Dr. Phillip C. Schlechty

Chief Executive Officer, Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform

Nominated by:

Becky Kennedy

Phillip Schlechty

Phillip C. Schlechty is one of the nation's foremost authors and speakers on school reform and is the founder and chief executive officer of the Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform. His intensive work—promoting the Schlechty Center's vision for public education—is a reflection of his dedication and commitment to public education. Phil serves as an advisor to school districts throughout the United States and Canada and is masterful at conducting seminars and training for superintendents, school board members, union leaders, principals, teachers, parental groups, and business leaders. Schlechty's latest book, *Leading for Learning: How to Transform Schools into Learning Organizations* focuses attention on specific strategies for changing schools so that they are more attuned to the realities of the 21st century. His other books such as, *Creating Great Schools: Six Critical Systems at the Heart of Educational Innovation; Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents; Shaking Up the Schoolhouse: How to Support and Sustain Educational Innovation; and Inventing Better Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Reform*, are also valuable tools for all school reformers. Business groups, as well as educators, acknowledge his perspective as understandable and useful.

Phillip Schlechty has been writing, speaking, teaching, and conducting research on teaching, teachers, and schools for nearly fifty years. In that time he has written nine books which, taken as a body of work, outline his unique views on the way schools work and the way they must work if all students are to learn at high levels. He has also developed a powerful framework, known among teachers as the Working on the Work framework, intended to provide teachers with a heuristic device to support their efforts to provide students with engaging intellectual work that results in students learning more and learning what they do learn at a deeper level.

Prior to founding the Schlechty Center, Schlechty had a long career as a classroom teacher, university professor, and associate dean. He also served as a special assistant to the superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Among the places where he held university appointments are the Ohio State University, Ball State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Louisville. He also was the founding director of the Gheens Center, which was a pioneering leadership development organization operating in the context of Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky.

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Walter & Lois Curtis Middle School

Allen Independent School District

April 26, 2010

Dr. Trent Gabert
Associate Dean, College of Liberal Studies
Chair, Executive Committee
Brock International Prize in Education

Dear Brock Jurors:

Five years ago my life changed during a summer conference. Not only did I see my own philosophy of education in a new light, but my staff's teaching practices as well. Dr. Schlechty has developed a framework of educational practices that provides teachers a method of developing engaging work for students. With the emphasis on engaging work for students, instead of the delivery of the lesson, students can begin to learn more and on a deeper level. Our teachers know this framework as "Working on the Work" or WOW. One of the basic tenets of Dr. Schlechty's research is that students are volunteers in the classroom. Another basic principle is that teachers are leaders and designers of engaging lessons. As one of the ten "standard-bearer" districts in the state of Texas, Allen Independent School District has fully embraced Dr. Schlechty's work and standards. With the two basic tenets mentioned above, I then returned to my district to put a plan of "Working on the Work" into action.

The Working on the Work framework is the tool that Phil Schlechty developed to support teachers in developing engaging work for students. In the effort to assist in the creation of schools and school districts that can support the kind of innovations needed to systematically design engaging work, Schlechty argues that schools must be transformed from bureaucracies to learning organizations and from teaching platforms to learning platforms. My mission was to utilize the plan of action so that it would introduce the framework to the staff. Through the use of the WOW framework, my hopes were that our school would become a true learning organization. It was also important there was a true "buy-in" from the staff. I did not want the staff to perceive this endeavor as the newest program that would quickly come and then just as quickly go.

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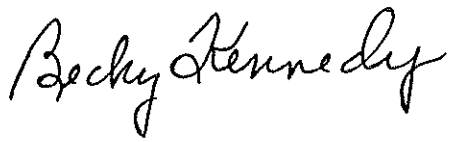
Just as the Schlechty Center predicted, our faculty reacted to the plan with mixed feelings. We had 8-10 trailblazers willing to try anything, 10-12 pioneers willing to follow a path, 20-25 settlers who would go if there was a good reason to go, several stay at homers who were happy where they were, and a couple of saboteurs who didn't want anything changed, ever. We immediately utilized our new trailblazers by first, sending them to training and then, forming them into our school design team. The design team led the reform. They planned the strategy for implementation of the action plan. Slowly, month by month, more and more teachers began to see the importance of the changes that needed to be made at Curtis Middle School. Those changes would impact student learning through the designing of engaging lessons that would include ten design qualities. The ten lesson design qualities included content and substance, organization of knowledge, clear and compelling product standards, protection from adverse consequences, product focus, affirmation, novelty and variety, choice and authenticity. The teachers were trained in how to incorporate the ten design qualities into lessons. The design qualities helped teachers accommodate the individual needs and learning styles of all students. The teachers used protocols, in a collaborative setting, to help guide them with problematic lessons. Teachers were also trained in recognizing the five student responses to schoolwork: engagement, strategic compliance, ritual compliance, retreatism, and rebellion. Teachers began checking students on a regular basis as to where they were in their own responses to their schoolwork each day. This activity aided the teachers in designing lessons that would further engage the students in their learning.

One of the primary tasks of teachers was to provide work for students, work that students would engage in and from which students would learn. A second task for teachers was to lead students to do well and have success in the work they undertook. Therefore, teachers were leaders and inventors and students were volunteers. What students had to volunteer was their attention and commitment. The differences in attention and commitment produced differences in student engagement. The differences in the level and type of engagement was directly affected by the effort that the students expended on school-related tasks. Effort affected learning outcomes as much as each student's intellectual ability. The level and type of engagement varied depending on the qualities the teachers built into the work they provided for students. Therefore, teachers directly affected student learning through the invention of work that had the qualities that were most engaging to students. Once teachers believed that students were volunteers in the classroom and that engaging lessons would impact student involvement in their own learning, fabulous things began to happen!

Through the engaging lessons, students had greater satisfaction with their own work, connected the knowledge to real-life applications, and linked their knowledge to their community and to their future. The quality of the work that students produced lowered the percentage of six weeks failures and promoted opportunities for students to think more critically and become better problem solvers. Because students were more engaged in their learning, we saw test scores rise, absenteeism drop, and an overall feeling of satisfaction about school from students and parents.

We are now in our fifth year of implementation of the WOW framework. Teachers meet collaboratively to create engaging lessons for all students. The design team continues to meet monthly to guide WOW activities for teachers so that teachers can continue to utilize design qualities in the work that they do. The innovations of Dr. Schlechty's Working on the Work has certainly paved the way for the incorporation of the work of other leading educators such Rebecca and Richard DuFour into our educational practices. As a faculty, we believe that we have become a professional learning community. The journey continues. We share in Dr. Schlechty's belief that "If these assumptions are firmly embraced and acted upon, there will be a dramatic increase in the effectiveness of our schools."

Respectfully,



Becky Kennedy
Principal
Curtis Middle School
Allen ISD
Allen, Texas

Phillip C. Schlechty
Vita

Narrative

Phillip Schlechty has been writing, speaking, teaching, and conducting research on teaching, teachers, and schools for nearly fifty years. In that time he has written nine books which, taken as a body of work, outline his unique views on the way schools work and the way they must work if all students are to learn at high levels. He has also developed a powerful framework, known among teachers as the Working on the Work framework, intended to provide teachers with a heuristic device to support their efforts to provide students with engaging intellectual work that results in students learning more and learning what they do learn at a deeper level.

There are two basic arguments undergirding Schlechty's work. First, he argues that students do not need to be motivated. Rather, the task of teachers is to discover the motives students bring with them to school and the classroom and then design student work that responds to those motives. Second, he argues that the way schools are organized shapes the extent to which teachers can design engaging experiences for students, and it is the responsibility of all school leaders, including parents, school board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers to "work on the system" at the same time they "work on the work."

The Working on the Work framework is the tool Schlechty has developed to support teachers in developing engaging work for students. It identifies 10 motivators to which teachers should attend as they go about their own work. In the effort to assist in the creation of schools and school districts that can support the kind of innovations needed to systematically design engaging work, Schlechty argues that schools must be transformed from bureaucracies to learning organizations, from teaching platforms to learning platforms, and from push environments to pull environments. Much of his recent work—especially his newest book *Leading for Learning*—is intended to develop these ideas and to give them sufficient specification that they can serve as a base for action.

