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100+ WAYS TO Recognize & Reward YOUR SCHOOL STAFF

Emily E. Houck



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Emily E. Houck

ASCD

Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
Author guidelines: www.ascd.org/write

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This work is dedicated
to my first teachers—
my parents.

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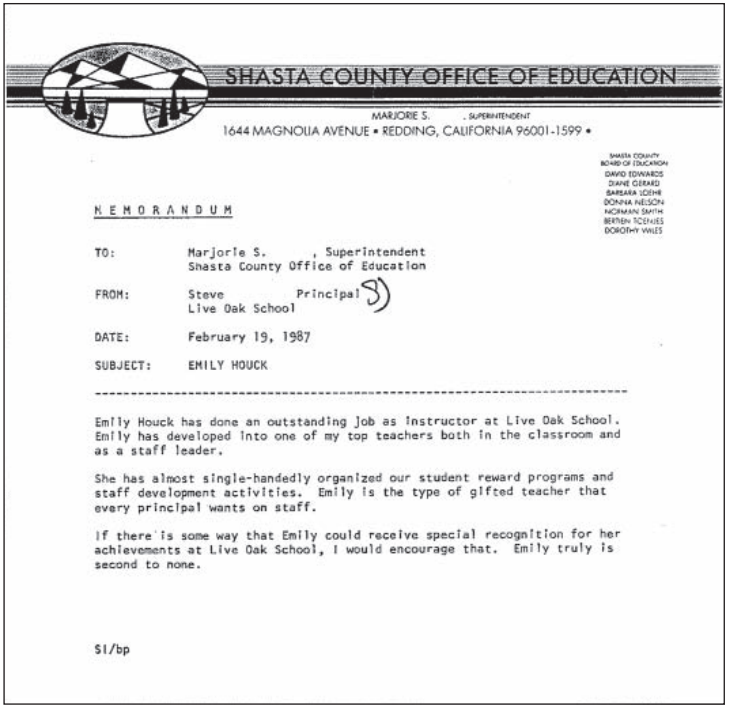
Preface

I received a copy of this letter (see Figure A) that was sent to my superintendent by my principal 23 years ago. Obviously I still have that letter. Why would I have saved this acknowledgment of my efforts so very long? It's simple; it was something special, unexpected, and extremely rare, and in retrospect, sad. Sad that it was so out of the ordinary, that it became a one of a kind keepsake. How different I would have felt if I had worked in an environment where the acknowledgment of my efforts was commonplace, where I knew every day that I was valued and what I did was making a difference. Who knows, I might still be there.

The goal of this book is to help you move your department, school, or district into that kind of place—a place where acknowledgment is appreciated, but is not a once in a lifetime event.

Praise isn't a foreign concept. It isn't difficult to dispense, but a jaw-dropping 65 percent of Americans report that they have never received any recognition for their good work on the job. Consequently they leave. We can change that in the business of education. We can increase individual productivity and increase engagement among colleagues. We can retain our teachers,

FIGURE A
A Recognition Letter



SHASTA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

MARJORIE S. , SUPERINTENDENT
1644 MAGNOLIA AVENUE • REDDING, CALIFORNIA 96001-1599 •

SHASTA COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
DAVID EDWARDS
DIANE GERARD
BARBARA LOEHR
DONNA NIELSON
NORMAN SMITH
BERTHEN TOEVES
DOROTHY WILES

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marjorie S. , Superintendent
Shasta County Office of Education

FROM: Steve Principal
Live Oak School

DATE: February 19, 1987

SUBJECT: EMILY HOUCK

Emily Houck has done an outstanding job as instructor at Live Oak School. Emily has developed into one of my top teachers both in the classroom and as a staff leader.

She has almost single-handedly organized our student reward programs and staff development activities. Emily is the type of gifted teacher that every principal wants on staff.

If there is some way that Emily could receive special recognition for her achievements at Live Oak School, I would encourage that. Emily truly is second to none.

SI/bp

encourage staff loyalty, and increase parent satisfaction by recognizing the hard work and effort of colleagues and our educational staff members.

