Sheldon Horowitz: Chambers uses an interesting phrase when he speaks of incorporating collaboration into the DNA of Cisco. What do you think is the key to making collaboration part of the DNA of a school’s culture?

Doug Fuchs: I think the question presumes that what we should be primarily concerned about is collaboration. I’m not suggesting collaboration is unimportant. I’m sure it’s important, but how important I don’t know. I would prefer to come at collaboration in a different way. I would ask how do we make educational attainment? How do we build or nurture, transform educational attainment into the DNA of a school? If it’s through collaboration, great. What kind of collaboration? I’m suggesting that it should be a collaboration among specialists, among specialists perhaps and generalists. I don’t think that we can have educational attainment as a part of school’s DNA, so to speak, without specialists working alone and in combination with each other.

The writings of some academics suggest that specialization is unnecessary, that all educators can and should be properly prepared to exercise the same necessary expertise to be of help to all children, including students with serious learning problems. And what concerns me about this thinking is that there is an implicit devaluation of specialization, a downgrading of special knowledge and skills promoted by special training that may distinguish the general educator from the special educator.

Sheldon Horowitz: Well that would never be the case in a corporate culture. You would expect that certain people would have certain levels of expertise in certain areas and others not. Isn’t it about who takes charge, what the responsibilities—the roles and responsibilities—are within the educational setting?

Doug Fuchs: I’m concerned about a devaluation of specialization because I believe that the mission of today’s schools requires it. And one way to make this point is to talk some about RTI. As you know, RTI is like a machine with many moving parts. There are many different tiers of increasingly intensive instruction. In Tier 1 teachers use a core curriculum. In Tier 2 they tutor children in small groups who have proved unresponsive to the instruction in Tier 1. At Tier 3, we have educators who work often one-on-one with children in what some refer to as experimental teaching which requires going from data to instruction and back to data again. Instruction at each of these tiers is very important and very different from each other. In addition to this, there is...in addition to the tiers and to, in addition to the instructional expertise at these various tiers, there’s data-based monitoring. For schools engaged in RTI there needs to be comprehensive monitoring of students’ progress so that educators know how well the
students are doing, whether they need to be Tiers 1, 2 or 3, and whether RTI is proving successful, whether there is educational attainment. Schools require experts who are comfortable collecting student data and capable of explaining the data to teachers and administrators.

**Sheldon Horowitz:** So would you say that collaboration is between experts and the non-experts in the educational setting?

**Doug Fuchs:** Yes, I would say collaboration is about communication between and among everybody in the school—Schools need assessment experts who understand how to move from assessment to instruction, back to assessment again. There’s also the need for people who know a lot about the use of universal screens at Tier 1, which children should we be concerned about from the get-go, before they manifest learning problems. We have instructional, I’m sorry, we have screening instruments that are capable of doing that, as you know. We need expert assessors who can implement comprehensive evaluations of kids who may require special education. RTI encompasses all of this, all of the instruction, all of the assessment, all of the data collection, many different and demanding tasks and I’ve just described a very few from them. That’s what makes RTI so challenging. RTI will accelerate student learning in schools where there is expertise across all of these tasks. RTI’s success in my view will require specialists, not generalists. Specialists in instruction assessment and behavior support. And successful RTI will require that these people speak to each other. If we refer to this communication, this coordination, among specialists as collaboration, that’s fine with me,

I see this all the time in many hospitals and clinics. You have on the one hand tremendous specialization, expertise and specialization, and on the other you have people coming together and trying to share their knowledge, trying to integrate what they know about a client, and it’s dynamic, it’s creative and it’s often highly collegial. These are specialists and they are collaborating and so why can we have the same in schools?

**Sheldon Horowitz:** Thank you, Doug, for being here today and for sharing your thoughts with us about both corporate culture and the DNA of schools.

**Doug Fuchs:** It’s been great to be here. I’ve enjoyed it. Good to see you.