Trust …Coaching …Teaming

I have been promoting the phrase for some time now that "**Teaching is a Team Sport and a Public Act.**" I've suggested that teams require trust and that being public with our work and our results is necessary to building that trust.

In a recent article, "Build trust for professional learning", from Learningforward, we are reminded that trust is cyclical:

"*The work of collaborative learning naturally provides colleagues opportunities to learn more about each other, share experiences, demonstrate competence, and strengthen relationships, the very behaviors that both require and build trust. As trust grows, it fosters deeper learning, and that deeper learning then builds more trust, reinforcing a cyclical process that sustains a healthy environment for continuous growth.*"

In a short video clip, Amy Edmondson, professor at Harvard Business School, describes teaming today as a verb, a skill set, and an activity. When asked, "How do you quickly build trust?" she responds:

" Self-disclosure, inquiry, the more I ask, the more genuine curiosity I have about you and the more questions I ask of you, the more you will trust me and the more I'll learn about you, which will also help me trust you. So, it's a kind of positive feedback loop and it starts with curiosity, inquiry and disclosure."

Edmondson suggest that we need to do team building in the context of work itself. Working on the task and building the team as we go, also building teaming skills as we go.

I have promoted for many years that peer coaching was a great strategy for teambuilding within a school. In pre and post conferences teachers have the opportunity to learn more about

each other. I am often amazed that in a peer coaching workshop with a school staff, when I match folks up for the first practice with pre-conferencing, inevitably the first comments in the debrief are things they didn't know about each other.

I use the word curious to describe what will set new coaches onto an initial effective conversation with a teacher. Seek to find out "who the teacher is'. Seek to see the classroom through her eyes. Have a natural curiosity about the teaching learning process. Being heard is a natural first step toward feeling trust and responding with greater disclosure, thus increasing trust.

When debriefing those first pre-conference practices, I've had a teacher share,"I think someone just listened to me talk about my lesson for 7 minutes. I don't believe that's ever happened before."

The Learningforward article cited above states that building trust is everyone's responsibility:

Trust is not the responsibility of just those in power. It exists – or doesn't – at individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, trust is interpersonal, such as between teachers and parents, mentors and new teachers, and among teams. Individuals remain benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent in their interactions and communications with each other.

I recently had the opportunity to witness a great trust building moment with a school leadership team. The team was designing a process for grade level PLC's to examine current student data in vertical grade level teams in order to set learning goals for the next year. One of the team leaders volunteered to have his class results used for the designing process. A high performing student's math results stood out as the student began the year at a high level and made extra ordinary progress. (In many cases high performing students

tend to show a leveling off). When the team asked the teacher about it, he said that he knew the student was coming and over the summer had found a great online program for the student and thus differentiated his math experience.

When the teacher posted his reading data that same student showed beginning at a high level and not making much growth. Before being asked the teacher said, ”…and I didn’t provide in reading what I did in math…. and look at the result.” I wanted to breakout with applause. That teacher is a leader…showing his own vulnerability increased trust and set the stage for many others to risk and learn and for students to reap the benefits.