

*“Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams is a must read for any leader who struggles with obtaining impactful results from their teams. The book provides a very specific roadmap for a school leader to take their teams to higher levels of learning and effectiveness, thus positively impacting the culture of the school.”*

**Vince Naccarato, Principal, USD 309, Kansas**

*“Clear, accessible, and grounded in practice, Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams offers school leaders and teacher teams practical guidance for building authentic collaborative learning cultures. With vivid vignettes and useful tools, it is an indispensable resource for transforming school communities.”*

**Jameelah R. Wright, Assistant Professor,  
William Paterson University, New Jersey**

*“This book offers a powerful blend of research-based insights and practical strategies that leaders can implement immediately. It delivers tremendous value with actionable examples, clear frameworks, and tools that support real collaboration. From fostering shared language of learning to addressing implementation gaps as systemic opportunities, this resource equips school and district leaders with the clarity and structure needed to strengthen teams and student outcomes.”*

**Saundra Mouton, Leadership Development Consultant,  
Fort Bend Independent School District, Texas**

*“This is a timely, research-driven roadmap for building collective expertise that transforms teaching teams into engines of student growth.”*

**Alexander Roberts, Director of Curriculum and Instruction,  
Bering Strait School District, Alaska**

*“By linking PLC research and Visible Learning to authentic, data-driven strategies anchored in success criteria, this book empowers teachers, administrators, PLC team members, and Collaborative Expertise Teams with the tools to deliver high-impact results at every level of education.”*

**Patrick Peters, Elementary School Principal,  
Alpine County Unified School District, Nevada**

*“This book provides a clear, research-based roadmap for building the collaborative expertise schools need to thrive. With practical tools and compelling case studies, it bridges theory and practice in ways that educators can immediately apply.”*

**Sarah Lawlor, Instructional Coach/Teacher Leader,  
Green Island Union Free School District, New York**

*“Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams is exactly the resource today’s schools need. As an experienced educator and school leader who has studied John Hattie’s research extensively, I approached this book with a critical eye and was thoroughly impressed.”*

*“This book strikes a powerful balance between theory and application. It is rich with practical tools, rubrics, self-assessments, case studies, and clear guidance for building collaborative expertise across any school setting. What makes it especially effective is its accessibility. Even readers unfamiliar with Hattie’s work will find the concepts approachable and the structure intuitive due to the authors’ clear writing style.”*

*“It offers exactly what our leadership team needs to move forward with strategic coherence and deepen our culture of collaboration. In fact, we plan to use it as the foundation for a future book study and implementation cycle.”*

*“This book has the potential to impact not just schools but any organization striving for collective growth. It’s a timely and valuable contribution to the field.”*

**Jon Konen, Superintendent, Stevensville Public Schools, Montana**

*“You are about to enjoy the most practical handbook for developing Collaborative Expertise Teams in your school.”*

**Ken Darvall, Principal,  
Tema International School, Ghana**

*“This book not only provides a reason for why school leaders should and need to consider what they are doing in terms of supporting sustained school improvement when it comes to student achievement but also supplies practical tools to support that work. Through real stories, leaders can see how these are utilized in the context of the school.”*

**Ray Boyd, Principal, Dayton Primary School,  
Department of Education, Perth, Western Australia**

*“Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams provides practical, realistic, and useful guidance via actionable frameworks, tabulated high-impact strategies, implementation tools such as PLC agendas and reflection logs, and realistic acknowledgments of constraints, positioning the text as a valuable resource for fostering sustainable educational transformation over a three-to-five-year span.”*

**Felipe Sepúlveda, Professor,  
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Chile**

*“Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams is one of the most comprehensive manuscripts that I have had the pleasure to read in quite a while! It provides practical and useful guidance and will be a resource for a wide array of educators.”*

**Lynn Macan, Retired School District Superintendent,  
Cobleskill-Richmondville CSD, New York**

*“Improving student performance requires engagement, commitment, and consistency, not only from the student but also, and perhaps even more importantly, from the adult stakeholders. This book provides a useable and relatable blueprint to effectively engaging staff for intentional collaboration for the betterment of the students. The authors present research-based practices and provide vignettes, graphics, and protocols to introduce those practices in any school environment.”*

**Martin J. Hudacs, Former District Superintendent,  
Pennsylvania**

*“As an educator, I found this book to be an honest and insightful reflection on the challenges teachers face in today’s classrooms. The authors skillfully highlight real issues within the U.S. education system and offer thoughtful, practical strategies to address them. It is a valuable contribution to the ongoing dialogue about improving teaching and learning.”*

