Transforming School Culture
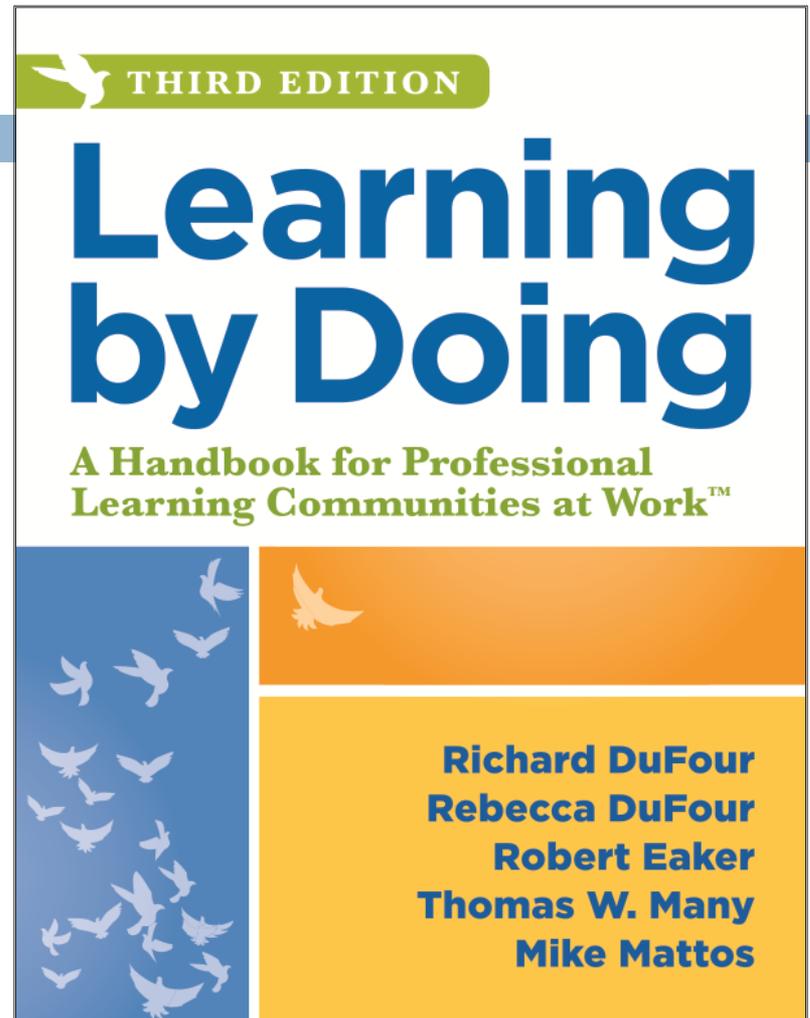## How to Overcome Staff Division (2nd Edition Update)
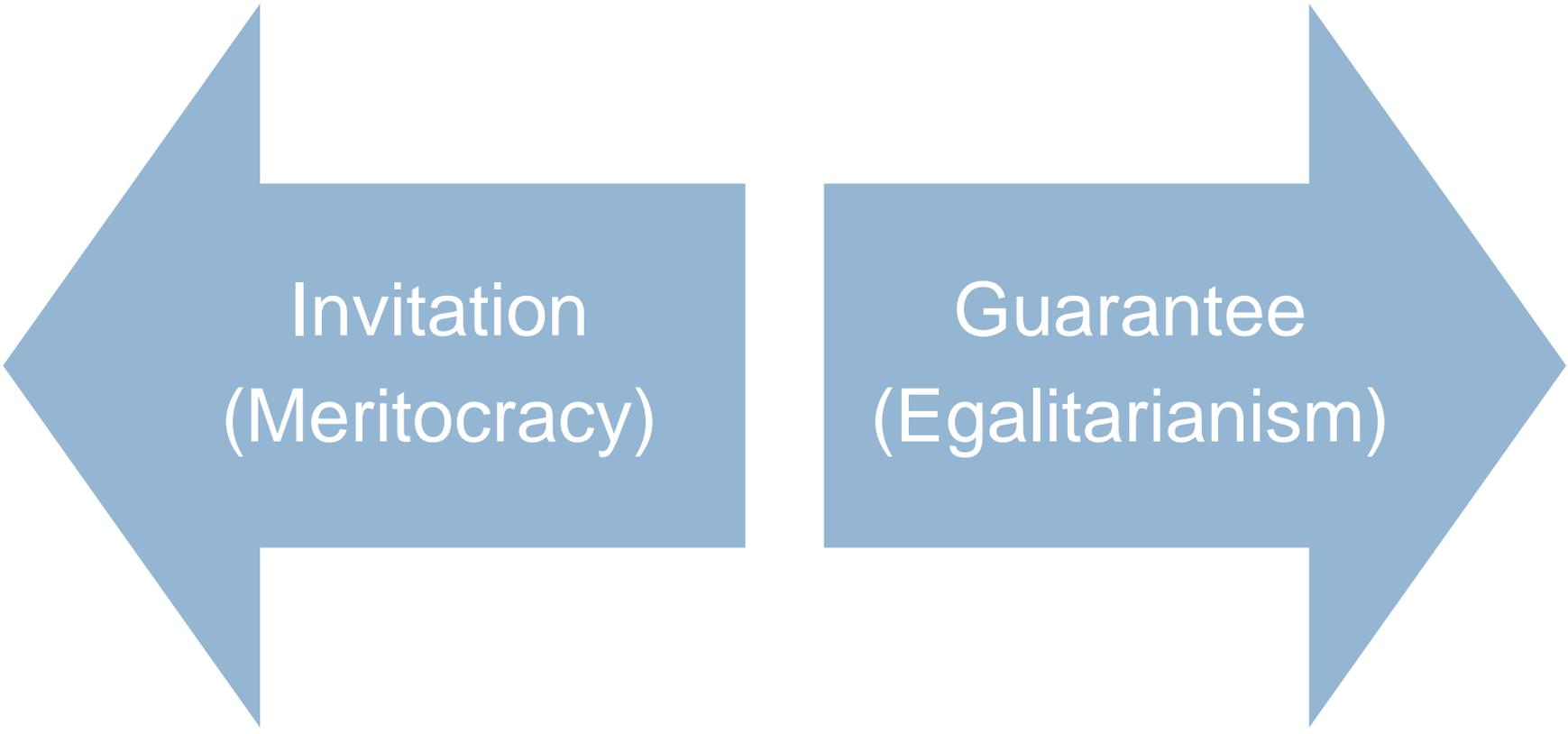
Anthony Muhammad, PhD

