

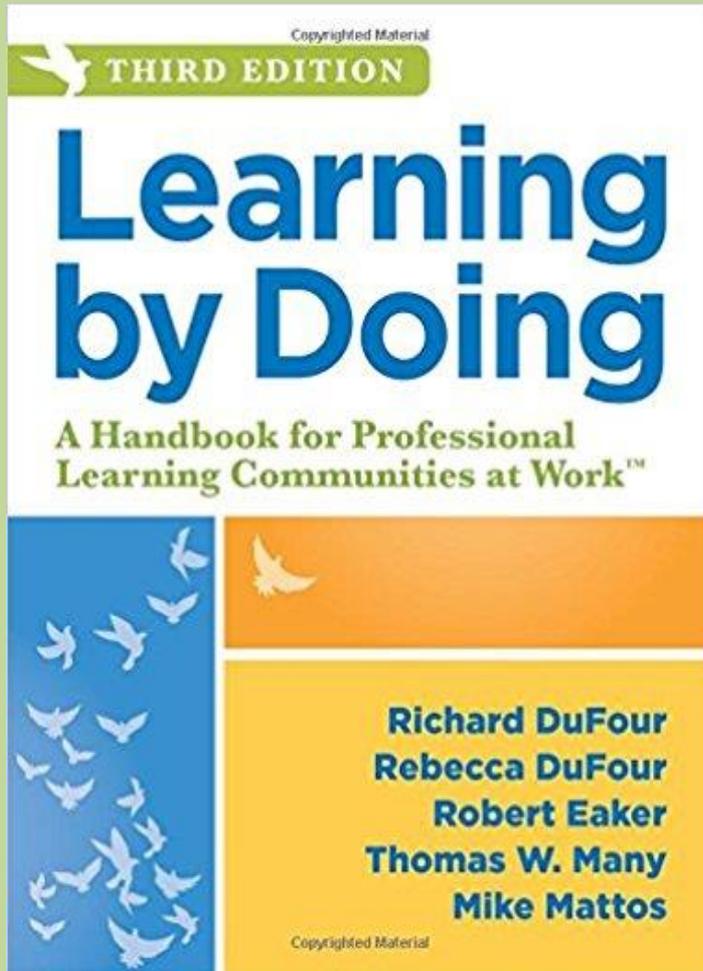
Leadership Matters:  
Moving Beyond “PLC Lite” and  
Nurturing Full Commitment

Anthony Muhammad, Ph.D.

Question????

How many people  
would like to see more  
students learn more,  
more often?

# What is a PLC?



“An ongoing process in which educators work together collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators.”

(2016) DuFour, DuFour, et.al, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, pg. 10

# 6 Essential Elements of a “Real” PLC

- Educators work collaboratively rather than in isolation, take collective responsibility for student learning, and clarify the commitments they make to each other about how they will work together.
- The fundamental structure of the school becomes the collaborative team in which members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which all members are mutually accountable.
- The team establishes a guaranteed and viable curriculum, unity by unit, so all students have access to the same knowledge and skills regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.

# 6 Essential Elements of a “Real” PLC (Continued)

- The team develops common formative assessments to frequently gather evidence of student learning.
- The school has created a system of interventions and extensions to ensure students who struggle receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, directive, diagnostic, and systematic, and students who demonstrate proficiency can extend their learning.
- The team uses evidence of student learning to inform and improve their individual and collective practice of its members.

# Four Corollary PLC Questions

- What do we want student to know and be able to do?
- How do we know if students have learned?
- How do we respond when students don't learn?
- How do we respond when students have learned?

Seems Simple Enough...Right???



# PLC Lite

“‘PLC Lite’ is the most accurate way to describe the current state of most professional learning communities around the country. Educators rename their traditional faculty or department meetings as ‘PLC meetings’, engage in book studies that result in no action, or devote collaborative time to topics that have no effect on student achievement – all in the name of the PLC process.”

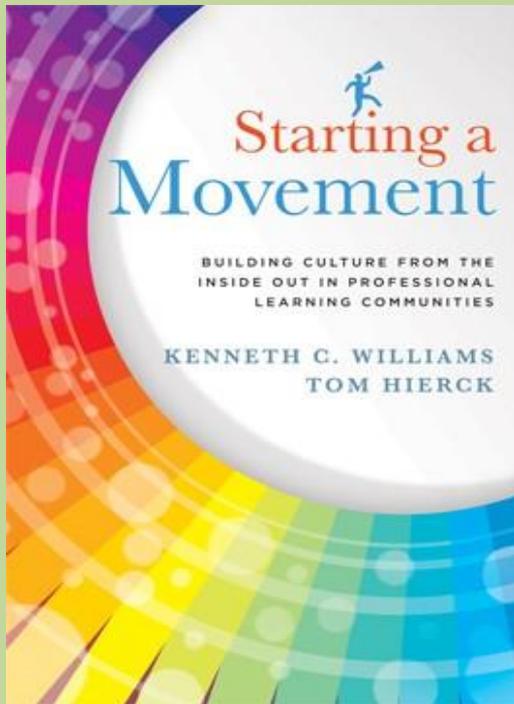
# Valley of Decision....

Is your school...

“Flirting” with or “dating”  
the PLC process?

Or

Are you “married” to the  
process?