This book is intended to provide administrators, department heads, classified managers, and anyone heading up a group of people with practical, easy to use, and inexpensive or free ways to motivate, reward, and recognize the efforts of their staff.

As a side note, I never heard from the superintendent.

The Top 20

These 20 ideas (see Figure B) are my favorites from the book. I have used them all with great results.

Figure B

Top 20 Recognition Ideas

Idea	Effort	Page
A Visit from the Past	Moderate	69
Aahhh!	Moderate	71
Ask Their Opinion	Moderate	72
Friday Focus	Moderate	78
Good Job Parents, Good Job Teachers	Low	32
Immediate Feedback	Moderate	87
Involve Them, Empower Them	Low	36
Make That Call	Low	40
One-on-One	More	118
Pay Them/Shake Them	More	119
Put Pen to Paper	More	122
Sweet Treats	Low	51
Table Topper	Moderate	99
Tell the Boss	Moderate	101
Tell the Story in Pictures	Moderate	101
Tell Us What You Think	Low	54
Thank the Parents	Low	57
There's More to Schools Than Just Teachers	Low	61
Tongue Depressors	More	128
You Are	Moderate	104

~ 1 ~

What Employees Want

There are two things people want more than sex and money. . . recognition and praise. —Mary Kay Ash

This section of the book will be kept relatively short, so you can get to the "good stuff" quickly. But I think it's important to touch on why recognition and praise are important in the workplace, even if it's just a brief overview.

Research tells us that employees want some specific things from their jobs (Blanchard & Bowles, 1998). These are

- The ability to provide for their families and themselves
- Control of achieving a goal
- Worthwhile work
- Recognition of staff efforts and accomplishments

Most of us don't have much control over paychecks, so we'll pass over that the first one and move on to control of achieving a goal.

Control of Achieving a Goal

"When teachers were asked, 'What is it that makes you so outstanding?' they readily remarked that they had an administrator who encouraged and supported them, trusted their professionalism, and made them feel like a significant member of a very important team."

—Neila A. Connors

In his work, Maslow talked a lot about reaching levels of belonging and esteem (Podmoroff, 2005). Teachers and staff members having a say in the development of the school or district goals falls nicely into supporting the development of these needs: belonging and esteem. When teachers are in a positive environment, one in which they are contributing towards the common goal, they are more apt to share their fulfillment with their students in a win/win situation. "Purpose is a powerful motivator. The inherent recognition in purpose comes from seeing progress towards goals" (Ventrice, 2003, p. 25). Sharing a common goal and working towards its attainment doesn't just benefit the individual person; it is a major contributor to school growth. Additionally, it is one of the leading factors as to why teachers stay at given schools or in the profession entirely.

Simply stated, folks that work in schools don't want to be treated as unthinking drones. They want to be part of the plan, they want their input to be heard, and they want their ideas to be taken seriously.

Worthwhile Work

"People have to understand how what they do contributes to the well-being of mankind." —Blanchard and Bowles

We spend nearly one-third of our adult lives at work, so it stands to reason that we want our workplaces to be a source of need fulfillment. When that happens, our lives are full and enriched, and we can focus our attention on finding meaning through work. When it doesn't happen, we are so preoccupied with finding other ways to satisfy our needs that we are never truly present at work (Podmoroff, 2005).

As educators, we can easily understand the importance of our work. In our young people, we nurture academic talent, mold behavior, increase occupational choices, develop civic accountability, and encourage personal maturity. In sum, we shape the future.

We cannot assume, however, that all our school staff members feel appreciated in this work, and we should not take their efforts for granted. Instead, we should highlight and recognize their contributions to the present and the future, both because it is the right thing to do and because it will motive them to continued excellence. Whitaker argued in *Motivating and Inspiring Teachers: The Educational Leader's Guide for Building Staff Morale,* "Principals who take the time necessary to make sure that teachers understand their worth will find that classroom instruction will improve as teachers' self-efficiency improves" (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2000, p. 188). We have all experienced the joy and honor we feel when a former student finds us and lets us know that we've made a difference in their lives. That's why we teach, that feeling. Administrators and other leaders can harness that commitment and passion by reminding our staffs that they matter.

