Building a Culture of Efficacy

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> "As teachers in a school feel empowered to do great things, great things happen."

> Eells, 2011

Mastery Moment: Think of a situation in which you felt such confidence and optimism that you believed anything was possible. Why was that belief so strong? What were the conditions that created those powerful feelings?

THE WHAT: THE FOUR SOURCES OF EFFICACY

Efficacy is a word that is often misunderstood. It seems and feels like it should have something to do with effectiveness and efficiency. And it does, sort of. *Efficacy* is defined as the ability to produce a desired or intended effect. It is about the *belief* in the ability to effect change. Imagine a school where efficacy is pervasive, where teachers and students alike believe in their capacity to learn no matter what the challenge, a school where growth mindset prevails—a culture of efficacy.

Taken a step further, collective efficacy is more than collaboration, more than a team of teachers getting together to talk to each other every Wednesday afternoon. Collective efficacy is the result of collaborating *effectively* over time, through thick and thin, collaboration that results in the group's collective *belief* in their power to effect positive change. It is knowledge building through learning from one another. It is the optimism, confidence, and resiliency that evolve from successful learning experiences for both teachers and students.

Impact Teams are a vehicle to develop and nurture efficacy. An *Impact Team* is a network of educators who partner with students and each other

in learning. It is a team that is committed to understanding their impact on learning. The stronger the beliefs they hold about their collective capabilities, the more they achieve. Impact Teams empower learners to own and take charge of their learning. Ultimately, they build a culture of efficacy.

Understanding Self-Efficacy

To understand collective teacher efficacy, one must understand self-efficacy. As stated previously, self-efficacy reflects one's confidence in his or her ability to achieve a goal or outcome (Bandura, 1997). It is what we all strive for both personally and professionally. The human drive to be efficacious has resulted in a multi-billion-dollar industry around self-actualization, health and fitness, business, and all sorts of purported pathways to personal success.

Ultimately, however, self-efficacy is a belief in one's ability to succeed. Not surprisingly, self-efficacy has a significant relationship to success and is highly correlated to confidence and optimism.

Four Sources of Self-Efficacy

Efficacy sounds and feels like something we all want in spades and a quality we want to develop in all our students. So our guiding question in our deep dive into the research around efficacy was "What does it take to develop efficacy?"

There are four major sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977; Hoy, 2000)

- Mastery Experiences: Having successful experiences influences your perspective of your abilities. These experiences boost self-efficacy. This is the most robust source of efficacy.
- Vicarious Experiences: We define this as having *models of success*. Models of success are an integral source of self-efficacy. Observing someone else perform a task or handle a situation effectively can help you to perform the same task by imitation.
- Social and Verbal Persuasion: We loosely define this as *feedback*. Self-efficacy can be boosted when credible communication and descriptive feedback is given in an effort to guide and motivate learners to successfully complete a task.
- Positive Emotional State: We interpret this as *safety*. A learner must feel safe. The feeling of safety creates a positive emotional state and a willingness to take risks, and make and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. The feeling of safety can boost self-efficacy.

Student Self-Efficacy

In the much-researched area of efficacy and motivation, student self-efficacy takes center stage. In the context of schools, self-efficacy is a belief in one's capabilities to learn and achieve the intended learning intention. In the classroom setting, student self-efficacy can be seen as a strong "I can" attitude. In contrast, a student with a low sense of self-efficacy tends to believe "I can't" when given a learning task. Often the negative perception is specific to the academic content, such as, "I'm not a good writer" or "I'm not good at Math."

Students who have a strong sense of self-efficacy:

- Are intrinsically motivated and put forth a high degree of effort
- Challenge themselves with difficult tasks
- Are persistent—show grit
- Are resilient and see mistakes as learning opportunities
- Are confident about achieving personal goals

Students are not born with self-efficacy; rather it is acquired in the same way adults build self-efficacy, that is, through:

- Mastery moments
- Models of success
- Feedback
- Safety

The good news is that these four sources of self-efficacy are inherent in the formative assessment process and are an integral component of the Impact Team Model. Specific teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, student goal setting, revision, self- and peer assessment also strengthen student self-efficacy (Fencl & Scheel, 2005). In a student-centered classroom where self-regulation is taught, modeled, and expected, developing self-efficacy is built into the learning process.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy is defined as the teacher's confidence in his or her ability to promote student learning (Hoy, 2000). This was first discussed as a concept more than 35 years ago. Teachers' self-efficacy is specific to their perception about their own capabilities to foster students' learning and engagement. It is a belief about one's ability to promote positive change for students and has proven to have a positive influence not only on student achievement but also on motivation (Moolenaar, Sleegers & Daly, 2011) and positive attitudes toward school (Miskel, McDonald,

& Bloom, 1983). This confidence and optimism lead to perseverance and commitment to reach and often exceed learning goals.

