

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 district leaders. It is designed to provide research insights and practical strategies for school and system leadership that align with the [Ontario Leadership Framework \(OLF\)](#) and to help implement the [Ontario Leadership Strategy \(OLS\)](#). Ministry-sponsored professional learning and resources are focussed on five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) derived from the OLF: setting goals, aligning resources with priorities, promoting collaborative learning cultures, using data, and engaging in courageous conversations.

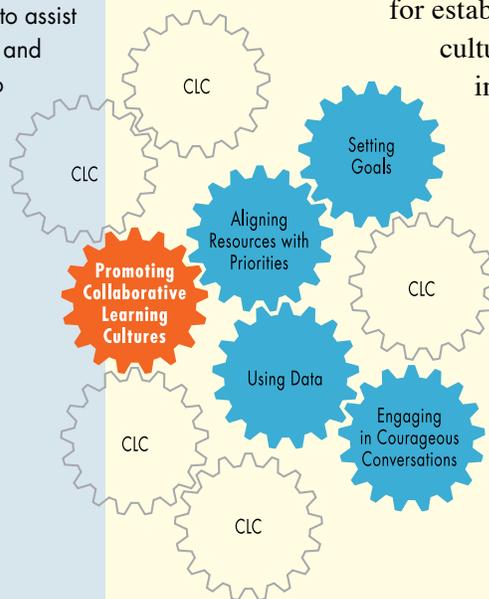
*Ideas Into Action* is likewise devoted to exploring these five CLCs as one of many supports being provided to assist leaders in further strengthening and integrating these capacities into their daily practice. Each issue has as its primary focus one of the CLCs and shows how it is derived from the Ontario Leadership Framework, which describes the full range of capacities leaders use to meet their specific challenges and leadership goals.

## Exploring Five Core Leadership Capacities

# Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures: Putting the Promise into Practice

**T**he case for collaborative learning cultures – and their direct impact on school improvement and student achievement – has been made so consistently and conclusively that collaborative approaches of one form or another have become a common feature of effective education practice in Ontario.

Yet most education researchers and practitioners would agree that we may have, individually and collectively, only begun to scratch the surface. What does a genuine collaborative learning culture look like? Are we there yet? If not, how can we move beyond structural change and bring about this kind of deep cultural change? What are the necessary conditions for establishing an authentic collaborative learning culture? How can we evolve from an organization of individual learners to a true learning organization in which knowledge is shared, developed and applied and practice is deprivatized? How can we build networks beyond our own individual walls to embrace – and benefit from – a system-wide collaborative learning culture? And how can we help ensure that the work of educators coming together results not only in more knowledge, but also significantly improved practice in classrooms?



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support every child  
reach every student



### Some Research Foundations

While the need for collaborative learning cultures, and for deprivatization of practice, might appear to be “contemporary” concepts, they date back as far as Willard Waller’s *The Sociology of Teaching*, published in 1932. It was not until the late 60s, however, that the issue began to receive broad attention.

- The issue of teacher isolation and its effect on school improvement has been explored by Jackson (1968), Sarason (1971), Lortie (1975) and Neumann and Wehlage (1995).
- Rosenholtz (1989) and McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) studied the effect of workplace factors – particularly opportunities for collaborative inquiry – on teaching quality.
- Insights on the characteristics of effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are offered by Little (1990) and by Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995).
- The connections between professional learning and student achievement have been studied by Louis, Marks and Kruse (1996), Louis and Gordon (2006) and Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004.
- DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2004) continue to have a significant impact on putting PLCs into practice beginning with their release of *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don’t Learn*.

An excellent adjunct to the U.S. literature is a Canadian study, by Coleman and LaRocque (1990), that explores the links between district climate and improvements in both teaching and student achievement.

## Re-Focusing on the BIG Picture: Deepening Our Understanding of Collaboration

In this issue of *Ideas Into Action* we explore research foundations supporting collaborative learning cultures, and present a sampling of current findings and resources that will help school and system leaders deepen their understanding and practice of this core leadership capacity.

While it could be argued that educators in 2010 collectively view collaborative learning cultures as essential to improving schools and education systems, the very acceptance of this idea has in some ways led to our greatest challenge. In viewing collaborative learning cultures as a process or practice – or worse, as the latest educational “innovation” – we risk losing sight of the intended outcome: a dramatic improvement in the culture itself that builds teaching capacity and improves student achievement. Far beyond process or practice, this is a profound shift away from isolation and autonomy, and toward deprivatized practice, away from the traditional silos of classroom, school, district, and province and toward a genuine, system-wide learning organization.

The rise of the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as Michael Fullan (2006) argues, is a case in point. Fullan hesitates to apply the PLC label, preferring to speak more generally about building collaborative networks. He does this first, because transforming the culture of schools and systems is the key focus, and second, because educators run the risk of simply describing what they are currently doing as a PLC, without realizing that they are not going deep enough. He describes this as a “you-don’t-know-what-you-don’t-know” (Fullan, 2009) phenomenon.



### Promoting collaborative learning cultures as a “wicked problem”

Transforming the culture of a school, district or education system certainly qualifies as a “wicked problem”, a term coined by Horst Rittel in the late 60s. This concept continues to capture the attention of leaders in business and education contexts alike. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010), for example, describe turning schools around as a wicked problem – one that is especially difficult to solve and resolve. Roger Martin (2009), Dean of the Rotman School of Business, relates the concept of wicked problems to his theory of integrative thinking. In the words of Jennifer Riel (cited in Martin, 2009), “attempting to solve a wicked problem is like that old cliché of trying to grasp a handful of sand: the harder you grip the more sand slips through your fingers. In other words the causes of the problem are not just complex but deeply ambiguous; you can’t tell why things are happening the way they are and what causes them to do so. Furthermore there is no clear stopping rule when attempting to solve the problem as it is difficult to tell when it is solved and what the solution may look like when you reach it.”