Call to Arms

"When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for ALL students

as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it."

—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many & Mattos, *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (2016), pg. 11

THIRD EDITION

Learning by Doing

A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work™

Richard DuFour
Rebecca DuFour
Robert Eaker
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Mike Mattos

A Major Shift in Paradigm

Invitation
(Meritocracy)

Guarantee
(Egalitarianism)

Two Forms of Change

- Technical

- Cultural

Healthy School Culture

"Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways.

"Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student."

—Kent D. Peterson in Cromwell, "Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive?" *Education World* (2002)

Toxic School Culture

"Educators believe that student success is based on students' level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways.

"Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement."

—Kent D. Peterson in Cromwell, "Is Your School Culture Toxic or Positive?" *Education World* (2002)

The Real Difference

| Healthy	Toxic
□ Reflective	□ Descriptive
□ Prescriptive	□ Deflective

Real Objective

School culture is about creating an environment that improves ***productivity***!

Theoretical Framework

"Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study."

Abend, Gabriel. "The Meaning of Theory." *Sociological Theory* 26 (June 2008): 173–199; Swanson, Richard A. *Theory Building in Applied Disciplines*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers 2013.
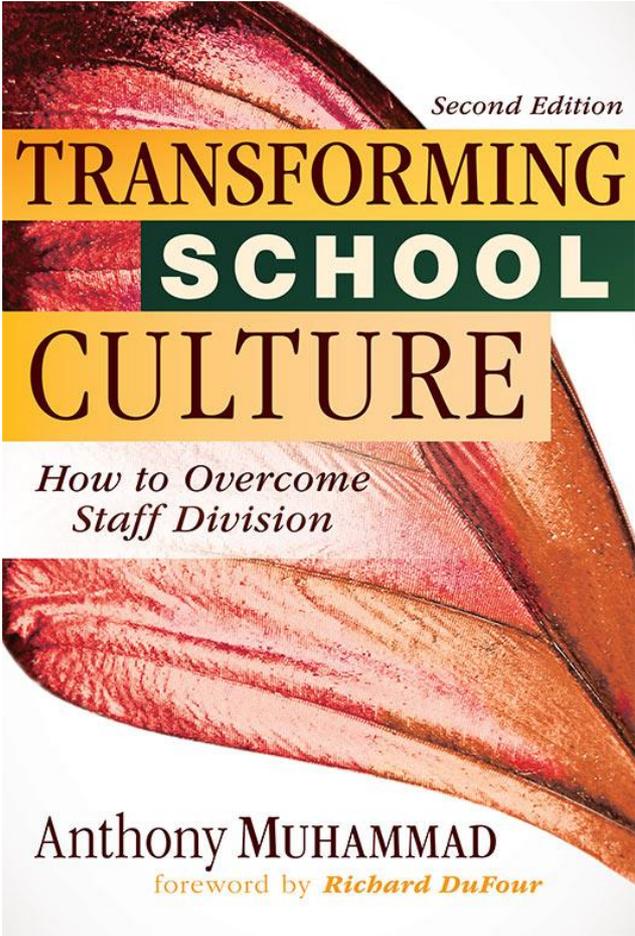
Adult Drama

Dysfunctional social interactions between adult professionals within a school environment that interfere with the proper implementation of important policies, practices, and procedures that support the proper education of students.

The Quandary

Tweeners

Fundamentalists

Believers

Survivors
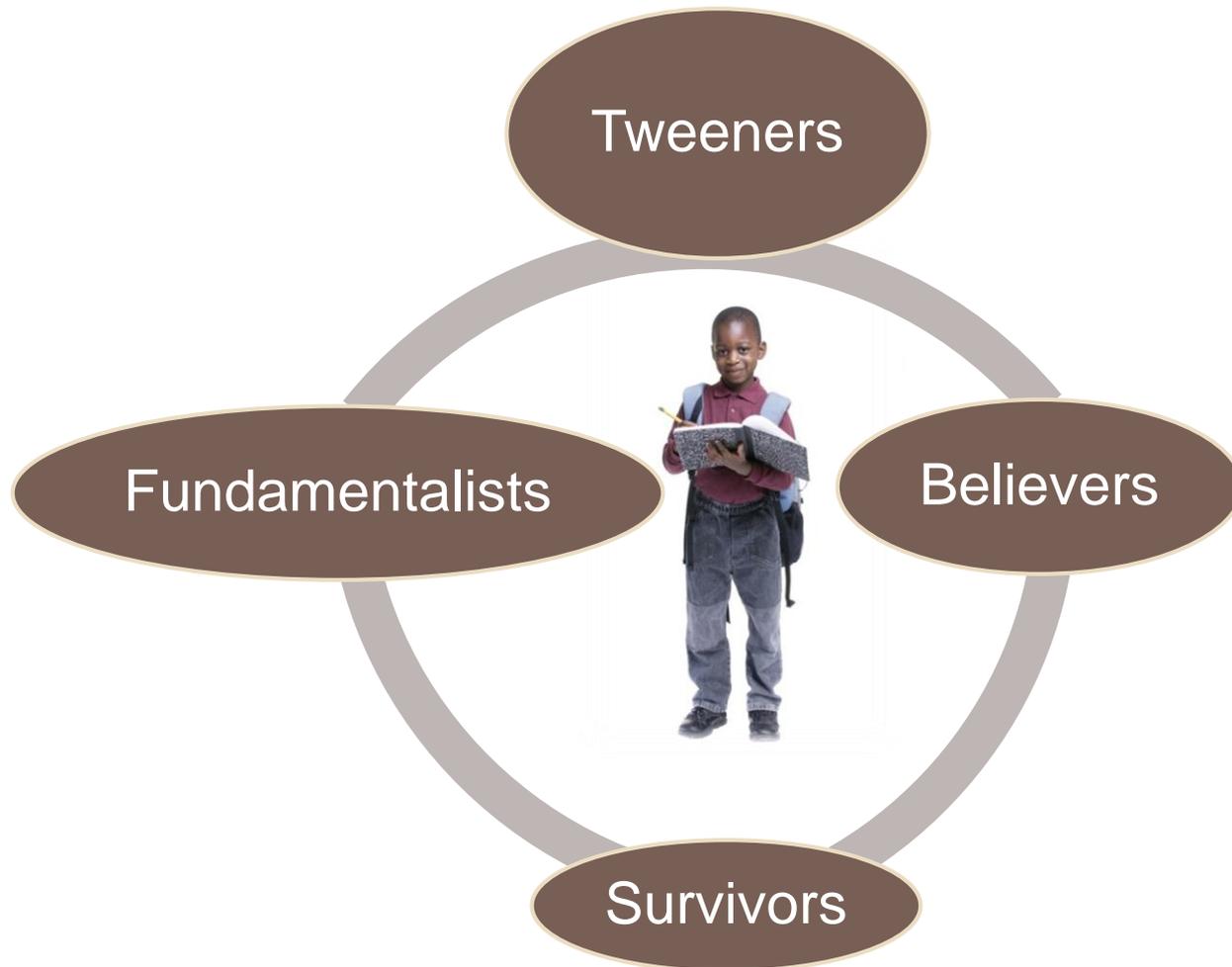
Muhammad, *Transforming School Culture 2nd Edition*, (2018)

