Sustaining Leadership in Complex Times:
An individual and system solution

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Leadership energy has recently received greater attention as people grapple with the complexity, not only of achieving substantial improvement under challenging circumstances, but also of maintaining organizational momentum for continuous improvement. (see Fullan, 2005,2006, Fullan, Hill, and Crevola, 2006, Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, and Loehr and Schwartz, 2003).

In this chapter we delve into the issues of leadership sustainability by examining a large school district with which we are associated. It is a particularly appropriate case for the topic, because the district has been intensively engaged in a district-wide reform for the past five years and has relied heavily on mobilizing leadership at all levels of the system. The question of interest is "under what conditions can leaders in the system sustain their efforts individually and collectively?"

We first provide some context in describing the district and the Literacy Collaborative (LC) model that has been the focus of reform. Second, we present the results up to this point. Third, we get into the substance of sustainability by drawing directly on data from school principals in the district. Finally we take up the implications for sustaining leadership presence as a continuous force for improvement, concluding that it is both an individual and a system responsibility. We note that if the latter two elements can operate in an interdependent manner the conditions for leadership energy, continuous renewal and sustainability have a greater chance of becoming embedded.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

York Region District School Board (YRDSB) is a large multicultural district just north of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It is rapidly growing with a diverse socio-cultural and linguistic population with over 100 different languages spoken in their schools. On average, the school board has been opening 5 elementary schools a year for the last five years and a secondary school every other year. There are a total of 140 elementary schools and 27 secondary schools with over 108,000 students and 8,000 teachers.

In 2000 when the district began its student achievement improvement strategy in earnest, Director of Education, Bill Hogarth, set out to develop the best possible model for reform drawing heavily on external ideas but developing a capacity from within the district to lead the reform with a critical mass of leaders at all levels of the district. The district decided the foundation for improving student achievement was to focus on improving literacy through a model which came to be known as the Literacy Collaborative (LC). Key features of the approach included:
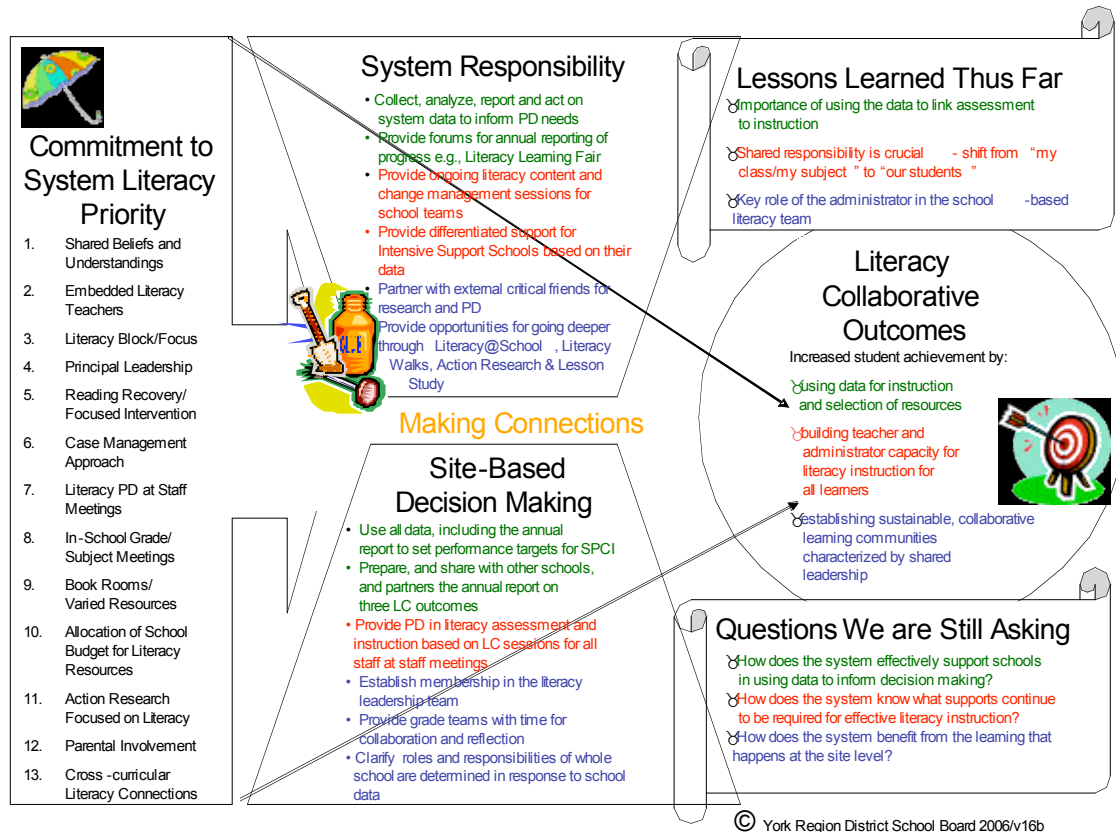
- Articulating a clear vision and commitment to a system literacy priority for all students which is continually communicated to everyone in the system;
- Developing a system-wide comprehensive plan and framework for continuous improvement (SPCI);
- Using data to drive instruction and determine resources;
- Building administrator and teacher capacity to teach literacy for all students; and,
- Establishing professional learning communities at all levels of the system and beyond the district.