A teacher's level of confidence about his or her ability to promote learning can depend on past experiences and on the school culture. In his review of the research, Jerald (2007) highlights some teacher behaviors that are found to be related to a teacher's sense of efficacy.

Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy:

- Tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization
- Are more open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students
- Are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly
- Are less critical of students when they make mistakes
- Are less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education

In an interview with Anita Woolfolk, a researcher in the field of teacher efficacy, Shaughnessy (2004) describes practical implications of the teacher efficacy research:

> *Teachers who set goals, who persist, who try another strategy when one approach is found wanting—in other words, teachers who have a high sense of efficacy and act on it—are more likely to have students who learn.* (pp. 156–157)

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Rooted in self-efficacy, *collective efficacy* is defined as a group's shared beliefs about their collective capability to promote successful student outcomes within their school (Goddard, Hoy, Hoy, 2000). Collective efficacy involves more than positive thinking. It is ultimately tied to collective action, the ability to make things happen. This ability is defined as *agency*.

Building a culture of efficacy requires system-wide focus on strengthening student and teacher self-efficacy. Eells (2011) states that collective teacher efficacy is the pervasive belief that directly affects the school's ability to increase achievement. At the heart of the Impact Team Model is the belief that the learners in the system can make a difference and impact learning for ALL.

THE WHY: RESEARCH AND REASONS

Strengthening efficacy at all levels of the school dramatically improves student learning. If teachers and students feel powerful they can surmount

obstacles and persist when challenged and expend the necessary effort to learn. We have highlighted the following four reasons:

Reason 1: Has the Greatest Influence on Student Learning

John Hattie (2014) identified *collective teacher efficacy* (CTE) as the single most powerful influence on student achievement. With an effect size* of 1.57, collective teacher efficacy can quadruple the rate of student learning (Eells, 2011). In fact, in a study by Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002), they found that collective teacher efficacy had a greater influence on student achievement than socioeconomic status.

*Effect size: .40 is about 1 year's growth in 1 year's time.

Reason 2: Creates and Sustains a Learning Culture

When emphasis is placed on intentionally planning for the four sources of efficacy, building knowledge together around effective practice is the result. Knowledge building and knowledge sharing thrive in a learning culture. Teachers and students not only learn at an accelerated rate, but they also learn how to learn, how to self-regulate, how to persevere, how to communicate, and how to problem solve.

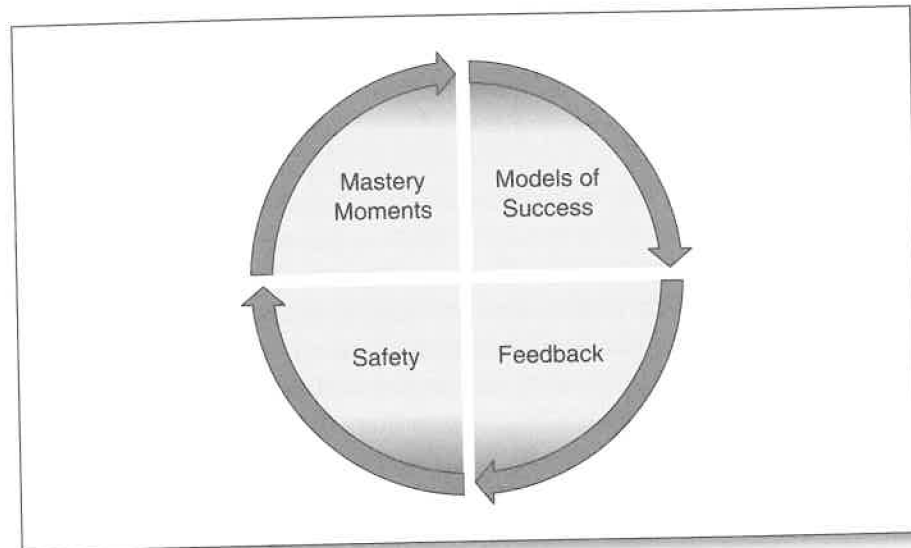### Reason 3: Focuses on System Strength

When the mission of the school is to ensure mastery experiences, it focuses the system on building off of people's strengths instead of identifying deficits. The studies on positive imagery suggest that employees who hold self-images of competence and success are more likely to achieve high levels of performance than those with poor self-esteem (Mohr & Watkins, 2002).

Reason 4: Creates a Healthy Climate

Learning is accelerated when people feel safe. Having a faculty that believes that it can accomplish great things is vital for the health of a school (Eells, 2011). Imagine coming to a school where making mistakes is understood as part of the learning process. Imagine coming to a school where students and teachers embrace the notion of taking risks and seek opportunities to learn more.

