

# **TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE**

*Dr. Anthony Muhammad*

## **Study Guide**

### **Chapter 1**

1. How has No Child Left Behind (NCLB) affected the focus, policies, and practices in your school?
2. How would you personally describe 'school culture' and how would you rate your school's culture ('healthy' or 'toxic')?
3. From your personal experience, what happens when Technical change precedes Cultural changes? How does this affect teacher morale and willingness to change?

### **Chapter 2**

1. How has the shift in focus to hold schools solely accountable for student performance affected you personally and professionally? How has it affected your school and district?
2. Has the concept of 'Predetermination' affected your school in a positive or negative way? If it has affected it in a negative way, what have you done to address the issue and have those efforts been effective.
3. Which form of 'Predetermination' is most prevalent in your school and/or district? Are professionals aware of its impact?

4. What percentage of your staff are Believers, Tweeners, Survivors, or Fundamentalists? How does this division cause problems in school reform efforts?

### **Chapter 3**

1. Why is 'flexibility' with students such an important concept in building a healthy school culture? How flexible is your school/district environment?
2. How do educators develop intrinsic motivation for student achievement? How can educators who lack this trait develop it?
3. Give some examples of 'Positive Pressure' from your experiences as both a student and an educator. How did this factor affect your zeal to learn?
4. Why do Believers tend to be non-confrontational? How can they confront the damaging paradigms within their school culture and maintain their professionalism at the same time?

### **Chapter 4**

1. Describe your experience as a Tweener. What do Tweeners need in order to be successful in this field?
2. How can we create a stronger connection between the Tweener and his/her school, district, and community?
3. Discuss ways that we can break the "Wall of Silence" between Tweeners and school/district leadership so that they can feel comfortable asking for assistance

without fear of losing their jobs? What type of training do school leaders need to meet this challenge?

4. Describe your 'Moment of Truth'. Who helped you through this period? Was your assistance systematic or random?

## **Chapter 5**

1. Have you ever experienced workplace stress that spiraled you into less potency? What stopped your descent?
2. How do Survivors survive and why do some cultures overlook their condition and put both teacher and student at-risk? What mechanisms do you have in your district to assist with Survivors?
3. What does it say about a school culture with high numbers of Survivors? What would you do if one of your closest colleagues were a Survivor?

## **Chapter 6**

1. What impact do past experiences or "contracts" have on the development of Fundamentalism? Do you believe that most Fundamentalists view themselves as Fundamentalists?
2. Is resistance to change a characteristic of only a Fundamentalist? Can a Believer resist change? Under what circumstances would a Believer resist change and under what circumstances would a Fundamentalist resist change?
3. How does Fundamentalism cause a road block to improvement? How does the 'Apprenticeship of Observation' play a role?

4. Why do Fundamentalists value the Bell Curve or Normal Distribution? How does this paradigm work against working towards improved learning for students?
5. Describe examples of how the 'Three Ds' have manifested themselves in your professional career in the past. How did you respond in each instance?

## **Chapter 7**

1. How can scholarship from other fields assist us in the field of education? Why would an analysis of the reaction of firefighters be relevant to the inner-workings of school culture?
2. How have top-down authoritarian models affected the culture of schools? What can we learn from the 'Drop Your Tools' (DYT) study as it relates to Level 1 Fundamentalists?
3. Has trust of leadership ever been an issue with you as a professional in your career? If so, how was it resolved? If has not been resolved, what can be done to resolve this issue?
4. Can the myriad of responsibilities placed on the plate of educators cause issues? If so, how? What can be done to reduce the influence of these varied day-to-day issues that can consume the agenda of the average educator?
5. Have you ever worked with someone who represented themselves as the vanguard of the staff's rights? How did he/she articulate their values? How can this type of person be convinced to give up comfort and autonomy for the benefit of students?

## **Chapter 8**

1. Can you identify and recite your school mission? If not, what are the factors that cause this disconnect? Can a staff truly be unified in purpose if they never formally articulate that commitment?
2. How do you celebrate the prowess of the staff in your school/district? What does authentic celebration produce in an educational community?
3. What are the current components of your school/district new teacher mentoring program? Does it adequately meet the needs of new teachers? What evidence do you have to support your belief?
4. How can teacher collaboration foster a sense of unity in a school? How can improper collaboration foster staff division? How can we nurture proper professional collaboration in our school?
5. How does professional development impact practice? How does a strong system of professional development support a Level 1 Fundamentalist?
6. Identify four things that you will actively implement within the next semester to reduce the influence of Fundamentalists