Schlechty is a person of thought, but he is also a person of action. In 1988 he founded what is now known as the Schlechty Center. Since the founding of this organization, Schlechty and the Center's staff have provided training and support for thousands of teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members, as well as numerous others concerned about the future of public education. He has served as an advisor to governors and legislators as well as to local civic and political leaders. In addition to the nine books, he has written well over 100 articles addressing the issues upon which he has chosen to fasten his attention.

Prior to founding the Schlechty Center, Schlechty had a long career as a classroom teacher, university professor, and associate dean. He also served as a special assistant to the superintendent of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Among the places where he held university appointments are the Ohio State University, Ball State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Louisville. He also was the founding director of the Gheens Center, which was a pioneering leadership development

organization operating in the context of Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky.

Books:
Working on the Work Revisited. Forthcoming in 2010.

Leading for Learning: How to Transform Schools into Learning Organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Creating Great Schools: Six Critical Systems at the Heart of Educational Innovation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Shaking Up the Schoolhouse: How to Support and Sustain Educational Innovation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Inventing Better Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Schools for the 21st Century: Leadership Imperatives for Educational Reform. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Reform in Teacher Education: A Sociological View. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1990.

Teaching and Social Behavior: Toward an Organizational Theory of Instruction. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976.

Recent Awards and Honors:
Horace Mann League's "Outstanding Public Educator" Award, presented in February 2010.

Pioneer Innovator Award, presented in October 2008.

The Ohio State University Hall of Fame, inducted October 2007.

ST. TAMMANY
PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gayle Sloan
Superintendent
W. L. "Trey" Folse, III
Deputy Superintendent

April 19, 2010

Dear Brock International Prize in Education Committee:

I am pleased to enthusiastically recommend Dr. Phillip Schlechty for your consideration for the Brock International Prize in Education. It is difficult to imagine another person who has amassed a more impressive collection of accomplishments, aimed at contributing toward building strong schools and developing clear thinking educators to serve America's school children. His books reflect the deep passion of a faithful advocate for public education, one who has carefully formulated his beliefs and vision for schools in America and is sharing them with those who are eager to commit to high levels of dedication and deep thought.

The Schlechty Center for School Reform is the organization that he founded to help ensure that his robust body of work becomes connected with classrooms, schools, and districts where professional educators are serious about transforming education and thinking through the systems and processes that will turn mediocrity into excellence. As a district superintendent, I have developed my own beliefs and turned them into vision for the district in which I work through my participation in professional learning opportunities offered through the Schlechty Center and a persistent examination of Dr. Schlechty's books and articles. His thinking is complex and requires me to stretch myself to reach a deep level of understanding. Dr. Schlechty founded the Superintendents Leadership Network to connect committed superintendents and provide opportunities for the group to think about our core work and to deepen our understanding of the complex nature of schooling. He forces us out of our comfort zones through well planned visits to business and industry institutions where we learn lessons that can be applied to our own efforts to create learning organizations.

I consider Dr. Phillip Schlechty to be the preeminent scholar and educator who has profoundly influenced a multitude of school leaders. He will likely never even know how many educational decisions he has helped guide or problems he has helped solve in district and school offices that have directly benefited classroom instruction and student learning. Such is the magnitude of his reach.

I urge you to bestow your prestigious award on this most worthy candidate.

Sincerely,

GAYLE SLOAN
Superintendent

April 26, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to express my support for Dr. Phil Schlechty in consideration for the Brock International Price in Education Award. I have known Dr. Schlechty professionally for seven years. During this time period, I contracted with him to work with my district and have since realized his impact throughout the State of Texas in many ways.

The last two decades in Texas have been saturated with high-stakes testing and all that that produces: quick fix educational strategies, teaching to the test, test-taking skills, reduced teaching to the science of testing, etc. My goal as a superintendent of a large fast-growth district was to find the "antidote" to this constricting accountability that had a stranglehold on teachers. Enter Phil Schlechty and his leadership of designing engaging work for students. The result was students and teachers being excited about learning and teaching in profound ways.

Most teachers in today's environment in Texas have only taught during stringent accountability measures. The art of teaching has not been experienced by most; instead, student progress is measured by one criterion-referenced exam. Dr. Schlechty and his staff have brought the art of teaching back to our profession by focusing professional development on designing engaging work for students in today's challenging environment. Teachers have newfound enthusiasm that is focused on student potential and excitement for profound learning. Dr. Schlechty's model for training allows districts to train the critical mass, as well as, training the district leadership at the Board of Trustee level.

Our district was one of the first Standard-Bearer Districts. We were one of ten in the State of Texas that embarked on professional development at all levels and participated in national networking opportunities , one-on-one conversations with Dr. Schlechty , on-site training by staff, and district needs assessment of our strengths and opportunities. The growth was exponential.

As I continue my work consulting throughout the state, "working on the work" is part of the fabric of our endeavors. Dr. Phil Schlechty continues to challenge us to reach greater depths of understanding about teaching and learning. What happens in our classrooms is changed because of his vision and passion for educating our students.

Dr. Schlechty has accomplished what many educational leaders attempt to do – impact student learning at the classroom level. He is an innovator, a visionary, and an inspiration to our profession. Thank you for considering him for your

great honor. Your decision to honor him will be respected and applauded by educators across our nation.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Preston, Ed.D.
Educational Consultant
Former Allen ISD Superintendent

John Horn
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May 13, 2010

Brock International Prize in Education Award Selection Jury

Dear Jurors:

I am honored to submit this letter on behalf of Dr. Phillip P. Schlechty for the Brock International Prize in Education Award. Thank you for the opportunity to do so.

History will judge Phil Schlechty as one of the leading educational thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st century. I believe this because of my personal knowledge of him, his work, and his impact on schools. That assertion is based on my experiences with him in three different arenas.

First, while I served as a superintendent of schools, I heard Phil speak at an NSDC conference, and subsequently read every book he had written and would go hear him speak every time I could. His 1990 book, *Schools for the 21st Century: Leadership Imperatives for Educational Reform*, and his 1997 book, *Inventing Better Schools,* particularity captured my thinking and caused me to realize that schools could be organized and focused very differently. All of our district's strategic decisions thereafter were based on the major assumptions of his writing.

Second, while I served as a leader in the Texas Association of School Administrators, our organization established the Texas Leadership Center, which is still a vibrant organization today. The purpose this Center and the character of the services it continues to provide Texas school leaders were framed in large part by Phil's thinking. Furthermore, the expansion of Phil's work in Texas since 2004 is through a partnership with the Texas Leadership Center.

Phil has developed and effectively articulated new insights into the social nature of schooling and documented them in his 2005 book, *Creating Great Schools*. His frameworks for helping us to think about why designing work for students are comprehensive and so critical to engaging students are described vibrantly in his 2002 book entitled *Working on the Work.* He was offering theoretical and practical applications for "design" and "engagement" long before they became so popular in current literature.

His concepts of student engagement, the connection between why students do tasks

they are assigned and the depth of the learning or lack of it that result is foundational to success with all students in all subject areas and all ages. He made clear for teachers and school leaders that compliance was not sufficient, that the learning needed in students would come from engagement, not compliance alone, and that engagement depended on those qualities that are intentionally designed into the work students are asked to do.

His deep philosophical understandings and the clear expression about the nature of the social systems in which we work and the role changes that are necessary to create learning organizations are again, ahead of their time. He has provided a clear vision of the purpose of schooling, how schools should be organized, how their character should reflect deep commitments to values such as collaboration, disciplined protocols, frameworks for designing work with a focus on students and tapping into their motivations. All of these concepts, frameworks, and recommended practices are brought together in his 2009 book, *Leading for Learning.*

Third, I started to work with Phil at the Schlechty Center in 2004 after retiring from Mesquite ISD in Dallas County Texas in 2001. My primary focus was on services to selected Texas school districts. Today, I work with approximately 30 districts that are using his ideas and frameworks for their overarching improvement initiatives. The Schlechty Center staff provides consulting services to scores of districts throughout the country and coordinates the national Superintendents Leadership Network that Phil established over 10 years ago.

In 2006 The Texas Public Education Visioning institute was born. It has now published a set of principles on which schools of the future should be based. His ideas and theories of change are reflected in the document created by 35 Texas superintendents who represent over 1,000,000 million students. That work is creating the conversations for new directions for public schools in Texas and has stimulated similar efforts in Georgia, Virginia, and Connecticut.

Phil is in the middle of a re-write of his book, *Working on the Work*, and over the past weeks as senior associates we have read this manuscript. Today in our staff meeting we discussed in detail how his latest thinking has developed and gained more clarity as well as to how these frameworks can become the norm in more classrooms.

