

An aligned model for continuous development of teachers and school leaders



LOES VAN WESSUM, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION, WINDESHEIM,
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES, ALMERE,
THE NETHERLANDS

THE LEARNING TURBINE

Three schoolboards of primary education in a new town in the Netherlands were confronted with disappointing student results over a longer period of time. They joined forces and asked the local government and an associative professor at a university of applied sciences (the author of this article) for help. These five parties came to the understanding that in order to enhance student results they needed to empower schools. They wished to focus on the continuous professional development of both teachers and school leaders. They were seeking a coherent or aligned way to activate this.

How could they work on developing the correct efforts on each organizational level (the classroom, the school and the organization as a whole)? By what means could they enhance capacity development on all levels and allow these levels to interact and contribute to mutual development? The answers to these questions resulted in a model, which was named The Learning Turbine.

In this article the author presents The Learning Turbine and some of the lessons learned whilst working with The Learning Turbine in nine schools.

THE LEARNING TURBINE

THE LEARNING TURBINE

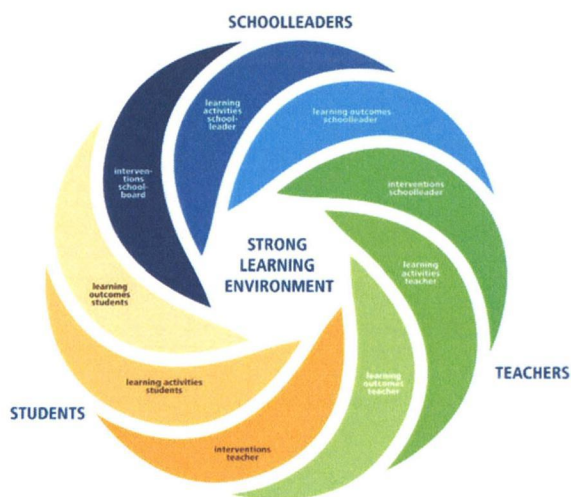


Figure 1. The Learning Turbine¹.

Everything teachers do should contribute to the learning processes of every student. Teachers can have an enormous impact on the education of their students². They can enhance their impact by taking a closer look at student learning processes and their own pedagogical didactical interventions (the orange slice in The Learning Turbine) using different forms of data (for example observations, talking with students, asking students for feedback and test results³). Which learning activities (the middle yellow slice in The Learning Turbine)

1 Translated from Van Wessum, L., & Verheggen, I. (2018). *Leidinggeven aan een lerende school. Welke vragen heb je vandaag gesteld?* Van Gompel & Svacina. We are planning on making an English version of this book (*Learning to lead an learning school. Which questions did you ask today?* Van Gompel & Svacina

2 Hattie, J. (2003). *Teachers make a difference: what is the research evidence?* Australian Council for Educational Research (pp. 1-17). Auckland: University of Auckland

3 Wiliam, D. (2011). *Embedded Formative Assessment*. Solution Tree Press

THE LEARNING TURBINE



can students undertake in order to achieve the learning outcomes (the brightest yellow slice)? Teachers need to work with a mindset on assessment for learning instead of learning for assessment. *Teachers can learn from studying their students learner processes.* This mindset of seeing students learning outcomes as feedback for teachers is one of the elements of the innovative approach of our project.

It is important that teachers feel that they can make a difference and formulate what goals or learning outcomes they would like to accomplish with their students. What kind of learning outcomes (for example: (meta-)cognitively, emotionally and socially) do they feel are necessary for their students to accomplish (the brightest yellow slice in The Learning Turbine)? What sort of learning environment can help achieve this (the heart of The Learning Turbine)? In which way can they collaboratively work on achieving this?

THE LEARNING TURBINE

Being a teacher requires continuous professional development in order to respond accordingly to their students' learning needs. They are able to learn much from studying their student learning processes in and with collaboration with their colleagues⁴. School leaders are the second most important factor contributing to students' outcomes⁵. As The Learning Turbine demonstrates, their impact on students' outcomes is indirect, via the learning of teachers. The school leader has a significant role in facilitating and stimulating teachers' continuous professional development. School leaders can regard themselves as teachers for teachers. In The Learning Turbine this is reflected by using the same slices for teachers' learning as for students' learning. *School leaders can learn from studying their teachers' learner processes.* This mindset of seeing teachers' learning outcomes as feedback for school leaders is another element of the innovative approach of our project.

Teachers can learn by undertaking diverse forms of learning activities, contributing to their learning outcomes (the middle green slice in The Learning Turbine), like their pedagogical repertoire (the brightest green slice) and their professional identity. Professional development is complex, it is not only about changing behavior, it also concerns changing attitudes, norms, values and beliefs and practical wisdom or personal knowledge and the interaction between all these facets.

4 Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017) Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 61, 47-59.

5 Leithwood, K., Harris, A., Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management* 28(1) 27-42.

THE LEARNING TURBINE

School leaders can offer teachers the opportunity to participate in different learning activities⁶, such as:

- Keeping up to date: Browsing Internet and social media, reading the professional literature of visiting conferences
- Learning by doing, through experience
- Experimenting
- Reflection
- Collaboration with colleagues

School leaders can undertake different forms of leadership practices (the darkest green slice) enhancing teachers' learning processes. These can be instructional (for example observe classroom instruction and provide constructive feedback to teachers; collaborate with staff

6 Kyndt, E., Gijbels, D., Grosemans, I., & Donche, V. (2016). Teachers' Everyday Professional Development: Mapping Informal Learning Activities, Antecedents, and Learning Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research* December 2016, 86(4), 1111–1150.

