Leading, Organizing & Engaging Members Through a Comprehensive Teachers Union

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Too often teachers and especially their unions are perceived as chiefly interested in "bread and butter" issues such as better pay and benefits and job security and not really concerned about larger issues like the quality of teaching and learning and the social justice concern that all students have an equitable opportunity for a quality education. We can call this limited view industrial unionism. A more encompassing framework would include professional unionism and social justice unionism as well as industrial unionism. I call this Framework: Comprehensive Teacher Unionism.

There is a rich and long history of professional unionism that goes back to the Medieval Guilds. Modern day craft or trade unions are in this tradition. Current craft unions have power over and responsibility for issues of quality including control of apprenticeship programs and entrance to the craft. On the other hand, industrial unionism has a different and more recent history going back to the organizing of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the early part of the 20th century. The 1935 Wagner Act codified this industrial unionism. As described by Barry and Irving Bluestone in their book, *Negotiating the Future*, in the 1950's, this industrial unionism approach got limited to strictly dealing with "bread and butter" and security issues (Bluestone 1992). In this model, concerns about the nature and quality of the work are the exclusive province of management and are considered "management rights."

Historically, teacher unions have followed an industrial union frame that did not allow them to become a vehicle for professionalization. The industrial frame approach indicates that the purpose of the union is limited to bread and butter, and security issues such as fair treatment and just cause. In this model, concerns about the nature and quality of the work of teaching and learning are the province of management, and management rights.
In the beginning of organizing the teacher unions and fighting for collective bargaining, many teacher union organizers aspired to more than just the industrial frame. However, the stance from management and policy makers and the prevalence of the industrial frame, especially in relation to collective bargaining and private sector labor law, forced most teacher unions into this industrial frame. Over time, union leaders and staff became used to these limitations. In fact, some union leaders even embraced them.

Early efforts to secure collective bargaining in the 1960's and 70's involved an interest on the part of many teacher union leaders to secure voice in decision-making about the nature and the quality of the profession's work. School management pushback was successful in most places to defeat these interests and impose the private sector industrial frame on the collective bargaining process at the local district level and in the language of state statutes governing collective bargaining for teachers. In many states, there are no state laws allowing collective bargaining for teachers. In fact, in some states collective bargaining for teachers is expressly prohibited. In such states, teachers have limited or no venues for collective voice and presence. It is hard to be a true profession without such collective voice and presence.

This resistance to teacher voice and collective professionalism in the early 1970's was something I experienced directly. I began work for the Illinois Education Association (IEA), the NEA affiliate in Illinois, in the Fall of 1972 as a field organizer. My first strike or job action, actually a "Blue Flu," was in the Fall of 1973. We had already settled salary and other economic issues. The main outstanding issue was teacher voice in decision-making. We were told by management and the school board that teachers had no right to such collective voice. This violated my basic sense of my calling to this work.

Let me share how I came to this work with the teachers' union and my own personal journey. I grew up in a traditional Catholic family in New England. I went to parochial schools from 1st grade through a Jesuit University, Boston College. Living as a young person in the Catholic Church in the 50's was like growing up in the Middle Ages. It was all about one's quest for personal salvation through right living in this world to earn salvation in the next.

When I entered Boston College in 1962, my plan was to become a Jesuit priest. That quickly changed. The Second Vatican Council began to make significant changes in the Catholic Church, an "*aggiornamento*" as Pope John the XXIII called it, an opening of the windows to fresh air and new ideas. I was majoring in philosophy and very open to new ideas. I was unwilling to be restricted in my thinking to traditional Thomism. I was greatly influenced by two particular books. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* with his notion of paradigms and paradigm shift revolutionized my thinking (Kuhn 1962). I began to realize that we all have paradigms or interpretations of the world but not the actual truth. The other book was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (Teilhard de Chardin 1955). This book described a theology of evolution, that salvation was not an individual journey from this world to some other better place but rather the quest within history to make this world a better place.

I became very involved in ecumenical dialogue and in the Civil Rights movement. In the summer of 1964, I was involved in a project to deal with sub-standard housing in Roxbury, Massachusetts. In the summer of 1965, I was involved in another project in inner-city Detroit to set up a Freedom School. A professor and mentor of mine at Boston College encouraged me to look into graduate work at the University of Chicago in a program called The Committee on Social Thought to pursue my developing interest and commitment to social change.

The mid-1960's was a time of great ferment and being at the University of Chicago put me right in the middle of it. I continued to be involved in Civil Rights work and also became involved in the Anti-Vietnam War movement. I became increasingly interested in politics and political action. I had been very impressed with the early work of the Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, and particularly taken with the concept of participatory democracy that they described in *The Port Huron Statement* (1962, 7-8). This approach to politics made a great deal of sense to me. But the evolution of the Anti-War movement and the morphing of SDS into groups like the Weathermen made me very uncomfortable and did not align with my emerging sense of politics.

It was my great good fortune that at this same time, during my 5 years with The Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, I got to study with Hannah Arendt. She connected me with a tradition of politics in the West and a very different approach to political action. In studying the Greeks and Thucydides, Machiavelli, *The Federalist Papers*, and Arendt's own work especially *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution*, I found a different way to act in the world. For Arendt, politics was a process of people coming together to create power together and working through their different views and interests to forge a way forward. It was not a process of forcing often through violence an ideology on one's opponents. Some of the New Left at the time was beginning to advocate and practice violence as evidenced in the Days of Rage.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt described how the Greeks created the "polis" or public space where human beings came together and appeared to one another in a new way to develop policy and a program of action, a merging of word and deed, to act into the world (Arendt 1958). In *On Revolution*, she describes how the U.S. Founding Fathers completed the revolution with a process of Constitution-making which created the public spaces for ongoing political action (Arendt 1963). It was Hannah Arendt who suggested that I seek out Saul Alinsky. I was becoming lost in the works of philosophers like Kant and Hegel, and she knew that I was ultimately interested in the world of action, not Academia.

