

# Peter Dewitt’s Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

“Collaborative Leadership has confirmed what I have, over the years, come to realize as a core truth in education: We must create an educational learning community grounded in trust and responsibility, not testing and accountability.” (Quaglia, 2017)

Every July for the past 10 years, I have had the pleasure of spending the better part of a week with exceptional educational leaders from across our region at the Developing Successful Schools Conference (DSS). Our four Atlantic Teacher Organizations – NSTU, NLTA, PEITF, NBTA, the NTA and the NB Department of Education have hosted DSS annually for the past 30+ years. Held on the beautiful campus of Mount Allison University in Sackville, approximately 70 leaders converge to learn with facilitators such as Andy Hargreaves, Bruce Wellman, Sandra Herbst, Ruth Sutton, Damien Cooper and others of similar caliber.

This past summer, Peter Dewitt was our facilitator. Together, we explored the work of John Hattie and Visible Learning. The evaluations from the event confirm that Peter is an exceptional facilitator. What we may not have realized at the time is that he is also an exceptional author. Since DSS 2016, he has gone on to publish his new book – *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most*.

## Meet, Model and Motivate

“A collaborative leader is someone who uses evidence to **meet** stakeholders where they are, **models** how to do it and **motivates** them to improve.” (Dewitt, 2017)

Throughout the book, Peter uses the ‘triangle of collaborative leadership’: **meet**, **model** and **motivate**, as an anchor for the reader to explore the six influences celebrated as mattering most:

- Instructional Leadership
- Collective Teacher Efficacy
- Assessment Capable Learners
- Professional Development
- Feedback
- Family Engagement



Although at first glance the triangle can appear rather simplistic, I would argue that its simplicity is what makes it such a powerful tool for self-reflection and goal setting. For each new idea introduced, the triangle challenges the reader to assess where their people are presently in order to **meet**. They must then consider where they want to be in order to **model**. Then, why it is important in order to **motivate**? A path forward seems clear as a result.

## School Climate: The Plate Everything Lies On

“The Collaborative Leader finds the perfect balance between inspiring stakeholders and co-constructing goals” (Dewitt, 2017)

Dewitt notes the importance of school climate in education. “In an inclusive and supportive school climate, teachers feel they can take risks with students because they know that regardless of success or failure, their school leaders will support them. Within that support, teachers and students find numerous learning opportunities.”

Dewitt continues by noting that school climate is defined by the National School Climate Center (NSCC 2014) as: *the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of student, ‘parents’, and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals,*

values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

“As a collaborative leader, it is one of your primary responsibilities to ensure that the climate in your school is just as rich and nourishing as the description offered by NSCC... Unsupportive and hostile climates exist where risk-taking takes a backseat to rule-following.” (Dewitt, 2017)

### The Importance of Teacher Voice in Increasing Collaboration

Russ Quaglia defines teacher voice as the opportunities teachers have to co-construct learning in their school community as well as their level of comfort in sharing opinions with their school leaders, and whether they felt heard by those leaders. (Quaglia Institute) Dewitt further explores the idea of teacher voice by asking two questions:

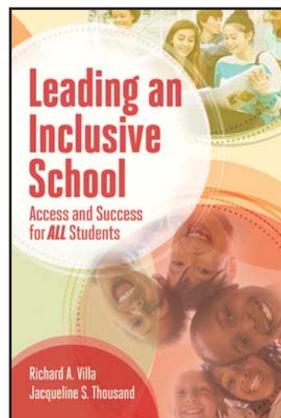
1. Do our conversations take place in the spirit of mutual respect and co-learning?
2. Are our schools places where people are comfortable disagreeing?



### Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Rosalyn Nickerson of St. Patrick's School in ASD-S who was the winner of our October Book draw! This month's draw is for **Leading an Inclusive School: Access and Success for ALL Students** by Richard A. Villa and Jacqueline S. Thousand.

Sound interesting? Send me an email with 'Book Draw' the subject line sometime before February 20th.



Using the comfort level of disagreement or conflict as an indicator of school success is an interesting concept to me. Based on my own observations I would agree with both Quaglia and Dewitt. I believe that those leaders who intentionally foster a level of trust and mutual respect within their school community excel. When differing opinions are celebrated and disagreement is seen, as an opportunity for learning, schools, and the people within them, thrive. Perhaps that alone is enough of a reason for all of us to strive to improve our own expertise in collaborative leadership! If that is of interest to you, Peter Dewitt's book is a great start.



P.S. See page 36 for an ad featuring our plans for Developing Successful Schools 2017. Join us as facilitator Jenni Donohoo explores the complexity of “Collaborative Inquire and Collective Teacher Efficacy” in our schools!

### Works Cited

- Dewitt, P. (2017). *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences that Matter Most*. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: Corwin.
- Quaglia Institute. (n.d.). *Quaglia Institute for Student Voice and Aspirations*. (R. Quaglia, Producer) Retrieved January 14, 2017, from Quaglia Institute for Student Voice and Aspirations: <http://quagliainstitute.org>
- Quaglia, R. (2017). Afterforward for Collaborative Leadership. In P. Dewitt, *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences that Matter Most*. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: Corwin.

### Closing Quote:

“Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson