

DES ENGLISH MEMORIAL LECTURE-

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Carrying the Legacy Forward:

Leadership, Belonging and
the Power of Collective Practice

"Leadership is not
about position,
it is about purpose,
people and impact."

Robyn S Sharma

RESPECT
RELATIONSHIPS
TRUST
EQUITY
HIGH EXPECTATIONS
EVERY LEARNER

LEADERSHIP
BELONGING
COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

HONOURING THE PAST . EMBRACING THE PRESENT . SHAPING THE FUTURE

WHO WAS DES ENGLISH AND WHY HE MATTERS

Leadership in Special Education

Des English demonstrated exceptional leadership, becoming principal of special schools and shaping education policies.

Advocacy and Professional Networks

He founded teacher-led organisations emphasising shared learning and collective voice in special education.

Champion of Inclusion and Dignity

Des advocated for students with disabilities, promoting inclusion and respect in education.

Legacy of Service and Equity

His legacy highlights leadership as service, courage, and commitment to equity and dignity for all.

WHY DES ENGLISH'S LEGACY STILL MATTERS TODAY

Enduring Educational Challenges

Core challenges in education, like inclusion and diverse learner needs, remain critical despite evolving policies.

Professional Community Importance

Des English emphasised shared learning among educators as key to sustainable educational improvements.

Teacher Voice and Empowerment

He advocated for recognising teachers' expertise as vital for creating practical, effective educational solutions.

Ongoing Inclusion Efforts

Inclusion in current education landscape, requiring commitment to equity, dignity, and quality teaching for all students.





PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY



MY PROFESSIONAL STORY AND PURPOSE

Commitment to Inclusive Education

A lifelong dedication to improving outcomes for students with disabilities through inclusive teaching and leadership.

Leadership and Capacity Building

Focus on empowering others through high-trust leadership and collaborative professional learning.

Professional Influence and Legacy

Professional growth inspired by trust, credibility, and the legacy of educational pioneers.

LEADERSHIP PATHWAY AND EVOLVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership Role Progression

Leadership evolved from classroom teaching to system-level roles, expanding impact from students to whole-school outcomes.

Diverse Leadership Responsibilities

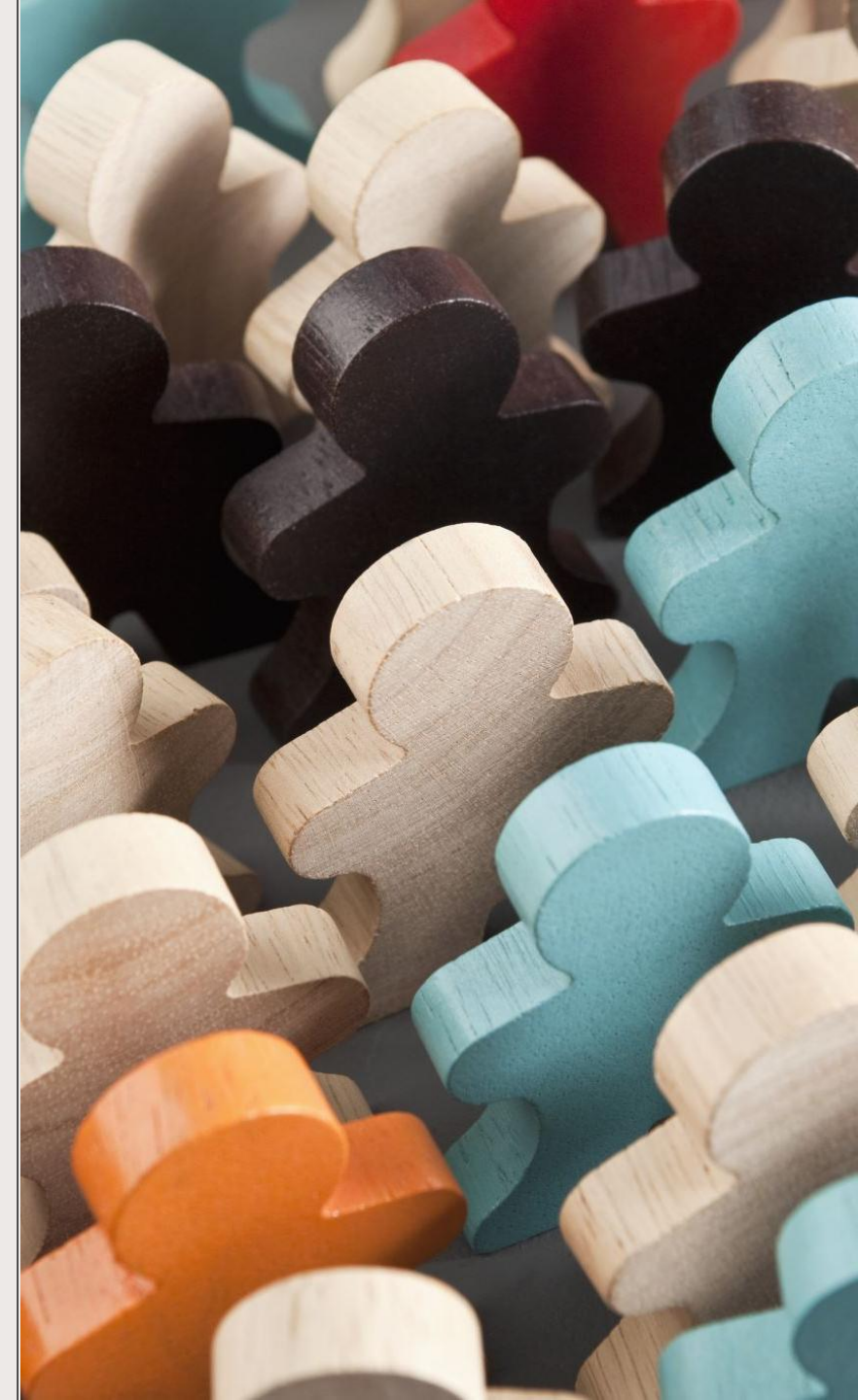
Roles involved instructional leadership, staff development, strategic planning, operational management, and community engagement.

