



# **Leading Change in Education Systems**

**The Importance of Teaching and Learning in Schools**

**Katherine K. Merseth**

# Overview



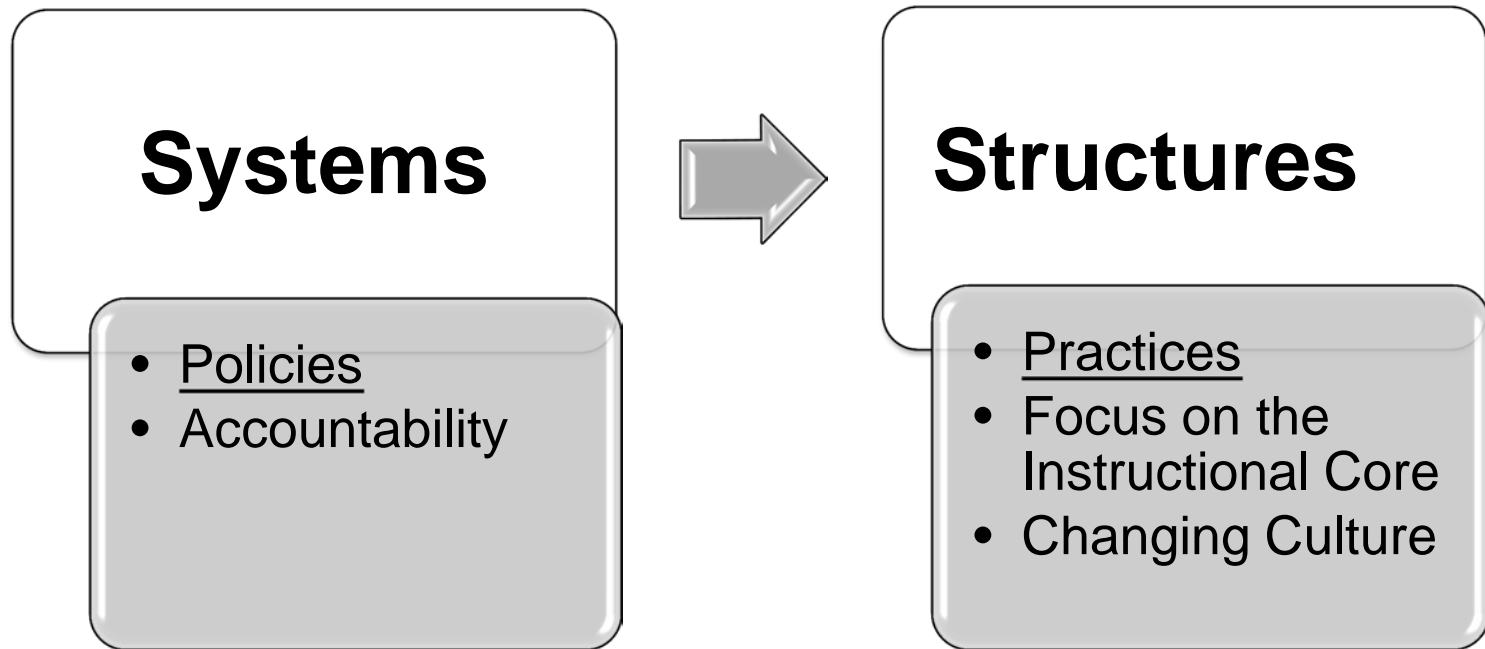
“The quality of an education system can not exceed the quality of its teachers.”

McKinsey (2007)

*How the world's best-performing schools come out on top*

- To develop an understanding of the necessary systems and structures and strategies necessary to improve teaching and learning in your nation's schools.
- To explore your role as an organizational leader in improving teaching and learning in your nation's schools.
- To prepare for the challenges inherent in changing culture and practice in schools.

# Systems and Structures



# Systems



**Systems**

The diagram consists of two rounded rectangular boxes. The outer box is white with a black border and contains the word 'Systems'. The inner box is gray with a black border and contains the text 'Establish accountability systems'. The gray box is positioned in the lower right corner of the white box, partially overlapping it.

Establish  
accountability  
systems

# Accountability

## According to Professor Richard Elmore,

- “Internal accountability precedes external accountability.”
- “Internal accountability” is the coherence and alignment among individuals’ conceptions of what they are responsible for.
- The most obvious person to help define, create and lead internal accountability is the school director or principal.

# The School Director's Role

- ✓ Exerts strong leadership.
- ✓ Has knowledge of and access to expertise about what good instruction looks like.
- ✓ Fosters a positive school culture focused on student learning.
- ✓ Leads an organization that gives teachers and staff opportunities to talk to each other about the work (shared goals).

# What This Means for You

You must support school leaders to create these conditions and then you must develop systems to hold principals accountable for these conditions.

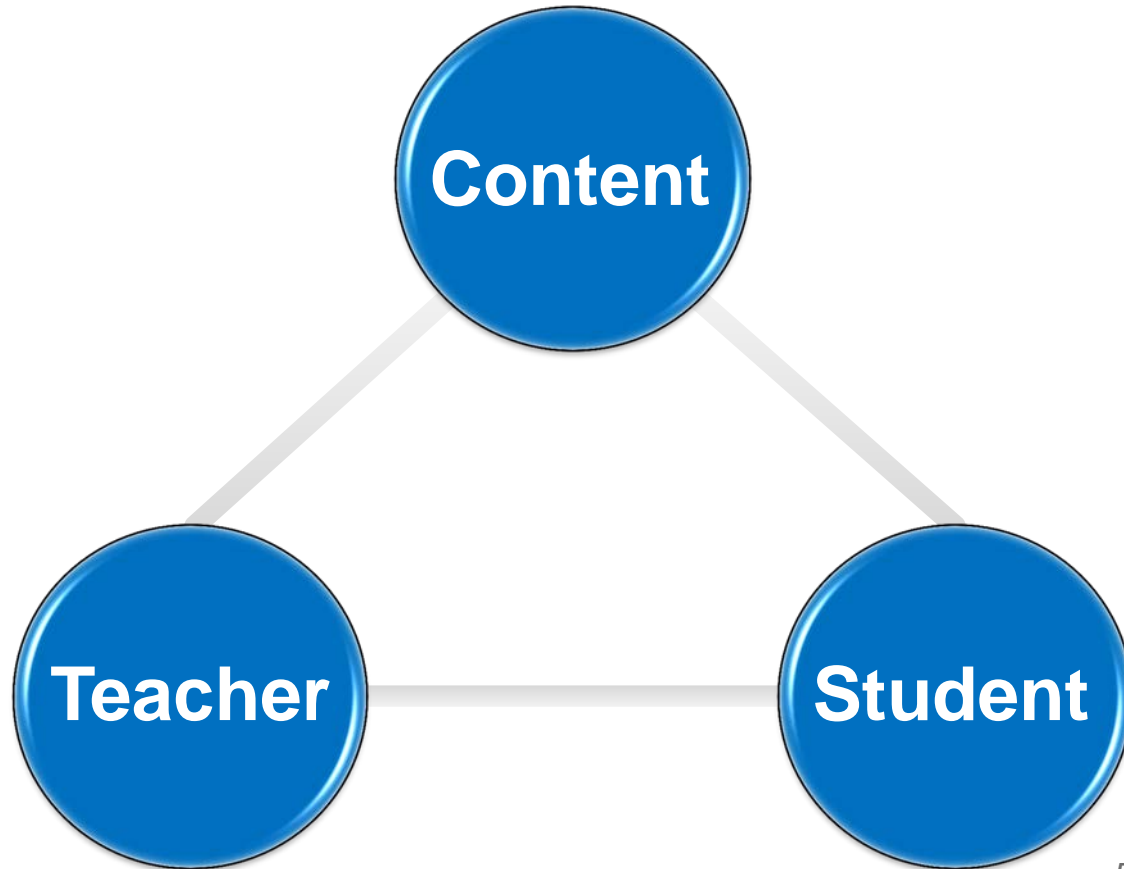


Once these conditions are created then  
you and your school leaders must  
**focus on the work itself**





