



FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

IdeasIntoAction

FOR SCHOOL *and* SYSTEM LEADERS

ONTARIO LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

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Ideas Into Action is published by the Ministry of Education to support Ontario's school and system leaders. It is designed to provide research insights and practical strategies for school and system leadership that are aligned with both the [Ontario Leadership Framework \(OLF\) 2012](#) and the broader [Ontario Leadership Strategy \(OLS\)](#). This and future issues will focus on five Core Leadership Capacities and personal leadership resources to assist leaders in further strengthening and integrating these capacities into their daily practice. You will find more information about [Leadership Development](#) on the ministry website. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at: ldb-ddl@ontario.ca.

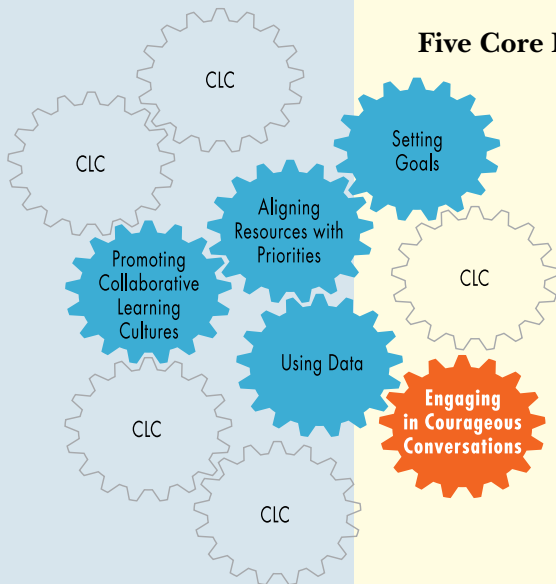
Exploring Five Core Leadership Capacities Engaging in Courageous Conversations

In the first issue of *Ideas Into Action* we introduced five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) derived from Ontario's Leadership Framework that have been adopted by the Ministry of Education as a key focus for capacity building beginning in 2009-10:

- **Setting goals**
- **Aligning resources with priorities**
- **Promoting collaborative learning cultures**
- **Using data**
- **Engaging in courageous conversations.**

Five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) as key

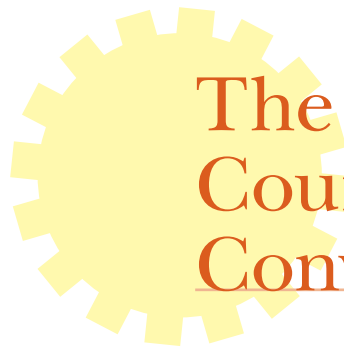
This issue and the next four will focus on one of the five CLCs. In this issue we will explore “engaging in courageous conversations”. Focusing on these core capacities will help school and system leaders further strengthen and integrate them into their daily practice. In turn, these key capacities will help leaders use their time, energy and resources as effectively as possible, and contribute to building excellence in instructional leadership across the province.



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support every child
reach every student





The Case for Courageous Conversations

“What is leadership?...
At the core of most definitions
of leadership are two functions:
providing direction and
exercising influence. Leaders
mobilize and work with others
to achieve shared goals.”

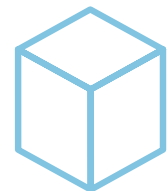
– Leithwood and Riehl, 2003

One of the key themes that appears consistently in our interviews with internationally-recognized leaders in *In Conversation* is the concept of “authentic leadership” and its role in building the foundation of trust necessary to lead improvement. This concept of authentic leadership is also reiterated by school and system leaders in Ontario who are participants in Mentoring for Newly Appointed School and System Leaders and those involved in the Principal and Vice-principal Appraisal process.

What capacity do we need as leaders to demonstrate authenticity and build credibility and trust? One of the most critical is our ability and willingness to engage in challenging, sensitive – in a word, courageous – conversations.

If we are leading for improvement, we are inevitably leading for change and can expect some degree of discomfort, disagreement or resistance along the way – whether on the level of the individual, or the organization. Change often challenges our deeply-held beliefs, and as John Kenneth Galbraith famously said, “Faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof”. Open, authentic, truthful dialogue, in an atmosphere of trust and respect, is the key ingredient that makes meaningful change possible.

