

## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

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*Leading With Intention delves into a complex topic, but makes it a “tight” read. Every chapter has charts, focused checklists, and reflective tools. Systemness is always helped by “interaction” effects of core factors. This book will help you focus and integrate through self-awareness and self-efficacy, connection and inquiry, and intentional professional learning that generates impact.*

—**Michael Fullan**, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

*Leading With Intention provides valuable insights that encourage “leaning in rather than leaning away” from our collective responsibility for student learning. DeWitt and Nelson have crafted a powerful guide inviting readers to harness thoughtful and genuine relationships to cultivate a legacy of learning.*

—**Kimberly M. Fry**, Assistant Executive Director, Professional Learning,  
Former School Principal and District Superintendent, Washington  
Association of School Administrators, Olympia, WA

*Education is in a tough spot. The only sustainable way out is through intentional leadership and connection. Peter M. DeWitt and Michael Nelson provide the roadmap here in Leading With Intention.*

—**Danny Bauer**, Ruckus Maker & Do School Different™ Designer, Better Leaders  
better Schools, Bestselling Author, Syracuse, NY

*Leading With Intention is an excellent resource for educational leaders aiming to deepen their impact on student learning and build stronger connections within their school community. Through a skillful blend of practical insights, research, and personal stories, authors Peter M. DeWitt and Michael Nelson articulate a vision for leadership that underscores the importance of self-awareness and human interconnectedness, providing a foundation for effective decision-making.*

—**Valerie Page Truesdale**, Senior Assistant Executive Director, The School  
Superintendents Association Alexandria, VA

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*For Britt, who always knew.*

*For Doug.*

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# Leading With Intention

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# Leading With Intention

## How School Leaders Can Unlock Deeper Collaboration and Drive Results

**Peter M. DeWitt**  
**Michael Nelson**

**Foreword by John Hattie**  
**Afterword by Shelley Harwayne**



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London EC1Y 1SP  
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Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block  
International Trade Tower Nehru Place  
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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: DeWitt, Peter M., author. | Nelson, Michael, author.

Title: Leading with intention : how school leaders can unlock deeper collaboration and drive results / Peter M. DeWitt, Michael Nelson.

Description: Thousand Oaks, California : Corwin Press, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024012466 | ISBN 9781071924419 (paperback) | ISBN 9781071947876 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781071947890 (epub) | ISBN 9781071947883 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Educational leadership. | School management and organization. | Professional learning communities.

Classification: LCC LB2806 .D486 2024 | DDC 371.2-dc23/eng/20240415

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024012466>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

24 25 26 27 28 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Foreword

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One of my passions lies in translating the messages of Visible Learning into the realm of sports coaching. We have successfully applied these principles to elite rugby, cricket, soccer, Australian rules football, baseball, and ice hockey. Coaching is a form of teaching, so it is no surprise that there is a great deal of overlap between the classroom and the sports field. Coaches, akin to teachers, can provide an amazing amount of feedback and often pride themselves on how well training sessions go. But in the game, things often turn to custard.

Sport is based on a simple premise – exploiting opponents’ errors and weaknesses. Elite players have a remarkably high level of game-savvy; they can efficiently exploit weaknesses and devise strategies on the fly. They capitalize on instant feedback during the game with the aim of hearing, understanding, and putting feedback into action. They know how to play the game alone and as part of the team, and they understand that lapses in attention or mistakes can be exploited by the opposing side.

Much of the feedback that coaches offer during a game goes unheard and, more importantly, is often given too late to provide any meaningful impact. The feedback is mostly about the game, the strategies, and the next moves. It is rarely about the thinking in the player’s heads as they play the game. Great coaches train for chaos, for mistakes, for optimizing opportunities, and for team bonding. Great coaches might advise a team player who makes a mistake that has important negative effects on the team, that it is ok to be upset for five seconds but then they must forget it. Great coaches help players to both acknowledge their emotions and also not let those emotions hinder future actions.

Timothy Gallwey, in his impressive book *The Inner Game of Tennis* (2015) argues that in competitive sports, we play not against one, but two opponents. The “outer” opponent is the other players/team, but we also play against an “inner opponent” – our own mind that can create obstacles like self-doubt, disappointment about letting down the team, low self-efficacy, concentration lapses, and nervousness. Gallwey noted tennis players talking to themselves with comments like “try harder”,

“why do I not know this?” and asked, “Who is talking to whom?” His answer was that we are speaking to two selves: Self 1 is the conscious mind, which is often judgmental and critical, and Self 2 is our body, nervous system, and unconscious mind. Self 2 physically performs and plays the game, but it is only when Self 1 and 2 are aligned that we get peak performance.

Gallwey’s coaching focused on bringing Self 1 and Self 2 into alignment: that is, bringing together the performance and the person. He identified four steps: (1) have the student/player observe without judgement; (2) make them think or relive the observations with images, feelings, and imagination; (3) have a go and try the thinking (“Just do it”); and (4) observe what they practices without judgement.

