best practice, not only in education, but also in other related fields. It is obvious that I try to cultivate this quality. I always try to improve myself by reading, studying, attending workshops, and being the best in everything I do. It is important for a leader to maintain a personal plan for self-improvement and continuous learning, and balance

their professional and personal lives, making time for other interests. I have to admit that I struggle a little bit with this one. Balancing personal and professional life is not one of my stronger assets. I am always trying to improve myself, I work to full capacity, and I strive to be the best I can in everything I do. Due to this, sometimes I don't pay as much attention to my personal life as I would like.

Leaders embrace informed, planned change and recognize that everyone may not support change. Leaders work to win support and are willing to take action in support of their vision even in the face of opposition. This is why the best leaders are both, warriors and wizards (Bolman and Deal, 2006).

I was fortunate to have a wonderful SAANYS mentor. Among many things, she taught me to believe in myself and to "dream big." She kept me grounded and helped me grow personally and professionally.

There is no doubt that she pushed me hard, and she never let me quit. She gave me advice, she nurtured me, she showed me what leadership is all about, and above all, she offered a friendship that I know will last longer than just a year of mentoring.

I am truly thankful for her dedication and expertise. And I have to admit that I am a little worried knowing that I will not have her (my "cane") walking alongside me in this new year and holding my hand, as I know I have so many things to learn that I still don't understand. I still need her to guide me as I continue to grow. It was a pleasure working with my SAANYS mentor. I know that whoever she works with next will be forever touched and blessed.
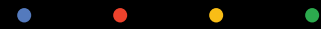
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Mobile Learning
Can Engage Students and Staff

By Mathew Swerdloff, EdD

Over the summer I had the opportunity to welcome several new teachers to our district. Some were just out of school themselves, some had been working as leave replacements or long-term subs, but all were eager to start on a new career and a new phase of their lives. Without exception, **they were all passionate and inspired to teach**, and all were looking forward to beginning in September. Several told me of teachers they had who inspired them or key moments in their own schooling that influenced their decision to teach.

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Anyone who has worked in New York's public schools for more than a few years knows that these are challenging times for educators. The pressures that teachers and administrators face today are enormous. From the implementation of Common Core to the organized attack on public education, from 3012c (and now 3012d) to reduced budgets and new unfunded mandates, we are all struggling to do more with less, to do what is best for students despite systemic failures in Albany and Washington, and to be true to our core values. How can we find a balance between the bright-eyed idealism of the new teacher, and the jaded weariness of the veteran educator?

Instructional technology offers some answers when used in new and creative ways. We know that many of our students are simply bored in school just by anecdotal observation. But a recent study concluded that as much as sixty five percent of America's high school students report being bored in school (Yazzie-Mintz , 2010). These data are outstanding in their implications for us as educators. Our students are used to being digitally connected 24\7, to living in a world that does not have artificial barriers between "face-to-face" and "real life", and they expect instant gratification. Many educators resist what simply is; namely, today's students, for better or worse, live in a world that we did not grow up in, and they expect school to mirror that world.

When we ask students to "unplug" when they enter our schools, we literally are disconnecting them from their world. An alternative, and a way to inspire them and perhaps rejuvenate our own practice, is to welcome them as they are, and engage them on their level, in their world, to meet our own instructional ends.

Often teachers argue that we have to "focus on curriculum" and "cover the content" and we don't have time to lets students use cell phones or laptops in class. Even today, there are many who resist the use of these tools, for whatever seemingly sound reason. It is my contention that if we do this we risk further disengaging our students, and that there are ways to use the inherent interests and skills of students to meet our own educational ends.

Mobile learning, and by that I meant the use of laptops, tablets, Chromebooks or smartphones in the school, has the power to reengage and motivate students and teachers. I have seen it work again and again, and have noted below a few key common factors in successful implementations.
Robust Infrastructure