# The Instructional Core



*Professor Richard Elmore  
Harvard University*

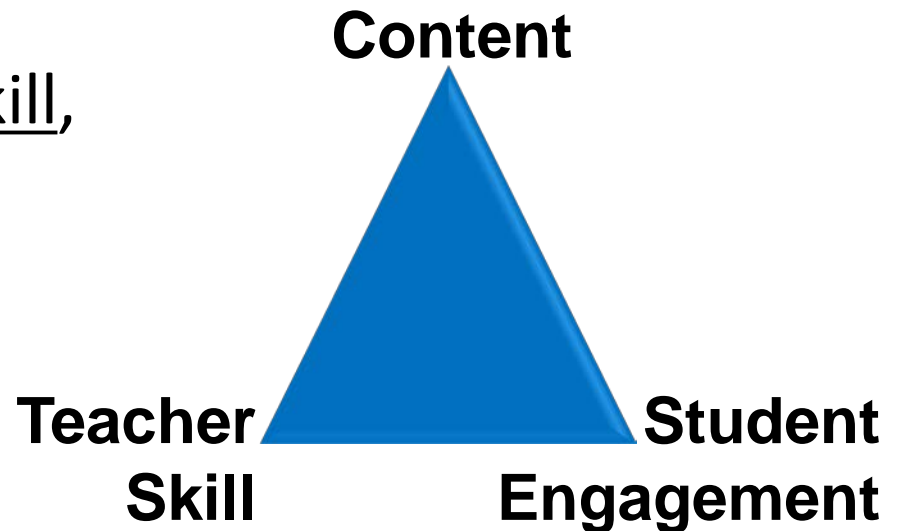
# Instructional Core Principles

Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of **improvements** in

the level of content,

teachers' knowledge and skill,

and student engagement.



# Focus

**An important focal point—a place to look--  
is at the interaction between teacher,  
student, and content**



- Focus within the classroom on four questions.

# Focus on Instructional Core

## Ask yourself...

1. What is the teacher saying and doing?
2. What are the students saying and doing?
3. What is the task the teacher has set for the students?
4. If the students did everything the teacher asked them to do, what would the students leave the classroom knowing how to do?

# Task and Cognitive Demand Level

## **What is the Task?**

The task is the actual classroom activity students are asked to do.

## **What is its level of Cognitive Demand?**

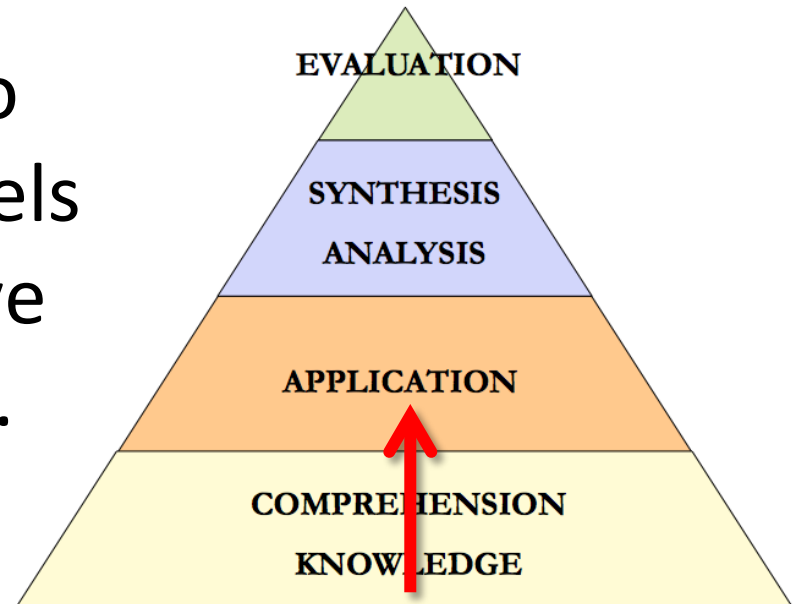
Cognitive demand is the degree of cognitive functioning required by the task. It can be low level (memory) or high level (evaluation).