Essential Leadership Qualities

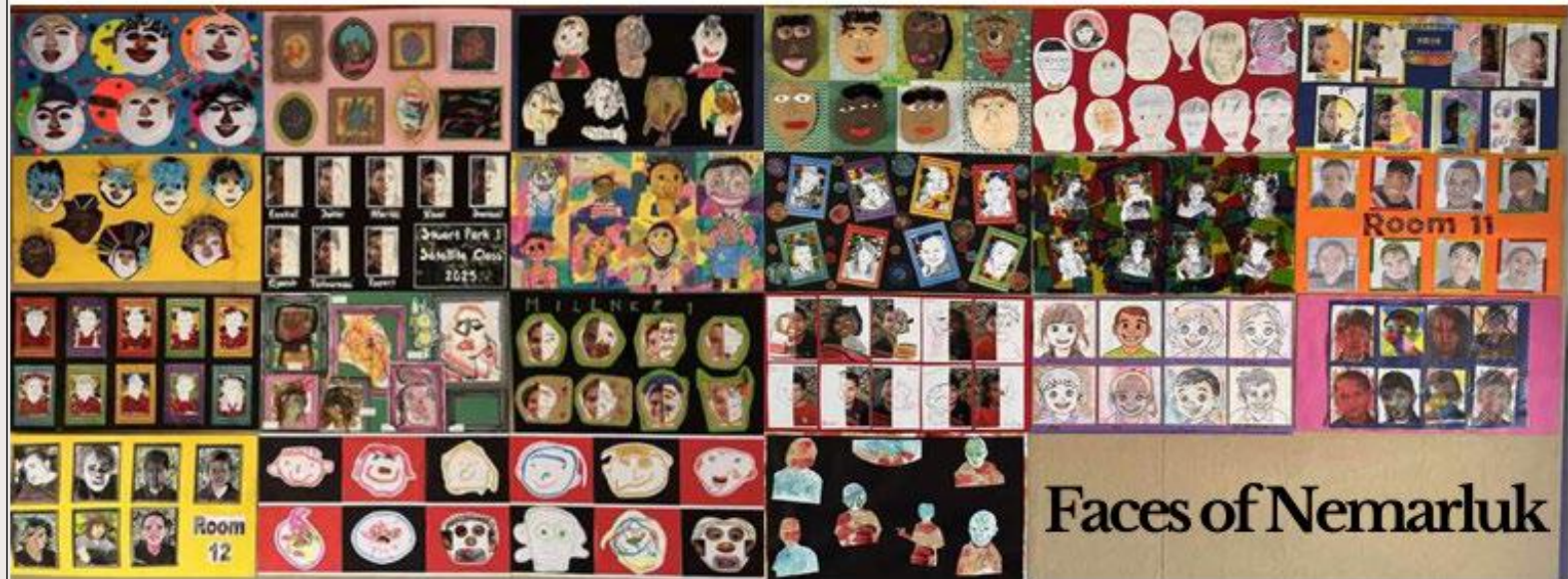
Effective leadership requires adaptability, humility, ethical decision-making, evidence-informed practice, and transparent communication.