— Hierck and Williams, *Starting a Movement: Building Culture From the Inside Out in Professional Learning Communities* (2015)

# PLC “Lite-ese”

- “We are having conversations”
- “We are in different places. Some of our PLC’s are further along than others”
- “District initiative”

# Hard Fact

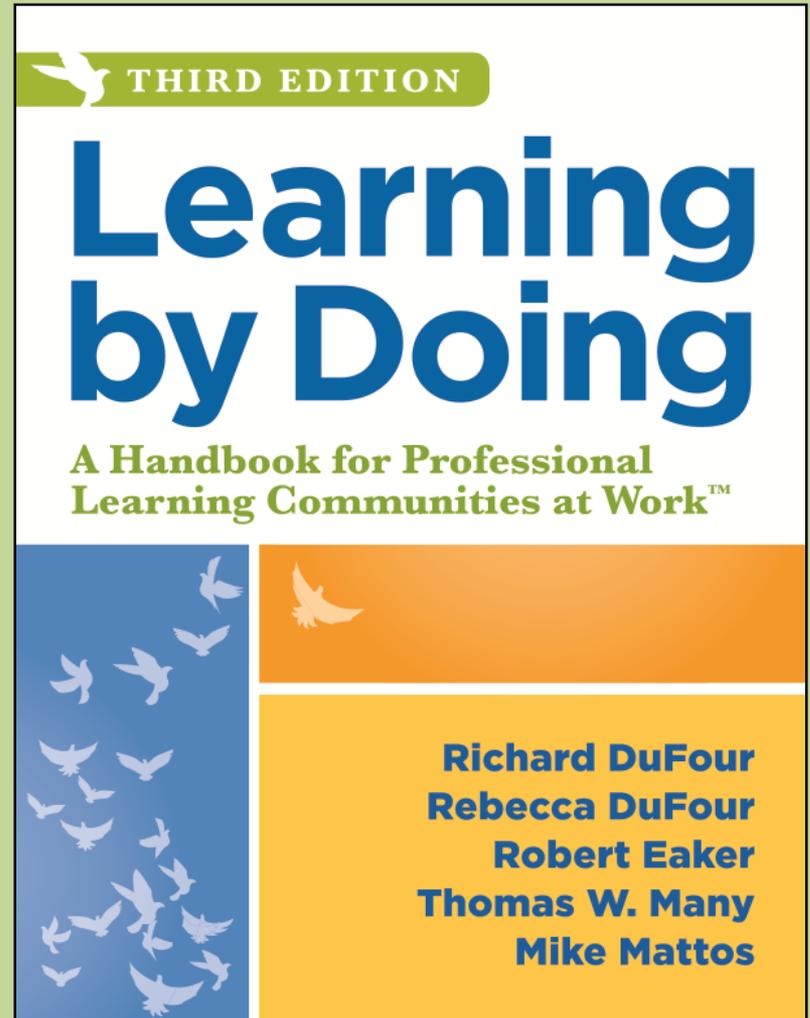
Everyone loves improvement

but.....