I began working with Saul Alinsky and his Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute for Organizers in the Fall of 1971. I discovered that Arendt's way of thinking about politics

and Alinsky's way of doing politics were very much aligned. The fundamental approach was to empower people to create and enter public spaces to act into their world, participatory democracy with a small "d."

I found my vocation as an organizer, which is the art of developing public relationships with and among others for the purposes of power to impact policy and change the world. Max Weber wrote an essay entitled "Politics as a Vocation" (Weber 1946). This fits with my sense of organizing as a vocation. I have seen myself as an organizer in every job I have had over the course of my career.

I spent 9 years in a training relationship with The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The IAF had a consulting relationship with both the NEA and the IEA. This is how I came to work for IEA, the teachers' union, in 1972. The IEA was just in the beginning of the struggle to create a union. In my view, the work involved creating a workers' democracy.

The organizing of the teachers' union in Illinois was a battle for the next decade, definitely an adversarial process of organizing and fighting for a place at the district and school policy-making table. I was involved in organizing 2 multi-local organizations called Unified Bargaining Councils during this time. A local union represented teachers in a single school district. The Unified Bargaining Council was an effort to coordinate and integrate the bargaining across multiple school districts. We had founding conventions to create new public spaces to develop communication amongst these locals in their common struggle and to make and keep promises to one another around their bargaining objectives. Hannah Arendt said, "the making and keeping of promises, … in the realm of politics, may well be the highest human faculty" (Arendt 1963, 175).

By the early 1980's, many locals in Illinois had gained sufficient political power to be accepted as entities that administrators and school boards found they had to deal with albeit begrudgingly. The union was not going to go away. On the other hand, relationships in schools between administrators and teachers were often like armed camps and very adversarial. No way for adults to live and certainly not good for students. It was time to find a different way, organizing in a different key, a more collaborative approach. We had created an industrial union but hardly a professional one.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Al Shanker began to reassert these notions of professional unionism in the mid 1980's. He was partly influenced by the work of Dal Lawrence and the Toledo Federation of Teachers which started the first peer review program in the country, a program where the union takes responsibility for supporting and evaluating new teachers and for ultimately deciding with management whether these new teachers should be retained or let go. Dal Lawrence was a colleague of mine for many years,

and in a conversation I had with him, he indicated that Al Shanker had asked him to present his work in Toledo to the AFT Executive Council.

The work in Toledo as well as the work on new approaches to teacher evaluation in three other districts was profiled in a Rand Corporation Report in 1984 entitled "Teacher Evaluation, A Study of Effective practices." This report suggested that teacher unions adopt a new approach to teacher unionism:

> "In such districts as Toledo, where organized teachers participate in the definition of teaching and in decisions about the membership in the profession, our study found the evolution of yet a higher stage in labor relations that goes beyond negotiated policy to *negotiated responsibility* as the basis of school district operations. Negotiated responsibility provides the basis for a collective professionalism more potent than the individual professionalism that existed when unorganized teachers had only permissive authority over the substance of their work." (Wise et al. 1984, 78-79)

The Carnegie Report in 1986 argued for turning teaching into a genuine profession and in turn suggested a new relationship between unions and school districts. "Unions, boards, and school administrators need to work out a new accommodation based on exchanging professional level salaries and a professional environment, on the one hand, for the acceptance of professional standards of excellence and the willingness to be held fully accountable for the results of one's work, on the other." (A Nation Prepared 1986, 128) Both the AFT President and the NEA President were on the panel that authored and signed the Carnegie Report.

From the late 1980's, there have been a number of examples and efforts to expand the more limited definition of industrial unionism to include the characteristics of professional unionism and social justice unionism. The National Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) and the subsequent Regional TURN Networks (www.turnweb.org) have been promoting and experimenting with professional union activities. These have included collaborative partnerships with administration, school boards and local communities to improve teaching and learning for all students. There are many local examples across the country of this kind of innovative labor-management collaboration to improve teaching and learning, where the groups work together and advocate for the equitable treatment of all students (National TURN 2022).

My own work in Illinois followed a similar path. In the mid-1980's we had an opportunity to change our approach to collective bargaining. An outside consultant provided a process called Win-Win negotiations to a few districts. Rather than get defensive and get excluded,

some IEA staff participated in the process. We learned that there was some real potential in this alternate approach.

Changing our approach to bargaining as a starting point made a great deal of sense because that is how our locals attached or connected most directly to our school districts. Traditional bargaining was also a source of quite a bit of the conflict with districts. We were able to integrate the theory of the Harvard Negotiations Project's *Getting to Yes* with some of the processes we had learned from the outside consultant (Fisher 1981). We also developed teams of facilitators which included an IEA staff person and an administrator or school board attorney. As more and more districts tried this approach, the results were similar. The substance of the negotiated agreements was as good if not a little better than the results in traditional bargaining. But the communication between the parties was markedly improved and people were beginning to develop good working relationships and some trust.

A number of teacher union leaders and superintendents and school board members involved in this interest-based bargaining approach asked how they could continue the process of building good working relationships day in and day out without waiting for the next contract bargaining in a few years. This led to organizing the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), a network of districts involving union leaders, administrators, and school board members working together to improve relationships with the ultimate objective of improving student learning.

For over 30 years, CEC has been involved in a learning journey to develop support for districts and their schools working through labor-management collaboration to improve systems to improve learning for all students. In the process, IEA and its locals have been learning how to become more comprehensive teacher unions. In this context, union organizing transforms from adversarial organizing to get a seat at the policy-making table to the organizing of labor-management collaboration for the purposes of transforming how school districts function.

Glenview, IL, was an early example of this CEC work. During the 1988-1989 school year, the union and district administration and school board through a strategic bargaining process transformed their traditional contract into a Constitution. A traditional contract consists of a set of work rules that essentially constrain the rights of management to act unilaterally. These work rules are often backward facing in that they attempt to develop language to deal with problems that happened in the past. Such work rules seldom create shared power. Contractual provisions around class size limits are an example of work rules that limit management authority but do not really share policy-making authority with teachers and their unions around what happens in classrooms.