Connection to Teaching and Service

Leadership remains connected to teaching practice and focuses on service, empathy, and improving outcomes for learners and staff.



LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE



BUILDING HIGH-TRUST TEAMS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Foundation of Trust

Trust fosters honest dialogue, encourages risk-taking, and supports continuous staff improvement without fear.

Coaching and Mentoring

Structured support like coaching, mentoring, and feedback nurtures growth for both new and experienced teachers.

Consistency and Clear Expectations

Shared teaching, behaviour, and communication standards reduce uncertainty and build collective efficacy.

Inclusive Partnerships

Trust extends to support staff, families, and professionals, forming strong collaborative relationships for student success.



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

Visible Instructional Leadership

Maintaining a visible presence in classrooms fosters professional dialogue and supports teacher development.

Data-Driven Decision Making

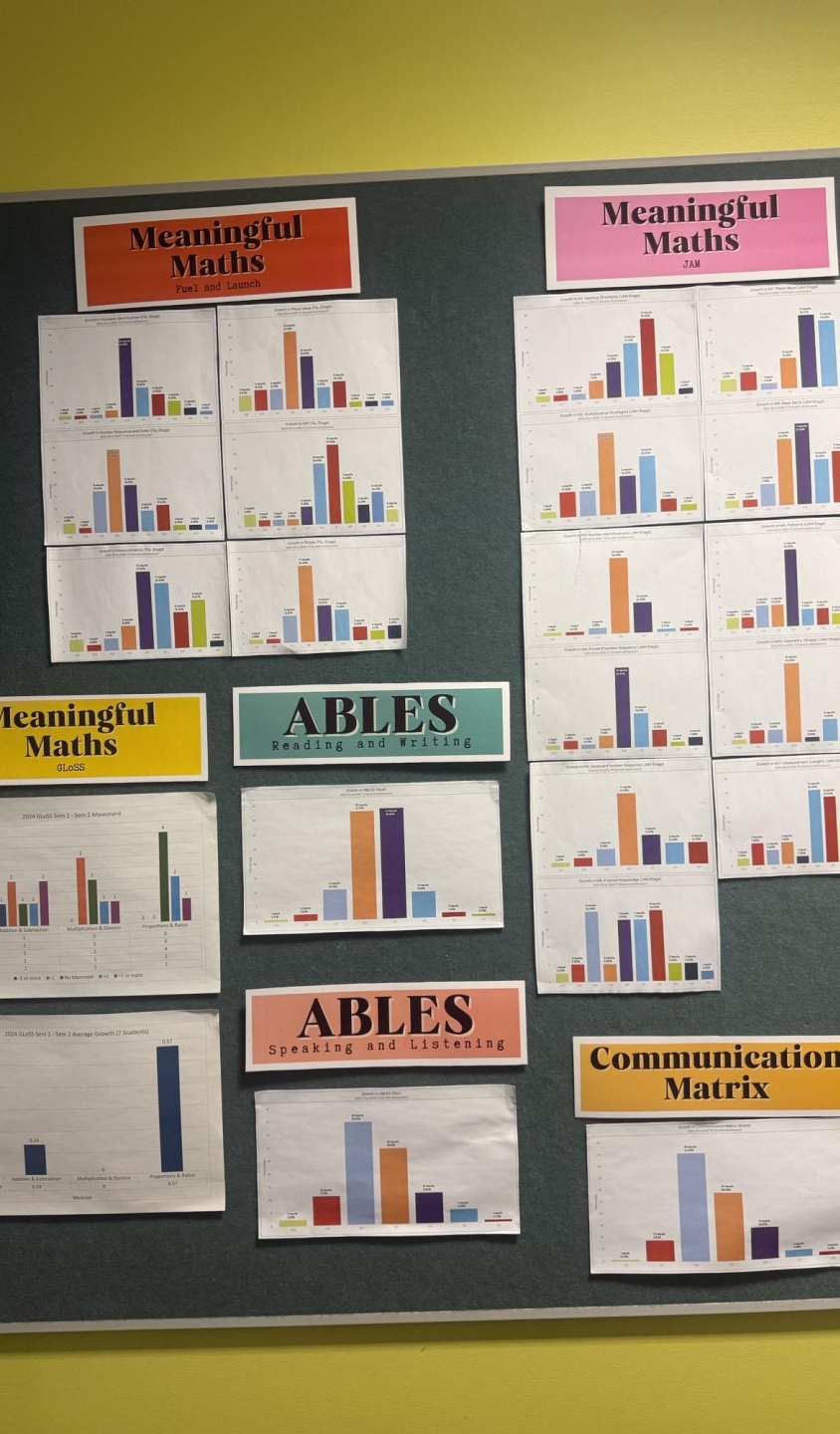
Using tools like Communication Matrix and ABLES helps track student progress and guide targeted interventions.

