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# Leading for Lasting Impact: **CREATING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING IN SCHOOLS**

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2025



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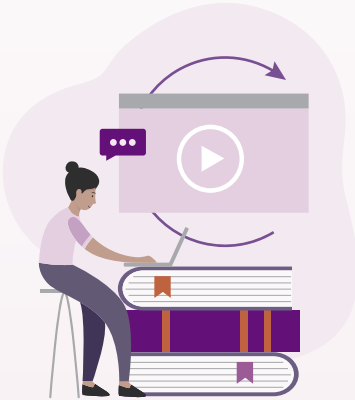
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# Introduction:

## Building the Foundation of a Learning Culture



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Continuous learning starts with shared purpose and intentional leadership. In schools where educators grow every day, a unified vision guides instruction and drives decision-making. Instructional leaders model reflection and support risk-taking. They create space for strategies that lead to real improvement.

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In these schools, professional learning becomes part of how people work. It's not an isolated event. It lives in classrooms. You hear about it in team conversations and see it in the ways teachers adapt to meet student needs. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) encourage honest dialogue. Educators learn from one another and refine their craft in real time.

This mindset extends beyond staff. Families, students, and educators build trust through shared goals. Everyone moves forward together.

What stands out in a school like this? A vision that drives direction, leaders who model what's possible, and a community where learning feels safe, even when the work is hard.

Progress comes from a cycle of reflection and action where educators embrace change, grow together, and stay responsive to students' needs.

**"When you invest in continuous development, you embed learning into every part of school life. It shapes instruction. It supports decision-making and becomes part of how progress is measured."**





This eBook explores how to build that kind of culture, beginning with the foundation: Shared Vision and Values. In this first focus area, you'll explore how to unite your school community around a common purpose and lead in ways that make learning continuous for everyone.



Trust and collaboration are at the heart of any strong learning culture. In this blog, explore how collaborative video coaching can help nurture reflective practice, build stronger relationships, and create the conditions where feedback drives growth.

Read: [Feedback that Fuels](#)



## Focus Area 1:

# Shared Vision and Values— Align Everyone Toward Common Goals

### OVERVIEW

As a school leader, your vision sets the purpose and guides how your school functions and what it stands for. It chaperones how people interact and how students learn. New Leaders defines a school's vision as "its goal for the future—the values the school community collectively holds, what success looks like, and how everyone works together to make that growth possible." (New Leaders, 2022)



When you clearly articulate your school's vision and ensure others share it, you create alignment. For example, if you lead a school committed to continuous learning, your vision might sound like this:

**Our school cultivates a culture of continuous learning where the entire community grows together through meaningful collaboration and reflection, building a foundation for lifelong growth.**

This isn't just a message for your website or hallway bulletin board. A clear vision shapes instruction, guides collaboration, and gives your school community a shared purpose and drive to keep improving.

But clarity alone isn't enough. You need core values to translate your vision into daily practice. As Robyn R. Jackson, CEO of Mindsteps Inc.<sup>®</sup>, explains, "A school's core values are terms of practice that clearly define how everyone will work together to achieve the school's vision." These values should influence everything from classroom expectations to how your staff interacts in team meetings. When you lead with values that everyone understands, your vision becomes actionable and real.