While effective leadership draws on a wide range of capacities, it could be argued that this one is unique in its influence over whether or not we can effect deep and sustainable improvement and, as part of that process, build an organizational culture in which change and improvement are welcomed and embedded in daily practice. In the absence of courageous conversations, we may be able to put a veneer on the status quo, and effect change on the surface, but deep and lasting change will be virtually impossible.



"Deep conversations uncover invisible goals."

– Kegan and Lahey, 2009

"Major change requires alteration in some of our basic, underlying beliefs."

– Kegan and Lahey, 2009

Leadership often involves challenging people to live up to their words, to close the gap between their espoused values and their actual behaviour. It may mean pointing out the elephant sitting on the table at a meeting – the unspoken issue that everyone sees but no one wants to mention. It often requires helping groups make difficult choices and give up something they value on behalf of something they care about more... 'adaptive leadership' is needed to confront such challenges.

– Adapted from Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 2009

"Adaptive leadership is a daily opportunity to mobilize the resources of people to thrive in a changing and challenging world."

– Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 2009

The Challenge: Leaders are as Human as Those They Lead

If the first truth about courageous conversations is that they are key to effective leadership for improvement, the second is that many leaders, if not most, find them difficult and uncomfortable. We often avoid courageous conversations, even when we recognize that they are desperately needed. Leaders are human too, and just as prone to avoiding discomfort as those they lead. In fact, Abrams (2009) has identified 18 reasons we can, and often do, avoid courageous conversations:

A desire to please: I want people to like me and to respect me.

Personal safety: I would rather avoid any emotional or physical pain.

Personal comfort: It will take so much effort to do what I need to do if this starts.

Fear of the unknown: I'd rather live with the status quo than take on the unknown.

No sense of urgency (for you): Not enough kids in the room are affected so let's not make a big deal of it.

"I don't fit in here": The culture doesn't address things head on. Why should I?

Waiting for the perfect moment: I can't do it until I know more about him or her or that.

Perfectionism: I don't have the right words yet.

Distrust of oneself and others: I am too judgmental, and maybe this is just another example.

Lack of authority: I don't have enough internal role authority or perspective, and I have no external role authority. So who am I to bring it up?

Distrusting our own judgement: It is her choice to do what she wants. Who am I to tell my peer what is best for kids?

Fear of kicking someone who is already down: I don't think she'll be able to take it. It will overwhelm her.

Too big a shift in role expectations: I thought I was here to work on classroom management and the external factors that make up a classroom. Now I am supposed to also focus on something personal and internal?

"This wasn't in the job description": I thought I hired someone who already knew how to do the job. I didn't expect to deal with these kinds of issues.

"Too close to home": This is a small town. My kid plays with her kid.

Conflict with beliefs or values: I don't agree with the program they are asking me to coach, and I just feel awkward.

Fatigue: I don't have the energy today.

Personality or intent: He is a nice person over all. She didn't mean it.

“Teachers who know that they are allowed to be imperfect works-in-progress can afford to engage in bold self-critique, especially if they are fully aware that the principal sees herself this way too. The role of the leader in setting the scene for continuous improvement is a powerful one that depends on strengthening beliefs, such as self-efficacy, among teachers. In the final analysis, teacher self-efficacy can make all the difference between choosing hope or despair and in deciding whether to engage or not to engage in the challenges of optimizing the learning conditions for all children.”

– Leithwood and Beatty, 2008

Courageous conversations are about being true to oneself, doing what is right for students, and shaping an environment that supports learning.

– Adapted from Abrams, 2009

One of the most powerful ways to overcome our own resistance to courageous conversations is to deepen our understanding of what they look like in practice, and how they can empower – rather than threaten – both our own leadership and those we lead.

Courageous Conversations in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)

Within Ontario’s Leadership Framework, the practice of engaging in courageous conversations is recognized as vital to successful leadership and is reflected within and across all of the framework’s domains. Engaging in courageous conversations is about challenging current practices and fostering improvement and growth through conversation, listening to and acting on feedback, and providing feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being. Leaders do this in a variety of ways; for example, they:

- Build relational trust and establish a culture in which courageous conversations and feedback are seen as necessary for improvement
- Challenge assumptions at both the individual and the organizational level
- Integrate description, analysis, prediction and a discussion of the next level of work in every debrief about teaching and learning.