This philosophy can be extended to the inner game of leaders. Leaders, like elite sports players, are constantly observed and these observers intuit the leader’s motivations and beliefs. The message in *Leading With Intention* is that the leaders need to anticipate, know, and reflect on how others see and interpret them. Leaders need to spend more time seeing the impact of their performance and person – and preferably bringing these together into “one” person. Leaders have to be superb listeners – of their Self 1 and 2. They need to be internally and externally self-aware, hear what others are saying and thinking, and demonstrate to others that they have understood what has been said (although they do not have to agree). An example is trust – trust is what you are when you walk into a room, it is your being and credibility in the eyes of others, it is based on the actions you have made from prior encounters, it is a function of your skills at active listening, and it is the bringing together of your performance and person.

The core notions discussed in DeWitt and Nelson’s book are the essence of being aware of Self 1 and Self 2 and include self-awareness, fostering human interconnectedness, engaging in collective inquiry, promoting professional learning and development, showing confidence and self-efficacy, and designing your own learning environment. The last element is core to schools – why should we make it compulsory for students to attend school and then not insist all adults in the schools also attend professional learning? You and your staff need to be continually growing, learning, and passionately working to improve your impact.

Every decision you make is up for queries about alignment with what you say you are with how others see you. The task is to lead others to do and think in ways that improve the impact we all have on our students, and this requires high levels of people management, high levels of trust, and great skills at convincing others that it is in their and everyone's best interest to enact that which you as leader ask them to do.

No one said being a leader was easy. It requires high levels of confidence, extensive experience with communicating what you are asking others to do, a relentless focus on improvement, and most of all it entails listening to oneself as well as to others, communicating your beliefs, passions and ideas, and bringing others along with you on a worthwhile set of actions, all deeply constructed within a climate and culture worth defending. This book on unlocking deeper collaboration has the potential to drive meaningful results in leadership, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, transparent values, and effective communication in creating a culture worth defending.

—John Hattie

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# Acknowledgments

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**From Mike:** This is my first book. As a result, I think about the many people during my nearly 40 years as an educator who saw things in me that I didn't see in myself. This includes Jan Donaldson (in memory), Sandra McCord, Tom VanderArk, Dale Holland, Mary Holland, Nancy Merrill, and Art Jarvis. Throughout this same time, I have worked with hundreds of colleagues who have supported me in becoming a better educator and have become lifelong friends, for which I am grateful. I am appreciative of Helene Parroff, Pat Large, Gerrie Garton (in memory), and Jill Burnes.

It was at the launch of the Instructional Leadership Network almost three years ago that I began working with Peter in supporting the incredible teaching and learning leaders across the state of Washington. We encouraged and nudged each other as colleagues and quickly became friends. I am deeply honored that he would consider me as a co-author for a book. We are both grateful that the impact of the network continues to have a rippling effect in Washington.

I'm a self-admitted emotional person particularly when it comes to thinking about my own children. I stand in awe of our son, Hans, and daughter, Anna. They are kind, loving, and generous humans. I am tearing up as I write this. They have selected perfect partners in Amy and Brian and have gifted us with three grandchildren: Carter, Grant, and Maisie. Blessed doesn't even begin to describe the feeling I have when I think of them.

My biggest fan and champion as a person and a professional is my wife, Britt. She predicted this moment many times. I would laugh, but secretly I was hoping she would be right.

**From Peter:** I am grateful that Mike agreed to co-author this book with me. I could not have worked with a better co-author, colleague, and friend. As you read this book, you will learn from his stories and expertise, just as I did every time I had the opportunity to work with him. To me, this book is not just a co-authoring experience but a journey through our friendship and conversations.

Additionally, I am so grateful for the support of my family and friends. They have always provided me with strength and support and helped give me the confidence to do anything I wanted. We should always surround ourselves with people who support us and make us better, and my family and friends have certainly done that.

**From both:** We would like to thank Chris Beals, Tom Murphy, Jenni Donohoo, Kim Fry, Joel Aune, John Hattie, and Shelley Harwayne. Additionally, we spent time visiting schools talking with leaders and teachers about their practices while conceptualizing this book. Thank you to the leaders and teachers in the Woodland School District and Fife School District, which are both in the state of Washington.

## PUBLISHER'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Corwin gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following reviewers:

Sean Beggin, Associate Principal  
Anoka-Hennepin Secondary Technical Education Program  
Andover, Minnesota

Jayne Ellspermann, Founder and CEO  
Jayne Ellspermann, LLC, School Leadership Development  
Ocala, Florida

Ronda J. Gray, Clinical Associate Professor  
Decatur, Illinois

Kathy Rhodes, Principal  
Hinton Elementary  
Hinton, Iowa

Joy Rose, Retired High School Principal  
Worthington, Ohio

# About the Authors

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**Peter DeWitt (EdD)** is the founder and CEO of the Instructional Leadership Collective. He was a K–5 teacher for 11 years and a principal for 8 years. For the last 10 years, he has been facilitating professional learning nationally and internationally based on the content of many of his best-selling educational books.

Peter's professional learning relationships are a monthly hybrid approach that includes both coaching and the facilitating of workshops on instructional leadership and collective efficacy. Additionally, in the summer of 2021, Peter created a yearlong on-demand, asynchronous coaching course through Thinkific where he has created a community of learners that includes K–12 educators in leadership positions.