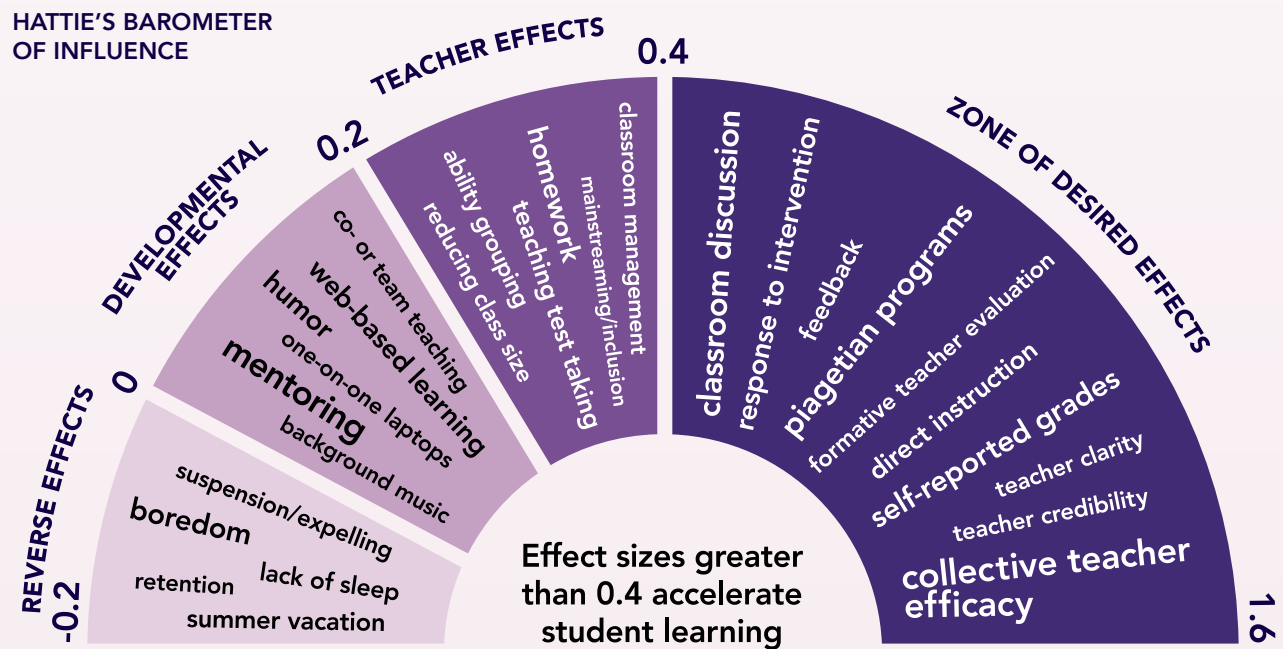
You can't build a meaningful vision alone. When educators and stakeholders help shape it, they feel ownership and that investment drives alignment and clarity. A strong vision turns big goals into actionable steps, like boosting student engagement or strengthening instruction through ongoing professional learning. Ultimately, it becomes the foundation for a thriving school culture.

## SIGNIFICANCE

You make hundreds of decisions each week and without a shared vision and values, those decisions can feel disconnected. One team leans into inquiry; another focuses on test prep. Students and staff get mixed messages. But when you ground your work in a clear and compelling vision, you bring consistency to how your school operates. Everyone moves with shared intent. Core values give that vision life, guiding how people work together to support student learning.

That alignment strengthens two of the most powerful drivers of student achievement: collective teacher efficacy (CTE) and teacher clarity.

**Collective teacher efficacy refers to the belief among staff that they can improve student outcomes together. John Hattie's research ranks CTE as the top school-based factor affecting achievement, with an effect size of 1.57—more than double the impact of feedback (0.72), and nearly four times the effect of a typical year of learning (0.4). (Hattie, 2012)**



Visible Learning Barometer of Influences. (c) 2019 Corwin and Osiris



When you lead with vision, you help teachers see themselves as part of something bigger. They stop working in isolation and start working with collective purpose. They gain confidence in their shared ability to support students, and that confidence fuels stronger outcomes.

Teacher clarity builds on that foundation. With an effect size of 0.85, it significantly outpaces most instructional strategies. Clarity means students know what they're learning and why it matters. They even know how to monitor their own progress. It shows up in how teachers organize lessons and model thinking. You can see it when they align their feedback to specific goals.

Clarity starts with leadership. When you define an instructional vision and align professional learning to that vision, you create consistency in how teachers lead and students learn. This shared purpose shapes a culture of collective impact, where every decision connects back to what matters most.



## ACTION STEPS



→ **Embed your vision into daily routines**

Your leadership brings the vision to life. Whether you're crafting a new vision or refreshing one that already exists, your role is to ensure it moves from words on paper to action in practice.

**Start by engaging your staff, students, and families. Ask questions. Listen deeply. When you include others in the process, you build ownership and increase the likelihood that people will align their work to shared values.**

Then, assess your current reality. What's working? Where are you falling short? Use your vision to guide honest reflection and set a clear path forward. A strong vision doesn't maintain the status quo, it pushes your school toward better outcomes.

