

PEER POWER

UNITE, LEARN AND PROSPER • ACTIVATE AN ASSESSMENT REVOLUTION!



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Peer Power: Unite, Learn and Prosper • Activate an Assessment Revolution

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Chapter 17

Empowering Teacher Teams to Drive Their Learning: Transforming Professional Learning with Impact Team Inquiry

Paul Bloomberg & Barb Pitchford

“Passion is needed for any great work, and for the revolution, passion and audacity are required in big doses.”

–Che Guevara

Impact Team Inquiry

If our goal is for students to take ownership of their learning, then we must empower teachers to take ownership of their learning. This notion of empowerment is the core of collaborative inquiry, and inquiry is the heart of a robust

learning environment. Creating the conditions for a learning culture in which all members of the school community are actively engaged in inquiry, investigation, and innovation requires teachers to take the lead both formally and informally, to advocate for teacher voice and to model key learning dispositions. The best way to cultivate these academic mindsets is for teacher teams to drive their own learning through collaborative inquiry that puts learning at the center. Growth, community, a sense of personal and collective agency, and creating meaningful work are the goals of the Impact Team System Innovation Model.

Schools don't change and innovate one teacher at a time or one leader at a time. Teams are the unit of change in a school, and all teams are not created equal. Like any relationship, teaming requires attention, relational trust, and commitment. To accelerate effective collaboration school-wide, systems began piloting the Impact Team Model nationally in 2013. Supported by John Hattie's Visible Learning research (2009), the core belief of the Impact Team Model is that all schools have what it takes to be extraordinary. Teachers are a school's greatest resource for innovation. What is needed, quite simply, is for teachers to be given the time to share best practice, to experiment with high-impact strategies, to investigate and innovate—to learn together. "As teachers in a school feel empowered to do great things, great things happen" (Eells, 2011).

Protocols for Inquiry and Innovation

Impact Teams focus their inquiry on expanding student ownership and agency with the aim of strengthening student and collective teacher efficacy. Embedded in this approach are 10 purposeful protocols that teams use to investigate and strengthen their practices around creating learner-centered classrooms—students know where they're going, how they're going, and what they need to do next to reach their learning goals. This approach requires teacher teams to determine their focus of inquiry and to design their own job-embedded professional learning. The Impact Team Model provides the processes and structures to share and build teacher leadership across the school community through strengthening peer facilitation.

To do this, Impact Teams collaboratively determine what core, formative practices (feedback, self- and peer assessment, goal setting, reflection, etc.) they want to strengthen so they can participate in and contribute to systemic innovation to gain a deeper understanding of what works best. The development and design of the Impact Team Model is based on extensive evidence-based research that identifies those practices that maximize student learning. Impact Teams operationalize multiple Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009) influences that are proven to have the highest effect on student learning.

- Help seeking: .72 ES (effect size)
- Teacher–student relationships: .72 ES
- Reciprocal teaching: .74 ES
- Feedback: .74 ES
- Teacher clarity: .75 ES
- Evaluation and reflection: .75 ES
- Classroom discussion: .82 ES
- Teacher estimates of achievement: 1.29 ES
- Assessment-capable learners: 1.33 ES
- Collective teacher efficacy: 1.39 ES

Growing From Within

What has become clear is that top-down, all-school, or all-district initiatives don't work. It is expensive, exhausting, and in no way empowers teachers or students to be engaged, curious, or motivated. Top-down approaches don't create optimal conditions for collaboration, collective inquiry, and innovation. Nor do these approaches attend to strengthening student or teacher efficacy. Empowerment is not part of this familiar formula. Impact Teams find innovative ways to partner with students in the inquiry process, which opens up endless possibilities for student involvement. Researchers have learned from educators that “inquiry is not a ‘project’, an ‘initiative’ or an ‘innovation’ but a professional way of being” (Timperley, Kaser, & Halbert, 2014). Collaborative inquiry propels the collec-

tive to learn together with a goal of strengthening student ownership, motivation, and agency.

Impact Team Innovation

Our belief and our experience is that every school and system has what it takes to innovate and improve every school. We don't believe that teachers or schools are broken. In fact, every school has the resources under the roof of a building to be extraordinary. Schools and systems need leadership that believes in the capacity of all teachers and all students to learn and lead together by creating formal and informal structures for teachers and students to access one another's expertise (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

Every school has strengths, and we must optimize those strengths to ensure that both teachers and students take ownership of their learning. When teacher teams are encouraged to innovate to expand student ownership, they

- take risks,
- embrace challenge,
- learn together,
- create new ideas,
- problem-solve,
- teach to their passions, and
- most important, make an impact.

Driving Questions

The Impact Team Inquiry cycle begins with a curiosity or an educational innovation that teams wish to explore. Impact Teams develop informed questions and/or theories of action about pedagogy and use the following driving questions:

- What will we learn together?
How will our inquiry allow us to learn new skills and understanding to put students in the driver's seat?

