

# Introduction

**W**e began our work together accidentally. We both shared a passion for helping and supporting others and we were both relatively new to consulting, having spent our entire careers in schools and districts as part of faculties in some capacity or another, and then both ending up as principals.

As consultants, we occasionally worked with the same schools and districts, and through our work together we soon discovered a shared and deep-seated passion for trying to truly make a difference for kids and a bone deep belief in the extraordinary capacity of teachers. We found ourselves trading ideas, experiences, and new knowledge more and more. We also discovered we shared an unshakeable belief that teachers do serious heavy lifting and need ways to lighten their load while increasing their impact on student learning.

At the same time, John Hattie came up on our radar, and his contributions to what works best in education combined with our knowledge from other education thought leaders and researchers moved us to focusing on two distinct and interrelated high-impact practices: teacher collaboration and the formative assessment process. And the rest is . . . well, not history, it is our book.

This book represents thousands of hours of practice, hundreds of dedicated partner schools and district teams, tons of research, and decades of experience that combine to create what we consider to be a powerful, doable, authentic process that recognizes and builds on teacher expertise and children's innate desire to learn. It is a process that is anchored in creating a learning culture in which teachers and students become confident in their capacity to learn and to succeed—in other words, this process builds a culture of efficacy.

For years we have heard about empowering teachers, about teachers being the number one influence on student learning (they are), about “making” good teachers, etc. We have also heard for years about the importance of teaching kids more than just content (the 3 R's +), but also

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the “21st Century Skills” such as cooperation, critical thinking, communication, and creativity.

The reality does not often reflect those ideas. Rather, it appears that the residual effect of No Child Left Behind has entrenched the traditional “stand and deliver” model where the teacher delivers the content and the students are receptacles of the information (hope springs eternal). From our experience, this model is alive and well in American classrooms and seems to be the default mode in many classrooms today.

To that end, most teachers in the last decade have been under serious pressure to “raise test scores.” In fact, those test scores could very well be tied to the teacher’s compensation. These initiatives have promised to get test scores up so districts have “bought” and teachers have “paid” (in time, effort, stress) for one initiative after another, scrambling to learn and try the newest, latest, and greatest silver bullet. It’s become an exhausting exercise for most and has rarely yielded positive results.

What has become clear is that the top down all-school or all-district initiatives do not work. It is expensive, exhausting, and in no way empowers teachers or students to be motivated learners. Nor does this model lend itself to teacher and student collaboration, collective inquiry, or innovation. Empowerment is simply not part of this formula.

The reality, in fact, is that teachers and leaders care deeply about kids, work incredibly hard to make a difference, but are often exhausted and frustrated from lack of progress. We get it. We’ve been there.

So why this book? Our belief and our experience is that every school has what it takes to improve. EVERY school! The resources under the roof of a school building are extraordinary. What is needed is leadership that believes in the capacity of all teachers and all students to learn, to succeed, and to excel. We need leadership that is unafraid to share the responsibility to make authentic learning happen. We need leadership that is willing to commit to creating optimal conditions that build a true learning culture in which everyone is a learner, everyone is learning how to share, to fail, to reflect, to persevere, and to celebrate success.

The last several decades have provided us with extraordinary resources that make it crystal clear what works in schools. We know what it takes to be effective—to be *excellent*. This book is about how to use what schools already have, teacher teams, to operationalize the high-impact practices that empower teachers to make a positive difference for all students. It is real, authentic, doable, and uses the resources every school has: teacher expertise and team time.

Book format: We wrote our book for busy educators. It’s straightforward and can be swallowed whole, from beginning to end, or read in chunks, based on your interest and/or need.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of Impact Teams. It is an overview, somewhat like reading the back cover of a book but with a bit more detail.

Chapters 2 through 7 are all formatted the same way. In fact everything we do uses simple but effective formats. We don't do complicated. Learning is complicated, teaching is complicated, leading is complicated, so why compound already complicated work with complex formats?

Each chapter is organized in the following way:

- A cool quote that pertains to the topic of the chapter
- An appreciative inquiry question that connects your experience to the topic
- The WHAT section succinctly explains the topic being defined
- The WHY section explains why the topic is critical to Impact Team success
- The HOW section describes the process used for implementation
- The NUTSHELL is a summary of the chapter
- The CHECK-IN is a checklist or rubric that gives the perspective Impact Team the opportunity to check where they are at in the Impact Team implementation process. This is essentially a reflection and provides an opportunity to think about where they need/want to go next.

The Appendices are full of resources that have been created, collected, and adapted for peer facilitators, teachers, leaders, and teams to support Impact Team implementation.

We all learn through experimentation, practice (and more practice), and sharing with one another. We have invited all of our partner districts, schools, teachers, and students to write their own success stories and we are committed to sharing their success! Each story is unique, but all share the same foundation . . . the basics of the Impact Team Model.

Impact Teams create the culture and conditions for every teacher every day to answer the question: "What is my impact?" Impact Teams re-energize teacher teams to believe in their collective capacity to make a difference, to immediately and significantly increase not only student learning but also teacher learning.