Everyone does not love the  
inconvenience of change

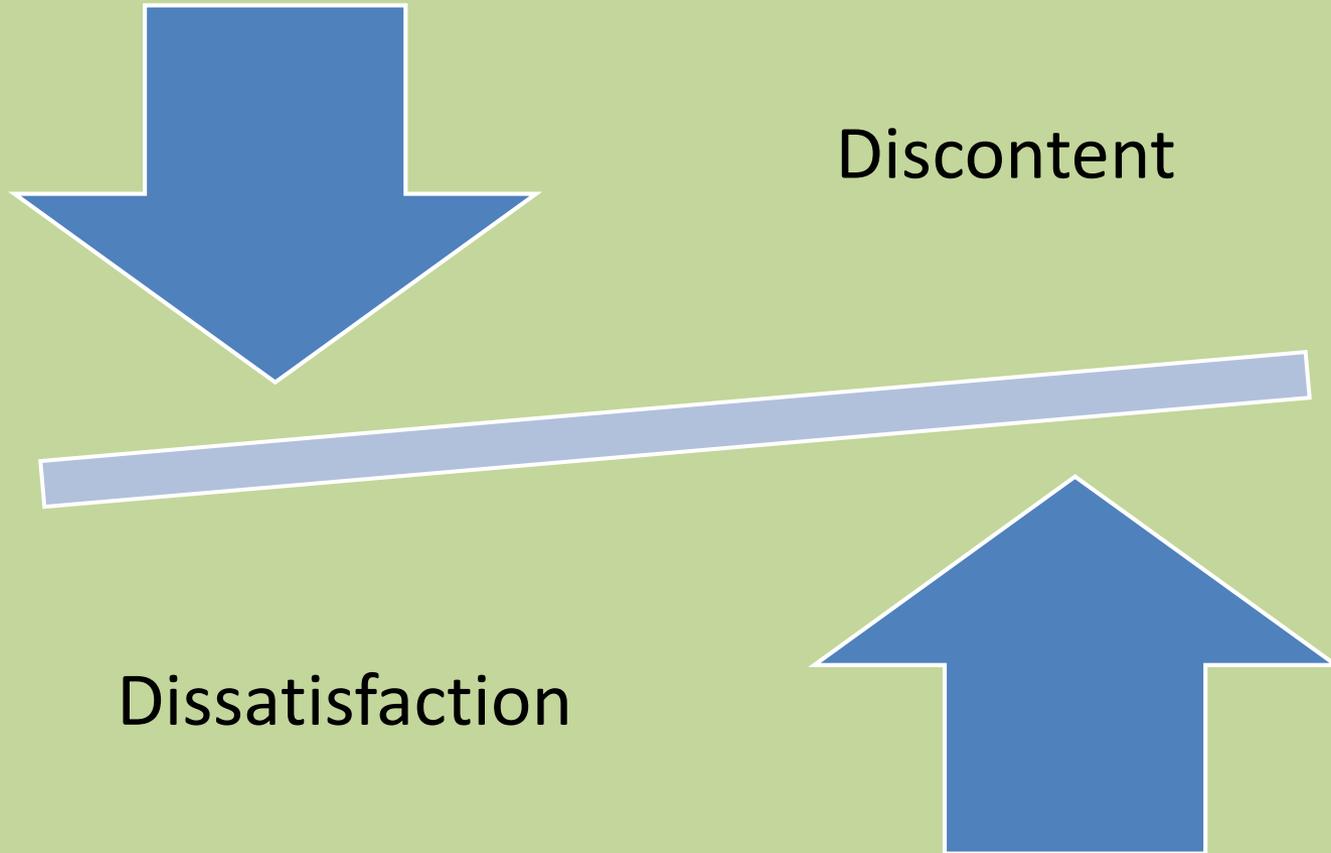
# Call to Arms

“When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for ALL students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental **responsibility** of those who work within it.”



—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many & Mattos, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (2016), pg. 11

# The Tipping Point



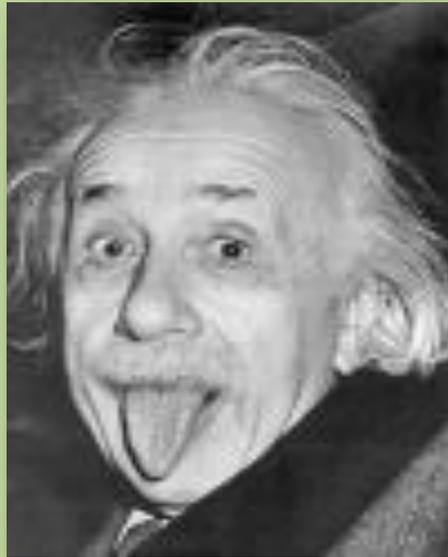
# Discontent vs. Dissatisfaction

*Discontent by itself does not invariably create a desire for change. Other factors have to be present before discontent turns into dissatisfaction. One of these is a sense of power. Those who are awed by their surroundings do not think of change, no matter how miserable their condition. When our mode of life is so precarious as to make it patent that we cannot control the circumstances of our existence, we tend to stick to the proven and the familiar.*

# Efficacy Defined

The ***power*** to produce a  
desired ***result*** or ***effect***

# Is Change Necessary?



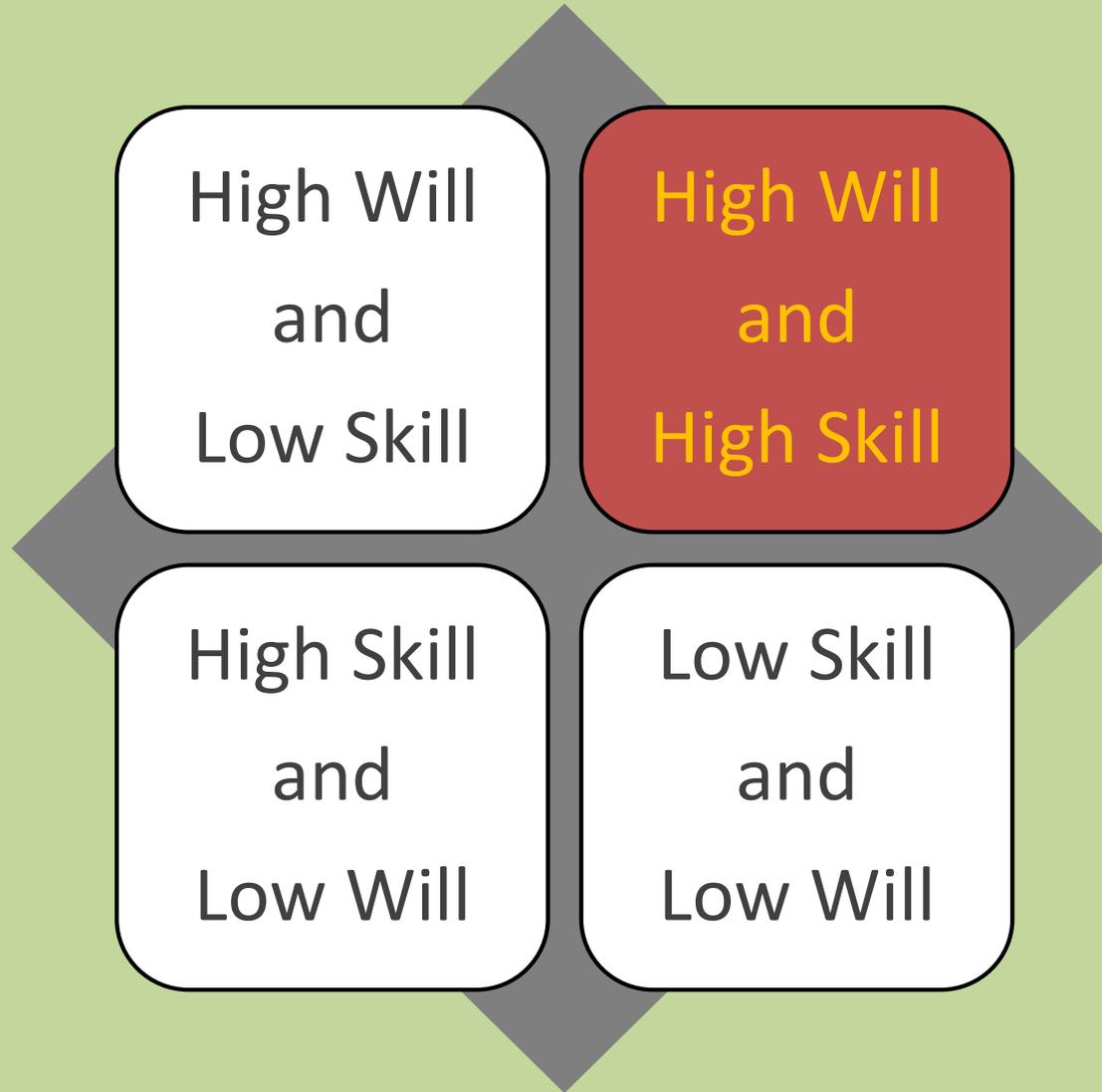
“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”

—Albert Einstein

# Two Forms of Change

- Technical–structural (skill)
- Cultural (will)

# High Will and High Skill



# Technical vs. Cultural

- Both forms of change are essential to improving organizations.
- Schools tend to focus heavily on technical changes and spend little time on cultural change.
- Deep change cannot be accomplished without cultural change.