### The Challenge: From Concept to Reality

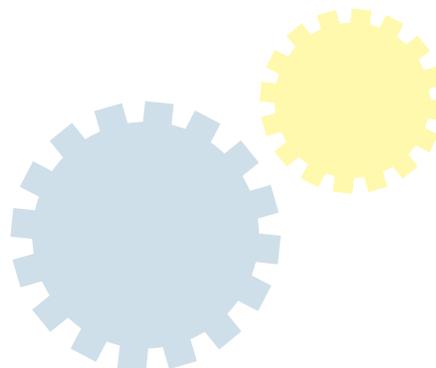
So what should we know that we don’t know? While the underlying concepts may be relatively straightforward – and the objectives clear – the business of realizing an authentic collaborative learning culture requires that leaders recognize the depth of this task, and the multitude of challenges that need to be addressed along the way. Developing a collaborative learning culture is a process, rather than a destination, and one that requires knowledge, skills and persistence.

### The Complexity of Culture Change

In the language of Heifetz and Linsky (2002), turning around school and system cultures is an adaptive – rather than a technical – challenge. As illustrated in the chart below, technical problems may be very complex and critically important, but they have known solutions that can be implemented through current knowledge. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization’s current structures and procedures. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative experience to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating new capacity to thrive.

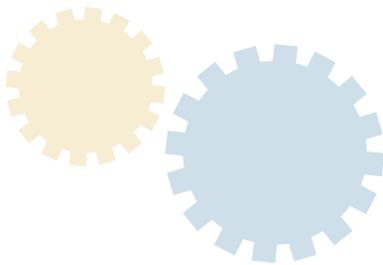
Kind of challenge	Problem definition	Solution	Locus of work
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Technical & Adaptive	Clear	Requires Learning	Authority & stakeholders
Adaptive	Requires Learning	Requires Learning	Stakeholders

Source: Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009



"Leading implies change and change implies leadership."

– Herold and Fedor, 2008



"Mental models are the images, assumptions, and stories which we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world. Like a pane of glass framing and subtly distorting our vision, mental models determine what we see. Human beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of our world without cognitive 'mental maps' and all of these mental maps, by definition, are flawed in some way."

– Senge et al, 1994

## Engendering Trust

Why does it take so long to initiate a PLC? Kruse and Louis (2009) suggest that trust is a key element of organizational culture that is often taken for granted, and routinely overlooked. High trust, they assert, is associated with improved performance on a variety of measures such as student achievement and parent engagement. Low trust is associated with stress and anxiety.

Kruse and Louis note that:

- Even where there are pockets of high trust among like-minded teachers in a school, there may be weak relational trust within the larger organization.
- Relationships between teachers and administrators may be less trusting than those among teachers, with the result that teachers may look cynically at an administrator-initiated change.
- Change itself decreases trust because it alters and disrupts the existing norms and functions within the organization.

Trust, then, is required for the development of effective collaborative learning cultures, and a factor that must be considered. Although leaders can't be solely responsible for creating a trusting culture in the school or district, their words and actions set the tone and lay the foundation.

## Cultural Context and History

Changing a culture requires understanding the local context and history, and designing the change process – and any supporting structural changes with sensitivity to both factors.

As Kruse and Louis (2009) suggest, culture describes "how things are", "how things operate" and reflects how we view the world. In order to change a culture, we first need to understand the current mental model of school and classroom organization. It is important to keep in mind that leaders inherit culture, rather than create it. Even in a new school, experienced staff will have preconceived ideas about how schools operate.

In the face of pressure to close achievement gaps and raise levels of achievement, and on the assumption that a leader may be in the school only a limited number of years, most principals feel a need to focus on what they can handle at the moment. Short term "wins" are useful, but they must be integrated into a long-term process of change – one in which the work is never done.

“Leadership has been delightfully defined as ‘the ability to foster consequential relationships’. Easier said than done. To promote collegial relationships in the school, someone has to make relationships among adults a ‘discussable’. Someone must serve as a minesweeper, disarming those landmines. I can think of no more crucial role for any school leader.”

– Barth, 2006

“Think ‘system’ and not ‘individual school’ if the goal is to fundamentally change the culture of schools.”

– Fullan, 2008

## Resistance to Change

In *Change the Way You Lead Change*, Herold and Fedor (2008) point out that it is one thing to lead change when you enjoy high-quality relationships with followers. However, it is another thing to do so when you are still in the process of establishing such relationships, and it is yet quite another to do so when the quality of such relationships is damaged.

In their words:

“People do not naturally resist change; they resist change they do not understand, the value of which they do not see, or the demands of which they cannot meet. It is a change leader’s job to motivate others to follow and to make it possible for them to do so. Change leaders are not born. They come in all shapes and sizes but they work with what they have and can achieve success using many approaches, as long as what they do fits with the situation in which they find themselves. People are not unfortunate obstacles to change plans; they are the key elements in these plans. Cultivating people’s commitment to the organization and to the leader may be the most important change tool leaders have.”

## The Issue of System Cohesion

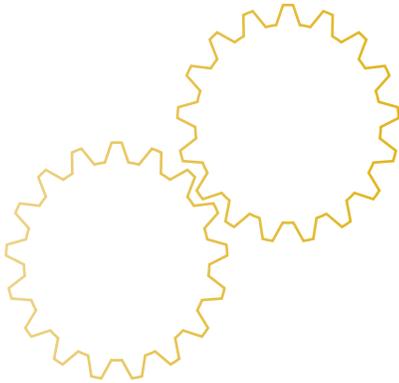
All systems, particularly larger systems, face the problem of how to achieve cohesion, which Fullan (2009) refers to as the “too-tight-too-loose” dilemma. Focus the organization with sharp goals and tight accountability, says Fullan, and you get passive or alienated workers. Go for decentralized creativity and you get drift and inertia. The key to achieving tight-loose organization lies more in “purposeful peer interaction” (Fullan, 2009) than in top-down direction from the hierarchy. This does not require less leadership at the top, according to Fullan, “but rather more – more of a different kind”. Fullan suggests positive peer interaction works effectively under three conditions:

1. When the larger values of the organization and those of individuals and groups mesh.
2. When information and knowledge about effective practices are widely and openly shared.
3. When monitoring mechanisms are in place to detect and address ineffective actions while also identifying and consolidating effective practices.