**Subuhi Owais, Academic Coordinator,  
Pakistan Air Force Women’s Association (PAFWA) Education System**



# Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams

*From Dave:*

*This book is dedicated to my family. It is through their steadfast support, understanding, and strength that I have reached this stage in my career. Kristen, you are an incredible partner, a loving wife, and a devoted mother—I am truly fortunate to have you in my life! Nicholas, Zachary, and Jacob, you have all grown into remarkable young men who bring me immense pride and serve as a true inspiration. I can't wait to see the man each of you is going to become. I am deeply grateful to all three of you for your unwavering love and patience and heaven knows Dad doesn't have a lot of patience. So I thank you from the bottom of my heart for yours!*

*From Bruce:*

*This book is for my family. I'm here only because of your steady love, patience, and strength.*

*Rebecca—my partner in every sense—thank you for your unwavering faith, your grace as a mother, and the joy you bring to our life.*

*Jaxen and Landon—you've grown into remarkable men who inspire me daily.*

*As I step into this next chapter, I carry your love with deep gratitude. I love you.*

# Developing Collaborative Expertise Teams

Transforming Schools Through  
Coherence, Belonging,  
and Consistency

Dave Nagel

Bruce Potter

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# Foreword

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“The greatest barrier in schools today isn’t knowledge or resources—it’s the **absence of courage.**”

This is one of the most striking and important lines in this book. It is also the reason this book is powerful and timeless, because it provides exactly what we’re missing—courage.

When I first read the manuscript, I found myself wishing I had the book earlier in my career. It also sparked a deep desire to share this book with as many people as possible. Now, you are a proud reader who will undoubtedly feel the same.

In many cases, we lure ourselves into a false sense of efficacy. Our organization may be filled with teams that seem to get along and are portrayed as competent, even successful. Classrooms are occupied by teachers who put their heads down, close their doors, and replicate the same practices as usual, even though no noticeable positive results are noted. This book is a response to that dilemma. John Hattie’s meta-analyses make the case clear that self-efficacy and collective efficacy are significant influences on student achievement. However, we know that accountability is necessary to promote a sense of efficacy.

We desire to hold people accountable but want to do so without micromanaging. What we often don’t realize is that what we’re really going for is a culture of accountability, one in which belonging trumps compliance. Simon Sinek’s work paired with ample research, including that of Abraham Maslow and others, indicates the significance and the urgency of cultivating a sense of belonging in our organizations. It is the responsibility of the leaders to create an environment that values the contributions of its people, maintains coherence, and consistently monitors and supports people, so much so that they feel as though they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Of course, how to go about cultivating this environment can feel overwhelming or even impossible, thus depleting our courage to focus on the right things. Leaders often find themselves concentrating on things that “feel” productive but end up right back at square one, such as ineffective professional learning communities (PLCs) that are held back by recurring problems (attendance, behavior, test scores, etc.). Another initiative, program, product, or training is implemented in hopes of addressing the problems that keep showing up, but little impact is noticed. In fact, sometimes we notice regression in both staff engagement and student learning. And so, the cycle goes: problem → external solution → limited progress → defeat → problem.

Why does this cycle continue? Perhaps it’s because we are drawn to focus on external solutions. External solutions seem to be easier and

faster, even when we believe that they won't produce the desired results. However, Nagel and Potter offer something different from external solutions. They focus on the deep HUMANITY of people, and that's why this book matters so much: The solution always lies within our people. Of course, this means that we must attend to the critical work of *developing* the people within our organization, both as individuals and as teams. We must steer clear of the assumption that where two or more people are gathered, authentic collaboration is happening. We must also avoid the assumption that, because we work with capable, mature adults, we all have the capacity to collaborate well. I have found in my experience as a school leader and through work with school teams across the nation that this is, in fact, not the case. The authors confirm this reality in the scenarios and case studies included in the book.

An aspiring principal once fired a list of questions at me, including the following: "How do you get everyone on the same page when teams don't work well together? What do we do about such large gaps in student learning? What about teacher resistance—they don't want to change? How do we get teachers to stay?" She was, unsurprisingly, overwhelmed by what feels like big, broad, and nebulous work. At the time, I gave her a convoluted response that vaguely alluded to the three components of Collaborative Expertise Teams. But I know I left her more confused than courageous and confident.

The beauty of this book is its depth of clarity and simplicity for the reader. In its simplest form, it provides leaders a guide for becoming the kind of school that boldly claims, "**This is how we do things.**" The authors break this simple idea down into three core components—coherence, belonging, and consistency—and further scaffold these into nine understandable frameworks.