THE HOW: PLANNING FOR EFFICACY

You have the power to build a culture of efficacy! But you have to plan for it. Fundamental to developing self- and collective efficacy are the four sources of efficacy.

To build a culture of efficacy school-wide, leadership teams need to intentionally and thoughtfully develop a plan that provides for multiple and ongoing opportunities for teacher teams to experience the four sources of efficacy.

1. **Mastery Moments**: To build confidence, teams need to experience success. Teacher teams need direct experience that they interpret as successful. These successes increase confidence and build resiliency. Interestingly, the research makes it clear that easy success does not contribute to building a sense of collective efficacy. In fact, quick and easy success followed by failure will produce discouragement (Goddard et al., 2000). However, teams who take on challenging goals and overcome obstacles to realize success come away with a robust belief in their collective efficacy.

2. **Models of Success:** Learning from others' successes is another way to build efficacy. Experiences in which teams of teachers observe the successful practices of other teams and/or schools provide indirect experiences that translate into doable practice. Think of this source as modeling effective practice. Teams observe successful teams and then see themselves as capable of performing similarly.

3. **Feedback**: We know that feedback doubles the rate of learning, and that's not just for students. We learn through descriptive timely feedback. Teams who collectively focus on getting better, commit to doing the research, taking the risks, and sharing knowledge and skills, use feedback as a tool for learning from one another. But not all feedback is created equal and not all feedback is heard. A key ingredient to effective teams is diving deeply into productive feedback practices. Feedback moves the group forward in ways that are positive, appreciative, and productive. With forward movement, success is possible, and with success, comes the possibility of increasing collective efficacy.

4. **Safety**: Relational trust is key to building effective teams and an essential ingredient in building collective efficacy. Relational trust in teams translates into team members who genuinely listen to one another, who respect others' opinions even if they differ from their own, who willingly share knowledge, and who feel accepted, respected, and empowered by their teammates. To build trust, first teams need to take their "trust temperature." There are several trust surveys available online (e.g., Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy). With baseline data of the level of trust, teams then commit to collaborate on ways to build trust where it might be weak. Checking the trust temp every 3 to 4 months is good practice and ensures the continued commitment to a safe team environment.

Team Reflection: *List some ways your leadership team provides opportunities for teams to:*

- Experience mastery moments;
- Share successful models;
- Learn to effectively give and receive descriptive feedback; and
- Create a safe team environment for learning.

NUTSHELL

What we have identified in the preceding pages are the roots of efficacy at the student, teacher, and collective levels. And while student and teacher efficacy is correlated to improved achievement, collective teacher efficacy accelerates learning at an even greater rate. Quite simply, sharing knowledge and developing skills together reaps significant gains. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) suggest that to improve student achievement system-wide it is crucial to raise the collective efficacy beliefs of the staff. Believing in the combined intellect, shared commitment, and focused energy of the group moves a school to even greater learning and higher impact.

When teachers believe that they can get through to all students, even the most difficult ones who may be hard to reach, they have collective efficacy. The Impact Team Model is explicitly designed to build teacher, student, and collective efficacy. This pervasive belief directly affects the school's ability to increase achievement (Eells, 2011).

CHECK-IN

Where is your team on the collective teacher efficacy (CTE) continuum?

Collective Teacher Efficacy Continuum	
High CTE	**Low CTE**
Optimistic: Have a shared belief that all students can achieve at least 1 year's growth in 1 year's time (growth mindset).	**Pervasive doubt:** Feel powerless over circumstances beyond their control, expect undesirable results (deficit mindset).
Confidence: Believe they can effectively teach students so that every student makes a year's growth in a year's time.	**Uncertainty:** Doubt that they can teach or touch certain students.
Collaborative: Believe in the power of collective thought and action.	**Isolated:** Believe that they are alone in their specific responsibilities and challenges, doubt that the team/group can add value.
Learners all: See themselves as learners, value error, seek feedback, learn from one another.	**Know enough:** See themselves as experts and know enough to deliver what needs to be taught.
Perseverance: Staying power based on commitment to success.	**Apathy:** Feel powerless, put in minimum effort.

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High CTE   Low CTE

Activity

Planning for CTE must be purposeful. With your instructional leadership team, use this organizer to develop a plan for strengthening CTE.

Fold a piece of chart paper into fourths. Label each box accordingly. With a green marker list the ways you are purposefully planning for each one of the four sources of efficacy. With a blue marker, write down ideas you have in each box that would help your team be more purposeful in strengthening CTE at your school.

Mastery Moments	Model of Success
Example: Teachers video record examples of effective practice.	*Example: Teachers watch effective teaching videos and discuss what made the practice effective.*
Feedback	**Safety**
Example: Noting strengths, the principal gives positive feedback as she does evidence walks regarding practices specific to the school focus.	*Example: The staff takes a relational trust survey and discusses the results and action steps three times during the year.*