



CREATING a CULTURE
— of —

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

*Capacity-Building for
Schoolwide Success*

PETE HALL | ALISA SIMERAL

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Preface

When we first wrote *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success: A Collaborative Approach for Coaches and School Leaders* (or *BTCFS* for short; Hall & Simeral, 2008), our work was more theoretical, based upon a strong case study (Anderson Elementary School in Reno, Nevada) and a few additional sample projects smattered about the United States. If you're interested in the Anderson School turnaround story, look up the *Educational Leadership* article "A School Reclaims Itself" (Hall, 2005). That's where Pete explains how the school went from being the lowest-achieving school in Nevada (the only school to have failed to make its Adequate Yearly Progress goals for four consecutive years) to the only Title I school in the state to earn a High Achieving designation just two years later.

Now, nearly a decade after the publication of *BTCFS*, the research is thorough, the implementations are widespread, and the jury is back: the philosophy, model, structures, and strategies within *BTCFS* are guilty of having a positive impact on student learning, through the capacity-building efforts of administrators, coaches, and educators worldwide. And we're not just looking at short-term results; indeed, this approach isn't fulfilled until we've established persistent, enduring, long-lasting, positive change in the belief systems, thought patterns, and collective results in schools and communities.

As one might expect, we have considerably refined our work over the past several years. We are refinement-stage thinkers, after all, and there's

no way our first product arrived as stain-free and streamlined as it could be! And while we thought these updates would serve as a 2nd edition of *BTCFS*, we quickly realized the breadth and depth of new, exciting, and extensive information herein truly amounts to a new tool, rather than a refurbished one. In fact, we believe this to be the *definitive* guide to building teachers' capacity.

Our experiences as in-the-trenches practitioners (Pete as a principal of two additional Title I schools; Alisa as a dean of students, instructional coach, turnaround specialist, and coach of coaches) and as in-the-field professional development agents (through years of concurrent consulting work in schools and districts internationally) have verified the impact that this work—this idea, this structure, this approach—has had upon legions of educators in elementary, middle, and high schools, in urban and rural settings, teaching every content imaginable.

If you're interested in exploring the implementations and their early (and long-term) results, you might look into some of the following locations:

- Washoe County (Nevada) School District
- Point Isabel (Texas) Independent School District
- Sarasota County (Florida) Public Schools
- Cypress-Fairbanks (Texas) Independent School District
- Page (Arizona) Unified School District
- Iowa City (Iowa) Community School District
- Gibbes Middle School (Columbia, South Carolina)
- Linn-Mar High School (Marion, Iowa)
- Brule Elementary School (Navasota, Texas)
- White Street School Elementary (Springfield, Massachusetts)

Our initial goal, as we launched this work, was to build a capacity model that truly affected the quality of the instruction delivered by our teachers, strengthened their reflective abilities in order to have a lasting impact,

and encouraged collaboration between the administrator, the instructional coach, and other capacity-builders (peers, mentors, teacher-leaders, and others) in our teachers' lives.

Interestingly, in a lot of the early implementations, we encountered instructional leaders who were so hyperfocused on their own roles and strategies, they hadn't yet included their *teachers* in the work. As they strove to improve reflective practices and technical expertise across their campuses, and despite the best of intentions, they had accidentally excluded the very people whose capacity they were attempting to build! Soon we wrote and published our parallel teacher text, *Teach, Reflect, Learn: Building Your Capacity for Success in the Classroom* (Hall & Simeral, 2015), to ensure that teachers were not only a part of the conversation, but also could take the reins of their own professional growth through the many self-directed options we provided.

At that point, we thought we had all our bases covered (be ready—that's just the first of many sports metaphors we've woven into this text). As we scrutinized the implementations and their effectiveness, it was clear that some settings were yielding stronger returns than others, despite the same professional development, resources, activities, and timelines. What made the difference? Well, many things: personnel, context, commitment of the leaders—and, more than anything else, the environment established by the leadership. Hence the “culture of reflective practice” that you'll read so much about in this book.

In the preface for *BTCFS*, we wrote something that still holds true today:

What follows are the current results of our investigation.
We write *current* because as education evolves, information expands, and experience accrues, our understandings of the work we do will continue to change and evolve as well. We'll never know everything we need to know, and we may never achieve our ultimate goal. But the beauty of this work is that while we strive, we make a difference. (p. x)

Throughout this text, we, the authors—one of us a veteran principal and the other a veteran instructional coach—add our individual two cents to the discussion. Sometimes telling an anecdote, sometimes going into a bit more detail, Pete Hall (in “Pete’s Perspective”) and Alisa Simeral (in “Alisa’s Approach”) share experiences and outlooks. Our hope is that these asides will add flavor and resonance to the text.

We also want to note that we have provided downloadable, fillable PDF versions of several of the book’s tools, templates, forms, and protocols for your immediate use at www.ascd.org. Here’s how to find them: TKTK.

As you read on, we challenge you to critically reflect upon your thinking and your work; we urge you to continuously strive for excellence; we encourage you to cultivate collaborative relationships; and we commend you for making a difference.

Truly, this work would not be possible but for the input and impact of the educators who shaped us, gave us opportunity, and helped to refine our approaches over the years. From the stout trunk of the Frank C. Garrity tree to the common sense of Derek Cordell, from the models of excellence from Kim Price and Lisa Johnson to the fearless leadership of Prim Walters, from the passion of Andre Wicks to the gorgeous lessons of Collette McIntyre, and from the nuanced coaching of Gia Maraccini to the persistent advocacy of Amanda Romey—this list could span to the moon and back, and we love and appreciate each of you that much.

As we’ve proceeded through the writing process with this project, we cannot say thank you enough to the wonderful folks at ASCD, namely the incomparable Genny Ostertag and the persnickety editing of Jamie Greene—both of whom have made us not only feel like we know what we’re doing but look like it, too. And to our families and pets—from spouses and kids to dogs, chickens, horses, cats, and hamsters—we owe a tremendous amount of appreciation for the love and support with which we are constantly warmed. You are why we do the work we do.



Demystifying the Surest Path to Student Learning

One hundred percent. Is there any other number in education—or in any element of life, for that matter—that is more important? Wouldn't our communities breathe a little easier if 100 percent of our citizens were well educated, employed, and contributing members to society? Shouldn't our school districts aim for 100 percent of their students graduating prepared for college, careers, and life? Don't schools and teachers want 100 percent of their students to master 100 percent of key learning outcomes? We can guarantee you that all parents want 100 percent of their children to succeed, achieve, and meet 100 percent of their potential.

Unfortunately, educators have long been loath to promote goals that include the lofty, audacious figure of 100 percent. In the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB), that very goal was set for 2014 student achievement rates. That “finish line” has come and gone, as has NCLB, but the effects are lasting: setting a goal of 100 percent proficiency has shifted the focus to *all* students, which by definition includes and emphasizes *each* and *every* individual student. Here's a mission—a philosophy, at least—we can all get behind.

In a lot of contexts, numbers other than 100 percent have been deemed sufficient. Many schools, districts, and teachers set goals to have 90 percent,

80 percent, 60 percent, or even a smaller percentage of students reach the proficiency level on academic achievement indexes. When would 90 percent be sufficient? When referring to the number of words one spells correctly on a spelling test? The number of students adequately supporting a thesis statement in an essay? The percentage of parents or families representing their children during parent-teacher conference week? The number of free throws made in a basketball game? The high school graduation rate?

Let's extend our thinking beyond education, just for argument's sake. Would 90 percent meet our needs for on-time flight arrivals? How about crash-free flights? Successful medical procedures? Accurate billing from your credit card company? The success rate of your own bungee jumps off the Rio Grande Bridge in Taos, New Mexico? Heavens, no!

One hundred percent is the *only* number that matters.

As educators, we engage every day in the most noble, the most impactful, and the most important act known to humankind: teaching. Ensuring the success, the learning, and the development of our community's young people is not a task to take lightly and certainly isn't one worthy of shucking off one-tenth of our clientele. We can, and we must, reach every single child, every single moment: 100 percent.

Are We There Yet?

Over the past two decades or so, we (the collective *we*) have pummeled our schools, lambasted our teachers, skewered our principals, and—worst of all—heaped anxiety upon piles of torment and stress on our kids—all in the name of explaining our collective lack of academic success and growth. We could look at PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) or TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) scores (both of which—along with other international measures—are available for your scrutiny at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/international/ide>), homegrown assessment results such as the NAEP (National Assessment

of Educational Progress, commonly known as the Nation's Report Card), or the reams of standardized test score data we've so eagerly collected to know this: it ain't pretty.

Let's just cut to the chase, shall we? If you teach, lead, or work in a school system—or if you're a member of our human society—you're quite aware that our schools are not functioning up to their potential. Never mind the unattainable (albeit admirable) goal of 100 percent across the board. The painful and plentiful reality is this: our students are not achieving as they could. We are stumbling along this path, churning out masses of young adults toting a remarkable disparity of knowledge, skills, and readiness for the *real* world, including some who are ill-prepared to the point of embarrassment. That's the bad news. Here's the good news: there's *plenty* of room for improvement.

Have We Gone Mad?

Because we have yet to encounter anyone who claims, "Our schools are fine; just leave them alone," it's safe to say there's consensus about the urgent need to improve our educational outputs. And now, for the \$620 billion question (that was the total expenditure for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 2012–13, according to the most recent NCES data, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=66>): *How do we improve our schools? And where should we allocate our funds to get the biggest bang for the buck?*

As a profession, and as a society, we decry the lack of funding in education. We lament the shortfalls, pummel our legislators, plead for increased spending, and even sue the states for their failure to adequately fund basic education needs (National Educational Access Network, available at <http://schoolfunding.info/litigation/litigation.php3>). To a certain extent, this is justifiable outrage. Then again, what mechanisms are in place to monitor and evaluate our allocation of the funds we *do* receive and the impact of those expenditures? Are we wise stewards of public

funds? Or are we simply asking for more money to spend on doing more of the same thing, sowing the seeds of the status quo? Do we even know what to do to improve?

In our ardent quest to unravel the mysteries of effective teaching, we have swung from one end of that puckish educational pendulum to the other. Over and over again, we've embraced a "new" approach, banishing our previous practices as "old school" and claiming innovation as the key to improvement. We have sought the strategies that lead to higher levels of student learning, hoping that replicating them in our classrooms will produce better results. The consequence of this pursuit, noble as it may appear, is a frightful adherence to lock-step actions, teachers following a prescribed checklist monitored by zealous principals; and when the test results come back stagnant, we switch to a different set of instructional techniques, again hoping for different outcomes.

Plan A

What does the research say about what successful, effective schools and districts are doing to make their gains? How do high-performing schools and districts allocate their precious resources (time, money, energy, and personnel)? If we are going to focus on the educational growth and development of our students, where do we start? Where do we direct our energy in order to address education's public accountability charge? The answer is startlingly simple. We must improve teacher quality, because *teacher quality—and quality instruction—is the number-one determinant of student success.*



Teacher quality—and quality instruction—is the number-one determinant of student success.

Now, now. Before you cast this claim into the cacophony of prominent voices all across the educational landscape singing the same song,

know this: we have an idea for how to do this in a rather simple, replicable, focused manner. More on that later. For now, let's validate the claim.

Research has long supported the assertion that better teachers lead to higher student achievement. A 70-year-old article in *Educational Leadership* identified an early perspective on the characteristics of effective teaching—with a rudimentary rubric distinguishing between the Teachers, the Gentlemen, the Conscientious Souls, and the Wastrels (Landsdowne, 1944)! More recently, Charlotte Danielson, creator of the indispensable Framework for Professional Practice, stated quite directly, “High-level learning by students requires high-level instruction by their teachers” (2007, p. 15). Not surprisingly, this is a global perspective, echoed by Barber and Mourshed in *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*: “The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction” (2007, p. 34). Education expert Linda Darling-Hammond studied the results of the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) to declare, “We cannot make major headway in raising student performance and closing the achievement gap until we make progress in closing the teaching gap” (2014–15, p. 18).

The message is the same closer to home. Bryan Goodwin, CEO of the research think tank Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), concurred that “one of the most important ways that school systems can change the odds for students is to ensure that every child receives the benefit of a great teacher, every year, and in every classroom” (2011, p. 19). The reality, as expressed by renowned educational researcher Robert J. Marzano, is this: “It is clear that effective teachers have a profound influence on student achievement and ineffective teachers do not. In fact, ineffective teachers might actually impede the learning of their students” (2003, p. 75).

Based on this commonsensical idea, the Teacher Quality Roadmap series from the National Council on Teacher Quality has investigated the state of teacher quality in 13 school districts since its launch in 2009, offering findings in policy and practice that guide reform initiatives (for more information, go to nctq.org). John Hattie, whose mega meta-analysis *Visible*

Learning carries significant professional clout, acknowledges the variation in teacher quality, noting that “it is the differences in the teachers that make the difference in student learning” (2009, p. 236). Hattie proceeds to reveal the teaching actions and instructional strategies that have the greatest effect on student learning. With this profound research support, the mystery of effective instruction really has no business being a mystery any more.

First off, let’s be clear that our emphasis is on improving the learning outcomes for every child, every moment of every day, in every classroom in every school. That means 100 percent. This effort requires a concerted, laserlike focus on strengthening core first instruction, an argument that the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) movement has attempted to bring to light, but its particulars have obfuscated that emphasis. Experts such as Buffum, Mattos, and Weber remind us, “No intervention program can compensate for ineffective core instructional practices” (2008, p. 74); and the esteemed Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey suggest, “Approximately 75 to 85 percent of students should make sufficient progress through core instruction alone. Schools where this is not the case should focus on improving core instruction” (2010, p. 24). We must remain beholden to this responsibility. First things first: we’ve got to have a strong Plan A.

The X Factor

In *Building Teachers’ Capacity for Success* (Hall & Simeral, 2008), we asked you to consider the difference between a classroom with no learning tools and one devoid of a teacher within it. We now ask you to hone your envisioning skills a bit further.

Imagine, if you will, a garden-variety school classroom—any setting, any content, students of any age. Fill it with the best furniture, materials, curriculum, technology, and tools that money can buy. Load it up with everything from your wish list, as if you had just won the lottery and your first act was to better equip this single classroom with top-notch *everything*. Gorgeous, isn’t it? The paint, the lights, the carpet, the tablets, the simulators,

and the thousand-dollar unbreakable-tip pencils. What parents wouldn't want their kid in this classroom? And right on cue, let's load up the room with students, as many as can comfortably fit while maintaining the ideal student-teacher ratio.

And for the coup de grace, bring in the teacher—and not just any teacher. No, for this classroom we're going to bring in a certifiably, thoroughly *mediocre* teacher.

What will the results be? What kind of learning is going to take place in this room?

Now let's shake things up a bit. First, turn off the electricity and eliminate all that technology—no computers, no panacean apps, no holographics, no Internet. Next, remove the books. Take out the desks, the paper, the ergonomically designed chairs, the lectern, and even the crayons. Picture the room barren of furniture and materials.

How will the students learn now? How will they develop their curiosity, grow and develop as thinkers, comprehend rules and exceptions to rules, understand the Earth's place in the universe, decipher poetry, conceive of ways to better the world, embrace the natural existence of mathematics, and make meaning of the events of World War II?

As a final touch, let's excuse that mediocre teacher. Quickly now—because a classroom without a teacher is ripe for some frightening situations—let's bring a different teacher into the room; someone exceptional, passionate, committed, engaging, and by all means extraordinary.

What will the results be now? What kind of learning is going to take place in this room? And how will the students learn?

Silly, isn't it, that it's that obvious, that straightforward, and that elemental? We're not overstating the point when we say that teachers matter. Effective teachers matter. The quality of the teacher is the "X factor." Everything in education depends on it.



The quality of the teacher is the "X factor." Everything in education depends on it.

It is doubtful that your response to this scenario includes exclamatory statements such as “Startling,” “Revolutionary,” or “No way! I’d never considered that before!” Even so, the questions remain: How much value are we really placing on teacher quality? If it’s so important, what are we doing to unilaterally and unabashedly address it? In their report *The Widget Effect*, the New Teacher Project dug into our profession’s tendency to hide poor performance and overinflate teacher evaluation ratings, finding a “culture of indifference about the quality of instruction” (2009, p. 2). Then, in their scathing follow-up, *The Mirage*, they uncovered an even uglier reality: despite expenditures of nearly \$18,000 per teacher per year on various forms of professional development, nearly 70 percent of teachers did not improve or *declined* in their performance over a period of two to three years, suggesting a “pervasive culture of low expectations for teacher development and performance” (2015, p. 2). As a result, and not surprisingly, teacher morale is in a steady decline, with large numbers of educators leaving the profession. A recent report for the Alliance for Excellent Education (XXXX), a policy and advocacy organization, found that “13 percent of the nation’s 3.4 million teachers move schools or leave the profession every year” (p. XX).

“The teaching force is a leaky bucket, losing hundreds of thousands of teachers—the majority of them before retirement age,” says a 2016 report from the Learning Policy Institute.

So a better question might actually be this: Why aren’t we *developing* our teachers with consistent, effective *professional development* endeavors that *improve* teaching, positively *affect* student learning, and *build capacity* for enduring, long-term professional growth? Why aren’t we (again, the collective *we*) providing PD that sticks?

PD That Sticks

Common sense tells us that in order to improve, we must change. Insanity, Albert Einstein told us, “is doing the same thing over and over again and

expecting different results.” Change, then, is a prerequisite of improvement. And in this case, change means learning more, thinking differently, altering practices, and improving student outcomes.

In his straightforward publication *Professional Development That Sticks*, award-winning educator Fred Ende states the obvious: “All of us, no matter what role we hold, no matter what organization we work for, no matter what profession we belong to, need to strive to keep getting better” (2016, p. 3).

For decades, we have erroneously focused our efforts on providing simple technical fixes to complex systemic problems. Our professional development still consists predominately of “sit ’n’ git” sessions that lack relevance and tend to encourage a single course of action—usually the *correct* implementation of a tool, a strategy, a method, or a program—that the rank-and-file teachers, once back in their classrooms, use only as directed, checking off boxes accordingly. And we’re surprised when (1) teachers fail to follow through as demanded, (2) student learning outcomes continue to lag, and (3) teachers rebel against such poorly designed, poorly executed professional torture exercises.

Oh, for heaven’s sake, we know what to do! The research is plentiful—and even eloquent—in its blueprints for continued professional growth. Ende (2016, pp. 8–9) continues with four key characteristics of professional development that sticks: it is meaningful, it is highly engaging, the audience has ownership, and it has an impact on professional practice and student learning. Let’s explore these commonsense items one at a time.

1. *It is meaningful.* Historically, educator PD has been rather hit-and-miss, something we do *to* teachers that may or may not have any relevance. With clear goals and a powerful vision, however, we can streamline all of our efforts. One of education’s leading voices on effective professional development, Tom Guskey, implores us to begin with the end in mind: “We must first consider the specific student learning outcomes we want to attain” (2014,

p. 13). Bryan Goodwin, in *Simply Better* (2011, p. 10), compels us to then answer the question: “In light of the hundreds (if not thousands) of things we might do, are we doing what matters most?” By emphasizing learning experiences that focus on the few approaches that will have the greatest impact upon our progress toward the collective outcomes, the meaningfulness quotient skyrockets.

2. *It is highly engaging.* One of our biggest misconceptions about professional learning is that it’s an event. Although workshops, seminars, and coursework certainly canvass the educational landscape, the notion of “inservice training” severely limits our perspective. In fact, the very term, *training*, causes a pseudo-gagging reflex in us, as it conjures images of seals with beach balls balanced atop their snouts, not the ongoing growth of professional educators. Instead, let’s think of professional learning as an experience: it could be job-embedded (Hall & Simeral, 2008), a function of collaborative inquiry (David, 2008–09), spurred by curiosity (Goodwin, 2014), and structured in a format that participants—either at the table together in a workshop or in a classroom trying out a new strategy with a colleague—are eager to focus on, interact with, and reflect upon thoroughly (Ende, 2016). In their 2015 revision of the Standards for Professional Learning (available at <https://learningforward.org/standards>), Learning Forward reveals an undeniable truth: “Educators learn in different ways and at different rates.” Our plans and delivery must respect this.
3. *The audience has ownership.* There’s a subtle but monumental difference between “ownership” and “buy-in,” which zealous principals and professional development facilitators often pursue. Doug Reeves, in *Transforming Professional Development into Student Results*, eschews the notion that staff “buy-in” is

an essential antecedent for positive change. Instead, he argues, we should be compelled by the *vision* and our focused goals—*those* are what should drive our professional learning ambitions, programs, and experiences (2010, p. 6). In his seminal work, *Drive*, author Daniel Pink details the impact autonomy has upon motivation, offering the view that we need less prodding and more choice in *how* to satisfactorily meet our vision and goals. We need to let our teachers *own* it (2009, pp. 88–90), rather than determining a course of action and then somehow trying to convince, bribe, or cajole teachers into “buying in.” Ownership rules. This is the difference between compliance and commitment.