Peter's work has been adopted at the state and university level, and he works with numerous school districts, school boards, regional networks, and ministries of education around North America, Australia, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom.

Peter writes the Finding Common Ground column for *Education Week*, which has been in circulation since 2011. In 2020, he co-created *Education Week's A Seat at the Table* where he moderates conversations with experts around race, gender, sexual orientation, research, trauma, and many other educational topics.

He is the series editor for the Connected Educators Series (Corwin) and the Impact Series (Corwin) that include books by Viviane Robinson, Andy Hargreaves, Pasi Sahlberg, Yong Zhao, and Michael Fullan.

Peter is the 2013 School Administrators Association of New York State's (SAANYS) Outstanding Educator of the Year and the 2015 Education Blogger of the Year (Academy of Education Arts and Sciences), and he sits on numerous advisory boards.



“There is no more noble profession than that of an educator.” That was what **Michael Nelson’s** mom said almost every day of his childhood. For almost 40 years, Mike has been an educator. His mom would be pleased.

Even though Mike still considers “teacher” as his primary title, he has served as principal, district instructional leader, and superintendent, and currently serves as assistant executive director developing programs and initiatives for superintendents and district leaders in the state of Washington.

Mike’s leadership is based on the foundation value that is it necessary to develop a kind, compassionate, and empathetic culture rooted in belonging and equity. He describes his leadership work as building human connectedness, recognizing you must always model what you lead as you build teams of individuals supporting students in their learning. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe awarded him with their official blanket for building a collaborative partnership between the Tribe and school district, the highest honor of the Tribe and the first time a non-Tribal member was selected to receive this blanket.

He has received many state and national awards during his time as a principal and superintendent. As a principal, he was acknowledged by Pacific Lutheran University as its Outstanding Recent Alumni in 1997. At the same time, the school he was leading as principal received the National Blue Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education. As a superintendent, he was named Washington state’s 2019 Superintendent of the Year. During his tenure as superintendent, Mike was elected president of the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) by his peers.



While WASA president, he was one of two superintendents in the nation selected to participate in the Embark Program facilitated by the U.S. Navy. He spent time on the USS *Ronald Reagan* learning from all levels of the men and women serving on this aircraft carrier. He also has received the Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development Educating the Whole Child Award.

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# Glossary of Terms

In schools, we often have a common language but not a common understanding around that language. When we look at educational leadership through an international lens, we know that we often don't even have a common language when it comes to the words used in schools.

To create a common language and common understanding, we here define the terms used in this book. This will help us as we work through international and cultural contexts.

**Building leader:** This is an administrative position where the leader must perform management duties as well as practice instructional leadership. Building leadership positions include school principals in the United States, Canada, and Australia and head teachers in the United Kingdom.

**Collective leader efficacy:** Collective leader efficacy is a school or district leadership team's ability to develop a shared understanding and engage in joint work that includes evaluating the impact they have on the learning of adults and students in a school.

**District instructional committee:** At the district level, there is often a district leadership team that may include the director of teaching and learning or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, along with other district and building leaders, depending on the makeup of the district.

**Faculty/staff meeting:** A school gathering that may take place once or twice a month, where teachers and leaders learn together about ideas or innovations that impact students in positive ways.

**Human interconnectedness:** Human interconnectedness happens when individuals unite to build a stronger learning culture by

authentically communicating with each other and challenging each other's thinking to create deeper and more intentional contributions.

**Instructional leadership team:** Instructional leadership teams are school-based or district-based teams. At the school building level, an instructional leadership team includes a principal, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and school staff such as school psychologists.

**Joint work:** Judith Warren Little (1990) defines joint work as "encounters among educators that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching (interdependence), collective conceptions of autonomy, support for teachers' initiative and leadership with regard to professional practice, and group affiliations grounded in professional work" (p. 519).

**Knowledge:** "The fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

**Metacognition:** How individuals think about their own thinking.

**Professional learning and development:** In *Call to Action: Bringing the Profession Back In*,

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (2016) write, “*Professional learning* is often like student learning—something that is deliberately structured and increasingly accepted because it can (to some) more obviously be linked to measurable outcomes... *Professional development* involves many aspects of learning but may also involve developing mindfulness, team building and team development, intellectual stimulation for its own sake, and reading good literature that prompts reflection on the human condition” (p. 3).

**School building:** This is a smaller system housed within a larger system such as a school district. In the United States, school leaders are sometimes referred to as school building leaders. School buildings, for all practical purposes, include grade levels or departments.

**School district:** A system that usually includes elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools. In countries like Canada, we may refer to these systems as divisions or school boards.

**Skill:** The ability to perform a task using previously acquired knowledge.

**Teacher leaders:** Teachers within a part-time or full-time leadership position where, in most cases, they do not have to evaluate their peers. Some teacher leadership positions are professional learning community (PLC) leads, department chairs, or middle-level leaders (Australia).

**Understanding:** An assimilation of an idea into what is already known.