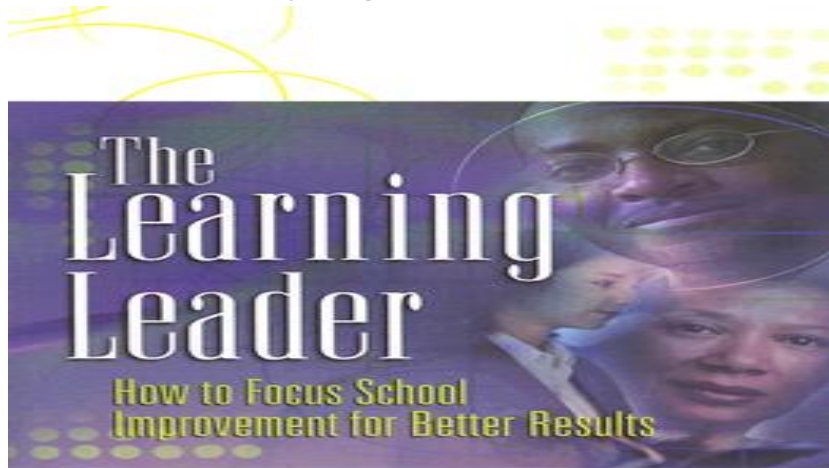


THE LEARNING LEADER

How to focus school improvement for
better results

By Douglas B. Reeves



Douglas B. Reeves

Brief Overview

Douglas B. Reeves focuses on the comment in *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* that effective educational leadership does not have to be a losing battle amongst the school community. Reeves helps leadership teams go beyond excuses making the most out of their strengths and in turn lessening their weaknesses to focus on effective leadership. He introduces the Leadership for Learning Framework, which challenges his readers to examine student achievement as more than test scores. He encourages leaders reading the book to use the Leadership for Learning Framework to look deeper into the results they crave for their school community.

CHAPTERS

Intro: What *The Learning Leader* Will Do For You

Ch.1: The Results Paradox

Ch.2: Challenging Leadership Myths: Hope for the Exhausted Leader

Ch. 3: Architectural Leadership: Why You Cannot Do It Alone

Ch.4: The Dimensions of Leadership

Ch.5: What Matters Most: From Planning to Performance

Ch.6: Transforming Research into Action

Ch.7: Leadership and Effective Feedback: The Dilemmas of Grading

Ch.8: Using Leadership Maps to Improve Your School

Ch.9: Putting It All Together: The Essential Transformations of the Learning Leader



Introduction: What *The Learning Leader* Will Do For You

The Leadership For Learning Framework

Achievement of Results

(High results=effective)

<p>Lucky High results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of success unlikely</p>	<p>Leading High results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely</p>
<p>Losing Low results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of failure likely</p>	<p>Learning Low results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely</p>

Antecedent of Excellence

(Observable qualities in leadership, teaching, curriculum, parental engagement, and other indicators that assist in understanding how results are achieved)



“the Leadership for Learning Framework will help you conceptualize your role and that of your colleagues”

p.xvii

Lucky Quadrant:

- Teach students who achieve high results
- Unable to link their professional practices to results because they do not know how their practices influence achievement
- There is so much self-congratulatory backslapping and protestations of "excellence"
- Treat their best teachers shabbily, because they do not recognize their extraordinary over effectiveness

Losing Quadrant:

- Self-defeating behavior by doing the same thing and expecting different results
- Low results on the vertical axis, but also are clueless about the antecedents of excellence on the horizontal axis

"The primary conclusions of that researcher are as follows:

1. *Leadership, teaching, and adult actions matter.*
2. *There are particular leadership actions that show demonstrate links to improved student achievement and educational equity*
 - Inquiry
 - Implementation
 - Monitoring
3. *Leadership is neither a unitary skill set nor a solitary activity*

“The Leadership for Learning framework engages a variety of skills and people throughout the organization, whether or not their official job titles suggest a leadership role”

p.xxiv-xxv



Author: Douglas B. Reeves

Douglas B. Reeves is a chairman and founder of the Center for Assessment, an international organization dedicated to improving student achievement and educational equity. The center helps educators and school leaders to improve student achievement through practical and constructive approaches to standards, assessment, and accountability.

Dr. Reeves is a frequent keynote speaker in the United States and abroad for education, government, and business organizations and is a faculty member of leadership programs sponsored by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Dr. Reeves is also the author of more than 20 books and many articles.

