1 Defining Impact Teams

"Together, people can accomplish that which one person cannot. Social action depends on the belief that a group can effect change. Collective efficacy helps people realize their shared destiny."

Bandura 1997, 2000

Empowerment: We have partnered with over 300 schools and close to a thousand teams, and we believe that as educators our moral purpose is to create optimal conditions for every learner in the system to develop the belief in their capacity to learn and to ultimately make a difference.

THE WHAT: REFOCUSING PLCS

Kids are struggling to be successful, and so are teachers. Tapping into the structures that already exist in nearly every school in America, team planning time with the Impact Team Model (ITM) refocuses *traditional* professional learning communities (PLCs) by combining two existing practices:

1. The formative assessment process: A *process* that happens in the *classroom* and involves students in every aspect of their own assessment (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006).
2. Collaborative inquiry: A *process* in which *teacher teams* partner together to understand their impact on student learning and to scale up teacher expertise.

Through efficient and effective collaborative practices, the ITM promotes a school culture in which teachers and students are partners in learning.

Through this partnership, the ITM continuously builds teacher, student, and collective efficacy.

The Classroom

The ITM operationalizes the formative assessment process in the classroom and puts students at the center of the learning. This model requires students to:

- articulate the learning intention and criteria needed for progress and achieve mastery of state standards;
- engage in accurate self- and peer assessment with the goal of being able to explain where they are at in the learning and their next learning steps;
- learn how to give and receive accurate, respectful, descriptive feedback;
- develop challenging and possible (*stretch*) learning goals and revise their work using feedback; and
- monitor their own progress and mastery of state standards.

Teacher Teams

Impact Teams meet frequently to understand their impact on student learning and to take collective action to make a difference for all learners. They meet for the express purpose of learning together in service to all students. ITM creates an efficient structure for teacher teams to engage in collaborative inquiry and use trained peer facilitators to guide their colleagues over time. Leadership makes instructional improvement a priority by actively participating in professional learning.

Impact Teams can take on many forms: grade-level teams, course-alike teams, department or division teams, vertical teams, school-level instructional leadership teams, district leadership teams, and special focus teams (e.g., RTI, child study, etc.).

Eight Purposeful Protocols

In our experience, teams have been asked to do collaborative inquiry but are not given structures to do inquiry effectively. Over the course of the book, you will learn about eight purposeful protocols that teams use to guide collaborative inquiry. These eight protocols are used in every meeting to ensure efficiency and focus and are central to the ITM.

The Difference

The ITM is significantly different from the current practice of most traditional PLCs implemented in schools nationally.

The ITM is NOT:

- A team of teachers solely focused on analyzing benchmark and summative assessment data with little time to respond to student needs
- A method to sort students into ability tracks
- A team whose sole purpose is to fill in a complicated template for accountability purposes
- A team of teachers that meet once a month for compliance and accountability

In reflecting where your team is in the collaborative process and where you want to go with the process, consider the following similarities and differences.

Similarities	Differences
Purpose • Focus on increased student achievement • To improve instructional practices	Purpose • To purposefully strengthen collective teacher efficacy • To empower teachers to improve their practice • To implement the formative assessment process—students being at the center • To create intellectual capital • To build agency • To focus on progress not just achievement • To operationalize the Visible Learning high-impact influences
Protocols • The 4 PLC Questions drive the inquiry • Sharing ideas around effective practice • Norms for effective collaboration	Protocols • Appreciative inquiry: focusing on and learning from what is best in the system • 3-Step (universal) protocol to focus the meeting and to ensure efficiency • Universal protocol is used at all levels of the learning organization • Eight purposeful protocols are used to share and build knowledge aligned to purpose of the meeting (classroom protocols AND team meeting protocols) • Requires student goal setting

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Similarities	Differences
• Planning for upcoming instructional units of study	• Requires student self- and peer assessment • Requires weekly meetings • Requires utilization of the formative assessment process • Teachers are not required to grade assessments or exams
Structure • Recursive cycles of collaborative teacher inquiry or action research cycles • Job-alike teams • Shared or distributed leadership	Structure • Variety of team configurations based on purpose • Focus on developing and supporting collective leadership
Evidence of Student Learning • Analysis of data	Evidence of Student Learning • Data is always formative (i.e., student work) • Data is always current, fresh • Assessments are criteria based (rubrics) • Use of multiple-choice items is rare • Student voice data (self- and peer assessment) is used to understand progress of learning

THE WHY: THE POWER OF EFFICACY

Our Educational Landscape

With the enactment of the NCLB legislation (2002), the focus of our schools shifted from an emphasis on learning to one of achievement on standardized tests above all. Superficially this emphasis did not appear to be very different from previous eras of "school reform"; however, the last decade has clearly shown us that achievement and learning are not synonymous. Simply put, achievement is the arm of accountability, while learning is the life skill. With accountability being the unyielding force, learning is often compromised. Unfortunately the victims of the drive to raise test scores are both the students and the teachers.