The Glenview Constitution was very different. It created shared decision-making structures at the district and school levels, essentially public spaces for empowerment and ongoing decision-making. It was very clear that the Constitution articulated a partnership between the community as represented through the school board and the administration and the profession as represented by the teachers' union. In the book *United Mind Workers, Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society* by Kerchner, Koppich, and Weeres, the Glenview Constitution is the most cited example of a new approach to professional unionism (Kerchner et al. 1997).

The work of CEC over the years has supported districts and their unions in creating ongoing shared decision-making structures at the district and school levels. Through this work, unions become partners with districts in transforming systems into learning organizations that are working to continuously improve student learning. Unions are becoming comprehensive in their purpose and work by integrating the three frames of unionism: industrial, professional, and social justice unionism.

In the last 10-15 years, these collaborative labor-management efforts have begun to touch more directly the work of transforming the profession from individual, privatized practice to more collective and public professional practice or professional learning communities. In my view, this work still has a long way to go in many districts. Teachers are not used to practicing in public with each other, and the whole system of district and schools is designed to prevent it. We will get to these systemic barriers in a moment. But professional learning communities or communities of practice are not an end in themselves. They serve to promote student learning, and student learning is also most effective when done in community with other students and adults. I have done a lot of work over the years to promote labor-management collaboration in the U-46, Elgin School District, the second largest district in Illinois. This District is now working intentionally with outside coaching and support to "achieve social, emotional, and cognitive learning in every classroom through academic teaming." They are working to unleash *The Power of Student Teams* (Toth 2019). They are working to use the adult collaborative structures they have built over the years to advance this purpose of building structures of collaboration, public spaces, among students. I think this purpose was well articulated over a hundred years ago by Francis W. Parker when he said a school "should be a model home, a complete community, an embryonic democracy" (Parker).

Over the years and especially in my time as a Senior Advisor to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, colleagues would frequently ask for some evidence that labor-management collaboration can indeed lead to improving learning for all students. Fortunately, there is now research that documents this potential impact. Saul Rubinstein at Rutgers and John

McCarthy at Cornell have published research that documents that labor-management collaboration at the district level that focuses on supporting and improving such collaboration at the school level that in turn supports and improves collaboration among teachers around their practice does in fact improve student learning as well as other system improvements including retaining teachers at high need schools (Rubinstein 2016).

In the rest of this paper, I want to explore what this expanded Comprehensive Framework for Teacher Unionism entails and why it is so difficult given the systemic barriers in place. Union organizing through this lens of Comprehensive Teacher Unionism becomes organizing for systems transformation.

The purpose of a union is to be a vehicle for meeting the needs, interests, and aspirations of its members. By organizing and banding together, the union's strength in numbers provides more power and effectiveness beyond what individuals could accomplish themselves. Stephen Covey describes in his work that there are four basic human needs:

- To live
- To love
- To learn
- To leave a legacy (Covey 1992).

Those needs can be translated for the teacher union members.

- To live = the need for a decent salary and benefits and fair treatment.
- To love = the need to be in relationship with colleagues and to have a sense of belonging in one's work.
- To learn = the need to continuously grow and learn in one's practice.
- To leave a legacy = the need to make a difference in all students' lives.

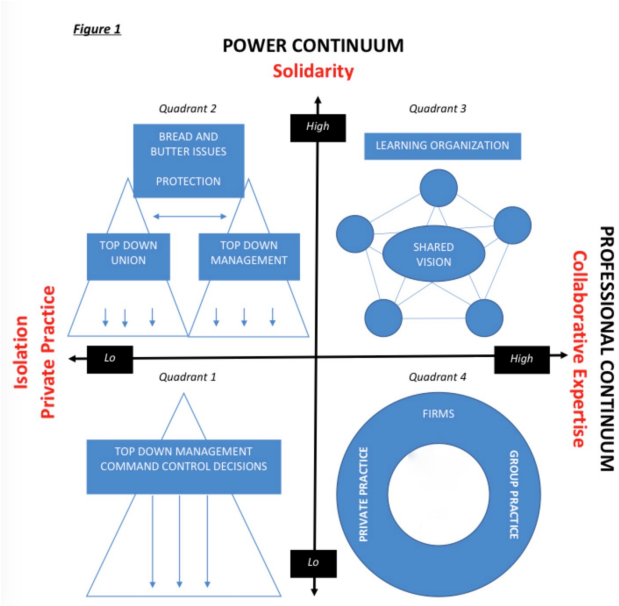
It is the need to leave a legacy where the teaching profession derives its moral purpose through making a difference in the lives of students. When the union serves as a conduit for teachers to collectively impact and improve the lives of all students, then the union exists for more than just the needs of its own members - it also exists for the benefit of students.

In order to improve the lives of all students, especially those impacted by poverty, the Comprehensive Union will develop an array of community organizing and political organizing strategies to improve the circumstances in which many students live. The union, along with community partners, will be a vehicle to organize around the social justice issues that impact the lives of their students and families.

The union also will be a vehicle for transforming teaching into a profession that will improve learning for all students within schools. The rest of this paper will focus on that journey. However, that focus is not intended to under-emphasize the social justice aspects of a Comprehensive Union. This moral purpose is at the heart of what it means to be a profession. The Latin roots of the word "profession" mean to put forth a belief, to stand for something, literally a profession of faith. As an organized group, a profession is a collective whole that has a set of standards around good practice in the service of and toward the betterment of its clients. The organized group is committed to training and supporting its members in living out of those standards. The profession takes responsibility for ensuring that happens and also has a commitment to continuously improve its collective practice over time. If teaching is to become a profession and live out its moral purpose, then the union can be the vehicle for organized teachers to make that a reality. This is exactly what The Rand Report argued for when it called for "collective professionalism." (Wise et al. 1984, 78).