Finally, embed your vision into daily routines. Make sure it shows up in the way you lead meetings, structure professional learning, and communicate decisions. Model it in collaborative practices and coaching conversations. When the vision is visible and actionable, your staff will carry it forward, and your students will feel its impact.

## Put your vision into action with these practical leadership moves.



### For District Leaders:

- Provide visioning templates and facilitation guides for school teams.
- Align district initiatives and PD to school-level values and instructional goals.
- Share cross-school exemplars to promote system-wide coherence.



### For School Leaders:

- Engage staff, students, and families in shaping or refining the vision.
- Reinforce values consistently in meetings, communication, and decision-making.
- Spotlight staff who model shared commitments in practice.



### For Instructional Coaches:

- Use vision-aligned goals to frame coaching conversations.
- Help teachers reflect on how their instruction supports the school's values.
- Embed core values into team norms and collaboration routines.

A shared vision means more when your habits support it. This blog post explores how leaders can bridge the gap between aspiration and action by aligning daily practices with long-term goals. Whether you're building trust, improving communication, or strengthening collaboration, discover practical steps to ground your leadership in intentional habits that move your school forward.

Read: [Aligning Leadership Habits with Leadership Goals](#)



## Focus Area 2:

# Trust, Belonging, and Growth Mindset—Create a Safe Environment for Continuous Learning

### OVERVIEW

A culture of continuous learning starts with trust. When students and teachers feel safe and valued, they're more willing to reflect, take risks, and support each other's growth.

Research from the Research Alliance for New York City Schools highlights four dimensions of school climate: leadership and professional development, high academic expectations, teacher collaboration, and school safety and order. Of these, school safety and order have the strongest connection to academic improvement. When students feel safe, they're more likely to participate. When teachers feel safe, they are more likely to reflect deeply and engage in honest conversations about practice.

Trust lies at the heart of this kind of culture. As Rebecca Midles writes for *Getting Smart*, leaders build trust when they meet people where they are and show vulnerability. (n.d.) That means being fully present. As a leader, you do this by listening with intention and seeking out diverse perspectives. When you model these habits, you signal that trust is not just a concept, it's a priority.



Dr. Sarah Whedon emphasizes that when people feel a sense of belonging, engagement and achievement increase. (n.d.) You can strengthen belonging by co-developing decision-making principles that include all voices. Shared leadership creates shared responsibility and builds the kind of relational trust that supports continuous improvement.



Mindset also plays a critical role. Carol Dweck's research shows that when students and educators believe growth is possible, they develop resilience and a stronger commitment to learning (Dweck, 2015). In a school grounded in continuous learning, progress matters more than perfection. Students view mistakes with curiosity, teachers treat feedback as growth, and leaders model learning by evolving their own practice. Leading with trust and belonging creates the conditions where learning thrives and sustains a culture that continually moves forward.

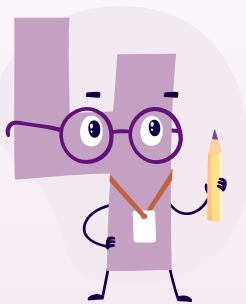
## SIGNIFICANCE

To create a learning environment where people thrive, you need two conditions: psychological safety and transformational leadership. These concepts are rooted in research, and they work hand in hand. Psychological safety helps students and teachers take risks without fear. Transformational leadership provides the vision and encouragement needed to sustain learning through change.

According to Education Support, psychological safety "allows people to be themselves and perform at their best without risk to their mental well-being (n.d.)." When teachers feel supported, they bring curiosity and creativity to their instruction. They try new methods and reflect on what's working. That mindset benefits both students and the broader school culture.

Transformational leadership creates space for that risk-taking. Originally introduced by James MacGregor Burns and expanded by Bernard Bass, this leadership style centers on trust and growth and includes shared purpose. Research shows that transformational leadership increases teacher confidence. It deepens collaboration, and it leads to stronger student outcomes (Windlinger et al., 2020; Kiliç et al., 2022; McCarley et al., 2016). Leaders who embrace this model guide their teams toward improvement through vision and shared ownership.

