Today’s teachers live in a society and work in a profession where demands are continually changing and expanding. In order to prepare their students to be successful in this society, teachers must be willing to continuously learn, expand their own abilities, and assume ever-greater leadership roles. And principals must create an environment that supports collaboration among teachers; provides time for teachers’ professional development; and recognizes, rewards, and celebrates the concept of teacher as leader.

Creating an organizational culture and infrastructure that supports leadership opportunities for everyone – a “leader-full” organization – requires principals to have an altogether different set of leadership skills than have previously been necessary. Many of today’s schools are not organized to effectively support and encourage learning. Our existing administrative structures (often organized in a bureaucratic and hierarchical configuration), our value systems, and our professional training programs are often in conflict with the kind of systemic change that the times demand. Teachers are isolated, without opportunities to collaboratively solve problems, share information, learn together, and plan for improving student achievement. Too often, children are not provided with work that is engaging, that meets high academic standards, and that is challenging and satisfying. Time is not always utilized effectively, and technologies that could enhance teaching and learning are either not available or not fully utilized.
Under our current paradigm, some students learn successfully, some make varying degrees of progress, and some fail. Now, however, it is crucial that all children acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be successful. This requires a transformation in our thinking about teaching and learning. Student learning must now become the focus of our educational efforts, and school leaders must have the ability to create systemic change and pursue ever-higher levels of student achievement. To be effective instructional leaders, school administrators and faculty must think in new patterns and act within new models.

The schools of yesterday and today are not the kind of schools we need for tomorrow. We need new strategies, new processes, and a new mindset. In effect, we need a new paradigm of instructional leadership. Schools need to be organized around, and focus on, the work of students rather than the work of the adults in the school. All rules, regulations, roles, and work processes in the school should be designed to support and enhance the faculty’s ability to design quality-learning experiences for all students. To accomplish this, the principal must ensure the transfer of knowledge among faculty and staff.
**Formative Leadership**

Formative Leadership Theory, developed by Ash and Persall, is based on the belief that there are numerous leadership possibilities and many leaders within the school. Leadership is not role-specific, reserved only for administrators; rather the job of the school leader is to fashion learning opportunities for the faculty and staff in order that they might develop into productive leaders. This theory of leadership is based on the concept of the teacher as leader and the principal as the leader of leaders. It is grounded in the belief that educators should enhance not only student learning but also the learning of the adults within the school.

The formative leader must possess a high level of facilitation skills because team inquiry, learning, and collaborative problem solving are essential ingredients of this leadership approach. Imagining future possibilities; examining shared beliefs; asking questions; collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data; and engaging the faculty in meaningful conversation about teaching and learning are all formative leadership behaviors. Ten Formative Leadership principles support a new paradigm for quality leadership.

**Formative Leadership Principles**

1. Team learning, productive thinking, and collaborative problem solving should replace control mechanisms, top-down decision making, and enforcement of conformity.
2. Teachers should be viewed as leaders and school principals as leaders of leaders. Leaders must be viewed as asking the right kinds of questions rather than knowing all the answers.
3. Trust should drive our working relationships. Leaders must not assume that the faculty, staff, and students will try their best to do their worst.
4. Leaders should move from demanding conformity and compliance to encouraging and supporting innovation and creativity. One of the leader's primary responsibilities is to drive out fear.

5. Leaders should focus on people and processes, rather than on paper work and administrative minutia. Time should be spent on value-added activities.

6. Leaders should be customer-focused and servant-based. Faculty and staff are the direct customers of the principal, and the most important function of the principal is to serve his or her customers.

7. Leaders should create networks that foster two-way communication rather than channels that direct the flow of information in only one direction.

8. Formative Leadership requires proximity, visibility, and being close to the customer. Leaders should wander about the school and the surrounding community, listening and learning, asking questions, building relationships, and identifying possibilities.

9. Formative Leadership is empowering the people within the school to do the work and then protecting them from unwarranted outside interference.

10. Formative Leadership requires the ability to operate in an environment of uncertainty, constantly learning how to exploit systemic change, rather than maintaining the status quo.

