Do you ever wonder whether researchers and professional developers really know what it’s like to be a school leader? Do you sometimes struggle to connect articles and conference presentations with the challenges you face day to day?

For award-winning educator William Sterrett, the answer to those questions was a resounding yes. So he made it his mission to identify the most important issues facing today’s school leaders and offer practical, effective strategies for success. Drawing on his own experience as a teacher and principal and on interviews with nine distinguished practitioners—including Carol Ann Tomlinson, Richard DuFour, Baruti Kafele, and James Popham—Sterrett merges current research and theory with lessons from successful educators who have truly “been there, done that.”

Each chapter of Insights into Action carefully examines a particular topic of relevance, translating research and experience into replicable, sustainable practices and offering ways to overcome barriers to success. You’ll learn

• How to be a more effective leader, including ways to turn your school vision into reality, become a learning leader, make professional development more meaningful, and achieve the elusive work-life balance;

• How to strengthen your learning community by differentiating instruction and leadership, fostering a positive school climate, and incorporating learning experiences outside the classroom; and

• How to face the challenges of today, including ways to infuse technology into your school community, gather and apply useful data, and turn crises both big and small into success for all.

Each chapter includes Action Items and In-the-Field Activities to extend the discussion, help you apply the book’s insights and strategies, and enable you to realize actual growth in your school.

In a job filled with constant stressors and challenges, it’s important to have a solid, well-grounded perspective. Insights into Action offers both practical lessons and inspiration to handle whatever comes your way.
INSIGHTS INTO Action
SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERS SHARE WHAT WORKS
WILLIAM STERRETT

ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA
This book is dedicated to the leaders in our schools—teachers and principals alike—who do this important work every day.
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I would also like to thank the people in the schools whom I have worked with and who have given me insights, energy, and confidence in my work. I want to thank those in Jessamine County Schools in Kentucky for their support of me as I began my work as a middle school science teacher. I want to thank the folks in Charlottesville City Schools in Virginia for helping to develop me further as a teacher and a leader. I am grateful to those at Albermarle County Public Schools for their support of a novice principal and the
continuation of that support throughout my tenure at a wonderful elementary school. And this work would not have been possible without great support throughout the University of North Carolina at Wilmington as I made the transition from principal to professor.

You cannot lead without having learned. In becoming an educator, I was profoundly influenced by a number of inspiring, encouraging faculty and staff members at Asbury University, Kentucky, who encouraged me to think critically. Likewise, as I completed my graduate degrees at the University of Virginia, I learned much about the importance of theory, practice, and reflection, which has helped shape this work.

Two professional organizations have helped me find my voice. I want to thank the Virginia branch of ASCD (VASCD) for giving me the opportunity to publish and present early in my educational leadership career. I also want to thank the Milken Family Foundation for striving to recognize and connect educators throughout the United States in a powerful, meaningful, and collaborative way.

This is my first book, and I am greatly indebted to the staff at ASCD for their diligence, patience, and support throughout this process. My developmental editor, Laura Lawson, provided helpful feedback and insights, and I am very grateful. Miriam Goldstein similarly helped me wordsmith my manuscript into a book that would have meaning in the hands of principals and teachers.

Finally, this work would not have been possible without the educators who contributed so much to the book. Jane Foley, I am indebted to you for your early advice and for writing such a meaningful foreword. This book has been strengthened incredibly by the powerful and thoughtful voices of educators who have “been there, done that” in so many ways, including Baruti Kafele, Rick DuFour, Alex Carter, Carol Ann Tomlinson, Temple Grandin, Roxann Kriete, Richard Louv, Pam Moran, Ira Socol, James Popham, and Yvonne Chan. May your voices as leaders and as learners influence many more in the days and years ahead.
Foreword

Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.
—John F. Kennedy

With Insights into Action, author William Sterrett invites us to learn, to think, and, as an added bonus, to apply as we lead. Sounds like good medicine indeed for the overwhelmed, overworked, and, yes, sometimes confused leaders in the field.

In my role as leader of the Milken Educator Awards initiative at the Milken Family Foundation (www.mff.org), I have the honor and distinct pleasure of traveling around the country. After visiting hundreds of our nation’s top-performing schools in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and meeting and learning from thousands of successful educators, I was excited to learn of William’s project to talk with successful educators, capture their unique and compelling stories, and share them with other educators.
As an educational leader, you are faced with a literal mountain of reading: memos, monthly periodicals or briefings, e-mails, blogs, web links, education reports, news articles, and more. So why is this book different? Why should it be the next educational book you will actually read cover to cover, and don’t relegate to your usual skim of titles, subheads, and bullet points, or, worse yet, place in your black-hole reading pile to address “at some point”?

Why? Because Insights into Action is equal parts information, wisdom, and inspiration. It provides case studies of individuals selected because they are exemplars who have received numerous external recognitions for their individual contributions as well as acknowledgment for their roles in transforming organizations and the education system itself.

The stories in the following nine chapters not only blend the best of theory and practice; every chapter also comes with its own leadership “lesson plans”—a series of practical reflective questions and In-the-Field Activities.

High school principal Baruti Kafele in Newark, New Jersey, shares his laserlike focus on changing the attitudes of students, which will in turn change their achievement. In fact, after only five years, his high school, with an 85 percent poverty rate, registered a 95 percent graduation rate. If you think that isn’t possible in your school, consider his actions.

Rick DuFour, the national voice of professional learning communities, shares that he had only three all-faculty meetings a year when he was a high school principal. How is that possible in a school that helped launch the successful PLC national movement? His insights led to the development of actions that transformed the way teachers and schools collaborate.

Is professional growth plus personal balance even possible for the 24/7 life of an educational leader? Young high school principal Alex Carter, in the high-achieving and equally high-pressure community of Telluride, Colorado, provides straightforward actions for you that are almost as easy as 1, 2, 3.

For years, renowned educator and author Carol Ann Tomlinson has been articulating the rationale and strategies that prepare teachers to use differentiated instruction with their students. Chapter 4 takes us to the next level and addresses the parallel importance for leaders to incorporate differentiated
approaches when working with individual teachers and building the organization as a whole.

Drawing on the work of author and former teacher Roxann Kriete, Chapter 5 provides commonsense tools for teachers and school leaders to transform a school culture from one consumed with and reacting to discipline issues to one that successfully focuses on common goals and maximizing learning opportunities. The foundation of such a culture springs from strong leadership that fosters relationship building within classrooms and throughout the school environment.

In Chapter 6, we learn from Richard Louv, author and advocate of environment-based education, the why and the how of incorporating learning experiences outside—literally—the classroom. School leaders can educate and motivate staff to engage students by creating a partnership of nature and learning, and thereby improve behavior, health, and achievement in core academic areas.

A division superintendent and one of eSchoolNews’s Top 10 Tech-Savvy Superintendents of 2010, Pam Moran makes the infusion of technology into every facet of her division an urgent priority for students, staff, and the community. She models use of technology, provides universal access to information and the latest technologies, develops shared ownership, and consistently aligns instruction with the needs of students in a 21st century world.

Assessment expert James Popham helps us examine the power of formative assessment by asking and acting on two essential questions: “Is an adjustment needed, and, if so, what should that adjustment be?” Chapter 8 helps leaders structure a yearlong framework to create authentic ongoing assessments that emphasize shared planning, quick checks for understanding, proactive adjustments, and, most important, assessments that function as an instructional tool.

We would be remiss to ignore the elephant in the room: the daily, monthly, yearly, lifelong challenges at the micro and macro levels. It is appropriate that we look to charter-school pioneer Yvonne Chan from Los Angeles, California, and her insights on overcoming challenges. Yvonne has weathered many
educational storms, and after 42 years in education, she is still known for her educational innovation, dynamic and motivational presentations, and, above all, her ability to lift everyone around her and inspire others to act.

You are reading this foreword out of your commitment to lifelong learning. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe said, “A great person attracts great people and knows how to hold them together.” You can be that great person. *Insights into Action* offers both practical lessons and inspiration to face the challenges ahead. Now you are ready for action, too.

Jane Foley, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President, Milken Educator Awards, Milken Family Foundation
1994 Indiana Milken Educator
Introduction

At some point during my first year as an elementary school principal, I looked out of my office window at the winter landscape and thought, “Am I really prepared for this?” I was 28 years old, did not have an assistant principal, and was facing the prospect of telling my staff that one of our colleagues had just passed away. Earlier in the week, an angry parent had informed me that she was “contacting a lawyer,” and I had several discipline referrals sitting on top of the stacks of paper that covered my desk. I turned from the window and saw my phone’s red message light flashing. I was lucky enough to be working with some trusted veteran administrators in the district who had taken me under their wing, and I knew I could count on them for advice, wisdom, and a chance to simply share my difficulties and challenges with them. And yet, at that moment, I felt very alone.

In my first year as a principal, I faced enormous challenges. By all accounts, I was ready for the job. I had a solid track record of teaching, had served as an assistant principal, and held a Ph.D. in educational administration and supervision. My school division was rich in resources, and I had attended a host of useful conferences and professional development sessions. But I just
could not escape that feeling of frantically bustling about like a race-car pit crew near the end of a tight race.

**A Need for Insight**

I realized early on that in a job filled with constant stressors and challenges, it was important for me to have a solid, well-grounded perspective that I continually renewed by soaking in relevant research in the field. But I struggled to find literature that incorporated a healthy marriage of effective action research and current theoretical understandings.

Combining educational journals and catalogs for the latest works on school leadership, I struggled to connect the writings and conference presentations with the specific challenges that I faced day to day. At times, the work was relevant and led to actual change in my building. Other times, even the best-selling books seemed dry or irrelevant, lacking that important in-the-field component. I wondered, “Do they really get it? Do they really know my reality of facing the teacher who is fed up with her negative colleague? Do they really know what it’s like to observe a teacher doing everything she can and yet still know that her student, who just transferred to our school three grade levels behind in reading, is not going to pass the high-stakes assessment? Does that author know what it’s like, as a Title I principal, to constantly worry about having a “failing school” label pinned to his school? Does that presenter know what it’s like to see students trail in Monday morning from the bus hungry and upset because they have hardly eaten the entire weekend?”

**Lessons from the Field**

The educators who I always knew “got it” have been those with engaging voices in the field. My colleagues, too, would perk up when a principal stood to share an approach that had led to sustained success in his or her building. Similarly, we would lean in to hear a science teacher talk about differentiating instruction to 26 students in a mixed-level class because we knew she was reporting to work the next day and *living* a narrative of teaching and learning.
Despite facing many challenges as a principal, I was also fortunate to see incredible successes. Our school received recognitions such as the Distinguished Title I School Award and the Governor's Board of Education Excellence award. And I was shocked and humbled to receive a Milken National Educator award in a surprise afternoon assembly in our school gymnasium. This life-changing experience led me to meet a host of other practitioners across the United States who shared their insights and success narratives. I got to meet educators who had beaten the odds and turned around failing districts faced with economic and social challenges, and talented teachers who reached diverse students with engaging lessons.

And they were willing to share. Listening to their words and hearing the names of their students brought a renewed perspective to me. Hearing a colleague describe how he had organized a framework for collaboration and shared leadership to cut back on meetings and maximize ownership gave me hope. Seeing a fellow principal walk through classrooms and ask students to describe, in their own words, what they were learning motivated me to do the same in my school. Hearing about “Anthony” making nearly a year’s worth of growth in just six months, “Nathaniel” thriving in school after losing both parents to legal difficulties, and “Renalda,” who had declared that she hated reading, having a determined teacher “light her fire” and foster a love for learning and discovery, sparked my own desire to share their stories.

**Insights into Action**

These powerful insights also brought to life many of the readings that were dry or lacking in relevance. So, as a new professor of educational leadership, I vowed that my work would address those questions that I had so long sought to answer.

I do not even pretend to have all the answers, so fortunately, this book is not just about me. Instead, I merge current research and theory with practical lessons from nine talented and successful educators in the field who have truly “been there, done that” in their roles as principals, team or department heads, or teacher leaders. As a former teacher and administrator, I had the
opportunity to lead and to learn. In this book, I have paused to reflect and
to draw on my own experiences, as well as on the insights of others. I am
humbled by the company I keep in these chapters.

Practical Lessons for School Leaders

This book focuses on relevant topics that face today’s educational leaders,
particularly those at the school level: teacher leaders, grade or department
chairs, assistant principals, and principals. Each chapter weaves a narrative
of a successful leader who embodies the characteristics that current research
and theory have established as essential for success. Each chapter examines a
different topic and offers practical applications and ways to overcome barriers
to success. In addition, every chapter includes Action Items and In-the-Field
Activities to help readers realize actual change and growth in their schools.

We face many challenges in our daily roles as educators and leaders. This
work can be hard and, at times, cause us to question ourselves. But there are
answers out there, and many of them are not as far off as we might imagine.
We all have much to learn; in the chapters ahead, may we learn together.
Section 1

Learning to Lead
The number-one determinant of a school’s success is the leader. I have to be throughout the school. When people are on the school grounds, they have got to see and feel my leadership in the lobby, to feel me, throughout the halls.

—Baruti Kafele

Action Items

- Make morning announcements
- Send a daily e-mail to staff
- Attend community events
- Conduct effective meetings
“Good morning, good morning, good morning,” the booming voice intones as students step off the bus and onto the school grounds. Principal Baruti Kafele extends his hand to and makes eye contact with every student as he or she enters the building—his building. Minutes later, over the public announcement system, he urges students to “have your best day yet while maintaining a positive attitude.” Not content to sit behind his desk and push papers, Kafele stresses the importance of articulating a vision and then modeling that vision each day—during each classroom visit, each conversation with a staff member, and each discussion with a parent.

Principal Kafele embodies what researchers call change leadership. He began his career in education as a substitute teacher in Brooklyn. Just completing his fourth principalship, Kafele is known for taking the reins of a school in crisis and transforming the entire school community. He served for the last five years at Newark Tech High School in Newark, New Jersey, a school where more than 85 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—and one that boasts a graduation rate of over 95 percent. Named a 2009 Milken National Educator, Kafele is author of the best-selling book Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life and speaks to audiences across the United States. He credits his schools’ successes to his vision and his visibility.

The Importance of Vision

In interviewing Principal Kafele, I quickly realized that he believes the school leader is the essential component in realizing a meaningful vision. He is not shy about noting the critical factor to transformative change in an education system: “It’s me,” he says bluntly. “I don’t care what the circumstances of the students are—where they are from, their home life. We have to see success in them, we have to envision excellence in them. That drives everything I say, everything I think, everything I do as a leader. . . . The number-one determinant of a school’s success is the leader.”
Researcher Judith Kafka (2009) agrees, noting that “a growing body of literature suggests that there is a discernible relationship between school leaders’ actions and student achievement” (p. 318). Goldring and Schuermann (2009) take it further, asserting that “today’s educational leaders need to motivate community-mindedness to address communitywide problems that are central to schools and the current imperatives of student achievement” (p. 16).