# School Culture

“School culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school.”

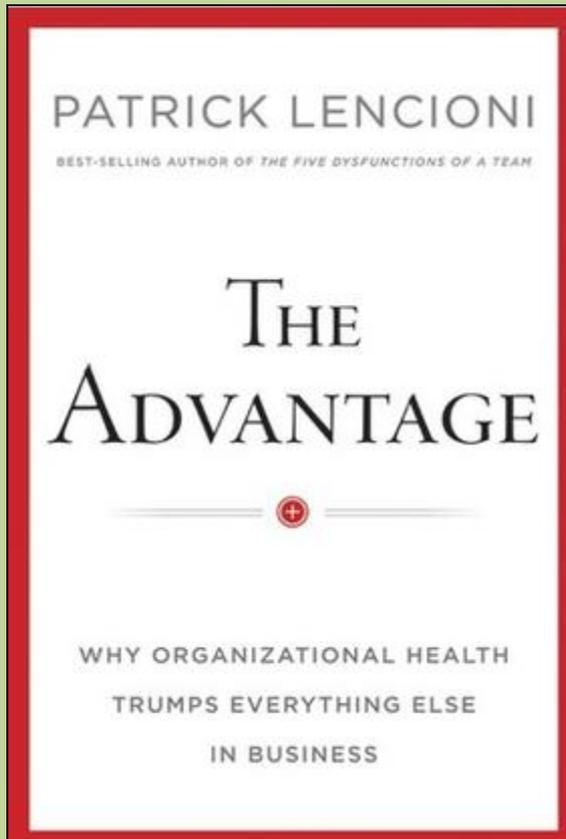
—Peterson, “Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive?”  
*Education World* (2002)

# “Healthy” School Culture

“Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways. Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student.”

—Peterson, “Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive?”  
*Education World* (2002)

# Don't Underestimate Culture



“The health of an organization provides the context for strategy, finance, marketing, and everything else that happens within it, which is why it is the single greatest factor determining an organization’s success. More than talent. More than knowledge. More than innovation.”

—Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (2012), p. 2

# Choosing Being “Smart” Over Being “Healthy”

## Smart

- The “sophistication bias”
- The “adrenaline bias”
- The “quantification bias”

## Healthy

- Build a cohesive team.
- Creating clarity.
- Reinforcing clarity

—Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (2012)

# Avoiding Culture

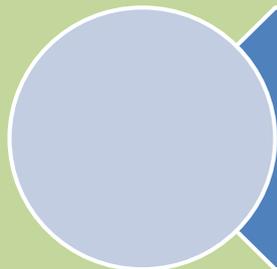
“Most leaders prefer to look for answers where the light is better, where they are more comfortable. And the light is certainly better in the measurable, objective, and data-driven world of organizational intelligence (the smart side of the equation) than in the messier, more unpredictable world of organizational health.”

—Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (2012), p. 7

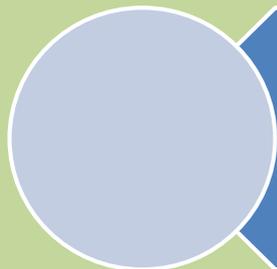
# Who's "Responsible"?



Government



District/School  
Leadership



Teachers

# Government

- Fair playing field and adequate funding
- Partner with schools, rather than punish
- Educate yourself and be an honest broker



FUND OUR  
\$SCHOOLS\$

EDUCATORS  
DESERVE  
A FAIR  
PAY RAISE



FUND  
TH  
TEACHERS

children  
ARE

WE S  
LA



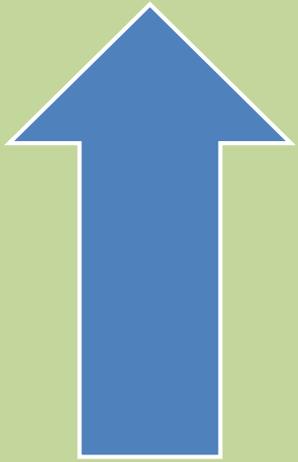
# Funding

“Most states cut school funding after the recession hit, and it took years for states to restore their funding to pre-recession levels. In 2015, the latest year for which comprehensive spending data are available from the U.S. Census Bureau, 29 states were still providing less total school funding per student than they were in 2008.”