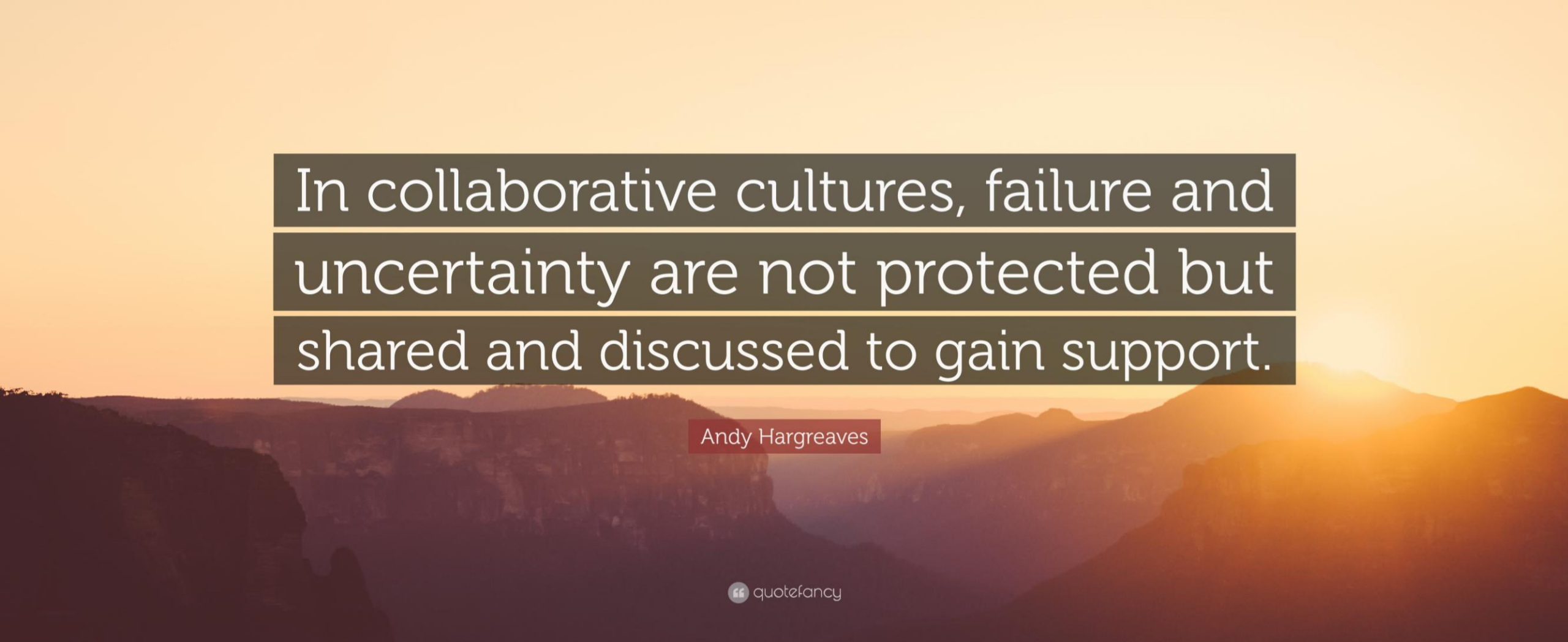
Collaborative Curriculum Alignment

Supporting teachers to align curriculum, assessment, and reporting with individual education plans and priorities.