Ownership rules. This is the difference between *compliance* and *commitment*.

4. *It has an impact on professional practice and student learning.*

Learning Forward’s updated standards (referenced earlier) also express a need to provide professional development that is ongoing, differentiated, and addresses the knowledge, skills, and *dispositions* (emphasis added) that lead to changes in educator practice, that lead to changes in student outcomes. This will require a significant amount of forethought in planning effective learning experiences that are related to the common vision and goals (Guskey, 2014). And, not to be overlooked, we must allocate a considerable investment in follow-up and follow-through: communicating expectations, monitoring implementation, providing just-in-time support, and maintaining focus and momentum on the goals (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo, & Simeral, 2016; Hall & Simeral, 2008; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). This isn’t work that we can leave to chance, hope, or happenstance.



If we want our PD to affect how we provide learning experiences for students, it's got to be intentionally crafted and delivered to meet that end.

In addition to Ende's clear blueprint for effective professional learning, we'd like to contribute our perspective on keeping the long-range vision in focus. In the fun and impactful leadership guide *Water the Bamboo*, author Greg Bell discusses the patience needed to see the full benefits of our capacity-building efforts. Although the growth rate of giant timber bamboo (a foot-and-a-half per day) is exciting, "what's even more amazing about giant timber bamboo is that once it's planted, it takes at least three years to break through the ground" (2009, p. 1). The farmers trust the process as they tend to their invisible crops, season after season. This observation offers a pretty vibrant metaphor for us as instructional leaders and professional developers.

We know what to do, so let's do it. Acting with deep knowledge, inescapable intentionality, and consistent support will undoubtedly have an impact—a lasting, powerful impact—and promises to strengthen the entire system. This is the essence of capacity-building: continued growth and ongoing development for the long haul.

$n + 1$

Perhaps there is a number as important as 100 percent, after all. It is this: $n + 1$. No matter what our present levels of performance are, no matter what our baseline is, and no matter where we are now (represented by data point n), we can always do better. We can always strive for more. We can always take that step forward. We can always aim for $n + 1$.

What if we altered the model, reduced the number of dollars we allocate to the *stuff* that comes in glitzy packages and touts success for all students and the *fluff* of PD that has strangled our profession, and instead extended our professional educators' daily and annual schedules to include

ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities? This could come in the form of extended collaboration time for teams, built-in time for research, PD with experts, data analysis, strategic planning, deepening content knowledge and pedagogical skill, and running instructional scrimmages. *Practice.* Let's pay our teachers more, invest our funds in the folks who truly determine the student learning outcomes, and get the biggest bang for the buck!

Pete's Perspective

I was recently working with a district that had a very adept grant writer on staff. This person, well versed in learning theories and recent research, successfully obtained over a million dollars' worth of grant funding for the district. With these funds, she purchased truckloads of educational tools: interactive white boards, piles upon piles of books, the latest and greatest PE equipment, laptops, subscriptions to websites with assessment tools and personalized learning pages, and a gazillion other items.

Needing to account for their whereabouts, she stored these tools in a central warehouse, available to teachers for checkout. She ran special training sessions to inform teachers of the tools and how to use them, she invited teachers to browse the inventory, and she offered bonus gifts to anyone who checked items out to use. Unfortunately, the incredible majority of these terrific tools remained in the warehouse, collecting dust and taking up space. Despite the best of intentions, this endeavor fell flat. No one took advantage of these items, so learning wasn't affected.

More dramatic was this: \$1 million of grant funds had brought in stuff. What might have been the impact on that district's children if that money had been allocated to personnel, professional development, or—better yet—personnel who provided professional development, like instructional coaches?

Unfortunately, the district will never know.

Let's Put Our Money Where Our Research Is

Here's a thought: let's gain clarity about what will make the greatest impact on student achievement. That's easy. It's teacher quality, and we've been banging this drum for a while now. Then let's prioritize that fact in our practices, policies, and pocketbooks. Let's reallocate the funds that get derailed at the online marketplace toward enhancing teacher quality. Paying teachers for the full days they're working anyway, let's reconfigure the work day to include regular teacher collaboration, job-embedded professional development, the pursuit of action research projects, data analysis, and regular opportunities for extending their professional learning endeavors. What if teaching became a true profession, in every sense of the word, and we paid our teachers to learn, grow, collaborate, reflect, and augment their performance *every day*, thereby increasing their positive impact on student learning? What if we truly put our money where our research is?

Let's put the person at the front of the classroom at the top of the list for funding. It isn't necessarily the number of dollars we spend in education that's the issue; rather, it's how we're spending those dollars. Let's get it right. And let's build a culture of reflective practice.

The Culture of Reflective Practice

What is a culture of reflective practice, you ask? Here is our operational definition:

A culture of reflective practice is an organization that embraces reflective growth as the primary driving force behind continuous, lasting improvement. In such an organization, members speak the language of reflection, engage in rigorous metacognitive tasks, and earnestly support their individual and collective growth. The entire organization oozes self-reflection.

In short, a culture of reflective practice describes the conditions that enable all our strength-based, adult-differentiated, student-learning-focused efforts to be successful. It is composed of the factors that embrace change, that clarify the vision and goals, that communicate openly and transparently, that work together to make steady progress toward organizational outcomes, and that facilitate deep reflection that leads to ongoing, steady, enduring professional growth.

The foundation of a culture of reflective practice is built upon seven fundamentals. These Building Teacher Capacity (BTC) Fundamentals are the foundational pieces necessary to support and guide schools and districts through the process of shifting school culture and climate, growing a reflective mindset, and establishing a culture of reflective practice:

1. Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities
2. Expectations and Communication
3. Celebration and Calibration
4. Goal Setting and Follow-through
5. Strategic PLC and Teacher-Leadership Support
6. Transformational Feedback
7. Differentiated Coaching

In Chapters 5 through 13, we will explore these BTC Fundamentals in more depth. But first, we've got to address that spongy gray matter between our ears.

Think about it.



Fundamental 1: Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities



Fundamental 1 Theory of Action: *If we cultivate strong professional relationships and obtain clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the various capacity-builders in our school, then we will have prepared a sturdy, solid foundation upon which to build the essential fundamentals of a culture of reflective practice.*

Sports metaphors have a way of bringing to life some of the more eloquent descriptions of the human experience. And here, as we embark upon a discussion of Fundamental 1 in a culture of reflective practice, we call upon the interactions, relationships, and common understandings of the United States women's national soccer team to help make our case.

Since July 2003, the U.S. women's national soccer team has been ranked either number one or number two in the world, accumulating more international championships than any other team. Of note: the U.S. women's squad has taken three Women's World Cup titles (this event has occurred only seven times, starting in 1991) and collected four of the past six Olympic gold medals, perhaps explaining why the 2015 World Cup Final was the most-watched soccer game in U.S. history (Sandomir, 2015).

Of course, each of these teams is composed of excellent athletes with superior knowledge of the game, deft footwork, mythological endurance, and a keen sense for performing under pressure. However, it's the connection between players, the relationships on and off the field, and the teamwork that come together to make this team a modern dynasty.

