Building Middle Leader Capacity

The type of work students need to do is not changing fast enough.

To speed up the process of changing teacher practice to achieve this change schools need middle leaders who stand up to lead, can lead teams and can lead practice change in the classroom.

Background

A shift in the work:

- "Low cognitive demand tasks involve stating facts, following known procedures, and solving routine problems." (Van De Walle, Karp, & Bay-Williams, 2012)

- "High cognitive demand tasks involve making connections, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions." (Smith & Stein, 1998)

- From the development of our current education systems post the second world war the work that students did in the classroom was largely based around memorisation and procedural repetition.

- It is now widely accepted that we want students to engage in high cognitive demand tasks so as to prepare them to face up to a future that is different from our past.

- The shift from low cognitive demand work to high cognitive demand work involves changes in the types of tasks that students work on, how the student approaches these tasks, how the teacher designs the tasks and how the teacher engages with students whilst they engage in the tasks.

- This complex shift in classroom practice needs to change faster in order to see student learning and outcomes increase at a greater rate.

- It is middle leaders who have the greatest impact – both positive and negative – on making these changes happen.

Three Challenges

Go back thirty years and there were no middle leaders in schools.

The need for them has arisen as the school environment has moved from being simple, to being complicated to now being complex.

Complexity is best handled by human decision-making where simple and complicated environments, in principle at least, can be handled through rules.

The challenge is to develop middle leaders to make good decisions that systematically lead to progressive change in classroom practices.

1. Develop the personal characteristics that inspire others to follow

2. Develop the processes to lead teams to effect change

3. Develop a deep understanding of what is happening in the classroom and how to change it

SELF

IMPLEMENT

CHAMPION

TEAM

INNOVATE

PRACTICE
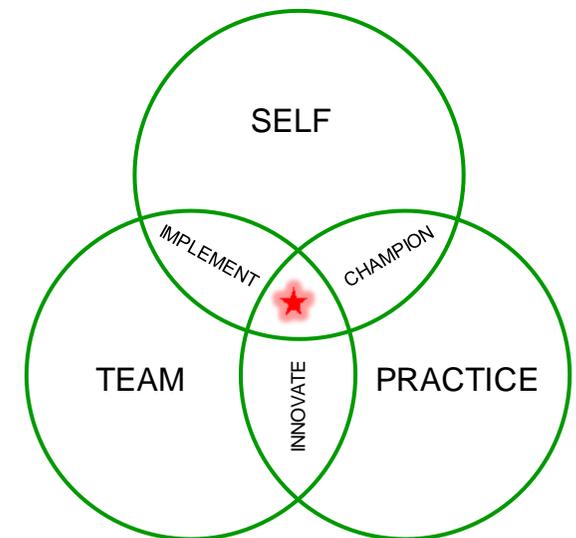
⭐ = change in student learning and outcomes

Each of these areas can be systematically developed through training, coaching and the adoption of new processes to manage teams and to observe and analyse what work is taking place in the classroom

A Comprehensive Model

What to look for in a middle leader development model:

- it builds personal effectiveness

- it builds the capacity to lead teams effectively

- it connects the work that a leader does and what we need to see happening in the classroom

- it builds a collegial group, with a common view of classroom practice and how it needs to change

- it can provide frameworks and processes (e.g. meeting protocols, coaching frameworks) to scaffold each area of development

	Leading Self	Leading Team	Leading Practice
Direction	Personal Goal setting	Team Goal setting	Work the students do
Practices	Coaching, Growth Mindset	Meetings, workshops, projects	Classroom observation, Analysis of evidence
The Work	Engaging one-on-one	Engaging teams	Engaging with practice changes