At age 74, Phil is driven by his desire to save public education in American from the current test-based and punitive accountability systems. He is committed to restoring the joy to teaching, to viewing students as knowledge workers, and to treating administrators as real leaders of leaders. He has in his head—as he said today—a book for parents and grandparents that will give them frameworks for designing engaging work for students to do at home to support their learning of the content they are expected to learn in school—not homework in the traditional sense, but meaningful work done at home.

His work permeates learning from the boardroom to the classroom and now will extend to the living room as well.

His more than 50 years of teaching in public schools, in universities, doing research, writing books and articles, speaking and creating the Schlechty Center are more than sufficient for him to be honored. But more importantly, this honor is deserved because of his impact on the thousands of teachers who have been liberated by his thinking and who have used his frameworks to discipline their work and conversations. The same applies to the thousands of school leaders who have embraced and applied his leadership principles in their quests to create the conditions for a focus on students and on the quality of the work students are given. But the best reason for honoring him is the impact of his work on the hundreds of thousand of students who have had an enriched school experience because of his work.

Finally, Phil created the Center for Leadership in School Reform in 1987 as a not-for-profit organization to serve school districts in their efforts to focus on student engagement and transforming schools into learning organizations. The Board of Directors changed the name to The Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform to honor Phil and assure that his name will continue to be associated with the Center even after he retires from active participation.

Diane Ravitch, in her 2010 best seller, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, questions the very survival of our public schools which is similar in some ways to the concerns Phil raised in his 2001 book, *Shaking Up the School House*. If public education in America survives the current efforts to dismantle it, that will be in part because Phillip Schlechty has provided the basis for schools and school districts to be the effective community institutions they were originally intended to be including enhancing the links among liberty, learning, and living in a free society.

Selecting Phil Schlechty for this award honors him, but the higher purpose served will be a tribute to what he is causing to happen in the lives of children in America's public schools.

Respectfully,

John Horn

FIFE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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website: www.fifeschools.com

DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

"A Standard Bearer School District"

April 22, 2010

Dear Distinguished Jurors:

It is my distinct privilege to write this letter of reference on behalf of Dr. Phillip Schlechty in consideration for the Brock International Prize in Education Award. I have experienced the good fortune over the past ten years to consider him a significant mentor in the journey of my own career. I am especially excited that Dr. Schlechty has been nominated for this award relative to his outstanding contribution to the field in the area of systems thinking in our public schools. Dr. Schlechty has been at the forefront of not only writing about, but in working firsthand with school districts across the nation regarding the importance of capacity building in school systems and in the value of designing systems that work to support the student work as opposed to focusing efforts on changing the teacher or the student.

Over ten years ago our school district had the good fortune to be the first district west of the Mississippi to work with Phil's organization. His work on systems assessment and design has been critical in our movement toward becoming a true learning organization in the purest sense of the term. I would encourage you to visit our website at www.fifeschools.com and see firsthand the impact of his work and thinking on our school district over the past ten years, nine of which I have been the district superintendent. I also hope that you will read a case study on our website that captures the impact of his thinking on our students, teachers, and on our educational community at large. The study is entitled; *Changing the Quality of Student Experiences: The Fife Way.*

Just this past week I was reminded of how cutting edge Phil's thinking has been in his effort to play a key role in the salvation of public education. I was at a meeting where our state rolled out some cutting edge thinking about systems change and alignment that would help us to better address the achievement gaps in our state. My school board was at this meeting with me and we were so pleased that the very work they cite as a cutting edge and researched based path to a new future is the very work we have been about for the past decade due to the thinking and incredible contribution to the field of education by Dr. Phillip Schlechty.

EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR
Wendy Merdian, Teacher, Endeavour Intermediate School
Vicky Franklin, Counseling Secretary, Surprise Lake Middle School

Finally, I was in the audience a few months ago in Phoenix, Arizona when Phil received the Horace Mann Distinguished Educator Award. It dawned on me at that time that he really has not done this work for the consideration of awards and personal attention at all. It has truly been about his care for public education and the impact we can all have on the students who deserve our very best. I hope that you will consider his nomination strongly. I know that his work has had great impact on building strong school systems that support the engagement of students and staff toward a better future for our system of public schools in our great nation.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. McCammon

Stephen D. McCammon, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Institute for
Student Achievement

Gerry House, Ed.D.
President and CEO
One Hollow Lane, Suite 100
Lake Success, NY 11042-1215
Phone (516) 812-6703
Fax (516) 812-6724

May 03, 2010

Dear Distinguished Members of the Nominating Committee:

It is a great honor and privilege to recommend Dr. Phillip Schlechty for the Brock International Prize in Education Award. For over 30 years, the name Phil Schlechty has been synonymous with educational reform. His theories on education and education reform are profound and have had an indelible impact on the educational reform landscape in this country and abroad.

His body of work throughout his career has been based upon developing an understanding, within the political and education worlds that the conscious choice to transform school districts into learning organizations will require not only vision and courage but also support and tools. To transfer his passion, research, and writings from theory to practice, Phil founded the Schlechty Center in 1988, a private, nonprofit organization committed to establishing partnerships with school leaders across the country to transform classrooms, schools, and school districts from places focused on compliance to those focused on student engagement and achievement. Now, more than 20 years later, the Schlechty Center is one of the nation's premier organizations, providing research, insights, strategies, guidance and support to district and school leaders who are interested in seeing their students achieve to their full potential.

I have personally and professionally known and admired Phil Schlechty for more than 25 years, since my graduate school days at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Phil was my professor for an evening class; and like most evening class students, especially those who are running to class from a full day of work as I was; I looked upon the next three hours of evening lecture with dread, wondering how I would stay awake. The first evening that Phil walked into class, I knew this class was going to be very different. He had no lecture notes, no voluminous textbooks assignments. Instead, he captivated us with his abundant knowledge of education philosophies and theories and challenged us to think critically about

the adequacy of the traditional models of education in our public schools to educate all students well, regardless of their race, ethnicity, and economic background. He inspired us to take advantage of sociological theory and to understand schools as complex social organizations, not merely educational institutions, in the pursuit of school reform. I have never had a professor from whom I have learned more about how to think differently about schools and schooling than Phil Schlechty.

A few years later when I became superintendent of a large underachieving urban school district, I re-connected with Phil. This time he was my coach and mentor. His theories and teachings about the nature of systemic change, why reforms of the past were unsuccessful, how to think differently about introducing and sustaining innovations had resonated with me as a graduate student and were having a profound impact on me as an education leader. I approached the transformation of this district with a different mental model of schools that had been shaped by my mentor, Phil Schlechty. This was the image of schools as learning organizations; students as knowledge workers, customers and volunteers; teachers as leaders and designers of knowledge work; principal as leader of leaders; the central office staff as capacity builders; the school board as community leaders; the superintendent as the moral and intellectual leader and parents as partners.

Though on the surface, this way of thinking might appear simplistic, it is revolutionary and complex in the education world. But—it can be done. I am convinced that my designation as National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators is due in large part to the accomplishments I was able to achieve in this district by implementing the theories of transformation espoused by Dr. Phil Schlechty.

As Phil inspired me, so have many other school and district leaders across the nation been impacted and influenced by his ideas and concepts about how to achieve real school transformation. I can think of no other candidate more deserving of the honor to be recognized for the conception, development and promotion of the best new ideas in education at the primary and secondary education levels than Dr. Phil Schlechty.

Sincerely,

Gerry House

Gerry House, Ed.D.
President and CEO

Appendix A: Creating Engaging Schoolwork

This appendix describes a framework that can assist teachers as they go about the business of designing engaging work for students. In this book I have discussed the significance of six critical systems in schools and the conditions under which and means by which schools can attempt to install disruptive innovations in those systems. The reason for making such innovative changes is of course so schools and teachers can focus on designing engaging work for students. This appendix summarizes an approach doing so. Readers seeking more information will want to read my 2002 book *Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents.* See also the new book by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn* (2004).

Designing Engaging Schoolwork

If student engagement is the preferred means of educating students, *then the core business of schools and teachers is, or should be, designing intellectual tasks and activities that have those qualities and attributes that are most likely to engage students, and ensuring that these tasks and activities call upon students to learn those things that are considered important.*[1] Furthermore, if engagement is to be central in the schooling process it is essential that teachers learn how to engage students in

[1] Conceptually, at least, a curriculum guide should clearly state what it is intended that students know and what they should be able to do as a result of the tasks and activities they undertake in school. Therefore what I suggest here seems very much congruent with the idea of curriculum alignment.

