

# Transforming School Culture

Overcoming Staff  
Division to Improve  
Student Performance

**Anthony  
Muhammad, PhD**



# Big Idea 1

## A Focus on Learning

Can ALL students learn?

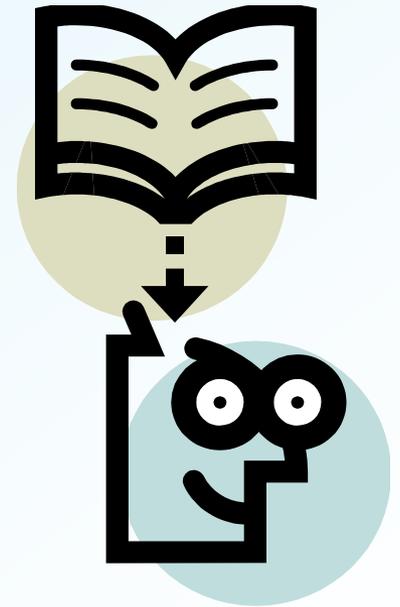
Are ALL students learning?

# What's the problem?

- Poor students cannot learn?
- Minority students cannot learn?
- Learning-disabled students cannot learn?
- Is learning gender based?

Or

- Are some underserved in our current system?



# Can these gaps be closed?

An analysis of research conducted over a 35-year period demonstrates that schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student backgrounds.

(Marzano, *What Works in Schools*, 2003)

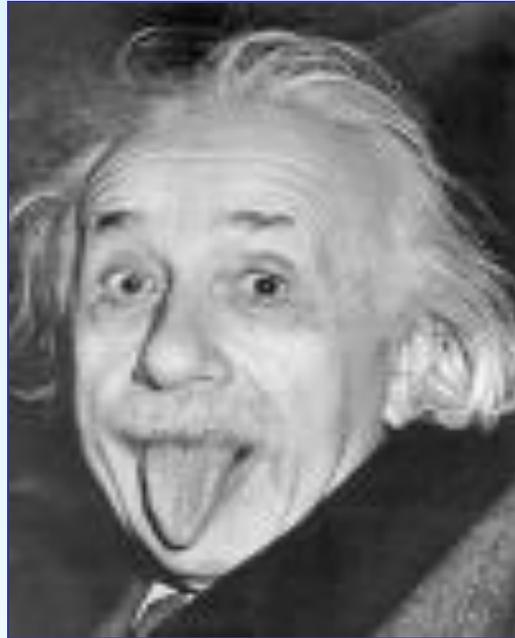
**So...**

**Why do they  
still exist?**



# What's next?

## Is change necessary?



“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”  
—***Albert Einstein***

# Technical and Cultural Changes



# Technical Change

Technical changes are changes in learning tools and structure.

1. Collaborative time
2. Common assessments
3. Data
4. Educational technology
5. Support classes

# Common Misconceptions About Technical Changes

- Changing the structure lead to higher levels of productivity (i.e., rearranging the seats on the Titanic).
- Technical changes can transcend low capacity or unprofessionalism
- Technical changes will fix kids or schools that are broken (i.e., dress codes, longer school day)



# Cultural Change

“Structural change that is not supported by cultural change will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and stability.”

—Schlechty, *Shaking Up the Schoolhouse: How to Support and Sustain Educational Innovation* (2001), p. 52

# Human beings are complex.

- Educators bring themselves to the classroom.
- The ills of **society** are the ills of the **school**.
- Schools are the only places qualified to truly break the cycle and bring about equality.

# School Culture

“School culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school.”

—Deal & Peterson, 2002

# Healthy School Culture

“Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways.

“Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student.”

—Peterson. (2002). Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive? *Education World* 6(2)

# Prescriptive

## Commitment

Belief in all students

School goals guide behavior.



## Reflection

Analyze data

Confront brutal facts.



## Prescription

Collaborative

Disciplined practice

# Toxic School Culture

“Educators believe that student success is based upon students’ level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways.

Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement.”

—Peterson. (2002). Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive? *Education World* 6(2)

# Descriptive and Deflective



# Real Difference

Healthy Culture

**Problem  
solvers**

Toxic Culture

**Complainers**

# ***Good to Great*** **(Jim Collins)**

What do great corporations or organizations do differently than good or average organizations?