As master teachers do, these authors scaffold learning for you from one chapter to another and make it possible to synthesize your learning across the book in its entirety. The learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter keep you focused. The scenarios and examples, so intentionally placed, will make you feel as though this book was written from your own experience, or as though it was written about your own school and teams. And then, the exploration of research, theory, and best practices are condensed down into applicable, realistic tools and strategies that you can implement almost immediately.

Rest assured, though, that this book is not one that restricts the reader to implementing these strategies and tools verbatim. Rather, the authors clearly value autonomy as they give one the freedom to approach this work flexibly while maintaining the core components of Collaborative Expertise Teams.

Even though I dive into school improvement work daily and write and teach about similar concepts, I found myself deeply moved and influenced by this work. I have gained new ideas that are practical for instructional leadership teams who are eager to improve their schools. It has

provided depth of understanding behind systems and frames that I can now break down into more manageable teachings. And it has given accurate language to concepts that once lacked clarity.

The authors and I have bonded over the phrase, “Clarity Precedes Capacity®.” You’ll notice a theme of clarity in this book. We know that clarity is important, but we often dismiss it as the depth at which we communicate verbally. The truth, though, is that clarity requires action. These authors give you action steps to both gain and create clarity. They come at this work from years of personal experience as educators, instructional leaders, and consultants, showcased in many of the examples included. And the clarity you will experience while reading this book should evoke a significant sense of courage that emboldens you to take action.

I know the authors to be outstanding individuals and remarkable teachers, but I didn’t know if their idea of Collaborative Expertise Teams could be broken down into an understandable series of components and frameworks. It just seemed too complex. They did exactly that, and they did it exceptionally well. I highly advocate that you read this work of art with teams or, at the very least, with a colleague who serves to multiply your intelligence—your own collaborative expertise team, if you will. I encourage you to dig deeply into this material. Pause as you read. Think deeply. Reflect. Have dialogical conversations that include questions from the book. Then apply what you’re learning and go back to the book again, learn some more, and apply your newfound knowledge. Keep in mind, to **know** is one thing and to actually **do** is another.

Winston Churchill was known for saying, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.”

We can continue the task of school improvement when we work outside of silos and in Collaborative Expertise Teams. The development of these teams is not an initiative nor is it a prescriptive program. It is a way of becoming and a way of being. To lead a campus with Collaborative Expertise Teams is to lead courageously. May this book give you courage to lead with strategic coherence, cultivate a sense of belonging, and consistently act on relevant evidence. After all, this is how we actually move the needle and improve our schools.

—Casey Watts, Author of *The Craft of Clarity*



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From Dave:

Once again I feel extremely fortunate to have had leaders in my life that pushed me to be better than I could have without them. A few I will mention here. I want to thank Dan Alpert, my first editor back in 2015 when I published *Effective Grading Practices for Secondary Teachers* (Corwin). Dan was unbelievably supportive but also challenged me to never settle for good. Jessica Allan, our current editor and champion who picked up right where Dan left off. Dr. Phil Ehrhardt, who was a tremendous mentor to me as a young aspiring administrator. Phil was the consummate professional and easily one of the greatest leaders I ever met. Kim Anthony, Executive Director of Elementary Education, Billings Public Schools. Working with Kim the past several years has been such an honor. She is someone that models everyday with every fiber in her body to challenge adults to be better and do what is best and whatever is necessary to support students to become great learners. I'm indebted to my family. Kristen who puts up with me and Nick, Zach, and Jake who I get to watch everyday develop into fine young men. And once again my hero, my Dad, Ken Nagel, who always taught me life is not lived if you are Standing OUTSIDE the fire!

From Bruce:

This project is the culmination of a life's work in public education and a launching pad for a second chapter as a full-time consultant. My deepest gratitude goes to Dave, my business partner and friend I count as a brother. For 15 years, Dave has elevated my thinking and the work of every school I've led, opening doors and creating opportunities I could not have imagined.

I am also profoundly grateful to the Heatly School. Life has a way of aligning purpose with place; finishing my career there felt like finishing on a summit—serving a school community that needed me as much as I needed them. The greatest joy was achieving real, measurable success alongside a leader I was privileged to mentor. DK, your talent, discipline, and integrity at such a young age continue to inspire me. I am deeply proud of you—and humbled by what you've accomplished.

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# About the Authors

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**Dave Nagel** has been a professional developer and educational consultant both nationally and internationally since 2003 and has done so as his primary job in education since 2008. Prior to this, he was a middle and high school science teacher and administrator in a large district in Indianapolis. As a school leader at Ben Davis High School (enrollment 3,000 students), Dave was instrumental in developing a focused plan for differentiated goals for students based on specific proficiency

measures that supported the school in improving its graduation rate 14% in just over four years.