Kafele stresses, however, that school success cannot rest on one leader’s personality. As he explains, “My focus is having the students develop a vision for themselves and transforming their attitudes, taking ownership of the vision. The rest—the test scores and achievement gaps—will take care of themselves.”

Forming, articulating, and living such a vision is crucial to sustained leadership in a school. Schools and other organizations spend an abundance of time on developing their visions, often bringing in outside consultants to help. A school’s vision should be more than empty words plastered on a marquee sign; it must have rich, relevant meaning. It is up to the leader to embody this vision every day. Each and every interaction serves as an opportunity to highlight where the school is headed.

When I became an elementary school principal in 2006, I wrote a letter to the community introducing myself and inviting parents to come in over the summer months to meet and chat. Little did I know how busy those “slow” summer months would be. Questions abounded about “the new guy,” and I’ll never forget the first parent who came into my office. I tried to make small talk and ask about her summer, but she got right to the point. “Dr. Sterrett,” she said, looking me straight in the eyes, “what is your vision for the school?” I paused. I recognized the importance of the question and knew that the answer wasn’t something I could just whip up or pull from a book. My response had to be sincere and relevant, and it had to speak to her child’s success. My mind raced, and I searched for something profound to say. Eventually, I came up with “challenging all students to achieve high levels of success,” which was apparently acceptable to the parent, who respectfully nodded in agreement. But that question stuck with me for years.
Visions drive organizations into the future. Bolman and Deal (2003) note that “vision turns an organization’s core ideology, or sense of purpose, into an image of what the future might become” (p. 252). Because of the importance of vision to a school, it must be clear to the entire school community. Sparks (2007) observes that successful leaders must “cultivate clarity regarding values and fundamental purposes that are most important” (p. 13).

In today’s schools, particularly in high schools such as the one that Kafele leads, educators value their creativity and autonomy. Some independently minded educators may equate articulating a consistent, clear vision with attempting to herd cats. Fortunately, autonomy and shared vision are not mutually exclusive. Kafele maintains that staff members can coexist and thrive under a common vision. He secures the support of his staff by rejecting micromanagement in favor of tying teachers’ individual strengths to a shared vision of success for all students.

Kafele believes in keeping vision statements simple. Use one sentence—two at most—and make sure it identifies a clear direction. Kafele’s most recent school’s vision statement is “Newark Tech will become a national model of urban educational excellence” (Essex County Vocational Technical Schools, 2011). This simple, concise statement is easily memorized and understood. And, as demonstrated by the many awards and accolades received by the school, it has been achieved.

The Importance of Visibility

Vision and visibility are necessarily intertwined for today’s school leaders. Whereas each is important in its own right, given the numerous challenges that today’s building leader faces, they must be fused together to sustain success.

Principal Kafele’s tall frame is often seen striding down the hallways of his school, from room to room, with the deliberate purpose of interacting with students. He explains, “You show me a school with a principal behind the desk, and I’ll show you a school without principal leadership.” The successful principal must be constantly “taking the pulse” of the school community. Kafele views successful visibility through both an individual and a team lens,
noting that “in basketball, you recall Larry Bird and Magic Johnson were often out there and visible, though they were also content to allow the team around them to grow and win. Sometimes they carried the team, other times they were more in the periphery, but together they won.” Similarly, Kafele notes that although he is usually “out there” serving as a visible leader, he can’t be everywhere at once; to realize sustained success, he must have a strong team around him.

Above all, Kafele stresses availability and consistency as the key elements of visibility.

Availability

Kafele ensures that he is constantly available to those with whom he works, particularly students. In a video documentary about Principal Kafele (Milken Family Foundation, 2010), a parent happily observes that “his students have his cell phone number; they can call him 24 hours [a day], and that’s really unheard of.” He has also been known to tweet news of students’ achievements from airports while awaiting connecting flights.

Other educators may make themselves available through designated online office hours during which they respond immediately to e-mails or instant messages about school-related issues. Availability might mean attending a community breakfast at a local housing complex to celebrate a tutoring program in the district, or it might mean dropping by a Little League game where a number of students and families congregate. Availability says, “I am working with you—here, in our community—to make a difference. You matter to me, and I want our work to matter to you.” Although the means of availability may differ, the importance of it does not.

Consistency

Successful educational leaders build regular “touch points” into their day during which they consistently reach out to the school community. Kafele’s touch points occur during students’ arrival at the beginning of the day, morning announcements, and daily classroom visits. Other principals may make sure to attend certain sporting events or engage in community
activities. However leaders choose to structure their touch points, they must be willing to be a visible presence, even at the end of a grueling day. Members of the school community appreciate being able to count on seeing their leaders consistently. As the new principal of a school that had recently experienced rapid turnover of principals, I realized that establishing routines and consistently following them built important relational trust. I asked our music teacher to identify and update a school song, which provided us with a new Friday morning ritual of song and celebration over the intercom. I served as a Bingo caller for the community night picnic. And I swallowed my pride each year and participated in the annual talent show, usually with a break-dancing routine. These touch-point opportunities were a way for me to be a lead player in the school community, and students, staff, and parents soon looked to me (and my colleagues) to lead and share. This consistent involvement fed an expectation of sharing my vision for greater school community in a visible, tangible way. If a school’s vision includes “growing together as a community,” then the school leader must be an active presence and willing to build trust, share laughs, and interact in a meaningful way.

24-Hour Visibility

The role of educational leader can be compared to the fast-paced 24-hour news cycle. Educators, like politicians or other headliners, cannot escape public scrutiny—even in the grocery store! As a principal, I was keenly aware of what was in my grocery cart when I shopped after a long workday. Parents and students would come up to me, often just to say hello—but maybe to peek in my cart, too! It comes with the territory. Although we might not feel comfortable giving out our cell phone numbers to the school community, we should always be mindful that we are public servants and find ways to use our “celebrity” to promote our vision. When you encounter students and their parents at the carnival or the local park, remind them of the next school event or praise the students’ recent achievement gains. When we live the life of a visible leader, reinforcing the vision should come naturally.
Overcoming Challenges

Putting forth a vision and then living it is no small task. In a school setting, the principal is the leader in articulating and living the vision. However, he or she cannot, and must not, do this work alone. Shared leadership is vitally important here. As Johnson (2008) puts it, "A principal with vision and expertise creates a blueprint of how the school can achieve its goals. He or she finds teachers and staff to help make that vision a reality. The principal continually coaches and mentors the staff so that together they can accomplish the desired results" (p. 72).

Many leaders can quickly be derailed or lose the support of their school communities by failing to recognize what the organization is doing right and affirming “quick wins” that are already occurring, or by simply not getting the job done. The leader must be a doer and bring the organization—the department or school—along in realizing the vision.

Work from the Current State

A successful school leader understands the current state—the reality as it stands now. Recognizing the current state requires both personal reflection and the ability to manage and make decisions based on data. As Patterson and colleagues (2008) note in the book Influencer, it is important to “diagnose before you prescribe” (p. 258). This multifaceted understanding enables the leader to foster change and growth in the organization. A successful leader will be able and willing to adapt the school’s vision to the ever-changing current state to facilitate continued success.

Find “Quick Wins”

It is important that the leader notch some quick wins to demonstrate that success is not only possible, but is also happening now. Doug Reeves (2009) advises leaders to “pull the weeds before you plant the flowers” (p. 13)—that is, reduce existing and less essential initiatives to clear space for the critical items that they are “drowning under” (p. 14). Establishing clear priorities creates a sense of authenticity and demonstrates that the leader will do what it
takes to support the common vision. Many successful principals make seemingly minor improvements, such as adding a coat of paint or mulching the grounds to rejuvenate the school’s immediate appearance. These actions will build momentum and align support for a shared, larger vision that encompasses every aspect of the school community.

**Follow Through**

As obvious as it sounds, it is nonetheless essential for the leader to ensure that the work aligned with the vision gets done. As the saying goes, “Leadership is about action, not position.” Simply manning the desk in an efficient manner does not make a great principal; rather, greatness lies in the transformative steps that the leader takes each day to make the vision come alive. Bossidy and Charan (2002) note that although planning and envisioning are important, it is *execution* that is the key role of the leader. Educational leaders will be seen as truly transformative when actual, noticeable change is occurring—particularly when that change is aligned with the vision that has been shared and lived in a consistent, visible manner. Davies and Brighouse (2010) note that “values without implementation do little for the school. It is in the tackling of difficult challenges to change and improve, often by confronting unacceptable practices, that passionate leaders show their educational values” (p. 4).

Baruti Kafele notes that plenty of his peer principals have identified the same challenges that he has and are just as aware of best practices and necessary next steps. Not all leaders, however, are successful at effective implementation through a determined, visionary approach. When Kafele was an assistant principal, “One of the first things I did was get permission from my principal to change the look of the building by putting up motivational messages and images and speak on the PA system to have morning announcements. I needed to change the climate and culture. The very next year, I was principal of the school.”

A few specific action items can make a significant difference in realizing a school’s vision.
Action Items

Without action, a vision is just a piece of paper. In education, we have lots of paper; sometimes, it doesn’t mean much at all. For the vision to be achieved, it must be seen as something vibrant and real. The following Action Items will help ensure that your school’s vision thrives.

Make Morning Announcements

Kafele says, “One thing that makes me cringe is when I am visiting a school and the day starts and the bell rings, and I don’t hear the principal’s voice over the intercom first thing. [Students] have got to see me first thing; they have got to hear me. It begins with morning announcements. Those interactions, conversations, and delivering that motivational message each morning to reverberate throughout the building” convey a message of high expectations to students. Kafele structures his announcements to include these four components:

- A greeting;
- An inspirational thought;
- Highlights of success within the school; and
- A challenge to begin the day.

Kafele’s announcements are a consistent, visible way to communicate his school’s vision, and the school community has come to rely on hearing his voice each morning. His superintendent notes that he is a “master teacher” through his use of morning announcements to recognize student success and, when necessary, encourage students to complete work, meet deadlines, and achieve to their capabilities.

Send a Daily E-mail to Staff

In a world where teachers and staff are inundated with communications, administrative e-mails are often met with groans and cringes—if the messages get noticed at all. I resolved this problem in my own school by starting to send a concise daily e-mail (see Figure 1.1 for an example) that contained...
useful information and administrative minutiae while also tying in the over-
arching vision of the organization (Sterrett, 2008). Consistently providing a
single point of communication, affirmation, and clarification to start each day
shows staff members that you view their “think time” as a valuable resource.

Attend Community Events
A school’s vision is not confined within the walls of the school building or
to the hours of the school day. Today’s educational leader must be prepared
to be an active, visible embodiment of the work of the school throughout the

Good morning, staff. Here are a few items for today, Monday, February 1st.

1. There will be a Fire Drill at 8:25 a.m. Please review expectations with your
students prior to this and remember that it is below freezing this morning!

2. Team PLC Meetings
   a. 1st Grade—8:45 in Ms. Smith’s room
   b. 4th Grade—11:45 in Ms. Jones’s room

3. Faculty Meeting this Thursday. Please bring your writing sample and
rubric guide. Refreshments by the 2nd grade team.

4. Upcoming—Schoolwide Field Trips to Cape Caverns next week
   a. Tuesday (Feb. 9)—K–2 teams depart at 8 a.m. and return at 2 p.m.
   b. Wednesday (Feb. 10)—3rd–5th grade teams depart at 8 a.m. and return
      at 2 p.m.

5. Quote for the day: Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner every-
where. (Chinese proverb)

Have a great day!
Dr. Sterrett
community and even through such venues as the evening news, Twitter, and YouTube. Baruti Kafele speaks to audiences of students and staff throughout the United States, and he ensures that his message is consistent and visible by using modern technologies and by staying on message about what’s important: realizing student success. Speaking engagements and meetings—opportunities many educational leaders have—are great forums for leaders to reiterate vision. In addition, community events provide opportunities to engage the school community and live the vision. For example, a high school principal might make a deliberate attempt to shake students’ hands at a basketball game and ask them about their Spanish club work. An elementary assistant principal might dress up as Dr. Seuss for the Wednesday reading night. And the enthusiastic teacher who dons the mascot outfit at the restaurant fundraiser will not be forgotten!

**Conduct Effective Meetings**

School leaders should be wary of meetings. In his book *Death by Meeting*, Patrick Lencioni (2004) refers to them as the “most painful problem in business” and poses the question, “How pathetic is it that we have come to accept that the activity most central to the running of our organizations is inherently painful and unproductive?” (p. viii). Educational leaders have the power to change meetings for the better, however. Kafele holds only one staff meeting each month. He says, “I have very little time to have meetings, and when I do, I want the staff to know that they are important and that I have a clear message that is tied to my vision.” Author Rick DuFour notes that, as a principal, he held only three full faculty meetings each year!

Meetings are valuable for communicating important information, but they must be interactive. As a principal, I realized that most of what I needed to communicate in terms of “one-way” updates (or even—gasp!—directives) could be done via e-mail. In my fourth year as principal, I structured meetings solely to affirm staff, share highlights from within, and give teachers the opportunity to work together (see Figure 1.2 for a sample meeting format).
We opened our meetings by bestowing the “Woody Bear award” on a staff member. This oversized, stuffed teddy bear in a school-spirit polo shirt was a token of appreciation passed from one staff member to another. Each meeting would start with the current guardian of Woody Bear reading a short announcement of affirmation and giving Woody Bear to a colleague. We cheered loudly, announced the honoree on the intercom, and placed the news on our school web page. Affirmation can be all too rare, but Woody Bear ensured that it was a regular part of our routine.

Education can be an isolating field, and we tend not to see the work of our colleagues regularly. So we used a portion of our weekly faculty meeting to share a classroom highlight, either by video clip or through a demonstration. Teachers got great ideas from one another and gained insights on how

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<th>What</th>
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<td>Refreshments and conversation</td>
<td>Teams (or departments) rotate each month</td>
<td>First 10 minutes</td>
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<td>Opening agenda (purpose of the meeting)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
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<td>Recognitions: “Woody Bear award” to a staff member; example highlight clips of teaching, testimonial</td>
<td>Principal, teachers</td>
<td>8 minutes</td>
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<td>Introduction of stated instructional focus</td>
<td>Principal or teacher leader</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<td>Teamwork on the specific related focus area</td>
<td>Led by team (or dept.) teacher leader; all teachers participate</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
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<td>Wrap-up (optional), review of objectives, closing</td>
<td>Principal or team leader</td>
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to engage students. This meeting segment provided an authentic opportunity for shared leadership and ownership of our collective work and displayed the great diversity of teaching approaches that led to student success.

Finally, having team time to work on instructional issues is essential. As a school leader, you can carve targeted, protected team time out of staff meetings. This time also provides an opportunity to interact with specific teams or have a division coordinator or colleague come and touch base with various teams.

