The Intelligent, Responsive Leader

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THE INTELLIGENT, RESPONSIVE LEADER

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My stance…

A cognitive psychologist…

AND

An "implementation" anthropologist

AND

A critical friend

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Nothing affects the learning culture of an organization more than the skill with which its executive team receives feedback. And of course, as you move up, candid coaching becomes increasingly scarce, so you have to work harder to get it. But doing so sets the tone and creates an organizational culture of learning, problem solving, and adaptive high performance

(Stone & Heen, 2014)

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The Leadership Challenge of Practice

- Caught in the middle between a set of top-down, district-level directives that prescribe expectations and a set of bottom up, practitioner-driven forces that favour experiential professional judgment.

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The experience…

- Implementation challenges at the nexus of pressures and supports… and the affective implications!
- Initiativitis – prescribed programs, interventions, resources, or processes that come with implementation and accountability expectations.
- Literal Leadership – The "letter" trumps the "spirit"!

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Stages in Growth from Emergent to Proficient

Emergent				Proficient
No practical experience. Dependent on rules.	Expects definitive answers. Some recognition of patterns. Limited experience. Still relies on rules.	Analytical. Locates and considers possible patterns. Has internalized the key dimensions so that they are automatic.	Uses analysis and synthesis. Sees the whole rather than aspects. Looks for links and patterns. Adjusts to adapt to the context.	Understands the context. Has a holistic grasp of relationships. Considers alternatives in an iterative way and integrates ideas into efficient solutions. Solves problems and makes ongoing adaptations automatically.

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The outcome…

- Polemics in the middle space
- Prescription and Professional Judgment are cast as competitors
- A set of either/or propositions → retreat to the poles and "take a stand"

THIS OR
THAT?

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The Intelligent, Responsive School

- The power of "and"…

- Prescription AND professional judgment

- Integrative Thinking – from *either/or* to *both/ and*

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Prescription and Professional Judgment

- *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (McKinsey, 2010)
- Improving systems know how to balance the competing demands between local and system expectations.
- Improving systems "prescribe adequacy" and "unleash greatness".

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Intelligent, Responsive

- Improving systems pay attention to the "what" of the intervention *and* the "how" of implementation. They pay attention to both prescription (in relation to the what) and professional judgment (in relation to the how)
- The what are the "intelligent expectations" and the how are the "responsive" conditions – responsive to local, contextual peculiarities that are key to effective implementation of the intelligent expectations
- The school is where the intelligent and responsive meet

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Intelligent Expectations

- We know quite a lot about what works in education
- The WWC and Visible Learning as repositories (for example)
- A "focused approach to instruction" as part of a "coherent instructional guidance system" (Leithwood, 2013)

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A district's instructional guidance system should be aimed at influencing the use of instructional practices supported by the best available evidence and considerable work has been done . . . to highlight those practices for districts and schools. . . . There is now an emerging, evidence-based consensus about the central features of most forms of powerful instruction. . . . It is these central features that strong districts capture in their instructional guidance systems. (p. 113)

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- Prescribing the intelligent expectations = efficient, and evidence-based.
- Prescription as a "swear word" with connotations of a lack of autonomy, agency, free will, and even respect for professional judgment.
- Towards a different polemic – informed or uninformed prescription.

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Responsive Conditions

- "The high-yield strategies aren't working"
- From "What Works" to "What's *Supposed* to Work"
- What works isn't the same as how to make it work in variable contexts
- Context matters; a responsive school *learns* in the space that exists when the intelligent expectations and practices don't land as intended

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The relationship between intelligent and responsive

- Suspicions of the intelligent
- Suspicions of the responsive
- Intelligent expectations that proceed without respect for context can be just as ineffective as responsive efforts that do not respect the evidence-based practices that are intelligent
- The informed/uninformed distinction plays out in the responsive realm as well

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- Intelligent and responsive stances interact and need one another.
- It's the interaction that creates the conditions for "demand" – the need and want that drives and propels real new learning!
- Today's responsive becomes tomorrow's intelligent.