The Principal as Chief Learning Officer of the School

As the new work of the formative leaders is different, so too are the required skills. The chief learning officer must help the faculty and staff overcome their fear of failure and grapple with the difficult problems, rather than only with the easy issues. Ironically, it is in school where we initially are taught to avoid difficult learning. It is part of the reward system of the classroom. Those students who know the answer are rewarded by good grades and by the teacher's approval and
praise. Those who do not know the answer stay silent, avoid the teacher, and hope that they remain unnoticed. This lesson, learned early in life, stays with us into adulthood, where we are rewarded for what we know rather than for being open to what we have yet to learn.

CLO’s need to focus more on the learning opportunities provided students and on the work students do, and less on the teaching process and the work teachers do. By shifting this focus, we can also change the leadership dynamics. Direct supervision of the work of the teacher, although still a necessary part of the instructional improvement process, is of less importance than working collaboratively with teachers in planning, scheduling, and leading students in academic work. The skills of observing, evaluating, and directing need to be supplemented with the skills of listening, questioning, probing, and guiding; a leadership style that might be characterized as interrogative rather than declarative.

To be successful, the CLO must become adept at managing by wandering around (MBWA), which is really the art and practice of listening and learning. It is the quintessential practice for building relationships and establishing trust. MBWA gets the leader out of the office, increasing visibility and contact with the people doing the work -- the students and the staff.

The principal’s direct customer is the teacher. The work of the principal as CLO begins with spending time -- lots of it -- with teachers, in and out of classrooms, engaged in conversations about teaching and learning. It is through this process, and within this kind of open, inviting organizational culture that teacher leadership is likely to emerge.
Emerging leadership theory places considerable emphasis on the power of conversation in driving improvement. School faculties typically engage in numerous daily conversations, in small groups and one-on-one, about all kinds of issues and concerns. The challenge for the CLO is to provide new information, to provide opportunities for collaborative planning and problem solving, and to lead the faculty in seeking to understand each other and in making sense of what schooling is all about. Leading faculty talk about beliefs, vision, mission, student work, and student outcomes is a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning in the school. Ideas and information are the basic tools for creating a school full of leaders who elicit the best from their colleagues and students alike.

Schools face enormous social and economic problems. Many students come to school bringing the accumulated baggage of a society that does not provide nearly well enough for its children. The demand to do better with less in an unfriendly political climate requires that school faculty and staff work smarter. Working smarter simply means that the individual talents of everyone in the school must be maximized for the collective benefit of the school and its customers. Productive teams engaged in collaborative, data-driven problem solving can provide the needed impetus for working smarter and, thereby, improving the teaching and learning process in the school.

Positive school change is neither top down nor bottom up. It is, instead, interactive and participative at every grade and department level. The principal’s role as Chief Learning Officer of the school is to build an organizational climate that encourages and supports emergent leadership throughout the school.
A growing body of research has identified practices that lead to high-performing schools. These practices are defined by:

- A clear framework for teaching and learning
- Shared governance and collaborative problem solving
- Use of visible standards to inform practice
- Extended in-school opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues, examining student work and designing new, more challenging, engaging, and interesting work for students
- Continuous use of data to drive decision making
- Action research where faculty members constantly examine their work

This design can only be successful if teachers and administrators assume new and different roles. New teacher roles, including responsibilities for interdisciplinary teaching, curriculum development, student assessment, counseling, peer review, and parental involvement require leadership skills and functions heretofore reserved for principals and central office supervisory staff. These roles are complex, require high levels of skill and ability, and are collaborative and collegial. The formative leadership model provides the skills necessary to successfully perform these roles.

Traditional approaches to teacher leadership might be summarized as follows:

- Serving as department head or grade-level chair
- Planning and providing in-service training for other teachers
- Mentoring other teachers
- Developing curriculum
While these are important functions, they fall far short of the level of teacher leadership that current school reform efforts demand and that principals in high performing schools need. What is required now is a new model of the teacher as leader, as well as new graduate level programs grounded in Formative Leadership theory.