From *Creating Great Schools: Six Critical Systems at the Heart of Educational Innovation,* by Phillip Schlechty.

- Affirmation of performance
- Novelty and variety
- Choice
- Authenticity

Contextual Qualities

Two qualities that must be taken into account when endeavoring to design engaging lessons are the nature of the knowledge and skill to be transmitted, developed, or acquired and the format in which this knowledge is presented to or made accessible to the student. I refer to the first of these as content and substance; the second as organization of knowledge.

Content and Substance

To the extent that a student gets personal enjoyment out of studying a particular subject or developing given skills, these preferences can be used as a source of motivation for undertaking schoolwork.[2] Such preferences are learned. Some students have learned to enjoy the study of history; others have learned that the subject is uninteresting. Some students become excited about the possibility of developing physical skills but have little interest in developing their skills as artists, musicians, or scholars. Others have learned to love music and are less fascinated with developing physical skills.

Learning theorists have had much to say about these differences. Some use brain research to explain why some students

[2] It is becoming increasingly popular to criticize the application of words like *work* and *customer* to educational matters. Some seem to assume those who use these words are somehow connected with a cabal that wants to turn schools over to private corporations and make them more businesslike. However, I am simply an old-line pragmatist of the John Dewey persuasion (as distinguished from the Kilpatrick persuasion). To me, *work* is nothing more nor less than purposeful, goal-oriented activity. Similarly, to speak of the student as a *customer* only recognizes the obvious fact that in both private and public schools, students are volunteers, and what they have to volunteer is their attention and their commitment. We can gain their attendance and compliance through bribery and coercion, but we must provide them with work they consider worth doing before they will volunteer their attention and commitment.

more interesting subject and little or nothing about the less interesting subject. Goal displacement is as common in the classroom as it is in the boardrooms of school districts and corporations.

The problem with efforts to make tedious content more interesting is that the effort sometimes encourages trivialization, superficial treatment, and lack of intellectual rigor. The fact is that the mastery of any discipline often calls for hard work and the toleration of a certain amount of tedious activity. If the student acquires a real interest in the subject, this interest alone may produce a level of attention and commitment that is sufficient to motivate the student to do the hard work and even endure the necessary tedium. Put differently, when students are personally interested in a subject, they are more likely to become engaged in tasks that result in their learning more about that subject. If, however, students have not learned to love the subject or even to care about it, they are unlikely to give either the attention or the commitment needed to complete the task satisfactorily—*unless* they are able to bring other values to the task. (I will say more much about these other values later in this discussion.)

Strained efforts to entertain students will produce no good results other than relieving boredom and perhaps decreasing rebellion. Of course I am not arguing in support of some educators' tendency to confuse rigor with rigor mortis and to assume that evidence of fun in class is evidence of frivolity. But it is important to recognize that *entertainment* and *engagement* are not synonyms. Students who are not engaged are more likely to need to be entertained than those who are engaged. Moreover, engaged students will do what might otherwise appear to be a trivial task, for example memorizing lists, when they see a link between this task and values that they hold.

The idea of the engaging teacher—as contrasted with the teacher who designs engaging work—has a certain appeal, especially to teachers who are engaging or who try to be. There is, after all, considerable research to support the idea that differences between teachers do make a considerable difference in student

[4] See, for example, L. Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," *Education Policy Archives,* 2000, *8*(entire issue, 1).

What is in virtually unlimited supply, once teachers figure out how to design them, are tasks, assignments, and activities that students find engaging and from which the students learn those things that teachers and the larger society believe the students should learn.

Organization of Knowledge

In discussing knowledge, I use the word in the broadest and most nontechnical sense possible. *Knowledge* means anything and everything schools intend for the young to learn, including skills and attitudes as well as understandings derived from the academic disciplines. Those who concern themselves with instructional and curriculum design are in fact concerned with organizing knowledge so that it will be optimally accessible and engaging to students. What is sometimes overlooked is that there are occasions on which some forms of knowledge cannot be made engaging. Furthermore, some forms of knowledge are necessarily more difficult to access than are others. Finally, before students can become engaged with some forms of knowledge, they must learn how to learn in the ways these knowledge forms require.[5]

What may be even more important is that ways of learning and ways of knowing may be as much conditioned by cultural and historical circumstances as they are by the way human beings are "wired." For example, 150 years ago, men and women sat with rapt attention and listened to Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas debate for hours on end. There were no electronic amplifiers, so it must have been something of a strain to hear. Yet Lincoln and Douglas were heard, and people did pay attention. And they learned. Today such patience is seldom available in the church, synagogue, or mosque, let alone on the campaign trail or in school. Similarly, in the past it was common to argue from major premise to minor premise and then to a conclusion—in the manner of academic discourse. Journalists and busy managers, however, often put the conclusion first and then provide the facts and arguments for anyone who is interested or who feels the need for them. The result is that many Americans have learned to be

[5] This is precisely the point Jerome Bruner made in his now-classic book *The Process of Education* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1961).

Sometimes lectures are appropriate and sometimes extensive periods of lonely work in the library or on the Internet may be needed. Silence and lack of physical movement do not indicate an absence of learning any more than great activity and mindless babbling indicate deep thought and high levels of learning. Learning is an active process, but thinking is sometimes a sedentary and lonely undertaking.

What proponents of "active learning"—as opposed, I suppose, to passive learning—sometimes miss is the fact that when a student is engaged, what may appear quite passive can be active indeed. When a student is engaged in a task and needs information presented in a lecture to successfully complete it, he or she will likely hear and learn very different things from that lecture than will the student in the next seat who is only attending the class and complying with a requirement. The engaged student is likely to be actively processing what he or she hears in terms of specific meanings he or she brings to the experience, whereas the compliant student will have no context in which to place what he or she is passively receiving. For example, one of the most fascinating lecturers I ever knew was Foster Rhea Dulles, a history professor at The Ohio State University. Dulles assumed that the graduate students in his class were likely to be engaged by intellectual puzzles and problems. Therefore he always began his lecture by posing a problem he was interested in exploring, and he invited his audience to join him in his exploration. Most of the time I was engaged in Dulles's lectures as were most of my colleagues. Dulles's approach may not have been a perfect approach, but it was a long way ahead of the tactics of those whose lectures consisted only of facts, usually presented in a monotone.

Sources of Disengagement

Just as the nature of the content to be taught and the way knowledge is organized can encourage engagement, these same attributes can contribute to disengagement. It is obvious, for example, that students who have learned to dislike the study of history, or any other subject, will likely be disengaged from the study of that subject unless the teacher can find some way *other than interest in the subject* to get them engaged. Similarly, when students are uncomfortable with,

the student knew or was able to do at the time the grade was given. Rather, the grade represents an average of what the student knew at various points in time—including the times when he or she was presumably most ignorant about the subject being studied or most unskilled in those areas where skill was to be developed. Whatever failures the student has had along the way are averaged in with whatever successes have accrued. Thus the student who for awhile just could not catch on to fractions or longitude and latitude but who masters these concepts just before the end of the grading period will likely receive a lower grade than will the student who mastered the concepts early on.

Various devices have been developed to get around these difficulties. Some people have advocated doing away with grades altogether and providing in their place detailed progress reports. Portfolio assessment is another strategy. Giving more weight to assignments completed later in the grading period is another strategy. Regardless of the strategies employed, however, it is almost certain that there will be those inside schools and out who will argue that any effort to uncouple grades from punishment for inadequate past performance lowers standards and amounts to grade inflation. The race goes to the swift, as in real life, or so some would say. Teachers may tell the story of the persevering tortoise crossing the finish line ahead of the speedier hare, but in real school the hare gets an A and the tortoise gets a C.