Personal Effectiveness

Energy

Time

Attention
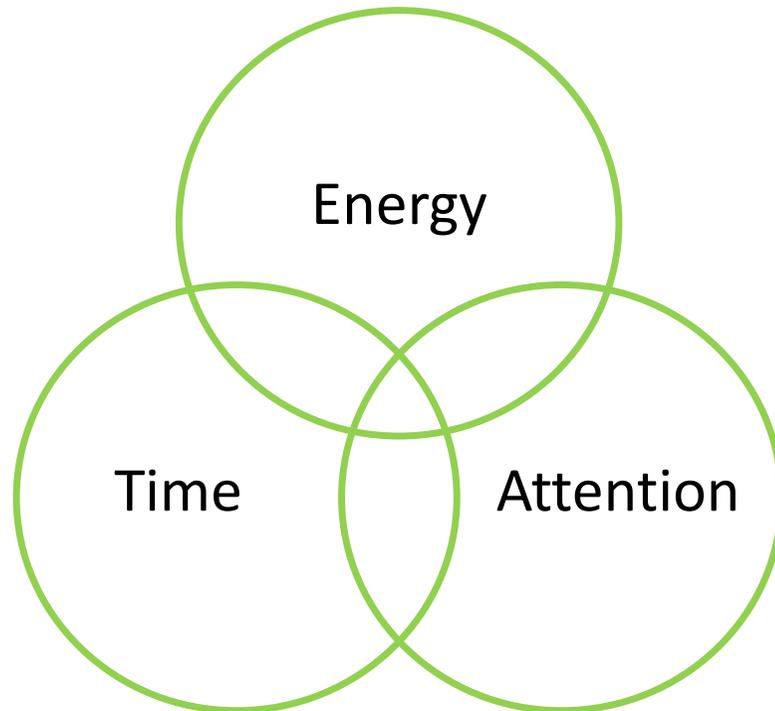
To lead others we must first learn to lead ourselves:

1. High energy comes from clarity of direction (through being coached), good health habits and good self-management of our mood

2. To be reliable in the work that we do comes from being in control of our time, effective task planning and the ability to focus on what is important

3. Connecting with others comes from how we respond to interactions, the mindset we hold and how we focus others' attention via the questions we ask

Personal effectiveness comes from Optimising Time, Attention and Energy

Personal Effectiveness

Coaching

Acceptance
Sustained Attention ✓

Focused Attention ✗
Comparing/Categorising
Judgement

Respond
Think
Frame

Moving ahead
Solutions-Focused ✓

Problem-Focused ✗
Dwelling in the past
Learned helplessness

Learning
Growth Mindset ✓

Fixed Mindset ✗
Sense of superiority
Need for validation
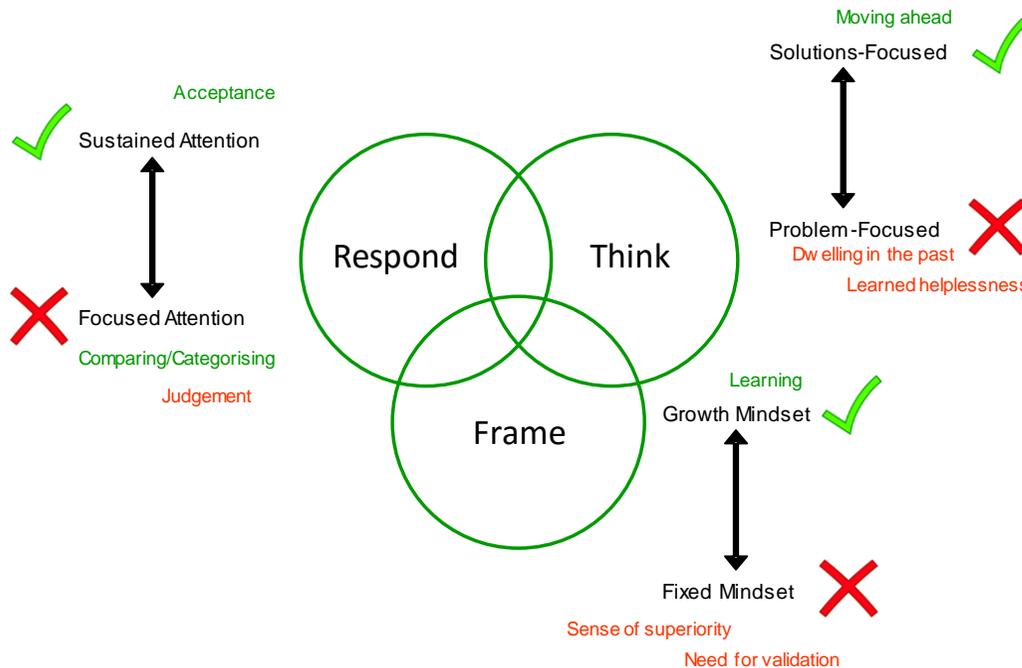
Learning to coach is an effective way to adopt and model the behaviours we want to see in the classroom, how we need teachers to engage with their students and is an effective way to connect with colleagues