The Importance of Reflection

The visible leader uses every opportunity to strengthen the vision among the learning community. This message is not constrained to meetings or to business cards; it is real, organic, and easily recognized. As leaders such as Baruti Kafele demonstrate, the role of educational leader is not for those unwilling to be a presence or to take some risks. By leading, the leader will stand on a pedestal—like it or not.

The effective visionary leader must constantly pause, however, to reflect on the vision. Be creative in finding opportunities for reflection. For example, if a student at Kafele’s school makes a mistake, such as violating the dress code or using profanity, Kafele assigns them to a “read-a-thon,” which entails staying after school and reading independently for one hour. Kafele not only monitors students but also participates, using the opportunity to read and reflect. “Where else do I get the time to read, uninterrupted, something that I actually want to read?” he asks. Constant visibility can be tiring, so finding time to reflect and recharge is essential. After all, if you aren’t fully energized as you greet every student in the morning or grasp the PA microphone, you cannot sincerely convey a vision that is alive and evident to the entire school community. Beyond the noise and the energy of learning, we must remember to reflect, and to continue our own learning.
In-the-Field Activities

1. Select an educational leader (school, division, or nontraditional) and ask him or her to articulate the school’s vision. Next, ask three stakeholders (student, parent, teacher, or another staff member) the same question. Are their answers aligned? Describe your findings and their implications.

2. Work with a school leader to create a faculty meeting format that incorporates the following items within a 90-minute time frame:
   a. Affirmation of the school community.
   b. Instructional highlights from within the building or department.
   c. Protected team time for instructional issues.

3. Review the Action Items from this chapter and develop a plan to implement at least one in your school setting. Consider Kafele’s use of morning announcements, or my example of a daily e-mail, or the potential power of community events. What steps are needed, and how will you communicate them to your team? What challenges do you anticipate? How will you reflect on your work after implementation?
Do you ever wonder whether researchers and professional developers really know what it’s like to be a school leader? Do you sometimes struggle to connect articles and conference presentations with the challenges you face day to day?

For award-winning educator William Sterrett, the answer to those questions was a resounding yes. So he made it his mission to identify the most important issues facing today’s school leaders and offer practical, effective strategies for success. Drawing on his own experience as a teacher and principal and on interviews with nine distinguished practitioners—including Carol Ann Tomlinson, Richard DuFour, Baruti Kafele, and James Popham—Sterrett merges current research and theory with lessons from successful educators who have truly "been there, done that."

Each chapter of *Insights into Action* carefully examines a particular topic of relevance, translating research and experience into replicable, sustainable practices and offering ways to overcome barriers to success. You’ll learn

- How to be a more effective leader, including ways to turn your school vision into reality, become a learning leader, make professional development more meaningful, and achieve the elusive work-life balance;
- How to strengthen your learning community by differentiating instruction and leadership, fostering a positive school climate, and incorporating learning experiences outside the classroom; and
- How to face the challenges of today, including ways to infuse technology into your school community, gather and apply useful data, and turn crises both big and small into success for all.

Each chapter includes Action Items and In-the-Field Activities to extend the discussion, help you apply the book’s insights and strategies, and enable you to realize actual growth in your school.

In a job filled with constant stressors and challenges, it’s important to have a solid, well-grounded perspective. *Insights into Action* offers both practical lessons and inspiration to handle whatever comes your way.
Any teacher can be a master teacher.

So says Robyn R. Jackson, author of the best-selling *Never Work Harder Than Your Students and Other Principles of Great Teaching*.

In this book for school leaders, Jackson presents a new model for understanding teaching as a combination of skill and will and explains the best ways to support individual teachers’ ongoing professional development. Here, you’ll learn how to meet your teachers where they are and help every one of them—from the raw novice to the savvy veteran, from the initiative-weary to the change-challenged to the already outstanding—develop the mindset and habits of master teachers.

Real-life examples, practical tools, and strategies for managing time and energy demands will help you build your capacity for more effective leadership as you raise the level of instructional excellence throughout your school.

To move your school forward, you must move the people in it. If you want a master teacher in every classroom, you must commit to helping every teacher be a master teacher. That work begins here.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP for EXCELLENCE in EVERY CLASSROOM

Robyn R. Jackson

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NEVER underestimate YOUR teachers
NEVER underestimate YOUR teachers

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP for EXCELLENCE in EVERY CLASSROOM

Robyn R. Jackson
To Sheri,
who is still very much the boss of me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is fitting to start a book on leadership by thanking the people who have faithfully provided leadership to me.

I have been blessed to know and be close to my grandparents well into adulthood. I am so grateful to have had the chance to learn from John F. Jackson II, Grace Kilby Jackson, Robert T. Colbert, and Dorothy Colbert. I miss them very much.

I thank God daily for my parents. I happen to have two of the best parents anyone could have. They taught me to be the leader that I am, and I value their loving guidance. I am blessed to have shared my parents with an amazing sister. I don’t exaggerate when I say that she truly encompasses all that is good and right and wise in the world. My family keeps me anchored and makes it possible for me to do all that I do. I wouldn’t be me without them.

Beyond my family, I’ve been blessed to be surrounded by some really smart people. I am grateful to the Mindsteps leadership team that has taught me so much about great teaching and instructional leadership. I continue to learn from Sharon Fogler, Dianne Hamilton, Beverly Brandon-Simms, Robin Kinney, John Jackson, Valda Valbrun, Jo-Jo Jackson, and Sheri Jackson. I am also indebted to my personal group of masterminds—Diane MacEachern, Lynn Miller, Betsy Garside, and Perry Pigeon Hooks—who continue to push and inspire me, and to Doug Shiffman, who keeps me focused on what’s important. This book would not be what it is without the leadership of Genny Ostertag and Katie Martin, my editors at ASCD. I love working with them.

Finally, I want to thank Charles D. Brooks II, to whose careful and loving leadership I gladly submit. I’d follow him anywhere.
INTRODUCTION: ANY TEACHER?

If we truly believe that all children can learn, then we must believe that all educators can learn, even in the face of contrary evidence.

—Roland S. Barth, On Common Ground

My conviction that any teacher can become a master teacher tends to provoke certain reactions. Some people smile indulgently and murmur something about the naiveté of youth. “You’ll learn,” they say. Others are taken aback by the boldness of the statement. “Any teacher?” they ask incredulously, while shaking their heads. “You haven’t met some of the teachers in my building.” Still others eye me suspiciously, as if I am some sort of huckster offering them a sip of snake oil to wash down a handful of magic beans.

Even those who agree with me in principle want to revise the statement. “I’d say most teachers,” they say cautiously. “Not every teacher is going to become a master teacher.”

This is the perspective that defines much of the professional development for educational leaders. It’s why we focus more on helping teachers fix aspects of practice than on helping them pursue limitless excellence. It explains why entire curricula and school programs have been built on the idea that student achievement can somehow be teacher-proofed. And this
habit of underestimating our teachers is what drives so many administrators and reformers to spend more time talking about getting rid of bad teachers than they do about transforming them into good ones. It seems that while we gladly embrace the idea that all children can learn successfully, we do not extend the same idealism to our colleagues. Any child can learn, but the adults? Well, that’s another story.

The tendency is to separate teachers into two categories: the silk purses and the sow’s ears. Although we acknowledge that a silk purse may occasionally turn out to be a sow’s ear, rarely does it happen the other way around. It’s as if we believe that teaching skill is a static gift: everyone is born with a certain amount, and it can’t be taught. But this idea creates a bizarre schism. The foundation of our work as educators is that we believe in the human potential to learn, to get better, to grow. Why do we embrace that fundamental belief when it comes to our students and yet reject it as unrealistic when it comes to our colleagues?

Maybe it’s because, in the experience of most of us, the really great teachers are a rare breed. Saying that any teacher can become a master teacher seems to sully the idea of masterful teaching, making it, well, common. And yet, shouldn’t masterful teaching be common? Shouldn’t every student have the benefit of a master teacher?

Why Master Teachers?

While we’re asking questions, why are master teachers so important, anyway? Does everyone have to be exceptional? Won’t a pretty good teacher or even a not-so-bad teacher do?

These are legitimate questions, and in order to answer them we must look at what we mean when we say “master teacher.” The quickest definition is that a master teacher is one who helps every student in the classroom meet or exceed the standards. Every student. The master teacher’s approach to teaching is seamless. Master teachers seem to instinctively know what to do to help each child learn. They have a large repertoire of skills, and they know when and how to deploy these skills to best help their students.

Master teachers consistently get at least a year’s worth of growth out of a year’s worth of school; some researchers even argue that master
teachers can help students make twice as much progress as an average teacher can (Hanushek, 2004). With an average teacher, a student who begins the year reading at a 3rd grade level might end the year reading at an early 4th grade level. Not bad—and certainly preferable to spending the year with an ineffective teacher and finishing the year still reading at a 3rd grade level. But put that student in a master teacher’s class, and by the end of the year, he will be reading at a late 4th grade level and possibly at a 5th grade level. Over time, having a master teacher can make up for disadvantages such as family background and poor early educational experiences. In fact, a student who has a master teacher five years in a row prior to 7th grade can overcome the average mathematics achievement gap that exists between lower- and higher-income students.

So, given the difference masterful teaching makes in students’ learning, I’ll ask again: Why shouldn’t masterful teaching be the goal—the attainable goal—of every teacher in the profession? And why shouldn’t promoting masterful teaching be a goal of every school leader? It should be, and it could be. And the very first step is to stop underestimating our teachers. Great instructional leadership means rejecting the idea of masterful teaching as a gift endowed to a select few. It means seeing masterful teaching for what it really is: a combination of skills and attitudes that can be learned . . . and that can be taught.

The Test of Leadership

Leadership is not so much getting people to follow you as it is working through other people to accomplish the vision and goals of the institution. Just as teachers might be judged by how well they handle their most challenging students, we school leaders can be judged by how we handle our most challenging teachers. It is easy to lead those who want to be led, but being able to lead those who initially resist? That’s the ultimate test of leadership.

I learned this lesson the hard way (ironically enough, as I was writing this book). Some things to know about me: I was a pretty good middle school administrator. I have coached hundreds of principals, assistant principals, headmasters, deans, and central office administrators on how to help any teacher become a master teacher. I have written a book
Never Underestimate Your Teachers

(Jackson, 2008) that provides step-by-step guidance on how to have difficult conversations with teachers. And I regularly give speeches on the topic, write articles, and offer advice to administrators who are frustrated and down to their last straw. It would be reasonable to think that I would know exactly what to do if my own leadership were tested, right?

Wrong.

Mrs. Quinton* was a difficult teacher, and she defied my ability to help her. Her problem was not that she didn’t know how to teach; it was that she was interested in teaching only certain students—the bright, motivated ones who were already eager to learn. For years, she had been considered one of the best teachers at her school, and she had long occupied a leadership position on the staff. Her colleagues were fiercely loyal to her because she did them little favors; they would not change unless she said so, even if they believed that changing was best for the school. When it came to dealing with Mrs. Quinton, the principal had thrown up his hands. He was afraid to get on her bad side because he knew that if he did, he would lose the cooperation of his entire staff. They would pick her over him.

Enter me. The leadership expert. The fancy paid consultant, brought in to help this school increase rigor in every classroom.

At first, I tried to befriend Mrs. Quinton and convince her that the kind of changes I had in mind would be good for the school. She agreed with me in principle but had very different ideas of how to implement change. In fact, she only wanted to make marginal adjustments to the way things were run, which basically amounted to no change at all. So I tried to work around her, talking with other teachers and providing them resources. Many of them would agree with me in private conversation and make plans to run their classrooms differently, only to change their minds after talking with her.

One morning, after a particularly difficult interaction with Mrs. Quinton, I headed to the principal’s office in a huff, my head full of how impossible she was and how she was poisoning the attitudes of the rest of the staff. I was ready to tell him it was time for her to go. But when I sat down in his office, I noticed a copy of my book, The Instructional Leader’s Guide to Strategic Conversations with Teachers, sitting on his desk. How could I

*The teachers and principals you'll meet in this book are all real people, not composites. Unless otherwise noted, their names and a few distinguishing details have been changed.
tell him to get rid of this teacher when my book made the case that every teacher could be “moved and improved”? How could I say that Mrs. Quinton was impossible to work with when I had provided templates that purported to help any leader work with any teacher?

The easy thing to do would have been to get rid of her. But doing that would have seriously damaged the school culture, which would itself have impeded the school’s progress. Instead, the principal and I formulated a new plan to work with Mrs. Quinton. When all was said and done, we helped her not only embrace the changes we were trying to make at the school but also improve her own instructional practice and become a much more reflective teacher.

When we become instructional leaders, we don’t stop being teachers. The difference is that now we teach through other people. Our biggest leadership challenge is not that we don’t know what to do to increase student success; our biggest challenge is that we must get our teachers to do it.

Your school is only as good as your worst teacher. What’s more, you are only as good as your ability to handle your worst teacher. Many books on leadership focus on rigorously examining data, developing a vision, and building a proper organizational infrastructure in order to make schools more effective. And they’re right. These things are important, and they can be powerful. Yet if you do all that and cannot communicate your vision and your plans to the people who must carry them out, if you cannot inspire teachers to change, if you cannot monitor and give feedback in a way that will ensure that change happens, then you will never get the results you are seeking.

We all have in our heads the image of the school leader who has such a compelling vision, such a strong personality, that the school changes in spite of itself. But the truth is much more boring than that: If you want to move your school forward, you have to move the people in it. If you want excellent instruction in every classroom, you have to help every teacher become an excellent instructor.

Using This Book

In the pages to come, you will learn a process for helping every teacher become a master teacher—a process that I have developed over the past
10 years in my work as an instructional coach, school administrator, and educational consultant. It is the result of the lessons I’ve learned as I’ve helped principals, assistant principals, central office leaders, instructional coaches, and superintendents grapple with the very real challenges they face in their urban, suburban, and rural schools throughout the United States. The strategies I’ll be sharing have worked time and time again, and if you really want to move your teachers and your school forward, this is the work you must do.

Never Underestimate Your Teachers does not address developing a mission statement or communicating your vision to your staff. It won’t teach you how to set goals and achieve them. There are other books that do a good job of showing you how to do those things—all of which are important in leading a school. But this book is not about leading a school; it’s about leading teachers.

Over the course of six chapters, I am going to show you how to recognize good teaching and what to do if you aren’t seeing it in the classroom. We’ll look at evaluation as something undertaken not to identify and get rid of bad teachers but to help bad ones become good, good ones become great, and great ones become even greater. You will learn how to meet these teachers where they are and, through a series of supports, help them all move forward. I’ll share real-life stories of how I and other school leaders have tackled the kinds of challenges you face in your school. Many of the skills and strategies we used are ones you already know; what you’ll learn is how to leverage those skills and strategies to make a real impact.