**Bernard Bass outlined four core components of transformational leadership, often called the "Four I's." While you don't need to memorize the framework, the ideas offer a helpful lens:**



- Intellectual stimulation encourages exploration and adaptation in instructional practice.
- Individualized consideration prioritizes support and feedback that helps teachers feel valued.
- Inspirational motivation creates clarity around what the school stands for and why the work matters.
- Idealized influence means you model growth, not just talk about it.



In schools led this way, teachers feel empowered to innovate, collaborate, and take ownership of learning. Transformational leadership sets the tone for growth through consistent actions, especially during challenges. This makes professional learning and continuous improvement a natural part of the school's culture.

The question becomes: What kind of environment are you creating? Will your teachers and students feel safe enough to take risks and challenge themselves to keep growing?

## ACTION STEPS

If you want continuous learning to take root, you need to build trust. And that trust isn't automatic. It grows when your actions reflect transparency and humility and when you show appreciation.

**Start by creating communication channels that people can rely on. When staff and students know their voices matter, they're more likely to contribute honestly and collaborate across lines of difference. This kind of transparency builds confidence in your leadership.**

Next, model what it looks like to learn out loud. Reflect publicly. Ask for feedback. Acknowledge challenges without losing focus. When you show your own commitment to growth, you give others permission to do the same.

Finally, take time to recognize growth when you see it. Whether it's a small win in a classroom or a team effort that moved the needle, your recognition reinforces belonging and reminds people that their work matters.



## Here's how you can bring this to life in your role.

### For District Leaders:

- Create space for schools to discuss and reflect on culture and trust.
- Highlight transformational leadership practices in district-wide communication.
- Fund ongoing learning opportunities focused on adult development and collaboration.

### For School Leaders:

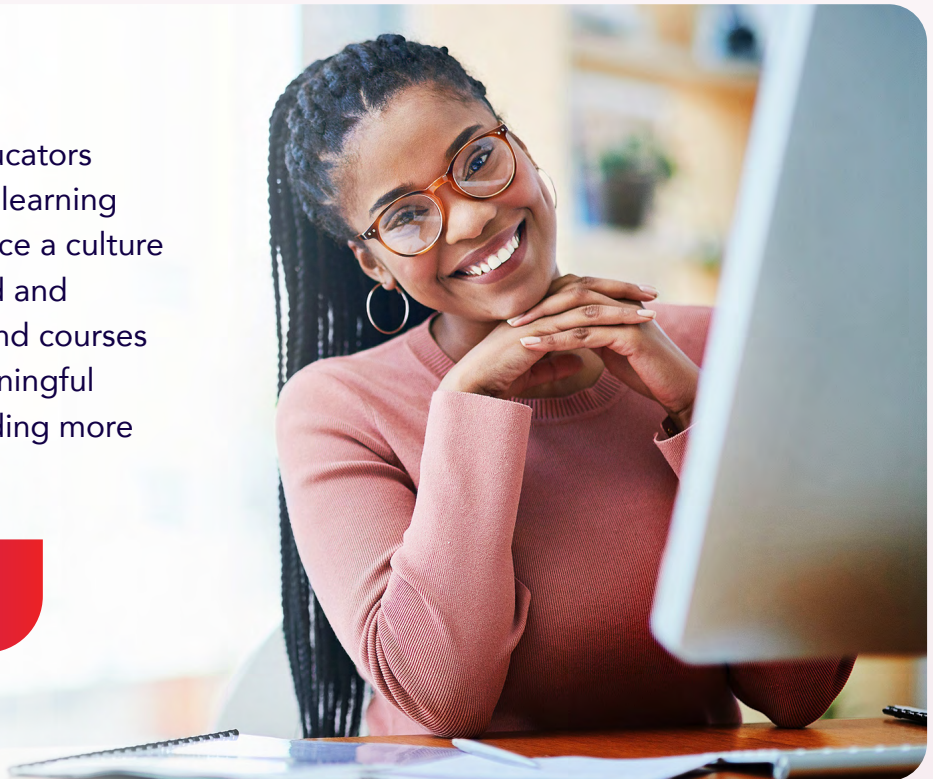
- Model reflective practice and vulnerability in your communication.
- Establish shared principles for feedback and collaboration that support risk-taking.
- Create regular opportunities for staff to share ideas and test new approaches, and encourage them to reflect together.