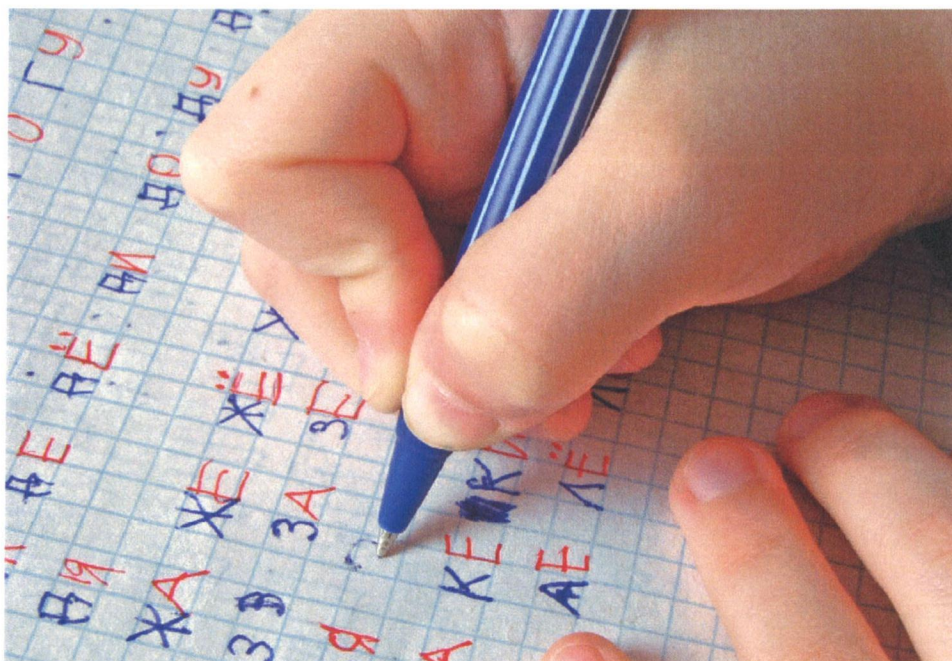


during the process of data interpretation) or transformative leadership practices (for example, developing a shared vision, and distribute leadership on selected tasks). They can develop a rich learning environment for teachers (for example, provide regular opportunities and structures that support teachers in working together on instructional improvement, and establish a system for monitoring their collaborative work) ⁷.

We do not know much about the contribution of schoolboards to student's learning⁸. Following my path of reasoning I assume schoolboards to have a more indirect impact on students' learning, via the learning of school leaders and working on the development of a powerful learning environment for all. The impact of schoolboards on students' learning resembles the impact of school leaders. Board members can walk the same path as school leaders do regarding teachers professional development by facilitating and stimulating the learning of school leaders. *Board members can learn from studying their school leaders' learning processes*. This mindset of seeing school leaders learning outcomes as feedback for board members is another element of the innovative approach of our project. The project aims to contribute developing different mindsets of professionals in all levels of the school. This is an innovative way of looking at professional development programs, especially because its focused on working on different mindsets and enhancing skills and knowledge from an aligned perspective. The professional development program approach is also innovative because it is focused on working on real live problems in authentic contexts for both school leaders and board-members.

7 Leithwood, K. (2012). *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012. With a Discussion of the Research Foundations*. Ontario: Institute for Education Leadership.

8 Honingh, M., Ruiter, M. & Van Thiel, S. (2018): Are school boards and educational quality related? Results of an international literature review, *Educational Review*



LESSONS LEARNED

After a two year period of developing data based decision making and developing an inquisitive school culture , I conducted reflective interviews with participants of each of the nine schools, the school leader and their partner in crime, the internal advisor⁹, a member of the school board responsible for advising schools with qualitative issues and the head of the board. Analysis of these interviews resulted in several lessons learned, I will present some of them¹⁰:

9 In the Netherlands schools of primary Education the internal advisor is there to help teachers with educational topics.

10 Also see: Eliahoo, R. Giglio, M., &Van Wessum, L. (2018). Methods and Tools to Improve Collaborative Lifelong Learning. *UAS Journal – Journal of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Special Issue: EAPRIL 2018*

THE LEARNING TURBINE

- School leaders and internal advisors were confronted with the fact that they were not aware of teachers' professional development needs
- School leaders and internal advisors developed educational leadership practices such as visiting classrooms and giving constructive and appreciative feedback to the teachers
- School leaders and internal advisors concluded that they had to develop their subject knowledge in order to give appropriate feedback to teachers
- Board members concluded that they lacked having insights in schools' development as powerful learning environments for teachers
- Board members concluded that they could focus more on facilitating and stimulating school leaders' professional development and being more aware of school leaders' professional development needs.
- All members concluded that they need to align their activities and begin to collaborate more closely in order to learn from and with each other and get the job done together.

CONCLUSIVE REMARK

If all professionals in schools learn and contribute to their mutual continuous professional development and the organizational development focusing on the impact on student learning, no learner will be left behind.