The district developed a strong team of Curriculum Coordinators and Consultants, all focused on facilitating balanced literacy instruction. It also linked into external research development expertise, particularly with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). Assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation was evaluated annually. Capacity-building focused on literacy assessment for learning, instructional strategies, and on change management. In this case, capacity-building means any strategy that develops the collective efficacy of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student achievement through 1) new knowledge competencies and skills, 2) enhanced resources, and 3) greater motivation. The operative word is *collective* – what the group can do whether it is a given school or indeed the whole district to raise the bar and close the gap of student achievement.

The district has invested in on-going, systematic professional development in literacy, assessment literacy, knowledge of the learner, instructional intelligence, and, e-learning,

as well as professional learning focusing on change knowledge (understanding the change process, dealing with resistance, building professional learning communities, leadership and facilitation skills, and the like). The full blown model is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Literacy Collaborative Vision

Commitment to System Literacy Priority

1. Shared Beliefs and Understandings
2. Embedded Literacy Teachers
3. Literacy Block/Focus
4. Principal Leadership
5. Reading Recovery/ Focused Intervention
6. Case Management Approach
7. Literacy PD at Staff Meetings
8. In-School Grade/ Subject Meetings
9. Book Rooms/ Varied Resources
10. Allocation of School Budget for Literacy Resources
11. Action Research Focused on Literacy
12. Parental Involvement
13. Cross-curricular Literacy Connections

System Responsibility
- Collect, analyze, report and act on system data to inform PD needs
- Provide forums for annual reporting of progress e.g., Literacy Learning Fair
- Provide ongoing literacy content and change management sessions for school teams
- Provide differentiated support for Intensive Support Schools based on their data
- Partner with external critical friends for research and PD
- Provide opportunities for going deeper through Literacy@School, Literacy Walks, Action Research & Lesson Study

Making Connections

Site-Based Decision Making
- Use all data, including the annual report to set performance targets for SPCI
- Prepare, and share with other schools, and partners the annual report on three LC outcomes
- Provide PD in literacy assessment and instruction based on LC sessions for all staff at staff meetings
- Establish membership in the literacy leadership team
- Provide grade teams with time for collaboration and reflection
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of whole school are determined in response to school data

Lessons Learned Thus Far
- Importance of using the data to link assessment to instruction
- Shared responsibility is crucial - shift from "my class/my subject" to "our students"
- Key role of the administrator in the school-based literacy team

Literacy Collaborative Outcomes
Increased student achievement by:
- using data for instruction and selection of resources
- building teacher and administrator capacity for literacy instruction for all learners
- establishing sustainable, collaborative learning communities characterized by shared leadership

Questions We are Still Asking
- How does the system effectively support schools in using data to inform decision making?
- How does the system know what supports continue to be required for effective literacy instruction?
- How does the system benefit from the learning that happens at the site level?

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The model may appear overwhelming and we do not intend to explain it in detail here. In fact, the model was developed over time and is presented and discussed on an ongoing basis within the system to clarify the overall vision and to continuously improve the approach. Our point here is that the model is explicit, evolutionary (open to refinement based on ongoing evidence) and comprehensive. It reflects and guides the work of the district and is used by instructional leaders at all levels of the system.

More specifically, the Literacy Collaborative model involved developing and supporting school literacy teams, starting with an initial cohort in 2001-2002 and adding schools

over a four year period until all schools in the district were involved, elementary and secondary. Each school team consisted of three people - the Principal, the Literacy Teacher (a leadership role typically released for .25 to .5 time to work along-side the principal and classroom teachers during the school day) and the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT). Note: The funding of the Literacy Teacher is from the school district's staffing using existing budget – not supported by provincial educational funding. The teams committed to participating in regional literacy professional development (PD) once a month and in change management sessions, led by Carol Rolheiser and Michael Fullan (OISE/UT) four times a year.

The cohorts joined LC, starting with the most disadvantaged elementary schools. In 2001-2002, 17 elementary schools formed the first cohort; 21 schools were added in 2002-2003; 45 in 2003-2004, and the remaining 57 schools joined in 2004-2005. Thus, by 2005 all schools were involved, including all 27 secondary schools. There is a longstanding saying in the change literature that "change is a process not an event". Such a process was actualized in York Region District School Board, not just because the professional development sessions were continuous over multiple years, but also because the strategy required school teams, working with their staffs, to apply ideas in between sessions and to continually build them into everyday practice. It was what happened in the schools in between sessions that counted. Ideas were constantly applied and discussed as the district emphasized "learning in context" i.e. learning by applying new ideas, building on them, and being re-energized by the successes achieved.

In short, the model was based on best knowledge. Comprehensive in coverage, the model was constantly shared and refined with all stakeholders---the school teams, the curriculum coordinator/consultant staff, the community, school board trustees, and the system as a whole. Moreover there was a multi-year commitment funded at the Board table and outlined in a comprehensive System Plan for Continuous Improvement (SPCI) so that the district stayed on course with the strategy. There was no mistaking that LC was clearly the system priority.

Each June the district organizes a Literacy Learning Fair in which the literacy leadership teams from all schools present what they have accomplished and learned. Schools must report on the three goals of LC: to increase students' Literacy achievement by:

- using data to drive instruction and to select appropriate Literacy resources;
- building administrators' and teachers' capacity for successful Literacy instruction; and,
- establishing professional learning communities across the district.

The Literacy Learning Fair is part celebration, part peer-pressure, and part peer-support to keep reaching new levels of achievement. By annually sharing every schools' commitment to and accomplishment of increased student achievement, the four hundred participants contributed to organization and individual leadership energy renewal.

RESULTS SO FAR

The intent here is not to explain the results in detail, but rather but to convey enough detail that it is clear that YRDSB is a district on the move (see Sharratt and Fullan, 2005 for a more in depth analysis of results). Our main question of interest in this chapter is what are the issues in *sustaining* improvement—what are the key leadership issues for the immediate future in a system that is already highly focused and intentional.

Assessment of student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics for grade 3 and grade 6 children is conducted annually by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO is an arms-length government agency charged with assessing and communicating the results of all students in the province. To take grade 3 writing as an example, over the past five years (from 1999-2000 to 2004-5) York has moved from 66% of the students reaching the provincial standard to approximately 75% During the first three years of this period the province as a whole was flat lined at around 55% until it launched in 2003 a province –wide strategy much along the lines of York's capacity building but applied to all 72 districts in the province-latterly the province has moved

from 55% to 63% (see Fullan, 2006). Table 1 describes these quantitative results in more detail.

Table 1.

5-Year Span in EQAO Results in YRDSB (1999-2005)

EQAO (Method 2)	1999 (baseline year before District's Literacy focus)	2005	% Increase
Grade 3 Reading	59	69	10%
Grade 3 Writing	66	75	9%
Grade 3 Mathematics	70	80	10%
Grade 6 Reading	61	75	14%
Grade 6 Writing	59	72	13%
Grade 6 Mathematics	63	76	13%
% ESL/ELD Learners	Gr. 3 4% Gr. 6 4%	11% 6%	7% 2%
ESL/ELD Grade 3 Reading	34	56	22%
ESL/ELD Grade 3 Writing	47	69	22%
ESL/ELD Grade 3 Mathematics	62	75	13%
ESL/ELD Grade 6 Reading	27	53	26%
ESL/ELD Grade 6 Writing	27	62	35%
ESL/ELD Grade 6 Mathematics	62	74	12%
OSSLT (diploma Bearing assessment)	Oct. 2002 77%	Oct. 2004 87%	10%
Reading at the end of Grade 1 (Reading Recovery™ site reports)	59%	83%	24%