Believers

Objective:

Success for All Students

The Believers

- Are very intrinsically motivated

- Are flexible with students (academically and behaviorally)

- Are mission driven or connection to school or community

- Are willing to confront negative talk and attitudes toward children, but only under extreme circumstances

- Have varied levels of pedagogical and professional skill

Pause to Think!

- Is your school culture focused on success for students or the likes/dislikes of the adults?

- Are your Believers politically active or docile?

- Are your Believers active in the informal culture?

Tweeners

Objective:

To Find Comfort Zone Within the Organization

The Tweeners

- Are loosely coupled with the school mission

- Are enthusiastic about the idealistic nature of school, but have not quite hit the tipping point

- Stay out of school and district politics.

- Follow instructions as given by administration, creating a wall of silence (considered "good" teachers).

One extreme experience (moment of truth) can swing them to be believers or fundamentalists.

Pause to Think!

- Do you have a significant amount of turnover among your Tweeners? If so, why? If not, what do you do to support and retain them?

- Who supports your Tweeners when they have their moment of truth?

Survivors

Objective:

Survival

Survivors

- Overwhelming nature of the job or life has caused clinical depression (burnout).
- They have no political or organizational aspirations.
- They create subcontracts with students to broker a ceasefire agreement.
- Little to no professional practice is evident.
- All members of the organization agree that they do not belong in the profession.
- Removal and treatment is the only possible remedy.

Pause to Think!

- Do you have colleagues that may be Survivors or in the process of becoming a Survivor?

- If so, have you reached out to him or her? Has administration addressed the issue?

- How have your Survivors impacted students?

Fundamentalists

Objective:

Maintain Status Quo (Leave Me Alone!)

The Fundamentalists

- Believe not all children can learn (social Darwinists).

- Believe that school reform is a waste of time.

- Believe in autonomy and academic freedom.

- Organize to resist threats to status quo.

- Believe that gaps in learning are due to outside forces (students, parents, administration).

- Have varied levels of pedagogical skills.

Methods: The Three D's

☐ Defame

☐ Disrupt

☐ Distract

Pause to Think!

- Do you have an active group of Fundamentalists at your school? If so, how have they affected the culture?

- Do your Believers challenge your Fundamentalists?

- Have you witnessed any of the three D's? If so, how has it affected your school?

The Real Difference

Believers

- Goal: success for every student
- Accept that change (the right change) is necessary to improve student performance.
- Student interest is more important that personal interest (public servant).

Fundamentalists

- Goal: Maintain status quo.
- Reject any substantive change if it clashes with personal agenda.
- Self-interest is more important than student interest (self-servant).