The new model of teacher leadership embraces the view that the process of teaching itself is a quintessential leadership function and rejects the notion that only those activities outside the classroom constitute leadership. Working collaboratively to improve teaching capabilities, designing learning activities, and engaging in school-based action research are all leadership behaviors that are informed and enhanced through the Formative Leadership model.

Teacher leadership is best served when the principal understands and values the Chief Learning Officer role. In this role, specific value-added activities both inform and drive the school improvement process. Examples of these activities are as follows.

• **Establishing high expectations for teacher and student performance.** This involves changing the culture of the school and increasing the collective capabilities of the faculty and staff. This can best be achieved by rethinking the school's approach to professional development. Too often professional development activities are imposed by the central office with little regard for the individual needs and goals of the schools, with programs of questionable quality, and with little consideration of the learning styles of adults. Most programs also lack consistent follow-up and coaching. The importance of effective professional development is magnified substantially when schools embark on site-based, collaborative decision-making. The need for increased expertise immediately expands from learning new
concepts that improve teaching and learning to include learning how to be a productive "player"
in team problem solving.

- *Creating opportunities for faculty and staff collaboration.* Few organizations isolate the adults from each other in the organization to the extent found in schools. This isolation is a major barrier to improvement. Adults talking together about professional issues is a powerful tool for learning and school improvement. Reducing the isolation of faculty and staff becomes then, a major concern of the school’s leaders.

- *Predicting the Future.* We live in a world increasingly shaken by sudden change. Uncertainty threatens the future so that our plans are often not consistent with, or useful, within the context of real events. Effective leaders must be aware of emerging trends in society in order to structure curricular and instructional strategies that will properly prepare students to live successfully in a highly complex, global information age. Constant change requires a different approach to planning, something more flexible and fluid than the traditional strategic plan. It requires a new meaning for strategy, one that encompasses planning as learning, asking “what if” questions, and considering multiple futures. Organizations must move from strategy as a fixed plan to a learning process that leads to continuous improvement and develops the organization’s ability to cope with changes in its environment. Scenarios are one way an organization can think about the future and anticipate both opportunities and threats. Scenarios are distinctly structured views of the future that are plausible enough to cause teams to look outward, to be more introspective, in other words, to learn. Through this process, multiple futures can be constructed, each one requiring a different approach and a different set of assumptions.

- *Encouraging and supporting innovative practice.* Nothing defines a school's ability to serve its customers quite like its propensity for innovation. The school's orientation to change is
embedded in its culture and is reflected in the collective mindset of the faculty and staff. If the school aspires to become a learning organization, it must commit to continuous improvement through experimentation or action research. Action research involves implementation of innovative practices coupled with an assessment of those practices on student learning. Establishing a climate of trust, eliminating the fear of failure, and encouraging innovation are actions that administrative staff must undertake. In the final analysis, these may be the most important actions influencing the school's success. All organizations, and individuals as well, resist change. In order to overcome the natural barriers to the change process, leaders should create a culture that reduces the fear of change and implement organizational processes that promote innovative practice.

- **Creating opportunities for faculty learning.** The concept that groups of people working together can be more productive than individuals working alone is receiving recognition as a critical element in most enterprises. Businesses competing in a global, information-based economy measure success largely on the collective brainpower of their human resources. Team learning and collaborative problem solving provide the most effective and efficient vehicles for realizing maximum benefit from the people within educational organizations as well.

In today's environment, producing effective change and improvement requires an altogether new and different set of skills. Listening, asking questions, engaging faculty and staff in conversation about teaching and learning, collecting and analyzing data, and benchmarking promising practices are replacing top-down driven directives, traditional models of supervision, and the expectation that the leader has all the answers. These new role expectations provide new opportunities for leadership to emerge from the teaching ranks. Changing demographics and the rigors of preparing students for the twenty-first century require that we rethink what we teach, how we teach, and how
we assess student and teacher performance. These changes will have to be made at the school level by principals willing to serve as Chief Learning Officers of their schools and at the classroom level by teacher leaders capable of restructuring the educational process.
References