**“Internal States”** include:

- those that are largely *affective*; i.e. individual teacher efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, teacher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, stress/burnout, trust in colleagues, students and parents, and morale
- those that are largely *cognitive*; i.e. engagement or disengagement from the school and pedagogical content knowledge.

– Leithwood, 2006



## **Working Together for the “Collective Good”: Union and District Relationships**

Researchers and experts in educational leadership argue that collaboration and partnership between unions and the school systems are necessary pre-conditions for creating a trusting collaborative learning culture in schools and districts.

For example, in Leithwood’s (2006) study of teachers’ working conditions, he points out that “teachers’ internal states and their classroom performance contribute much more positively to student learning when there is a consistent, largely uncontested sense of direction for change in the province”. Michael Fullan (2010) in *All Systems Go* extends this argument, suggesting that “there is no way to make whole-system reform work without the entire teaching profession and its leaders working together for the collective good”. The writings of these and others opens doors to greater collaborative efforts between school systems and teachers’ unions both to improve working conditions for teachers and to build teacher satisfaction and morale, and in turn, positively impact teaching, learning and student achievement.

## **Toward a Collaborative Learning Culture: Promising Findings**

What does recent research suggest about addressing the issue of culture change? In addition to the following selected findings, see “Walking the Talk: Building Our Capacity” on page 15 for many additional sources and learning resources.

“Relational trust involves a willingness to be vulnerable because one has confidence that others will play their part. It should not be mistaken for feelings of warmth or affection.”

– Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000

## How Leaders Develop Relational Trust

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 competencies involved in effective educational leadership, these researchers identify “building relational trust” as essential in schools and systems where the success of one person’s efforts is dependent on the contribution of others.

What qualities or behaviours engender trust? According to these researchers, the critical components are: respect for others, personal regard for others, competence in role, and personal integrity. Of these, the most basic is respect. Practical steps educational leaders can take to build relational trust include:

- acknowledging the interdependence – and therefore vulnerability – of members of the school community, and the importance of trust in building commitment and cohesiveness
- modelling the four critical components of trust on a daily basis
- following through on expectations for school staff, including the difficult task of confronting issues involving both behaviour and performance
- demonstrating integrity by “walking the talk” and through actions that uphold the interests of students as paramount.

## Relational Trust as a Resource for School Improvement

Involves	Does Not Involve
Integrating the needs of adults with advancing the best interests of students	Meeting the needs of adults
Putting the needs of students first when their needs and the needs of staff are in conflict	Putting the needs of staff before those of students
Making critical decisions collectively on the basis of a unifying focus on what is best for students	Staff doing their own thing with mutual indifference or tolerance
Giving transparent explanations of reasons for treating staff differently	Giving similar affirmation and voice to staff, regardless of their commitment or breaches of trust
Explaining respectfully what is and is not acceptable and why	Tolerance of and collusion with a negative status quo (for example, high rates of staff or student absenteeism)

Source: Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009

“Educators who believe that a ‘primer’ – containing the philosophical underpinnings of professional learning communities and the practical steps needed to create them – and the introduction of modest changes such as study groups and team times are a sufficient set of tools to ‘re-culture’ their school don’t really grasp the sea change required to deepen trust and to create the intellectual ferment that characterizes a learning organization.”

– Louis, 2006

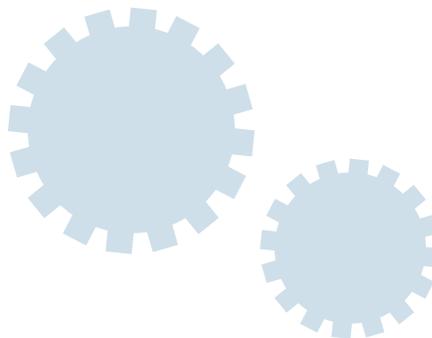
“The measure of collective efficacy is that school and district leaders have confidence that they and their peers, can together figure out how to make progress – that is, their ongoing interaction and experience with one another build the trust and knowledge that they are collectively responsible and good at their work. It is not the sum total of individual qualities that counts, but the fact that people learn from and identify with one another.”

– Fullan, 2009

## The Principal’s Role

In *The Principal’s Role in Supporting Learning Communities*, researchers Hord and Hirsh (2009) suggest principals have found that the following approaches support strong learning communities:

- **Emphasize to teachers that you know they can succeed – together:** Particularly in schools with a history of low achievement, lay the groundwork for collaborative learning cultures by letting teachers know that you believe they have the expertise to make student learning happen. Make clear that you expect them to pool that expertise.
- **Expect teachers to keep knowledge fresh:** Let teachers know you expect them to keep their skills up-to-date through collaborative study.
- **Guide communities toward self-direction:** Effective learning communities are democratic and participatory. Share authority and decision-making from the beginning and prepare others to take the lead.
- **Make data accessible:** Support instructional decision-making by ensuring that data on student performance is available in a format that teachers find understandable and that invites interpretation.
- **Teach discussion and decision-making skills:** Especially if collaboration is new in your school, help teachers develop skills in talking and making decisions together. Explain the different modes of dialogue and discussion (See for example, Garmston and Wellman, 2009).
- **Show teachers the research:** Research on professional learning communities indicates that teachers reap benefits such as: collective responsibility for student success, increased understanding of teachers’ roles in helping students achieve, feedback and assistance from peers, and professional renewal.
- **Take time to build trust:** Giving teachers guided practice in conducting appropriate conversations, making decisions, and managing conflict will help strengthen trust; so will keeping the focus on building student and teacher learning.



“Schools with high levels of Professional Community, Organizational Learning and Trust (PCOLT) have statistically significant improvements in student learning.”