The U.S. women's team undergoes rigorous practice sessions and meticulous preparation before its matches. Players not only understand their roles in a generic sense—who are the defenders, who are the midfielders, who are the strikers, and who is the goalie—they also clarify the particular areas of the field they will cover, their roles during game-specific plays such as corner kicks, and their collaborative strategies for attacking and defending throughout each match. For players on the team, the left foot definitely knows what the right foot is doing at all times, because they've talked about it, clarified it, practiced it, and performed it. And when they make a mistake, they fix it—together.

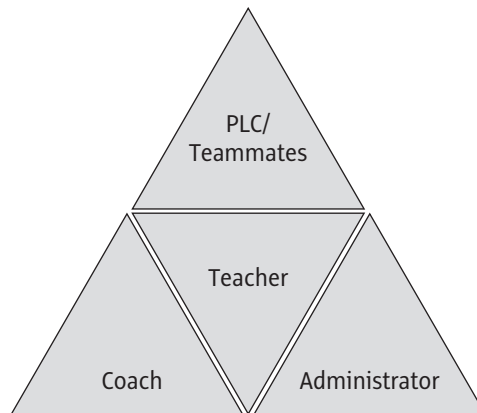
In the Schoolhouse

The broad, unyielding foundation of a culture of reflective practice begins with the establishment and nurturing of positive, professional relationships between all the members of the school. It's critical to emphasize that the relationships are not an *end* in themselves; rather, they are a *means* to an end. Having strong relationships enables the rest of the work to proceed unfettered. Adding to this strong base is the clarity of roles and relationships between the capacity-builders within the system, to ensure that they all know the parameters of their own work and that of their peers, and where there might be overlap. These three concepts (relationships, roles, and responsibilities) require the immediate and ongoing attention of those in leadership roles if a culture of reflective practice is to flourish.

The primary responsibilities in a culture of reflective practice rest on the shoulders of those in instructional leadership roles at the school level: administrators and coaches. Because their job descriptions contain

language and obligations directly related to supporting individual teachers' professional growth, we'll refer to these two roles as "official" capacity-builders. These responsibilities are shared with others, however, as shown in our Triad Diagram (Figure 5.1), where you'll note that there are actually *four* specific roles designated: the administrator, the coach, the PLC/teammates, and the teacher. In the following paragraphs we'll provide a brief overview of these four; later in the chapter, we'll provide some guidelines for how the roles partner in their collaborative endeavor to build teachers' capacity.

FIGURE 5.1
Triad Diagram



Administrators include principals, assistant principals, and those in any other site-based administrative position responsible for the supervision and evaluation of teachers. Although administrators' feedback inherently packs more wallop, those embracing our capacity-building model will ensure the establishment of a trusting relationship bent on maximizing teacher potential and having a positive impact on student learning. Administrators establish the tone and tenor of a school's capacity-building efforts, and their involvement is absolutely critical to the overall success of this venture.

Coaches make up a category headlined by actual instructional coaches, those who are hired to provide job-embedded professional development at the site level. This is a position and role introduced several decades ago

by Joyce and Showers, who stated, “Like athletes, teachers will put newly learned skills to use—if they are coached” (1982, p. 5). For simplicity, we use the term *coach* throughout this text, though we’re also referring to literacy coordinators, content coaches, department chairs, grade-level representatives, mentors, teacher-leaders, and any other site-based staff developers. They possess the ability to approach each teacher as a peer, providing nonevaluative, nonthreatening, meaningful support in an individualized collaborative coaching model.

The PLC/teammates includes other teachers with assignments within that teacher’s discipline, such as fellow grade-level, department, or content teachers. This category may also include members of a teacher’s learning network, professional learning community, or anyone else with “skin in the game”—that is, an interest in achieving an interdependent student-learning goal in partnership with a given teacher. Teammates have a unique leverage point: as colleagues with common interests, common assignments, and common challenges, they’re fantastically poised to provide realistic, valid, and credible perspectives that help develop teachers’ reflective and technical expertise.

Teachers, lest we forget, are the central focus of our work. As we’ve said before, the teacher is “the center of the universe” (Hall & Simeral, 2015, p. 2). Teachers are a vital part of this equation and should be included at every step in the process. Effective collaborative support, differentiated feedback, and personalized coaching are not things done *to* teachers; they’re things done *with* teachers. Partnering early with our teachers is a wise step in building a robust capacity-building model that transforms the entire school community.

Relationship Triangulation

In data analysis, the term *triangulation* refers to the technique for drawing a defensible conclusion based on multiple data points from various measurement sources. In capacity-building, *triangulation* refers to the technique for strengthening a teacher’s reflective tendencies based on multiple relationships between the teacher and the various sources of support in

this process. Growth and progress require change, and change is often difficult. The *significant* relationships will ease the strains associated with lasting, meaningful, productive change.

Consider Figure 5.1 (p. xx). With the teacher in the center of the triad diagram, we note three clear sets of connections: (1) the teacher's significant relationship with the administrator; (2) the teacher's significant relationship with the coach; and (3) the teacher's significant peer relationships, grounded in the foundation of the PLC framework.

We also recognize three other important relationships: (1) the administrator's significant relationship with the coach; (2) the coach's significant relationship with teacher teams; and (3) the teacher teams' significant relationship with the administrator. All these players—these key capacity-builders—must work in a coordinated, intentional, and collaborative manner to support teacher growth.

Having all these relationships in place virtually ensures that the teacher will be bent on learning, be keyed into self-reflection, and interdependently receive support that leads to continuous professional growth. These three unyielding elements constitute the support network that is critical to building teachers' capacity.

Our overarching goal within this triad is to deepen teachers' reflection, to help teachers grow as reflective practitioners—to modify, amend, open, and strengthen their thought processes. Each of the various sources of support provides a specific venue for augmenting the teacher's reflective tendencies:

- The teacher-administrator relationship allows for clear expectations, regular reflective feedback, and accountability for making consistent progress.
- The teacher-coach relationship provides the job-embedded learning opportunities to meet the expectations and to deepen thinking.
- The teacher-team relationship ensures a collaborative, interdependent setting for practicing, sharing, and diversifying ideas and approaches.

To move effectively from *compliance* to *commitment*, we must shift the teacher’s mindset—slightly or significantly—to get beyond the *doing* and into the messy and critical world of *thinking*.

Characteristics of Effective Capacity-Builders

As mentioned earlier, “official” capacity-builders include those in administrative or coaching positions, those who share the bulk of the responsibility for encouraging individual teachers’ reflective growth. Members of each teacher’s collaborative team (department, grade-level, content, or otherwise) do not ordinarily engage in direct, intentional capacity-building efforts, unless specified in their job descriptions or in the school’s charter. So, for our purposes here, references to “capacity-builders” include those in the administrator and coach corners of the triad. Individuals seeking to thrive in this realm must possess and cultivate a slew of other interpersonal and professional skills. Let’s look at the characteristics that tend to yield success.