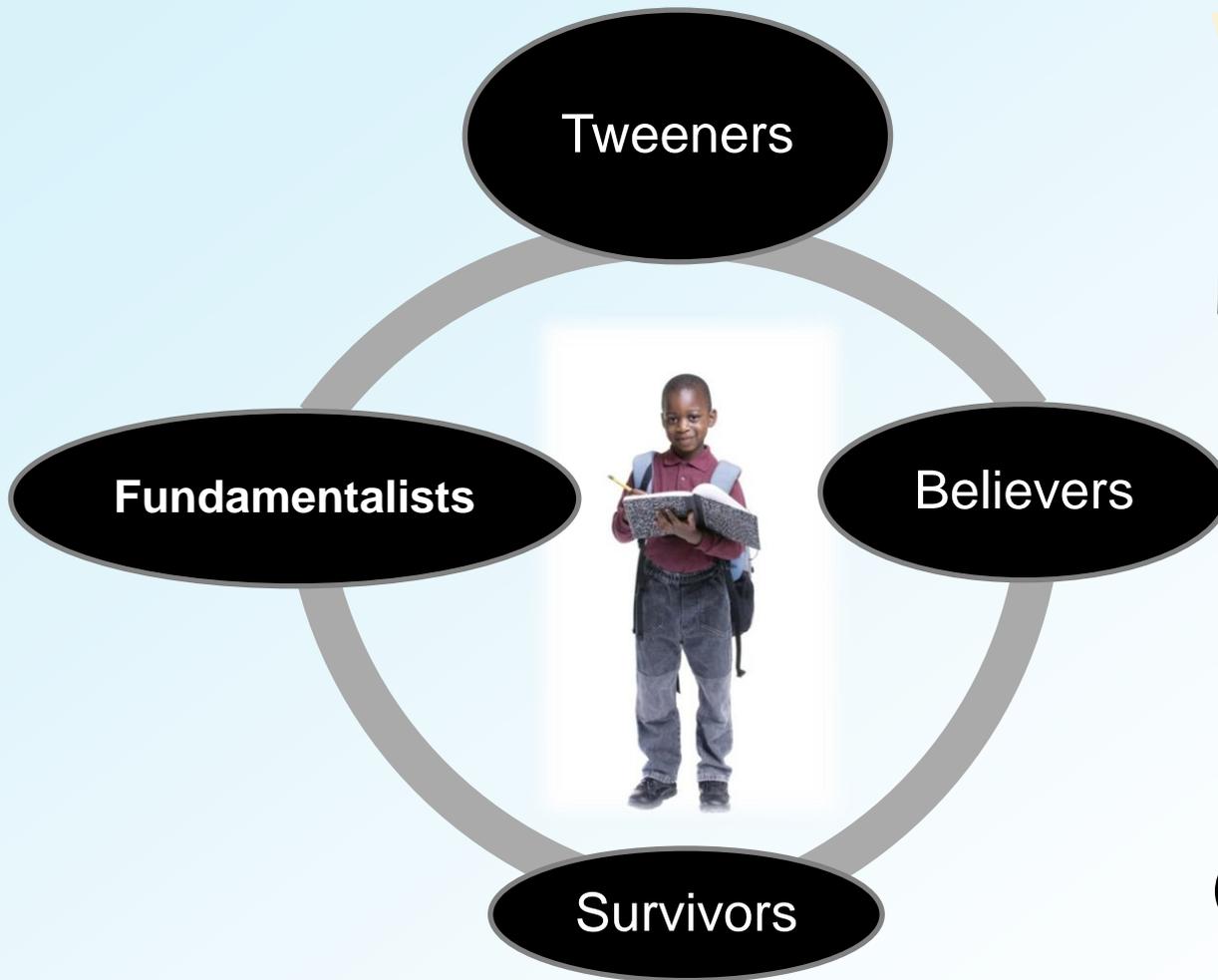
- Seek and confront the brutal facts.
- Get the right people on the bus in the right seats.

