LEAD
Collectively

From **Belief**
to **Action**
to *Impact*

Peter M. DeWitt | Michael Nelson

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Introduction

MOVING FROM COLLECTING DATA TO USING EVIDENCE

Imagine you are a leader, sitting in your biweekly leadership team meeting with all nine members of your middle school team. As you sit in the meeting, you feel a sense of pride. Your team recently voted to change the name of the school's academic plan to RISE (Roadmap for Improvement and Student Excellence). You didn't choose RISE because it was yet another acronym in education that was needed; instead, you chose it because RISE represents how you want all teachers and leaders in the school to demonstrate the ability to do the actual work.

After several meetings focused on the new RISE plan, your team comes to the consensus that there are three areas of focus for your students: literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. These three areas of focus are directly tied to the district's strategic plan—not exactly groundbreaking, because through reading research, articles in *Education Week*, ASCD's *Educational Leadership*, and Learning Forward's *The Learning Professional*, your team understands that these three areas of focus are part of a worldwide issue. Some might call it a world health issue, impacting the success of our nation and the world as a whole.

At the beginning of the RISE plan meetings, you used a concept attainment strategy called the Frayer Model. You divided your team into groups of three, and they each had to define the word *literacy* using a variety of representations. They defined it, wrote about why it's important, and provided an example and non-example of literacy. This strategy helped each member of the team deepen their understanding, which will help them be more impactful.

In today's meeting, you move into discussion about what influences collective efficacy, which is shared understanding, joint work, and evidence of impact. It's also about how you want your parents, community, and businesses to talk about your school and the focused work you are doing on behalf of students.

To further this discussion, you break the team into smaller groups of three, each representing a different type of data from Victoria L. Bernhardt's work, which are demographics, perceptions, student learning, and school processes. Bernhardt (2018) says, "Looking across the four types of data allows schools to

see what they are doing to get the results they are getting now, what is working, what is not working, and how data elements relate to each other to impact results" (p. 16).

Your team has agreed that over the course of the next four meetings, each group of three will rotate which data set they analyze during the meeting so they can all build mastery across the four data types. Typically, you would be in one of the groups, and someone else from the team would facilitate the learning, but today is your turn. As a leader, you consciously hold the belief that the work of your school is not something only teachers should engage in; you are keenly aware of what you need to learn about the process as well.

Prior to the meeting, one of the teachers on the team emailed everyone a recent article showing that the average reading scores of fourth- and eighth-grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have declined in the last two years, and sadly, two years ago showed the same results. Another member of the team replied with a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) showing that the literacy rates in most developed countries have gone down for adults as well. You realize this has implications for your school, and in order to help students become proficient readers and learners, families must be engaged. It's not new information for you, but the world and the attention spans of the children and adults in it have shortened. After all, you remember when TED Talks were mind-blowing because speakers had to cover a topic in under 18 minutes, or you could read articles that were 2,500 words in length, but now if a video is more than 1 minute long people will struggle to watch, and most blogs are 750 words or less.

Speaking of a changing world, using two inspiring articles on data, you created a short podcast using NotebookLM by Google. The podcast, generated by artificial intelligence (AI), focuses on data pitfalls and the issue of making assumptions about data.

Most of the team listened to the podcast on their drive into school, and a few say they listened when they were on the treadmill. As your team looks at their data using a protocol to keep their small-group collaboration focused, you hear some of the following conversations:

DEMOGRAPHICS GROUP

"We know that students living in poverty are at risk, but we have to look past that. The 2024 OECD article Maisie sent us said, 'Adults with highly educated parents outscored those with low-educated parents by 50 points in literacy,' but that doesn't mean we can't change that dynamic."

One of the reasons why focusing on demographic data is so important is that it can highlight inequities within our system. Whether those inequities are evidenced by historically underserved students being missing from our Advanced Placement courses, or whether they operate within the assumptions people make when they say their students are high poverty, demographic data give us the opportunity to begin addressing issues of underserved populations.

After a conversation about equity, the group's focus turns to teacher preparation. "More than 50 percent of our teachers did not have a lot of exposure to literacy instruction in their preservice programs," one member points out, "and many of our veteran teachers have not had literacy training in the last three years."