An effective capacity-builder is mission-driven. The mission, should you choose to accept it, is crystal clear: build the capacity of each and every teacher within the scope of your influence. Effective capacity-builders identify the particular goals that each teacher is working toward, and they pull out all the stops to help the teachers achieve their goals. When the mission is embraced as the driving force behind all decisions and actions, and the capacity-builder is determined to work relentlessly to support each and every individual teacher, then the likelihood of success is increased dramatically. That’s being mission-driven.



Effective capacity-builders pull out all the stops to help their teachers reach their goals. That’s being mission-driven.

An effective capacity-builder is highly self-reflective. Well, this seems like a no-brainer, doesn’t it? If we are to be successful in supporting

a teacher’s reflective growth, the least we can do is to model the expected approaches ourselves, right? This is a keystone skill, habit, strength, tendency—whatever you’d like to call it, capacity-builders *must* possess it. And demonstrate it. Our teachers deserve the very best role modeling, especially with this complicated and important skill.

An effective capacity-builder is service-oriented. One of the first things we realize about effective capacity-builders—all effective educators, really—is that they are givers. They give to others of their time, their knowledge, their support, their love, their resources, their energy, and their hope. This selfless, make-the-world-a-better-place approach enables capacity-builders to consider the “bus question,” one we first posed in *Building Teachers’ Capacity for Success* (Hall & Simeral, 2008). If you were to be struck by a bus on the way to work tomorrow (don’t worry, you’ll be fine; you just won’t be able to report to work for about a year), how will you have prepared your teachers to be successful in your absence? How have you built their capacity? How are they better off after having worked with you all this time?



We gauge the effectiveness of capacity-builders by how much capacity they build in their teachers.

An effective capacity-builder is strength-focused. If we are to truly build capacity, we must have a foundation upon which to *build*. What better than strengths? Pete refers to our individual strengths as “little green stars,” and we all have them. Do you notice the little green stars that each of your teachers brings to the schoolhouse every day? Do you use the growth mindset (once again, we thank Carol Dweck (2006) for introducing this term to the popular vernacular) in your thoughts, words, and actions with teachers? Do you bring positive energy to every interaction with your teachers and encourage them to use their strengths as frequently as possible? Staying focused on strength means believing in your teachers—every

one of them—and building in them a sense of efficacy that they *will* be successful with their students.

Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities Within a Culture of Reflective Practice

The following four factors contribute to the successful development and implementation of Fundamental 1, contributing to a robust and successful culture of reflective practice:

- a. Administrator and staff have rapport and trustworthy relationships.
- b. Coach and staff have rapport and trustworthy relationships.
- c. Administrator and coach discuss their roles and responsibilities, the nature of their professional partnership, and their common goals as capacity-builders.
- d. Staff have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of coach—and can articulate how they are distinct from those of administrator in order to encourage reflective growth, support effective teaching, and promote student learning.

We invite you, the capacity-builders, to engage your school staff in dialogue and explore your understanding of these factors, each of which is described in greater detail throughout this chapter. More important than falling entirely in line with what *we* (the authors) mean when we use certain terms or why we've included something and omitted something else is your consensus and the process by which you build it. Feel free to add, delete, or modify the factors in this list to better meet your particular school's contextual needs. We ask only that you keep in mind the spirit and big ideas of this fundamental—minding the related Theory of Action at all times!—and to think very critically about your collective rationale for making any changes before doing so.

A familiar tool, the Reflective Cycle, can help us refine our thinking about the strength of the interpersonal, working relationships within the school and the common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the capacity-builders as they work together to fortify the culture of reflective practice. The questions in Figure 5.2 provide a macro-level (10,000-foot) perspective about Fundamental 1 as a whole. As you continue to read about the factors that make up this fundamental, you will be able to drill deeper, develop a more detailed understanding, and generate a more specific (micro-level) approach to refine your thinking—and your practices.

To help you apply the Reflective Cycle to focus your thinking on each factor, we provide explanations that should help all capacity-builders (administrator, coach, leadership team, and school staff) identify how to

FIGURE 5.2

The Reflective Cycle Within Fundamental 1:
Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities

Building Awareness	<i>How aware are we of the importance and strength of our professional relationships and the defined roles and responsibilities of the capacity-builders within our school?</i>
Working with Intentionality	<i>How intentionally do we work to cultivate those relationships, communicate with each other to clarify our roles and responsibilities, and connect with all staff to ensure a strong foundation for the culture of reflective practice? Do we have a plan for this?</i>
Assessing Our Impact	<i>How do we know to what extent all staff members are committed to the professional relationships within the school and understand the roles and responsibilities of the capacity-builders? How—and how frequently—do we check in?</i>
Becoming Responsive	<i>How do we adapt and adjust our practices and professional relationships as a result of our assessments in order to meet the shifting needs of the staff?</i>

build awareness. For each factor, you'll also find a corresponding figure with some guiding questions to get you started. The rest is up to you and will be determined by your goals, context, and identified areas of emphasis.

Factor 1a: Administrator and staff have rapport and trustworthy relationships. Establishing relationships is a critical piece of a healthy working environment in any field; in an arena such as education, which is heavy with interpersonal interactions between various human beings *all the time*, those relationships become even more important. Administrators have an immense responsibility to connect, build, and maintain positive professional relationships with every person on staff in order to begin the process of establishing a culture of reflective practice. It all starts in the principal's office.

Positive professional relationships, mind you, are different than getting along (being collegial) and working together without outward strife (being cooperative). Administrators and their teachers needn't always agree with each other, seek out each other's company, or even like each other as fellow travelers on the planet! However, when it comes time to work together for the benefit of students and the greater good, the relationship must be strong enough to enable everyone to buckle down and collaborate with purpose and professionalism.

Administrators must get to know and understand their teachers—their interests, their skills, their “little green stars,” their fears, their dreams, and their ambitions. Trust and mutual respect are characteristics that cannot be overstated—this is especially important because the “elephant in the room” is that administrators also evaluate their teachers, making their high-stakes relationship fraught with anxiety.

However, by properly tending to the relationship; communicating clearly, specifically, and consistently; and following through with whatever is said, administrators can bolster the working environment and create a trusting, positive, mutually respectful atmosphere for professional learning, risk taking, dialogue, and collaboration. To move from a culture of compliance to one of commitment, we must all embrace and live in accordance

with this fact: we're all in this together and we must row in unison, even if we're sitting in different seats in the boat. See Figure 5.3 for a set of guiding questions for capacity-builders related to the Reflective Cycle for Factor 1a.

FIGURE 5.3

Reflective Cycle for Factor 1a

Building Awareness	<p><i>Does the administrator have positive working relationships with the staff?</i></p> <p><i>Does the administrator have a positive working relationship with each individual staff member?</i></p> <p><i>What characterizes the administrator-staff relationships? Trust? Mutual respect? Common interests? Fear?</i></p> <p><i>Do the administrator and staff members believe in each other's abilities to achieve their responsibilities toward the agreed-upon goals?</i></p>
Working with Intentionality	<i>What is our plan addressing for this?</i>
Assessing Our Impact	<i>How will we assess the impact of our actions?</i>
Becoming Responsive	<i>How will we respond to the shifting needs of the staff?</i>

Factor 1b: Coach and staff have rapport and trustworthy relationships. Not surprisingly, the strength of the coach's relationships with every teacher in the building plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of a powerful culture of reflective practice. The coach is a highly influential, visible member of the staff, often interacting with many—if not all—of the teachers in a particular department, grade, or the entire faculty.