(Sharratt & Rolheiser, 2006)

The aggregate figures mask the more fine grained explanation of how results were achieved in specific schools. In Sharratt and Fullan (2006), we present data that show that those schools which had Principal and teacher-leadership that focused more specifically on all 13 parameters of the LC model in action achieved much greater results, including many of the most disadvantaged schools that began much below the YRDSB and the

Ontario average, only to surpass both averages over the ensuing five years. As we said in our earlier paper, the leadership teams in these schools:

a) clearly understood the model and most importantly lived the shared beliefs and understandings;

b) did continuous self-assessment, striving to align behavior and beliefs among the principal, teacher-leaders and staff as a whole; and,

c) did not let other "distractors" divert their focus and energy. In fact they drew or renewed their leadership energy by means of understanding their improvement.

There are many schools in York Region that have these qualities and the system is now working toward greater consistency. For example, 28 elementary and six secondary schools were identified, using data, as "stuck" or declining, and in 2005-2006 are receiving more intensive capacity building support for school leadership teams from the curriculum and instructional services team (in the meantime all schools in York Region continue to be engaged in district-wide reform, including all 27 secondary schools).

There is little doubt that there is widespread support for and understanding LC in the district. In April 2005 we conducted a survey of all school teams in the district (each school leadership team consists of the principal, the lead literacy teacher, and the special education resource teacher). We received 387 or 76% return. The results from the survey showed that a very high percentage of school leaders perceived that LC had a strong, positive impact. The percentage scoring 4 or 5 on a five point impact scale for selected questions is displayed here.

The Literacy Collaborative has:
1. Provided teachers with a wider-range of teaching strategies   90%
2. Helped ensure adequate resources to support students   78%
3. Raised the expertise of teachers within their schools   88%
4. Increased the school-wide focus on literacy   95%
5. Clarified the role of all teachers in the support of literacy   78%
6. Provided more attention and assistance to students at risk   83%
7. Raised literacy expectations for all students   90%
8. Produced more consistency and continuity in literacy across subjects 75%
9. Fostered a more positive attitude among staff re literacy teaching   85%
10. Facilitated sharing of expertise with teachers from other schools   69%

Granted that this survey does not tap into the perceptions of individual teachers but the leadership teams are very much in close interaction with classroom teachers. We conclude that it is accurate to say that the system as a whole has been energized by the strategy and the strong results being obtained. We get further confirmation from the fact that the provincial Literacy Numeracy Secretariat identified YRDSB as one of eight school districts which exemplified quality strategies in action. But our interest in this paper is not about the results so far. Rather, what are the prospects for sustainability? How do individual principals sustain their commitment? How can the system help? Could it be that large scale initiatives, even if successful, eventually take their toll and lead to diminished effort in light of relentless demands?

THE NATURE AND PROSPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) define sustainability in this way: "Sustainability does not simply mean whether something will last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the environment now or in the future" (p.30).Thus, intentional reform models, like LC, must unfold in a way that all schools benefit. The spirit underlying such approaches attempts to create a we-we mindset. As a result of purposeful interaction within and across schools, school leaders become more aware of, and indeed more committed to, the success of other schools in addition to their own.

It is our contention in this paper that while individual leaders can and must work on their own sustaining energies, the conditions for sustaining large numbers of people can only be fostered if the organization as a whole is working in this direction. Moreover, we maintain that focusing on sustainability must become more deliberate and precise. It needs explicit attention—it must be worked on in a self- and -organizationally conscious manner.