– Kruse and Louis, 2009

“The district plays an essential role in providing the conditions that enable schools to develop PCOLT ... School districts can support change by:

- clarifying expectations bilaterally
- establishing common values and priorities
- designing opportunities for communication and mutual learning
- building trust
- coaching and modelling a culture of professionalism
- planning and thinking strategically.”

– Kruse and Louis, 2009

## Building School Culture

In their most recent publication, *Building Strong School Cultures*, Kruse and Louis (2009) describe the cultural attributes of a school that they have found will create better opportunities for students. Among these is a shift from the concept of the “heroic leader” – one person with all the answers – to an approach that increases the number of people engaged in leadership roles, with a particular focus on student outcomes.

They also identify three features of school culture that have been tied to student learning in multiple studies – professional community, organizational learning, and trust – which they have named PCOLT.

- **Professional Community (PC):** strong school cultures are based on shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, public practice, and collaboration in which adults feel a sense of collective responsibility for students and outcomes.
- **Organizational Learning (OL):** collective engagement with new ideas generates enhanced classroom practices and deeper understanding of how organizational improvement occurs. In the learning school, teachers work together to gather more information about their teaching and their content areas and then discuss, share and critique the new ideas so that all members understand and can use the new information.
- **Trust (T)** is the glue, according to Kruse and Louis, and comprises integrity, honesty and openness, concern and personal regard for others, competence, reliability, and consistency.

The authors believe school leaders need to move beyond the current pressure to focus on curriculum and instruction. Rather, school leaders ought to concentrate on integrating the fragmented subcultures that exist in every school. In their view, it is the influence of peers, parents, colleagues, and community that creates a fidgeting, rebellious student or a cynical teacher. Nothing inherent in a classroom creates these realities, nor can classroom teaching alone cause them to disappear.

Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009) draw attention to Little's (1990) four-fold taxonomy for examining collaboration as a useful organizer for thinking about and questioning existing practices:

1. Storytelling and scanning for ideas
2. Aid and assistance
3. Sharing
4. Joint work.

As they point out: "Looking across the four forms of collaboration, it is obvious that joint work is something of a different order that includes deprivatization and a collective commitment to change. Simple intensity of collaboration cannot automatically be taken as a precursor to improvement."

"Deprivatized practice is when teaching practice goes public, teachers visit one another's classrooms to observe lessons and materials and to mentor and to solve problems in the living laboratory of instructional space."

– Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996

## Assessing Cohesion and Organizational Climate

How staff members feel about their work, their supervisors, their peers, senior management, and many other factors affects their individual performance and, collectively, the organization's ability to achieve its goals. Without a formal process, finding out about staff attitudes usually relies on the instincts of their supervisors or the individual employee's willingness to communicate upward. But managerial instinct rarely provides the kind of hard data needed for decision-making, and most employees are hesitant to communicate anything but positive information to their supervisors. Organizational reviews, employee surveys and culture studies are being increasingly used by leading edge organizations across the province to get an accurate picture of the organization's current climate with the goal of helping to drive the continuous improvement/change process. Such tools help leaders to:

- understand the connection between their actions and the climate they create for their staff
- understand the climate they themselves experience on a daily basis
- work with teams and the survey results to put action steps for improvement in place
- inform professional learning through mentoring and coaching.

## Building System Culture: From PLC to Networked Learning Community (NLC)

Drawing primarily on the Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) initiative in England, Jackson & Temperley (2007) make the case for school-to-school learning and collaboration, and argue that in a knowledge-rich and networked world, the school as a unit is too small-scale and isolated to provide professional learning to its members on its own without system support.

- **Networked learning:** occurs when people from different schools engage with one another to learn together, to innovate and to enquire into their collective practices. This activity is purposeful, designed, sustained and facilitated.
- **Networked:** involves random relationships and offers rich opportunities for learning, but is distinct from networked learning, which is organized by design.
- **The effective PLC:** requires openness to learning sources from outside the school community – thus, networked learning is at the heart of the relationship between school networks and the PLC.

“Collaborative inquiry involves two components – collaboration (working together) and inquiry (a search for deep understanding). ... Collaboration is what most people think about as the purpose of networks. Collaboration is why you would want to bring people together. However, not all collaboration is equal, and working together for the sake of working together is not enough to move improvement forward.”

– Katz, Dack and Earl, 2009

### Four principles underpin networked learning:

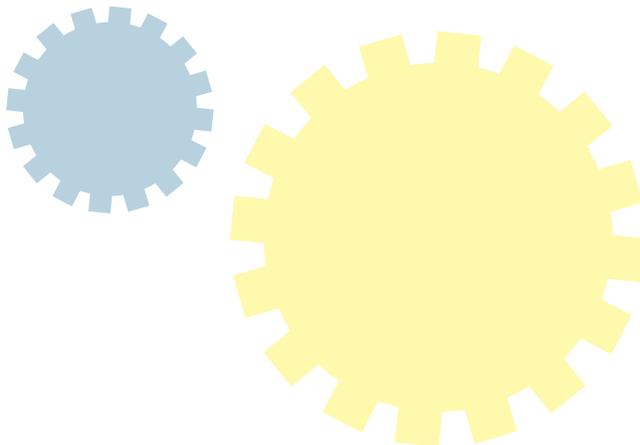
1. Moral purpose – a commitment to success for all children.
2. Shared leadership.
3. Inquiry-based practice which is evidence- and data-driven learning.
4. Adherence to a model of learning that draws on three fields of knowledge: practitioner, public, and new.

These four principles underline a commitment to collaborative practice and generosity of spirit – hence, networked learning has two key mantras. The first is that collaboration means working smarter together, rather than harder alone. The second, which represents a critical part of the principle of moral purpose, revolves around learning from, with, and on behalf of, one another.