As a means to an end, we must ask: Are the coach's relationships with each teacher strong enough to support the roles that the coach must play to support teachers' reflective growth—unconditional partner, motivator/strategist, mentor, and collaborator? (You'll read more about these specific roles in Chapters 10 through 13.)

One critical difference between the coach's relationships with teachers and the administrator's relationships with teachers is the absence of an evaluative role in the coach's responsibilities. Because the coaching position is characterized by nonevaluative, fully supportive, in-your-corner peer relationships with teachers, there *should be no concern* about whether or not what a coach observes or sees is reported to the evaluating administrator. To solidify that trusting component of the relationship, this point must be clarified (see Factor 1c below), communicated overtly to staff (see Factor 1d after that), and lived genuinely at all times. See Figure 5.4 for a set of guiding questions for capacity-builders related to the Reflective Cycle for Factor 1b.

FIGURE 5.4

Reflective Cycle for Factor 1b

Building Awareness	<p><i>Does the coach have positive working relationships with the staff?</i></p> <p><i>Does the coach have a positive working relationship with each individual staff member?</i></p> <p><i>What characterizes the coach-staff relationships? Trust? Mutual respect? Common interests? Fear?</i></p> <p><i>Do the coach and staff members believe in each other's abilities to achieve their responsibilities toward the agreed-upon goals?</i></p>
Working with Intentionality	<i>What is our plan for addressing this?</i>
Assessing Our Impact	<i>How will we assess the impact of our actions?</i>
Becoming Responsive	<i>How will we respond to the shifting needs of the staff?</i>

Factor 1c: Administrator and coach discuss their roles and responsibilities, the nature of their professional partnership, and their common goals as capacity-builders. One of the major themes of *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success* (Hall & Simeral, 2008) concerned the partnership between the administrator and the coach—hence the

subtitle of the book: *A Collaborative Approach for Coaches and School Leaders*. These two positions are often the most influential, active, and impactful capacity-builders in a teacher's life, so it's crucial that each understands his or her own role, the other person's role, and how they can partner to best support each individual teacher on staff. This isn't something that happens magically. It takes work.

In particular, administrators and coaches must commit to engaging in frequent, honest, and hearty conversations about these very topics. The more they talk and communicate with one another, the stronger *their* working relationship will become, and the greater clarity they'll both obtain about the particulars of their working assignments. How frequent is often enough? That's up to the parties involved. In our experience, ne'er a week should go by without a face-to-face dialogue between these two critical roles.

During these conversations, it's important to understand—and talk about directly—what's *on* the table and what's *off* the table between the two roles. To help with this, we've provided some descriptive guidelines in this Q & A:

Q: What should coaches and administrators talk about when discussing individual teachers?

A: Two things are *on* the table: (1) each teacher's current stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection and (2) each teacher's individual goal. With those two pieces of information in hand, both know how the other will be approaching the capacity-building work.

Q: Can coach and administrator discuss individual teacher performance?

A: This is not advised. If either wants to gather more information about how a teacher runs a classroom, implements a strategy, plans lessons, or otherwise teaches, we suggest that person go ahead and stop by the classroom to see it directly. Otherwise, any discussion about performance is *off* the table.

Q: What else is *off* the table during these conversations?

A: Anything that has to do with the teacher evaluation process, rubric scores, observation feedback, and performance concerns are "no-go" areas. Nothing good comes from venturing here unless your goal is to create a culture of destructive practice—which it's not. So stay out.

One of the most prominent philosophical foundations of this work is simply this: the administrator and the coach are partners in this venture. And like teammates in any sport, their roles are sometimes distinct, sometimes quite similar, and sometimes overlapping; however, the goal is always the same.

And what is the overarching goal in our capacity-building efforts? We expect we've made this abundantly clear, though it's worth repeating nonetheless. The goal is twofold, with the two parts woven intricately together:

1. To support our teachers' growth as reflective practitioners, enabling them to think more deeply, accurately, and frequently about their impact upon student learning; and
2. To support our teachers' growth in technical expertise, positioning them to meet each and every one of their students' needs, thereby increasing student learning along all measurable achievement outcomes.

In short, the coach and the administrator share the ultimate goal of *effecting positive change*. Meaningful, positive change—a necessary condition for school improvement—is only possible within a framework of cooperation and collaboration. The coach and the administrator are partners through and through as they undertake this critical work.

As partners, the particular roles of administrator and coach are built to complement one another as they strive to build capacity in teachers across the Continuum of Self-Reflection. Figure 5.5 is a quick guide to the complementary roles undertaken to support teachers' reflective growth. Figure 5.6 is a set of guiding questions for capacity-builders related to the Reflective Cycle for Factor 1c.

Factor 1d: Staff have a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of coach—and can articulate how they are distinct from those of administrator in order to encourage reflective growth, support effective teaching, and promote student learning. Not only do

FIGURE 5.5

Complementary Roles of Administrators and Coaches

Unaware Stage

Administrator's role: *Director*

Instructional coach's role: *Unconditional partner*

Conscious Stage

Administrator's role: *Navigator*

Instructional coach's role: *Motivator/Strategist*

Action Stage

Administrator's role: *Prompter*

Instructional coach's role: *Mentor*

Refinement Stage

Administrator's role: *Challenger*

Instructional coach's role: *Collaborator*

the coach and the administrator need clarity around their roles, but the teachers also need to know where the two positions are similar, are distinct, and overlap. This is particularly important when dealing with a relative unknown. Instructional coaches aren't yet commonplace in every school; often the positions are new and part of a larger initiative; and for schools that do not have coaches, there are other players (department chairs, mentors, etc.) who assume that responsibility. So clarity matters.

The understandings surfaced during coach-administrator conversations are repeated (in a concise and direct manner) with the teaching staff. This is no time to assume that teachers already know or that the role is "obvious." So whether the message is communicated via e-mail, presented in faculty meetings, reiterated in team meetings, shared in face-to-face conversation, posted on the staff room bulletin board, inserted in a newsletter, broadcast on the PA system, or mass-texted, the point is that it's

FIGURE 5.6

Reflective Cycle for Factor 1c

Building Awareness	<p><i>Do the administrator and the coach understand the similarities and differences in each other's roles and responsibilities?</i></p> <p><i>Have the administrator and the coach discussed this together?</i></p> <p><i>How often do the administrator and the coach converse about their professional relationship and the nature of their collaborative work?</i></p> <p><i>Are the administrator and the coach clear about their mission and their complementary roles for supporting teachers' reflective growth?</i></p> <p><i>Have the administrator and the coach achieved clarity about which topics they can address and which topics they cannot discuss together?</i></p>
Working with Intentionality	<i>What is our plan for addressing this?</i>
Assessing Our Impact	<i>How will we assess the impact of our actions?</i>
Becoming Responsive	<i>How will we respond to the shifting needs of the staff?</i>

shared, repeated, and clarified as necessary. All teachers should be able to answer the following questions with confidence:

- Why do we have a coach?
- What is the coach's goal in working with teachers?
- How can a coach support my growth as a professional?
- What are some ways I can connect with a coach?
- Will a coach contribute to my formal evaluation?