Why is this so? In part it is because schools, like most bureaucracies, are based on the assumption that the best means of gaining compliance is the systematic application of extrinsic rewards and punishments. Those who comply get promoted. Those who fail to comply—whether through lack of skill or lack of will—stay behind. Those who comply gain status in the system; those who fail to comply lose status. Thus it is in real life and thus it should be in school—or so some would argue. A second reason that schools link failure and punishment so tightly is that the traditional function of schools—in addition to developing in some students some degree of academic competence—has been to select and sort students in terms of their likely stations in life. Those who are swift, especially with regard to verbal materials and mathematics, make better "material" for the professional and management classes than do those who are slower and more plodding. As some would have

things, the designers of this project recognize that drafts of work are successive approximations and therefore should not be graded. I have, however, heard some teachers report that they felt compelled to violate some of the design principles of this project by, for example, grading rough drafts, in order to have enough grades in the book to justify a final grade. The fact is that much of the punitive nature of schooling is systemic, and about all that individual teachers can do until this system is changed is to ensure that their personal behavior does not reinforce or exacerbate the problem. They can also do much to offset some of the harm the present system does by being especially attentive to and empathetic with those students who are experiencing a great deal of failure even though they are investing effort.

These observations should not be taken as arguments for giving credit for effort, or for grading by different standards students who seem to have less or more academic aptitude. I am simply suggesting that as leaders, teachers need to recognize that students need much more support and encouragement when they are failing than they need when they are experiencing success. Unfortunately, as Skinner and Belmont have observed: "If left to run their typical course, teachers tend to magnify children's initial levels of motivation. This is fine for students who enter the classroom motivationally 'rich'; they will 'get rich.' However, for students whose motivation is low, their typical classroom experiences may result in its further deterioration."[10] Great teachers know this is so, as do other great leaders.

Clear and Compelling Standards

The word *standard* often stirs up images of test scores. Certainly, test scores and other ways of assessing the quality of student performance are connected with the idea of standards in schools, and I do not discount this fact. Here, however, I am more concerned with the standards students hold for themselves than I am with the

[10] E. Skinner and M. Belmont, "A Longitudinal Study of Motivation in School: Reciprocal Effects of Teacher Behavior and Student Engagement, unpublished manuscript, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, 1991, p. 31, quoted in Brewster and Fager, p. 5.

What, then, makes standards compelling to students? Among the more important considerations are the following:[12]

- *The clarity of the standard.* The more certain students are regarding what is expected the more likely they are to be engaged. The less certain they are, the more likely they are to withdraw—especially if they already have a history of failure.
- *The visibility of the performance.* Students are more likely to be committed to a standard when they believe that the performances indicated by the standard are visible (to themselves and to others) and that the performances expected are somehow under their own control—that is, they can do something about the matter. (This is one of the reasons that rubrics are so useful.)
- *The value significant others attach to the standard.* Standards that are clearly valued by persons of significance to the student are more likely to be compelling to the student than are standards that are devalued or not consistently upheld.
- *Consistency of communication.* The importance a student attaches to a standard will vary depending on the frequency with which the standard is communicated to the student and the consistency of the messages the student receives from those to whom he or she refers for guidance and direction (including peers as well as teachers, parents, and others).
- *The investments of others.* Standards likely to be important to students are those in which persons of significance to the student make clear investments as they help the student meet the standards.
- *Personal efficacy.* A student is more likely to embrace a standard and be committed to actions that support meeting that standard when the student believes he or she has the ability to meet it if enough effort is expended.

[12] These considerations are my summary of a wide range of research on motivation and evaluation. I have been particularly influenced by the work of S. M. Dornbusch and R. W. Scott, *Evaluation and the Exercise of Authority* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975).

condition of traffic still exists—it just happens that on this day driving is easier because there are no other cars. Regardless of what the traffic situation looks like on any given day, the driver must take traffic into account. The more adept the driver is at handling different volumes and types of traffic, the more effective the drive will be. You don't get to choose to ignore the traffic situation when you get into the car. It just *is*. Similarly, content and substance, the way knowledge is organized, fear of failure, and the clarity or ambiguity of standards will have an effect on student engagement regardless of the teacher's intentions. In this matter, teachers have little choice. The only choice they have is how they are going to cope with these qualities as they are presented to them by the students they teach.

Teachers cannot control the predispositions of students toward what teachers want students to learn, nor can they control students' preferred learning styles. Neither can they control the extent to which students need reassurance and guarantees of protection as a condition of pursuing high standards. These are matters that are determined in large measure by the prior experiences of students. The long-term picture may of course be more optimistic. Experiences do continue to add up in students' lives, which means that even though in the short run these qualities cannot be controlled, in the long run they can be altered. For example, if students experience increasing amounts of success, they are likely to need less protection from failure. And if a student becomes engaged in the study of a subject despite not liking it, he or she might eventually come to be sufficiently interested in the subject that this interest itself will serve as a source of engagement. Nevertheless, in the short run the teacher needs to appeal to motives other than those having to do with interest in the subject when this interest does not exist. All the teacher can do is to be aware of students' previous experiences and take them into account while designing tasks and activities for students.

Qualities of Choice

Uncomfortable though it may be for academics to accept, the fact is that academic work is of more interest to academics than it is to the majority of America's citizenry. Nonacademics have other interests and other concerns. This does not mean that nonacademics

is the only means of helping students develop the ability to evaluate and synthesize information.

Affiliation

Many students have learned to place considerable value on activities that encourage them to work with others, in other words activities that provide opportunities for affiliation. In band and choral music activities, for example, it is likely that some students are committed and attentive because they value the positive regard of their peers, and a quality performance as a band or chorus member is one means of gaining that regard. Indeed, opportunities for feedback from peers, coaching from peers, and observation by peers are built into the work, and it is the result of these opportunities that appeals to some students. For other students it may simply be the opportunities for camaraderie that keep them engaged in this work. The band director who fails to provide opportunities to realize the latter value may well find engagement deteriorating among those who place high value on affiliation. The point here of course is that for some students affiliation is a powerful motivating force.

There is a caution, however; for some students affiliation is, or may become, a negative value. Few teachers have failed to hear the complaint that *group work* simply holds some students back or slows them down. If this is so, it is because the group work is not properly designed. Indeed, some tasks assigned to groups are really not group tasks—they are tasks that could be done by one person if given enough time. Group tasks cannot be accomplished by one person; they require cooperative action and coordination of effort. It is, for example, impossible for one person to sing both bass and soprano at the same time or to simultaneously play as quarterback and center on a football team. Similarly, if one student is assigned the role of researcher, another the role of writer, another the role of editor, and still another the role of presenter, and if the teacher monitors the work to ensure that each person carries out the functions assigned to his or her role, academic group work might both play to strengths and develop new strengths as well. Furthermore, defining tasks in this way tends to encourage students to become invested in the success of their peers because they are dependent on them.

clearly affect the likelihood of student engagement. Furthermore, the more frequently others who are significant to the student, such as parents, are put in a position to see the student perform or read or present a detailed description of what he or she has accomplished (as opposed to reading or hearing a teacher's evaluation of the task), the more likely it is that the power of affirmation as a motive force for engagement will be realized.

Novelty and Variety

Though it is true that people resist change, they also like and need a certain degree of novelty and variety in their lives. In fact some psychiatrists see an overly heavy insistence on routine as an indicator of mental illness or approaching senility. Novelty not only introduces some degree of excitement into an activity but also tends to fasten the student's attention, because newness, in itself, calls upon the student to develop new skills or to employ established skills in new ways. For example, during the 1980s—and to some extent even now—the introduction of computers into classrooms increased student engagement in learning tasks simply because these tasks were often designed so that students had to use this novel device of the computer to accomplish what it was intended that they accomplish. Some students paid attention and were committed to tasks that allowed them to use computers when under other circumstances these same students would have done their work only if other incentives were offered.

As students become more accustomed to computers and computer uses are routinized, the novelty wears off. Once this occurs, the opportunity to use a computer will be no more motivating than the opportunity to use a pen or pencil. However, the computer may continue to be a source of novelty if the content available through electronic means is novel.

Choice

Children and adolescents, like adults, are more likely to find a task or activity engaging when they feel they have some choice in the work they do or at least in how they go about the work. Obviously, there are some tasks in which little choice is possible. When this is

do with *that which is real to the student.* For some students the idea that they should be concerned with reading books is simply not within their reality. The football game on Friday night is real. Conversations in the hallway are real. The way parents respond to schoolwork taken home is real. Personal embarrassment is real.

Realities such as these must be of concern to teachers who would use authenticity as a means of increasing engagement. They must attend carefully to the world in which their students live their present lives at least as much as they attend to the world they anticipate these students will inhabit after leaving school.