(2017) Leachman, Masterson, and Figueroa, A Punishing Decade for School Funding, [https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-](https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding)

[budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding](https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/a-punishing-decade-for-school-funding)

# Teacher Morale



50%  
(2018)



34%  
(2019)



# Why is Morale so Low?

- Poor and inadequate compensation
- Increased social/emotional needs of students
- Lack of societal respect and public vilification
- Poor leadership

(2019) 5th Annual Educator Confidence Report, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

# Teacher Shortage Crisis (2008 – 2016)

- 15.4% drop in education related degrees
- 37.8% drop in student enrolled in teacher preparation programs
- 27.4% drop in number of people completing teacher certification programs
- Unfilled vacancies have doubled since 2008

*(2019) Garcia and Rice, U.S. Schools Struggling to Hire and Retain Teachers, Economic Policy Institute*



# Basic Maslow.....



# Not enough money?

## Schools vs. Jail Spending

- Most American states (27) spend more money on incarcerating youth than on their education
- California spends \$64,642 per prisoner compared to \$11,495 per student (\$53,146 gap)
- Youth incarceration has tripled over last 30 years while crime rate has fallen



# G.E.R.M. Global Educational Reform Movement

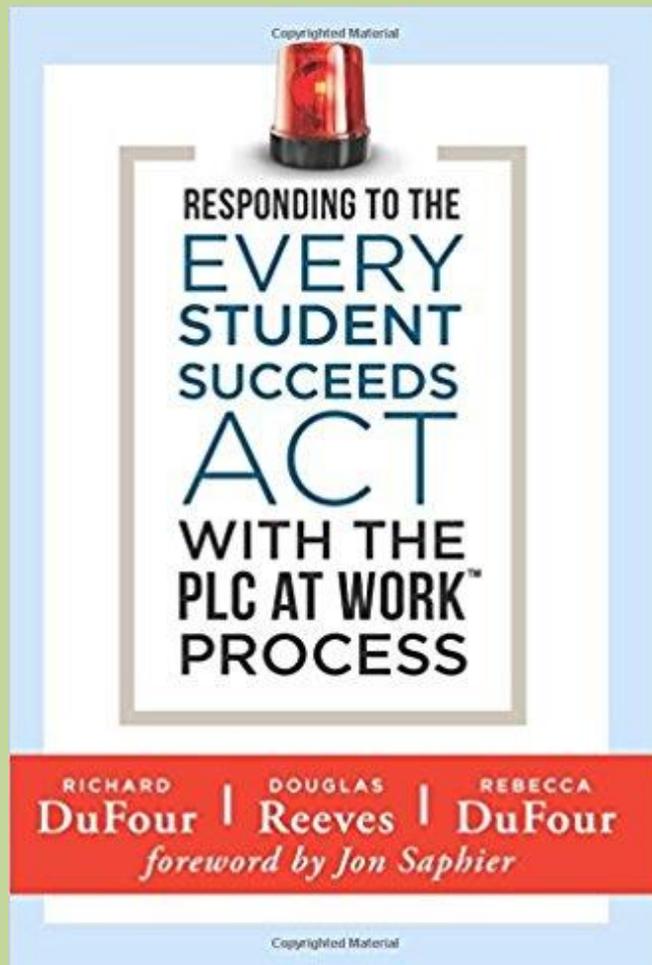
- Standardize teaching and learning
- Focus solely on literacy and numeracy
- Teach prescribed curriculum
- Borrow market-oriented reform ideas
- Test-based accountability and control

# NCLB

## The Great Re-segregator!

- School and Home Choice are two of the most important decisions that an American citizen will make in his/her lifetime.
- **Gold Standard** – The ability to move into a racially and socio-economically segregated community with a school system that reflects that exclusivity.
- NCLB and creative home financing fueled a level of segregation that exceeds pre-Brown vs. Board of Education

# ESSA does not have to be NCLB 2.0



*“If states pursue this new direction, they must abandon the thinking that led to failed reforms and embrace a new mindset regarding the most promising strategies to improve their schools.”*

(2017) DuFour, DuFour, and Reeves, Responding to ESSA With the PLC at Work Process, pg. 27



# Leadership: “Culture Keepers”



# University of Chicago Consortium on School Research

- 7 years of data collected from 2007 – 2014
- 600 Elementary Schools
- Schools who made the most academic gains created an “opt in” culture (i.e. Student success is not optional)

# University of Chicago findings

- Successful principals develop systems for supporting teachers to support students.
- Successful principals are skilled in organizing and supporting shared leadership among staff.
- Successful principals manage shared leadership by guiding, coordinating, and monitoring the work of teachers and leaders in the school.

# California “Beating the Odds” Study



- Why do high risk schools score over 800 on the California Academic Performance Index (API)?
- Isolated over 50 variables including class size, teacher experience, curriculum, and parental involvement
- The only common factor in all of the schools studied was a positive and student centered culture