Dave's primary areas of expertise are in the areas of effective teacher and leader collaboration, assessment and feedback, and specifically effective grading actions both at the school and the classroom levels. He has been working specifically with Professor John Hattie's Visible Learning research since 2011, which is a driving force for all of his work with teachers, coaches, and administrators. He has authored five books previous to this one, including four within the PLC+ series of publications (Corwin).

Published multiple times in various publications such as *Principal Leadership* and *Educational Leadership*, Dave has also presented at various national conferences.

Dave has a strong moral aspect, strives to be relatable and practical when working with people, and has a savvy sense of humor that supports him in his life and work. Dave stays busy with his beautiful and supportive wife, Kristen, and three boys (ages 20, 15, and 13). He acknowledges every day that the Lord guides his actions and is the driving force in his life. Dave is an independent consultant for Corwin Press and is the owner of NZJ Learning LLC (named after his three boys) and the founder of the Center for Collaborative Expertise.



**Bruce Potter** is a career educator and leader with 30+ years of experience spanning classroom teaching, building leadership, and 11 years as a district superintendent. In 2013, he secured special legislation—signed by the governor of New York—to open a public school serving at-risk and special education students identified as likely dropouts; over six years, that school achieved an 80% graduation rate. Today, Bruce continues to consult with his former district following its Visible Learning Associate-Level School certifica-

tion, developing Collaborative Expertise Teams (CETeams) Framework™ using the model featured in this book.

Bruce's work, focused on turning research into daily routines, has earned national recognition for redefining success for historically underserved students. He has presented district results at multiple national conferences, consults independently with Corwin, and co-founded the Center for Collaborative Expertise. His approach centers on fostering collaborative expertise through engaged professional learning communities (featured in *The Learning Professional*, Feb. 2025), assessing staff readiness, and sequencing supports so change sticks. Bruce is co-author of *Grading Visible Learners: Learning With Fluidity, Not Finality*, and is widely regarded for practical implementation, system coherence, and a relentless focus on impact.

# PART 1

## THE BREAKING POINT—AND THE BLUEPRINT

### A Tough Truth

Despite substantial investment, the United States struggles with a disconnect between educational spending and student outcomes. American students consistently lag behind their global peers in mathematics and science, raising urgent questions about resource allocation and system effectiveness (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

The situation is more nuanced than global rankings suggest. Although academic performance correlates with economic growth, the link between resources and results is not straightforward, particularly in a diverse and decentralized nation like the United States (Zhou, 2024). In the United States, with the largest student population among OECD countries in 2022 and a fragmented education system, expectations and instructional quality vary widely across states and districts.

Demographic diversity complicates this landscape further, with the United States serving a higher percentage of disadvantaged students compared to many other countries. Critics of international assessments like PISA argue that this diversity shapes outcomes but does not lessen the urgency for reform; rather, it amplifies it. James Harvey (2000) warned that schools risk becoming victims of change if they do not lead it—a message that resonates even more today as student outcomes stagnate in a volatile environment requiring systemic solutions (Martin, 2024).

## Urgency in the Teacher Workforce

Nationwide teacher shortages are reaching crisis levels. Creating a culture of collaborative expertise takes time and trust, yet many schools struggle to keep classrooms staffed. Recruiting talented educators is only part of the challenge; retention is critical. When educators feel unsafe questioning plans or proposing new ideas, they disengage and often leave, disrupting school capacity.

These issues can be overlooked as school leaders may focus solely on achievement scores while missing signs of disengagement during team meetings or feedback sessions. In March 2025, the Learning Policy Institute reported that 90% of teacher vacancies result from voluntary departures due to low pay, poor working conditions, and inadequate support. Teachers are leaving environments that fail to honor their voices and growth.

The financial toll is significant, with teacher turnover costs ranging from \$12,000 per departure in small districts and over \$25,000 in larger systems—costs that translate into lost relationships and continuity for students.

## It Goes Deeper

High teacher turnover undermines student learning and broader school improvement efforts. Schools with high turnover rates see decreased student achievement—especially in reading and math—and incur substantial costs for recruiting and training new staff. According to research from the University of Texas at Austin, turnover erodes shared goals and institutional memory while fracturing trust needed for sustained problem-solving (Holme et al., 2024). Until we create environments where teachers feel safe and supported, we will continue losing essential talent.

## Stop Looking Across the Street—Look Inside

A significant blind spot in education today is the focus on structural reforms rather than internal improvements. Research by John Hattie shows that variance in student achievement exists within schools rather than between them—the real issue lies within individual classrooms.

This mirrors corporate findings by Marcus Buckingham that performance differences exist between teams working under similar conditions; success comes from allowing individuals to utilize their strengths daily. Instead of chasing models or rebranding failing schools, we must identify advantages within our buildings to ensure every educator can perform at their best.