The Current State of School Reform
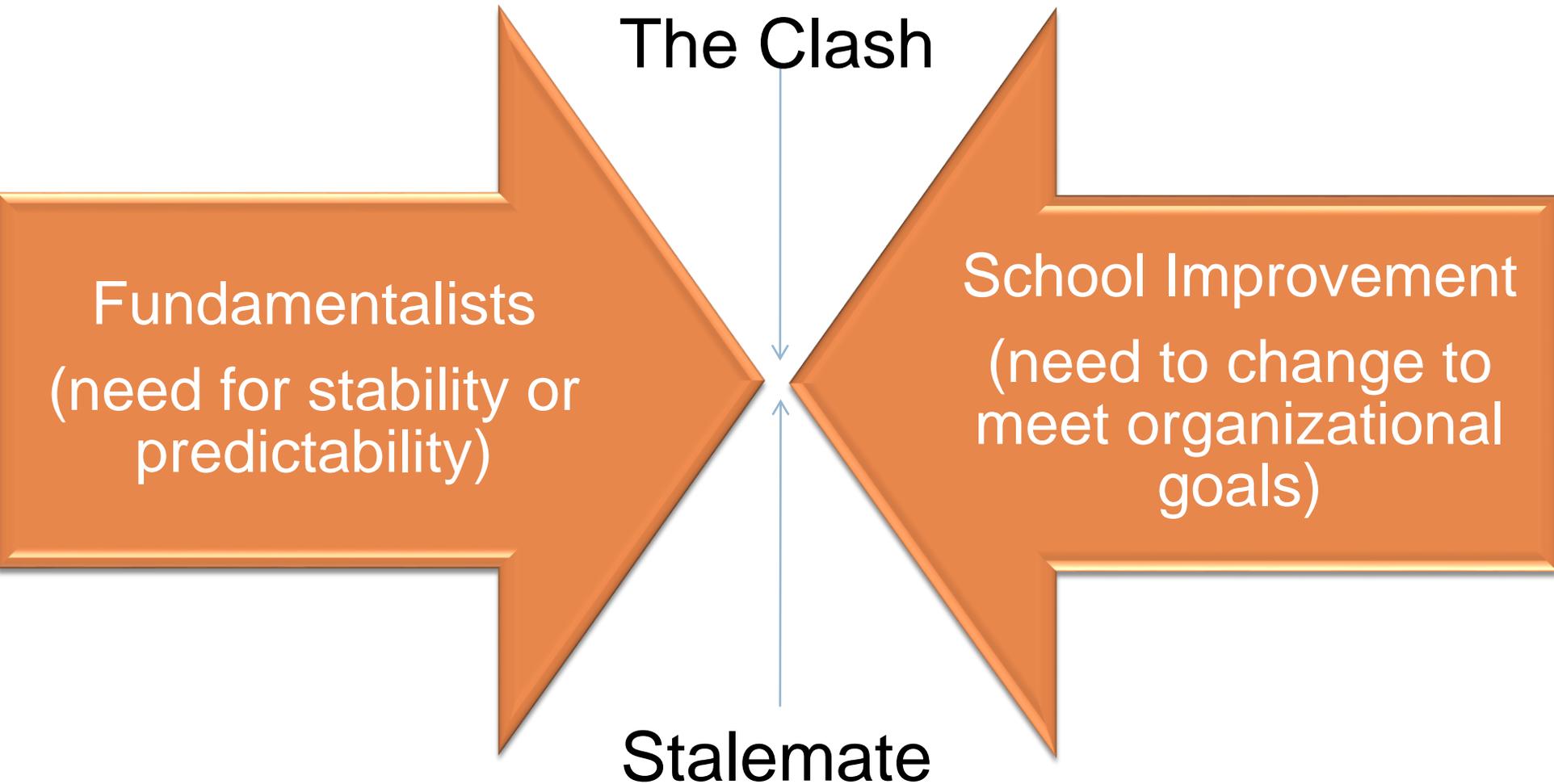
New 2nd Edition Insights

- NCLB and other external drivers made culture worse over the last nine years.
- Tweener turnover dropped, but burnout (Survivors) increased.
- Research has increasingly identified culture as the top driver of school improvement.
- Good leadership and school culture development cannot be separated.