1. To coach well a coach needs to develop the ability to use sustained attention, adopt and model a growth mindset and use solution-focused questioning

2. Coaching helps improve the quality of decision-making that takes place

3. The energy and commitment from coaching leads to more effective action

Adopting and modelling coaching behaviours and practices increases the leader's effectiveness

Example - Coaching
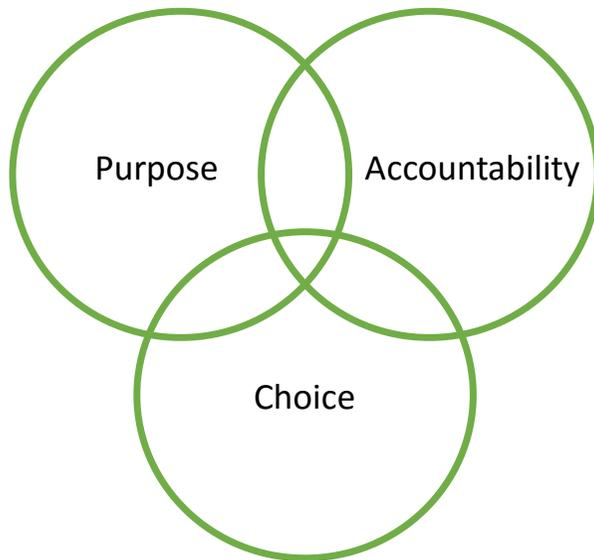
Leading Teams

Leading teams is a key capacity that needs to be developed:

1. **Purpose**: the team has a purpose that all members buy into. A team-based goal setting process will achieve this – the team is doing what it ought to be doing, given its mix of skills and abilities

2. **Accountability**: each team member buys into the purpose and is accountable to the other members of the team for doing the work that they have agreed to do

3. **Choice**: to get the best from a team each team member needs to have a measure of control over the work that they choose to do

Understanding and putting in place each of these processes is key to having effective teams

