



Learning Partnerships: Trust Forward

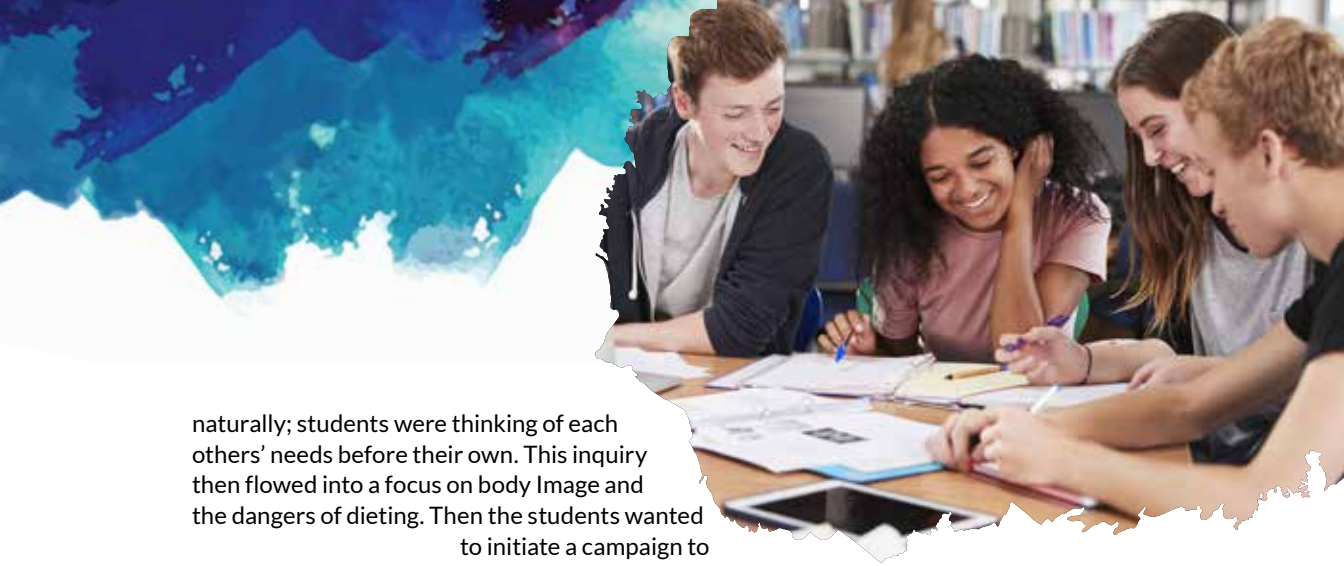
David Marr, a teacher with the South Coast Education Collaborative in Massachusetts, teaches students in an alternative program. These students have a troubled past, strained family situations and have struggled in school most of their lives. The mainstream system has not managed to serve these students and David is here to pick up the pieces. David gives these fragile adolescents a soft space to land. He uses the Four Elements of Deep Learning Design (Learning Partnerships, Learning Environments, Leveraging Digital, Pedagogical Practices) to create conditions so they can carve out success like they have never experienced before.

"I let my guard down, got going and it's made all the difference. This is just taking off in my classroom."

David was first exposed to Deep Learning when he attended the Deep Learning Lab in Vancouver in 2018. He looked at the 6Cs and they just made so much sense. It was there he encountered Scott Millman, a teacher, who stood up in front of 600 people and talked candidly about his first fumbles as he set off to facilitate deep learning. David was so impressed that this global community would encourage such risk taking, that he thought, what do I have to lose? He says, "I let my guard down, got going and it's made all the difference. This is just taking off in my classroom." Very quickly, Deep Learning has become a habit.

"... I'm so energized by this I forget how exhausted I am!"

Here David describes his classroom last week. "One of my students is diabetic. Glen and Jesse also have serious obesity issues. I looked at the curriculum and engaged them in some inquiry about nutrition. Instead of giving them a quiz, I asked them to keep a food journal for three days. When we broke down their results into the food groups, they were shocked by what they were eating. Then we wrote a menu including our favourite foods and analysed serving sizes in the context of a 2000 calorie diet. It was a huge "A-ha" for them. They were awakened to saturated fats, trans fats and sugars. These personal insights fuelled their passion. We went on-line and found some programs that helped us better understand what we were eating. Then they researched healthier alternatives. Within a few days, we were meal planning for our class: we had to shop with the needs and interests of the students in mind, and within budget. The sense of citizenship emerged



naturally; students were thinking of each others' needs before their own. This inquiry then flowed into a focus on body image and the dangers of dieting. Then the students wanted

to initiate a campaign to let other students know. There is no stopping them. Their engagement is amazing." David concludes, "And I'm so energized by this I forget how exhausted I am!"

Glen had major literacy challenges but now he is taking an introduction to journalism course.

Here are just a few examples of David's successes this year. One student, Glen, has become re-integrated into the mainstream school for part of the day while also joining the football team and receiving two awards for sportsmanship and the most improved player. Glen had major literacy challenges but now he is taking an introduction to journalism course. Another student, Jesse, has struggled with learning her whole life. Now she has started a business on Etsy and she plans to go to community college. Another student spent his entire schooling career in a residential program. He is now captain of the basketball team and pursuing a culinary pathway.

The Four Elements of Deep Learning clarify how all students can be successful. This lens allows David to be intentional and reach the needs of each student. One element particularly, Learning Partnerships, represents a profound departure from a teacher centred relationship to one that is more reciprocal, shifting the voice, control and interactions within the classroom. Students and teachers partner with each other but also beyond the classroom to catapult learning to a more meaningful, personal level. Teachers facilitate this growth by linking learning to student interests, talents and needs; providing powerful feedback; and instilling a sense of belonging and connectedness that fosters innovation and risk-taking. As learning becomes more relevant and authentic, student engagement grows. Students become owners of their own learning as they exercise choice, voice, self assessment and reflection. They take increased responsibility for their (and each others' learning) and that encourages them to take action in positive ways.

David has embraced this shift and recognizes that being flexible, making connections to the real world and responding to students' needs and interests are the foundational conditions that turn these students into confident, competent learners with a promising future. But before he can do that, he must build trust and continually demonstrate his trustworthiness. Here is how he does that:



- David states and demonstrates his trust of his students; they don't have to earn it first. He says, "I don't want to look at your file. That's someone else's opinion. In here, it's a clean slate." This assures the students that the past won't haunt them. It provides them with hope, that maybe this time it will be different.

- His classroom is a place where "we're in this together." It's expected that there is mutual and self respect. They support each other in the learning and celebrate each other's successes.

- David listens to them, especially when they arrive, stressed in the morning. Students need a safe space to vent before they can move on to the business of learning. He recognizes he is not a counsellor but listening goes a long way to set them up for the day.

- David knows many students will give up before they even begin. So, he plays to their strengths and gets to know their interests. Knowing students informs his general learning design but also his micro-interactions. For example, he will ask students to help others when he sees a strength, no matter how small that strength may seem. He sees them for their assets. That's a trust builder.

“ ...the first step in effective Learning Design begins with Learning Partnerships.

- David defines his success as a teacher in helping them reach their own goals not his goals. "Tell me what you want," he will say, "You're in charge of your own educational plan." Not every student will be a professional football player so he helps them explore options within a field so their dreams aren't crushed.

”

- David scaffolds opportunities to build student confidence and engagement. High stakes testing is always in the background but he does not perseverate on it.

David's early experiences with deep learning remind us that the first step in effective Learning Design begins with Learning Partnerships. Start with the self and ask the question: **What can I as a teacher do to foster and deepen a sense of trust in service of deep learning?**