This position is reinforced by the findings of two of the more informative books on organizational change which confirm the basic conditions for sustainability. Jim Collins (2002), in his well-known book, Good to Great, compares Fortune 500 companies that

had "good" performance with those that had "great" performance as measured by 15 or more years of continuous financial success. Collins and his colleagues found five key themes associated with ongoing success. The first three, he claims, are more important early on because they build momentum. First, he found that we need more "executive leaders" who can help build enduring greatness (leaders whose main mark is not only their contribution to success but also relative to how many leaders they leave behind who can go even further). Second, he emphasizes that organizations need to work on securing "who" not just "what". The "who" in this case are leaders who can help develop the five themes in question. The third theme is "confront the brutal facts" i.e., a relentless focus on examining data for making improvements. The fourth theme was the "hedgehog effect"—a hedgehog is an animal that once it focuses, is hard to distract. Thus sustainable organizations learn to concentrate through passion, expertise and mobilization of resources in a way that keeps them going. The fifth theme is "disciplined inquiry"— always problem-solving in relation to the central mission. Collins calls the overall effect the "flywheel". This is clearly related to sustainability because it takes less energy to keep the flywheel going once it is underway, permitting leaders to go deeper, which leads to greater success. More recently, Collins (2006) has confirmed that these ideas apply to the social sector, not because they come from business but because they focus on getting and maintaining greatness. The virtuous circle builds and further attracts believers and resources by getting and leveraging results.

An identical finding is contained in Kanter's (2004) study of Confidence: How winning and losing streaks begin and end. "Confidence", says Kanter, "influences the willingness to invest – to commit money, time, reputation, emotional energy, or other resources—or withhold or hedge investments" (p 7). Kanter's solution is framed around developing three interconnected cornerstones –accountability, collaboration, and initiative. It is these conditions that generate sustaining investments of energy and commitment.

The system must also foster what we have come to call "positive pressure" (Fullan, 2006). Positive pressure is one that is non-pejorative, that assumes that capacity is at the root of success, and that focused capacity-building strategies promote transparency in

sharing practices and viewing results. In other words, one key to getting at sustainability is to bring issues out in the open in order to understand them, and in turn in order to address any problems.

In sum, the key concepts for us pertain to whether the system goes about its work in a way that helps people focus, that motivates and energizes people to make investments that are sensitive to the ebb and flow of energies, that uses success to beget more success, and that creates a critical mass of leaders who work together on these very matters.

Sustainability in York Region

There are very little direct data available in the literature on what leaders in given systems think about in relation to the concept of sustainability. We decided then that a good place to start would be to go to the source and ask YRDSB principals three questions:

1. How do you sustain your school's literacy initiative as a leader?
2. How do you maintain energy/renewal for your staff to sustain the literacy focus?
3. How do you maintain your energy and renew yourself to sustain the literacy focus?

We set out to select a large number of principals on the basis of how active they were in the Literacy Collaborative. Thus, this is not a random sample but one in which leaders identified were engaged in the reform. We wanted to know what active, purposeful principals thought about sustainability. We did not, it should be noted, select on a narrow basis a few exceptionally active principals. We wanted the sample to represent typical principals who could reflect what happens when "regular" principals get immersed in ongoing change. We identified 61 elementary and 18 secondary school principals and asked them to respond in writing to the three questions. The response was overwhelming with 50 (82%) of elementary and 17 (94%) of secondary principals responding. This is admittedly a selective sample but is large and diverse, representing about 38% of the total in the district. We found as expected that, although the questions were open ended, the vast majority of responses related to the components of the LC model. In other words,

given that the model was intended to mobilize support at the school level for a sustained focus on literacy, and given that the model was developed in close communication with principals, we would expect that school leaders would gravitate to the content of the strategy when they thought (unprompted) about sustainability. We report below on the main themes that respondents spontaneously formulated, indicating the percentage of those who commented on the theme along with a representative quote or two relevant to the topic. Our interest here is in identifying the conditions or elements that are conducive to sustaining focus and energy on continuous improvement. Think of sustainability conditions as those that motivate people to continue to invest their energies in working with others to accomplish greater improvement.

Question #1: How Do You As Leader Sustain Your Schools' Literacy Initiative?