Empowering Teacher Autonomy

Building teacher confidence to make informed decisions fosters sustainable improvement and professional growth.





In collaborative cultures, failure and uncertainty are not protected but shared and discussed to gain support.

Andy Hargreaves

quote fancy

INQUIRY, COLLABORATION, AND SYSTEM IMPACT

Using Inquiry to Drive School Improvement, Leading Beyond the School: System and Network Collaboration

USING INQUIRY TO DRIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Structured Inquiry Framework

Spirals of Inquiry offers a flexible method for identifying learner needs and testing evidence-based strategies.

Professional Collaboration

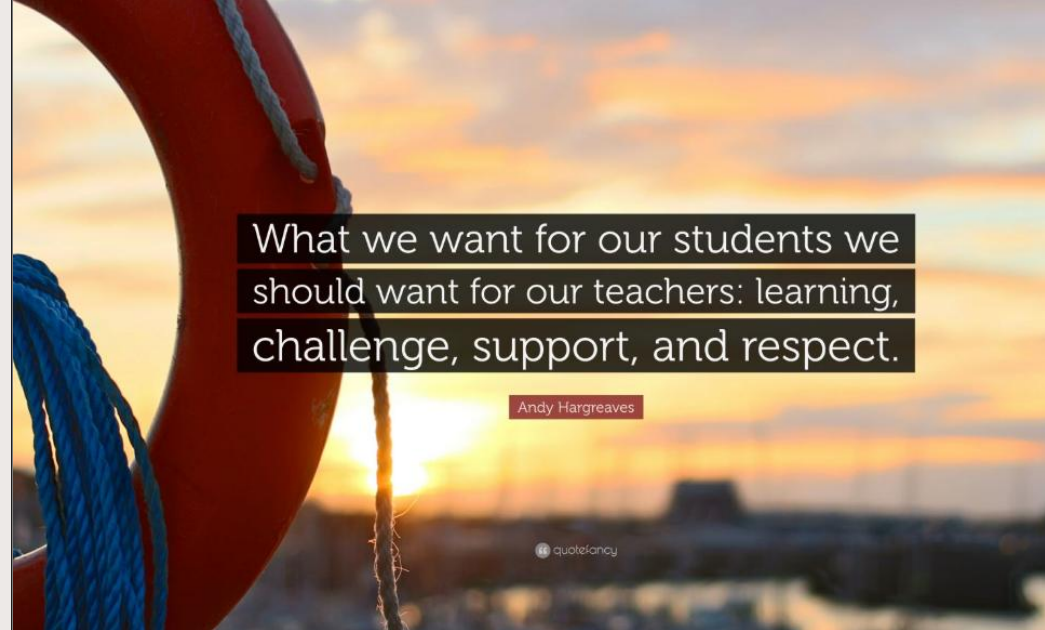
Inquiry fosters deep conversations and shared ownership of outcomes among educators, enhancing alignment and confidence.

Embedding Inquiry in Practice

Integrating inquiry into regular meetings and planning ensures continuous improvement without overburdening staff.

Inquiry as a Mindset

Inquiry nurtures a culture of reflection, collaboration, and lifelong learning in inclusive educational environments.