Dr. Reeves work has appeared in numerous national journals, magazines, and newspapers. He has been selected twice for the Harvard Distinguished Authors Series and won the Parent's Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

Dr. Reeves has spent much of his time working in large-scale assessment and research and had devoted many years to classroom teaching with students ranging from elementary to doctoral candidates.

Chapter One: The Results Paradox

The Limits of Results

Dr. Reeves explains that *The Learning Leader* is not a “screed against testing or a suggestion that focusing on results is inappropriate” rather; the central thesis of the book is that results can be improved through applying a comprehensive framework such as Leadership for Learning (p.3).

The Leadership For Learning Framework

Achievement of Results	<p>Lucky High results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of success unlikely</p>	<p>Leading High results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely</p>
	<p>Losing Low results, low understanding of antecedents Replication of failure likely</p>	<p>Learning Low results, high understanding of antecedents Replication of success likely</p>
	Antecedent of Excellence	

Learning Quadrant: The Learner has not yet achieved desired results but possesses deep insights into the antecedents of excellence. This leader will look and dig deeply into the data, rather than blaming the students for expressing confusion like the “Loser”.

Leading Quadrant: The Leader enjoys the optimal combination of high results and deep understanding of the antecedents of excellence, yet is “perpetually seeking opportunities to improve” (p.8).

LESSONS FROM ENRON



Reeves uses the example of the failure of Enron, and asks the question; ‘How can such smart people do such dumb things?’ He says that this is the question that every leader in every area of public life has asked in the wake of scandal, failure and debacles in the 21st century.

Analytical intelligence, prized by business schools and policy-makers, created the illusion of invincibility (p.2). Superior analytical intelligence gave us the Enron scandal.

Reeves explains that some schools achieve high test scores with profound improvements in teaching and leadership practices, while others abuse the system.

Enron taught us, riches and notoriety come more quickly through manipulation than through innovation and hard work

Chapter Two: Challenging Leadership Myths: Hope for the Exhausted Leader

Reeves explains to readers of *The Learning Leader* that they are “exasperated with simple solutions” to effective leadership (p.9) and they are willing to accept a challenge but can not avoid the notion of ‘It’s really easy-just follow these steps...’ Leaders are vulnerable to such an enticement after a challenging day. Reeves reminds his readers that this can be hard, but rather than fix leaders who are broken, we must redefine the leadership challenge in a way that recognizes the complexities of leadership and leaders (p.11-12).

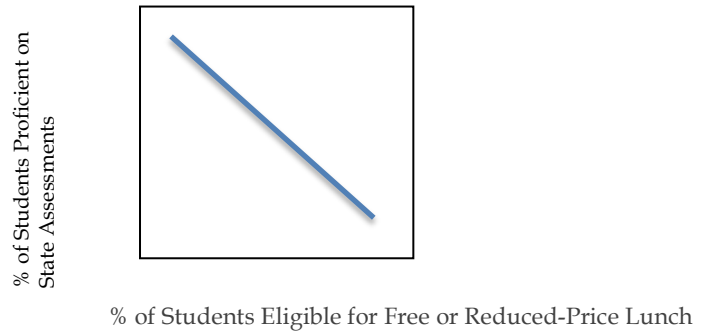
Analytical Models

Kati Haycock of *The Education Trust*, conclusively finds that although demographic variables influence student achievement, teacher quality trumps them all, and by a decisive margin. Her conclusion, in the academic article "Good Teaching Matters...A Lot", was that "we have chosen to focus... on what all of the students conclude is the most significant factor in student achievement: the teacher" (Haycock, 1998, p.3).

- First conclusion: teaching quality is an important influence in student performance, is encouraging, this is the variable that educational leaders and policymakers can influence
- Second conclusion: no matter how much we improve the quality of teachers, we allocate this precious resource in a perverse manner, giving the most effective teachers to economically advantaged students and denying those teachers to impoverished students

“The ‘one thing’ that leaders need to learn is that there is never ‘one thing’” (p.23) we cannot do it alone; leaders will magnify their own strengths and simultaneously create teams that do not mimic the leader but provide different and equally important strengths for the organization (p.23).