The contributions teachers make to the development of young people is readily apparent. We must also remember to recognize and reward the other members of our staffs whose

contributions remain hidden from obvious view. Our cooks, custodians, bus drivers, and secretaries also matter in the quality of a school, and we must strive to also highlight and publicize their efforts and achievements.

Recognition of Staff Efforts and Accomplishments

"Administrators who make it a priority to treat teachers with respect, recognize invaluable contributions, and realize teachers are their best allies, see great things happen." —Neila A. Connors

If we want to keep our quality employees and those energetic young teachers, we need to make sure that we are meeting their needs. Recognizing and rewarding their efforts helps. Many teachers start their careers working hard and excelling, but if over time their efforts go unappreciated and unrecognized, even the most dedicated and creative teacher will fade into the background (Podmoroff, 2005).

With one-half of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years, we need to reflect on what causes this loss and what can be done to reduce the loss of the young, ambitious employees that come into the profession. More than half of those leaving cited unsupportive principals as a factor in their decision to leave—we can change these conditions. We can make our employees feel supported and involved in shaping their work lives.

If your efforts to increase morale, motivation, and recognition are embraced by your staff, then they will know that you care about them as professionals and as individuals. This sense of caring will lead to greater achievement by both your staff and your students (as a product of the staff's efforts). "With the right

recognition, you will find employees more willing to tackle problems on their own instead of bringing them to you to solve. With the right recognition, employees will show more concern about quality and reputation. With the right recognition, employees will be more willing to pitch in when things get difficult" (Ventrice, 2003, p. 3).



Elements of Recognition

The best executive is one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it. —Theodore Roosevelt

Before we delve into the main elements of recognition, we should debunk a few myths. When we ask administrators to recognize members of their staffs they generally raise four excuses. Dianna Podmoroff outlined the following myths:

1. *I'm an upbeat person, so I can motivate my people.* This implies that someone else can motivate you. You can't motivate others, but what you can do is create a motivating environment for each of your staff members. A motivating and supportive environment can cause employees to motivate themselves towards a more productive performance.

2. *Fear is the best motivator.* Some managers believe that the fear of losing their job is motivation enough to keep a staff

producing. In the education arena, this belief misses on three points. First, fear will only work for a very short period of time. Second, fear creates a hostile workplace, which leads to a higher than usual turnover of staff, which is never good for children. Third, after teachers earn tenure they no longer fear losing their job for underperformance. As a result, a fear-filled workplace creates only resentment and unhappiness, rather than performance and achievement.

3. *I know what motivates me, so I know what will motivate my staff.* This is wrong on a couple of levels. What motivates one person does not necessarily motivate another, and what motivates today may or may not motivate the same person tomorrow. An educational leader needs to know which factors will promote and nurture professional growth in each individual.

4. *Recognition of some will cause jealousy and tension among the staff.* This can be a real problem if the recognition is viewed as favoritism. Leaders can avoid this pitfall by having clear criteria for the recognition and then recognizing employees for meeting those criteria. Consistency is critical. Don't confuse this recognition with the simple thank you. Thank yous can and should be given out freely. Just as human sensitivities about salaries do not prevent people from picking up their paychecks, sensitivities about recognition should not stop the structuring of recognition programs and events (Podmoroff, 2005).

In general, we can divide recognition into four elements: praise, thanks, opportunity, and respect.

Praise

What is praise? Simply put, to praise is to recognize and to commend a job well done. It reminds recipients that the quality of their efforts matters, and it shows them that their good work is

noticed and appreciated. If praise is to be effective, it needs to be tied to five elements. Praise needs to be authentic, specific, immediate, clean, and private.

What does *authentic* praise mean? It's simple—it means that you praise your employees for actual accomplishments, and that you don't make up things just to offer them some positive strokes. You don't have to worry about giving out too much praise if you make sure that the recognition you give is earned. Your employees will know when you are making stuff up merely to recognize everyone, and no one will feel that they are praised too much or too often if it is for something genuine.