## A Path Forward: What Data Tell Us

Creating meaningful educational opportunities is crucial for long-term economic mobility. While academic success alone doesn't erase poverty's effects, strong outcomes significantly increase students' chances of earning a living wage as adults.

However, too many students fall behind without targeted intervention. A TNTP (2024) study identified just 5% of elementary and middle schools—28,000—that accelerate student learning by over 1.3 years annually through common practices: fostering belonging, delivering grade-level instruction consistently, and maintaining coherent instructional systems across classrooms.

## Systems Thinking and Collaborative Expertise Are Nonnegotiable

These successful schools demonstrate that transformation comes not from quick fixes or charismatic leaders but from deep investment in people and practices that matter most. In today's complex educational environment, transformation requires systemic thinking—connecting classrooms, teams, and structures.

Collective teacher efficacy—the shared belief among educators that they can significantly impact student learning—is a powerful driver of improvement (e.g., Hattie's 2012 visible learning research). Building this efficacy through collaborative expertise emphasizes trust, shared responsibility, and aligned action throughout the system.

This work demands immediate clarity, commitment, and intentional implementation over the next three to five years. We cannot afford to maintain the status quo of fragmented professional development, siloed teams, and low-leverage routines. Instead we must change the narrative to move toward ongoing job-embedded professional learning, transformative collaboration, and high-impact strategies that drive systemic change.

The stakes are critical. A 2023 Work in America™ survey (American Psychological Association, 2023) revealed that 92% of employees want to work in organizations that prioritize their psychological well-being. When educators feel safe, supported, and valued, they not only stay but thrive.

Building collaborative expertise is essential for unlocking the potential of both students and staff. It's the key to creating schools that not only respond to current challenges but actively shape a better future. The time to act is now—let's seize this opportunity for meaningful change!

This book provides a roadmap to achieve significant school improvement, with an accompanying Online Implementation Guide to serve as your personal GPS.



# CHAPTER 1

## The Need for Expertise

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*“Experts were once amateurs who kept practicing.”*

—Amit Kalantri, *Wealth of Words*

### The Quest for Expertise

When we witness expertise it captivates our attention, particularly in the vibrant landscapes of entertainment. There are breathtaking performances of athletes like Simone Biles or Shohei Ohtani, where their stunning feats defy gravity with grace or mystify us with precision and power, or musicians like Billy Joel, whose fingers dance effortlessly across piano keys while his mouth perfectly cues his harmonica while we echo lyrics like “It’s 9:00 on a Saturday.” As we witness such extraordinary talents, we can’t help but marvel at the heights of human achievement.

At its core, expertise embodies profound mastery—an accumulation of knowledge and skill forged through years of experience, education, relentless practice and most of all reflection. Ultimately, it is through examining what is working, what needs to be changed, and what should be replicated that one truly understands the journey that has forged their expertise.

*How would you define or describe expertise in teaching/education?*

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## Success Criteria

After reading this chapter, the reader will be able to

1. Distinguish between experience and expertise
2. Explain why ongoing reflection, adaptation, and evidence-based practice are essential for achieving true mastery in any profession, including teaching
3. Explain how the concept of “practice” supports the development of expert professionals over time
4. Explain the need to scale expertise among educators within schools, which can reduce variability of impact and improve outcomes for all students

## Experience Is Not Synonymous With Expertise

In our daily lives, we actively seek out skilled professionals which we *perceive to have expertise* in their field all of the time—accountants, plumbers, wedding planners, and landscapers to name a few. Many times businesses will advertise how many years they have provided their services to the public. We expect these individuals to possess a certain amount of genuine acumen in their field and thus sometimes pay a premium for their services based on the reputation of their level of expertise in their field.

**Figure 1.1** Fields Defined by Results-Based Expertise

Field	Example of Expected Result That Is Contingent on Payment for Services Rendered
Accountant	Taxes completed and filed properly, on time, including all possible tax write-offs and redemptions
Plumber	Leaking bathroom pipe fixed with minimal disruption to surrounding infrastructure of house
Wedding Planner	A beautifully organized and memorable event that reflects the couple's vision with as few as possible hiccups on the big day
Landscaper	A beautifully designed and functional outdoor space that enhances curb appeal and provides enjoyment for the homeowners while requiring minimal maintenance

What do you notice about all four examples in Figure 1.1? In each situation what are we paying for? **The result.** There is an expected and often guaranteed outcome to be delivered before payment is due. Until my bathroom pipe is fixed, and the mess from doing so is cleaned up, I do not write the check or submit payment on my credit card.