To move beyond the narrow industrial frame and become a true profession with moral purpose, teacher unions need to pursue a professional continuum as well as a power continuum. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
The Unionization Matrix



Prior to organizing into a union, teachers in public education lived at the bottom of a top-down, command-control, bureaucratic system. Patrick Dolan best describes the nature of this existence through the illustration in Quadrant 1 within Figure 1 (Dolan 1994). Teachers are defenseless against the demands coming from the top down, even when these

demands are arbitrary and capricious. Teachers are also isolated in their practice, working in a privatized practice world behind closed doors with very little useful feedback and opportunities to improve in their practice. There are no public spaces in which to be seen and heard.

The vertical axis in Figure 1 represents the power continuum, the journey of collectively organizing for power to provide a counterforce to the top down bureaucratic system. In effect, as shown in Quadrant 2, the union becomes its own top-down, command-control, bureaucratic system against the system in place. The purpose is to put forth an adversarial stance in order to protect its members from arbitrary and capricious treatment and to collectively bargain for better salaries, benefits, and fair treatment. This is essentially the Industrial Model borrowed from private sector industrial unionism. The hallmark of the relationships amongst unionized teachers is solidarity, and any attempt to distinguish teachers from one another around their practice is considered to be a threat to the power of solidarity. Teachers remain isolated in their practice in this model.

In my experience, this solidarity really manifests itself when teachers take collective action, such as in a strike. They come together and experience each other in a new way, often saying that for the first time they feel like a faculty, a collective with real power over their circumstances. An example for me was a strike in 1983 in a school district west of Chicago. There were continual meetings and convenings to determine the next steps in strategy. Public spaces emerged and teachers appeared to one another in new ways. This particular strike ended when the teachers decided to settle after trying to change the composition of the school board with some write-in candidates and falling short of having a new majority on the school board. The financial settlement was less than ideal but the experience of coming together and creating new power together constituted the victory. In the next few weeks after the strike, teams of teachers went up and down the valley sharing their story of collective action with colleagues in other districts. It was in the telling of the story that they captured the victory and what Arendt calls "the specific revelatory quality of action and speech" (Arendt 1958, 186). They revealed themselves to one another as a faculty, a collective professional presence. The problem even tragedy here is that to become faculty, the teachers had to take collective action outside of school, away from the work of teaching and learning.

What has happened to the union on this adversarial continuum is also problematic. It has become itself a top-down, command control, bureaucratic system. The public space for rank and file teacher action becomes severely reduced. In its place, leaders and staff of the union take action or perform services on behalf of their members. This is very much like what Peter Senge in the *Fifth Discipline* called the "Shifting the Burden" archetype. In the short-term, the union elects leaders or hires staff to fight teachers' battles for them because

the teachers themselves are too weak and dependent on the management in the top-down system to fight for themselves. The problem is that over time, the teachers are still dependent and weak but they have shifted their dependency to the union gladiators fighting their battles for them. "The phenomenon of short-term improvements leading to long-term dependency is so common, it has its own name among systems thinkers—it's called 'Shifting the Burden to the Intervenor'" (Senge 2006, 61).

The horizontal axis in Figure 1 represents the professional continuum and the journey from isolated, privatized practice to "collaborative expertise," using the language of John Hattie and Michael Fullan (Fullan 2015). This collaborative expertise is the building of professional capital as described by Fullan and Hargreaves (Fullan 2012). This professional capital not only involves human capital or individual capacity, but also social capital … the power of the group as a continuously improving community of practice. Professional capital also involves decisional capital, the individual and collective judgment that is informed by data and grows out of collective expertise. Relationships among practitioners are much more horizontal and dense where individual differences in expertise are promoted and allowed to flourish, as well as shared for the benefit of the continuous learning of the group. The interlocking circles in Quadrant 3 depict this organizational state. What holds the group together is not coercion from above but the power of a shared or common vision. This is a new public space for teachers to be seen and appear to one another and become a genuine profession, independent and inter-dependent.

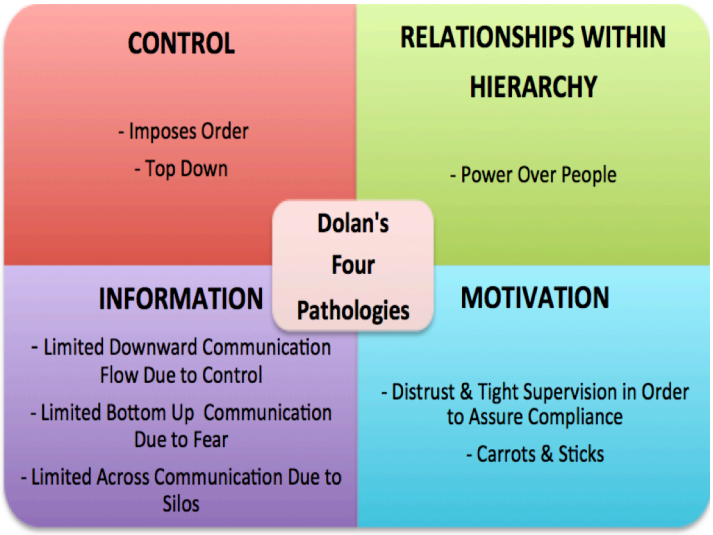
Quadrant 4 represents groups of professionals in private professional practice, groups like law firms or medical group practices or the Danielson Group in education. Law and medicine have developed high degrees of professional practice and standing compared to teaching. The interesting phenomenon is when groups of lawyers or doctors go to work for large bureaucracies, they often unionize but bring their professional cultures with them to some extent.

The real journey for teaching is to move from Quadrant 2 to Quadrant 3. Important to emphasize here is that this move maintains the collective power of Quadrant 2 but deploys it in different and collaborative ways. For example, in the area of collective bargaining, it means moving away from adversarial or positional bargaining toward interest-based, collaborative bargaining.

This journey involves not just transforming the union but also transforming the system of public education. It means moving from top-down, command-control bureaucracies to organic and responsive, continuously improving and innovating, learning organizations. Teacher unions cannot do that by themselves. They need management partners within the system of public education and the community partners who own these public systems.