### The Role of School and District Leaders in Supporting NLCs

According to Katz, Earl and Jaafar (2009), formal leadership is critical in the work of NLCs, at both the school and network levels in what these researchers term “enabling activities”. They argue that the involvement of formal leaders in such enabling activities is correlated with changes in thinking and practice at both the school and the network levels. Four important roles that formal leaders – whether school or district – play in relation to networks are:

1. Encouraging and motivating others
2. Setting and monitoring the agenda
3. Sharing leadership
4. Building capacity and providing support.



“For collaboration to be an enabler of the kind of meaningful professional learning that can impact on practice, it needs to be more than just an inventory of group-based activities that someone hopes will make a difference. Practitioners need to be able to work together in a way that makes their knowledge accessible and explicit, and then subject it to scrutiny and challenge in an evidence-driven sense. That is, they need to practice inquiry together. Inquiry is about a need to know or a search for deep understanding. The practice of inquiry promotes the challenge and reconstruction of professional knowledge based on a body of evidence.”

– Katz, Dack and Earl, 2009

### Some terminology

- Asynchronous describes events that don't require learners to gather at the same time; they can participate at their own convenience.
- Synchronous describes events that require learners to gather at the same time for collaboration such as a chat or phone call.

– *Journal of Staff Development*,  
February, 2010

## Using Technology to Support Collaboration

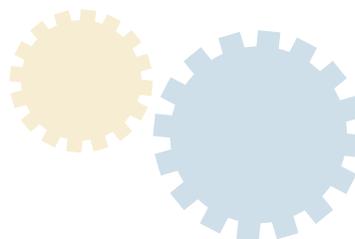
Online technologies can provide a powerful platform to support PLCs, NLCs, and other collaborative learning and work teams. Chris Dede (Crow, 2010), a leading researcher in the field at Harvard Graduate School of Education, offers the following observations:

- Online communities can be widely distributed – peers with like goals, knowledge, capacities and learning needs can connect far beyond local boundaries.
- Web 2.0 technologies allow rich collaboration and the sharing of information and resources in a wide variety of media.
- Online communities can be blended with, and support, face-to-face interactions.
- An effective online community will potentially use a wide variety of technologies from wikis, asynchronous discussions and synchronous chats to streaming videos and other media.

Dede points out the importance of developing an online community that is rewarding enough for members to participate regularly and share information and resources, in the knowledge that others will share in turn. It is not the technology, but rather the shift in culture needed to create an active community, that presents challenges, and much remains to be learned about effectively building cultures online.

## The Power of the Human Connection

Douglas Reeves (2009), recognizes the advantages that Web 2.0 offers schools and students: “Let’s remember that online interaction will never replace the human connections that underlie the most powerful education. Think for a moment about your best teachers and most inspiring leaders – the ones who challenged you to be better than you thought possible. Did they equip you merely with the most efficient way to learn many things, or did they provide essential insights that helped you make sense of what you learned? It still takes a person to accomplish that kind of teaching and learning.”



## MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CLCS

### Collaborative Learning Cultures and Courageous Conversations

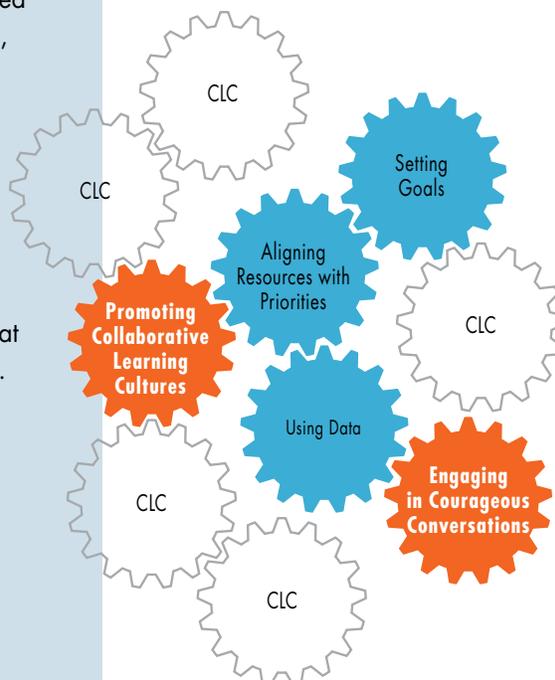
Having the capacity to engage in courageous conversations (see *Ideas Into Action*, updated Winter 2012–13) is an indispensable pre-condition for promoting and leading collaborative learning cultures. Engaging in courageous conversations is about challenging current practices and fostering improvement and growth through conversation and feedback. It requires that leaders build relational trust and establish a culture in which “difficult” conversations are not only accepted, but seen as necessary for improvement. Likewise, it requires that we challenge assumptions at both the individual and organizational levels. As we lead the shift toward deprivatized and collaborative practice, courageous conversations become a very powerful vehicle through which we can engage in open, trustful and purposeful dialogue, identify and address barriers, and build a cohesive culture that embraces positive change.

# The Ontario Context: Collaborative Learning Cultures and the Ontario Leadership Framework

How are these research findings reflected in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)? Within the OLF, the core capacity promoting collaborative learning cultures is recognized as vital to successful leadership and is reflected within – and across – all of the framework’s domains.

The framework recognizes that promoting collaborative learning cultures is about enabling schools, school communities and districts to work together and learn from each other with a central focus on improved teaching quality and student achievement. It also recognizes that leaders may do this in a variety of ways. For example, they may:

- Facilitate a shared understanding and ownership of student achievement and well-being as a central focus for collaboration among staff, federations, associations, the school board and the diverse school community.
- Improve and build on existing models of professional learning communities.
- Enable teamwork and collective decision-making among teachers and staff, providing opportunities for teacher-leadership.