Imagine you have a legal problem or health issue. You still seek out established professionals the same way *but not for guaranteed results*. Physicians and attorneys will not give us a promise of a guaranteed outcome. Instead, we invest even more in them for their expertise, trusting they'll improve our chances of achieving the best outcome because they will apply the best and most current research and actions.

Attorneys and doctors refer to their work as a “practice,” highlighting a lifelong commitment to learning and refining their skills. This perspective acknowledges that even the most accomplished professionals face ongoing challenges and must stay updated on evolving knowledge. Such a mindset fosters humility and dedication, urging them to remain open to new information, which ultimately benefits their clients and patients.

Recognizing that each case is unique, their practice requires adaptability and critical thinking. Mastery involves not just understanding complex concepts but also effectively applying that knowledge in real-world situations. Think back to a Los Angeles Dodgers game or a Billy Joel concert—while we expect athleticism and artistry, we know there won't always be a home run or a perfect note every time.

## The Need for Expertise in Teaching

We must recognize teaching expertise as a valued practice, akin to that in medicine and law. Mastery in education involves not only understanding complex concepts but also applying this knowledge effectively

in real-world contexts. Researcher Dylan Wiliam highlights that effective teaching hinges on a teacher's ability to assess student needs and adapt instruction accordingly. Like medical professionals and lawyers, educators must evolve with changing student requirements, curriculum updates, and pedagogical advancements. This journey of continuous reflection, experimentation, and adaptability enhances the educational experience.

Both teaching and professions such as law and medicine demonstrate that expertise grows through practice and emphasize the importance of mentorship and lifelong learning. Breakthroughs in medicine inform current practices, just as studies by Robert Marzano show that effective teaching strategies stem from a deep understanding of content and pedagogy. Like doctors, educators must continuously refine their skills to enhance learning effectively.

## Guidance for the Practice of Teaching

Developing expertise in education requires adhering to research—both recent findings and time-tested principles. By grounding our practices in evidence-based strategies, we boost the likelihood of positive student outcomes. John Hattie's research, as outlined in *Visible Learning: The Sequel* (2023), provides valuable insights into factors that enhance the probability of student learning. After 25 years of examining over 2,103 meta-analyses and data from 132,000 studies involving 300 million students worldwide, Hattie's findings highlight that while no instructional strategy guarantees success, certain practices significantly raise the chances of desired outcomes (see Table 1.1).

The average effect size across educational interventions in Hattie's analyses is 0.4, suggesting many practices yield about a year's growth in a single academic year. Strategies with an effect size above 0.4 are considered "above average," indicating a stronger positive impact on learning. An effect size of 0.8 or above is "well above average," potentially doubling student learning rates.

## Examples of Enhancing Probability

### Wearing a Seatbelt

- ▶ *Impact:* Significantly increases safety in a car accident.
- ▶ *Enhanced Impact:* Combined with safe driving practices, it further improves safety chances.

### Not Smoking

- ▶ *Impact:* Drastically reduces the risk of lung cancer.
- ▶ *Enhanced Impact:* Paired with a healthy diet, exercise, and proper rest, it improves overall health.

## Providing Feedback ( $d = 0.51$ )

- ▶ *Impact*: Enhances chances of improved student performance.
- ▶ *Enhanced Impact*: Effective feedback specific to cues and next steps in learning ( $d = 0.92$ ) is even more impactful.

**Table 1.1** Example Influences With High Potential for Positive Impact

Influence	Short Description	Average Effect Size
Teacher Estimates of Achievement	Accurate estimates of student achievement guide expectations, challenges, placements, and instruction through questioning, observation, assessments, and presentations.	$d = 1.29$
Teacher Credibility	Students view teachers as credible authorities based on competence, trustworthiness, and care, prompting questions like, “Can I seek feedback from this teacher?” and “Should I invest in their tasks to improve my learning?”	$d = 1.09$
Jigsaw Method	The jigsaw method is a cooperative learning strategy where students research subtopics in expert groups before sharing findings within their home groups, ensuring everyone learns about all topics.	$d = .92$
Teacher Clarity	Teacher clarity involves organization, explanation, examples, guided practice, and assessment, that is, clearly communicating lesson intentions and success criteria.	$d = .85$
Problem-Based Learning	PBL engages students in actively investigating real-world problems and challenges through collaborative, hands-on projects.	$d = .78$

Source: <https://www.visiblelearningmetax.com> (Data pulled Sept. 17, 2025).

Hattie’s research guides educators by providing a framework to select strategies that maximize successful learning outcomes. While not a strict script, certain practices are essential for achieving significant impacts. By prioritizing high-impact strategies and refining our approaches, educators can enhance effectiveness and elevate student achievement. Instead of seeking guaranteed results, we focus on strategies that increase the probability of success, just as medical professionals adapt methods for optimal patient outcomes.