# All of Us!



# Are You Willing to Confront the Elephants in the Room?



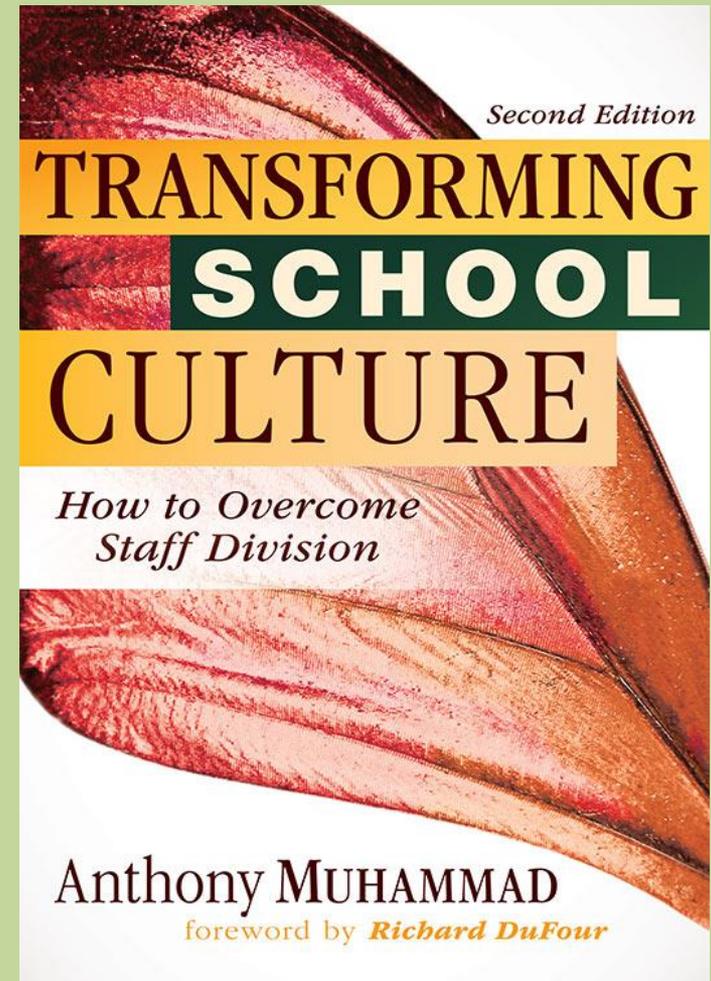
# Predeterminations

- Perceptual (Teachers)
- Intrinsic (Everyone)
- Institutional (Leadership)

# Perceptual Predetermination

“Perceptual predetermination involves an educator’s own socialization and the impact of that socialization on his or her practice in the classroom, including expectations for student performance.”

—Muhammad, *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division* (2018), p. 21



# Stereotypes

“To help simplify a complex world, people develop mental models called schemas. Problems arise when people start to oversimplify schemas. Oversimplified schemas are known as **stereotypes**. **Stereotypes** are fixed impressions and exaggerated and preconceived ideas and descriptions about a certain type of person, group, or society.”

—Langlois, Kalakanis, Rubenstein, Larson, Hallam, & Smoot,  
“Maxims or Myths of Beauty? A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review,”  
*Psychological Bulletin* (2000), p. 390

# Dangerous Synonyms

- “Changing demographics”
- “High minority”
- “High poverty”
- “Special ed kids”
- “ELL students”

# Crucial Conversations

- Conflicting opinions
- Potential to become highly emotional
- Stakes are high

Patterson, et.al, Crucial Conversations: Tools for  
Talking When the Stakes are High (2011)

# Corrective Lenses

## “The Optometrist”

Combat false/incomplete information with better information.

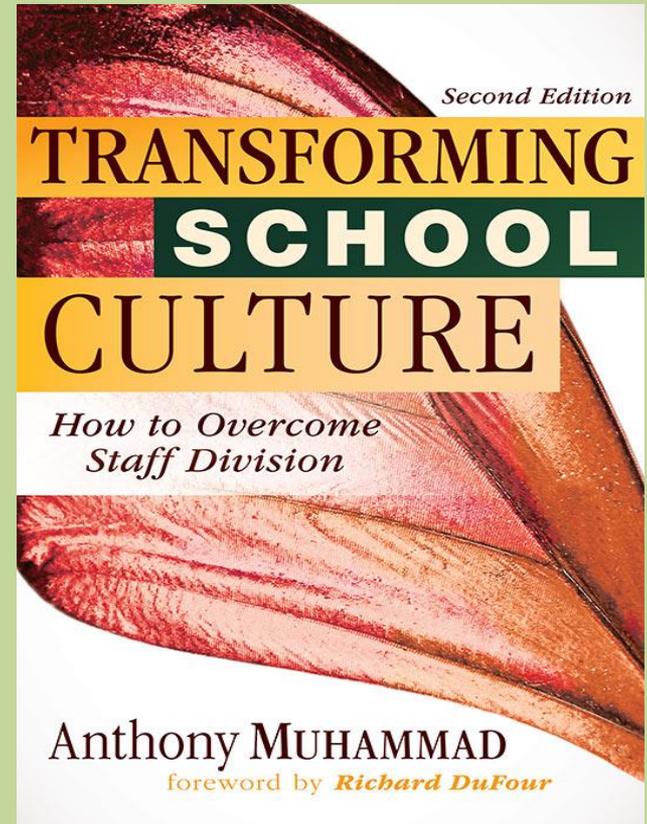
Try:

- Enlightenment
- Encouragement
- Experimentation



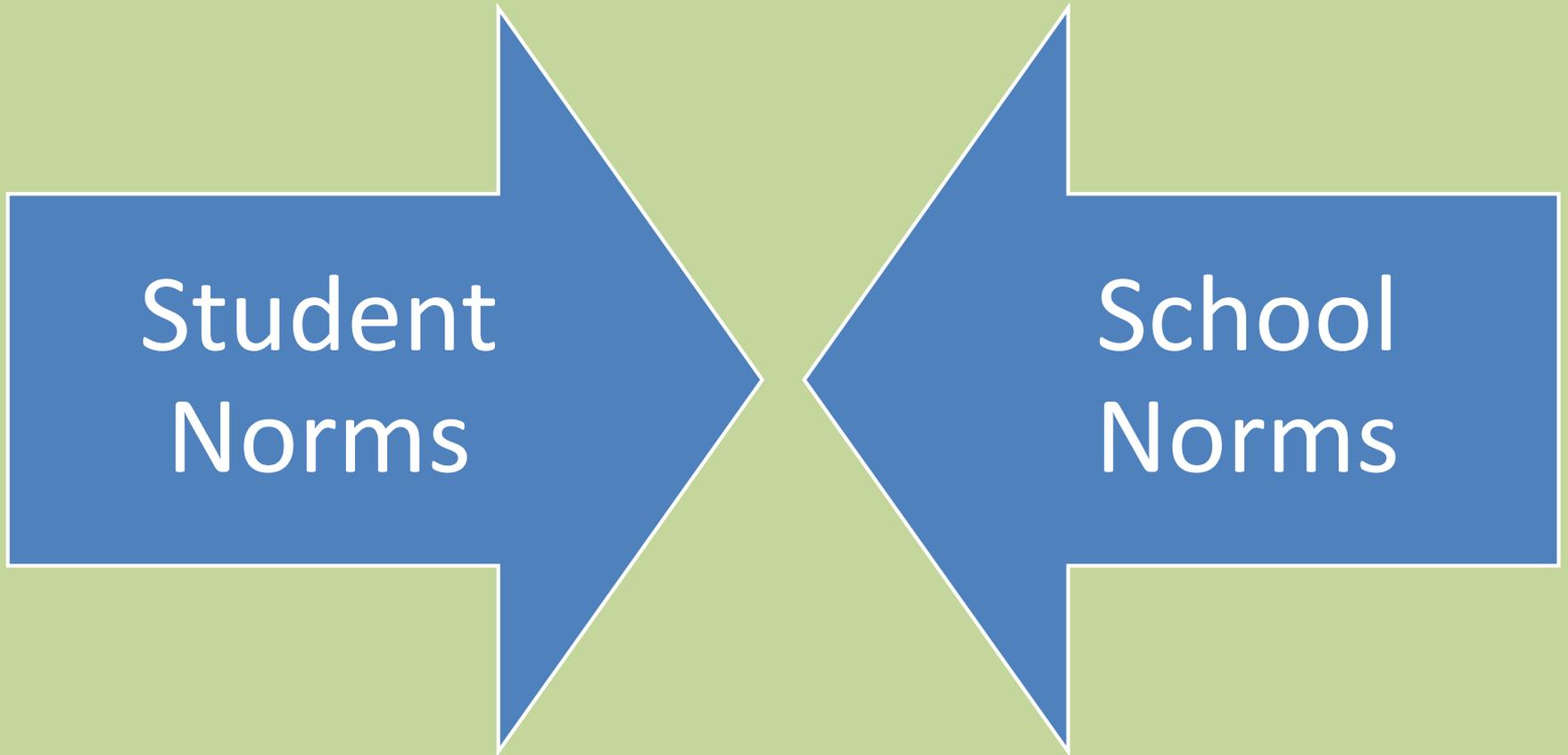
# Intrinsic Predetermination

“Intrinsic predetermination is the student’s perception of his or her probability of success in school. The messages that students receive from their environment—the home, community, and school—can either build their confidence or work to destroy it.”



—Muhammad, *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division* (2018), p. 23

# When Cultures Collide



# Assimilation or Education

## **Assimilation**

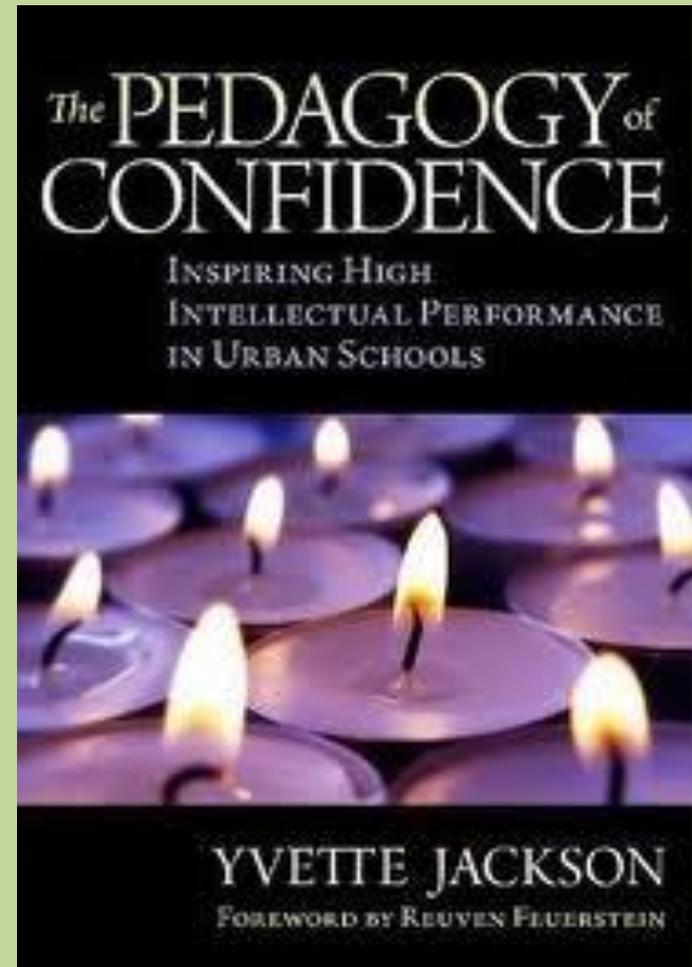
- Control
- Manipulation
- Standardization
- Docile

## **Education**

- Liberation
- Development
- Creativity
- Empowerment

# Pedagogy of Confidence

- Identify and activate student strengths.
- Elicit high intellectual performance.
- Provide enrichment.
- Integrate prerequisites.