Dolan described the top down, command and control system as having four pathologies. (Dolan 1994, 30-41). (See Figure 2).

Figure 2
Dolan's Four Pathologies



The first pathology has to do with top-down control. The system is strongly committed to controlling people and their actions and imposing order, keeping things the same and standardized. It has very limited capacity for change and innovation.

The second pathology centers on information and its flow within the system. Information is highly guarded, fragmented, and sectioned in siloes of expertise. Information does not travel well, especially from the bottom up or across the system. This makes it very hard for the system to understand its changing environment and adapt to it.

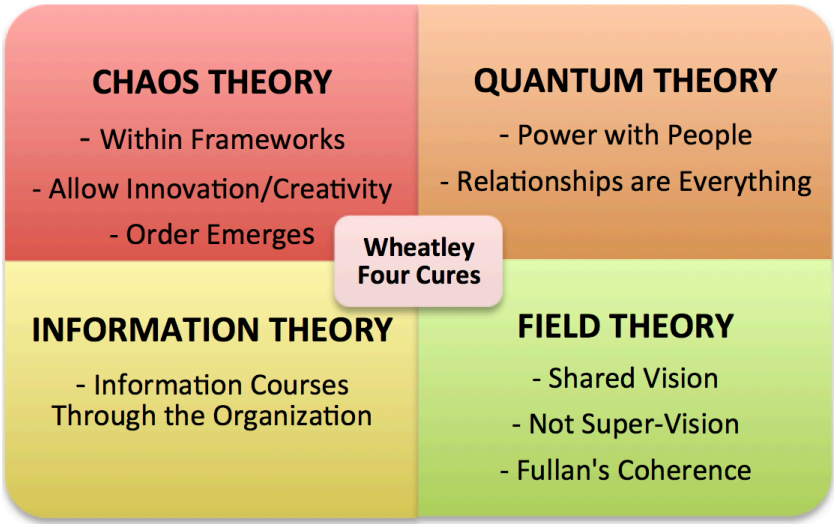
The third pathology is around relationships among people. With hierarchical drops in the system and fragmentation, the relationships center on the power over others and competition with others. There is isolation from others, and very few relationships, especially at the bottom. This breeds fear, very little trust, and lack of openness. Learning in the system is very difficult. Public space for collective professional action is almost non-existent.

The fourth pathology is around people's motivation. The system does not trust people to have the internal motivation to do the right thing and therefore puts external systems of supervision in place with emphasis on carrots and sticks to get people to do what the system wants them to do. This severely limits individual and collective enthusiasm and creativity and action around the work of the system.

These pathologies prevent the top-down, command-control system from becoming an adaptive and responsive learning organization. Teaching as a profession cannot grow in such a system. The union as a vehicle for professionalization has to find strategies, with partners, to transform this system into a learning organization. Again, union organizing, at least organizing a Comprehensive Teachers Union, now becomes organizing labor-management collaboration to transform systems into learning organizations.

A number of systems thinkers and writers like Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley have described in powerful ways what the new learning organization looks like. Margaret Wheatley does this in a way that mirrors Dolan's pathologies. In her book, *Leadership and the New Science,* Wheatley suggests some cures or antidotes to Dolan's four pathologies. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3
Wheatley's Four Cures



She looks to some of the breakthroughs in science and its emerging understanding of the natural world as metaphors for what we need to do to transform bureaucracies into learning organizations or at least what learning organizations look like on the other side (Wheatley 2006).

In Chaos Theory, Wheatley sees a way to counter the top-down, command-control system. Just as even chaos has patterns to it, she suggests that an organization can establish some overall patterns or parameters for action and then promote a lot of autonomy and innovation within these parameters. In this system, order and reordering emerges, rather

than being imposed. This empowers people on the ground of the system to act and interact to create new possibilities.

In Information Theory, she sees a way to free up the organization so that information courses freely throughout the organization. Bringing people together across siloes and out of their isolation creates new relationships and new information, new public spaces for word and action.

In Quantum Physics, she finds a metaphor for relationships and bringing people together. At the very minute, subatomic scale of the universe, Quantum Theory finds there are relationships instead of discrete, separate particles. At this level, one particle can only be found and defined in its relationship to another particle. She suggests that in learning organizations, we need to develop not so much relationships of power over but instead power with one another. This unleashes far more synergy, power, creativity, and collaboration. I think this power in relationships is very much like Hannah Arendt's notion of political power.

Finally, in Field Theory, Wheatley finds a metaphor for how to promote internal motivation in organizations. A magnetic field is invisible but an extremely strong force that holds things together. Wheatley suggests that promoting shared vision is a way for a learning organization to create this invisible field that holds people and the organization together in a dynamic process of learning and changing to accomplish its mission and purpose. Fullan's notion of "Coherence" as a subjective and inter-subjective process gets at the meaning of shared vision. "Coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work. Coherence, then, is what is in the minds and actions of people individually and especially collectively" (Fullan 2015, 1-2). This is what Wheatley describes as shared vision, which is the antidote to supervision.