This is not to say that the outside world and anticipated futures should play no role in the decisions made by teachers, for these factors should play a role indeed. But for most students reality has less to do with the world of adults than it has to do with the world of children and adolescents. Both school and the adult world outside of school are sometimes seen by students as disconnected from their reality.[15] As Willard Waller observed long ago, one of the most serious challenges confronting the teacher is that of developing sufficient empathy with the world of students that he or she can "understand [student] roles and live vividly roles of his own not wholly incompatible with the roles of [students]."[16] At the same time, the teacher must maintain his or her standing and perspective as an adult, even though, as Waller also observed, it is difficult for the teacher to take the world of students seriously without so identifying with the children that an adult perspective gets lost. Or, worse, to protect themselves from this overidentification with the world of children, some teachers interpose an "immense distance" between themselves and students, and then "the teacher-pupil relationship becomes one of dominance and subordination in its strictest form."[17]

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[15] See, for example, P. Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1998).

[16] W. Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching* (New York: Wiley, 1967) (Originally published 1932), p. 60.

[17] Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching*, p. 59.

chapter
TEN

Creating the Capacity to Support Innovation

If the performance of America's schools is to improve, it is essential that the schools have the capacity to innovate on a continuous basis and in a disciplined way. Bureaucracies lack this capacity. Continuous innovation is the lifeblood of learning organizations.

Bureaucracies are, of course, capable of installing innovations, but only if the innovations do not require fundamental changes in the way critical social systems are organized—that is, as long as the innovations are sustaining innovations. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, the introduction of innovations that call for rearranging the relationships within or between social systems usually creates a crisis in a bureaucracy.

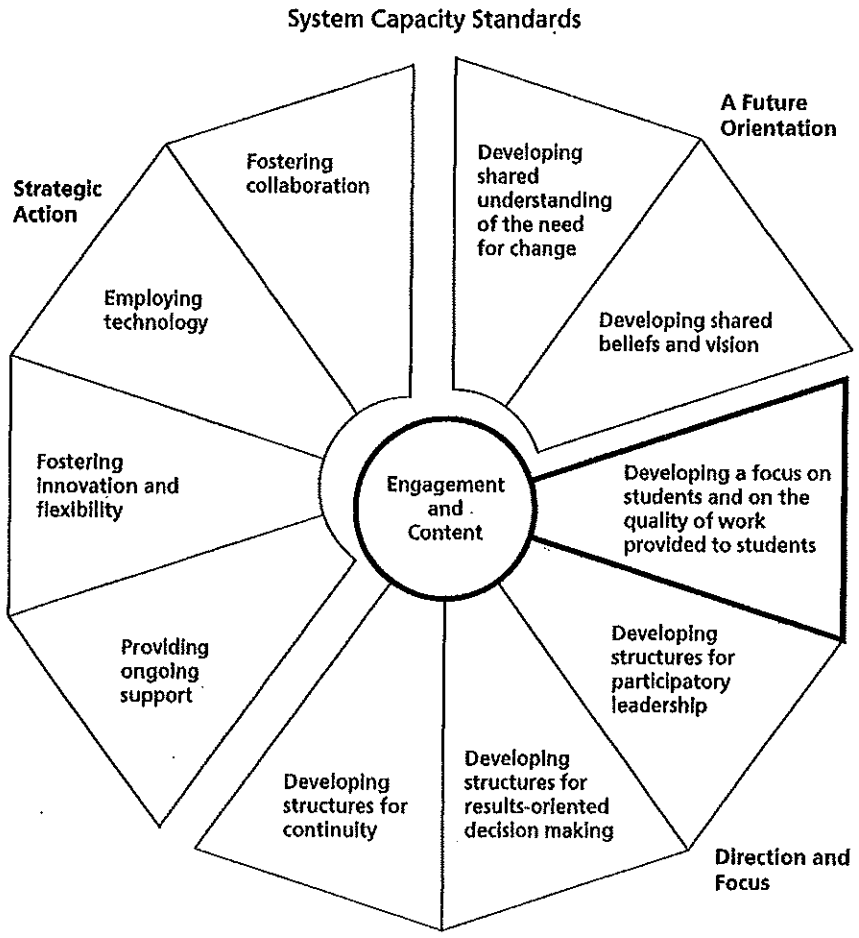
It is the inability to smoothly incorporate innovations requiring systemic changes that makes bureaucracies incapable of continuous innovation, and it is this failing more than any other that leads to the need to transform schools from bureaucracies to learning organizations. Thus, this transformation requires, among other things, capacity building, the topic of this chapter.

CAPACITY BUILDING: A POINT OF VIEW

In the most generic sense, the word *capacity* has to do with potentials and limitations: what a person, group, or organization is capable of doing if called on to act. It also has to do with the limits beyond which performance should not be

From *Leading for Learning: How to Transform Schools into Learning Organizations,* by Phillip Schlechty.

Figure 10.1
Developing System Capacity to Support Innovations



developed within the social systems that define schools (and other organizations as well). Figure 10.1 summarizes those standards.

A Future Orientation

The capacity of a school, or any other organization, to be oriented toward the future depends on the ability of the organization and its leaders to develop a shared

Today most teachers, even good teachers, place heavy reliance on the fact that their tradition-based role as adults entitles them to expect students to look to them for instruction, direction, and guidance. In the opening chapters of this book, I suggested that the assumptions underlying these expectations are increasingly suspect. It will, therefore, become necessary for teachers to rely less on the status claims that have been embedded in the role of teacher and to rely more on the expert authority that derives from a deep understanding of student motives. It also means that schools must be organized to support teachers who are intent on changing their roles and to shed obsolete expectations that come out of the past but have no place in the future.

Teachers need to focus on creating work that gains the attention and commitment of students. Although they must ensure that the work students do calls on them to learn things that the adult community values and sees as important, the primary job of the teacher can no longer be that of instruction and ensuring that students are on task simply because the teacher demands that it be so. The title of Marc Prensky's article on the new expectation students have regarding their learning—"Engage Me or Enrage Me"—is not too far off base.[3]

Developing Shared Understanding of the Need for Change In addition to being capable of leading by vision, leaders must be able to determine whether the innovations required to move the vision into reality require one or more sustaining innovations—or innovations that go beyond the capacity of the existing system. Put differently, leaders must determine whether the innovations they are trying to install call for changes that are systemic in nature.

This means that leaders need to be able to assess whether the existing system has the capacity to support the proposed innovation. If it does, then the job of the official organizational leaders (for example, superintendents and principals) is to ensure that those who are charged with installing the innovation have the authority needed to command the resources they require. If the needed capacity is lacking, leaders must involve themselves in the much more difficult (and less well understood) process of capacity building.

[3]Marc Prensky, "Engage Me or Enrage Me: What Today's Learners Demand," *Educause Review*, Sept.–Oct. 2005.

means that leaders must have considerable persuasive skills to move followers from beliefs to vision.

It is also essential that this vision, which is necessarily a district-wide vision, be translated into missions that can drive action in the schoolhouse, the classroom, each department, the superintendent's office, and the school board itself. Each of these operating units might have a different mission, reflecting both their unique condition and unique capacity to contribute to the overall good of the district, but all would be disciplined by the same vision and be committed to a common direction anchored in shared beliefs. Indeed, another way to think about mission is to conceive of it as an operating unit's version of the overall vision that drives the enterprise. (Visions differ from missions in the sense that visions cannot be accomplished; they can only be realized. Visions set direction; missions determine action. Missions can be accomplished, and it is in the accomplishment of missions that visions are realized.)[6] For example, a compelling mission for a large urban high school might be very different from the mission that would guide a small elementary school in the same district, but both missions would derive from the same vision, and each would be consistent with the beliefs and standards that guide the district as a whole.

Direction and Focus

Transforming schools from bureaucracies into learning organizations means first developing a clear sense of direction. This can be done only by centering attention on those elements of the system that have to do with the means by which direction is maintained in an organization where creativity and inventiveness, rather than routine and control, are prime values.

Focus on Students and Quality Work Two general conditions must be ensured if direction is to be maintained:

1. Leaders must have a clear image of where they are going.
2. Leaders must have a clear understanding of where they are now—and some appreciation of what it is going to take to get from where they are to where they want to go.