**This table illustrates how “engaging in courageous conversations”
is embedded in the *Ontario Leadership Framework***

DOMAINS OF THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK	SELECTED SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES & EXAMPLES OF WHAT THESE PRACTICES LOOK LIKE IN ACTION	PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES: Leaders draw upon their personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices
Setting Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying specific, shared, short-term goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Build consensus among students, staff and other stakeholders for the school’s goals and priorities stakeholders about the school’s goals – Ensure the goals are clearly communicated to all stakeholders – Refer frequently to the school’s goals when engaged in decision making about school programs and directions • Communicating the vision and goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use many different formal and informal opportunities to explain to stakeholders the overall vision and goals established for the school 	
Building Relationships and Developing People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider staff members’ opinions when initiating actions that affect their work • Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Challenge staff to continually re-examine the extent to which their practices support the learning of all their students – Encourage staff to try new practices that are consistent with both their interests and school goals • Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage staff, students and parents to listen to one another’s ideas and genuinely consider their value • Establishing productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage federation representatives to collaborate in determining how to implement labour contract provisions in ways that support school improvement work 	<p>Cognitive Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving expertise • Knowledge of effective school and classroom conditions with direct effects on student learning • Systems thinking <p>Social Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceiving emotions • Managing emotions • Acting in emotionally appropriate ways
Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage a willingness to compromise among collaborators – Foster open and fluent communication toward building and sustaining professional learning communities • Structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Engage teachers in making decisions that affect their instructional work 	<p>Psychological Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimism • Self-efficacy • Resilience • Proactivity
Improving the Instructional Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing instructional support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Observe classroom instruction and provide constructive feedback to teachers – Provide advice to teachers about how to solve classroom problems • Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Collaborate with staff during the process of data interpretation 	
Securing Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building staff members’ sense of internal accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Regularly engage staff in analyzing data on the learning progress of the learning progress of all students – Insist on the use of data that is of high quality (reliable, valid, collected using systematic collection processes, available in its original form, and has been subjected to collaborative interpretation) 	

Aspects of leadership practice that are critical to constructive problem talk include:

- Building relational trust
- Having “open-to-learning” conversations
- Identification of qualities or behaviours that engender trust
- Engaging theories of action to bring about school-based change in instructional practice.

– Adapted from Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009

Courageous Conversations in Research Literature

Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) recently published one of the best syntheses to date of empirical research evidence that illuminates the complex relationship between educational leadership and student outcomes. Among the eight dimensions of leadership the authors identify as having the greatest impact on student outcomes is what they term “constructive problem talk”. Some constructive problem talk takes the form of “courageous conversations”. Other such talk which is problem focused and requires more knowledge than courage will be addressed in future issues of this bulletin.

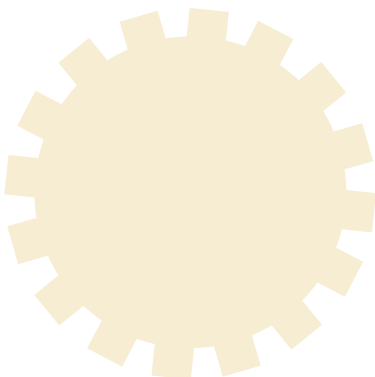
The authors suggest that, “In order to build communities that learn, leaders may need to challenge and change well-established aspects of teacher culture”. They argue that the evidence is compelling and shows “that leaders who engage in constructive problem talk are better able to help teachers make changes that benefit their students rather than those who avoid problem talk or who blame and invite defensive reactions”.

These principles would apply equally to other conversations involving directors, supervisory officers, principals and teachers. It is also important to note that courageous conversations can – and often need to – flow in both directions. Leaders must be prepared to hear from staff members about their leadership if the school is to be more effective. Leaders need to be seen as open to challenges from others about the value of what they are doing.

The intent of constructive problem talk, according to the authors, is to reveal possibilities for change by identifying, describing and analyzing problems. Effective leaders describe problems in a way that invites ownership and commitment, and includes respectfully identifying the ways in which they, and others, may be contributing to the problem.

Another important element of courageous conversations is leaders’ ability to inquire into the theories of action that lie behind the processes they wish to change. By exploring not only the behaviours and actions of colleagues, but also the beliefs that lie behind them, leaders are demonstrating respect – taking the time to acknowledge, discuss and understand why colleagues act as they do, before suggesting alternatives.

