

Professional Learning  
Communities at Work

---

Developing a Stretch Culture

Robert Eaker

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Assumption:

If schools are to successfully function as professional learning communities, developing a school culture that stretches the aspirations and performance levels of students and adults alike, must be a fundamental goal.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Prerequisites for  
Developing a Stretch  
Culture

1. The adoption of "Learning" as the school's purpose, and
2. Giving the learning mission life by addressing three critical questions:
  - a. What do we expect students to learn?
  - b. How will we know what students have learned? And,
  - c. How will we, as a school, respond to students who don't learn?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. The alignment of policies, procedures and practices with the learning mission.

4. High performing collaborative teams must be embedded into the daily routine of the school.

5. A genuine commitment to continuous improvement and a focus on results.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Cultural Shifts:  
Moving to a Stretch Culture

"How do we do things around here?"

"What must change if schools are to develop a stretch culture?"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

1. From "fixed" time to "flexible" time.

2. From "average" learning to "individual" learning

3. From "group" support to "individual" support.

4. From "blame and punishment" to "encouragement and caring".

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- 5. From "teacher tell/student listen" to "teacher coaching/student practice".
- 6. From "good" to "great".
- 7. From "recognizing and celebrating a few" to creating "lots of winners and celebrating their success".

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Expectations in a Stretch Culture**

The culture of expectations that exists within classrooms, schools and school districts has a dramatic effect on behavior. Administrators, teachers, support staff and students work together in a social system - a school. It is impossible to develop a stretch culture within that social system if those who work within the system consistently communicate a message of low expectations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Self-Efficacy in a Stretch Culture**

Findings from numerous studies demonstrate the critical role self-efficacy plays in stretching achievement levels of students. "Self-efficacy" refers to the beliefs that we are capable of ensuring high levels of learning for all students. It might be difficult and it might take time. It will take longer for some students than others. It may require unique and innovative approaches, but we can do it!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The impact of self efficacy is enhanced by the use of collaborative teams.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Efficacy and the Curriculum**

Schools must have a curriculum that enables all students to stretch their levels of achievement.

But, merely offering courses and programs is never enough. Students will need additional time, support and assistance and, most importantly, encouragement.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Encouragement is Personal**

Since encouragement is personal, the quality of relationships in schools is critical.

Students respond to those they respect.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Creating a Culture of Hope:  
Attacking Learned  
Hopelessness**

Many students, by the end of the fifth grade, have developed a sense of hopelessness. Many school practices and procedures contribute to this loss of hope but few can have the devastating effect as the misuse of assessments.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Assessment "of" Learning  
vs.  
Assessment "for" Learning**

While assessment of learning is useful for public reporting and accountability purposes, assessment for learning can be a powerful tool for helping students learn more.\*

\* Rick Stiggins, "The Absence of Assessment for Learning" Phi Delta Kappan. June 2002.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

According to Stiggins, teachers form the assessment for learning when they are:

- understanding and articulating *in advance of teaching* the achievement targets that their students are to hit;
- informing their students about those learning goals. *In terms that students understand*, from the very beginning of the teaching and learning process;
- becoming assessment literate and thus able to transform their expectations into assessment exercises and scoring procedures that *accurately reflect student achievement*.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

■ using classroom assessments *to build students' confidence* in themselves as learners and help them take responsibility for their own learning, so as to lay a foundation for lifelong learning;

■ Translating classroom assessment results into frequent *descriptive feedback* (versus judgmental feedback) for students, providing them with specific insights as to how to improve;

■ continuously *adjusting instruction* based on the results of classroom assessments;

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

■ engaging students in *regular self-assessment*, with standards held constant so that students can watch themselves grow over time and thus feel in charge of their own success; and

■ actively involving students in *communicating* with their teacher and their families about their achievement status and improvement.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Hope Has a Human Face**

Faculty and staff are the heart and soul of a professional learning community. Policies, procedures and organizational structure, while important, are never enough. Teachers and staff are in the unique position of becoming a hero to some student each day. They do this by giving kids hope.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

A stretch culture is, in fact, a culture of encouragement, caring and support, for both students and adults.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Developing a Stretch Culture Requires Positive Action:  
*Why Not Now?*

The one piece of advice we would have for those who want to create a stretch culture in their school is this: Get started! Do something! Don't wait until the stars align and the time is right or "consensus" has been reached. Simply begin.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Action Stimulates Hope**

As simple as it may seem, the way to begin overcoming cynicism, negativity and hopelessness is to act. We need leaders who:

One, have the will to act,  
Two, have the courage to act, and  
Three, have the persistence to keep acting.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

When people begin to act, people begin to hope. When people gain hope, they begin to act differently. When people act differently, they begin to experience success. When people begin to experience success their attitudes change. When peoples' attitudes change, they begin to affect each other. This is the essence of developing a stretch culture in schools.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---