Chapter 1 provides the foundation for this knowledge, deconstructing what good teaching really is and how it incorporates both teacher skill and teacher will. The chapters that follow examine how you can affect both of these aspects so that over time your teachers get better and better at what they do. You’ll find “Yes, but . . .” sections designed to address common concerns and “Takeaways” that summarize each chapter’s key points—and are perfect for sharing with other members of your instructional leadership team. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses how to bring all the strategies you have learned together to shape a professional culture at your school where every teacher is on a sure pathway to masterful teaching and, as a result, every student is on a surer pathway to success.
If you are an instructional coach, you’ll learn strategies for helping teachers grow and want to grow. You'll learn how to help teachers prepare for and respond to observations and evaluations and how to inspire and support all the teachers you serve to work toward mastery. If you are a teacher leader (i.e., a department head, a team leader, a lead teacher), you’ll learn strategies for moving your team forward toward team and school goals. You’ll also learn how to straddle the dual roles of teacher and leader in a way that best supports the teachers you serve. If you are a school-based administrator, you’ll learn how to move your entire school toward a professional culture that is focused on masterful teaching, and how to help each of your teachers ultimately get there. You’ll learn specific strategies for facilitating the observation process and helping teachers use the observation process to grow toward mastery. And, if you are a district leader, you’ll learn how to best support the schools you lead so that every teacher in every school is continuously improving. You’ll also learn strategies that will help you design and implement a teacher evaluation process that truly improves teaching and learning. No matter which of these roles is yours, you’ll learn how to identify what is important for teachers to focus on and how to develop better teachers and, ultimately, better schools.

To help you succeed in this very important work, this book’s Appendix contains several other tools to help you put what you are learning into practice, including diagnostics you can use to help you determine a teacher’s skill level and prime motivator and to determine your own prime motivator as well. We have also created a companion website at www.mindstepsinc.com/lead so that we can share even more tools, tips, and strategies.

After reading this book, you’ll know exactly how to assess and move the teachers you serve toward mastery. You’ll have a plan for getting started and all the tools you need to make it work. And you’ll know how to access other resources to support and sustain your work over time. In short, you’ll have everything you need to build and lead master teachers.

Now, let’s get to work.
WHAT IS MASTERFUL TEACHING?

Experiences where you are forced to slow down, make errors, and correct them—as you would if you were walking up an ice-covered hill, slipping and stumbling as you go—end up making you swift and graceful without your realizing it.
—Daniel Coyle, The Talent Code

Walk into Mr. Ishigowa’s* classroom and you wouldn’t be impressed. There are no objectives written on the board. The bulletin boards display no student work. In fact, the walls are bare, save an ancient poster of Einstein and a chart illustrating different geometric shapes. Watching Mr. Ishigowa teach, you wonder why his students—mostly minority boys, with pants hanging well below their waists and baseball caps pulled low over their eyes—are even paying attention. Mr. Ishigowa doesn’t wow his students with dramatic lectures or entertain them with beguiling stories. He doesn’t group them into jigsaws or dream up clever games for them to play. He just teaches math. For 45 straight minutes he is at the board writing formulas, explaining angles, showing students how to calculate the

*The master teachers in this chapter are called by their real names.
slope of a line. Short, bespectacled, and thin; bald, save for a few wisps
of gray hair that stick up on top; and wearing pants pulled up almost to
his chest, Mr. Ishigowa’s physical presence defies the image of a master
teacher. So does his quiet manner and heavily accented speech. And yet . . .
he can take any student—even students who have failed geometry twice,
even fourth-year freshmen—and help them pass the state geometry test.
Mr. Ishigowa is a master teacher.

* *
In Mrs. Meneker’s classroom, music blares from the stereo on her desk.
Half of the student desks are pushed casually against the far wall. Few
if any of her 11th graders are sitting down, though: They are standing in
corners talking or hunched over tables coloring while occasionally sipping
sodas. Some are slouched in a row of beanbag chairs along the back wall
of the classroom, eating chips and laughing as they flip through maga-
zines. Mrs. Meneker works with one student at her desk, while the other
29 seem to be on their own.
But look more closely: The students standing in the corner aren’t just
talking; they’re looking at a map and debating the value of the Louisiana
Purchase. Those students coloring? They’re drawing maps of what the
United States looked like before and after the Louisiana Purchase, dis-
cussing different possibilities for dividing the states, and debating which
should be slave states and which should be free states—and using their
maps to bolster their point. The students slouched in the beanbag chairs
reading? They are looking through collections of political cartoons from
the time and selecting which they will address in an argumentative essay.
Mrs. Meneker and the student at her desk are reviewing the student’s last
test results and setting long-term goals for the next assessment. Before
the week is over, Mrs. Meneker will have a similar meeting with all of her
other students. Even though some struggle now because they aren’t really
prepared for the class, by the end of the year, all of them will pass the AP
exam with at least a score of 3. Mrs. Meneker is a master teacher.

*
Mrs. Marshall doesn’t work with students after school. She doesn’t stay in class during lunch and work with them, either. She doesn’t give make-up work and rarely offers extra credit. Her gradebook has few grades in it. When she lectures to her 6th and 7th graders, she does so from the front of the classroom using nothing but a short list of topics written on the chalkboard—no PowerPoint, no interactive whiteboard, no video, no technology at all. At the beginning of her lecture, she tells her students, “I am not a tape recorder, and there is no rewind button on me, so you will have to pay attention.” After the lecture, her students work on their assignment sheets—and there is an assignment sheet almost every day. When asked, she will tell you that her students determine their own grades. If they want to pass, they will pass; if they want to fail, that is their choice as well. Every one of Mrs. Marshall’s students signs a learning contract for each unit of study. They are required to do a certain number of assignments, and if they do them, they earn a C for the unit. Those who want to earn a higher grade complete extra assignments according to the contract. And although the “choice to fail” is up to the student, few if any of them ever make that choice. Mrs. Marshall is a master teacher.

In Mr. Davis’s classroom the students, all male, sit in rows—razor-straight rows, facing the board. They raise their hands for permission to sharpen their pencils; often, their requests are denied. Mr. Davis doesn’t like a lot of movement in his classroom. He refers to his 4th graders by their last names and insists that they refer to him as “Sir.” Mr. Davis runs a tight ship. At first, it seems a bit much for 9- and 10-year-olds. After all, they are still children, and such military precision seems a little draconian. But for this group of boys, the structure helps them focus on planning the class garden using sophisticated tables based on average rainfall, crop yield, and the merits of organic compost over commercial fertilizer. The structure helps them concentrate on developing their own hypotheses about the optimal time to plant and whether it is better to start the seeds in a pot in the classroom or plant them directly in the soil. The structure helps them resist using yardsticks as swords rather than using them to measure
the proper size of their lot. And the structure helps them develop the self-discipline to work independently or in small groups without becoming distracted. They're learning to think like scientists. Mr. Davis is a master teacher.

* 

If I were to ask you to close your eyes right now and picture a master teacher, odds are that you wouldn't conjure up Mr. Ishigowa, Mrs. Meneker, Mrs. Marshall, or Mr. Davis. We each have a sense of what a master teacher "looks like" and what a master teacher does. And yet in classrooms all around the world there are teachers doing a masterful job of helping students meet or exceed the standards who don't look at all like what we would imagine and who may not engage in the laundry list of best practices we would expect. There are also many teachers out there who conform exactly to our personal "master teacher" schema and yet have students who are making little to no progress and may even be consistently failing.

We need a better schema.

What Is Teaching?

Before we pin down what masterful teaching is, we should backtrack to consider teaching in general. All teaching is a combination of skill and will.

*Skill* is the science of teaching; it involves a teacher's pedagogical and content knowledge. It determines how well teachers know the subject and how well they can help students learn it. *Will* has to do with a teacher's passion; it is the art of teaching. It involves teachers' drive to help all students be successful. Master teachers have high skill and high will. They don't just know their craft; they also have the drive and determination to be the best at it.

Because teaching is such a complex act, cursory feedback and standardized support can never help teachers grow to the master level. Unless you understand both their skill and their will, you cannot provide the targeted help that they need. Rather than rely on Hollywood images of effective teaching or our own notions of what good teaching should look
like (based on how we were taught or what we ourselves did as teachers), assessing a teacher’s effectiveness requires a much more objective and comprehensive idea of what masterful teaching looks like and how it incorporates both skill and will.

**Teacher Skill**

As noted, the skill component of masterful teaching comprises both content knowledge and pedagogy. Teachers who understand content but cannot figure out how to help students understand it cannot be effective in the classroom. Neither can teachers who know several strategies for helping students learn but not how to apply these strategies in different situations and tailor them to all learners, or teachers who are excellent instructional designers but poor classroom managers. Pedagogy and content-area knowledge are intricately intertwined and cannot be separated into two distinct categories; teachers must have *both* to be considered skillful.

Teacher skill is rooted in the seven principles of effective instruction (Jackson, 2009), a concept we will explore in greater detail in Chapter 2. In short, though, highly skilled teachers start where their students are, know where students are going, expect to get them there, support them along the way, use feedback to help themselves and their students get better, focus on quality not quantity, and never work harder than their students. As a result, highly skilled teachers are good planners. They know how to structure a lesson and a unit to ensure that students learn and understand the material. They plan both formative and summative assessments and use the feedback these assessments render to adjust their instruction throughout the unit. Those with high levels of skill structure lessons so that learning becomes inevitable rather than accidental. They understand how to sequence instruction, how to anticipate student confusion, and how to explain difficult concepts in ways that help students develop increasing understanding over time. They know different ways to explain concepts and how to match their collection of instructional strategies to individual students’ needs.

Another essential component of teacher skill is classroom management: knowing how to structure the classroom so that students can focus on learning. When inappropriate behaviors distract students, highly skilled
teachers know how to help students quickly get back on track. They know how to balance structure and support with autonomy and how to help students take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning and behavior over time.

Teacher Will

The will component of masterful teaching is rooted in the desire to help all students learn and the determination to ensure that all students do learn. It’s more than simple motivation, however; will encompasses a teacher’s entire attitude and approach to teaching and to students. It’s what powers a teacher to find ways to reach students even in the face of huge obstacles. It’s about persistence, trying strategy after strategy until one succeeds. Teachers with very high levels of will see teaching not as a job but as a vocation.

Will is what drives the teachers who continually refine and hone their craft, reflect on practice, and embrace data and feedback. It’s why these teachers set high expectations of themselves and their students, why they are not content with the status quo. They want their students to keep growing and reaching, and they model that in their own practice. Teachers with high levels of teaching will understand the importance of relationships and work hard to make sure that every student in the room is safe, engaged, and connected.

An individual teacher’s will is affected by countless factors, including working conditions, personal problems, relationships with colleagues, passion about a particular subject, district constraints, school climate, and student attitudes. Will can fluctuate throughout the course of a career, a school year, or even a day. Teachers often start their careers with high will but, because they don’t receive the right kind of support, become discouraged and frustrated and lose their will over time. Conversely, a teacher may begin a school year with low will and meet a group of students that is so inspirational that the teacher’s will skyrockets during the course of the year. Teaching will is not static and must constantly be nurtured if it is to be sustained.
The Will/Skill Matrix: Where the Path to Professional Development Begins

Given that teaching comprises both skill and will, and that teachers possess varying degrees of each, considering where an individual teacher falls on a simple matrix of skill level and will level (see Figure 1.1) gives us a new way to think about that teacher's professional development needs.

The matrix allows us to identify four teacher profiles or “types”—high will/low skill, low will/low skill, high will/high skill, and low will/high skill—and these designations offer an approach to the analysis and development
of masterful teaching that is far more useful than the familiar stereotypes and the same old received wisdom. Each type of teacher has a different set of needs and, thus, needs a different type of instructional leadership. Understanding where teachers in your school fall on the Will/Skill Matrix will help you identify a leadership approach that directly addresses their individual needs.

Let's take an initial look at the four general types. You'll learn more about each in the pages to come.

High Will/Low Skill
High-will/low-skill teachers are often enthusiastic about teaching. They know that they have areas they need to work on, and they want to improve. They often seek out a supervisor's feedback, enthusiastically participate in professional development, and try new strategies or ideas in their classrooms. But because their practice is not rooted in principles, their reliance on strategies makes their instruction disjointed.

High-will/low-skill teachers tend to be new to the profession. However, veteran teachers who have not found ways to integrate their teaching knowledge over time can also fit the profile. High-will/low-skill teachers often have very lofty ideals about teaching, which unfortunately can lead them to implementing instructional strategies that do students more harm than good. Or, in their eagerness to improve, they may try out several instructional strategies without giving much thought as to appropriateness for their students.

High-will/low-skill teachers are willing to learn. With the right kind of support, they can quickly get better. The danger is that without the right kind of support, these teachers can quickly lose their enthusiasm and become low-will/low-skill teachers.

Low Will/Low Skill
Low-will/low-skill teachers have, in many ways, simply given up. They see teaching as a job rather than as a profession or a calling. Many are "retired on the job" or are biding their time until they can move on to other things. They "phone it in" and do not seem invested in their craft.
Low-will/low-skill teachers do not buck the status quo; theirs is a more passive resistance to change. They tend to stay out of the way and do only what is absolutely necessary and no more. They do not volunteer for additional duties. They participate marginally on teams, letting others take on the bulk of the work, and passively attend meetings without contributing anything. They work hard at being invisible.

In some ways, the low-will/low-skill teacher is the most difficult to move toward mastery. It's very challenging to try to address both will and skill at the same time, so you need to determine which to take on first. If it appears that low will has resulted in low skill, it makes sense to work on will first. But other times these teachers have lost their will over time because they have been repeatedly unsuccessful in the classroom. In that case, it makes sense to work on their skill first; as they become more successful in the classroom, their will increases.

High Will/High Skill

High-will/high-skill teachers are master teachers. They are adept at both the art and the science of teaching. Not only are they highly motivated and committed to their students’ success, but they have the knowledge and skill to make their students successful.

High-will/high-skill teachers operate according to the principles of effective instruction. They have integrated their practice to the point where it seems that they instinctively know the right thing to do. But they are not content to rest on their laurels. Their high will means that they are constantly refining their practice, learning new ways to reach students, and seeking input and feedback from others to hone their craft.

The danger with high-will/high-skill teachers is that without the right kind of leadership and support, they can become bored and seek new opportunities elsewhere, or become frustrated and grow cynical over time. Because they are so effective with students, they take on more responsibilities or work with the most challenging students. Many want to do a good job and will work hard even in the most impossible of circumstances, but over time they can become burned out. In that case, a valuable high-will/high-skill teacher can become a low-will/high-skill teacher.
Low Will/High Skill

Low-will/high-skill teachers understand the science of teaching but have neglected the art. They know their subjects and have fairly decent pedagogy, but they lack the soft skills that make teaching truly masterful. They have the skills to be effective teachers, but for a variety of reasons they simply do not do what is best for their students.