City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel (2009) also identify the positive outcomes associated with engaging theories of action. They stress



"A theory of action can be thought of as the story line that makes a vision and a strategy concrete. It gives the leader a line of narrative that leads people through the daily complexity and distractions that compete with the main work of the instructional core. It provides the map that carries the vision through the organization. And it provides a way of testing the assumptions and suppositions of the vision against the unfolding realities of the work in an actual organization with actual people.

– City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009

"What leadership qualities or behaviours engender trust?"

- Respect for others,
- Personal regard for others,
- Competence in role, and
- Personal integrity are all factors.

Of these, the most basic is respect."

– Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd, 2009

that, while the term "theory" may conjure up thoughts of lofty, abstract ideas, a theory of action is, in fact, a highly practical tool that grounds our strategies in reality and helps us examine them more deeply to produce concrete results.

The authors suggest that an effective theory of action is stated as a series of "If ... then" propositions that can ultimately be tested against real outcomes. For example, "If I take this action ... then the following outcome will result". They suggest that the "If ... then" structure is an important way we can remind ourselves that each of our theories of action is a proposition that can be tested, and should be subject to revision. The end result is that we have established a platform for continuous improvement and professional learning.

In another synthesis of research that examines school leaders' influences on student learning, Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) describe four paths through which school leaders can impact student learning – the rational, emotional, organizational and family paths. The authors indicate that more than 90 studies have identified a connection between teacher emotions and their consequences for classroom practice and student learning. The rational and emotional paths, they suggest, are much more tightly connected than many leaders believe. Teacher trust in colleagues, parents and students is among the seven emotions the authors identify as having a particularly significant effect on teaching and learning. This research suggests that teachers' collective efficacy will increase when leaders:

- Clarify goals and encourage collaboration among staff toward reaching them
- Encourage their staff to network with others facing similar challenges
- Offer individual support and value staff opinions
- Sponsor and engage with staff in meaningful professional learning
- Provide appropriate models of both desired practices and appropriate values.

Relational Trust: A Key Foundation

No matter how good a leader's pedagogical knowledge and problem-solving ability may be, their ability to effect change and improvement will be compromised if relations within the school are characterized by lack of trust. Relational trust influences the effort, risk taking

“... trust has to grow out of patterns of practice over time in which people learn that they can depend on each other to behave in predictable ways in high-stakes activities. For many administrators, exposing their practice to the scrutiny of others is about as high-stakes an activity as one can imagine.”

– City, Elmore, Fiarman
and Teitel, 2009

and collective commitment that staff bring to the complex task of increasing student achievement and well-being.

Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) draw on the seminal work of Bryk and Schneider (2002) to support the following key observations about the importance of relational trust:

- Trust is critical when the success of an individual’s efforts is dependent on the contributions of others
- Such interdependence, however, creates risk and vulnerability – relational trust requires a willingness to be vulnerable, because each individual must have confidence that others will play their part.

Trust, they advise, is required for all school relationships including those between teacher and principal, teacher and teacher, and teacher and parent.

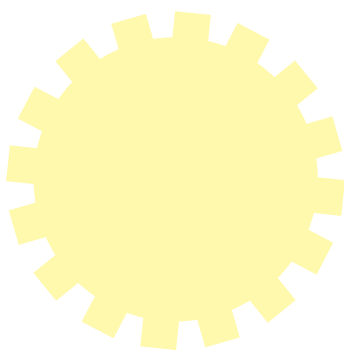
“Open-to-Learning” Conversations

Crucial to all the leadership dimensions are the interpersonal skills and values that enable leaders to identify and check their own and others’ “taken-for-granted” assumptions about themselves, other people, and the situation. Leaders need to be able to:

- Disclose their views and the reasons for them
- Listen to others’ views and be open to reciprocal influence
- Give and receive tough messages
- Detect and challenge their own and others’ problematic assumptions.

To engage in “open-to-learning” conversations, leaders need the skills and values that will make it possible for them to respectfully give and receive the tough messages that are an inevitable part of the process of improving teaching and learning.

The “open-to-learning” conversations model provides the theoretical framework for strategies that leaders can use to effectively deal with difficult issues, as shown in the table on the next page.



