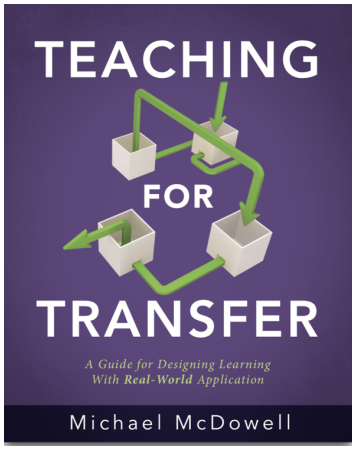
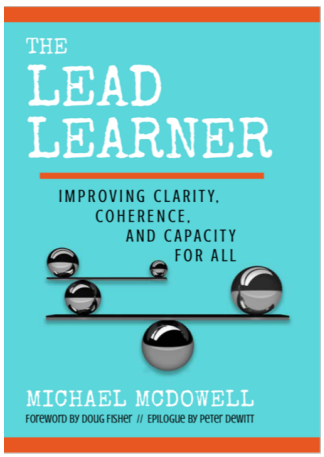
The Lead Learner — Improving Coherence, Capacity, and Clarity for All.

Michael McDowell, Ed.D.





Michael McDowell, Ed.D.

Michael McDowell, Ed.D. serves as the Superintendent of the Ross School District. During his tenure, the Ross School District has progressed to the top of California schools and districts in relation to student connectedness and wellbeing as well as being in the top tier of districts in academic achievement and growth. Beyond academic achievement and social and emotional development, the Ross School District has emerged as a beacon for innovation creating over 65+ different electives from virtual game design and broadcast journalism, sponsoring the first TEDxYouth event in the Bay Area, and co-creating a student-led non-profit that engages in service-learning and community engagement around the world.

Prior to serving as a superintendent, he served as an associate superintendent of instructional and personnel services and as a high school principal of a Title I and California Distinguished School. Before entering administration, Dr. McDowell was a leadership and instructional coach consulting with schools, districts, higher educational institutions, and state departments on educational leadership, teaching leadership, and instruction. Additionally, Dr. McDowell has five years of teaching experience in middle and high school science and mathematics. Dr. McDowell is the Chair to the Advisory Board of 1% for Education, a non-profit serving to allocate funding for public education. Moreover, Dr. McDowell continues to teach students and work in his community to enhance public education. Previously, Dr. McDowell was a National Faculty member for the Buck Institute of Education and an advisor to educational organizations focused on equity, excellence, and innovation. His practical expertise in schools and systems is complimented by his scholarly approach to leadership, learning, and instruction. He holds a B.S., M.A. and Ed.D

Dr. McDowell is the creator and author of all 5 published works and original professional development programs offered through Hinge Education that support professional learning in educational systems around the world.

Defining Culture

In this activity, you will engage in two think, pair, share protocols. You will start by answering the first two questions on your own. Next, the facilitator will ask you to find a partner and discuss your responses. Finally, the entire group will share responses.

What is a culture?

How do you/we change a culture?

After the presenter shares their definition of a culture, you will answer the next three questions on your own. Next, the facilitator will ask you to rejoin your partner and find another dyad to discuss your responses. Finally, the group will share their responses.

How is the definition presented by the facilitator similar and/or different from what you stated above?

How is the method of changing a culture similar and/or different from what you presented?

What are the major recurring tasks in your system?

Universal Habits of Practice

"You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. Your goal is your desired outcome. Your system is the collection of daily habits that will get you there. This year, spend less time focusing on outcomes and more time focusing on the habits that precede the results."

-James Clear

Key Influences	Key Questions	What are my next steps as a leader? What systems need to be put in place to ensure this occurs?
Clarity	I know I'm doing great things in my classroom, but are my students with me?	
Feedback	When it comes to feedback, am I working harder than my students?	
Rigor	Are our kids engaging in academic rigor?	
ACL	How do we get students to own their own learning?	
CTE	How can we collaborate to improve differentiation in our classrooms? How do we ensure our students are gaining +1 in their learning?	

Ranking the Leadership Research

In this activity, you will explore the significance of leadership on student learning. Moreover, this activity illuminated the degree of impact specific leadership actions have on enhancing student learning. To start you determine which leadership typology has the greatest impact on student learning. Next you will rank each of the "Influences on Learning" under "My Ranking," from 1–5 (1 = the most substantial influence on student learning, whereas 5 is the least influential). You will have an opportunity to compare your responses to the research presented during the presentation.