Because they are fairly effective teachers, they may have an inflated view of their own practice. They may think that because they have to some degree mastered many of the skills of teaching they have mastered teaching itself. This makes them particularly unreceptive to feedback, especially if it highlights areas where their practice needs improving.

Low-will/high-skill teachers can sometimes become the saboteurs of the school and of any attempt at change. Because they don’t feel that they need any improvement, they may actively resist efforts to provide feedback, institute reforms, or start new programs—often to the detriment of students. They also can become very cynical, identifying ways that this strategy or that reform won’t work rather than finding ways to make it work.

The good news is that many low-will/high-skill teachers started out as high-will/high-skill teachers who experienced some disappointment or frustration that has sapped them of their will. Thus, there is every reason to believe that with the right kind of leadership and support they will once again function at the master teacher level.

It is important to understand that a teacher’s “type” is fluid. Teachers may shift from one quadrant to the next as they move through their careers, change courses or subjects, switch schools, move to different grade levels, work on different teams, or experience different events in their personal lives. Thus, you cannot label a teacher as one teacher type and expect that label to still apply in a few months or years. To truly help every teacher become a master teacher, you have to be aware of what quadrant they occupy on any particular day, semester, or year. This means continually examining data, both formal and informal, and knowing what to look for.
Checkpoint Summary

Take the first steps toward supporting every teacher’s progress toward mastery by figuring out their “type”—where they fall, right now, on the Will/Skill Matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Looks Like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High will/low skill</td>
<td>Enthusiastic; idealistic;</td>
<td>Seeks feedback and explores new strategies and ideas, but implementation is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>willing to learn</td>
<td>inconsistent and ineffective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low will/low skill</td>
<td>Discouraged; not invested;</td>
<td>Does not volunteer or contribute; passive; tries to stay beneath the radar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“retired on the job”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High will/high skill</td>
<td>Motivated and skillful</td>
<td>Easily identifies and implements appropriate strategies; explores new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ideas, seeks feedback, and refines practice; takes on challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low will/high skill</td>
<td>Skillful but disinterested;</td>
<td>Unreceptive to feedback; resists efforts to try new approaches; saboteurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“seen it all”</td>
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Leading All Types to Mastery

It is as critical to provide teachers with differentiated leadership as it is to provide students with differentiated instruction. Tailoring your leadership approach to the skill and will of the individuals you are leading is key to helping all teachers embrace change and significantly improve their practice. Not tailoring your leadership approach can lead to undue frustration—for you and the teacher—and undermine your leadership goals.

For instance, many leaders make the mistake of trying to solve a will problem with a skill solution. They hope that by providing more and better professional development or providing additional resources, they
can raise a teacher’s will. Or they take the opposite approach and try to solve a skill problem with a will solution, wasting time trying to inspire a struggling teacher to do better when what that teacher needs is specific help with developing skill. Understanding a teacher’s will and skill is not only more efficient, in that you don’t waste time on the wrong leadership approach, but also more successful. It helps you identify a targeted approach that will make the biggest difference for your teachers.

In the next few chapters, you will learn strategies for understanding and building teacher skill and will. In the last chapter, you will learn how to put those strategies together to create a strategic leadership approach for the teachers you serve.

YES, BUT . . .

What if a teacher thinks that he is high skill or high will but I think just the opposite?

Sometimes you will assess a teacher’s skill or will and come to a conclusion that differs from the teacher’s own perception of his skill or will. What do you do when you run across a teacher whose self-assessment seems inaccurate or downright delusional?

For starters, remember that you don’t ever have to share your assessment of a teacher’s will or skill with the teacher. It’s a tool for you, intended to guide your approach, your work.

You also don’t have to convince a teacher of his low skill or will in order to help him; the strategies you’ll read about in the chapters to come are designed to work even for teachers who think they are closer to mastery than they really are. So don’t get caught up in convincing teachers to assess their own will and skill in the same way that you have, and take heart that the kind of support you provide will help them develop a more accurate self-assessment over time.
### CHAPTER 1 TAKEAWAYS
Understanding Teacher Skill and Teacher Will

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSIDER</th>
<th>KEY QUESTION</th>
<th>INDICATORS OF HIGH SKILL</th>
<th>INDICATORS OF HIGH WILL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Observational data | What does the teacher’s instructional practice look like? | • Posts objectives and essential questions.  
• Uses classroom management strategies that are effective and consistent.  
• Uses instructional strategies effectively. | • Interacts well with students (responding to questions, supporting a range of learners, using motivational strategies, and encouraging student engagement). |
| Feedback | How does the teacher respond to feedback? | • Implements suggestions or otherwise acts on feedback. | • Engages in reflective conversations about feedback. |
| Teacher artifacts | What instructional materials has the teacher produced, and how do they align with the standards, the curriculum, and the learning needs of the students? | • Designs lesson plans, assessments, and assignments that align with standards, are appropriate for students’ ability levels, and reflect sound pedagogy. | • Communicates with parents and comments on student papers and products.  
• Sets and follows classroom rules, policies, and procedures that support student progress. |
| Classroom formative assessment tools and data | How does the teacher create/use formative assessment? | • Uses student data/results to improve instruction and practice.  
• Aligns assessments with instructional goals and unit objectives. | • Adjusts instruction based on assessment data.  
• Follows up with individual students regarding their performance and supports students accordingly. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSIDER</th>
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<th>INDICATORS OF HIGH WILL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom summative assessment data</td>
<td>How many of the teacher’s students have mastered the standards?</td>
<td>• Analyzes data/results and targets areas for improvement (students and instructional practice).</td>
<td>• Takes ownership of data/results and uses them to improve instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal conversations</td>
<td>How does the teacher view his or her practice?</td>
<td>• Understands where students are and what they need to do to move forward.</td>
<td>• Takes ownership of student progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Has a good sense of pedagogy; instruction is driven by overarching, instructionally sound principles.</td>
<td>• Shows enthusiasm for new ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Likes/enjoys students and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation on teams, committees</td>
<td>How does the teacher interact with colleagues?</td>
<td>• Makes valuable contributions; shares resources.</td>
<td>• Seeks input from colleagues and is appreciative of support and feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Implements team feedback in classroom.</td>
<td>• Shares ideas and the work of the team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any teacher can be a master teacher.

So says Robyn R. Jackson, author of the best-selling *Never Work Harder Than Your Students and Other Principles of Great Teaching*.

In this book for school leaders, Jackson presents a new model for understanding teaching as a combination of skill and will and explains the best ways to support individual teachers' ongoing professional development. Here, you'll learn how to meet your teachers where they are and help every one of them—from the raw novice to the savvy veteran, from the initiative-weary to the change-challenged to the already outstanding—develop the mindset and habits of master teachers.

Real-life examples, practical tools, and strategies for managing time and energy demands will help you build your capacity for more effective leadership as you raise the level of instructional excellence throughout your school.

To move your school forward, you must move the people in it. If you want a master teacher in every classroom, you must commit to helping every teacher be a master teacher. That work begins here.
The New Principal's Fieldbook
Strategies for Success

Pam Robbins • Harvey Alvy
The New Principal’s Fieldbook

Strategies for Success

Pam Robbins • Harvey Alvy

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA
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Acknowledgments

The New Principal’s Fieldbook: Strategies for Success was inspired by the questions, challenges, and triumphs of new, aspiring, and veteran principals from around the world. Their dedication, commitment, and inquiries sent us on a quest to mine the most significant research on leadership and examples of best practice. Together with these resources we combined the sage advice and vivid stories of successful practitioners to create this interactive fieldbook. It is designed as both a guide and a repository for new ideas, inspiration, hopes, and dreams. We are deeply grateful to the many professionals who shared their expertise and friendship and contributed their experiences in the field. We believe their gift of knowledge, seasoned with reality, will allow others who wish to follow in their footsteps to add tools to blaze the leadership path in a relentless pursuit of excellence.

Harvey Alvy is particularly grateful to the school leaders, administrators, teachers, and support staff who have guided his journey as a teacher, elementary and secondary principal, and university professor. Their guidance and sage advice enabled Harvey to weather the storms of his rookie year as a school principal and to define his work as a practitioner and student of the principalship. Ray Cubbage deserves special thanks for his friendship, insights, and manuscript editing. Dan Alvy, Harvey’s father, still working at the age of 89, continues to be a role model of tenacity and dedication. Harvey’s mother, the late Rebecca Pearl Alvy, inspires us to remember that children come first. Finally, the greatest debt is to Bonnie and Rebecca for their love, support of the journey, and their presence at the finish line, which is always sustaining.
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We extend our thanks to Anne Meek, an early advisor in this endeavor, and to Shelley Young for her dedication to designing the book cover. Tim Sniffin, Darcie Russell, and Julie Houtz deserve special recognition for countless hours of editorial assistance. Finally, we would like to especially thank Nancy Modrak, a visionary leader in her own right, as well as the ASCD staff for their confidence in us and valuable assistance with the manuscript.
On my first day of school as a new principal, I arrived early only to discover that the bells, which had been turned off all summer, weren’t calibrated. And the custodian was absent! I realized that in all my years of preparation for the principalship, nothing had prepared me for this. Fortunately, the secretary knew how to program the bells. Right away I realized I would have to depend on others, as well as myself.

Despite having read dozens of books on leadership, having spent hundreds of hours in the classroom, and having been selected as the most qualified candidate for the position, often principals find themselves unprepared for the twists and turns on the leadership path. While calibrating bells may not seem a significant piece of content for an administrative class, bells ringing intermittently in the schoolhouse and interrupting precious instructional time can become a significant obstacle in realizing a vision of student learning.

This situation also reminds one of the subtle complexities of the principalship in action. A seemingly managerial task,
programming bells, ultimately is intertwined with an instructional leadership responsibility: protecting quality learning time.

Day in and day out the principal faces surprises—some obstacles—and some opportunities. You can never predict each challenge that will occur on the leadership journey. Decisions made on the spot and the strategies employed to solve problems will determine success or failure. Reflective principals come to realize that they do not have all the answers. In the previous scenario, the act of reaching out to tap the talents of others helped foster uninterrupted instructional time for students.

**Why This Fieldbook?**

The purpose of *The New Principal's Fieldbook: Strategies for Success* is to provide newcomers to the principalship with research-based practical strategies and sage advice from practitioners designed to help them succeed—right from the start. The fieldbook concept is intended to provide a guide for newcomers by offering a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges that beginning principals experience. The book will help to assure that principals develop capabilities that will enable them to proactively respond to the day-to-day responsibilities of the principalship and to the surprises that can throw leaders off center. Additionally, a critical concern of the authors is that patterns or habits developed in one’s initial years of service tend to influence success in the remaining years of one’s career (Parkay & Hall, 1992). Thus, it is vital that new and aspiring principals be provided with clear, concise, and practical information, along with effective strategies to help them become visionary leaders, skilled in promoting the success of students and teachers, facilitating a positive and learning-focused collaborative culture, and building strong home–school–community bonds.

In each chapter the reader will find (1) content based on research and practice, (2) short stories and scenarios about successful practice, (3) activities designed to invite the reader to
interact with content through personal application, and (4) a section to record field notes that reflect one’s perceptions of the chapter’s content and its implications for practice.

An Invitation

The principalship is an adventure. It requires traversing familiar terrain but in a new role. Recently a new principal commented, “I walked into the teachers’ workroom and everyone became quiet. This never happened when I was a teacher.” Familiar territory has become surprisingly strange. The newcomer continued, “I never realized how alone this role can be. I still feel like the same person, ‘a teacher.’ I still act the same . . . but the reaction of my colleagues is now different. I am no longer one of them, but rather I am now the administrator.”

Another new administrator spoke of the rapid pace of the work: “I don’t know where the time goes—I arrive at work before the sun rises. The next thing I know, I look at the clock and it is 3:30 p.m. Although I’ve not always completed my to-do list, I’m amazed at all that transpired during the day.”

A new principal in an international school wrote: “I love my job. Being a school administrator at a school of 992 kids sure keeps me on my toes. It is kind of a paradox: Some days, the spontaneity of the job is the thing I like the most, but on other days it is the source of my frustration. I like the problem solving and interacting with folks, but the small petty stuff gets me down. However, when I walk down the hall and get hugs and ‘high fives’ it makes it worthwhile.”

Surprises, unexpected obstacles, and opportunities characterize the leadership path. As you make the journey, often alone, in a leadership role, you will traverse uncharted territory while simultaneously helping others along the way. There are no detailed maps. As noted earlier, this book provides a much needed field guide, grounded in the practical experiences of successful principals and supported by solid research. This guide offers tips, tools, and tricks of the trade to help newcomers succeed.
Research on learning (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) has identified the use of metaphor as a powerful tool for fostering understanding. The fieldbook metaphor helps to crystallize the complexities of the principalship and provides a vehicle to illuminate opportunities for effective leadership in action.

**Critical Themes**

Nine critical themes or threads run through the book’s 15 chapters. These themes represent a vision of essential concepts linked to the success of principals in the 21st century. The themes include

- **Committing to a belief that keeps all students at the heart of organizational actions.** This commitment means that in decision making, problem solving, and planning the guiding light should be what is best for all students. Maintaining this commitment influences the nature of conversations within the building as well as the daily, routine interactions. The very culture of the schoolhouse should resonate this theme in its celebrations, rituals, values, norms, reward systems, crisis management, and communications. The physical environment portrays the notion that, above all, kids matter.

- **Being a learning leader.** Learning leaders model the pursuit of knowledge regarding effective practice. They strive to learn from experience and mistakes. Asking questions is a way of life and yields information as well as a way of communicating interest. Learning leaders inspire organizational members to create a workplace where risk taking and experimentation are valued. They set a personal example for the organization.

- **Building trust and quality relationships.** There is tremendous power in forging relationships and networks to garner both skills and the motivation to make a difference. In schools where trust prevails and individuals join hands and hearts in pursuit of a vision to make a difference for students, learning soars (Gordon, 2002). Leaders affect change by shaping conversations in their
organizations (Sparks, 2002). By engaging in robust conversations with ourselves, colleagues, the community, students, and their families, school outcomes are created to reflect our collective values. In the wake of September 11th, we are reminded forever that in the final analysis, it is relationships that matter.

- *Acting with integrity and in an ethical manner.* A leader who commits to these virtuous principles possesses an unwavering moral commitment to student success, teacher growth, and quality school communities. Ethical behavior must include a commitment to all students regardless of race, religion, gender, and ethnicity. This also entails heralding the value of ethnic diversity and intentionally taking action to assure that regardless of socioeconomic status every child is guaranteed meaningful, challenging learning experiences. This commitment represents a relentless quest to do what is fair—to do the right thing.

- *Developing a vibrant, healthy, learning-centered culture.* Creating such cultures engages the leader in motivating staff and community members to coalesce around a common core of values including a safe, learning-focused environment, high expectations for student success and staff learning, a climate of joyfulness, a recognition of teaching as a calling, norms that encourage and celebrate the deprivatization of practice, and routine that is focused on making a difference for all students.

