A Vision for Comprehensive Teacher Unionism
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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

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 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.

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. 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.

To move beyond this narrow industrial frame and become a true profession, teacher unions need to pursue a professional continuum as well as power continuum. (See Figure 1.)
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 above. 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.
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 became its own top-down, command-control, bureaucratic system against the system in place. The purpose was 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.

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. This collaborative expertise is the building of professional capital as described by Fullan. 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.

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 community partners who own these public systems.
Dolan described the top down, command and control system as having four pathologies (See Figure 2).

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 relations 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.
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 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 to a learning organization.

In her book, *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley suggests some cures or antidotes to Dolan's four pathologies. (See Figure 3). 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.

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.

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.

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 and creativity.

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, “Coherence”). This is what Wheatley describes as shared vision, which is the antidote to supervision.

CEC’s Framework for Change and Pathway suggest a way for teacher 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.

CEC’s 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.
CEC begins with **Empowering Students through Learning**, which is the heart of the work. Learning includes both academic learning and encompasses social-emotional learning as well. 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. It 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 -- 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.

CEC’s Framework for Change then moves to “The How,” which describes how the organization collaboratively builds capacity from the “Outside-In.” The inner purple arc describes CEC’s Pathway.
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.

The second step in the Pathway is a process of **diagnosing needs**. There are a variety of ways CEC does this, including:

1. Dolan’s Boundary Audits of relationships
2. The System Assessment process, that is in-depth and based on the DuFour Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework, including the three focus areas of learning, collaboration, and results

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 the in-depth CEC strategic planning process, which engages multiple stakeholders in a four-month process that
typically leads to an ongoing process of strategic action planning and implementation.

The fourth step involves utilizing collaborative structures and processes to do the work at the various levels of the system: district, school, and PLC. The diagram below 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.
The fifth step involves **targeted support** that matches effective, research-based practices to specific district and school needs. CEC has developed a catalogue of offerings for such targeted support, organized by the stages in the “Inside-Out Framework for Change” that is available at:

[http://cecillinois.org/programs-services/](http://cecillinois.org/programs-services/)

CEC’s Framework for Change and Pathway provide the larger context for the particular work of the union to:

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

The comprehensive union will 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)