But the vision of the learning organization is much easier to describe than the strategy for getting from the top-down, command control bureaucratic system in place to the new system of a learning organization. As Andy Calkins says in his post "Why Transforming Public Education Is So Damn Hard: "That's what we've all inherited in our public education system: a completely self-reinforcing, relentlessly self-repeating closed system" (Calkins). That is the problem. We are not organizing in a vacuum. There is an entrenched system in place. As Saul Alinsky said, "The first step in community organization is community disorganization" (Alinsky 1989, 116). W. Patrick Dolan had a deep understanding of what we were dealing with in school systems, what he called the system in place or the "Steady State. "If I were writing in German, I would be able to invent a new word to describe this phenomenon. I would call it the System-In-Place Over-Against-Which-You Start. That is no small presenting problem…. What's more the system-in-place will actively resist change –

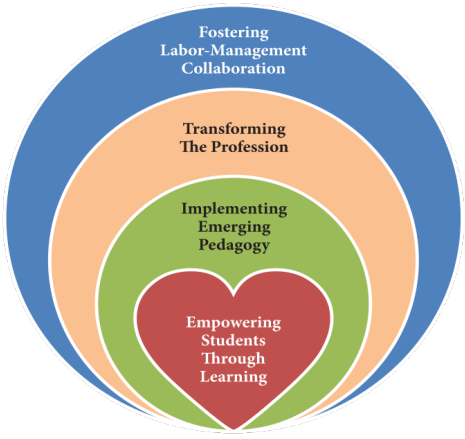
and with a certain ferocity to boot. There is a fundamental, relational, and intellectual consistency in every system that translates into a powerful drive to retain its equilibrium. It is in a 'Steady State' and needs to stay put" (Dolan 1994, 5).

In the early days of organizing CEC, in the late 1980's, we met Pat Dolan. We had an intuitive sense of what our strategy needed to be. He gave us the systems thinking frame and analysis that made our work much more robust. We became partners for the next 30 years in a learning journey to transform the Steady State into a learning organization working in districts and schools across the country.

Let me share our learnings over this 30 year period and suggest a Framework for Change and a Pathway that provide a way for teachers unions to work with partners in districts and communities to transform bureaucratic systems into learning organizations. This is a critical part of the process to turn the union into a vehicle for the transformation of the teaching profession. Over the last 9 years, this has been very much the organizing strategy we have developed and continue to implement working in partnership with the Rockford Public Schools and the Rockford Education Association, the third largest school district in Illinois.

This Framework for Change begins with "The Why" the work is important, giving purpose and meaning to the work from the "Inside-Out." It articulates the moral purpose that also informs the work of the union as vehicle for transforming the profession. In effect, it articulates a logic model for the work. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4
The Framework for Transformation



This Inside-Out Framework begins with "Empowering Students Through Learning," which is the heart of the work. Michael Fullan describes this as "Deep Learning" and describes it

as follows: “Deep learning is the process of acquiring these six global competencies: character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. These competencies encompass compassion, empathy, socio-emotional learning, entrepreneurialism, and related skills required for high functioning in a complex universe.” (Fullan 2018, 16) Collaboration and citizenship in particular capture the kind of public spaces and embryonic democracy that begin to empower students as political beings.

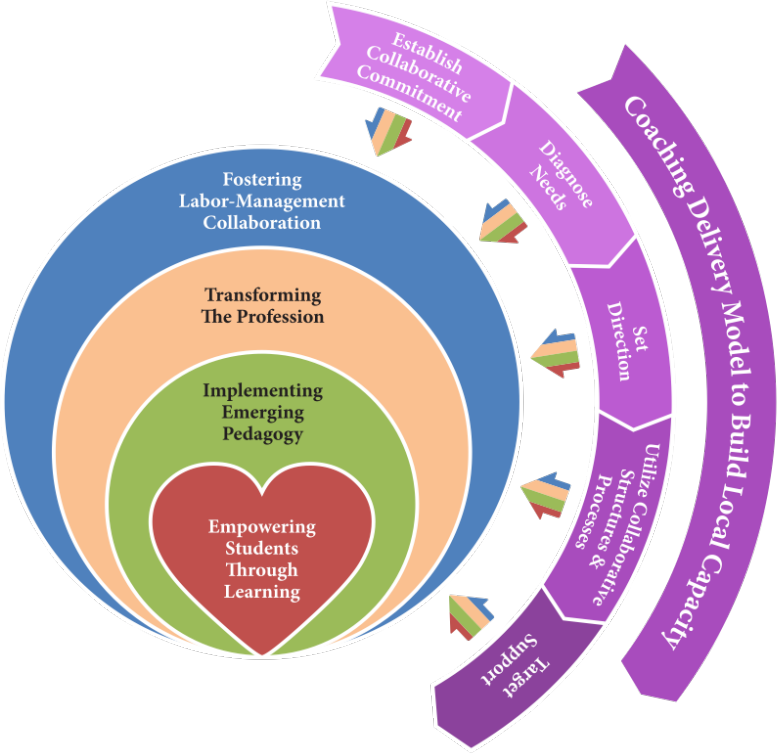
To provide students with the learning experiences they need to be able to work, live, and thrive in the 21st century global world, schools need to “Implement an Emerging Pedagogy” that engages students actively in their learning to think critically, problem solve, develop creativity, and work collaboratively with others. This emerging pedagogy is a big lift for many teachers and leaders.

Such a lift requires “Transforming the Profession,” specifically transforming how teaching is organized, providing opportunities for the development of professional capital, including human, social, and decisional capital. This type of major system change -- moving from isolated, privatized practice to communities of practice, public spaces -- requires “Labor-Management Collaboration,” beginning with fundamental changes in how teacher unions and school management relate so that they can collaboratively redesign the current systems (contracts, administrative procedures, board policies, etc.) to empower the teaching and learning process.

This Framework for Change then moves from “The Why” to “The How,” which describes how the organization collaboratively builds capacity from the “Outside-In.” The inner arc in Figure 5 describes this Pathway. (See Figure 5).

The Pathway begins with a “Collaborative Commitment” among the three anchors (teacher’s union, superintendent/administration, school board) to work together and build the collaborative relationships needed to transform the system in place. It is not expected that people already know how to work well together. However, it is a requirement that they have the disposition and commitment to learn and try to work well together. Rockford started here.