PERCEPTIONS GROUP

Grant, one of the instructional coaches, talks about empathy interview answers that he and the team completed with random students from each grade level. They found that many students said their teachers went too fast when it came to teaching literacy skills. When the students were asked about success criteria, most of the students said teachers didn't refer to it much. This aligned with some of their other perception data because, Grant says, "On the recent survey teachers filled out, 40 percent of them said they did not feel confident teaching reading. And the family survey data showed that parents did not necessarily feel comfortable asking teachers for help when it comes to supporting their children's literacy at home."

Jylese, another teacher in the group, suggests a parent who might be able to talk with teachers about how to engage parents, and the group seems interested in hearing more.

STUDENT LEARNING GROUP

Mara is looking at the overall results from the recent i-Ready progress monitoring tool, which shows that while many students are making progress, a couple of subgroups are not showing growth. She used AI to create a table that shows a gap analysis to help the team understand what has been missing from their conversation. They explore whether

- professional learning communities are leading to instructional improvement,
- materials are being used effectively, and
- families are participating.

SCHOOL PROCESSES GROUP

Carter, the school psychologist on the team, can be heard saying, "We have to explore how our new curriculum based on the Science of Reading is impacting student literacy. Is the curriculum helping meet the needs of our students? Is it that our teachers don't have the knowledge and skills yet to implement it with fidelity?" You smile, having heard the same conversation being explored by Mara's group.

The small collaborative teams have about five more minutes before they come back to the whole group, and Tevyn, your other instructional coach, will lead the whole group through the ORID protocol, which focuses on *Objective*—What do we know? (Facts, Data, Observations), *Reflective*—How do we feel? (Emotions, Reactions, Connections), *Interpretive*—What does it mean? (Patterns, Significance, Analysis), and *Decisional*—What will we do? (Next Steps, Actions, Commitments).

It is the content from next steps within the Decisional phase that helps you build your work and conversations between meetings and supports you in building your next meeting agenda. It also helps you bring together conversations from all of the groups.

Putting the team into smaller groups to explore the data that they collect throughout the year has been ongoing over the last few meetings. The goal for the team is to have as much information as possible from multiple measures of data so they can specifically identify the improvement they are trying to make when it comes to student learning.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Perhaps as you read this introduction you feel that your team is in the exact same place as the team represented here, or maybe you feel that your team is so far away from possessing the knowledge and skills necessary to even have a conversation about equity, literacy, or grading that you want to close the book and find another. Either way, there are tools, strategies, and resources in this book to support you, so please keep reading.

This book is divided into four parts that focus on three important influencers of collective leader efficacy.

- **Part I** sets the stage and presents practical research on collective leader efficacy.
- **Part II** focuses on shared understanding.
- **Part III** focuses on joint work.
- **Part IV** focuses on evidence of impact.

Think of this book as a combination playbook and workbook, and it will help your team engage in the same kinds of conversations as the team in our introduction.

At the beginning of each part, you will find the Frayer Model (Frayer et al., 1969), which we used in the opening story. The Frayer Model is an impactful strategy for many reasons, especially when considering examples and nonexamples. Durkin and Rittle-Johnson (2012) found that "comparing incorrect examples to correct examples led to better performance than comparing correct examples." Using both examples and nonexamples led students to concept mastery more than just the use of examples alone. The Frayer Model and other strategies we share throughout this book will help lead your team to mastery as well.

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE LEADER EFFICACY?

Collective leader efficacy is a school or district leadership team's belief in developing a shared understanding, engaging in joint work, and evaluating the impact they have on the learning of adults and students in a school.

When we think of shared understanding, joint work, and evidence of impact, they act as a three-legged stool. If one leg is missing, the stool tips over. If one leg is longer or shorter than the others, it becomes wobbly. Our purpose in this book is to help you build a three-legged stool that doesn't wobble but instead stands strong, and we will use a variety of methods to help get you there.

For the past 50 years, research has focused on how collective efficacy is defined by the belief team members have in each other. Collective leader efficacy, in particular, happens when a leadership team comes together, focuses on a learning goal among their group, and does the work together to learn and achieve that goal, which will ultimately have a positive impact on students. For those leaders who lack experience walking into classrooms or knowing what to talk about in formal observations, collective leader efficacy is about helping them focus on making those experiences more meaningful. This effort is less about compliance and more about growth and learning.

We would like you to read the book through two lenses. The first lens is growth for your own personal development as a leader, and the second is growth in your ability to facilitate learning and growth among those you lead.

OUR EXPERIENCE

Over the last few decades, we have engaged in research and practice as practitioners both in the classroom and at the school level, and Michael was also a

school superintendent for 14 years. Those experiences laid a great foundation for us to engage in the work of developing collective leader efficacy, which is what happens when your team engages in conversations like the one we described.