### For Instructional Coaches:

- Use coaching to surface mindset shifts and celebrate small wins.
- Normalize reflection as part of team learning.
- Offer feedback that's rooted in trust and centered on growth.

When you equip your educators with flexible, high-quality learning opportunities, you reinforce a culture where growth is expected and supported. Our on-demand courses make it easy to offer meaningful development without adding more to your plate.

See How Our Courses  
Could Fit Your PD Plan



## Focus Area 3:

# Instructional Leadership— Guide Instruction and Model Effective Practices

### OVERVIEW

A culture of continuous learning takes more than inspiration, it requires strong instructional leadership. By centering on instruction, you create the conditions for purposeful collaboration, educator growth, and better outcomes for every student.

Instructional leaders shepherd more than operations. They set expectations for adult learning to support high-quality teaching. They ensure professional growth stays grounded in evidence. As the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) noted, instructional leaders promote shared responsibility for student success by focusing on improvement and building connections across the school community.



You don't need a formal coaching session to lead instruction. You can do it during a classroom walk-through or in a planning meeting. Imagine walking into a literacy lesson, observing student engagement, and then debriefing with the teacher in real time. You pose questions that support reflection:

- What strategies engaged your students?
- How did your questioning deepen comprehension?
- What small adjustment might make participation more inclusive?





Then, you briefly model a think-aloud strategy on the spot. Your curiosity and guidance turn the moment into professional learning.

Now imagine adding video to the process. The teacher reviews and annotates their own lesson reflecting on strengths and growth areas. You, then as the instructional leader, review their self-reflection and add your own time-stamped, annotated feedback to their instructional video. You meet virtually or in person, and together, you pause the video to unpack key moments, making feedback visible, not just verbal. Sounds impactful? It is!

Research from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) supports this approach. In a study of five-cycle video-based coaching models, teachers, especially newer ones, improved student achievement and received more actionable feedback (Garrett et al., 2022). The study also showed that adding more cycles beyond five didn't lead to greater impact, suggesting that focused, timely coaching creates the most value.

Blending video reflection with coaching transforms observation into action. It strengthens teaching, builds lasting habits, and offers tangible next steps through real classroom examples turning leadership into daily growth.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Instructional leadership has the greatest influence on student learning. Among the many approaches leaders can take, this one consistently leads to better outcomes. Viviane Robinson's research in New Zealand found that instructional leadership had the strongest effect on achievement across a range of studies (Robinson, 2011). And that impact extends across settings and systems. When you lead instruction with clarity and consistency, student performance improves.

Peter DeWitt (2021) built on this idea by analyzing five decades of research. He highlighted specific practices leaders should use to focus their efforts.

- Using learning walks to drive conversation
- Engaging student voice to reduce disengagement
- Building confidence in instructional strategies by responding to the realities of in person and virtual learning

DeWitt emphasizes that leaders who prioritize teaching, without overwhelming staff with initiatives, create the most sustainable impact.



Instructional leadership means staying focused on learning. When you define strong instruction and give your team consistent ways to reflect, even on their own classroom moments, you build lasting momentum. Teachers refine together, students stay at the center, and growth becomes part of daily practice.

## ACTION STEPS

Effective instructional leadership starts with presence. By spending time in classrooms and engaging teachers in reflective conversations, you move from observing practice to shaping it. When teachers see their own instruction and reflect with your guidance, they gain clarity, feel empowered, and take greater ownership of their growth.

Support collaboration by creating time and space for teachers to learn from one another and connect their reflection to real instructional goals. Model how to use data purposefully, not just for reporting, but to spark meaningful shifts in practice so your team can turn insights into action and strengthen instruction together.



## Put these strategies into action through your daily leadership.

### For District Leaders:

- Provide tools and time for leaders to conduct walk-throughs and structured reflection.
- Align coaching frameworks to instructional priorities and student needs.
- Highlight schools that model instructional leadership in action.