## Teaching Should Mirror Medicine and Shift Practice Toward New Evidence

In 2016, Dave had a meniscus tear injury and sought medical attention. Following surgery in December, he resumed running by 2019.

In November 2022 when he was running, he felt a grinding pain in his knee that he had never felt before. He went to see another knee specialist, where he was made aware that he no longer had a meniscus in his left knee and his days of running were probably over.

Dr. Aaron Krych, orthopedic surgeon at Mayo Clinic, noted that past meniscus removal almost guarantees arthritis, impacting athletic function. Today, they repair tears that were once deemed irreparable. Recovery from repair takes six to eight months, with tailored rehab improving outcomes. Had Dave's injury occurred just a year later, advances in treatment could have offered him a different path.

Round robin reading (RRR) remains prevalent in K–8 classrooms, with over half of teachers still using it, despite its ineffectiveness. Literacy expert Timothy Shanahan warns that without change, RRR could persist for another 50 years. While reading aloud is vital for fluency, RRR can induce anxiety in reluctant readers, fueling a dislike for reading (Shanahan, 2019).

Students often focus on their turn rather than understanding the material, leading to poor comprehension. RRR also models dysfluent reading, passing mispronunciations among peers and undermining fluency. Additionally, turn-taking reduces the total reading time for each student and may lead to off-task behavior.

Fortunately, more effective alternatives, such as guided and paired reading, can foster reading confidence and fluency. Just as we wouldn't expect doctors to rely on outdated methods deemed less or even ineffective than previously thought, should we not embrace the same practices in education?

## Shifting Paradigms About What We Think Works

Hattie also highlights educational practices that warrant less investment or should be avoided, emphasizing the need for evolution in education. Just as knee surgery has shifted from removing damaged tissue to repairing it, some traditional practices may seem impactful but offer limited returns when implemented in isolation.

The three influences in Table 1.2 highlight that we should not automatically expect a high impact on learning from specific approaches by default. For instance, *individualized instruction* shows a positive effect on student learning with an effect size of  $d = .24$ , but this is still below average. This does not mean we should avoid tailoring instruction to meet specific learners' needs; rather, we must be cautious to ensure that other essential factors—such as teacher clarity, feedback, and credibility—are also in place. For example, wearing a seatbelt while driving, after

**Table 1.2** Example Influences With Positive (Average) Possible Impact

Influence	Short Description	Average Effect Size
Individual Instruction	Instruction that provides personalized feedback, timely interventions, and adaptive lessons to meet diverse learning needs and ensure mastery.	$d = .24$
Within-Class Grouping	Organizing students into small groups by interest, skill, ability, or various other factors within the regular classroom.	$d = .16$
One-on-One Laptops	Each student uses a laptop or computer device (iPad, netbook, tablet, computer, or other).	$d = .16$

consuming several beers and texting, may undermine the safety benefits that the seatbelt provides. Similarly, giving all students a laptop for research without providing clarity in the task or monitoring if they are browsing TikTok instead of examining the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire is unlikely to enhance their social studies knowledge or skills.

### What Expert Educators Should Avoid—or At Least Prepare For

Table 1.3 highlights some actions that educators should be mindful of the potential extremely low or negative impact on learning.

**Table 1.3** Example Influences With Negative Possible Impact

Influence	Short Description	Average Effect Size
Perfectionism	Perfectionism involves students setting excessively high and often unrealistic standards of performance.	$d = .03$
Suspension/Expulsion of Students	When students are removed from the school permanently or temporarily, usually for adverse behavioral or safety issues.	$d = -.20$
Retention	The practice of retaining a student in a single grade level in the next academic year because she or he has not made adequate progress.	$d = -.24$
Lecture	The instructor presents uninterrupted to a more passive audience.	$d = -.41$ (All studies negative)
Teachers Labeling Students	Consider two students of the same personality, behavior, or aptitude; label one (e.g., Asperger's, naughty, struggling) and not the other. This research investigates the effects of these labels. Labeling can lead to effective intervention or discrimination or exclusion.	$d = -.53$

The influences outlined in Table 1.3 identify key factors to avoid in the pursuit of academic success and prompt a reexamination of our educational approach. For instance, perfectionism ( $d = .03$ ) is often internalized early, leading to stress and risk aversion in learning. Elementary teachers should avoid over-celebrating perfect work; an assignment scored at 100% most often signals one specific truism—the assignment was too easy. What often happens to students is they develop a schema for loving how the praise for perfect work makes them feel. As they progress in their educational careers they desire the feeling that comes from the recognition of perfect work, which causes them to avoid taking risks in their learning. A more constructive response would be, “That’s great! What do you think your next learning step should be?”