- What is the moral purpose that propels our inquiry?
How can we make a difference for all learners?
- What formative practices do we want to strengthen as a team?
Are these practices proven to accelerate learning?
- What will we solve together?
How will our inquiry allow us to identify problems and design improved solutions?
- What will we create together?
How will our inquiry allow our team to invent and create new teaching tools or improve existing ideas?

What practices can we let go of to make space for student ownership?
- What are our passions?
How will our inquiry allow our team to follow our passions, dreams, and ambitions?
- How can we share our impact?
How will our inquiry benefit others?

How will we share our innovations and discoveries with others in our school and community?

Ideate, Design, and Envision

Ideate: Impact Teams ideate. They invest collaborative time to determine their learning focus. Teams define why their focus is important, and they validate their inquiry with the Visible Learning synthesis to ensure that their cycle is evidence-based. They determine what expertise resides in their team and school with a vision of bringing research to life in their classrooms in service of student ownership. The Impact Team's ultimate objective is to *empower* students to

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- find and pursue their passions with purpose;
- enjoy designing and showcasing products and performances;
- articulate the processes they use to increase their own learning;
- expand intrinsic motivation to own and drive their learning;
- increase control and responsibility for their learning;
- strengthen content knowledge, metacognition, self-regulation, and executive function; and
- cultivate student agency.

Impact Teams have autonomy over the focus of their research-based inquiry cycle. Their inquiry focus may be grounded in solving a problem of practice or goals they wish to explore with their students. Keep in mind, their inquiry should be aligned to the overarching school goals. Therefore, it is important that overarching school goals offer flexibility to teams. For example, The Public School 13 in Staten Island, New York, had an overarching goal of strengthening student engagement and involvement. Teams had choices in what formative practices they would strengthen based on what their learners needed and what they wanted to explore. This broad goal gave teams autonomy when making decisions about their learning focus or inquiry. When schools offer this kind of flexibility for teams, it creates optimal conditions for team creativity, increased motivation and innovation. For example, some teams may focus on leveraging reflection, some teams may explore self and peer assessment with their students, some teams may focus on expanding goal setting with students; team's inquiries may vary. Conversely, in some schools the instructional leadership team, with support from all stakeholders, collaboratively decides to do a full school inquiry. As long as shared-decision making is used, the inquiry will prove effective because of teacher buy in. Especially, since all team's inquiries serve to strengthen dispositional learning and expand student ownership and agency.

Voices From the Field

Norris School District | Bakersfield, CA

Kelly Miller, Superintendent, and Chantel Mebane, Director of Instruction

“To begin the Impact Team process, we had to get full investment from our principals to lead the way for their school sites. They embraced the chance to try something new and change collaboration as we knew it. They were immersed in the professional development process with their teachers and learned right alongside them. Throughout this journey, our teams have developed a common language of learning and have gained a deeper understanding of the standards while being able to differentiate for all learners. The Evidence, Analysis, Action Protocol (EAA), a foundational protocol from the Impact Team Model, has become a regular routine that keeps teams engaged in constantly making instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all learners. Impact Teams (PLCs) analyze a variety of evidence (student work, student voice, observations, etc) and take collective action in the service of strengthening student efficacy and ownership.

As a result of the powerful collaborative practices with a focus on teacher clarity, students are now taking more ownership of their learning. They can self-assess and provide constructive feedback to their peers. With the use of success criteria, our students are able to identify where they are at in the learning process at any given point and what they need to do to progress and achieve mastery.”

Design: Impact Teams design their cycle by specifying what evidence they will analyze to understand impact. A variety of evidence is key for teams to have a clear understanding of their impact. The evidence can be qualitative, quantitative, or both. Using multiple sources of data strengthens the trustworthiness and reliability of the *Impact Team Inquiry*, because different forms of evidence can be compared or “triangulated.” For instance, in exploring student ownership, one evidence source might be student interviews and another might be student work. A third evidence source might be to participate in an *Impact Team Evidence Walk* as a way to observe teacher and student experiences in the peer and self-review process. These three sources of data, drawn from interviews, observations, and student work products, are triangulated to provide a multidimensional perspective on the inquiry being explored. The following evidence can be used as sources of evidence for *Impact Team Inquiry*:

- *Student Work:* Analyzing student work is foundational to Impact Team Inquiry. The analysis of work provides teacher teams with valuable insight into their students' understanding of concepts and skills relating to the focus standards. Teams focus on transferable tasks to ensure that transfer takes place under a variety of conditions and environments.
- *Student Voice:* Student voice or student perception are terms commonly used to describe students' expression of their learning process and their overall perceptions about learning. Student voice data can be collected with surveys, focus groups, interviews, reflections, and self- and peer-assessments. For example, if problem solving is the focus of a team's inquiry, asking an identified group of students what it means to be a problem solver is a great way to gather student voice data throughout an inquiry cycle.
- *Video:* Impact Teams create and analyze video-based evidence of students and their peers to strengthen their inquiry. This evidence is a form of observation data and allows teams to use video to stop and rewind while analyzing the evidence to enhance pedagogy around deeper learning outcomes.
- *Observation:* Effective teams may choose to collect observation data while students are collaborating, during a 1:1 conference, during small-group instruction, and during classroom discussions. Teacher teams may also choose to observe one another during inter-visitations, lesson study, and during evidence walks. Observation data are often overlooked as a data source. This qualitative data provide critical insight to strengthen next steps.
- *Teacher Voice:* Teacher voice or teacher perception data supports teams in understanding teachers' perceptions of the Impact Team's learning focus. Perceptions are usually the attitudes and beliefs held about a school by the people with a vested interest in seeing the school succeed. Teachers can be asked about their ideas and feelings about their team's inquiry. Teachers may discuss where expertise resides in their team or across their school. Teachers check in with one another during the inquiry process to

ensure that all voices are heard. Understanding each teacher's attitudes and beliefs of the learning community is important—because perception does shape reality.