2.1- Poverty and Student Achievement



2.2- Poverty and Teacher Quality

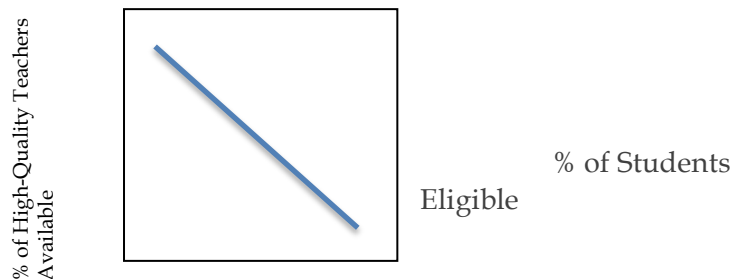


Chart 2.1 & 2.2: There are two exceptions to this rule: there are some systems where the relationship between student poverty (as measured by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch) and student achievement is negligible.

Schools and entire school system can close the achievement gap. The only question is whether the leaders and policymakers have the will to do so (p.20).

Analytical models can shed light on these matters, but accurate statistical analysis alone is insufficient for pursuing educational goals (p.21).

Chapter Three: Architectural Leadership: Why You Cannot Do It Alone

The Leadership Performance Matrix suggests that exceptional abilities in data analysis, staff motivation, and public communication are all essential for the effective leader.

The task of the leader:

- Is to create an organization that is exemplary in every dimension
- Not engage in behaviors suggesting that a single person bears the burden of exemplary performance in every area

Building on an existing strength in a diverse leadership team is superior to forever attempting to fix one's weaknesses.



THE LEADER AS THE ARCHITECT

Throughout history the "architect was clearly a visionary genius, but one conclusion is inescapable: *No architect every built a temple alone*

"Architectural definition of leadership":

- Helps us to understand that vision is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective leadership
- No single person can achieve the essential demands of leadership alone

"In schools led by architectural leaders, everything is connected"

p.30

Architectural Leaders in Education

"school leaders who know that it is essential to include bus drivers and cafeteria workers in professional development sessions on student discipline and motivation, because the school day for many students begins on the bus or at breakfast, not in the classroom" (p.29).

- Such leaders do not view educational accountability as something done 'to' teachers only in the grades and subjects that are required for standardized testing
- Architectural leaders know that every class is an opportunity for students to engage in creativity, literacy, project management, personal responsibility, teamwork, and a host of other skills that will contribute to their success (p.30)
- Every certified and noncertified staff member supports a common focus on improving teaching and learning



"Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvement" p.27

Chapter Four: The Dimensions of Leadership

The focus of this chapter is to explain the dimensions of leadership in a way that allows leaders to capitalize on their strengths and take a complementary approach to their weaknesses

A deficiency in one dimension of leadership is not necessarily a prescription for improving that apparent failing, but *rather a suggestion that the leadership team should be broadened to include complementary dimensions* (p.33)

THE SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Visionary Leadership	Articulating a compelling vision and linking clear standards of action that will accomplish the vision, visions are blueprints of the architect, "effective visions helps individuals understand that they are part of a larger world and also reassure them of their individual importance to the organization" (p.36).
Relational Leadership	Depends on the trust and integrity that are at the foundation of any enduring relationship, "effective relational leader: listening without interruption or prejudgment, respect for confidentiality, and genuine empathy achieved through deliberate inquiry" (p.41).
Systems Leadership	Must take the time to understand each interaction and its impact on the entire system, and then communicate this complexity in manner of the organization to understand and consistently use these important interconnections (p.45).
Reflective Leadership	Take time to think about the lessons learned, record small wins and setbacks, document conflicts between values and practice (p.50).
Collaborative Leadership	Decision making takes place in three levels in every organization Level 1: allows for individual discretion Level 2: decisions are made collaboratively Level 3: issues involving safety and values (p.52)
Analytical Leaders	The best analytical leaders are not the master of answers but rather persistent questioners, is the one who will challenge assertions about students demographics being the cause for student achievement
Communicative Leadership	"the power of personal communication, voice to voice, pen to paper, heart to heart, is undiminished by tech"

"Leaders need not, indeed they cannot, be every dimension themselves, but they can and must ensure that every leadership dimension is provided by some member of the leadership team" p.34

Chapter Five: What Matters Most: From Planning to Performance

The research in this chapter suggests that when it comes to planning documents, ugly beats pretty, provided that ugly is not a reflection of wanton messiness, but rather thoughtful consideration of the continuous updates and modifications that make planning documents correspond to reality (p.63).