(Collins, 2001)

# Adult Drama

Dysfunctional social interactions between adult professionals within a school environment that interfere with the proper implementation of important policies, practices, and procedures that support the proper education of students

# The Quandary



(Muhammad, 2009)

# The Real Difference

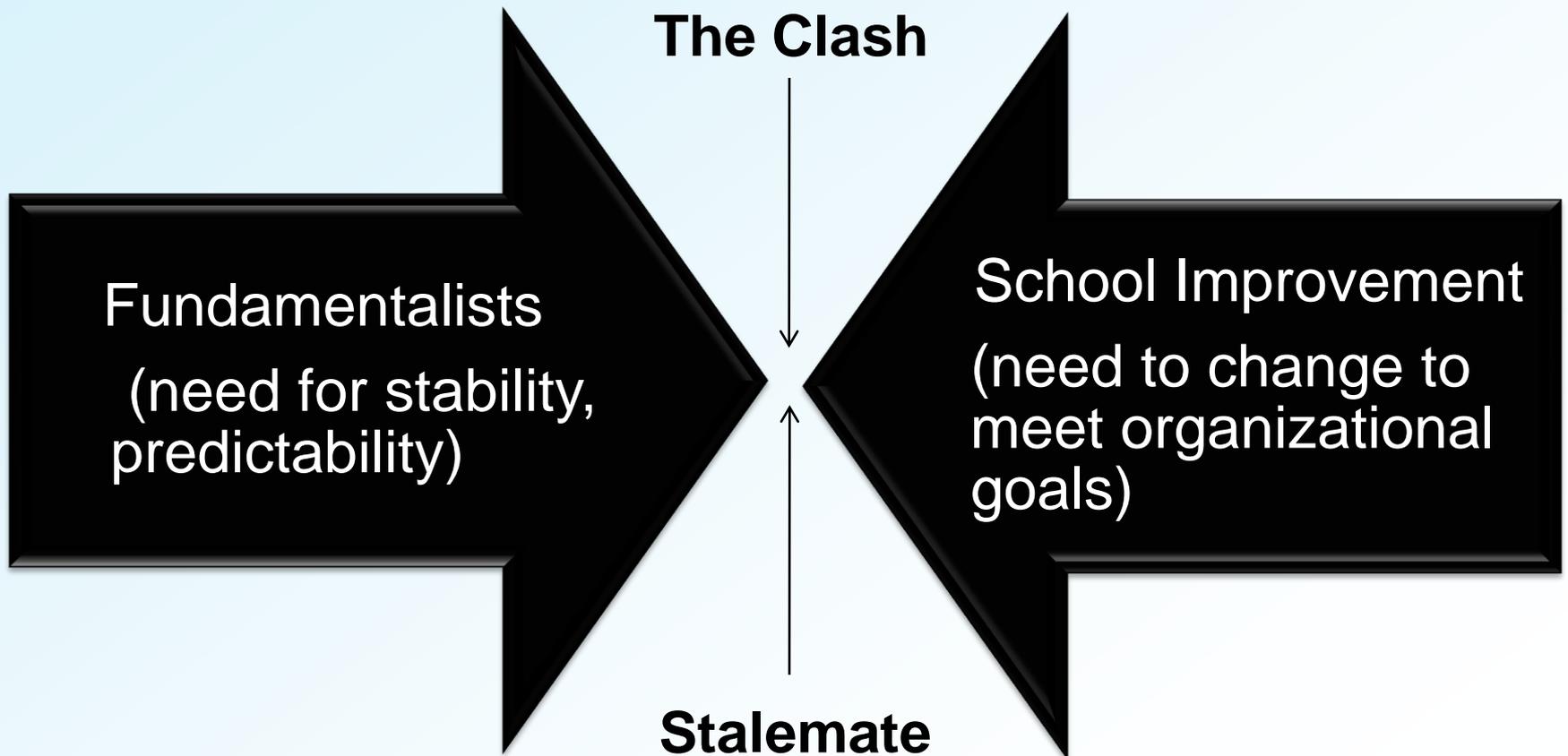
## Believers

- Goal: Every student shall succeed.
- Accept that change (the right change) is necessary to improve student performance.
- Believe student interest is more important than personal interest (public servant).

## Fundamentalists

- Goal: Maintain the status quo.
- Reject any substantive change if it clashes with personal agenda.
- Believe self-interest is more important than student interest (self-servant).

# The Current State of School Reform



# Can Fundamentalism Be Reversed?

# Fundamentalist change is not easy.

## “Drop Your Tools” Research

- People persist when they are given no clear reason to change.
- People persist when they do not trust the person who tells them to change.
- People persist when they view the alternative as more frightening.
- To change may mean admitting failure.

(Maclean, *Young Men and Fire*, 1992)

# How do we respond?

- **Level 1** – Make a clear case for change.
- **Level 2** – Develop relationships, do not ostracize.
- **Level 3** – Increase capacity and consider the context.
- **Level 4** – Monitor strongly.