Nothing will doom a mobile learning initiative quicker than a weak wireless signal or slow tech support. To be successful, schools need to build a wireless infrastructure that is fast, reliable, and can scale for growth. One thing we know from
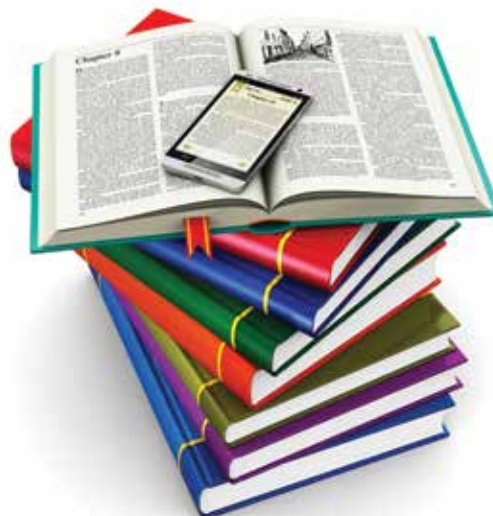

experience is that every time we add bandwidth, it gets used. By building a wireless infrastructure using the latest protocols we can ensure that the hardware can support faster speeds over the life of the product.

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instant gratification. Many educators resist what simply is; namely, today's students, for better or worse, live in a world that we did not grow up in, and they expect school to mirror that world. When we ask students to "unplug" when they enter our schools, we literally are disconnecting them from their world. An alternative, and a way to inspire them and perhaps rejuvenate our own practice, is to welcome them as they are, and engage them on their level, in their world, to meet our own instructional ends.

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ROBUST INFRASTRUCTURE

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growth. One thing we know from experience is that every time we add bandwidth, it gets used. By building a wireless infrastructure using the latest protocols, we can ensure that the hardware can support faster speeds over the life of the product.

TEACHER COACHES

Essential to any educational change, robust professional learning can make or break an effort. When it comes to mobile learning, teachers need to see, firsthand, how it can work in schools. Begin with site visits to neighboring schools, form a task force to conduct research, and then invest in your best assets, your teachers. Personally, I find the internal coaching model to be most effective. By building capacity within our own staff, we are ensured that our investments in time, and money, will be put to good use. One model includes dedicated technology coaches for a school or district, another model might include release time to work with peers, or a stipend to work after school. The logistics are not as important as the willingness to choose the best staff to lead the effort, and to support them so they can support their peers.

SUPPORT FROM ALL LEVELS

All too often we leave the "tech" stuff to the "techies." Mobile learning is not a technical initiative, it is an educational one, and as such it is the purview of every school and district leader to understand it and be able to advocate for it. All too often we take the easy road in education. We say that the student with an IEP is the special ed department's, we say the use of computers is the "tech department's, we say the ENL student belongs to the ENL department. As school and district administrators who are educational leaders, we need to "own it all" and understand how all of these highly specialized areas come together. Not as an expert but as an advocate for learning, I would argue that this applies to the assistant principal, principal, director, superintendent, and the board president equally. It is our job

as leaders to provide our students with proven, effective tools and environments, and mobile learning is one such option.

RESEARCH-BASED DECISION MAKING

Very often we succumb to the hype of very effective marketing. Public education is a billion dollar business, and salespeople are well aware of that. They are very effective at reaching the right people with a slick brochure or sales pitch over lunch, and all too often that substitutes for research. In this digital era it is astoundingly easy to compare actual products and methods, to look at case studies and peer-reviewed research, and avoid the mistakes we see all too often in implementing technology. There are no quick fixes or guaranteed results. There are tools and methods that might help our students learn; we owe it to them to base our decision making on sound research.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Teachers are our best assets, and we know from research that the most effective professional learning comes from within the school, from peers, and is sustained over time (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos, 2009). If we look closely at how teachers learn best, we know that they need continuous support with opportunities for feedback, collaboration, and conversation. By offering a teacher coaching model, we can provide that to all staff in a building and know that our investment of time, money and human capital is well spent.

In a recent talk, Ken Robinson said, "If you sit kids down hour after hour doing low grade clerical work, don't be surprised if they start to fidget" (TED, 2013). That is a very funny and simple way to say that without engagement there is no learning, and without understanding where our students are and what their needs are, we cannot be fully effective. By allowing our students to use the tools they know, we can support their learning and rejuvenate our own practice at the same time.

For more information about this

article, contact Dr. Mathew Swerdloff, executive director of educational support services at Hendrick Hudson School District, at mathew.swerdloff@henhudschools.org or 914-257-5170.

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DR. MATHEW SWERDLOFF is an executive director of educational support services at Hendrick Hudson School District.

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michel.richez@oscworld.com
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