“Improving the quality of planning, monitoring and implementation is strongly associated with improvements in student achievement”

p.69

THE PIM STUDY: PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND MONITORING

- Nevada’s Clark County School District (one of the largest schools systems in the U.S. and one of the fastest-growing school districts and changes every year in size and complexity) “Majority-minority” district, with a majority of its students who are members of ethnic minorities (schools that have some of the nation’s highest-performing students and schools in challenging urban settings that contain profoundly disadvantaged students)

***Key Question of the PIM Study: When the external variables (governance, budget...) are consistent when which variables are most related to improvements in student achievement and educational equity?**

Data Sources

School systems provided data on student achievement school demographics and copies of school plans

Validity

A “valid” plan that claims to improve achievement and equity would include actions that are related to increases in achievement and equity (p.67)

Correlations Analysis

- Correlations between high poverty and low achievement
- Equally strong correlation between high poverty and a high proportion of teachers who lack knowledge and skills to be effective in the classroom
- Strong association between effective teaching and a teacher’s strong content knowledge

Limitations of the Study

Results of standardized tests do not accurately reflect the achievement of students, words, not people (no opportunity to explain, missed some important insights, explanations, and elaborations)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

“in education, studies of schools with high poverty rates, high minority populations, high second-language learners, and high achievement levels have led to some important insights about specific leadership and teaching practices that mitigate the influence of demographic characteristics” (p.73)

the data presented make it clear that there is an association between student characteristics and student achievement

Two Key Conclusions:

- Relationship between demographic factors and the percentage of student who score proficient or higher is consistently negative for the entire district
- Researchers are frequently so intent on looking for relationships that we fail to recognize the important of the *absence* of a relationship

Chapter Six: Transforming Research into Action

TRENDS IN SCHOOLS WITH THE GREATEST GAINS IN ACHIEVEMENT & EQUITY



1. *They embrace holistic accountability*

- Leadership for Learning Framework suggested that accountability, as a mere litany of test scores is inherently insufficient. Great accountability systems include causes and effects, and holistic accountability precisely provides
- Accountability includes the actions of adults, not merely the scores of the students

2. *These schools included consistent nonfiction writing assessments in every subject*

- Evidence is clear: when students engage in nonfiction writing, student achievement improves, not only in language arts, but other subjects
- Effective on improving performance on tests
- When students write, they are engaged in thinking, reasoning and analysis
- They get effective feedback, high praise for their writing

3. *Frequent common assessments*

- Formative, improve teaching and learning, immediate feedback
- "integral parts of teaching, leadership, and learning cycle" (p.87)
- "Assessment informs teaching; leadership provides the time and resources for teachers to respond to assessment results; and the students use assessment feedback as a series of cues for improved performance" (p.87)

4. *Immediate and decisive intervention*

- Successful schools do not give a second thought to decisive and immediate interventions (ie. schedules, supervision, student assistance)
- Intervention: "When students are drowning, they do not need a lecture on the theory of aquatics-they need a life preserver" (p.89)

5. *Constructive use of data*

- Rather than being tools for ranking, sorting or humiliation, data displays in these schools are celebrations of teacher effectiveness
- Value the honesty and transparency of public display
- Evidence alone is not enough, we must confront the "knowing-doing gap" (p.90)

Focusing Change on What Matters Most

Once deciding to embark on organizational change, it should be focused on those areas that will have the greatest effect on student achievement.

The Leadership for Learning Framework allows systematic thinking about the ways that change will lead us towards a goal.

Effective leadership has a profound and direct impact on student achievement.

p.100

Chapter Seven: Leadership and Effective Feedback: The Dilemma's of Grading

WHAT DO GRADES MEAN?

THE MISSING INGREDIENT IN GRADING SYSTEMS: THE TRUTH

"This chapter will focus on an essential element of classroom practice student feedback that is accurate, rational, and effective"

Zeros

Using a grading scale where numbers 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0 correspond to grades of A, B, C, D and F, then what number is awarded to a student who fails to turn in an assignment? *No work, no credit?*

Argument: the failure to turn in work should receive a zero

7.5 A 4-Point Grading Scale

A= 4	
B= 3	
C= 2	ALL INTERVALS ARE THE SAME
D= 1	
F= 0	

7.6 The Impact of Zero on a 100-Point Scale

Notice the interval between scores:

A= 91+	
B= 81-90	
C= 71-80	ALL INTERVALS ARE THE SAME-
D= 61-70	10 POINTS
F= Zero?	

This 4-point scale is a rational system, as the increments between letter grades are proportional to the increments between numerical grades. The interval from one grade to the next is one point.