Instructional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
•Classroom observations •Interpreting test scores with teachers •Focusing on instructional issues •Ensuring a coordinated instructional program •Highly visible •Communicating high academic standards •Ensuring class atmospheres are conducive to learning	•Inspirational motivation •Individualized support •Sets direction •Vision, group goals, high-performance expectations •Instructional support •Monitoring school activity •Buffering staff from external demands •Fair and equitable staffing •Easily accessible •High degree of autonomy for the school

Which leadership typology has a greater influence on student learning?

- ☐ Transformational Leadership
- ☐ Instructional Leadership

Why did you select this type of leadership as the most influential?

Ranking the Leadership Research, Part II

Leadership Actions	My Rankings	Actual Rankings	Effect Size
Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment			
Resourcing strategically			
Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum			
Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development			
Establishing goals and expectations			

To what extent does your leadership team prioritize the things that make the greatest difference to student learning?

Situational Habits of Practices Related to Rigor

Influence	Surface	Deep	Transfer
Outlining (ES .85)			
Similarities and differences across contexts (ES 1.32)			
Seeking help from peers (ES .83)			
Planning and Predicting (Es. 0.76)			
Classroom Discussion (ES .82)			
Mnemonics (ES .76)			
Seeing Patterns in new situations (ES 1.14)			
Setting Challenging Goals (Es.57)			
Strategies to integrate prior knowledge (e.g. KWL) (ES. 93)			
Evaluation and reflection (ES .75)			
Solving problems in new situations (.80)			

ES= Effect Size

Hattie, J., & Donoghue, G.M. (2016). Learning strategies: A synthesis and conceptual model. *Science of Learning* volume 1, Article number: 16013 (2016)

Motion versus Action

What will I do to ensure that we work on small shifts in practice?

How can we spend 80% of our time on action to design versus design to action?

How can I begin developing small shifts in practice at scale? Who will be involved? To what extent can we scale this work?

3 Key Practices Innovative and Impactful Systems

Key Practice 1: **Clarity**

Next Step

Key Practice 2: **Coherence**

Next Step

Key Practice 3: **Capacity Building**

Next Step

The Lead Learner Learning Intention and Success Criteria

Learning Intention: To ensure *all* learners and faculty develop, substantially progress towards and apply a proportional level of knowledge and skills (surface, deep, and transfer) knowledge and skills in their work.

Elements of The Lead Learner	Success Criteria
Clarity- Develops and executes a lean set of actions towards substantial growth at all levels of learning	• Strategic plan focuses the district on growth and criterion goals related to equity, engagement, and excellence. • Leadership team has used tools to assess system progress towards and proficiency of equity, engagement, and excellence outcome before making plans of action. • Leadership has devised a strategic plan that articulates competing theories of action, the learning needs of the organization, a narrative to cascade across the organization, and routines for inspecting performance.
Coherence- Aligns all systems to ensure substantial impact on student learning at surface, deep, and transfer learning	• Consistent growth and proficiency expectations for students are established and are consistent regardless of school, classroom, or teacher. • Standardized learning intentions and success criteria across schools and classrooms are established. • Standardized criteria for surface, deep, and transfer are established in the system • Customizable approaches to teaching at varying levels of complexity are articulated in the organization. • Personnel systems ensure expectations of staff are clearly articulated, candidates are filtered, structured interviews are deployed, interviews and demonstrations are required, and targeted feedback and support is ongoing and consistent.
Capacity- Builds System-wide Capacity	• Leaders center professional learning on student progress and proficiency (more than 90% of their time). • Leaders ensure professional learning is job-embedded and involves inspection of impact on students. • Leaders ensure that learning is shared across the system • Leaders select from a variety of organizational routines including: critical friends teams, student involvement in the CFT process, learning rounds, learning convenings (meeting reboots), and professional learning events.

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Let's Get EmpowerED!

Impact Teams, IncludED, Clarity for Virtual Teaching and Learning, the EmpowerED Learner eToolkit, our EmpowerED Learner Pathways.

Talk to Brian Roy about which professional learning fits your needs!

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