Figure 5
The Pathway to Transformation



The second step in the Pathway is a process of "Diagnosing Needs." There are a variety of ways districts and schools can do this including the following:

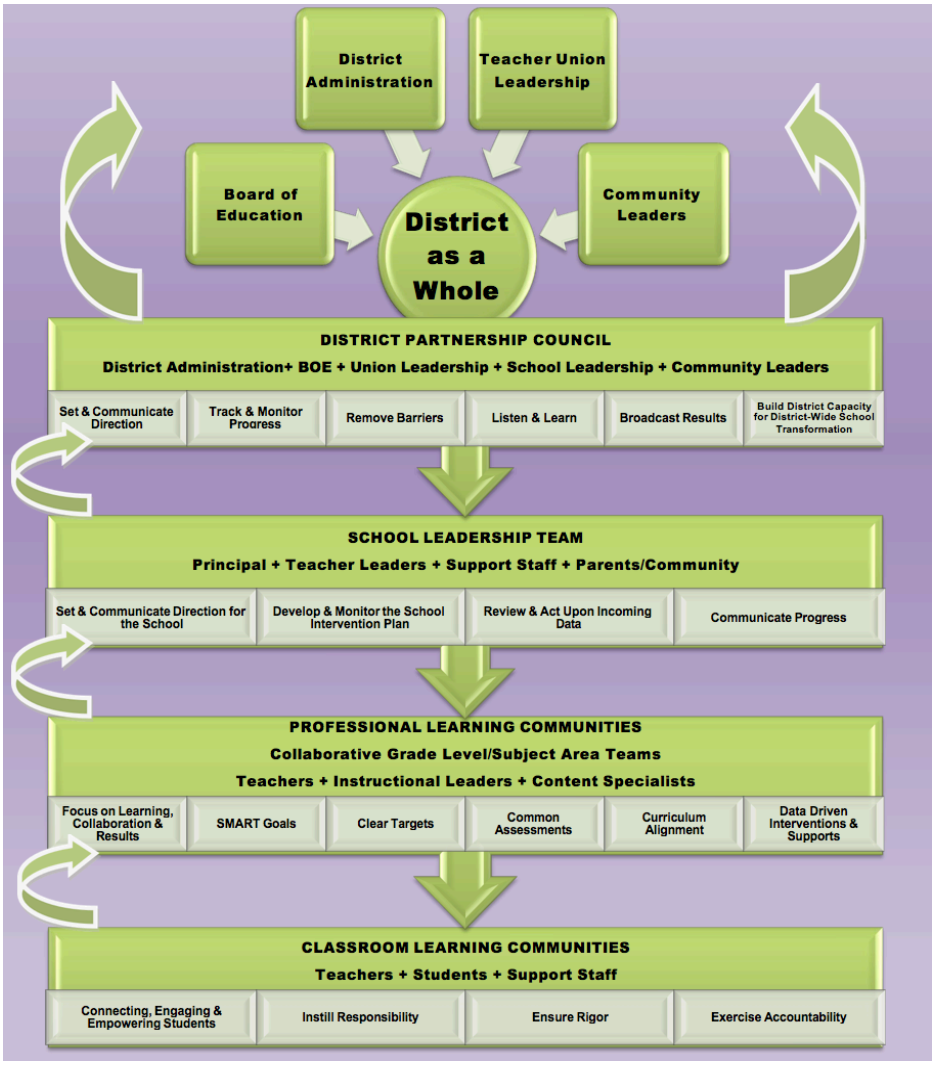
1. Dolan's Boundary Audit of relationships
2. A System Assessment process that is in-depth and based on the Baldrige Criteria and the DuFour Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework, including the three focus areas of learning, collaboration, and results (Baldridge Framework, December 13, 2022; DuFour 2008).

Rockford used both of these processes.

The third step is about "Setting Direction." While there are a variety of ways to do this, one of the most effective and comprehensive ways is an in-depth strategic planning process, which engages multiple stakeholders in a months long journey that typically leads to an ongoing process of strategic action planning and implementation. Again, Rockford took this step as well.

The fourth step involves "Utilizing collaborative structures and processes (public spaces)" to do the work at the various levels of the system: district, school, PLC, and student teams. (See Figure 6)

Figure 6
Collaborative Public Spaces at All Levels of the System



The diagram in Figure 6 maps out the structural interventions that provide the containers for joint collaborative work to empower teams at the school and classroom levels, and to then do the ongoing listening and learning throughout the system (bottom up, top down and across) to identify and share breakthroughs and to remove barriers.

Listening and learning may be one of the most powerful change strategies and also one of the most difficult to organize. In Rockford, it took 2 to 3 years to organize a District Leadership Team (DLT) and then another couple of years for the DLT to home in on the

strategy of really listening and learning to what is happening in the system. People want to act, and listening and learning do not seem like acting, but in reality, when the different pieces of the system are gathered together in a single container, they bring new information and new learning that allows the system to see itself and remove barriers and to move to new levels of possibility.

The fifth step involves "Targeted support" that matches effective, research-based practices to specific district and school needs. One of the most effective ways of doing this is through an external ongoing coaching process that is designed to build continuing coaching and capacity building inside the system of districts and schools. Coaching is what organizing looks like in this context: an external intervention to provide the capacity building within the system to move people from dependence to independence and inter-dependence.

This Framework for Change and Pathway provide the larger context for the particular work of the union to:

- become a vehicle for transforming the profession from individual, privatized practice to collective, public practice
- become a Comprehensive Union responsive to all four levels of needs, interests, and aspirations of its members
- define and live its moral purpose

The Rockford Education Association is on this journey of becoming a Comprehensive Teachers Union. Such a Comprehensive Teachers Union will over time align the following systems with this moral purpose of becoming a profession that meets the needs of all students:

- shared and distributed leadership systems
- strategic planning and execution (aligned with District plans, state and national teacher union plans, and other unions in the community)
- member relationships (processes and structures to recruit, support, develop, and communicate with members)
- partnerships and processes to define the work, and describe the how and the what of the work (collective bargaining is one of these processes)
- data and information systems to monitor and track progress and results (including the financial health of the local) and continuously improve union systems

The work in Rockford is still a work in progress. We would all be the first to admit that there is still a long way to go. In fact from our experiences working in a number of districts as well as Rockford, the Pathway to Transformation is nowhere near as robust as it needs to be to overcome the inertia, the "stuckness," of Dolan's Steady State. Let me suggest some

of the barriers that get in the way of transformation to a Learning Organization and to a Comprehensive Teachers Union.