# Learning for all is possible.

**If...**

- We have the will to make it happen.
- We care enough to self-examine.
- We care enough to put in the work to make a difference.

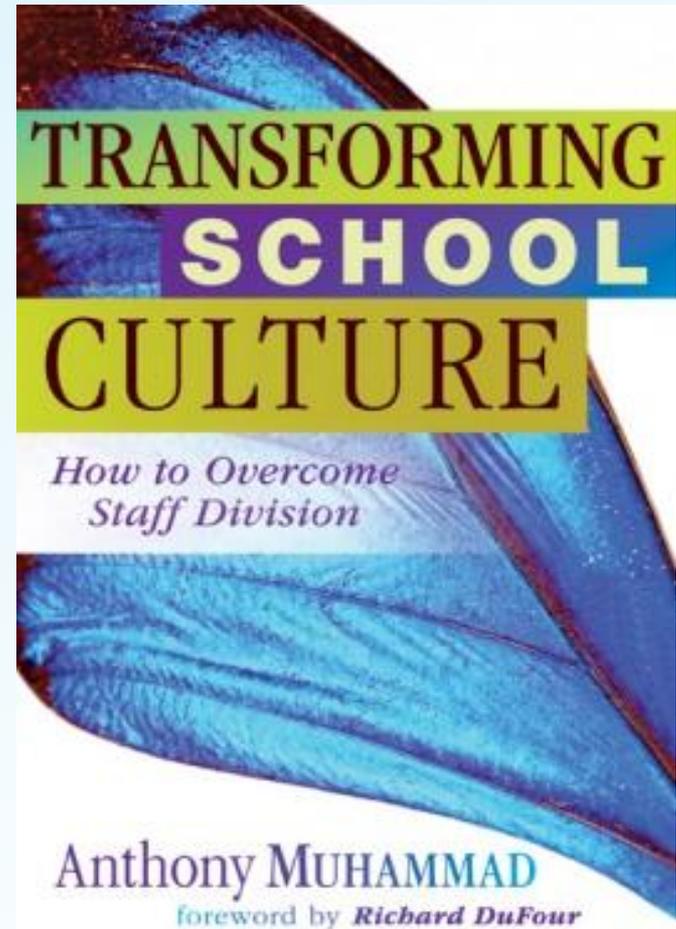
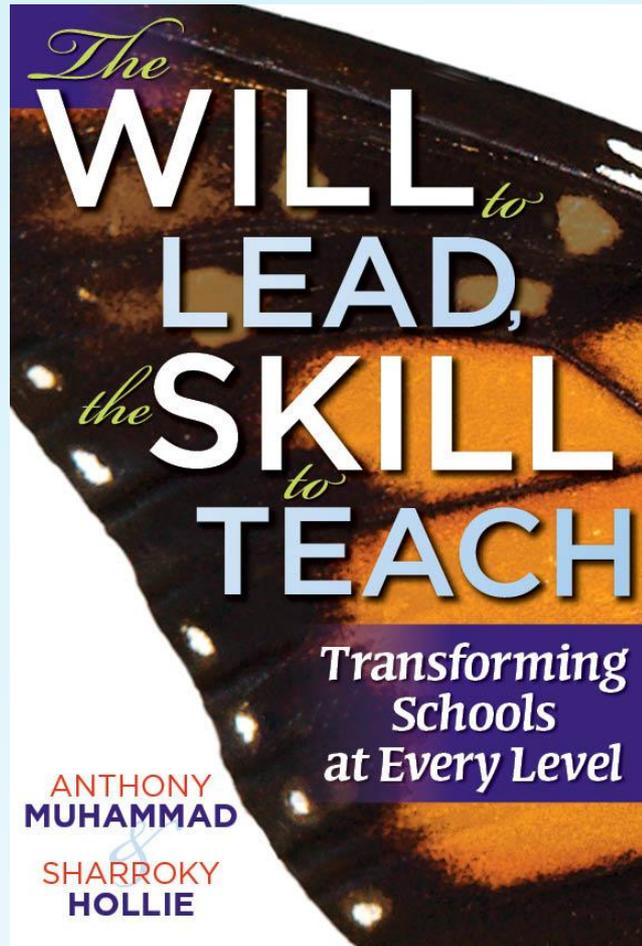
Only you can answer these questions...

# Derek Lamont Crawford



**Rest in peace, Baby Brother!**

# Two Must-Reads for Follow-Up



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