There were five major themes that attracted high numbers of comments:
1. Shared beliefs, goals, and vision
2. Distributed leadership and professional learning cultures
3. Data based decisions/impact measures/celebrating success
4. Resources
5. School-community/home relations

As we have found before, these are recurring themes (Sharratt, 2001); however, they are found here to be even more precise. We also note that shared beliefs is more of an outcome of a quality process than a precondition (Fullan, 2006). Put differently, one condition for sustainability involves working on defining, shaping and refining the shared vision of the school, in this case, using school data in relation to literacy improvement. The more that beliefs are shared, the greater the ongoing effort, and the efficiency of the effort. Over 60% of respondents identified shared beliefs as in the following three comments:

> *A common goal of improved student achievement and the attitude that <u>all</u> students can learn is embedded in the culture of the school.*

To sustain the school's literacy implementation, we try to maintain focus and assure that we have a common language. We try to set a few clear targets and we have an overall vision regarding where we want our students to be across the grades.

When we reflect on the impact of our instructional decisions and what the data tell us that students are learning, it creates "intellectual energy". It becomes a craving to impact the learning of every student.

A second key factor associated with continued success is what we have come to call the presence of dedicated "second change agents" or what is sometimes referred to as distributive leadership—a critical mass of leaders led by the principal working on establishing a culture of ongoing learning. The principal is the first change agent. Having one or more "second change agents" is crucial --- for example, literacy lead teachers with direct responsibility and time during the school day to work with other teachers in their classrooms, to link teachers with each other internally and across schools, to help set up data management systems, and to work with principals on school improvement. Over 70% of respondents highlighted this aspect.

Sustaining the momentum within the school is possible because of the many levels of support available to schools. The staffing made available for literacy coaches has been critical. This has given our school a teacher-leader who is working to increase the knowledge of those around her.

We model processes and literacy content at staff meetings and build shared leadership by providing staff opportunities to take leadership roles in modeling and facilitating the use of information gained at LC sessions. As a principal, I fully utilize the concept of sharing leadership and creating a learning community. The sharing of leadership allows the administrative team and me to pace ourselves in terms of energy expenditure.

Administration communicates clear expectations to staff about why/how/when literacy instruction and focus occur in classrooms. Ensure that staff members have the tools, skills etc. to use effective literacy practices i.e., no excuses.

Our primary learning team truly is a professional learning community with many teachers doing projects together and sharing ideas.

By using staff meetings, divisional meetings and grade partner planning times, teachers are encouraged to reflect on the needs of <u>all</u> students, generally, and at-risk students specifically.

Third, data driven instruction and the ubiquitous presence and use of data are core themes for promoting and maintaining effort. The case management approach is in place in all elementary schools where individual students are tracked with corrective action taking place on an ongoing basis. Over 40% of responses related to this theme.

Student achievement in both literacy and numeracy is a focus for transition planning for students coming from grade 8 to grade 9. We make particular note of student achievement levels in grades 3 and 6 EQAO assessments. (secondary principal).

It was a natural step for us to [use case data] to strive for differentiated instruction to provide for the diverse needs in each classroom.

Success breeds success. What we have done to date has proven to make a difference to increased student achievement. We celebrate this!

We have set aside time to review school results—to identify areas of weakness and to share successful approaches.

Fourth, resources are part and parcel of continued success, provided that they are part of a cycle of success. Kick start the process with new resources, and then have success chase the money—this year's success is next year's additional resources (Fullan, 2006). Some 35% highlighted this factor.

We have invested heavily in bookrooms and appropriate classroom libraries for all three division.

We carry out decisions about the school resources in the area of literacy based on our School Plan for Continuous Improvement. We allocate our financial, human, material resources in a way that makes literacy a priority.

The fifth theme for sustainability is probably one of the most important in the long run but also the most difficult to establish, namely, school to home community relationships. This element was reflected in comments from almost 40% of respondents.

We have extended our partnerships with the parents and guardians from day one. This community has extended our understanding of cultural diversity–English as a second language, and economic and lifestyle impact on children's learning.

Finally, a kind of omnibus comment struck us as a particularly apropos summary with respect to question one.

Support and encouragement are crucial. Pushing too hard never works. Magic happens when teachers take initiative within a framework which has been developed by the district. Incorporating PD into staff and division meetings needs to be led by staff not the principal. When teachers share their best practices, things happen. Providing both time and resources for mentoring/team teaching ensures that literacy becomes and remains a focus. Walking the fine line between push and pull is always an exciting challenge and worth the time to build strong leaders in a school.