Collaboration often starts at the top of the system with district leaders and union leaders. They begin to transform their relationships from adversarial to collaborative. They jointly communicate with the rest of the system that they are working together in new and collaborative ways. On the other hand, in some if not many of the schools, administration still acts out of a top down mindset and teachers do not experience this collaboration supposedly happening at the district level. Teachers then will turn on their leaders and press them to become adversarial and fight for them. Union leaders will push the superintendent or other top central office staff to come down on their principals and change their behavior. In some cases, the central office staff actually supervising the principals act in a top down way and actually foster the same top down behavior in the principals. If this pattern persists for too long the union leaders are in danger of being unelected by their angry members.

Top administrators and union leaders at the district level need a strategy to jointly train their principals and union reps at the school level in new ways of seeing their roles and give them new tools for working together. As one superintendent put it, to become principals and union reps, individuals need to have the same "table stakes" in terms of mindset and skill set to take on these roles. This is both a recruitment and a training issue for management and union leadership and requires time and resources. The Elgin and Rockford School Districts have entered into a partnership with Northern Illinois University to recruit and train new principals in a program modeled after the nationally recognized partnership between the Chicago Public Schools and the University of Illinois at Chicago that involves a full-time residency (Tozer 2023).

Collective, public practice among teachers is also very difficult. Professional Learning Communities are a strategy meant to bring about this collective efficacy. But PLCs have gotten a bad reputation with teachers as administrators have often not trusted teachers to work together on the right things and have commandeered PLC time and dictated how teachers should spend this time. This increases teacher resentment and alienation. In turn teachers are not used to working together and sometimes do not want to work together. At the high school level, this is often not how they see their work. At the elementary level, teachers are resistant to adding time to their schedules and day which often feel overwhelming already. Teachers need support and training on how to work and learn together in new ways. This is what the Elgin School District is trying to provide through their work with Michael Toth and his organization Instructional Empowerment.

Compounding these issues are changes in leadership, both superintendents and union leaders. Holding the course becomes very difficult. We do have experience in places like Elgin and Rockford where they have longstanding collaborative structures in place at the district and school levels, and even with changes in leadership, these structures and the resulting culture of collaboration hold new leaders to the transformation journey. This is what Jim Collins called the "Flywheel Effect," the building of momentum through continuous effort over time (Collins 2001).

But perhaps the biggest barrier is the reluctance of both management and the union at the district level to really empower their school communities. We have helped districts put in place processes for schools to come forward and ask the district for more empowerment and to be released from administrative policies and provisions in the collective bargaining agreement. In Elgin, this is called the site exception process and is expressly for the purpose "to improve student learning and performance" (The Elgin Agreement 2019, 115). To get a site exception requires a super-majority of the teachers at the school and both the approval of the School Board and the Elgin Teachers Association. Our experience in many districts with these provisions is that too few schools ask for the exceptions and often the district and union are reluctant to grant them. Again, these systems are stuck.

The frustration of the outside world with this inability to transform districts and schools, especially for poor kids and kids of color, has led to the charter movement to create schools that are independent of the system including the union. David Osborne in his book *Reinventing America's Schools* argues for the power of charter schools to free parents and students from oppressive bureaucracies and unions. "Most charter school leaders believe that industrial unionism, with its labor vs. management paradigm, is a poor fit for education. They prefer to view teachers as professionals, giving many of them decision-making roles"(Osborne 2017, 13). This view is not that different from the vision of Comprehensive Teacher Unionism, except it does not see current teacher unions as capable of this kind of professional unionism.

Districts and unions have both seen charter schools as a threat, taking away students, money, and members. This has led to increasing political resistance to charter schools. Osborne himself in the light of this resistance has argued for a different approach, what he calls Innovation Zones. "In most (Innovation Zones), schools remain district schools with district employees" (Osborne 2021). Key to schools in the Innovation Zone is meaningful autonomy at the school level.

This is the challenge for aspiring Comprehensive Teacher Unions and their school district partners, finding a third way that is more robust than the current site exception process but not creating separate charter schools, something like the empowerment at the school

level that happens in an Innovation Zone. This third way would give schools control over staff, budget and program including curriculum with accountability for results. This would provide schools the opportunity to create collective, empowered public spaces at the school, PLC, and student team levels that are necessary for teachers to become a profession and a professional union. It would be the role of the union and management at the district level to support capacity building and keep the playing field level to assure equity for all students and hold all schools accountable for results.

District and union partners would also have an additional role especially in high need, poverty-impacted communities and that is to organize with other community partners the external integrated support systems to provide the health and well-being for families and students that is foundational to learning. The Community Schools Strategy is a way to do this (Community Schools Playbook). For the Comprehensive Teacher Union, this is a strategy to implement Social Justice Unionism.

In this paper, I have tried to describe what it means to be a Comprehensive Teachers Union and provide some historical context for this kind of unionism as well as a case for its importance if our teachers and ultimately our students are to become all that they can be. This has been my life's work, my vocation as an organizer. It is a work in progress with a lot of other partners, and it is still aspirational and far from a reality. Indeed, it is not a certainty that we will succeed. But for me as well as others I think the vision is too compelling and important not to keep pursuing it.

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Abstract

This paper describes what it means to be a Comprehensive Teachers Union, one that integrates industrial unionism, professional unionism, and social justice unionism, providing a historical context for this evolution. The author relates his own journey in becoming a union organizer and then in building public spaces for teachers to find their collective voice and power, first in more adversarial settings and then through labor-management collaboration in the professional setting of teaching and learning. He describes how the union becomes the vehicle for transforming teaching into a genuine profession and how this collective efficacy can be realized up against a deeply entrenched top down command and control system. The union cannot make this journey alone but has to do it in partnership with school management and school boards through labor-management collaboration and a systems transformation vision and strategy. Ultimately this is a strategy not only to democratize teaching but to democratize learning for students as well.