But the common use of the zero today is based not on a scale with a range for four points but on a 100-point scale

Two issues:

1. What is the appropriate consequence when students fail to complete an assignment? Most common answer=punishment. Few educators experimenting with the notion that the appropriate consequence for failing to complete an assignment is completing the assignment, lose of privileges? The price of freedom is proficiency, and students are motivated by the opportunity for greater freedom and discretion when work is completed correctly and on time
2. Even if we want to punish students who fail to complete our assignments, then what is the fair, appropriate and mathematically accurate punishment? On the four-point grading system, A's are no longer 100 points but 4 points, F is a zero, one point below a D, at least the zero on a 4-point scale is not the mathematical travesty that it is when we apply it to a 100-point system

Averages

Reeves explains that year-long averages in subjects do not show as the semester progress, students comfort level increases and does not show the "Oh- I get it!" stage that leads towards increase achievement at the end of the semester.

Should I evaluate their performance based on the average of "Now I get it", or should I evaluate students based on their proficiency at the end of the semester?

"When grading systems are mathematically flawed, unfair, and ineffective, then legitimate boundaries established by leaders have been violated (p.130).

Chapter Eight: Using Leadership Maps to Improve Your School

"Leadership mapping is a tool that will allow you to use research data and your own student accountability data in a constructive manner so that you can literally watch your map as it changes over time, create strategies to respond to the inferences from your map, and, most importantly, use those inferences from national research and your own data to implement effective change"

p. 133

Creating Your Leadership Map

- Contains a series of nodes: result plots on a coordinate grid

- **Vertical axis:** student achievement (values 0-100 range), percentage of students who are successful

"Definition of "success" can be adapted to meet the needs of your school" p.184

- Variety of sources measuring student achievement

- Find patterns of connectivity among nodes so great teaching/leadership practices can be linked systematically

- Recognize the "cancerous" nodes that link ineffective/destructive practices that results in poor results and toxic relationships

- **Horizontal axis:** effectiveness of a strategy that a school uses to meet a particular objective

Depends upon the use of research-based strategies and upon research that shows a correlation between particular teaching and leadership actions and student achievement

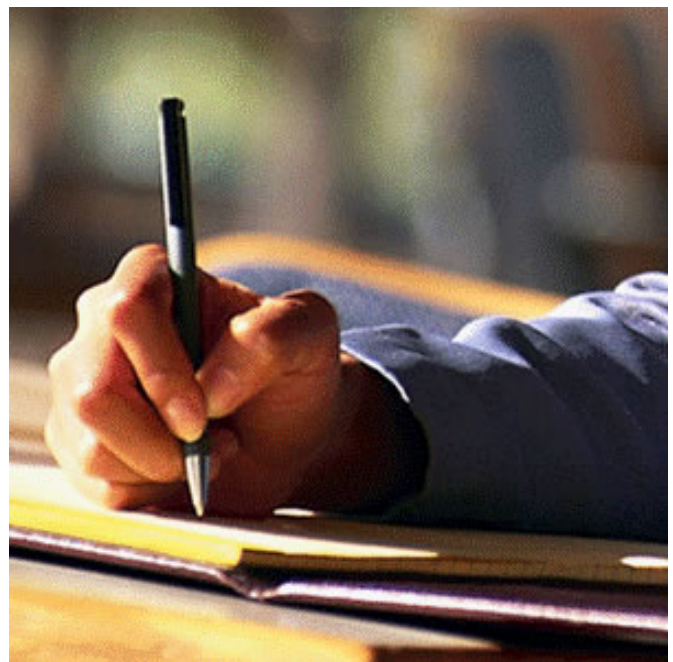
- **Rest of map:** entering nodes that correspond to the existing leadership strategies and actual student achievement results

8.2 Leadership Map Charting the Effectiveness of Non-Fiction Writing

Achievement Results

Lucky	Leading
Losing	Learning

Effectiveness of Teaching and Leadership Strategies



INTERPRETING YOUR LEADERSHIP MAP

Lucky Leader:

- Enjoys solid student achievement

Losing Leader:

- Leads a school in the worse way possible, poor results and awful leadership/teaching practices
- Does not inspire colleagues, but alienates with terrible leadership/teaching practices, infects students with disengagement, and failure

Leading Schools:

- Learned that morale is highest for students and teachers when there are clear rewards for real success and the long hours and exceptional effort that they have invested as learners

Learning Leader:

- Prime candidate for frustration
- Effective leadership and teaching practices are starting but have yet to bear fruit
- Often resistance from staff and sometimes lack of will to persist in new initiatives by the teacher
- Most frequent question in learning schools: "we're doing all the right things- so when will we see some results?"