One way to categorize is using Bloom's Taxonomy.

# Nature of the Task

**It's not just what we ask of students,  
but the nature of the “what.”**

- Cognitive Demand of the Task.
- The levels go from lower to higher, with the higher levels including all of the cognitive skills from the lower levels.
- Blooms Taxonomy.



# Importance of the Task

**Focusing on the task is important because**

task predicts performance,

and

the real accountability system is in the tasks  
that students are asked to do.

# Questions to Ask

**Teachers must ask questions that demand higher cognitive processing**

- Asking student to think, not memorize.
- Asking students open-ended questions.
- Asking students to propose their own questions.



# Your Role

## What is your role?

- Create awareness of the importance of the Instructional Core.
- Ask your leaders to focus on classrooms and on these four questions.
- Create both support and accountability systems to direct the work of those closest to the children.

# Leadership



To explore approaches to establish a productive school and organizational culture and to prepare for the challenges inherent in changing culture.

# Definition of Culture

## What is Culture? Can it be changed?

Culture, as defined by **Edgar Schein** (1995), is

the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted fashion' an organization's view of itself and its environment.

These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in the external environment and its problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably.

*(Organizational Culture and Leadership, p. 6)*

# Structures

## Structures

- Practices
- Focus on the Instructional Core
- Changing Culture

# Changing Practice

**Stage 1:**  
**Exposure to a different  
way of thinking.**



**Stage 2:**  
**Experimental Stage.**  
**Try some things.**  
**Some won't go as planned.**  
**Reflect, adapt, learn.**



**Stage 3:**  
**Build a community and  
internal capacity for support.**  
**Continue the cycle.**



# A Do Now Activity

- Record 3 words or phrases that **describe the culture** of your school as you have experienced it.
- Offer 2 or 3 **assumptions (start with those that are visible)** in this culture?
- What **values (Explicit and Implicit)** ground this culture?

# Activity Feedback



# Cultures

- Tend to conserve what is; they support and embrace continuity (Evans, 2001)
- Can be shared explicitly or implicitly by a host of stakeholders (new and old) but changing culture is a very hard task.
- Are sometimes fragmented and thus, difficult to change. (McIntyre, 2001; Evans, 2001)
- They are also difficult to change because people tend to resist change.
- Affect the behavior of students and employees.
- Do not fall from the sky; they are created and thus can be manipulated by people.
- Are unique; whatever their commonalities, no two schools or organizations will be exactly alike.
- Can become the cohesion that bonds the school or organization together as it goes about its work.

**Cultural change is a process, not a noun.**



# What are the Steps in Leading?



# The First Step is the Most Important

## 1. Build Urgency

**You will never change what you are willing to tolerate.**

# Building Urgency

**What are some topics around which you could develop a sense of shared urgency in your organization?**

- In Schools...
  - Poor student outcomes.
  - Low graduation rates.
  - Corruption within the bureaucracy.
- In Government Ministries...
  - Shortage of qualified human capital.
  - Lack of funding.

# Eight Steps to Transforming your Organization

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency.
2. Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition.
3. Create a Vision.
4. Empower Others to Act.
5. Communicate the Vision.
6. Consolidate Improvements.
7. Plan for and Celebrate Short Term Wins.
8. Produce More Change and Institutionalize New Approaches.

Changing Cultures is not Easy!

**HARD WORK**

# Resistance to Change

## Why Do Cultures and People Resist Change?

- Change = Loss
  - $C = L$
- Costs are seen to be greater than the Benefits.
  - $C > B$
- They fear change.
- It's just too HARD!

# Other Reasons

- They don't agree with the change.
- They feel no ownership.
- Individuals wonder what's in it for me?
- **Perhaps the most important resistance factor is**  
**They don't know HOW...**

# Your Takeaways

- Name THREE things you learned today.
- Name TWO things you promise you will do as a result of today.
- Name ONE person to hold you accountable to this promise.



# Summary