Once the evidence is determined, Impact Teams decide what protocols they will use to guide their inquiry; these protocols ensure that the team stays focused on deeper learning outcomes for students. Trained peer facilitators guide teams to choose from 10 purposeful protocols to drive their inquiry. The peer facilitator ensures that norms, guidelines and/or rules of engagement, and structures are used to make the meetings efficient and effective. The protocols teams use are purposeful and generated from what effective teams choose to learn about:

- Getting to know standards and/or creating student-friendly, criteria-based rubrics
- Calibrating student work samples
- Analyzing impact through analysis of student work
- Aligning the curriculum
- Analyzing student voice data
- Sharing and trying out innovative teaching strategies
- Engaging in lesson study through peer-to-peer observation

Impact Teams use classroom protocols to provide routines and processes to ensure that students remain at the center. Efficient routines and learner-centered protocols have been developed to guide students in

- personalizing learning intentions,
- defining the criteria of success,
- giving and receiving evidence-based feedback,
- effective self- and peer assessment,
- reflection and goal setting, and
- strengthening self- and social awareness.

Envision Success: Impact Teams envision success before they begin their inquiry. They build a shared vision of the future. They dream big and imagine what success will look like, sound like, and feel like if they are successful with their inquiry. They imagine what students will be thinking, feeling, saying, and doing if their team worked at optimal levels to realize their inquiry becomes a reality. When teams envision success, they co-construct the success criteria for their Impact Team Inquiry Cycle. By envisioning success (see Figure 17.1), they share their dreams and visions that move them from where they are today to where they want to be in the future.

Figure 17.1: The Envisioning Process – Impact Team Inquiry Design

If we engage students in the self- and peer review process, then they will be:

Thinking	Feeling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What feedback will I give my friend?</i> • <i>How can I be very specific and use the success criteria to guide my feedback?</i> • <i>I need to make sure I communicate respectfully.</i> • <i>I need to make sure I give my partner a strategy to close the gap.</i> • <i>What if I give the wrong feedback?</i> • <i>I love taking ownership of my learning!</i> • <i>I need to be honest with my feedback.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I am nervous to show my mistakes.</i> • <i>I feel like the teacher trusts me to lead my learning.</i> • <i>I am worried that my feedback might not help my partner.</i> • <i>I feel confident because I know this is just practice and the feedback will help me.</i> • <i>I feel safe because I can make mistakes, and mistakes are a part of learning.</i>

Saying	Doing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One strength that you have is ___ and one next step could be ___.</i> • <i>What was the hardest part?</i> • <i>This may help you achieve your goal.</i> • <i>Have you ever tried thinking about this?</i> • <i>You may have forgot this step.</i> • <i>This would make your work even better.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Giving feedback using academic vocabulary</i> • <i>Receiving feedback through active listening</i> • <i>Revising work using feedback</i> • <i>Setting goals using the feedback from our partners and teacher</i> • <i>Talking through the steps of a strategy</i> • <i>Reflecting on the feedback given</i>

Building a Culture of Efficacy

Effective professional learning must be job-embedded, differentiated and focused on both content and pedagogical expertise. It must be sustainable over time and aligned to what increases learning the most, that is, student ownership. When students know where they are going, know where they are at, and can articulate why the learning is relevant to them, teams know that their inquiry is getting results, changing behavior, and accelerating the learning process. Sharing knowledge and collaboratively developing pedagogical expertise reaps significant gains (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017). Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) suggest that to improve student learning system-wide it is crucial to raise collective efficacy beliefs of the staff. Eells (2011) states that collective teacher efficacy is the pervasive belief that directly affects the school's ability to raise achievement. Believing in the combined intellect, sharing the commitment, and focusing the energy of the group on student ownership moves a school to even greater learning and higher impact (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017). The shared mastery experiences that occur over time develop an unshakeable optimism, collective confidence, and a profound belief that no matter the challenge, together, we can and will make an impact. When teachers believe they can make a difference for all students, they do.

Guiding Questions:

- How does your school empower teacher teams to drive their own professional learning?
- Do your PLCs engage in the collaborative inquiry process? How and why do you decide on your team's inquiry focus?
- What is the goal of your current PLCs? How do they expand student ownership?
- What could your school do to expand teacher agency? Why is teacher agency important?

Connect with Paul and Barb on Twitter
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Learn more about Leading Impact Teams at
www.LeadingImpactTeams.com