An unrelenting focus on absolute achievement has had a significant impact on the culture of many of our schools and has directly and negatively impacted teachers' sense of efficacy, collectively and individually (Finnigan & Daly, 2013). Admittedly the stakes are high for our teachers,

leaders, and schools so the drive for achievement regarding high stakes testing is understandable. However, along the way we often sacrificed the notion of learning in our quest for "[a]ll students will be proficient or above."

Thankfully, the winds are shifting with the passing of the ESSA legislation (December, 2015) to a more balanced approach to accountability. However, changing the decade plus practices of accountability by annual test results will take time. We designed the ITM for schools to use as a tool to move from the practice of summative tests to drive instruction to the practice of using the formative assessment process to monitor and support student growth and to instructionally respond to diverse learning needs.

Beware another initiative? Or a way to repurpose existing practices to have greater impact? We are practitioners working in all sizes, sorts, and flavors of schools. We are currently partnering in over 138 schools across the nation from rural to urban to suburban. We know from experience that in our current educational landscape, when educators hear the words *reform* or *assessment*, they think *test* or *check-lists*. When they think *test*, they think or say the following:

- I will be judged or evaluated by this.
- It takes away from my teaching time.
- It takes too much time to grade.
- The at-risk children never do well on tests.
- It shuts down kids who are struggling.

The ITM is a strengths-based model in which the focus is to help teacher teams discover what works well in their school and build upon their existing strengths. Our intention is not to fix broken students, teachers, or systems. Our intention is to support schools by creating conditions where innovation and creativity thrive. "When people focus on human ideals and achievements, peak experiences, and best practices, these things—not the conflicts—tend to flourish" (Mohr & Watkins, 2002).

We must never forget that our core business *is* learning, not dispensing information, not raising test scores, not clever pedagogy, not technology tools. And the learning is not just about student learning. Our role and responsibility is to relentlessly learn together to ensure student progress. Learning together at its best results in a pervasive attitude of "We can do this!" School cultures grounded in the commitment to and practice of learning together are schools in which efficacy thrives. Restoring the belief that teachers as a group can and do make a difference is the impetus of our Impact Team Model.

The Research

In Hattie's (2009) seminal meta-analytic synthesis, *Visible Learning*, he identified the effect of 138 influences on achievement using effect size calculations. Considering that a .40 effect size (ES) is about 1 year's growth in 1 year's time, it is incumbent upon education leaders and teachers to pay attention to those influences that ensure at least a year's progress in a year's time for *all* students.

The development and design of the ITM is based on extensive research that identifies those practices that maximize student learning. Impact Teams operationalize multiple influences that are proven to have the highest effect on student learning. The following are a sample of several high-impact influences used in the ITM:

- Teacher-Student Relationships: .72 ES
- Feedback: .75 ES
- Teacher Clarity: .75 ES
- Formative Evaluation: .90 ES
- Microteaching: .88 ES
- Success Criteria: 1.13 ES
- Assessment Capable Learners: 1.44 ES
- Collective Teacher Efficacy: 1.57 ES

The Power of Efficacy

Bandura (1994, 1997) recognized that academic progress in a school is not only a reflection of the sum of the individual contributions, but also comes from the collective whole, the ways in which the teachers work together. Bandura found that a collective sense of efficacy among a school community contributes significantly to academic achievement. In fact, it was a more powerful predictor than socioeconomic status and as powerful as prior academic achievement.

THE HOW: THE STEPS TO SUCCESS

The design of this book is intended for instructional leadership teams, instructional leaders, or teacher teams who want to expand their collaborative practices regarding the formative assessment process. Each chapter clearly defines the success criteria for successful implementation of this model with chapter Check-Ins.

The Steps to Success

- Chapter 2: Building a Culture of Efficacy
  - What: Defining collective efficacy
  - Why: Impact on student learning
  - How: Strategic planning for strengthening collective efficacy
  - Check-In: System assessment
- Chapter 3: Teaming to Learn
  - What: Effective learning teams
  - Why: Building collective efficacy
  - How: Network, process, and structure
  - Check-In: Team assessment
- Chapter 4: Strengthening Student Efficacy: The Formative Assessment Process in Action
  - What: Partnering with students in the assessment process
  - Why: Building student efficacy
  - How: Three protocols to expand quality formative assessment (EAA Classroom, Microteaching, Lesson Study)
  - Check-In: The formative assessment process
- Chapter 5: Creating Context for Efficacy
  - What: Equitable, viable, and coherent curriculum
  - Why: Teacher and student clarity, strengthening efficacy
  - How: Two protocols for curriculum clarity (Unpacking for Success & Calibration)
  - Check-In: Curriculum checklist
- Chapter 6: Evidence to Inform and Act
  - What: Quality evidence
  - Why: Springboard for action
  - How: Three protocols to inform and act (EAA Team Meeting, Check-In and Case Study, Evidence Walks)
  - Check-In: Analyzing student work
- Chapter 7: Leading Model Teams
  - What: Leading effective learning teams
  - Why: Creating capacity from within to strengthen collective efficacy
  - How: Gradual release
  - Check-In
- Appendices