**This table illustrates how “promoting collaborative learning cultures”  
is embedded in the *Ontario Leadership Framework***

<b>DOMAINS OF THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>SELECTED SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES &amp; EXAMPLES OF WHAT THESE PRACTICES LOOK LIKE IN ACTION</b>	<b>PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES:</b> Leaders draw upon their personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices
<b>Setting Directions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building a shared vision</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establish, in collaboration with staff, students, and other stakeholders, an overall sense of purpose or vision for work in their schools to which they are all strongly committed</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Identifying specific, shared, short-term goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Build consensus among students, staff, and diverse stakeholders about the school’s goals and priorities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>Building Relationships and Developing People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Facilitate opportunities for staff to learn from each other</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establish norms in the school that demonstrate appreciation for constructive debate about best practices</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Cognitive Resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem-solving expertise</li> <li>• Knowledge of effective school and classroom conditions with direct effects on student learning</li> <li>• Systems thinking</li> </ul>
<b>Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Model collaboration in their own work</li> <li>– Foster mutual respect and trust among those involved in collaboration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide regular opportunities and structures that support teachers in working together on instructional improvement, and establish a system for monitoring their collaborative work</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Building productive relationships with families and the community</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create a school environment in which parents are welcomed, respected and valued as partners in their children’s learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceiving emotions</li> <li>• Managing emotions</li> <li>• Acting in emotionally appropriate ways</li> </ul>
<b>Improving the Instructional Program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Staffing the instructional program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Retain skilled teachers by providing support and time for collaboration, sharing leadership, creating a shared vision and building trusting relationships</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Providing instructional support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide teachers with the opportunity to observe effective instructional practices among colleagues in their own school as well as in other schools</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide conditions for teachers to use data effectively (time, support, partnerships with experts, a culture in which the use of data is valued)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Psychological Resources:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Proactivity</li> </ul>
<b>Securing Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building staff members’ sense of internal accountability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 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)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

### **Collaborative Learning Cultures in Action: Student Success School Support Initiative**

The Student Success School Support Initiative offers intense support to principals from secondary schools where data show a significant number of students not being successful academically. The goal is to build on and enhance the instructional leadership capacity of the principal, who in turn can develop and lead school-based professional learning teams that focus on student achievement. The initiative brings together a group of principals, within a given district who work together in a collaborative learning culture to share ideas, learn from each other, and build and support their capacity as school leaders.

This initiative matches each participating principal with a retired secondary school principal who acts as the principal's coach. It uses a collaborative coaching model to focus support on the principal's role as leader of learning and instruction.

The Student Success School Support Initiative not only provides direct support to participating principals, but also serves to foster the growth of networks of support generally, and to support learning within and across districts.

# Walking the Talk:

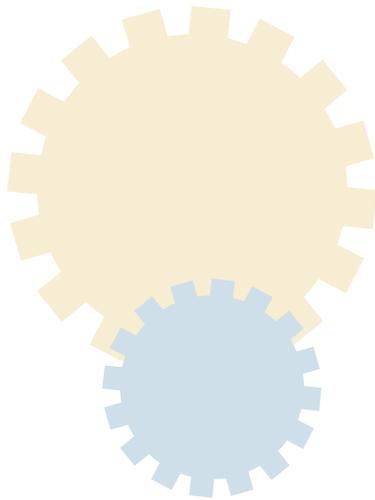
## Building Our Capacity

How can we as leaders further develop our leadership practices and personal leadership resources for promoting collaborative learning cultures? The following is a brief sampling of current programs and resources that support the development of collaborative learning cultures.

### Ministry Resources and Supports Available to Ontario Leaders

#### **Programs:**

- **The Principal Congress** is a continuing series of province-wide “think tanks” through which some 400 school and system leaders in 2009 and 2010 have had the opportunity to collaboratively explore, and generate successful leadership practices to improve schools and enhance student learning. The Congress contributes to a professional learning network through dialogue that invites open exchange and solicits input on policy directions that impact schools and students.
- **Effective Leadership, Effective Schools: Schools in the Middle** is a co-learning initiative through which teachers, principals and supervisory officers come together in networks that support open-to-learning conversations. The focus is on developing the instructional leadership capacity of team members within and across schools.
- **Connections for Students** is a joint initiative of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) which supports a child-centred collaborative approach to improving transitions for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) who leave intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) services provided by Autism Intervention Program (AIP) and start or continue with applied behaviour analysis (ABA) instructional methods in publicly funded schools. Some resources connected to this initiative can be found at [www.ontariodirectors.ca](http://www.ontariodirectors.ca).



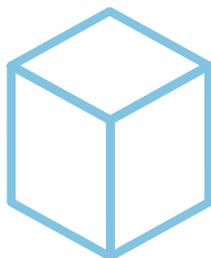
- **Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP)** supports selected schools over a two-year period, facilitating professional learning community discussions about student data and work, sharing successful evidence-based teaching strategies, and assisting the principal in bringing about school and classroom changes for improved teaching and learning.

#### Publications:

- ***In Conversation*** is a series of thought-provoking papers designed to support professional learning and dialogue, available on the ministry's [leadership website](#).
- ***New Leader*** provides practical strategies for student achievement. See for example 'Beyond Professional Learning Communities' by André LaRouche, Principal, Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CÉPÉO). *New Leader* is published by the Student Achievement Division and is available at [www.inspirelearning.ca](http://www.inspirelearning.ca).
- ***Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools*** and ***Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways: One Model for Ontario Professional Learning Communities*** are two resources relevant to collaborative learning cultures. Both are part of the Capacity Building Series produced by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) to support leadership and instructional effectiveness in Ontario schools posted at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire).

#### Webcasts:

- **Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways, Hubs and Networks:** The Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP) is a powerful model for organizing the work of teacher action teams (Professional Learning Communities) which has shown promising results in improved student learning and the creation of new teacher knowledge. This series of podcasts which are available at [www.curriculum.org/secretariat/literacy\\_en.shtml](http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/literacy_en.shtml) includes the expert voice of Kenneth Leithwood who reflects on the evidence about the value of three approaches to managing change.
- **Networked Learning Communities:** This webcast features researcher Stephen Katz, who shares insights on what makes networks effective, based on his research and experience. He suggests that six characteristics consistently emerge as being essential to effective networks: Purpose and focus, "leadership-full", collaboration, inquiry, accountability, building capacity and support. This webcast is available at [http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/literacy\\_en.shtml](http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/literacy_en.shtml).



