

# INTRODUCTION

## LINKING TEACHER CREDIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

This book is about **you**, and it is for **you**. This is not a book of teaching strategies, although there are strategies included in it. Rather, it is a book about the actions you can take to increase your credibility with students as well as your collective efficacy as a member of your school team. When you increase your credibility with your students, they learn more. And when you increase your collective efficacy, they learn even faster. We were motivated to write this book because there is a powerful synergy between teacher credibility and collective efficacy. These two ideas are among the strongest influences on student achievement. Hattie (2018) collected meta-analyses, or studies of studies of influences on student achievement, from all over the world. At this point, his database represents over 300 million students. As quantified by Hattie, the average effect of an influence is .40, and as you will see, teacher credibility and collective efficacy are well above average. However, these relational elements of our profession are rarely mined with intention. Instead, we seem to be governed by folk wisdom about what we do in the company of students and colleagues.

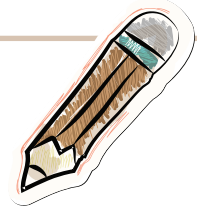


# TEACHER CREDIBILITY

Let's start with teacher credibility, which is students' perceptions of their teacher's competence, dynamism, trustworthiness, and immediacy (McCroskey & Young, 1981). A student's ability to learn is influenced by whether the source (the teacher) is believed to be knowledgeable (competent), enthusiastic (dynamic), reliable (trustworthy), and accessible (immediate). In other words, learning isn't purely a cognitive function. It is governed by the social and emotional perceptions that lie just below the surface.

## REFLECTIVE WRITING

What might be the long-term implications of teachers having low credibility with students?



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We have seen too many teachers implement what should have been effective instructional strategies, but not get the impact they hoped for. You've heard that learning is a social endeavor? Teacher credibility is part of the social nature of learning.

Teacher credibility is sometimes confused with the concept of authority. Being authoritarian does not build credibility. And simply asserting yourself as an authority will not ensure that students learn at high levels. We've all met people who clearly are experts, authorities as it were, in an area. But if we did not trust them, if they were not dynamic and willing to share, and if we did not feel a connection with them, we probably did not give them much of our attention and may even have disregarded what they said. The medical field calls this bedside manner; in education, it is called teacher credibility.

We want to be sure to avoid a false dichotomy here. There isn't a binary credible/noncredible teacher. We are all on a continuum with our students. Our actions are always observed and judged by students, and our credibility quotient is updated continually. Of course, the more credit you have with a given student, the easier it is to repair a problematic interaction. Effective teachers build their credits with students so that there is some wiggle room when missteps by either party occur.

Teacher credibility is students' belief that they can learn from a particular teacher, because this adult is believable, convincing, and capable of persuading students that they can be successful. Students are very perceptive about which teachers can make a difference for them.

## REFLECTIVE WRITING

Based on this introduction, how credible are you with students?



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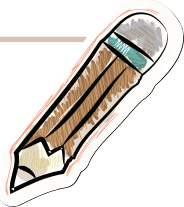
# COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY

Collective teacher efficacy refers to a staff's shared belief that through their collective action, they can positively influence student outcomes, including for students who are disengaged and/or disadvantaged.

Collective teacher efficacy is the belief of a group that they possess the wherewithal to positively impact student learning. Members of a group with a high degree of collective efficacy have confidence that they can successfully execute a course of action (Bandura, 1997). Evidence of collective efficacy transcends professions. Athletes draw on their beliefs about the success of their team to win the game. Military forces count on their beliefs that fellow soldiers are providing top-notch information and making wise decisions. To return to the medical field, patients under the care of nurses with a high degree of collective efficacy heal more rapidly. There is an interaction between teacher credibility and collective teacher efficacy. These two constructs can either undermine or amplify our efforts.

## REFLECTIVE WRITING

How much does your team reflect the values of collective efficacy?



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## WHEN TEACHER CREDIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY COLLIDE

Marc Kilpatrick distributes a text to his fourth graders, and says, “We’re reading this text today. I’m not sure that you’ll understand it but give it a try.” He does not let the students know the purpose of the lesson or even that they will be reading about animal adaptation (something most nine-year-olds think is pretty cool). He quickly informs students about the process of reciprocal teaching, which they have never done before, and then tells them it is time to start. Brittany does not start right away; she’s talking with a peer rather than reading. Mr. Kilpatrick interrupts the task, saying, “Brittany, move your clip. You should be reading, not talking.” Brittany leaves her chair and walks to the board. She moves the clothespin with her name on it from green to yellow, indicating that she now has a warning for behavior and next will be sent to the principal.