- *Recognizing the stages of socialization (and surprise) for the newcomer.* Research and experience document the presence of three evolutionary stages that newcomers to an organization encounter. These include the anticipation phase, when you look anxiously at becoming the new principal; the encounter phase, when you enter the organization; and the insider phase, when you become part and parcel of the organization (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1974). Surprises—in all areas of one’s encounters—abound. Thankfully, there comes a point in one’s career when a newcomer awakens to a feeling of competence and personal satisfaction!
Dedicating oneself to being an instructional leader by choice—not because it’s mandated by the job description. Instructional leaders are governed by an inner commitment to foster teaching and learning for all within and outside the schoolhouse. Despite the temptation to wallow solely in management functions that may offer immediate gratification upon completion, instructional leaders are able to manage bifocally (Deal & Peterson, 1994). That is, they recognize and operate on the belief that leadership and management can go hand in hand and that management functions—such as checking on buses—can offer an important leverage point for the instructional leader by building relationships with those who drive and ride those vehicles.

Paramount to all this, instructional leaders must recognize that they are directly accountable for learning and can influence this outcome in the organization through their actions, for example, by visiting classrooms, analyzing data and making data-driven decisions, facilitating job-embedded learning, and championing teacher excellence.

Managing as an essential instructional leadership tool. As noted previously in the instructional leadership theme, one can get completely tied up in management aspects of the principalship. Remember, however, that management tasks support instructional leadership responsibilities. As a principal has noted, “To facilitate learning, the instructional leader also makes sure the classroom lights are working” (Robbins & Alvy, 2003). Managing the master schedule to allow teachers to meet during the school day combines a very important management function (that of building the master schedule) with an important instructional responsibility (that of providing time for teachers to plan).

What is implied here is that management tasks need to be embraced within the context of the broader system. That is, when the leader effectively and efficiently uses management tools, this action frequently has a positive effect on the instructional program. For instance, when a principal personally calls a supplier or textbook company to ensure that essential instructional resources
arrive on time, so that teachers and students will have them at the beginning of the school year, the instructional program benefits.

- *Orchestrating school-community partnerships.* Today, schools cannot succeed alone. When a leader formulates partnerships, a vast support network is created involving essential stakeholders, such as parents, the business community, social services, emergency and medical service personnel, and security personnel, senior citizens, and the media. School leaders must systematically reach out to these stakeholders to maximize resources to foster student success socially, emotionally, physically, psychologically, and academically. In times of crisis, community personnel and resources are indispensable.

School leaders should also ask: What are we doing for the community? Full-service schools, which give back to the community by providing evening classes, recreational activities, and medical assistance, illustrate one approach that can emerge from a school–community partnership.

**Final Thoughts**

Collectively, these themes and related sections of the fieldbook mirror key content areas addressed by the recently merged ISLLC/NCATE Standards for school leaders (Jackson & Kelley, 2002), and provide needed resources to support new leaders as they embark upon and travel the leadership path. With this preview of what is to come, readers are invited to explore the pages and linger with the ideas that resonate for them. Best wishes for success in the journey to make a difference.
It was her very first faculty meeting as a principal. Christine knew this first meeting with the staff would be a pivotal one. She decided she must share her vision in a way that would invite the staff to follow so that, as a consequence, daily life in the building would be guided by a shared vision that places serving students well at the heart of the school and every classroom. After welcoming staff members, Christine explained:

I have a vision that at this school we will create a culture of care. While this is currently my personal vision, I hope it becomes a vision every one of us will come to embrace. I believe that such a shared vision will become a beacon that guides our efforts to make a positive difference in every student’s life at this school.

To understand what a culture of care would entail, I’d like us to begin thinking about a time in our own lives when we felt cared for, and I’d like us to share these experiences. I’ll take a risk and begin. As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. She always spoke softly to me, listened carefully, made me laugh, and took time for me. She had raspberry bushes in her yard. Together, we plucked raspberries from the bushes and talked about what we would make with
them. She allowed me to eat as many as I wished! To this day, raspberries remind me of what it feels like to be cared for.

Some staff members looked down, some squirmed in their chairs, others looked up and dabbed tears from their eyes, and still others looked around. Silence fell over the group. Christine’s heart was pounding. She wondered if anyone would break the silence.

After what seemed like eternity, a senior member of the staff spoke up and shared her experience with care. Taking her lead, others described their memories.

In the days that followed the staff meeting, Christine began to find small, anonymous gifts in her mailbox—a basket of raspberries, raspberry soap, raspberry-scented candles. She thought, with a smile, “Perhaps creating a culture of care is beginning to emerge as a centerpiece of the schoolhouse.”

Two weeks later, it was kindergarten orientation. Traditionally, a bus went around the neighborhood, picked up parents and kindergartners, and brought them to school. Prior to this day, one parent contacted the school and spoke to the assistant principal about pick-up times. The assistant principal mistakenly indicated a time later than the actual pick up. Hence, on kindergarten orientation day the parent and child missed the bus, and the mother called the school. The assistant principal took her call and said, “Sorry, we’re not a transportation service; you’ll have to find another means of transportation.” The resourceful parent, angered by what had transpired, contacted the district superintendent. He heard the parent’s story and responded empathetically, “Madam, I realize that you’ve probably looked forward to this day for five years. If you give me your address, I will personally drive you to the orientation.”

Unaware that any of this had transpired, Christine spotted the superintendent walking down the hall with parent and child in tow. Interpreting his presence as a special visit to orientation, she approached him and thanked him for coming to the school for this important occasion. He quietly took Christine aside and told her what had transpired, adding, “I have the car seat in my vehicle;
call me when orientation is over, and I’ll take them home.” Christine responded, “No, give me the car seat, and I’ll personally take them home. I want to talk with the mother about what happened. This is not the way we are going to do business around here.”

After orientation, Christine invited the mother and child into her office for a chat. She asked the secretary to take her calls so that she could devote undivided attention to the mother and child. She spoke about her vision of a “culture of care” and expressed dismay that the mother’s initial experience with the school didn’t convey a caring act. She explained that developing a culture of care takes time and would require great commitment on the part of those who serve children at the school. “But,” she added, “I believe this vision will become a reality here.”

Christine concluded the conversation and walked the mother and child to her car. After everyone was buckled up in their seatbelts, she turned to the mother and said, “I hope you’ll give us another chance.” The mother nodded and remarked, “I know new ways take time.”

The next morning Christine called the assistant principal into her office. Christine told her about the mother’s experience on orientation day. And then, she simply asked the assistant, “Is this something that would happen in a culture of care?” The assistant principal looked down and said, “No,” and continued, “I need to write that mother a note of apology.”

Vision Defined

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines vision as “something seen otherwise than by ordinary sight; something beheld as in a dream.” A school vision is a descriptive statement of what the school will be like at a specified time in the future. In schools where all organizational members genuinely share a vision, the vision serves as a compass, lending direction to organizational members’ behavior. When the vision is the principal’s, but is not embraced by organizational members, individuals may go
through the motions or act on *shoulds* rather than as a result of deep commitment. At the heart of any vision is a set of core values and beliefs. Principals new to a school sometimes experience a conflict between their own values, beliefs, and vision for the organization and the existing organizational values, beliefs, and vision. These existing beliefs and values are reflected in the culture of the organization or, as some people say, “the way we do things around here” (Peterson & Deal, 2002). These beliefs play out in individuals’ patterns of behavior, mental maps, and unwritten rules or norms for behavior. Many new principals describe what it feels like to encounter a culture where values and beliefs do not align with theirs as “being out of alignment.” A high school principal shared an example wherein his personal vision was connected with making a difference—cognitively, affectively, socially, and physically—for every student. Student success was at the heart of his vision. He entered a school where patterns of behavior and unwritten rules protected seniority in the organization as a core value. Veteran teachers were assigned advanced placement classes and the best schedules, whereas newcomers were frequently assigned struggling students with learning challenges and less desirable schedules. He reflected, “I knew I had to work hard to remove this misalignment. I knew what I encountered was what I didn’t want. But this situation made me aware that I had to come up with a detailed vision of what I wanted if I was to be successful. I had to make this picture so attractive that it would generate followers—so I wouldn’t be the only one sharing this vision!”

**Multiple Visions**

The situation faced by this high school principal points to the notion that there are often multiple *visions* in an organization:

- A *vision of self as a leader* entails one’s beliefs about the leadership role, how one should act, things one should and should not do, and one’s code of ethics.
A personal leadership vision represents one’s dreams, aspirations, and hopes for the organization and its members. It is also based on a code of ethics and deeply rooted values and beliefs about what is important.

A shared vision focused on teaching, learning, and assessment engages organizational members in forming a collective vision that everyone can buy into, because it is reflective of the shared values and beliefs that place student learning at the center of all practices and actions within the schoolhouse.

A shared vision for the school community embraces the notion that schools cannot operate effectively without an important partnership with the larger community. This partnership affords enriched, augmented resources for members of both school and community.

When these visions are out of alignment or not shared by all organizational members, individuals often perceive a lack of focus and the organization doesn’t run smoothly. Prioritizing becomes difficult. Although visions serve to guide people and direct action, competition for attention often exists. For example, administrative newcomers in Louisville, Kentucky, put it this way, “It’s hard to stay focused on your vision and take a broad view of things when immediate demands such as bursting pipes, a fight in the hallway, or a possible child abuse situation are facing you.” One administrative mentor, in response to this, asked the newcomers to imagine, when competing priorities like these arise, that they are wearing bifocal contact lenses. One lens is for close vision; and the other, designed for distance. The mentor explained,

It is the nature of the principalship that, at times, you have to go back and forth between your distance and close-up lenses, and, at other times, you try to use them simultaneously. For instance, how you work with students involved in the fight in the hallway (close-up lens) might become a lesson on the value of collaboration and successful conflict resolution (distance perspective). How you work with what may turn out to be a child abuse situation (close-up lens) may be an opportunity to demonstrate a concern for the child’s physical,
psychological, and emotional well-being, as well as an opportunity to build trust and become a significant positive adult connection and advocate (distance lens).

“Temptation is all around you,” one middle school principal remarked. “It may be part of my personal leadership vision that I protect valuable instructional time. Every minute counts. And then, a vision challenge emerges when a situation arises, and I find myself thinking that the simplest thing to do would be to use the intercom and interrupt classes! Having a vision for teaching and learning makes you stop and think: What is important? What is the best choice?”

Creating a Personal Leadership Vision

Roland Barth defines leadership as “making happen what you believe in” (2001, p. 446). This is accomplished through symbolic and expressive leadership behaviors. From the symbolic perspective, a principal models and focuses individual attention on what is important. From the expressive side of leadership, principals talk with teachers, help to crystallize and communicate the rationale for a vision, and generate shared discussions about what is important in the school. This focus on the meaning of a school leads to the development of a mission statement grounded in the collective beliefs of the staff. The process creates a commitment to a common direction and generates energy to pursue it. But it begins with a personal leadership vision (see Figure 1.1).

Getting clear about the answers to these questions will be reflected in how the principal interacts with others in the school and community, that is, setting priorities and making decisions. To develop a vision consistent with one’s values and beliefs, a statement of an envisioned future state is then drafted (see Figure 1.1). Going through this process develops an “inner compass” within the school leader that will point the way on the leadership path. Leaders who develop a personal vision, communicate this vision to others, and act consistently with this vision are perceived with respect and integrity, two vital ingredients for trust.
Figure 1.1
Developing a Personal Leadership Vision

Values and Beliefs
What do I deeply value?

What are my beliefs?
   About leadership?
   About students?
   About staff members?
   About community building?
   About curriculum, instruction, and assessment?
   About learning?
   About professional development?
   About supervision?
   About communication?
   About change?

Vision
My vision—a desired future state—entails:
Creating a Shared Vision

While a personal leadership vision is essential for the leader, members of the staff are not involved in its development. Hence, a process is needed so that the staff can articulate a shared, core ideology and an “envisioned future” for the school. Although it would take less time to copy or borrow a vision from another organization, great benefits are derived from engaging with staff in a vision-building process. It generates ownership, commitment, and energy toward making the vision become reality (see Figure 1.2, p. 9). As Stephanie Hirsh, associate executive director of the National Staff Development Council, writes:

A school vision should be a descriptive statement of what the school will be like at a specified time in the future. It uses descriptive words or phrases and sometimes pictures to illustrate what one would expect to see, hear, and experience in the school at that time. It engages all stakeholders in answering such questions as:

- What kind of school do we want for our children and staff?
- What will students learn? How will they learn?
- How will students benefit from attendance at our school?
- How will their success be measured or demonstrated?
- Of all the educational innovations and research, which strategies should we seek to employ in our school?
- If parents had a choice, on what basis would they choose to send their children to our school? (Hirsh, 1996)

There are several approaches to developing a vision. Certainly, one approach is to invite all stakeholders to come to consensus on the answers to the preceding questions. Then, a vision statement would be drafted, encapsulating their responses.

Another method of vision building involves a “Post-it strategy” (see Figure 1.3, pp. 10–11). This approach has been used successfully in schools throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Great Britain, and Asia.

The vision derived from this process serves as a beacon, lighting the way for organizational members to collaborate on behalf of students.
Closely related to the vision statement is the mission for the school. As Hirsh says,

A mission statement is a succinct, powerful statement on how the school will achieve its vision. The mission answers:

- What is our purpose?
- What do we care most about?
- What must we accomplish?
- What are the cornerstones of our operations? (Hirsh, 1996)

A mission statement serves as a galvanizing force for staff, students, and community. Goals identify how the mission and vision will be achieved. Some schools summarize the vision and mission in a bumper sticker to keep them in the forefront of everyone’s mind. Seeing the school you want is the first step in the journey to making the vision become reality.

If the vision is truly shared, it will be evident in both the climate (how a school “feels”) and the culture (how “business” is transacted) of the school.
Figure 1.3
Post-it Strategy

Materials Needed
- Chart paper
- Tape
- Markers
- Large Post-it notes
- Index cards

Steps
1. Explain what a vision statement is. For example, “A vision statement communicates what the organization stands for, what its members believe, and what ends will be accomplished in keeping with the purpose and beliefs. It serves as a galvanizing force for action.”

2. Build a rationale for the vision statement. This step might include explaining why vision statements are helpful (shared sense of purpose, common direction, energizer) and examining vision statements from other organizations. During this examination, the staff could be asked to analyze the values that seem to be implicit in the vision statement. Identify how a vision statement influences a staff member’s life.

3. Invite the staff to take part in the development of the vision statement. Explain that this will allow the opportunity to synthesize individual staff members’ dreams or visions into a statement reached through consensus. This statement will represent the ends to which all within the organization will strive.