## **Collaborative Learning Cultures in Action:**

### **Leading Student Achievement**

Leading Student Achievement (LSA) is a collaborative learning project initiated in 2005 and now going into its sixth year with 55 districts and 1600 schools participating. The LSA is a large-scale action research project sponsored by the Ministry of Education and implemented jointly by the LNS, CPCO, OPC and ADFO. This initiative is designed to improve student achievement in literacy and numeracy, and build the instructional leadership capacity of school leaders to support effective classroom practices.

School leaders work in Principal Learning Teams (PLTs), hubs and networks to improve instructional leadership, and build professional learning communities within and across schools and districts. They use evidence-based inquiry to inform assessment for learning practices, and use the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway T-LCP process for collaboratively improving instructional practice.

Recommended areas of focus in 2010-11 include:

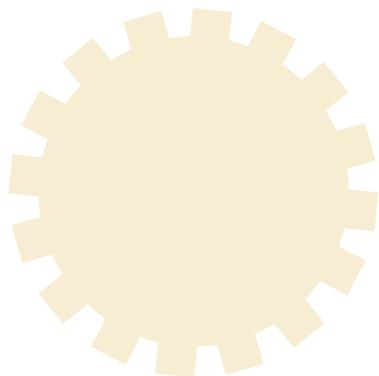
- continued T-LCP training for principals and their staffs with particular attention paid to clarifying the meaning of “big ideas” and the critical importance of developing “deep understandings” about such ideas
- continued learning for principals about how to develop “academic press” in their schools
- continued support for principals’ work in PLTs
- strengthening of PLCs to increase their impact on student learning.

## **Professional learning opportunities and resources offered by Ontario Leadership associations:**

- **The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)** invites educators to upload resources to APPLIKI a succession planning search engine for Ontario educators found at [www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca). The IEL library currently houses documents and articles to assist school and system leaders to develop their leadership capacity.
- **Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) and Association des gestionnaires de l’éducation franco-ontarienne (AGÉFO):** Beginning in spring 2010 throughout October 2010, ADFO and AGÉFO will be offering tri-level provincial training, a DVD and guide for school and system leads on building collaborative relationships. In addition, ADFO has developed *Le guide du mentor - mentorat pour les leaders scolaires nouvellement nommés* as well as training focussed on violence against women and its effect on children in our schools. A number of news bulletins and resources continue to be available on the association websites at [www.adfo.org](http://www.adfo.org) and [www.agefo.ca](http://www.agefo.ca).
- **Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers’ Association (OCSOA)** will continue to offer both the introductory and “going deeper” session for *Coaching Catholic Leaders to Attain Student Success* as a summer institute on August 16 to 19. On-line registration can be accessed on the CPCO website. The well-received OCSOA/CPCO Speaker Series designed to encourage professional dialogue and networking will also continue in 2010-11. CPCO has a full range of professional learning workshops and resources that support school and system leaders in building capacity in the various leadership domains. Learn more at [www.cpco.on.ca](http://www.cpco.on.ca) or [www.ocsoa.ca](http://www.ocsoa.ca).
- **Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) and Ontario Public Supervisory Officials’ Association (OPSOA):** OPC provides a full range of professional learning opportunities and resources that support the growth of collaborative schools. For example:
  - Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway is a process supported by OPC facilitators and professional development sessions for principals and teachers participating in the LSA project.
  - Leading and Learning through Professional Learning Communities is a workshop offered to all school leaders and the districts that are looking for support in developing a culture where schools use PLCs to build leadership capacity and improve teacher practice and student achievement.

- *The Principal as Professional Learning Community Leader* from Leading Student Achievement Series (joint Corwin Press/OPC publication) is a print resource providing school administrators with hands-on, practical support to lead the development of PLCs in their schools. Learn more at [www.principals.on.ca](http://www.principals.on.ca).

OPSOA continues to coordinate a strong mentoring program for new supervisory officers and directors of education emphasizing the collaborative role of the system leader in building a positive and active learning culture. The program utilizes the proven experience of veteran administrators, reviews expert models and establishes networks. Efforts are made through all mentoring teams to establish system-wide learning organizations. Learn more at [www.opsa.org](http://www.opsa.org).



### **Selected resources and publications recommended by Ontario leaders:**

*All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform* by Fullan (2010) shows educators what must be done to “strip away distractions and move an entire system forward” and bring about sustainable change that involves all stakeholders.

*AllthingsPLC* found at [www.allthingsplc.info](http://www.allthingsplc.info) is a clearinghouse for information about establishing and implementing professional learning communities.

*Attending to Problems of Practice: Routines and Resources for Professional Learning in Teachers’ Workplace Interactions* by Horn and Little (2010) investigates how conversational routines, or the practices by which groups structure work-related talk, function in teacher professional communities to forge, sustain, and support learning and improvement.

*Becoming a Learning School* by Killion and Roy (2009) is a comprehensive resource that provides tools, ideas, and research-based strategies on how to build learning communities and collaboration.

*Building Strong School Cultures: A Guide to Leading Change* by Kruse and Louis (2009) is a practical handbook that shows school leaders how to build a climate of collaboration with staff, teachers, parents and the community.

*Building and Connecting Learning Communities: The Power of Networks for School Improvement* by Katz, Earl, and Ben Jaafar (2009) draws on the authors’ professional development and research experience to unpack the kinds of collaborative professional learning opportunities that can have a positive impact on student learning and achievement.

***How to Change 5000 Schools: A Practical and Positive Approach for Leading Change at Every Level*** by Levin (2008) is a realistic account of the key ideas and strategies necessary to raise the bar and close achievement gaps for all students in public school systems.

***It's About Learning (and It's About Time): What's In It for Schools?*** by Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) is about understanding the connections between pupils', teachers' and leaders' learning, and between learning in schools and in the wider community, with a focus on developing schools as learning communities.