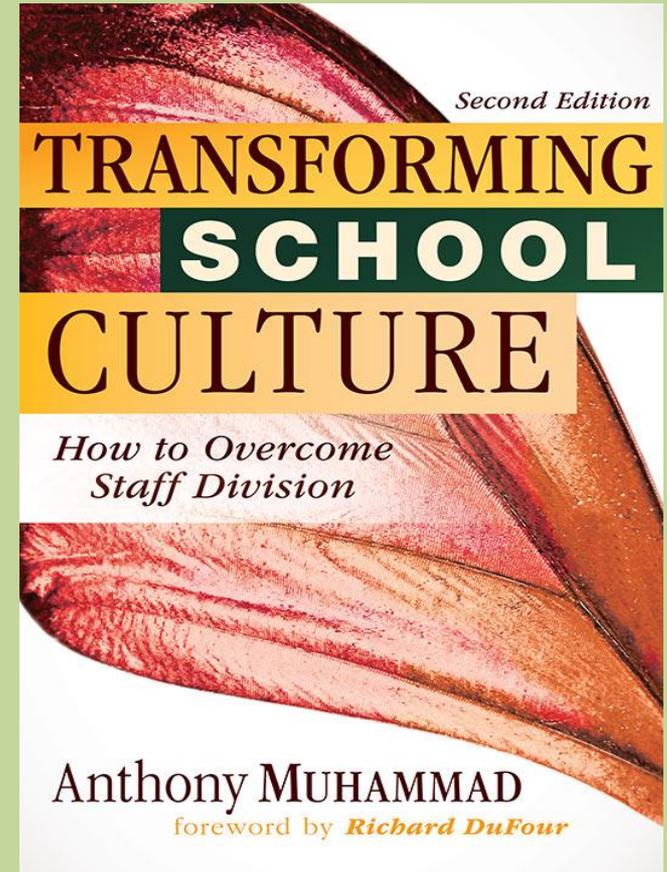
# The Maestro

Blending the best in students with the best in the institution to create beautiful music



# Institutional Predetermination

“I contend that we have institutional barriers in place that make the job of educating every student very difficult.”



—Muhammad, *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division* (2018), p. 25

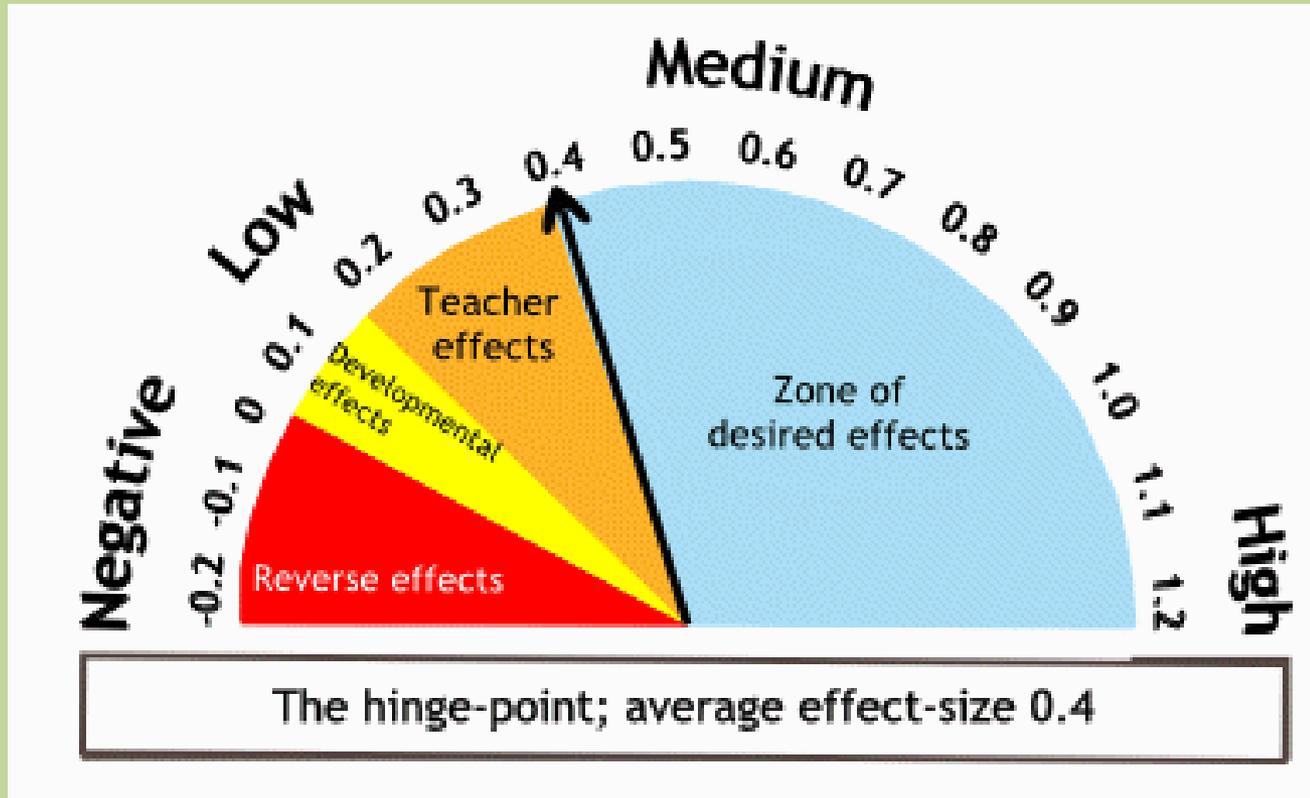
# Policy Elephants

- Student placement in advanced coursework
- Zoning policies around ethnicity and economic class
- Discipline/expulsion policies
- Graduation standards/policies

# Rosa Parks Moment



# Evidence Based Practices (Will)



-Hattie, Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement, 2009

*Teacher Estimates of  
Achievement*

1.29

*Collective Teacher  
Efficacy*

1.57

*Student Self-Reported  
Grades (Student  
Confidence/Efficacy)*

1.44

# My “Rosa Parks Moment”



It's Not About Us!  
It's About Them!