### For School Leaders:

- Use walk-throughs to gather evidence and guide coaching conversations.
- Co-teach or model lessons to demonstrate key strategies.
- Offer regular, targeted feedback and support aligned to school goals.

### For Instructional Coaches:

- Use data and observation to guide personalized teacher development.
- Embed video reflection and peer observation into ongoing coaching cycles.
- Connect daily instructional support to schoolwide instructional focus.



When you give your teachers access to the tools, feedback, and learning they need to grow, great things happen for students. The Empower Platform helps school and district leaders provide that support consistently and effectively, without creating more work for your team.

See How Empower Can Support  
Your Vision for Teacher Growth



## Focus Area 4:

# A Focus on Growth— Drive Improvement Through Reflection and Action

### OVERVIEW

In schools where learning is continuous, iteration is normalized, and it builds momentum. Reflection helps identify where learners are and where they're headed, guiding purposeful action. But to move from insight to impact, reflection must lead to real-time adjustments. That means using evidence of learning to drive instruction and nurturing a feedback-rich environment.

**There are three impactful practices that lead to instructional improvement and better alignment to student needs. They are: peer observations, data discussions, and responsive feedback.**

The most effective coaching strategies build on this mindset. Research confirms that practices like video reflection and peer discussion help teachers refine their instruction and improve student learning over time. Analyzing data in professional learning communities guides teachers to connect data to instruction. Sharing exemplars alongside timely, specific feedback helps teachers grow and closes the feedback loop, strengthening instruction.



### SIGNIFICANCE

Sustaining a culture of continuous learning takes more than good intentions. It requires purposeful action informed by evidence. Growth becomes embedded when teachers and students use data to drive decisions and feedback to shape next steps. Research supports this approach: John Hattie (2009) found feedback has an effect size of 0.7, nearly double the expected impact of a typical year's growth. Similarly, Black & Wiliam (1998) showed that formative assessment strengthens both instructional precision and student learning.



Data makes learning visible. It clarifies what's working and what needs to change. As Panorama Education notes, data-informed decision-making uses analyzed information to allocate resources and provide student supports that lead to measurable progress. When used well, data becomes more than numbers. It becomes insight.

At every level, data guides action. Leaders can use walk-throughs and instructional trend data to spot patterns and strengthen coherence, responding to gaps with targeted professional learning. In classrooms, teachers rely on student work and formative assessments to shape instruction. Instructional coaches help translate that data into strategy, offering timely refinements that improve practice and outcomes. These efforts, small and steady, drive meaningful gains.

Feedback fuels this growth when it's specific, timely, and embedded in daily work. Whether shared through a quick student exchange or a reflective coaching session, clarity makes all the difference. When feedback loops are built into routines, continuous improvement becomes part of your school's culture. It becomes something you live every day.

## ACTION STEPS

To lead a school focused on growth, you need to build routines that connect insight to action. When data and feedback are part of daily decision-making, students make progress. When reflection drives progress, learning accelerates.

Start by embedding feedback into everyday instruction. Create structures for self-assessment, peer observation, and data reflection. When teachers and students see feedback as part of the process (not as a final step), they stay engaged in improvement.

Align professional learning to actual growth goals. Use observation data and student work to shape development opportunities. When professional learning addresses the challenges teachers face right now, it feels relevant. It leads to change.



Make growth visible. Highlight progress through routines and artifacts, or in moments that reinforce the value of reflection. When teachers and students can see their own learning over time, motivation increases.



## Turn these insights into meaningful action in your school.

### For District Leaders:

- Set expectations that growth goals are evidence-based and ongoing.
- Provide structures for tracking schoolwide and systemwide progress.
- Offer professional learning aligned to observed needs and real classroom data.

### For School Leaders:

- Guide staff in setting and revisiting instructional growth goals.
- Use formative data to adjust professional learning and instructional planning.
- Celebrate progress through visuals and staff highlights through reflection routines.

### For Instructional Coaches:

- Support teachers in tracking progress toward goals using self-assessment and feedback tools.
- Use classroom data to help teachers refine instructional strategies.
- Facilitate reflection on student work to drive planning.