Classroom Observation

RELATIONSHIP

STUDENT

TASK

TEACHER

CONTENT

DESIGN
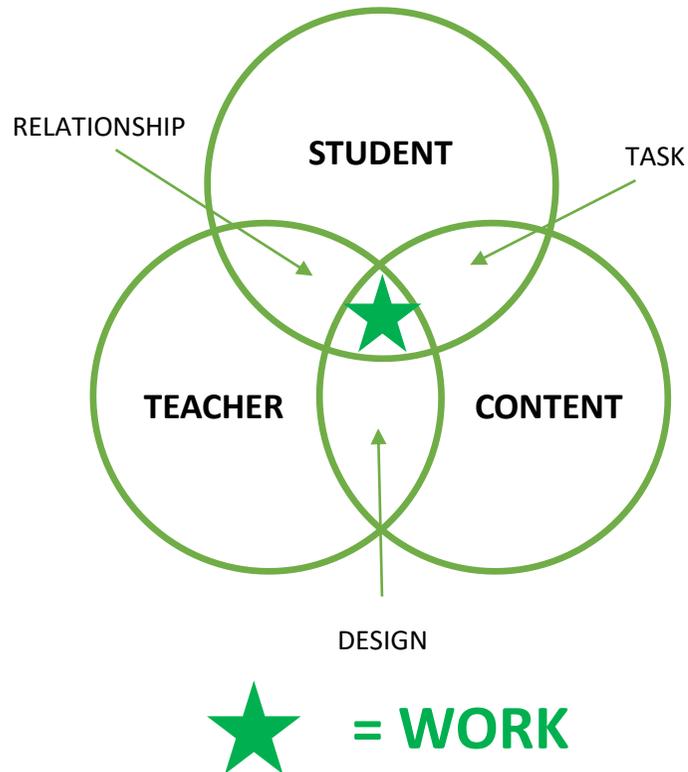
★ = WORK

At the heart of leading practice change is an intimate knowledge of the WORK that is being done in the classroom by students

1. Collectively develop an idea where practice seems to be stuck

2. Use observation across multiple classrooms to collect specific and descriptive evidence of what WORK is being done

3. Analyse the evidence to find patterns and identify some high leverage patterns

4. Conduct a Root Cause analysis to find the reasons that the pattern(s) occur

5. Develop an intervention to change practice

6. Lead teams to change practice in the classroom

Linking middle leaders' work to what needs to change in the classroom is central to continuous improvement in practices and outcomes

Developed from 'Instructional Rounds in Education' – Harvard Graduate School of Education

Where is your organisation?

As Senior School Leaders have stepped up:

- Senior Leaders see more clearly the gap in leadership capacity between senior and middle leadership

- Senior Leaders need to focus increasingly on the strategic not the day-to-day operational issues

- In a complex environment decisions need to be made close to the action to avoid unnecessary escalation

- Despite significant increases in cost per student the work being done by students in the classroom has not changed enough towards high cognitive demand

- Senior Leaders recognise that for teachers to change their practice they need to be well led

Category	Score	Description
Thriving	100	All Middle Leaders moving the organisation forward – dynamic and thriving
Thriving	70	Processes in place to lead learning in the classroom - practices begin to change
Traction	30	Processes in place to lead teams and initiate & manage projects - greater efficiency
Traction	10	Time management, relationships, clarity of direction – personal effectiveness
Deficit	-5	Middle Leaders simply occupy a role
Deficit	-10	Insufficient numbers to fill Middle Leader roles

A Middle Leader Development Program

	Leading Self	Leading Team	Leading Practice
Direction	Personal Goal setting	Team Goal setting	Work the students do
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The Work	Engaging one-on-one	Engaging teams	Engaging with practice changes

Developing middle leaders so that they are increasingly effective and can make a real difference to a school's success. Middle Leaders need to:

1. model the behaviours that we need teachers to exhibit to get the right work happening in the classroom

2. use evidence-based analysis of what work is taking place in the classroom and develop high leverage responses

3. lead teams and their projects to implement practice changes

4. build themselves into a team with a common focus and understanding of what needs to change

An effective Middle Leader development program can help turn managers into leaders, help them stimulate teacher collaboration and connect their work directly to changing practice in the classroom.

About the Author

John Corrigan works with school leaders who are committed to increasing confidence, collaboration and creativity amongst their staff and students.

John is an expert in helping individuals to bring their whole of mind to their daily life and increase their effectiveness and the effectiveness of those around them. This expertise scales from the individual to the team to the organisation. Developed from the premise that education does NOT prepare us to live well in the modern world, so how DO we live well? First, shift our attention to trigger our right hemisphere. Second, focus on the wellbeing of others.

John's first degree is in Mathematics and he has an MBA from INSEAD. He has been an officer in the Parachute Regiment and a wireline logging engineer (taking measurements in drilled oil and gas wells) in various parts of the world, before entering the corporate sector via strategy consulting and corporate planning.

John's interest evolved into change management in organisations where the employee-client relationship forms a major part of the value produced.

John has had a full-time interest in education since 2001 and set up Group 8 Education in 2003 to help in the transformation of our education systems.

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