Question #2: How Do You Maintain Energy/Renewal For Your Staff To Sustain The Literacy Focus?

Our second question extended the school sustainability question more directly to focus on staff. As expected, there was overlap with the first question but more personally-based aspects surfaced. We can use the same five categories to capture the comments.

First, with respect to shared beliefs about 30% of the responses related to this category.

> *I have very high expectations for myself and others. I expect the best and then offer opportunities and experiences to help others improve.*

> *Time to focus on the goals of the school as a team has been met in an improved way this year and is making a difference.*

> *Talk about buy in—we all have a common message and again it gets linked back to that common vision.*

Second, for leadership and learning cultures, principals talked about the day-to-day built-in support for what we call 'learning in context' – the kind of learning that occurs every day because it becomes part of the culture. About 45% to 60% (depending on the subcategory) responded along these lines.

> *Teacher mentoring and team teaching have been important methods used to sustain the literacy implementation and energy in such a large school.*

> *The Literacy Teachers (Literacy Coaches) have given staff many opportunities for support and role modeling. We give teachers time to collaborate with their grade partners.*

Staff members need time to hear about a concept, learn about it, experiment with it, work it into everyday practice, consolidate it, and ultimately sustain it as part of good teaching practice.

Probably the most effective means for sustaining something is the teacher's own enthusiasm when they see their students progressing and responding to strategies they are using. It's catching!

A culture of shared leadership is in place. We promote shared leadership in the school and teachers feel comfortable assuming these roles.

The external training provided by the district based on the LC model is a great motivator for me. I always bring back little seeds that I plant back at the school.

The opportunities available through the Literacy Collaborative have been excellent and the increased opportunities of more teachers attending workshops have provided great motivation and excitement at every level of the school.

Third, the use of data on student achievement as a tool for improvement, playing itself out in a learning culture, is crucial for maintaining focus and momentum-mentioned directly by 20% of the respondents and by many more in relation to establishing sharing cultures.

We analyzed the data collected, charted the students identified as 'at risk' in the fall, and made plans to address their needs.

Our staff meeting agenda planning focus is on student data and related improvement ideas and activities, while keeping operational/informational items to an absolute minimum!

Fourth, about 25% of the respondents mentioned resources.

Our book room is a central part of our school. Our teachers take tremendous ownership for it. They look forward to buying for it and keeping it up.

Budget for initiatives or simply having the resources in place is vital to ensuring that the change process is not interrupted or discarded and is integral to creating a culture of cohesiveness as staff members work and take ownership of literacy in their classrooms and in the school.

Timetabling, shared grade-level prep time, using curriculum instructional supply teacher days and, freeing up teachers to engage in professional learning are key to maintaining the focus.

Fifth, only a small minority (10%) mentioned home/school relations as a sustainer, possibly because this is the most difficult aspect, and takes the longest to develop. In our experience, principals and teachers need to develop their own professional learning communities to a certain point first, before they reach out in a more proactive way to the community.

Key is engaging all educational partners and effectively using many volunteers, including: Co-operative Education students, tutors in the classroom and other community resources –human and non-human.

Question #3: How Do You Maintain Your Energy and Renewal For Yourself To Sustain The Literacy Focus?

The third major question in this research is the most personal because it asks principals what they, themselves, do to maintain their own energy and renewal. Three interrelated clusters stood out:
1. Personal renewal and challenge;
2. Passion expressed as student success (passion without success is a non-

sustainer); and,

3. The social basis of sustainability.

Over two thirds of respondents identified personal growth and stimulus as sustaining them.

> *It may sound trite but if we are asking our staff and students (and other employees) to read, read, read, then we had better be reading as well. I find that this is important in reminding me how important literacy is, so I read all the time, including professional reading, but more importantly expanding to novels, newspapers, etc.*

> *The personal satisfaction comes from learning new skills myself, and participating in PD provided by the curriculum department.*

> *Ongoing learning opportunities through the Literacy Collaborative, Literacy Walk training, in-school study groups and personal professional reading are some of the vehicles for energizing and empowering the sustaining focus on literacy.*

> *Attending the LC sessions with the teachers is another way to maintain my energy and renewal.*

> *I endeavor to never let the mood of others or the stress felt by others determine my mood. I strive to be positive, professional and set personal goals that I would like others to model.*

The second theme was passion expressed through student success. Again, about two-thirds spontaneously expressed this theme.