4. Ask staff members to think for a moment about the place where they would like to send their own very special child to school. How would the child be treated? What would his or her experiences be like? How would he or she feel? Ask staff members to describe their thoughts on Post-it notes.

5. Now ask the staff members to think about the place where they would like to go to work every day. What would it be like? How would they feel? How would people interact? Write this on Post-it notes.

6. Ask staff members to each take their two Post-it notes and fuse them into one. Tell them to write their thoughts on an index card.

(continued)
7. Individuals then meet as table groups of four to six people and share their index cards. After they have all read their index cards, the table group creates a composite representing a group consensus of the individual cards. This is written with markers on chart paper.

8. Pairs of table groups meet and share their charts. They synthesize their two charts into one.

9. The groups continue the process until they create one chart that represents the shared visions of all in the room.

10. If parents and representative students have not been involved in this process, this same procedure may be repeated with them, and the products of their work brought to the faculty. At this point, the staff could incorporate these charts with the faculty work.

11. At another time, a contest could be held or the group could work together to create a slogan that would encapsulate the vision statement.

In large schools, Steps 1 through 7 might be conducted within departments. Departments would then share their completed charts and eventually synthesize their work, cross-departmentally, into one charted vision statement on which all can agree.

Activity

Communicating a Personal Leadership Vision

Although it is essential that the vision of the school be a shared one among organizational members, it must also be one that is compatible with the principal’s personal leadership vision. Take a moment to list or graphically depict the ways in which you communicate your personal leadership vision (e.g., writing newsletters, what you pay attention to in visiting classrooms, or prioritizing agenda items for meetings).
Reflective Field Notes

Please use this space to jot down notes that are important for your personal leadership journey. You may do this in a structured way—by responding to questions—or in an unstructured way. Use whatever approach works for you!

- How does vision serve as a compass?
- In what way might vision function as a leadership tool?
- What would you craft as a personal leadership vision? What has influenced your thinking?
- Draft a sample vision statement for staff to analyze for core values and beliefs.
- Which approach to vision building do you prefer?
- Create a graphic organizer to encapsulate key aspects of this chapter.
The New Principal’s Fieldbook

Strategies for Success

Grounded in recent research and successful practice, The New Principal’s Fieldbook prepares new and aspiring principals for the unexpected twists and turns of school leadership. Capitalizing on their experiences and those of other educational leaders, authors Pam Robbins and Harvey Alvy offer practical information, research-based strategies, and provocative stories to help principals develop into visionary leaders skilled in promoting the success of students and teachers.

Surprises, obstacles, and opportunities characterize the leadership path. Within the chapters, the authors use research and specific examples from recognized practitioners to create a road map for navigating the complex challenges of the principalship. Collectively, the book’s themes mirror key content areas addressed by the ISLLC Standards for School Leaders as well as other topics essential for success:

• Creating a shared vision that places student learning at the heart of the school
• Transforming toxic cultures into positive cultures
• Dealing with challenging experiences unique to new principals
• Promoting quality teaching and learning
• Creating professional learning communities
• Facilitating change within the school culture
• Building productive partnerships with central office staff, parents, and the greater community
• Designing management tasks as leadership tools
• Working with unions, budgets, the law, and the media
• Balancing personal and professional responsibilities
• Leading ethically and with emotional intelligence

Robbins and Alvy guide the reader through important concepts and practices, including instructional leadership, data-driven decision making, differentiated supervision, professional development, crisis intervention, and time management. At the end of each chapter, they invite readers to reflect on how to apply their new knowledge to real situations. Covering everything from everyday management tasks to the larger goal of student success, The New Principal’s Fieldbook is an essential guide for new and aspiring principals.
What does it take to be a good school principal? No two principals work in exactly the same way, but research shows that effective principals do focus on a core set of factors that are critical to fostering success for all students.

In Qualities of Effective Principals, James H. Stronge, Holly B. Richard, and Nancy Catano delineate these factors and show principals how to successfully balance the needs and priorities of their school and continuously develop and refine their leadership skills. Throughout the book, the authors provide readers with helpful tools and extensive research that will help them to:

- Develop a blueprint for sustained school leadership
- Create an effective school climate for learning
- Select, support, and retain high-quality teachers and staff
- Assess high-quality instruction
- Build a foundation for organizational management
- Create, maintain, and strengthen community relationships
- Make contributions to the professional educational community
- Define their critical role in student achievement

This book also includes practical skills checklists, quality indicators and red flags for effective leadership, and an extensive annotated bibliography. Qualities of Effective Principals is an excellent resource for both experienced and new principals committed to developing and leading strong schools that help all students succeed.
QUALITIES OF effective principals
QUALITIES OF effective principals

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Qualities of Effective Principals isn’t devoted to Hollywood-style heroic school leaders; it isn’t even about them. In fact, Jim Collins (2001), in Good to Great, found that “larger-than-life, celebrity leaders who ride in from the outside are negatively correlated with taking a company from good to great” (p. 10). Instead, this book on what makes principals effective is concerned with the unsung heroes who do their jobs day after day, year after year, and make a difference in the lives of young people. Thus, we dedicate this book to all caring, committed, and capable school principals everywhere.
Qualities of Effective Principals

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Developing a book of this nature can be a solitary achievement. However, in writing *Qualities of Effective Principals*, this was not the case. Moving from imagination to culmination required the encouragement, support, and assistance of many individuals. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of many friends, generous colleagues, and capable students.

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Several current and former doctoral students in the College of William and Mary’s Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership program are due substantial credit for their background research and writing that was adapted for the book. Specifically, John Caggiano, Ellen Turner, and Brig Lampert contributed content to selected sections of the book. Their work, along with the work of numerous other graduate students, has provided a solid connection between research and practice as the book has unfolded. Xu Xianxuan provided assistance in reviewing and refining annotations included in the annotated bibliography. Additionally, we wish to especially
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JHS, HBR, and NC

Finally, I wish to acknowledge Scott Willis, director of Book Acquisitions for ASCD, for his confidence in my work and his support throughout the book development process—from initial proposal to completion. This is my fifth book published with ASCD, and it is the capable and conscientious professionals there that have made these publishing endeavors a pleasure. Thank you!

JHS
Introduction

Do principals factor into student success? In *Qualities of Effective Principals*, we answer this question with a resounding YES! In fact, among school factors, the effect of principals is considered second only to that of teachers in facilitating student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Highly effective principals are considered “the key to initiating, implementing, and sustaining school success” (Tucker & Codd, 2002, p. 253) and “imperative to high student achievement” (Anthes, 2005, p. 1). Consequently, principals are expected to promote and develop the school vision, empowering stakeholders to build and maintain the conditions necessary for the success of all students.

The nature of the principal’s role has changed significantly in the past two decades, from primarily managerial to that of management and leadership (Lashway, 2002b; Murphy, 2003; Shellard, 2003; Tucker & Codd, 2002). Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership, principals continue to be responsible for traditional duties such as facility management, budgeting, school safety, and student discipline—tasks that continue to absorb a considerable amount of their time (Doyle & Rice, 2002; Lashway, 2002b; Tirozzi & Ferrandino, 2001).

Due to the increasing number of responsibilities required of principals, it is not surprising to find that long hours are spent on the job. Elementary school principals work an average of 62 hours per week (Groff, 2001), while middle and high school principals spend successively greater amounts of time on the job (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Although it is generally agreed that the principals’ role has evolved in recent years, there is no clear
definition of that role and no method to balance the responsibility of instructional leadership with the myriad of other demands on their time (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Given the competing demands for precious time, it is imperative not only that principals do their work well, but also that they do the right work.

One essential ingredient for success in education or any business, for that matter, is effective leadership. Ken Chenault, CEO for American Express, captured this sentiment well: “Most companies maintain their office copiers better than they build the capabilities of their people, especially the ones who are supposed to be future leaders” (cited in Colvin, 2007, p. 100). If we are to succeed as an educational enterprise in a highly competitive world, then we must embrace leadership development—not in a cursory fashion, but rather in an ongoing, comprehensive, sustained manner. It is for this purpose—leadership development—that we have written *Qualities of Effective Principals*. We hope you find it of value to your organization and your leadership team.

**Conceptual Framework for the Book**

The framework for *Qualities of Effective Principals* is provided in Figure I, which outlines eight key qualities for understanding and prioritizing the principal's work.

Although we can comfortably identify the major components of the principal's work, interestingly, “we know much less about how—or how much principals carry out these functions on a daily basis” (Lashway, 2002a, p. 2; also, see Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Nonetheless, these qualities, based on our review, do capture well the essence of the principal's work.

Each quality serves as the basis of discussion for the eight chapters included in Part 1. Additionally, the style and format by which we present the findings are designed to be user-friendly, providing easy-to-use summaries and tools for reference.

*Qualities of Effective Principals* is based primarily on existing research, although we also include applicable policy and theoretical perspective. Specifically, the sources considered in creating this synthesis of principal effectiveness include empirical studies of principal practice as linked to student achievement, case studies of principals, meta-analyses of principal effectiveness, and other reviews of research.
The research findings and recommended practices identified in the book should be familiar to many school leaders. For effective principals, the book should serve as a review and reminder for continued improvement. For developing school leaders, the same findings serve to build awareness as they take steps to enhance their effectiveness. By focusing on principal effectiveness, our ultimate goal is to improve the educational experiences and achievement of the students we serve in our schools.

**Parts of the Book**

*Qualities of Effective Principals* is designed to serve as a resource and reference tool for school leaders and their supervisors. It identifies elements of effective leadership within eight broad categories and points readers interested in
further exploration to the research studies and reviews used in the preparation of the text. The book is divided into two parts.

- Part 1 provides a research synthesis useful in developing a profile of what an effective principal should know and be able to do.
- Part 2 contains checklists for principal effectiveness, along with quality indicators and red flags that are tied to the eight identified qualities. It also provides an annotated bibliography for selected sources that we considered central to understanding the effective principal.

In Part 1, the first seven chapters address major aspects of a principal’s job responsibilities and practices. In the final chapter, we turn our attention to the direct impact of principals on the ultimate goal of leadership—student success. Within each chapter, information is organized into categories of characteristics or behaviors that are supported by existing research on important aspects of principal effectiveness. Summaries of research are provided in a straightforward manner in each chapter, with a list of key references to guide the interested reader to further information on the topics.

Part 2 of the text provides checklists to assess principal skills, quality indicators to look for in effective principal performance, and red flags for inappropriate or ineffective principal performance. This portion of the book focuses on helping principals apply the qualities of effectiveness to improve—whether the improvement is self-diagnosed or the result of supervisor assistance. In particular, the checklists and qualities should be helpful in converting research findings into more effective practice. Part 2 also contains an annotated bibliography of selected sources, a matrix of those sources tying them back to the eight principal qualities, and a complete reference list. We hope that the annotations are useful for those who would like a convenient summary of the research.

**Uses for the Book**

By identifying and carefully considering the attributes of quality leadership, we can be better equipped to identify links between leadership processes and desirable school and student outcomes. Thus, *Qualities of Effective Principals* is aimed at improving the quality of principal performance and the learning
community in which they work. In this effort, the book can be a valuable resource for the following audiences:

- Principals who desire to improve their own performance through analysis and reflective practice.
- Administrators who supervise and evaluate principals and assistant principals. Staff development specialists who plan and deliver training focused on improving school leadership.
- Human resource specialists who are responsible for recruiting and selecting high-quality principals and assistant principals.
- Professors of educational leadership who can employ the book’s research synthesis in their leadership programs.
- Policymakers and their staffs who are responsible for developing tools and strategies for state or district leadership development programs and processes.

For any user of the book, we attempt to make clear that there are only two things, beyond safety, that really count in schools and school leadership: (1) teaching and learning, and (2) supporting teaching and learning. And it is to these ends that we hope you find *Qualities of Effective Principals* beneficial.

Part 1 of *Qualities of Effective Principals* focuses on the research useful in developing a profile of an effective principal. Following the Introduction, the eight chapters of the text address major qualities of principal effectiveness. Chapters 1 through 7 provide an extensive review of the key roles and responsibilities of building-level school administrators. Chapter 8 serves as a culmination for the book by exploring the effect of effective principals on school improvement and student success.
Beth entered the education profession as a middle school science teacher who wanted to make a difference in the lives of her students. After teaching for a number of years, she wanted to accomplish more than the work that she could do within her classroom and, thus, became a grade-level chair. Beth also worked on the district’s science curriculum committee, and then began taking classes at the university at night to earn her administrative and supervision license. Beth was an outstanding teacher, and her first administrative position as the assistant principal for instruction seemed tailor-made for her strengths. Her instructional expertise and knowledge of curriculum provided her with a sound foundation for leading instructional efforts in her school. Beth’s office walls looked like a strategic command center of data disaggregation and data tracking. She traveled through classrooms daily, observing instruction and student learning. Her observations helped her to identify classroom needs and strengths. She collaborated regularly with grade-level teams to monitor the needs of students and to determine strategies and resources that could better support students and teachers. And she continued to meet with students to talk about their education goals and progress. In essence, Beth is committed to make teaching and learning in her school the most positive experience it can be.

One major emphasis in the educational arena in the early 21st century has been the continuing demand for greater accountability to increase student performance. National and state expectations require schools to ensure that all students achieve mastery of curriculum objectives, and local schools focus on implementing those requirements to the best of their ability. As a result, leading instructional efforts in a school has evolved into a primary role for school principals.
In order to meet the challenges associated with national and state expectations, principals must focus on teaching and learning—especially in terms of measurable student progress—to a greater degree than heretofore. Consequently, today’s principals concentrate on building a vision for their schools, sharing leadership with teachers, and influencing schools to operate as learning communities. Accomplishing these essential school improvement efforts requires gathering and assessing data to determine needs, and monitoring instruction and curriculum to determine if the identified needs are addressed. This chapter summarizes existing research related to instructional leadership and methods principals use to exhibit and harness that leadership to meet their school goals. In particular, we focus on the following goals:

- Building and sustaining a school vision
- Sharing leadership
- Leading a learning community
- Using data to make instructional decisions
- Monitoring curriculum and instruction

Figure 1.1, at the end of the chapter, outlines key references relating to these elements of instructional leadership.

**Building and Sustaining a School Vision**

If you are not sure of where you want to go, how will you ever get there? Furthermore, how will you know when and how to take corrective action along the way? And how will you know when you’ve arrived at the destination? A successful principal must have a clear vision that shows how all components of a school will operate at some point in the future. Having a clear image of their schools helps principals avoid becoming consumed by the administrative requirements of their jobs. In fact, principals may need two types of vision: one vision of their schools and the roles they play in those schools, and another vision of how the change process will proceed (Manasse, 1985).

Clearly, multiple role expectations exist for school leaders. All schools need principals to exercise their roles as instructional leaders who ensure the quality of instruction (Portin et al., 2003). Thus, there is a need to spend time in classrooms observing the process of teaching and learning while also balancing other needs such as student safety and parent relationships.
Fulfilling these multiple responsibilities well requires principals to possess an inner compass that consistently points them toward the future interests of the school, never losing sight of their schools’ visions, missions, and goals.