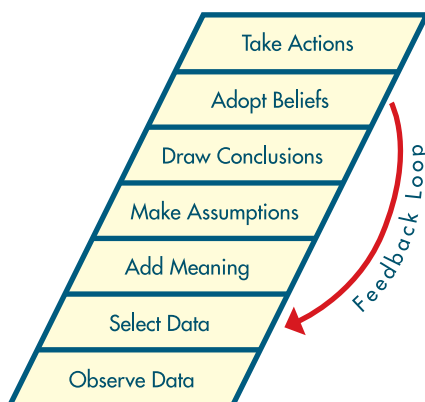
Guiding values	Key strategies
<p>1. Increase the validity of information Information includes: thoughts, opinions, reasoning, inferences, and feelings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclose the reasoning that leads to your views • Provide examples and illustrations of your views • Use the ladder of inference (see ‘What is a ladder of inference?’ below) • Treat your own views as hypotheses rather than taken-for-granted truths • Seek feedback and try to confirm the validity of the information
<p>2. Increase respect Treat others as well-intentioned, interested in learning, and capable of contributing to your own learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen deeply, especially when views differ from your own • Expect high standards and constantly check to see how you are helping others reach them • Share control of the conversation, including the management of emotions
<p>3. Increase commitment Foster ownership of decisions through transparent and shared processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the problems and the problem-solving process • Require accountability for collective decisions • Foster public monitoring and review of decisions

Source: Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd, 2009

The three guiding values illustrated in this table are widely espoused, but hard to put into practice. The conversations are referred to as “open-to-learning” because, within them, individuals have the opportunity to express their views openly rather than defensively, which increases the chance that faulty assumptions are made – about one another, the problem or task, or what needs to be done.

What is a “Ladder of Inference”?

Most of us are quick to leap to our own conclusions and make assumptions about a situation. This often occurs in the absence of any facts or supporting evidence – particularly the evidence of others. Argyris (1982) and Senge (1990) have used a “ladder of inference” to illustrate the way that we need to avoid leaping to conclusions without checking facts/data. At the bottom of the ladder is a pool of information or data. Each rung on the ladder represents the assumptions or inferences we make about that information as we incrementally move up the rungs toward a conclusion. The top step of the ladder represents a conclusion that should be data-based. To ensure that we are developing valid conclusions, the data (whether our own or others’) at each rung should be carefully checked for accuracy. Checking involves a high level of “inquiry”, or questioning, to test both our own and others’ perspectives. Checking minimizes the drawing of invalid or inaccurate assumptions. Providing and checking of evidence is therefore a crucial component of productive reasoning because it prevents us from drawing premature and often inaccurate conclusions.



Walking the Talk: Building Our Capacity

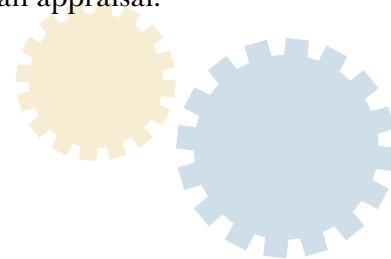
Courageous conversations in action: Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP)

The T-LCP is a process that is used to sequence and organize actions for teaching and student learning within school-level professional learning communities (PLCs). The work of individual PLCs is supported, challenged and shared through hubs (groups of three to five PLCs) and networks (larger groups of hubs). Courageous conversations are a foundation of success in the T-LCP. School leaders play a critical role by working with teachers to create a context of trust in which risk taking, innovation and ownership provide the conditions for change and improvement. They build a high tolerance for truth as they “put their thinking on the line” and reflect, share and refine practice through the T-LCP.

How can we as leaders further develop our leadership practices and personal leadership resources for engaging in courageous conversations? Here is a sampling of supports and resources available. See www.ontario.ca/eduleadership for more information.

Ministry supports available to Ontario leaders

- **Conversation Starters:** This resource offers suggested guiding questions to provide focus in professional dialogue as well as support for engaging in courageous conversations. This resource will be helpful in a variety of contexts from daily interactions to more formal opportunities; for example, dialogue between mentors and mentees and between principals and superintendents in the performance appraisal process.
- **Mentoring for Newly Appointed School and System Leaders:** Mentoring provides the ideal context for strengthening leaders’ capacity to engage in courageous conversations by raising difficult questions and finding solutions to adaptive challenges. The context of confidential professional mentoring relationships based on trust and mutual respect makes it possible for newly appointed school and system leaders to take risks, try out new behaviours and strengthen their leadership related to this capacity. This in turn builds leaders’ confidence and willingness to open up the conversations needed to bring about improvements in student achievement and well-being in their own school and system contexts.
- **Principal and Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal:** Skilful appraisers can motivate and support principals/vice-principals to hold courageous conversations that challenge current practices and bring about change in their schools. In fact, the appraiser may need to have courageous conversations with the principal/vice-principal through the course of an appraisal.