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Intelligent	Responsive
• Clear expectations informed by evidence and research become the parameters for system work. • Clear communication about these directions happens on every level of the organization. • The rationale for implementing certain expectations is understood. • Training is offered to implement what is known, not debate it.	• The creation of clear expectations is informed by multiple learning contexts serving diverse needs. • The voices of educators working with students influence this communication and make it authentic. • The rationale for engaging in an inquiry process to gain new understanding is understood. • Professional learning is influenced by context and the needs of students and staff, which means that aspects of this learning will look and feel different.

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- Intelligent, responsive schools require intelligent, responsive leadership!
- Intelligent expectations regarding effective leadership are based on what evidence and research tell us.
- Responsive leadership means that the way these effective leadership practices are exercised is influenced by local context.

Intelligent Leadership Practices

- The OLF as a curriculum of leadership.

- Setting Direction
- Building Relationship and Developing People
- Developing the Organization
- Improving the Instructional Program
- Securing Accountability

Beyond mugs and t-shirts!

- The responsive stance is where leadership as "influence" takes hold. Without it, the intelligent practices – regardless of how well they're articulated – remain confined to a world of platitudes.

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE CANADA

- *Judging a leader's development entails not only assessing the extent to which the person is generally skilled in the use of leadership practices, it also entails judging the extent to which they are able to enact these practices in a contextually appropriate way (Leithwood, 2012)*

The work…

- Learning *how* to enact these leadership practices in particular contexts in order to influence improvement is where the real work (and professional learning) for leaders lies.

- The key question: What's involved in getting there?

The big effect sizes
(leadership attributes that are linked to student achievement)

1. Leaders who believe their major role is to evaluate their impact. (ES=.91)

2. Leaders who get everyone in the school working together to know and evaluate their impact. (ES=.91)

Two key questions these leaders are asking themselves:

- Am I getting better?

- How do I know?

How this makes a difference to student achievement

- Why is it the case that leaders who consider it a core professional responsibility to know the impact of both themselves and others have a significant effect on student learning outcomes?

- Because these people want to improve in places where the desired impact is falling short and they work hard to do so; and their improvements lead to teacher improvements

Getting better isn't automatic

"Research has shown that, generally speaking, once a person reaches [a] level of acceptable performance and automaticity, the additional years of practice don't lead to improvement. If anything, the doctor or the teacher or the driver who's been at it for 20 years is likely to be a bit worse than the one who's been doing it for only five, and the reason is that these automated abilities gradually deteriorate in the absence of deliberate efforts to improve."

(Ericsson & Pool, 2016)

Alex Gough

Getting better requires Purposeful Practice

- "Purposeful practice" is about trying to improve in a focused area, where there are clear goals and a specific plan about how to reach the goals and how to monitor progress.

- Purposeful practice requires specific goals, focus, feedback, and discomfort.

- Very different from "naïve practice", which is just repeating the same thing over and over again.

It's not fun!

"I HATED EVERY MINUTE OF TRAINING, BUT I SAID...

DON'T QUIT. SUFFER NOW AND LIVE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AS A CHAMPION."

-MUHAMMAD ALI

What are Leader Learning Teams?

- Leader learning teams involve small groups (ideally 5-6) of leaders. Each leader is working on an individual leadership inquiry that relates to a place where s/he is stuck in relation to "influence" (Part 1). The group regularly comes together to work collaboratively as critical friends, adding value to one another's individual work as a result of being together (Part 2).

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Leadership…

- Leadership is the exercise of influence on organizational members… toward the identification and achievement of the organization's visions and goals

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Leadership inquiries: The way to "get better" at leadership

- Leadership inquiries are about identifying places where you know you need to get better in relation to influence (because it's crucial to teachers getting better and students being successful) but you don't know how to do it and there isn't an algorithm

- Our process provides a structure for Purposeful Practice- using goals, focus, feedback, discomfort

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Thank you!

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