***King Arthur's Round Table: How Collaborative Conversations Create Smart Organizations*** by David Perkins (2003) argues that organizations function and grow through conversations – face-to-face and electronic – and offers insights on collaborative problem solving.

***Leading with Teacher Emotions in Mind*** by Leithwood and Beatty (2008) draws on theory and empirical evidence to show how teachers' emotional well-being can affect performance in the classroom. The authors provide specific practices educational leaders can enact to create the conditions that support teachers in their work resulting in improved climate and culture and increased student achievement.

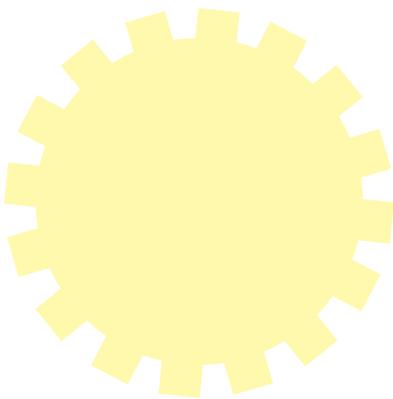
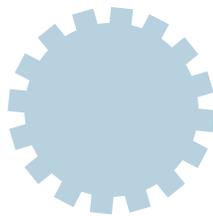
***Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Building Professional Learning Communities*** by DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2006) is intended to “take all the excuses off the table” for policymakers and practitioners alike in their pursuit of establishing authentic professional learning communities in schools and districts.

***Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*** edited by Stoll and Louis (2009) draws on research to bring together the best experts on professional learning communities.

***Shaping School Culture, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*** by Peterson and Deal (2009) describes the critical elements of school culture and shows how a positive culture can make school improvement efforts work.

***The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*** by Peterson and Deal (2009) provides tools and practical suggestions on how leaders can balance cultural goals and values against accountability demands.

***The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition***, by Garmston and Wellman (2009) addresses aspects of schooling – culture, community, and communications – that are often overlooked, and provides a detailed menu of tools, strategies and protocols for school improvement.



## 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 (OLF) 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](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca) for more information about the IEL including the *Leading the Future* report, upcoming events, leadership research, and a variety of tools and resources for leaders.

## Continuing the Dialogue: We'd Like to Hear From You

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

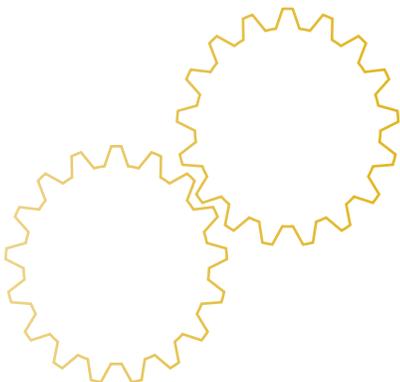
### Engaging in Courageous Conversations – What you told us

Here are comments we received from the last issue of *Ideas Into Action* which focused on the CLC engaging in courageous conversations:

- “*Ideas Into Action* #2 is a thorough treatment of a timely topic – making a case for courageous conversations. The research has been synthesized in a clear and concise way, making the document easy to read and exceptionally practical.”
- “As a participant in the Principal Congress 2010, I wrote about my theory of action for bringing about a change in instructional practice in response to the advance question we were asked to complete. When I read *Ideas Into Action* #2, it really struck a chord. A key challenge I face as a school leader is, in fact, to address long-held beliefs in order to bring about breakthroughs in closing achievement gaps, and to do this in a way that is constructive and does not result in defensiveness and disengagement.”
- “As a Student Success Leader, I found that having some key questions in mind is helpful when engaging others in courageous conversations about school and district data. Some examples of questions I found useful are:
  - Is the data accurate? Accurate versus exact.
  - How do I communicate the change? Explain versus defend.
  - What do I do about it? Act rather than accept.”

- “Principal Qualifications Program (PQP) providers report that *Ideas Into Action* bulletins are a valued resource used to help meet expectations of the program. In the words of one principal council representative, ‘keep them coming’ as they are a relevant and meaningful support to those who aspire to become principals in future.”
- “As a PQP instructor, I use the *Ideas Into Action* bulletins as a resource reflective of current educational research and as a tool for candidates to familiarize themselves with Ontario pedagogy and educational priorities.”
- “*Ideas Into Action* #2 provided an easy-to-read, concise document. It is a great resource for today’s school leaders looking for more information on courageous conversations, how to challenge current practices and foster improvement and growth through conversation, to support teachers as they strive to continuously improve their practice.”

### **Write to us about promoting collaborative learning cultures**



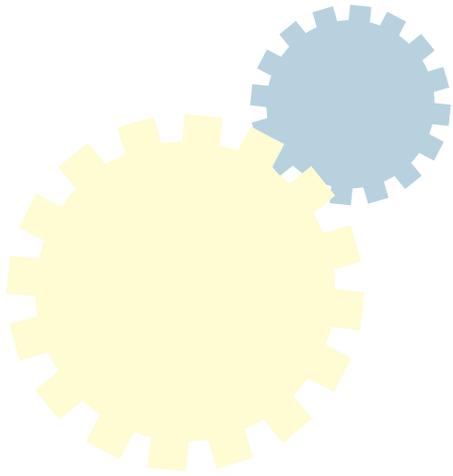
We encourage you to share your insights with us about this issue, and tell us about your own experiences with promoting collaborative learning cultures. What has worked for you? What professional learning supports have you found to be effective in strengthening this capacity? We look forward to your responses and to sharing excerpts in the next issue of *Ideas Into Action* which will focus on “setting goals”.

**Learn more about the Ontario Leadership Strategy at**  
[www.ontario.ca/eduleadership](http://www.ontario.ca/eduleadership).

You will find more information about Leadership Development on the ministry website and on the website of the Institute of Education Leadership (IEL) at [www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca).  
If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at:  
[ldb-ddl@ontario.ca](mailto:ldb-ddl@ontario.ca).

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