In part, the development of a clear image of where leaders intend for the system to go is addressed in the visioning process. It is essential, however, that this

[6]See Schlechty, *Inventing Better Schools,* for further discussion of these distinctions.

can help to transform fear into heroic collective action by making it possible to exploit the power of what anthropologists refer to as the *shared ordeal.*

Knowing that others are as frightened as you are often generates courage. After all, courage is nothing more than behaving as you need to even when you are scared to death. It is only through participatory leadership that one is likely to create the level and type of commitments necessary to generate the courage to sustain disruptive innovations.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter observes,

> My favorite maxim of management, if not of life, is "Everything can look like a failure in the middle."
>
> Predictable problems arise in the middle of nearly every attempt to do something new. Almost inevitably, innovation projects encounter shortages of time or resources because forecasts were overly optimistic. Unexpected obstacles have to be removed for the project to proceed. Momentum is lost because of staff turnover. Morale dips because of setbacks or sheer fatigue. Or critics attack because they start to notice the project when it looks like it might succeed. Before that, it was not enough of a threat to arouse antagonism.[8]

It takes a great deal of courage and commitment for those who are associated with the change to ride through these rough spots. Such commitments are more likely to happen when the change has been introduced by leaders who know how to involve others in decisions, are strong enough to absorb failure on behalf of others, and are strong enough to give away success to others. Without such leaders, system change will not occur.

In summary, people who have committed to a common vision based on shared beliefs are more likely to persist with their efforts when they confront difficulties than are those whose only reason for participation is compliance with a directive from above. Enhancing the capacity of leaders to lead in a participatory way and developing policies and procedures that encourage participatory leadership are essential capacity-building activities. Without this capacity, few will be willing to take the risks that must be taken to invent new systems.

[8]Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *On the Frontiers of Management* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), p. 11.

technical skills needed to act in the way the culture requires. Too many induction programs in education attend only to technical matters. Moreover, when transformation is occurring and new social systems are being installed, it becomes equally necessary to provide for the induction of members of the old system into the new. Indeed, the failure to provide for such induction often leads to failed transformation efforts.

Executive succession planning, which is virtually absent in most school districts, is also essential to the maintenance of direction. Indeed, the absence of such planning leads teachers to the view that "this too shall pass," a view that not only decreases commitment but also engenders cynicism. Leaders who are committed to building capacity therefore must attend to executive succession planning almost before anything else.

People who are asked to make the sacrifices that transformational change requires need to be assured that a leadership structure to sustain them is in place. In an organization that is already in the process of transformation, a new leader with a vision different from the vision that is motivating the initiative is as likely to generate cynicism about the prospects of improvement as to inspire new hope. Being a visionary leader has its merit, but it is more important to be a leader who leads by vision. The most difficult work in any transformation may not be in establishing a vision but in sustaining it over time. Critical to school transformatiom is ensuring that when leaders change, the vision that inspires action remains constant.

Leaders who are committed to the creation of organizations that have the capacity to support disruptive innovations do have different characteristics from those who lead change-inept organizations:

Leaders in Learning Organizations	Leaders in Bureaucracies
Are clear about their core business and can communicate this understanding to others in clear and persuasive ways.	Have only a vague understanding of their core business, or define their business in terms of the peculiar interests of their department or operating unit. This results in leaders' holding competing views and therefore sends unclear messages to others regarding what they should be about and what matters should be given priority.

Strategic Action

Strategic action, which focuses on the future, seeks to bring into existence some desired end state that has yet to be realized. It is not the intent of strategic action to solve immediate problems. Rather, the intent is to seize opportunities and invent new futures for the organization.

Schools face a number of significant barriers to strategic action:

- The way schools are governed, especially the tendency of boards of education to anchor decisions in short-term constituent interests as opposed to strategic goals
- The tendency to allow efforts to keep things from getting worse (maintenance interests) to overwhelm efforts to make things better (developmental interests)
- The lack of an understanding of and support for the experimentalism that is involved in innovative efforts, especially innovations that require the disruption of existing systems
- The tendency to try to domesticate emerging technologies rather than incorporate such technologies in ways that exploit the full power that they might otherwise bring to the task
- The limited capacity of most schools and school districts to develop and sustain actions that call for collaboration within the system, for example, among departments, grade levels, or schools, as well as between the system and other organizations that have a stake in the way the schools operate, such as teacher unions and advocacy groups

If schools and school systems are to develop the capacity to act strategically, leaders must be prepared to address these issues in the following way:

- Ensure that appropriate support systems are in place—especially human resource development systems and political and financial support systems.
- Create a culture that drives out fear, encourages responsible risk taking, and separates unsuccessful tries from punishment
- Assess the system requirements presented by innovations and ensure that these requirements are responded to at the same time that the other requirements of the innovation are being addressed

To provide support to disruptive innovations, leaders must have or must develop the capabilities these issues suggest. Among other things, they must do the following:

- Develop strong and personal bonds of trust and feelings of common destiny with those whose support they want and need in order to make the innovation work as it is intended to.
- Be prepared to make themselves vulnerable and proceed as a learning leader rather than an expert leader. Like those they are leading, they will often be on the cutting edge of ignorance rather than on the cutting edge of knowledge, and they need to learn to be comfortable with this condition.
- Like Caesar's wife, they must not only be virtuous but must appear to be virtuous. The slightest dissembling can destroy credibility. Unlike bureaucratic leaders who sometimes absorb success and give away failure, leaders who are committed to the installation of disruptive innovations must learn to absorb failure and give away success. Fixing the system is very different from "fixing the blame" or solving the problems that the present system has created.

Fostering Innovation and Flexibility Although encouraging innovation is essential to strategic action, schools are peculiarly ill equipped to encourage innovations, especially disruptive ones. Although they regularly install innovations, they seldom stick with them long enough to ensure that their intended effects will be realized. The result is that many see schools as fickle and given to fads. But the fact is that schools too often lack the system capacity to support innovations through the difficult stages of implementation.

Fostering Collaboration Collaboration and the ability to engage in collaborative action are becoming increasingly important to the survival of public schools. Indeed, without the ability to collaborate with others, the prospect of truly repositioning schools in the constellation of community forces is not likely. And schools that are not repositioned are unlikely to have the capacity to support the kind of disruptive innovations that will be needed to ensure a healthy future for public education in America. Here is what schools and school leaders must do to ensure that the organizations they lead will have the capacity to collaborate with others. First and foremost, leaders must ensure sufficient cohesion within the school and the school district that cooperation with others does not

Kanter has observed, "To convert imagination into useful ideas requires persistence, which is also helped or hindered by the organization."[9]

Competent leaders who display courage and strength of will are essential to the transformation of schools. But competent, courageous, and strong-willed leaders will fail if the schools and school districts they are trying to transform do not have the systems in place that are needed to support and sustain innovations over time. For example, school districts that do not create the means to protect developmental activity will not be able to sustain efforts at continuous improvement because the needs of the maintenance systems will overwhelm developmental needs and lead to the co-optation of developmental resources. (See the discussion in Chapter Three regarding goal displacement.) Persistence of effort is an organizational capacity issue as much as a question of competence, courage, and will.

Thus, leaders must work first on those things that enhance the capacity of the schools they are leading. This enhanced capacity will make it possible to invent schools where nearly every child learns at high levels and no child will be left behind—because every child will have a genuine opportunity to get ahead.

[9]Kanter, *On the Frontiers of Management*, p. 11.

From *Shaking Up the Schoolhouse: How to Support and Sustain Educational Innovation*, by Phillip Schlechty.

CHAPTER FIVE

Learning from Competitors

Explaining variance in student learning by referring to the qualities and characteristics of the students or the students' parents is akin to a business's blaming the lack of profit on the customers. When teachers explain poor student performance by saying that television and electronic games have shortened children's attention spans, they are engaging in the same behavior that the business leader is engaging in when he or she explains a decline in profits or lack of growth by saying that customers as less loyal than they once were.

It may be true that consumers are less loyal to businesses than they once were, and it may be equally true that television and electronic games have conditioned students to expect immediate gratification and short bursts of activity rather than long-term consequences and sustained effort. But consumers' lack of loyalty and students' short-term view do not explain why a corporation does not make a profit and a school has low test scores. Changes in the competitive environment have something to do with the matter as well.

Instead of asking questions like, How can we force Americans to buy our products? or, How can we get Congress to impose a tariff to protect our goods from unfair competition? business leaders should

In spite of these facts, educators can learn many lessons from studying how their competitors go about their business. This chapter illustrates some of these lessons.[1]

VISITING AN ALLENTOWN BAR

In January 1994, a colleague and I visited a hotel bar in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Television monitors were everywhere, and the bar patrons were gazing at them intently. "What," I wondered, "could be the attraction?" There was no sports action on the screens. All I saw there were multiple-choice questions, such as, "Which President was given the nickname 'Old Hickory?'" Many of the patrons had a keyboard through which they communicated with an electronic device that recorded answers to the questions. Some participants were single persons sitting alone; some were members of teams sitting together at a table. Some were obviously chemically impaired. The teams usually designated one member of their group to staff the keyboard (the designated "scorer"). All team members contributed answers—or tried to.