Growth starts with self-awareness, and small shifts lead to lasting impact. This free eBook offers practical strategies to help educators reflect with purpose and use video to strengthen their practice. Explore tips on building strong coaching relationships, incorporating daily reflection, and supporting professional growth.

Download: [Simple Ways to Use Video and Self-Reflection to Grow Professionally](#)



## Focus Area 5:

# Ongoing Collaboration— Strengthen Collective Problem-Solving & Innovation

### OVERVIEW

As educational challenges evolve, you need more than flexibility. You need shared expertise and structures that support real collaboration. A culture of continuous learning depends on teams that problem-solve together and adapt quickly to changing needs.

Take artificial intelligence (AI), for example. In a responsive learning culture, teams proactively explore new tools and guide students in using them responsibly. Whether through student leadership or new lesson structures, collaboration ensures learning stays relevant and aligned to real-time needs.

To lead well in environments like this, educators and leaders need adaptive expertise. This is the ability to shift strategies based on new information. It is different from routine expertise, which prioritizes efficiency and repetition. Adaptive expertise supports innovation. It encourages you and your team to reflect and problem-solve for collective improvement (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986).



Collaboration deepens when educators share insights across classrooms and schools. Grounding this work in research-based frameworks like situated learning and distributed leadership ensures it's relevant, sustainable, and rooted in daily practice.



## SIGNIFICANCE

If you want collaboration and innovation to be more than buzzwords, you need to integrate them into everyday routines. Research offers two powerful frameworks to guide this work: situated learning theory and distributed leadership.

Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasizes that professional growth is most effective when grounded in real, collaborative problem-solving. Instead of isolated workshops, teachers learn best by co-planning, observing, and refining lessons based on actual student needs. This kind of relevant, in-the-moment learning is built to last.

Distributed leadership (Spillane, 2010) shifts improvement efforts from a top-down model to one that taps into the strengths of your full team. When teachers lead key work, like coplanning curriculum or analyzing student writing, they build ownership and help create more consistent, connected instruction across classrooms.



To make these theories practical, consider what happens when you:

- Turn faculty meetings into working sessions where teachers review student work and reflect on instruction.
- Guide peer coaching cycles that include video review and structured dialogue.
- Use PLCs as spaces to test and refine strategies based on what's actually happening in classrooms.
- Encourage teacher-led innovation teams that take on instructional planning or assessment design, or even experimentation.
- Anchor instructional decisions in student learning data, not assumptions.

These aren't isolated strategies. They create a rhythm of shared responsibility and continuous refinement. And when you embed that rhythm into daily routines, professional growth becomes part of the culture.

You can lead a school where innovation is collaborative and reflection is routine. When you prioritize structures that make this possible, student outcomes improve and educators grow stronger with every challenge they tackle together.



## ACTION STEPS

If you want collaboration to drive real instructional change, it needs to be consistent and intentional. It must also be built into how your school operates.

**Start by creating cross-disciplinary teams. When teachers work across content areas and grade levels, they share strategies that expand their instructional toolkit. These teams often lead to new connections for students and innovative approaches to persistent challenges.**

Make sure collaborative planning time is protected and purposeful. Use this time for focused, evidence-based work like lesson studies or shared data analysis. When collaboration leads to action, your teams build confidence and clarity.

Support collaboration with digital tools. Technology gives your team flexibility letting them connect and problem-solve without needing to be in the same room. When you model and encourage that kind of connection, your learning community becomes more agile and more resilient.



## Lead the work by translating these principles into everyday decisions.

### For District Leaders:

- Support cross-school PLCs, lesson study groups, and knowledge-sharing events.
- Provide tech tools and platforms that sustain asynchronous collaboration.
- Encourage teacher-led innovation and shared decision-making structures.

