

Creating a Culture of Error: Developing Your Understanding as a Leader

“To create an environment where your [teachers] feel safe making and discussing mistakes, so you can spend less time hunting for errors and more time fixing them.”

-Doug Lemov

Building a Culture of Error—*for adults*

Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*, focuses the Culture of Error theory around classroom instruction. With your leadership team, read the following excerpt and make edits so it is staff-directed, rather than student-directed. This will help you better understand what culture of error looks like for teachers and leaders as you develop a vision. The first few lines have been completed for you as an example. (Source: *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*, p.66)

Building a Culture of Error

~~An instructional team~~
~~A classroom~~ is a culture established through the words and actions not only of the ~~teacher~~ ^{leader} but also of the ~~students~~ ^{teachers}. A ~~teacher~~ ^{leader} alone cannot establish a culture in which it is safe to struggle and fail. If snickers greet a ~~classmate~~ ^{colleague} who gets an answer wrong, for example, or if impatient hands wave in the air while another ~~student~~ ^{colleague} is trying to answer, very little that a ~~teacher~~ ^{leader} does will result in ~~students~~ ^{teachers} willingly exposing their errors to the group.

Shaping how students respond to one another's struggles is therefore a must. It is a process that starts with teaching students the right way to handle common situations *before* they happen. Explain how you expect them to act when someone struggles with the rationale, practice those expected behaviors in hypothetical situations, and when a breach inevitably occurs, reset the culture firmly, but with understanding. You might say something like, “Just a minute. I want to be very clear about the respect we will all show one another when we are in this classroom. We will support each other and help one another. And we will never, ever undertake actions that tear down another person. Among other things, we know that person could just as well be us.”

Doug Lemov's Field Notes: 2.0 on CFU 2.0

Read the following blog post from Doug Lemov on the importance of creating a Culture of Error for teachers and leaders. Reflect on the following guiding questions to help you think through how you might approach this work in your own school.

1. Imagine the school leader from the story is a teacher at your school. How will you support this teacher? What is your first step?
2. What role can a leader play in creating a Culture of Error in their school? Consider leadership moves, structures, and strategies.
3. What impact might a school-wide Culture of Error among teachers and leaders have on students?

ALL NOTES

TEACHING & SCHOOLS

COACHING & PRACTICE

03.13.13 2.0 ON CFU 2.0



I posted this morning about the power of building a Culture of Error in the classroom. The idea is that *if students try to hide their errors from you, you have to work twice as hard to find them*, but if they WANT you to see them... if you tacitly agree that uncovering error and fixing it is your shared task, a good right and just thing, well, then you are on your way.



But I also want to point out that *this same principle also applies to the adults in the building*. I once worked as a consultant with a principal who wasn't very good with data. My job was to help her analyze and use her data to understand her kids' needs and strengths and to help make her teachers better. But it was very hard. Every time we met she pretended to understand what I suspected she didn't. "Yeah, ok. I got it. What else?" I wanted to spend time one-on-one at her conference table answering all the questions she was afraid to ask in front of her bosses or her staff or just working through the things she knew a bit about but didn't have locked down to mastery, but in the end I couldn't get her there. She pushed the conversation onto the things she was able to do with data... or she pushed the conversation off topic, or she expressed suspicion of the veracity of the data, or she didn't follow through on tasks, or she said she already understood and had already had the meeting to explain that to her teachers, etc etc etc. In the end her school foundered.

I took that lesson with me when I came to Uncommon Schools and started hiring principals to run high performing schools. One of the things I knew I wanted was people who were humble enough and confident enough to let me see their weaknesses—who would expose their errors rather than hide them. But I also had to learn to do more things to show my leaders that my conception of my job was that it was my first obligation to help them and to make them better. I had to model exposing my errors to them. In the end I think that understanding that it is a sign of talent not weakness to be comfortable exposing error is one of the core skills of a leader. Learning that remains one of my biggest managerial lessons.

So I just want to follow up on the discussion of building a "Culture of Error" in the classroom by observing that what applies for students also applies for teachers, principals and employees of any variety, not to mention players, teammates, spouses and maybe most of all kids.

Supporting a Culture of Error

“...a great organization makes it easy for people to talk about what’s hard about the work—to make it normal to struggle, to get help, and to improve.”

-Doug Lemov

Implementing a Culture of Error

When there is a Culture of Error in my school, what will I see and hear?	
From teachers:	From leaders:
What new or existing structures and strategies will I leverage to create a Culture of Error?	
What leadership moves will I commit to in order to promote a Culture of Error?	
What are my short- and long-term goals for creating a Culture of Error?	
Short-term:	Long-term:
How will I leverage my leadership team to help create a Culture of Error?	
Team member	Role/responsibility