Courageous conversations in action: School Effectiveness Framework (SEF)

The SEF is designed to bring about continuous improvement through school self-assessment. It serves as a catalyst for courageous conversations that foster introspection, reflection and analysis and help schools become more precise, intentional and strategic in their planning. The school self-assessment process focuses on three key questions:

- How effective are we in achieving our student learning and achievement goals?
- What is the evidence?
- What actions will we take to ensure continuous improvement?

Within a trusting and supportive environment, school self-assessment provides an opportunity for principals and teachers to engage in open, honest dialogue about strengths, areas for improvement and next steps.

Professional learning opportunities and resources offered by Ontario leadership associations:

- **Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) and Association des gestionnaires de l'éducation franco-ontarienne (AGÉFO):**

ADFO and AGÉFO will be offering a one-day face-to-face provincial session, a web conference and a DVD and guide for school and system leaders focused on building collaborative relationships. In addition, ADFO has developed "*Le guide du mentor - mentorat pour les leaders scolaires nouvellement nommés*" and training focused on violence against women and its effect on children in our schools. A number of news bulletins and resources can be found on the association websites at www.adfo.org and www.agefo.ca.

- **Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers of Ontario (OCSOA):**

CPCO in partnership with OCSOA hosts one-day workshops with internationally renowned speakers to provide educational leaders with access to current research and information. These shared learning opportunities support implementation of the Ontario Leadership Strategy and the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, while providing networking opportunities to strengthen Catholic education. Learn more at www.cpco.on.ca or www.ocsoa.ca.

CPCO has also designed and developed a number of workshops to support the Ontario Leadership Strategy which can be customized to meet the needs of individual boards. For more information visit www.cpco.on.ca.

- **Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and Ontario Supervisory Officials of Ontario (OPSOA):**

OPC provides professional learning opportunities that support collaborative schools and, in particular, can assist school leaders in establishing effective working relationships. Programs focus on a wide range of topics such as challenging conversations, alternative dispute resolution and conversations about equity and inclusion. For more information visit www.principals.ca.

OPSOA offers a two-part networking session for new supervisory officers in their first year. As well, each new superintendent is connected with an experienced mentor who acts as coach and confidant. A similar program is in place for new directors of education. Learn more at www.opsoa.org.

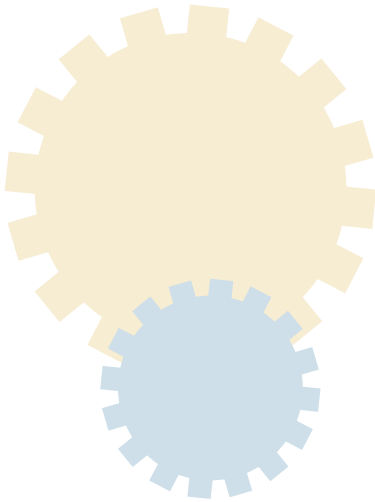
Courageous conversations in action: Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy:

Implementation of the provincial Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy requires shared and committed leadership by the ministry, boards and schools to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that can impact student achievement and well-being. Courageous conversations that reach out to our diverse communities and occur at all levels about equity and inclusive education including parent engagement and issues such as racism or homophobia are needed to identify the biases and barriers and find ways to address them so that every student can reach his or her full potential.

Commercial resources recommended by Ontario leaders:

- *Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler (2002) provides tools to handle life's most difficult and important conversations including preparing for high-stakes situations and making it safe to talk about almost anything.
- *Difficult conversations* by Stone, Patton and Heen (1999) is based on 15 years of research at the Harvard Negotiation Project. This book answers the question: "When people confront the conversations they dread the most, what works?" It walks the reader through a proven step-by-step approach to having a tough conversation with less stress and more success.
- *Fierce conversations: Achieving success at work and in life one conversation at a time* by Scott (2004) includes helpful tools and a work book to show how conversations can change educators' and students' lives. Susan Scott, the author of this book also writes 'Collaborative Culture', a regular column in each issue of *Journal of Staff Development* available at www.nsd.org.
- *Having hard conversations* by Abrams (2009) provides an interactive, personal approach to mastering the art of challenging conversations and includes sample scripts and practical tools to help educators prepare for the conversation.
- *Immunity to change* by Kegan and Lahey (2009) examines why change is so hard, shows how our individual beliefs – along with the collective mindsets in our organizations – combine to create a natural but powerful immunity to change, and provides practical insights and tools to help unlock our potential to change and move forward.
- *Influencer: The power to change anything* by Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan and Switzler (2008) builds on the advice the authors offer in *Crucial conversations* and provides concrete steps in the influence process to make change inevitable.
- 'Leadership practices that build trust: A closer look at trust and its importance in the principal-teacher relationship' by Ontario vice-principal Martine Lewis (2009) is an article published in the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario's *Principal Connections* in which the author reports on her research and study on trust in schools.

- *The practice of adaptive leadership* by Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009) provides tools and tactics for mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and fashion new and better responses.



Seven Principles of Fierce Conversations:

Regardless of our skill and experience, courageous conversations will always be challenging. Scott (2004) advises that we need to focus on passion, integrity, authenticity and collaboration in approaching what she refers to as “fierce” conversations, and offers the following seven principles:

Master the courage to interrogate reality. What has changed, does the plan still make sense? If not, what is required of you? Of others?

Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real. No one has to change, but everyone has to have the conversation. When the conversation is real, the change occurs before the conversation is over.

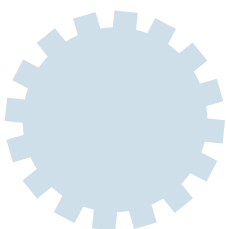
Be here, prepared to be nowhere else. Speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person.

Tackle your toughest challenge today. The problem named is the problem solved. All confrontation is a search for the truth. Healthy relationships include both confrontation and appreciation.

Obey your instincts. During each conversation, listen for more than content. Listen for emotion and intent as well. Act on your instincts rather than passing them over for fear that you could be wrong or that you might offend.

Take responsibility for your emotional wake. For a leader there is no trivial comment. The conversation is not about the relationship; the conversation is the relationship. Learning to deliver the message without the load allows you to speak with clarity, conviction and compassion.

Let silence do the heavy lifting. Talk with people not at them. Memorable conversations include breathing space. Slow down the conversation so that insight can occur in the space between words.



The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)

Ontario's Institute for Education Leadership is a unique partnership committed to exploring leading-edge thinking on education leadership and applying that expertise to the development of high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school, board, and system leaders. As part of its work on research into practice the IEL has adopted the Ontario Leadership Framework and continues to support and promote it as a powerful vehicle for strengthening school and system leadership in the province.

Visit: www.education-leadership-ontario.ca for more information about the IEL, upcoming events, leadership research, and a variety of tools and resources for leaders.

A Call to Action

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) remains the key foundation of initiatives being undertaken within the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). **The Ontario Leadership Framework** includes the leadership practices found to be effective for most schools and systems in most contexts and a small but critical number of personal resources which leaders draw on in order to enact effective leadership practices including cognitive, social and psychological resources.

The framework consists of four key components: school-level leadership; the K-12 School Effectiveness Framework; system-level leadership; and a district effectiveness framework. Five Core Leadership Capacities, taken from the Ontario Leadership Framework, are the province's focus for capacity building beginning in 2009-10.

Ideas Into Action is designed to support and align with this capacity building, which is being undertaken by the ministry, Ontario's provincial leadership associations, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and district school boards. It is intended to contribute to your ongoing professional learning and provide you and your colleagues with a meaningful springboard for reflection, professional dialogue and for putting ideas into action.

Do you have insights to share? We are interested in hearing about your experience with courageous conversations – what has worked for you? What professional learning supports have you found to be most effective in strengthening this capacity?

We look forward to your responses, and to sharing excerpts from them in our next issue of *Ideas Into Action* which will focus on “promoting collaborative learning cultures”.

Learn more about the Ontario Leadership Strategy at www.ontario.ca/eduleadership.

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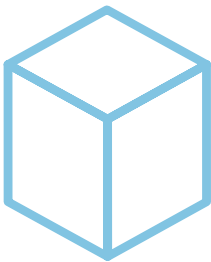
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