> *But what really excites me is the children! Seeing their work displayed on the hallway walls, highlighting the reading comprehension strategy of the month, is very rewarding.*

Watching amazing teachers work with students on something that you've taught them or that they have learned as a result of an opportunity that you have offered is energizing.

It is very easy to sustain the literacy focus when I see the positive results of the literacy practices our teachers implement in the school.

We focus on sharing and celebrating success that we're having. There is certainly an energy that comes from seeing that the instructional practices we are implementing are making a difference in the lives of all students.

Listening to success stories is encouraging and inspiring when one is occasionally faced with resistance or frustration.

The third theme - Working on and appreciating personal well-being and the social nature of sustainability in and outside of school was featured by, again, some 60% of the respondents

My energy is sustained by watching and listening to dedicated staff that work hard and have fun doing it!

I spend time in classrooms to see literacy strategies in action (morning and afternoon walkthroughs).

I talk to staff, visit classrooms, am aware of how staff members are maintaining a literacy focus in their classrooms on a daily basis.

Renewal comes when I spend time with my family and friends. This allows me to keep life in perspective, appreciate the little things and not take myself too seriously.

I have learned to slow down (and that is hard for me) and digest the information from "above". I have learned how to prioritize the information and redistribute it to key staff for interpretation.

Finally an overall comment seemed to capture the essence of personal sustainability.

I see literacy leadership as a never-ending cycle of learning and improvement. When you accept this idea it becomes easier to accept personal renewal as an essential component of effective leadership.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLITY

Our chapter is clearly only one snapshot, albeit of a large district that is taking leadership sustainability seriously. We think that the personal perspectives of a large number of school leaders are both a unique and valuable contribution to our knowledge of personal perceptions on the question of sustainability. As we stand back and survey the overall LC model from the perspective of conditions that favor sustainability, four propositions stand out for us.

Proposition One: Sustainability is not about prolonging specific innovations, but rather it is about establishing the conditions for continuous student improvement.

Proposition Two: Sustainability is not possible unless school leaders and system leaders are working on the same agenda.

Proposition Three: Proposition Two notwithstanding, sustainability is not furthered by school and system leaders simply agreeing on the direction of the reform. Rather, agreement is continually tested and extended by leaders at both school and system levels putting pressure on each

other. Sustainability is a two-way or multi-way street.

Proposition Four: We have a fair idea about what makes for sustainability within one district under conditions of stable leadership over a five or more year period, but we still do not know how sustainability fares when district leadership changes, or when state leadership changes direction.

We have been able to identify some of the main themes of sustainability. They amount to focus, consistency, mutual reinforcement between the school and district levels, staying the course, and developing an attitude that continuity of good direction, and of increased student achievement is paramount. We know sustainability, as in continuous effort and energy, is always vulnerable. We know that sustaining cultures require a lot of work to build and maintain, but can be destroyed quickly with different leadership, and change in political conditions. Yet by making what works explicit, and by enabling more and more leaders at all levels of the system to be aware of the conditions that energize themselves and those with whom they work, the chances for continued success are greatly enhanced.

Our general conclusion is to make the notion of sustainability transparent--- foster open and continuous dialogue about whether system and school level discussions are focused and, thus, whether energy is flourishing. Finally, we do not see sustainability as linear. There are always ebbs and flows, a time to stand back and regroup, and so on. Sustainable organizations are more likely to see positive flow as cyclical and, thus, treat setbacks as temporary, and more likely, in turn, to find ways of reenergizing. Indeed, sustainable organizations do not experience and do not expect continued good fortune, but rather stay the course when things are not going well. Persistence and resilience are the hallmarks of individuals and organizations that are self-conscious and confident about their own capacities to win more than they lose, and to create their own self -fulfilling prophecies.

In short, it is not so much that people need to believe that sustainability is possible, but

more that the only way to move forward is to be "in the game" – to be engaged, seeking and helping to produce other leaders who are similarly disposed.

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