See also Figure 5.7 for a set of guiding questions for capacity-builders related to the Reflective Cycle for Factor 1d.

FIGURE 5.7

Reflective Cycle for Factor 1d

Building Awareness	<p><i>Do all staff members understand the role and purpose of coach?</i></p> <p><i>Do staff members know the options available to them for partnering with a coach?</i></p> <p><i>How often (and in what manner) does this communication occur?</i></p>
Working with Intentionality	<i>What is our plan for addressing this?</i>
Assessing Our Impact	<i>How will we assess the impact of our actions?</i>
Becoming Responsive	<i>How will we respond to the shifting needs of the staff?</i>

Bringing Fundamental 1 to Life

In the following two scenarios, you'll read about some capacity-builders' efforts to implement Fundamental 1 within their schools. Though the characters are fictional, they're amalgams of real human beings, compiled from case studies within schools we have worked and consulted with over the past several years. After the scenarios, we'll offer some discussion to distill a few of our key learnings for this fundamental.

Scenario 1

The principal of School 1 was excited to launch the district's instructional-coaching initiative, and the district had hired a fantastic teacher-leader to serve in this new role. Wanting to be sure that the position quickly had significant impact, the principal met with the incoming coach and outlined his expectations for her, explaining that she would be working with struggling and new teachers in the areas where they needed the most support.

At the back-to-school meetings before the first day, the principal introduced the coach and invited her to share a little about herself with the staff. Knowing that her responsibilities were focused mostly on a small group of teachers, the principal did not revisit the coaching conversation beyond this first meeting, opting to not clutter up the teachers' plates with information they really didn't need. If and when the time came for a teacher to be coached, there would be time for that discussion.

Over the course of the school year, teachers wondered aloud exactly how this coach was earning the same paycheck as they were, since she didn't have students, lesson plans, report cards, or homework to grade. The principal defensively supported the position and suggested that they all focus on improving their own classroom practices before they worry about others. Needless to say, there was much worry to follow.

Scenario 2

In School 2, the principal and the assistant principal invited the new instructional coach to lunch to discuss their roles and responsibilities. Over the course of an hour and a soup-and-sandwich combo, the three leaders built the foundation of the work that would guide their relationships and their interactions with each other for the year. They drafted some statements on operational norms and agreed to finesse them, and then sign them, when they got back to the building.

Over dessert, they sketched out a rough game plan for how they would approach each week: a Monday afternoon meeting was put on the books, followed by some outlines for visiting classes, connecting with teachers, and engaging in intentional coaching and feedback practices. And, very important, they discussed their "safe word." If one of them overstepped the boundaries or asked one of the others to overstep the boundaries, either party could say the safe word. For them, it was simple: "Time out." That would cue them to have a conversation about something that was going awry before it turned catastrophic.

Back at the building, the trio planned their back-to-school welcome, set aside some time to talk “coaching” with the staff, and brainstormed some ways to keep the coaching conversations in the front of the teachers’ minds all year long. With a solid handshake, they agreed that this was going to be one fabulous year.

What’s Really Going On?

Both schools in these scenarios are launching brand-new coaching initiatives, so there’s ample opportunity to set things up in a way that exudes confidence, clarifies the concepts, and prepares the entire staff for success. In School 1, the principal appears to be keeping the reins taut, holding on to the key information and unilaterally making some decisions about the allocation of coaching support. With the intent of affecting teacher quality—and therefore student learning—the focus is on the weaker, or newer, teachers. For the most part, the rest of the staff is left in the dark, leading to skepticism and bitterness toward the coach. Unfortunately, with a poor launch, this initiative doesn’t show much promise.

School 2 offers much more promise, however, as the principal, the assistant principal, and the coach connect, communicate openly, and create a collaborative plan for bringing the teachers into the fold. Their commitment to the success of the venture is never more evident than in their agreement on a “safe word,” equipping everyone on the team with a way to call out each other’s behaviors before a situation gets out of hand. By talking openly and planning in advance, the likelihood that the coaching initiative will succeed is much greater.

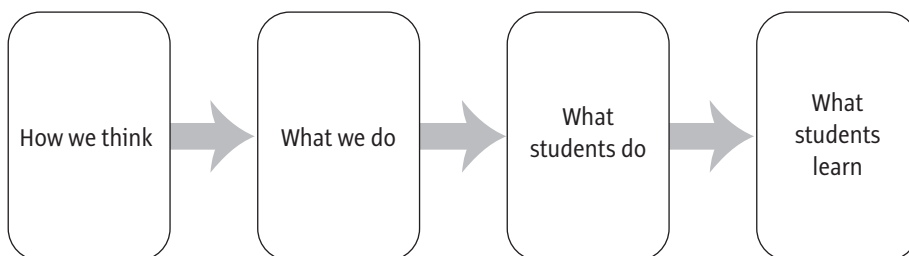
Wrapping Up

The fact is, we can’t skip the first step. Even though talking about roles and responsibilities and doing yeoman’s work to establish positive relationships isn’t headline-grabbing, exciting stuff, it’s essential. Fundamental 1

is the foundation upon which the rest of our culture of reflective practice is built. Success in the long haul—supporting the reflective growth of everyone in the building—hinges upon the quality and consistency of the work done at the onset. That’s why it’s Fundamental 1.



Want long-term success? Focus on a solid first step.



As capacity-builders, it’s incumbent upon us to address this fundamental in a way that accounts for all aspects of the Reflective Cycle. We must become aware of what we need to do, we must implement it with intentionality and consistency, we must assess to what degree it’s working, and we must be willing to adapt and adjust as events warrant.



About the Authors



Pete Hall

Veteran school administrator and leadership expert Pete Hall has dedicated his career to supporting the improvement of our education systems. In addition to his teaching experiences in three states, he served as a school principal for 12 years in Nevada and Washington. This is his seventh book—and his fourth coauthored with Alisa Simeral—to accompany over a dozen articles on school leadership. Mr. Hall currently serves as a professional development agent, motivational speaker, coach, and mentor for educators worldwide. If he's not competing in (or training for) a triathlon, you can reach him at PeteHall@EducationHall.com or on Twitter at [@EducationHall](https://twitter.com/EducationHall).



Alisa Simeral

Alisa Simeral has guided school-based reform efforts as instructional coach, school dean, professional developer, and leadership mentor. Her focus is, and always has been, empowering educators to take charge of their own professional growth. If how we *think* drives what we *do*, then developing and refining strong metacognitive

habits is at the heart of all capacity-building work, leading directly to both teacher and student success.

Alisa’s commitment to this mission has been the focus of her research, writing, speaking, and teaching. This is her fourth book; and she now works as consultant and professional speaker to schools—both nationally and internationally—focused on cultivating reflective practice and shifting from cultures of compliance to cultures of commitment. Her mantra is, “When our teachers succeed, our students succeed.” She can be reached at Alisa@AlisaSimeral.com or on Twitter at [@alisasimeral](https://twitter.com/alisasimeral).