Over the time that we have researched the content for this book—engaged in our hybrid approach to professional learning with groups in the Arkansas Leadership Academy, District School Board Ontario North East, New Brunswick Teachers' Association, Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership in Melbourne, Queensland Department of Education in Brisbane, Next Level Leaders in Washington state, and our Global Instructional Leadership Network, or coaching Ka'ū-Kea'au-Pāhoa school leaders on the Big Island of Hawaii—we have learned a lot about how to develop a shared understanding, how to engage in joint work, and what it means to evaluate our own impact.

Through this book, we will provide stories, research, reflective points, protocols, and rubrics to help guide your team, regardless of whether they are at the building or district level, to strengthen the work that influences collective efficacy and move them from collecting data to using it as evidence to analyze and interpret what it says.

We are grateful you are here, so please stick with us, because our areas of growth are real, and education is a world health issue we all need to work on and solve together.

—Michael and Peter

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

SURVEY SAYS!

Let's begin with a reflective survey we would like you to take before reading this book. Have your team take the survey too. You will find this survey at the end of the book as well. Consider it a pre- and postreflection assessment.
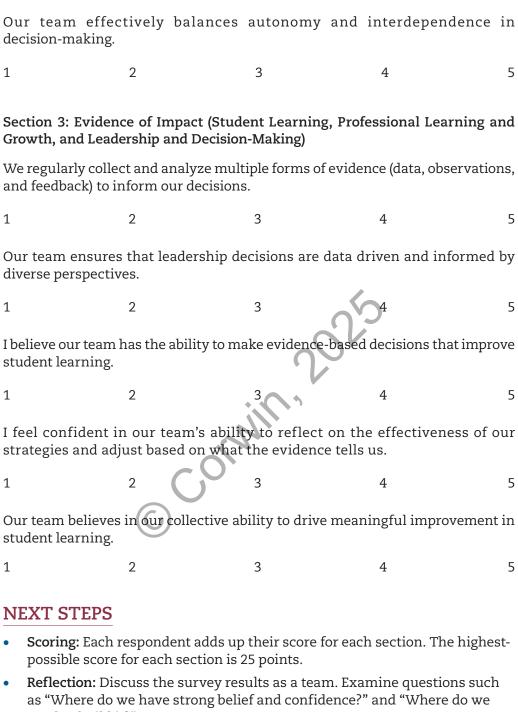
After you and your team complete the survey, take time to review your combined answers. A word of caution: This is for reflection and conversation, and not meant to create judgment or be a test of how well your team collaborates.

Instructions: For each statement, rate your level of agreement on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Section 1: Shared Understanding (Trust, Clarity, and Coherence)

Our team has a clear, shared understanding of our school's vision and priorities.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We believe that having a shared understanding improves our ability to lead effectively.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We use common language and aligned expectations when discussing instructional practices.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

I feel confident that I understand my role in achieving our shared goals.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We regularly check for understanding and adjust communication to strengthen alignment.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Section 2: Joint Work (Culture, Network, and Systems)

Collaboration within our team is purposeful, with clear roles and shared responsibility.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

We engage in collective problem-solving rather than working in silos.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

I believe my contributions to our joint work are valued and impactful.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

I feel confident that our team can implement and sustain shared initiatives effectively.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Our team effectively balances autonomy and interdependence in decision-making.

1   2   3   4   5

Section 3: Evidence of Impact (Student Learning, Professional Learning and Growth, and Leadership and Decision-Making)

We regularly collect and analyze multiple forms of evidence (data, observations, and feedback) to inform our decisions.

1   2   3   4   5

Our team ensures that leadership decisions are data driven and informed by diverse perspectives.

1   2   3   4   5

I believe our team has the ability to make evidence-based decisions that improve student learning.

1   2   3   4   5

I feel confident in our team's ability to reflect on the effectiveness of our strategies and adjust based on what the evidence tells us.

1   2   3   4   5

Our team believes in our collective ability to drive meaningful improvement in student learning.

1   2   3   4   5

NEXT STEPS

- **Scoring:** Each respondent adds up their score for each section. The highest-possible score for each section is 25 points.
- **Reflection:** Discuss the survey results as a team. Examine questions such as "Where do we have strong belief and confidence?" and "Where do we need to build it?"
- **Action Planning:** Identify areas in each section to strengthen shared belief, trust, and confidence in leadership work.