### For School Leaders:

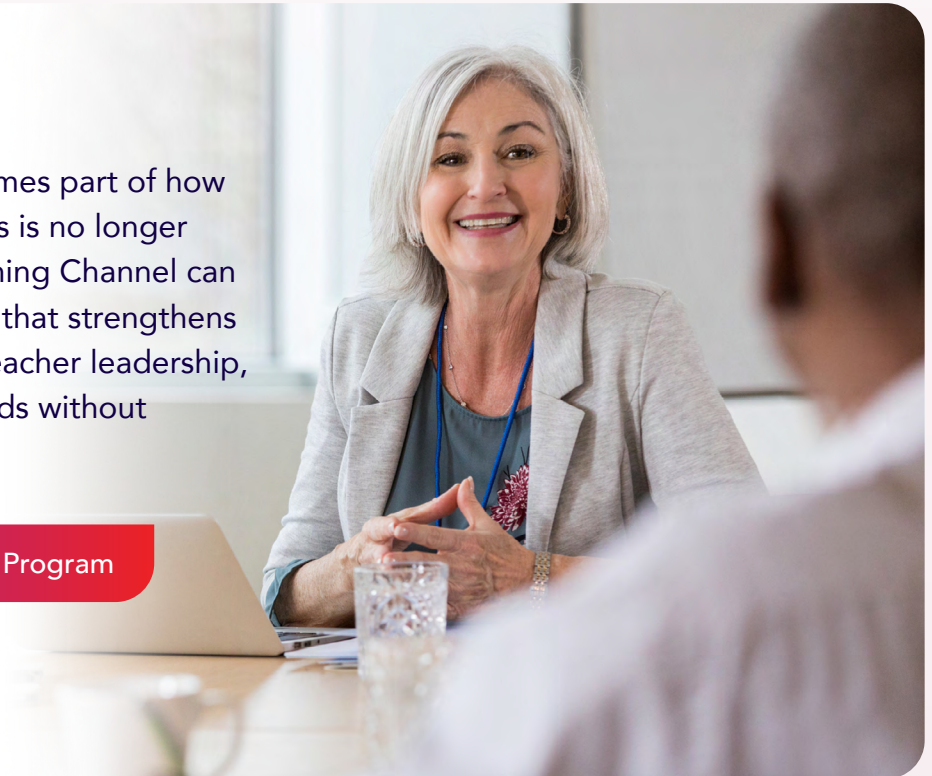
- Create dedicated time for structured collaborative planning and reflection.
- Build cross-grade or interdisciplinary teams to solve instructional challenges.
- Encourage peer observation and joint problem-solving as part of daily work.

### For Instructional Coaches:

- Facilitate peer coaching and team-based learning cycles.
- Use video and collaborative analysis tools to deepen instructional dialogue.
- Encourage shared experimentation and reflection in team settings.

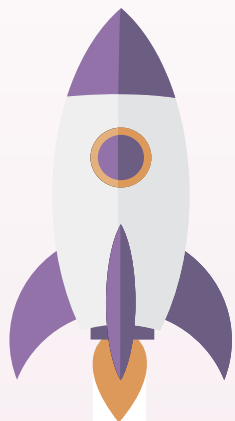
When collaboration becomes part of how your teams work, progress is no longer isolated. It's shared. Teaching Channel can help you build a program that strengthens peer learning, supports teacher leadership, and fits your district's needs without adding to your plate.

Start Designing Your PD Program



## Conclusion:

# Become a Catalyst for Growth



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Creating a culture of continuous learning is no accident. It's the result of intentional leadership. When your school's vision is clear and aligned, instructional leadership gains focus. When trust and reflection are woven into daily practice, growth becomes a habit. You'll notice it in collaborative team conversations, in the way classrooms function, and even in how you make decisions. Data sharpens those decisions, and shared leadership fuels lasting momentum.

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This eBook has explored how to lead this work through five essential focus areas: shared vision and values, trust and belonging, instructional leadership, evidence-informed growth, and collaboration. These elements don't stand alone. Together, they form the foundation of a learning culture where both educators and students thrive.

Now it's your move. Choose one way to begin. Revisit your school's vision with your team or create time for teachers to reflect together. That first step matters. Culture doesn't change in a single moment. It changes through every intentional choice you make.

You already have the tools. You've built the foundation. Now you can lead the work forward one decision, one conversation, one learning opportunity at a time. And in doing so, you create a school where learning doesn't pause or plateau. It continually evolves.



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