So much has happened in these few minutes, and each of the teacher’s actions has the potential to accelerate or prevent learning. On the one hand, Mr. Kilpatrick is using an evidence-based instructional routine. Reciprocal teaching has four decades’ worth of research demonstrating its above-average impact (“250+ Influences,” n.d.). On the other hand, the strategy will probably not compensate for the lack of teacher credibility. Mr. Kilpatrick does not seem excited or passionate about the lesson. He fails to invite students into the learning and doesn’t even let them know what they are learning or why it is relevant. He does not convey optimism or even an expectation that they will be successful. He doesn’t fully explain the task, leaving several students confused about what to do next. And he uses public humiliation as a classroom management tool, allowing students to wonder if he even cares about them. The odds are that Mr. Kilpatrick’s students are not going to learn at high levels, even though he is using an otherwise effective instructional approach.

But his lack of credibility with students spills over into his work with colleagues. Mr. Kilpatrick was doubtful when his grade-level chair, Marsha Findlay, discussed reciprocal teaching a few weeks ago. She shared the many benefits of the strategy but didn’t spend much time on the details. Ms. Findlay prepared some handouts explaining the process. However, the team didn’t discuss a plan for building their students’ capacity to take on this complex technique. Further, these fourth-grade teachers don’t have a shared expectation of spending time in each other’s classrooms, so they rarely discuss instructional practices. Another colleague, Bob Santana, has used reciprocal teaching for several years and is a master at it. But no one else knows that, and Mr. Santana certainly isn’t going to volunteer that information for fear of being seen as the know-it-all. He’s concerned that sharing his success seems like bragging. Besides, Mr. Santana knows that there are more parent complaints about Mr. Kilpatrick than any other teacher in the school, and more requests to transfer students out of his class. *It’s not my job to fix that, he thinks to himself. I just need to take care of my students. Maybe the principal will get fed up and do something about it.*



## WHEN TEACHER CREDIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY THRIVE

Fourth-grade teacher Arnold Schmidt works at a neighboring elementary school in the same district as Mr. Kilpatrick and his colleagues. Mr. Schmidt is knowledgeable about the influence of teacher credibility on student learning and is therefore intentional about his practice. Mr. Schmidt holds up a book and talks about it. He's giving an overview, hoping that some students will want to read this particular book on their own. As is consistent with the research (e.g., Marinak & Gambrell, 2016), he does this every day with several books. He selects texts that he believes will appeal to his students and usually manages to strike a chord, because he pays attention to their interests and aspirations. The book he has in his hand is about computer coding, something several students have grown interested in due to an afterschool video club they've joined. Mr. Schmidt is enthusiastic, saying, "I hope someone decides to read this and then teach me some things about coding! This didn't exist when I was in school."

When one table of students starts talking to each other, the teacher says, "I'm glad to hear you're excited about this topic. Let's chat about this when we're walking to lunch. I'd like to hear what you are thinking about."

Fellow teacher Yasmin Jackson is taking notes in the back of the classroom. Members of her grade-level team are regularly in and out of each other's classroom, to the point where some students will say they have five teachers, not just one. Their team decided the previous week to revisit book talks. "We were all feeling like we were stuck in a rut," said Ms. Jackson. In advance of their next meeting, they are each watching one another during book talks. They'll discuss at their upcoming meeting their observations and what students told them about the practice. Getting student feedback in classrooms other than their own is natural, because the children know all the fourth-grade teachers well.

"This is how we cross-pollinate ideas," said Mr. Schmidt.

"It's amazing to watch how ideas bloom when we're together," Ms. Jackson noted.

### NOTES

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## THE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER CREDIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Mr. Kilpatrick had low expectations for his students, and his team might have supported him to have higher expectations for students. Unfortunately, Mr. Kilpatrick works at a school in which teachers are lone rangers. They do have grade-level meetings, but these conversations are operational in nature. Teachers rarely talk about curriculum, instruction, or assessment in detail. They don't examine student work or look at the relationship between their impact and student support needs. These dispositions are cultivated by a school culture that values competition over collaboration.