Leadership Map Patterns

Continuum:

- Nodes form a link between two quadrants
- Common in schools that are undergoing focused improvement efforts while they have different measurements of student achievement

Victim Continuum:

- Schools located in the suburbs, top-performers, admission to Ivy League schools and regularly appear in newspapers
- Often escape the worst consequences of external testing requirements
- Heavy on blame and light on personal responsibility

Challenge Continuum:

- Path that almost every turnaround school must travel, they learn that there are no silver bullets or any immediate fixes in school reform

Scattered/Distributed Pattern:

- Nodes are scattered all over the map
- Achievement is high and low; leadership and teaching effectiveness are at times outstanding, negligent, and counterproductive
- "Islands of excellence": random acts of leadership, randomly distributed, little systematic inference

Applying Your Leadership Map for Organizational Change

Applications: accompanied by personal reflection, leadership support and professional coaching

KEY QUESTIONS:

***Key Questions represent the starting points for leaders as they take their Leadership Map from interpretation to application:

1. What are the sources of our leadership and teaching practices?
2. What are we gaining from our present decision-making framework?
3. What is our three-to five-year trend?
4. Where are the missing data?
5. What information about student achievement, teaching practices, and leadership behaviour must be expressed in qualitative terms?

These questions reach deep into the heart of every professional learning community and the answers are not always comforting

p.157



“Leadership Map is a powerful tool for analyzing leadership practices and applying the Leadership for Learning Framework”

p.158

Chapter Nine: Putting It All Together: The Essential Transformations of the Learning Leader

In this final chapter, Reeves synthesizes the ideas and research of this entire volume into five core ideas; the crystallization of the main points of this book- the essential transformations of leadership for learning

FROM ISLANDS ON EXCELLENCE TO SYSTEMATIC IMPACT

Double-edged sword: while it is imperative that leaders find, document and recognize these islands, the leaders forming the islands of excellence into systematic impact

Transformation will happen only when we become dissatisfied with islands of excellence as the start and end of school reform. p.159

The transformation from islands of excellence to systematic impact requires that we must revisit the Leadership for Learning Framework, and narrowly focus on the energy and time of the leader

The complexity of the framework (covered in nodes and disjointed islands) can seem overwhelming

How can we make order out of chaos? By reconceptualising the Leadership Map from a series of nodes to a small number of hubs



“Leadership is about change- how to justify it, implement it, and maintain it”



FROM NODES TO HUBS

There are some isolated areas of high achievement; these areas are sometimes associated with good practice, equally likely to be associated with ineffective actions of leaders and teachers

Some effective actions appear to yield poor results

By shifting their attention from nodes to hubs, leaders can sharpen their focus on what matters most

The leader must identify and focus on hubs, both those that hold the key for great improvement in the future and those that are emerging networks of negativity

Effective leaders reject the chaos hypothesis, knowing that effective and ineffective practices are the result not of random chance but of deliberate choices

“Leaders make connections, knowing that the absence of connections will allow chaos to persist and prevent effective practices from being connected throughout the system” p.167

9.1- Scattered Pattern: Islands of Excellence

Achievement of Results	

Antecedent of Excellence: Effectiveness of Teaching and Learning Strategies

Hubs= connecting the nodes

FROM FRANTIC TO FOCUSED

When leaders shift their focus from large numbers of random practices with random effects to a small number of intersections of many nodes-hubs-they nurture, support, and recognize the most effective hubs, and break the toxic connections stemming from the most poisonous hubs.

Focused leaders engage in daily disciplines that maximize their energy, bringing the highest level of concentrated effort on the challenges that are most important (p.167).

Focused leaders allocate their time as if it were a set of precious jewels

Effective time management disciplines include these practices:

- **Avoid lines**
- **Excuse yourself from pointless meetings**
- **Be focused**

The Learning Leader

“Educators and leaders who read and implement the strategies outlined in *The Learning Leader* are making a commitment to a journey” p.178

The strategies in *The Learning Leader* offer a set of mileposts. The journey from islands of excellence to systematic impact will require intellectual engagement and profound commitment.

"Many people live their lives aspiring to make a difference and to live a life that matters. There need to be no such uncertainty in the life of an educator or school leader. Every decision we make, from daily interactions with students to the most consequential policies at every level of government, will influence leadership and learning. After all these words, statistical analysis, and graphs, the proceeding pages all come down to this: What we do matters" p.180

