Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems

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<td>1.</td>
<td>There is only one way to achieve greater coherence, and that is through purposeful action and interaction, working on capacity, clarity, precision of practice, transparency, monitoring of progress, and continuous correction. All of this requires the right mixture of “pressure and support”: the press for progress within supportive and focused cultures. p. 2</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Coherence making in other words is a continuous process of making and remaking meaning in your own mind and in your culture. Our framework shows you how to do this. p. 3</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Effective change processes shape and reshape good ideas as they build capacity and ownership among participants. There are two components: the quality of the idea and the quality of the process. p.14</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>… that these highly successful organizations learned from the success of others but never tried to imitate what others did. Instead, they found their own pathway to success. They did many of the right things, and they learned and adjusted as they proceeded. p.15</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Most people would rather be challenged by change and helped to progress than be mired in frustration. Best of all, this work tackles “whole systems” and uses the group to change the group. People know they are engaged in something beyond their narrow role. It is human nature to rise to a larger call if the problems are serious enough and if there is a way forward where they can play a role with others. Coherence making is the pathway that does this. p. ix</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>What we need is consistency of purpose, policy, and practice. Structure and strategy are not enough. The solution requires the individual and collective ability to build shared meaning, capacity, and commitment to action. When large numbers of people have a deeply understood sense of what needs to be done—and see their part in achieving that purpose—coherence emerges and powerful things happen. p. 1</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Coherence pertains to people individually and especially collectively. To cut to the chase, coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work. Coherence, then, is what is in the minds and actions of people individually and especially collectively. p. 1-2</td>
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The Coherence Framework

[Diagram of Coherence Framework]

Focusing Direction
Cultivating Collaborative Cultures
Securing Accountability
Deepening Learning
Leadership
Purpose Driven: Quick Write

Clarify your own moral purpose by reflecting and recording your thoughts about these four questions using the quick write protocol:

1. What is my moral purpose?
2. What actions do I take to realize this moral purpose?
3. How do I help others clarify their moral purpose?
4. Am I making progress in realizing my moral purpose with students?

Share your thoughts with other members of your team and discuss themes that emerge.
The Largest Barrier to Student Learning: Within-School Variability

If we are to truly improve student learning, it is vital that we identify the most important barrier to such improvement. And that barrier is the effect of within-school variability on learning. The variability between schools in most Western countries is far smaller than the variability within schools (Hattie 2015). For example, the 2009 PISA results for reading across all OECD countries shows that the variability between schools is 36 per cent, while the variance within schools is 64 per cent (OECD 2010).

There are many causes of this variance within schools, but I would argue that the most important (and one that we have some influence to reduce) is the variability in the effectiveness of teachers. I don’t mean to suggest that all teachers are bad; I mean that there is a great deal of variability among teachers in the effect that they have on student learning. This variability is well known, but rarely discussed, perhaps because this type of discussion would necessitate potentially uncomfortable questions. Hence, the politics of distraction are often invoked to avoid asking them.

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Coherence: Putting your inner drive into overdrive

Forms of Cooperation
- Building collaborative cultures
- Participating in networks of schools or districts to learn from each other
- Relating to state policies and priorities

School Cultures
- Focus on pedagogy
- Link to measurable results
- Non-judgmental
- Transparent
- Develop individuals
- Mobilize collective efficacy
- Combine principal and teacher leaders
- Are outward facing

Groupthink
- …situations where groups are cohesive, have highly directive leadership, and fail to seek external information. Such groups strive for unanimity, failing to consider alternative courses of action.

Deepening Learning
- Clarity of Learning Goals
- Precision in Pedagogy
- Shift Practices Through Capacity Building
Simply stated, accountability is taking responsibility for one’s actions. At the core of accountability in educational systems is student learning. As City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) argue, “the real accountability system is in the tasks that students are asked to do” (p. 23). Constantly improving and refining instructional practice so that students can engage in deep learning tasks is perhaps the single most important responsibility of the teaching profession and educational systems as a whole. In this sense, accountability as defined here is not limited to mere gains in test scores but on deeper and more meaningful learning for all students.

**Internal accountability** occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional, and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). “p. 110-111

**External accountability** is when system leaders reassure the public through transparency, monitoring, and selective intervention that their system is performing in line with societal expectations and requirements. The priority for policy makers, we argue, should be to lead with creating the conditions for internal accountability, because they are more effective in achieving greater overall accountability, including external accountability. Policy makers also have direct responsibilities to address external accountability, but this latter function will be far more effective if they get the internal part right.
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<td>Accountability is now primarily described as an accountability for student learning. It is less about some test result and more about accepting ownership of the moral imperative of having every student learn. Teachers talk about “monitoring” differently. As they engage in greater sharing of the work, they talk about being accountable as people in the school community know what they are doing and looking to see what is changing for students as a result. And as they continue to deprivatize teaching, they talk about their principal and peers coming into their classrooms and expecting to see the work [of agreed-upon practices] reflected in their teaching, their classroom walls, and student work. (Anonymous, personal communication, November 2014)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Teachers and administrators talk about accountability by deprivatizing their practice. If everyone knows what the other teacher or administrator is working on and how they are working on it with students, it becomes a lot easier to talk about accountability. When everyone has an understanding of accountability, creating clear goals and steps to reach those goals, it makes it easier for everyone to talk and work in accountable environments. (Elementary principal, personal communication, November 2014)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>We are moving to define accountability as responsibility. My district has been engaged in some important work that speaks to intrinsic motivation, efficacy, perseverance, etc., and accountability is seen as doing what is best for students . . . working together to tackle any challenge and being motivated by our commitment as opposed to some external direction. (Superintendent, personal communication, November 2014)</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I do believe that a lot of work remains to be done on building common understanding on the notion of accountability. Many people still believe that someone above them in the hierarchy is accountable. Very few take personal accountability for student learning and achievement. There are still those who blame parents and students’ background for achievement. (Consultant, personal communication, November 2014)</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>In one school, the talk about accountability was pervasive as the school became designated as underperforming. The morale of the school went down significantly, and the tension was omnipresent at every meeting. The team switched the conversation to motivation, innovation, and teamwork and the culture changed. The school is energized and the test scores went up in one year. The team is now committed to results and continuous improvement. (Consultant, personal communication, November 2014)</td>
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