As the school year drew to a close, the teachers at Mr. Kilpatrick's school were given cards with students' names on them. They were asked to put colored sticky dots on the back of each card to indicate the following:

- English learner
- Student with a disability
- Difficult parent
- Behavior problems
- Gifted/talented
- Attendance problems
- Low test scores

The team received their cards from their third-grade colleagues. They then had what they call a "card party," in which they formed the classes for the following year. The principal said it was for the purpose of "balancing classes." But our observation was that there was a lot of trading between teachers. In fact, it more closely resembled a fantasy football draft than a careful consideration of student strengths and needs.

Mr. Kilpatrick said, "I've had a rough year and I deserve a few more GATE students, but I'm okay with more difficult parents."

Upon hearing that remark, Mr. Santana thought to himself, *No, you're actually not. But if you want to believe that, fine by me.*

To our thinking, this is not building the collective efficacy of the group and does not ensure that teachers have high expectations for all their students or each other as professionals. In this case, an entrenched system perpetuates an inequitable distribution of resources and diminishes the potential collective efficacy of the organization.



At the school where Yasmin Jackson and Bob Findlay teach, preparations are underway for building next year’s classes. Teachers completed summaries of each student and submitted them to the principal, Elena Flint. The teachers are asked to comment on the social, emotional, and academic needs of their current students, not on demographics. “We have a computer to do that,” she says. The school management information system creates draft class lists for the following year such that students are placed randomly in classes. The principal reviews the computer-generated lists to ensure that classes are balanced and that each student’s needs can be met based on her teachers’ credibility with students.

Ms. Flint meets with each grade-level team to discuss her proposed lists, and she brokers changes personally. “We don’t ‘trade’ children. This isn’t a swap meet,” she said later. “Our focus as a school, and with each team, is on how we can create the best ecosystem we can to support the needs of every student.”

Ms. Jackson, who is finishing her third year of teaching, is feeling confident about her ability to address the needs and strengths of next year’s students. “Look at the team I’ve got around me,” she said. “These people are my best resources. I know here I don’t ever have to sit with a dilemma all by myself.”

**NOTES**

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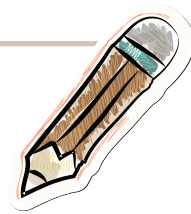
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# A CHAIN IS AS STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST LINK

There is an adage that states that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The relative strength of a team—its collective efficacy—erodes when a member struggles and yet does not receive support. The damage done when a member leaves the school, district, or profession because of low credibility with students persists long after the departure. In fact, the only thing it does strengthen is the belief that each member is on his or her own to sink or swim.

## REFLECTIVE WRITING

How do you see these two ideas, teacher credibility and collective teacher efficacy, fitting together?



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## THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The first part of this book addresses teacher credibility and focuses on specific actions you can take to increase your credibility with students. Teacher credibility is an individual score. And it's an important factor that has been underrecognized in school improvement efforts. But students' learning is also influenced by the collective efficacy of their teachers. Individual efforts are important, and so are collective efforts. Thus, we spend the second half of this book focused on collective efficacy. We review the components of collective teacher efficacy, which also has an above-average impact on students' learning ("250+ Influences," n.d.).

We believe that teacher credibility and collective efficacy are important considerations for school improvement and student learning. And we think that they need to be combined and addressed simultaneously. If teacher credibility is high with some staff but they are not engaged in a collective, they are likely to burn out. And, it's hard to build collective efficacy when teachers are not credible with their students. Both are necessary. And both are within reach.

Each chapter starts with an introductory video in which Doug outlines some of the concepts. In addition, each chapter includes several videos in which Dominique shares his thinking and experiences. We call this feature a Think Along, as we hope you'll consider the ideas Dominique shares and think along with him as he talks. Each chapter concludes with a challenge. In these videos, Nancy provides a summarizing challenge for the chapter that will build your credibility or collective efficacy.

In addition, each chapter includes several Reflective Writing prompts in the margins of the text that allow you to record your thinking as you read. Further, there are Pause & Ponder tasks in which you will assess the skills and data collection tools that allow you to obtain information from students and/or your colleagues. We hope that these features allow you to engage with our ideas and continue to grow as a professional. As one of our colleagues often says, "You don't have to be sick to get better." The same applies to teaching and learning: We can all get better. Focusing on your credibility and collective efficacy are two ways that you continue to grow as a professional. We hope you enjoy the process.