Successful principals understand that it is important to establish clear learning goals and garner schoolwide—and even communitywide—commitment to these goals. The development of a clear vision and goals for learning is emphasized by principals of high-achieving schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). They hold high expectations that teachers and students will meet these goals and hold themselves accountable for the success of the school. These principals provide emotional support for teachers and are viewed as possessing the ability to foster positive interpersonal relationships. They protect instructional time by limiting loudspeaker announcements and scheduling building maintenance to minimize disruptions. They ensure that student progress is monitored through the continual aggregation and disaggregation of student performance data that are directly related to the school’s mission and goals. Principals of high-achieving schools are confident that they will accomplish their vision and goals despite challenges and setbacks and, thus, serve as role models for staff and students (Cotton, 2003). And when milestone achievements are reached, those successful results are celebrated.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research related to the role of the principal and building and sustaining the school’s vision:

- First and foremost, principals need to have a clear vision for their schools (Manasse, 1985; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).
- Schools need principals who strive to ensure the quality of instruction in their schools (Harris, 2007; Marzano et al., 2005; Portin et al., 2003).
- Principals of high-achieving schools expect teachers and students to meet the schools’ goals (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).
- Principals of high-achieving schools are confident that their schools can meet their goals (Cotton, 2003).
- Principals who focus on school improvement have more effective schools (Shen & Hsieh, 1999).
- Principals of high-achieving schools communicate to all stakeholders that learning is the school’s most important mission (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).
Sharing Leadership

Guiding a school staff to reach a common vision requires intensive and sustained collaboration. After all, it is the expertise of teachers upon which any quality educational system is built. Wise principals know that going it alone makes meeting instructional goals virtually impossible. A key responsibility of school leaders is to sustain learning, and this can best be accomplished through leading learning endeavors that are focused on long-term outcomes rather than short-term returns. Additionally, distributing leadership throughout a school and providing for leadership succession are indispensable to a school’s success (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). “Leaders influence others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how. This process requires the facilitation of individual and shared efforts to accomplish common objectives” (Kyrtheotis & Pashiardis, 1998b, p. 3).

Tapping the Expertise of Teacher Leaders

There is no evidence of troubled schools turning around without the influence of strong leadership. Effective leadership sets the direction and influences members of the organization to work together toward meeting organizational goals. Principals can accomplish this essential responsibility by providing individual support, challenging teachers to examine their own practices, and securing models of best practice. Additionally, effective principals develop and depend on leadership contributions from a variety of stakeholders, including teachers and parents (Leithwood et al., 2004). As key instructional leaders, principals share their leadership with teachers to promote reflection and collaborative investigation to improve teaching and learning. Subsequently, teacher leaders lead change from the classroom by asking questions related to school improvement, and they feel empowered to help find the answer (Reason & Reason, 2007).

In practical terms, principals talk to teachers, provide staff development, and support lifelong learning about teaching and learning (Blase & Blase, 1999). They also create opportunities for teachers to work together and share teaching practices with one another. What they tend not to do, however, is to exhibit directive leadership styles (Mendel, Watson, & MacGregor, 2002). Consequently, principals are not the only instructional leaders in a school.

In sharing leadership, principals collaborate with teachers to evaluate issues related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As part of this
collaborative process, teacher leaders provide valuable insight and ideas to principals as they work together toward school improvement. Principals who tap into the expertise of teachers throughout the process of transforming their schools and increasing the focus on learning are more successful. And a valuable byproduct for principals who collaboratively focus on instructional leadership is that they are less likely to burn out (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Collaborating in Leading

Interestingly, some evidence suggests that female elementary school principals participate more actively in instructional leadership than their male counterparts. Also, they spend more years in the classroom before entering their first administrative post and, consequently, may possess greater knowledge in instructional matters (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). Perhaps most telling is the suggestion that because female administrators tend to assume a major instructional role as central to their work, they shape teachers’ attitudes regarding students’ ability to master subject matter, thus, having an indirect effect on student outcomes through their teachers (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger et al., 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

The research shows that effective principals (both men and women) facilitate shared leadership and collaboration among their staffs to include the following:

- Wise principals understand that they cannot reach instructional goals alone (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).
- Attaining school goals requires individual and shared efforts (Kyrtheotis & Pashiardis, 1998b).
- Effective instructional leaders believe that staff should collaborate and openly discuss instruction and program administration collectively among all stakeholders (Blase & Blase, 1999).
- Principals who distribute leadership across their schools contribute to sustainable improvements within the school organization (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).
- Highly successful principals develop and count on the expertise of teacher leaders to improve school effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2004).
- Principals need to create opportunities for teachers to work together (Mendel et al., 2002).
Principals need to tap the expertise of teacher leaders in their schools in order to enhance improvement efforts and results (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Principals need to function as the chief instructional leader of their school while balancing multiple responsibilities. However, to effectively foster student learning requires the exercise of distributing leadership (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002).


## Leading a Learning Community

Today’s principals must become role models for learning while continually (or at least regularly) seeking tools and ideas that foster school improvement (Lashway, 2003). Simply put, schooling is organized around two key functions: (1) teaching and learning, and (2) organizing for teaching and learning. Thus, it seems clear that school principals need to manage the structures and processes of their schools around instruction.

### Principals as Learners

Effective principals make student success pivotal to their work and, accordingly, pay attention to and communicate about instruction, curriculum, and student mastery of learning objectives, and are visible in the school. Learning needs to occur throughout an organization, and principals need to become participants in the learning process in order to shape and encourage the implementation of effective learning models in their schools. To illustrate, effective principals don’t just arrange for professional development; rather, they participate in staff training provided to their staffs. Additionally, good principals foster the idea of working together as a valuable enterprise because they understand that this kind of collaborative learning community ultimately will build trust, collective responsibility, and a schoolwide focus on improved student learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2003).

### Teachers as Learners

Keeping staff informed about current research and practice and possessing a belief system that schools are learning communities are crucial to school success. Principals use a variety of staff development tools to focus awareness on research-based strategies that facilitate improved instructional
effectiveness (Blase & Blase, 1999). In an effort to infuse instructional know-how across the entire faculty, the concept of an instructional leader needs to become broadened beyond that of increasing student learning. Principals also need to mobilize teachers’ energy and capacities. This requires a transformation of the learning cultures of schools—a capacity in which effective principals are adept (Fullan, 2002).

To summarize, principals—that is, effective principals—support instructional activities and programs by modeling expected behaviors and consistently prioritizing instructional concerns day-to-day. They strive to become a learner among learners. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment are crucial to the idea of instructional leadership. As part of their ongoing instructional leadership responsibilities, effective school principals are highly visible through contact and interaction with teachers, students, and parents, thus promoting the concept of a learning community (Marzano et al., 2005).

Particular features of effective principals and their role in leading the learning community include the following:

- Effective principals tend to the learning of all members of a school community (Lashway, 2003).
- Effective principals also serve as participatory learners with their staffs (Prestine & Nelson, 2003).
- Successful instructional leaders provide conditions through staff development that incorporate study of professional literature and successful programs, demonstration and practice of new skills, peer coaching, and use of action research focused on student data, and they study the effect of new strategies on students (Blase & Blase, 1999).
- Instructional leadership requires a broader view that incorporates the expertise of teachers (Fullan, 2002).
- Schools that work (i.e., that are successful by various measures) have leadership that provides meaningful staff development (Marzano et al., 2005).

Using Data to Make Instructional Decisions

Data sources inform and guide action, or at least they should. Without meaningful data it is impossible to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school initiatives. Effective principals skillfully gather information that
determines how well a school organization is meeting goals and use that information to refine strategies designed to meet or extend the goals. Thus, they find themselves in a constant state of analysis, reflection, and refinement. They challenge their staff to reexamine assumptions about their work and how it can be performed. Beyond the ability to successfully gather and analyze school data, principals need to possess basic skills for using these data for setting directions, developing people, and reinventing the organization. The use of appropriate data helps to maintain a consistent focus on improving teaching and learning, and, consequently, effective principals accept no excuses for lack of success to improve student learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Many proponents of school improvement stress the importance of data-driven decision making. Today, school districts collect demographic, achievement, instructional, and perceptual data in an effort to improve teaching and learning. For example, information is gathered to diagnose student learning and to prescribe interventions that will best support students in need (Education Commission of the States, 2002). At the building level it is vital that principals employ data-gathering processes to determine staff and student needs.

The demands that accompany high-stakes testing compel principals to guide their schools to learn from their results and experiences. Doing so will lead to coherence within a school and offer better opportunities to sustain results. Additionally, continuous improvement requires principals to examine data and find means to address inconsistencies with expected results (Fullan, 2005).

Useful and properly mined data can inform staff about the gaps between desired outcomes and the reality of the results. Furthermore, this knowledge should result in changes in practice. Encouraging staff to collect, analyze, and determine appropriate actions based upon the results should be a collective enterprise. When staff members assume an active role in the data analysis process, it promotes solutions and actions for improving results (Zmuda et al., 2004), and facilitating the active involvement of all staff in information gathering and analysis is the prerogative of the principal.

A summary of key indicators of the role of effective principals and gathering and using data in their schools is listed on the next page:
• Effective school leaders skillfully gather data and use them to determine school effectiveness (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).
• Continuous improvement requires an examination of the data (Fullan, 2005).
• Greater results are achieved when principals encourage school staff to actively analyze data for improving results (Zmuda et al., 2004).


Monitoring Curriculum and Instruction

There are good reasons to focus on school leadership. The importance of the principal’s role has never been greater, taking into consideration national accountability standards for schools and the likelihood that principal job vacancies will increase in the near future. Not only do effective principals focus attention on curriculum and teaching, they also understand teaching and possess credibility in the eyes of their staff (Mazzeo, 2003). Schmoker (2006) suggested that too often school cultures discourage close scrutiny of instruction. He says that effective leaders can raise the level of importance by looking for evidence that curriculum standards are taught through the review of formative assessments, grade books, team lesson logs, and student work.

Principals support instructional activities and programs by modeling expected behaviors, participating in staff development (as noted earlier), and consistently prioritizing instructional concerns on a day-to-day basis. They strive to protect instructional time by removing issues that would detract teachers from their instructional responsibilities (Marzano et al., 2005). Moreover, principals in effective schools are involved in instruction and work to provide resources that keep teachers focused on student achievement. They are knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and promote teacher reflection about instruction and its effect on student achievement (Cotton, 2003).

Visiting Classrooms

Principals build trust by supporting and nurturing teacher development by providing feedback that helps teachers to improve. This is more likely to occur when principals exercise the collegiality of leadership. Additionally, principals are in the best position to help teachers improve in areas of weakness and can
accomplish this through observations and dialogue that shows respect for teachers as professionals (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005). Ultimately, many principals spend too little time in classrooms or analyzing instruction with teachers. It is important to evaluate the quality of teaching in order to select and retain good teachers, which is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. Principals must develop leadership skills that help them to build the intellectual capital that is necessary to make good curriculum choices, establish expectations for student work, and provide teachers with opportunities to learn the specifics of teaching well within their academic areas. As such, leadership skills and knowledge of instruction must be tied together (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

**Monitoring the Curriculum**

Some educators believe that if a school organization is not meeting curriculum expectations established by state and local policymakers, the problem is leadership. Principals must monitor how the curriculum is taught and participate in how it is developed. The knowledge that principals gain through this process can ensure that teachers understand the curriculum and have access to all the necessary tools and resources. They then can hold teachers, students, and themselves responsible for the results (Ruebling, Stow, Kayona, & Clarke, 2004). Not only do principals need adequate knowledge and skill to assess teacher performance, they also need a sense of self-efficacy that they can do so successfully. This is especially important when principals are faced with removing ineffective teachers. Knowing what is important about good teaching is different from the ability to use that knowledge well in stressful situations such as teacher removal. To do so successfully requires that principals are confident in their ability not only to assess the quality and effectiveness of teachers but also to take the necessary actions when instruction is weak (Painter, 2000). Evaluating teachers is addressed in more depth in Chapter 4. Existing research related to the role of the principal and monitoring curriculum and instruction indicates the following:

- Effective principals possess knowledge of the curriculum and good instructional practices (Cotton, 2003) and, subsequently, focus their attention in their schools on curriculum and instruction (Mazzzeo, 2003).
- Effective principals monitor the implementation of curriculum standards and make sure they are taught (Schmoker, 2006).
• Effective principals model behaviors that they expect of school staff (Marzano et al., 2005).
• Principals are in a good position to support teacher effectiveness through observations and conversations with teachers (Cooper et al., 2005).
• Principals need to spend time in classrooms in order to effectively monitor and encourage curriculum implementation and quality instructional practices (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Pajak & McAfee, 1992; Ruebling et al., 2004).
• Teachers and principals feel it is important to have someone to steer the curriculum and prioritize staff development (Portin et al., 2003).
• Teachers too frequently view classroom observations as a means to satisfy contractual obligations rather than as a vehicle for improvement and professional growth (Cooper et al., 2005).
• In effective schools, principals are able to judge the quality of teaching and share a deep knowledge of instruction with teachers (Fink & Resnick, 2001).
• An effective leader promotes coherence in the instructional program where teachers and students follow a common curriculum framework (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).
• Effective principals trust teachers to implement instruction effectively, but they also monitor instruction with frequent classroom visits to verify the results (Portin et al., 2003).


A Final Word on the Power of Positive Instructional Leadership

Nothing in the principal’s role is more important for ensuring successful student learning than effective instructional leadership. School principals who focus on a vision for their schools nurture the leadership capabilities of their teachers. Additionally, if their schools are moving in the right direction, they model effective leading and learning. Combining these efforts with using data appropriately, as well as monitoring what takes place at the classroom level, will increase the likelihood that schools will achieve their goals for student learning.
Figure 1.1 **Key References for Instructional Leadership**

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What does it take to be a good school principal? No two principals work in exactly the same way, but research shows that effective principals do focus on a core set of factors that are critical to fostering success for all students.

In Qualities of Effective Principals, James H. Stronge, Holly B. Richard, and Nancy Catano delineate these factors and show principals how to successfully balance the needs and priorities of their school and continuously develop and refine their leadership skills. Throughout the book, the authors provide readers with helpful tools and extensive research that will help them to

- Develop a blueprint for sustained school leadership
- Create an effective school climate for learning
- Select, support, and retain high-quality teachers and staff
- Assess high-quality instruction
- Build a foundation for organizational management
- Create, maintain, and strengthen community relationships
- Make contributions to the professional educational community
- Define their critical role in student achievement

This book also includes practical skills checklists, quality indicators and red flags for effective leadership, and an extensive annotated bibliography. Qualities of Effective Principals is an excellent resource for both experienced and new principals committed to developing and leading strong schools that help all students succeed.