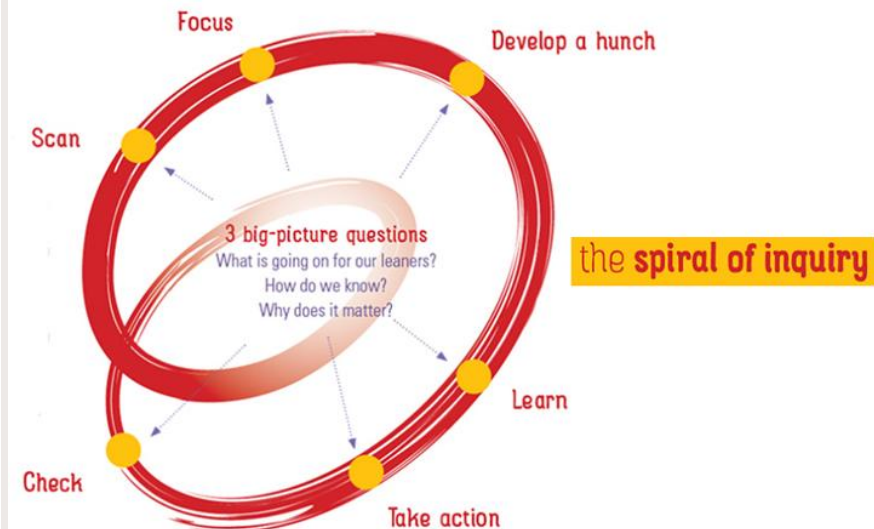


Big ideas for learning and leadership

OECD seven principles of learning

- Put learners at the centre
- Emphasize the social nature of learning
- Understand that emotions are central to learning
- Recognize individual differences
- Stretch all learners
- Use assessment for learning
- Build horizontal connections

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation



LEADING BEYOND THE SCHOOL: SYSTEM AND NETWORK COLLABORATION

Cross-School Collaboration

Working across multiple schools fosters shared expertise and builds collective capacity to address common challenges effectively.



System-Level Leadership

System leadership ensures coherence between policy, professional learning, and classroom practices through strong communication and engagement.



Advocacy and Networks

Collaboration with professional associations strengthens advocacy and keeps practitioner voices central to decision-making processes.



Inclusive Education Vision

Sustaining inclusive education requires partnerships, open learning, and collective advocacy for equitable education systems.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CONTINUING THE LEGACY

Importance of Culture

Inclusive outcomes are shaped by daily interactions, expectations, and relationships within schools.

Clarity Drives Consistency

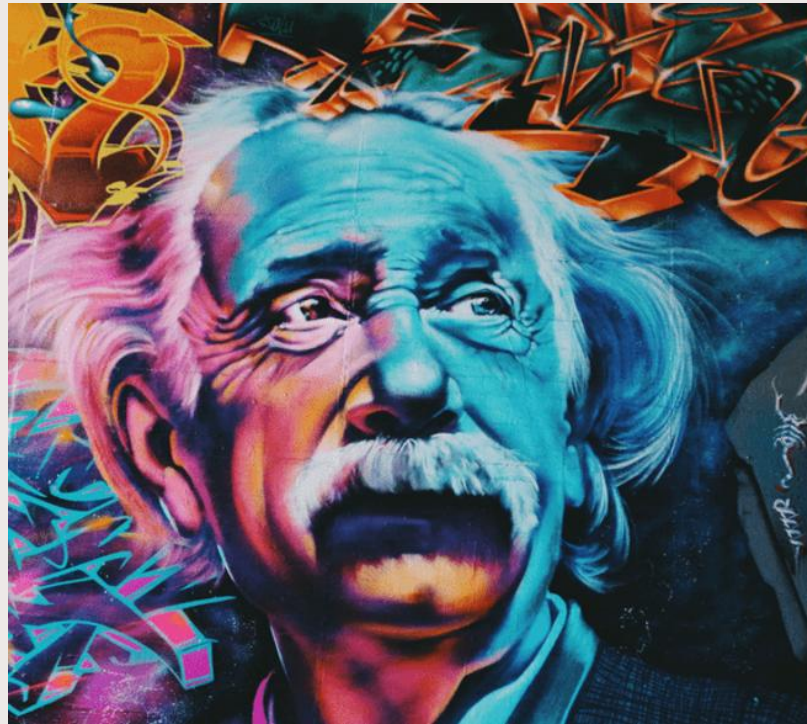
Clear purpose, shared language, and aligned practices reduce variability and support equity.

Relationships Underpin Success

Trust, respect, and empathy enable honest conversations and sustained improvements in education.

Leadership as Moral Endeavour

Leadership decisions must reflect dignity, equity, and high expectations for all learners.



"I have no special talents, I am only passionately curious."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Reflection *and* call to action

A woman with long dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a grey sweater and dark pants, sits on a stone wall. She is looking out over a vast landscape at sunset. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds. In the distance, there is a lake and mountains. A wooden signpost with an arrow pointing left is visible on the right side of the image. The overall mood is contemplative and inspiring.

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