I also observed that consistent with the views advanced by cooperative learning advocates, such teams had become quite proficient at arriving at a consensus about the answer team members thought was right and that participants understood that some members of the group were strong in one area (such as history) and others in other areas (such as science, geography, popular culture, or music). Furthermore, in the barroom as in the classroom, when there was uncertainty, it appeared that those who were perceived as expert in an area were looked to for leadership and direction.

REFLECTING ON WHAT I SAW

Given what I saw in that Allentown bar, there are at least two sets of conclusions one could draw about engaging people in an activity. One could conclude that eliciting and conveying information in a trivialized, disjointed, and irrelevant way is the key to holding people's attention and that therefore this approach should be enshrined in the school curriculum. I did not reach this conclusion, although I did see that electronic technology would allow educators to trivialize the curriculum further than it is already and to do so without risking boring students to the point of rebellion. I fear, indeed, that some large com-

Conclusion. Teachers who organize the work they assign students so that the students see some linkage between what they are asked to do (and to learn) and some product, performance, or outcome they care about are more likely to engage students than are teachers who fail to make this link.

Observation. The barroom game communicates clear performance standards that are understandable to the participants. Furthermore, the participants perceive these standards to be fair, reasonable, and significant (that is, meeting these standards is perceived to be important). In the case of the barroom game, the standards have to do with speed and accuracy. Getting the right answer fast is the desired goal, but accuracy is more important than speed. Players who get the wrong answer are penalized in the scoring process.

Conclusion. Teachers who attend to communicating clear standards for student work and ensuring that students view these standards as fair, reasonable, and significant are more likely to gain commitment than are teachers who are less careful about such matters.

Observation. In the barroom game, participants are given honest, accurate, and useful information about the quality of their performance in relation both to the standards of the game and to the performance of others engaged in the same activity. By virtue of satellite uplinks, even international comparisons are possible. The winner in a bar in Winnipeg can be compared to the winner in Allentown (I was in Winnipeg when I saw this happen). Even the losers in the local bar seemed to take pride in the performance of the local winner when winning performances were compared among sites. He or she suddenly became "we."

Conclusion. Properly presented, honest feedback to students regarding how close they have come to meeting the intended standards and how their performance stacks up compared to the performance of others can be a source of inspiration to try harder rather than a devastating blow to low performers' self-concepts. The key seems to be to ensure that students find the standards worth pursuing and see a reasonable prospect that they can make a successful effort to meet these standards.

Observation. In the barroom game, participants have considerable control over the degree to which they will risk adverse consequences for failure to meet standards or to perform to expectations. Put differently, in the barroom game, although participants are given very clear feedback about how well they are doing compared to the stan-

Conclusion. Teachers who design their activities in ways that encourage and permit students to affiliate with each other are likely to engage more students than are teachers who are less attentive to group activity as a source of positive motivation.

Observation. The barroom game is designed so that participants have some choice in the way they go about their work. For example, teams can be formed—and they often are—but an individual can also choose to play the game alone and remain anonymous if anonymity meets a need. Cooperative learning is valued, provided for, and even encouraged, but those whose learning and performing styles are more solitary can be accommodated as well. Similarly, as described earlier, participants can choose the level at which they want to compete. Those who are timid, uncertain, or just exploring can maintain anonymity. Those who find competition stimulating have the opportunity to compete to their heart's content. Whooping and hollering are permitted.

Conclusion. Teachers who provide students some choice and some sense of personal control over how they will conduct their work and when they will work with others are likely to engage more students in assigned tasks than are those teachers who are less flexible about working arrangements. Affiliation is a powerful source of motivation, but there are times one just wants to be left alone to cry in one's beer and to sort out one's confusions.

Observation. In the barroom game the content is organized in such a way that there is a wide range of opportunities for success. Participants have many opportunities to contribute to the group. Even individuals who are well along the way to being drunk sometimes suddenly come to life on a question that has to do with baseball trivia or popular culture.

Conclusion. Teachers who design tasks in such a way that all—or nearly all—students are held to common standards yet all will also experience some level of recognizable success are more likely to increase engagement than are teachers who are less attentive to students' needs for achievement.

THE BIG LESSON

Each of the little lessons I learned from my research in barrooms can be summarized into this one big lesson: With care and planning, schoolwork can be designed so that all students are engaged in pre-

performance, exhibition, or result about which they care and that is responsive to needs they have. Certainly, entertainment meets needs, but students want and need substantial activity as well. When substantial activity that meets needs is lacking, students become bored. Entertainment at least temporarily alleviates that boredom.

The schools' new competitors also seem to understand better than do many educators that students do not mind failure; what they dislike is the implicit punishment that so often accompanies failure in schools. On the one hand, protecting students from failure does no one any good, and it encourages poor student performance. On the other hand, punishing students for pursuing high standards and failing to meet them encourages students to pursue lower standards or to disengage entirely.

Educators tend to punish failure, or just as bad, they try to prevent failure by lowering standards. When one watches students play computer games and sees them fail to achieve the desired result yet come back for more, it becomes clear that there are ways to design activities that require students to meet high standards but that do not, implicitly or explicitly, rely on punishment and extrinsic rewards.

There are many other things educators could learn from the design of electronic games that would help in the design of engaging schoolwork. Furthermore, they need not go to bars to learn these things, but what they must do is accept the proposition that students are volunteers and that the work schools provide to students, rather than the students themselves, is the real product of the schools.

Teaching as a Social Transaction

In the field of sociology the concepts of *social exchange theory* proceed from the assumption that it is useful to study the social values that are satisfied by any human interaction. For example, youngsters who join a gang might be seen by a social exchange theorist as exchanging their support of the gang's activity for status, affiliation, and security. Like all social theories, this one has seen a great deal of debate regarding its validity. Rather than enter that debate here, I prefer to downgrade this theory to a category I am more comfortable with using—the metaphor.

I suggest, then, that our understanding of teaching and learning would be greatly enhanced if educators allowed themselves to play out in full the implications of a transactional metaphor that assumed that

What the new competitors of schools are showing is that when student are provided with activities that respond to their needs, students do become engaged, they do persist when things are difficult, and they do experience a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Students who are engaged and who persist will learn. Whether what students learn will be of value depends upon the ability of teachers and schools to create work that is engaging and that at the same time brings students into significant and profound interactions with the content they need to know and the skills they need to master to deserve to be called well educated in the context of modern society.

Given this transactional framework, it seems that even though schools—both public and private—*often behave as though they are monopolies, they are not.* Yet because they persist in the illusion of monopoly, they allow many of their potential customers and most of their real market go unserved or underserved. They often offer their customers that which they can conveniently produce and leave it up to the customer to buy or to refuse to buy.

The primary product of the schools today is academic work that if properly pursued results in academic learning. Those who find academic work attractive or at least tolerable are likely to find schoolwork engaging, whereas those whose values and needs cannot be satisfied by academic work will be less engaged. Indeed, one of the laments of public school educators is that private schools do not have to enroll everybody, and they can get rid of students who do not buy what the school has to sell. This is probably true enough. It is also generally true that students who are willing to do academic work in private schools also do well in suburban public schools that offer strong academic programs and emphasize academic work.

The problem is that some students in suburban schools, some in private schools, and many in urban schools and rural schools find little meaning in academic work as that work is done by academics. The consequence is that academically speaking these students learn too little. Furthermore, in the effort to accommodate (as opposed to serve or respond to) students who are not academically oriented, schools often resort to strategies that reduce the quality of the academic program as well. This is one of the reasons that families who place a high value on academic work opt for private schools, where students who do not value working in the manner that academics work are sometimes excluded.

will engage voluntarily and that will result in their learning what adults believe they need to know to carry on with the building of our democratic society. Understanding what the new school competitors are doing that schools are not doing should persuade us all that if teachers are to function successfully without the support of traditional authority, the only authority they have to rely on is that expert authority, which proceeds from a detailed understanding of students and what motivates them, along with a profound understanding of the nature of the engaging work that must be created for students. The next chapter offers a framework to assist teachers in this endeavor.

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