

## Leading to Learn

A REVIEW OF *LEADERSHIP MINDSETS: INNOVATION AND LEARNING IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS* BY LINDA KASER AND JUDY HALBERT  
ROUTLEDGE, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0415476942

The challenge of transforming Industrial Age schools to a more appropriate model for our knowledge-based society has engaged researchers and practitioners for many years. Yet progress has been slow, sporadic, and rarely sustainable. *Leadership Mindsets* provides a well-conceptualized framework for, and refreshingly optimistic viewpoint on, the nature of the transformative leadership that will be required for this work. Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert convincingly blend the most recent studies of learning and leadership with practical illustrations reflecting their extensive experience as school, district, and provincial leaders and their ten years of leadership research in schools.

The authors characterize the changes required of schools as a shift from the industrial function of sorting and ranking students to a new mandate where all students are expected to learn during their school years and beyond. Such a shift involves a focus on deeper forms of learning, formative assessment, teachers working in learning communities, and internalized commitment, capacity building, and responsibility. Kaser and Halbert argue that such a cultural and systemic shift “requires a different way of thinking, new forms of teamwork, focused effort, continuous learning and passionate commitment” (p. 13). For leaders, new mindsets will be necessary. The book describes six leadership mindsets fundamental to the innovation and transformation of schooling.

The first – intense moral purpose – brings passion to the work of ensuring quality and success for all students. Furthermore, it provides the imperative to constantly re-imagine our notions of quality in pursuit of a more just, sustainable world. This mindset fuels the energy, persistence, and ethical drive required for cultural change in schools.

The second mindset stresses the critical importance of building trusting relationships in any change endeavour. A thorough yet concise review of the literature establishes the importance of relational trust in building learning communities and sets out the necessary criteria for building such trust.

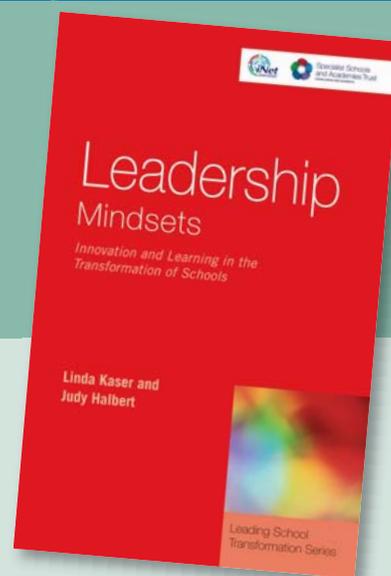
Third, a spirit of inquiry-mindedness, enables the effective leader to approach change efforts with curiosity and a constant desire for greater knowledge. The authors discuss the role of four forms of inquiry (narrative, appreciative, problem-based, and reflective) in deepening the learning culture. They conceptualize inquiry as a cycle and a spiral, informing relevant direction- and goal-setting.

Kaser and Halbert argue that “leading a school focused on learning requires leaders to know a great deal about learning” (p. 77), which leads to the fourth mindset: the continual desire for a deeper understanding of the learning process. They present various perspectives on, and models of learning as examples of, what leaders must understand if they are to provide intellectual stimulation and contextual support for teachers.

Fifth, an evidence-informed mindset encourages leaders to carefully consider what types of information truly reflect deep learning and to understand how such evidence informs dialogue and action.

Finally, a mindset of learning-oriented design recognizes the importance of designing impactful learning opportunities for school staffs. The authors present various research-based design principles that take note of the complexity of creating appropriate structures and opportunities within the varied context of individual schools.

Kaser and Halbert stress that these mindsets are intricately connected – neither discrete nor sequential – and that leaders of deep learning cultures engage dynamically with all the mindsets. “From a mindsets’ perspective, leadership is much more like jazz participation than like conducting a symphony” (p. 141). The authors do not underplay either the complexity of developing these mindsets or the difficulty of doing so in isolation. The book concludes with a discussion of reflective partnerships and networks of inquiry as powerful strategies for leadership development and school transformation.



*Leadership Mindsets* is clearly written and well structured, interspersed with stories from the field. The authors suggest that this book is for new and experienced, formal and informal leaders. It would also serve well as a text in graduate leadership programs to underscore the critical importance of leadership to deep student learning and to highlight the successful leader’s need for ongoing personal development.

Kaser and Halbert suggest the book club as an effective learning-oriented design strategy. *Leadership Mindsets* would itself be an excellent choice for a book club, either for an inter-school or intra-school leadership group or book club. Each chapter closes with “Questions for consideration,” asking readers to reflect on their own context and practice. Formal leaders engaging in conversations with their staffs around the six mindsets would demonstrate a vulnerability helpful to developing relational trust.

In her introduction, Alma Harris notes that this is not a “how to do book.” And, although it is filled with many good examples, this is certainly true. Yet, the development of these mindsets is difficult and complicated work. It will require, for many educators, changes in both their mental models and their underlying assumptions and beliefs. Such changes may only occur when we develop new skills and capabilities, giving us new sensibilities and awareness, and gradually influencing our mental models. Perhaps we can look forward to a *Leadership Mindsets Fieldbook* with strategies for developing the requisite skills and capabilities? |

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