Additionally, while we’ve unfortunately had to suspend or expel students for safety reasons, consistently implementing restorative practices can minimize unnecessary disciplinary actions. Teacher labeling ( $d = -.53$ ) raises concerns about whether it fosters effective intervention or contributes to discrimination and lowered expectations. Sometimes students demonstrate an accelerated level of learning compared to their peers, which leads to the label of being *gifted*. A fair question, “How come so many *gifted* kids don’t become *gifted* adults?”

A commitment to evidence-based practices is essential in education. Hattie’s research shows the importance of effective instructional leadership and collaboration among educators, mirroring how medical professionals refine their practices to enhance outcomes. Just as doctors rely on proven methods, educators should adopt strategies grounded in solid research, creating a culture of continuous improvement. Expert educators prioritize effective practices while knowing what actions to avoid.

***What key factors shape the instructional decision-making process among educators in your school? How are those decisions monitored for impact?***

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## The Need to Scale Expertise in Our Schools

There are specific common factors that drive student learning and achievement to high levels. Teachers and school leaders often perceive their schools or students as unique. Each school has its own culture and challenges, yet overwhelming evidence indicates that effective teaching strategies and educational frameworks share significant similarities across settings. By focusing on these successful practices, we can enhance student outcomes on a larger scale.

Another truism in our profession is that teachers are not created equally. Hattie has argued that within-school variability, the difference in impact between two teachers, is a more significant barrier to student learning than differences between schools. In Western countries, the average percentage of variability between schools is 36%, while 64% is due to variance within them (OECD, 2010). Therefore, what happens within your school is most critical. Leaders have excellent opportunities to reduce this variability and elevate the impact of all your educators.

Expertise extends beyond knowledge; it involves professional development and embracing innovative ideas. Educators must continually adapt to diverse student needs and engage in reflective practices that assess their effectiveness. By blending experience, a commitment to continuous learning, and ongoing reflection, teachers can ensure their methods remain relevant in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

### Collaboration: A Driver for Scaling Up Expertise

In sports we have witnessed teams transform in a short period of time from mediocrity to champions through focused strategies like aligned team defense, intentional attention to detail, and fundamentals. Schools can also elevate their impact on student learning and progress by promoting intentionally effective teaching actions and aligned efforts. Unlike sports teams that frequently adjust their rosters from year to year, schools must enhance the skills of *their existing faculty* and cultivate the expertise from within their ranks. School leaders play a vital role in this by ensuring that all educators receive necessary resources and support, rather than only focusing on standout teachers.

Harnessing this *collective expertise* involves creating networks for educators to exchange insights and collaboratively develop effective strategies. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are essential for fostering continuous improvement and turning schools into true learning communities. Teachers and administrators should engage in classroom observations and collaboratively analyze student work to deepen their understanding of one another's roles.

Involving all stakeholders in improvement planning through inquiry cycles—identifying progress and areas for change (Eckert, 2022)—is crucial for advancing learning. Additionally, fostering risk-taking among educators and emphasizing innovative teaching approaches can alleviate anxiety about missteps. Confident educators, using research-based strategies, foster a culture of exploration and innovation (Edmondson, 2016).

Developing collective expertise also involves ensuring there are multiple ways for teachers to learn and develop. In *Developing Teaching Expertise*, Dunn and Hattie (2022) call for five tenets to consider: develop a mindset of acceptance, empower teachers to respond to their own contexts, form teams not individuals, design lean improvement processes, and foster psychological safety (p. 33).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, professional development or even more *professional learning* must prioritize the most current and evidence-based practices combined with ongoing coaching and support. Investing in the professional learning of specific high-yield instructional techniques also leads to a shared understanding of effective practices. Coaching and mentorship are then needed to further refine educators' skills. By focusing on successful teaching methods and providing sustained support, we can cultivate a culture of high achievement for all students.



## Chapter Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do you actively engage in the continuous practice of teaching, and how does this reflect the concept of “expertise as a journey” rather than a destination?
2. How do you distinguish between experience and expertise in your own teaching practice and that of your colleagues?
3. What instructional practices or beliefs do you currently hold that may not be supported by evidence, and how open are you to adjusting these in pursuit of greater expertise?

This book is a call for courage—the courage to challenge the status quo without dwelling on what we lack but instead making the absolute most of what we have. That is real courage.

Do you have the courage to identify the teachers making the greatest impact, to build collective strength around them, and to invite all others into that work?

The greatest barrier in schools today isn't knowledge or resources—it's the absence of courage. This book is your invitation to step forward with it.