Your praise needs to always be *specific*. Just as we teach our instructors, you have to tell the person why they are being recognized in a very specific way. Describe the behavior you are recognizing when giving recognition. For example, instead of saying, "Thank you. You did a good job," say, "Thank you for leading our textbook committee. Your talents brought a tough group to consensus." Specificity indicates that you really do know precisely how the employee contributed and highlights the particular behaviors that are praiseworthy.

The need for *immediacy* is rather self-evident. Provide your recognition shortly after the deed is done. It certainly loses much of its potency when you wait weeks or longer to recognize someone's efforts. Immediate might not be possible, but sooner is better than later. Immediate praise is important for at least two reasons. First, it signals true respect for the action and the actor because it requires us to rearrange our priorities to make the praise happen now rather than waiting until it's convenient for us. If it's praiseworthy, it's worth praising now. Second, in order for praise to shape behavior we need to intervene immediately with gestures that support and affirm. Don't let days or weeks go

by—weeks that might be filled with grumblings of resentment—before offering praise.

Keep it *clean*. The term "clean" isn't quite as clear. It simply means that you shouldn't tie anything to the recognition. It should stand on its own. In particular, never tarnish praise with criticism. For example, clean praise states: "Great job heading the report card committee. You guys did great work and your leadership kept them on track." Do not blemish this praise with criticism such as, "But next time maybe you could speed up the process a bit." It would have made it unclean and diminished its effect.

The last element of praise is *private*. Experts disagree on this point. Some follow the maxim "Praise in public, criticize in private," while others maintain that your praise should also be done in private until you have the person's permission to publicize it. However, you can have it both ways by offering anonymous praise in public. This allows you to recognize the accomplishment without unwanted pointing of fingers. An example might be saying at a staff meeting, "Thank you to all of you who got your report cards turned in on time. It meant a lot to the office staff."

If you are not convinced that praise is the way to go, consider this quote from Todd Whitaker's work: "Which is more likely to keep you on a diet—someone saying, 'Boy you are really looking good!' or the comment 'It's about time…'"? (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2000, p. 31).

Thanks

A sincere thank-you is a highly effective form of recognition. The simplest and most desired form of recognition is a simple expression of gratitude. Simply stated, thank your staff for their efforts.

Does that mean you should say thank you for everything everyone does every day? No, not necessarily. If what they do makes your job easier or if it makes a difference in the lives of your staff or students, say thank you. It will go a long way toward promoting a positive environment.

There are many ways to give thanks, and they can be very simple or elaborate in nature. Simple can be appreciated as much as any elaborate message. Putting a thank-you into a written form can be seen as a grand gesture. Have you gotten a note from an employer and kept it? A simple note in written form expressing gratitude or pride is, in my opinion, the most powerful form of recognition. Mix it up—start simple with an oral thank-you, and move toward more complex or elaborate avenues such as a written note, paying thanks in situations where it wouldn't be commonplace, making a home phone call to express your thanks, and holding special events to show your appreciation.

Opportunity

Giving opportunities is a subtle yet very valid form of recognition. Ask staff members for their opinion on how things should be done, let them voice their opinion on critical issues, and include them in decision making. All of these give them the opportunity to participate at a meaningful level. What a level of recognition you'd accomplish if you allowed your employees to select their own professional development courses and seminars. Give them the opportunity to determine what skills they need to develop.

When a teacher comes to you with a request to try a new approach in his or her class, you can recognize them as professional by giving them the opportunity to try new things. Finding funding to do projects, taking trips, or exploring a change in

techniques sends a message that you believe in them and their ideas. This is inherent recognition that is built into the workplace.

Respect

"Employees want to be valued, not just for what they can do, but for who they are" (Ventrice, 2003, p. 19). We need to consider our employee needs as we make decisions and recognize them as valued assets to our schools, districts, and profession.

There are several ways to demonstrate to your employees that you respect them and what they do. Does your staff have the resources to do their jobs? Teachers having to reach into their own pockets to buy supplies for their classrooms is a subtle way to tell them that what they do isn't important to the district. They might think, "If the district thought more of me, then they'd support my program." Funding is always scarce, but it is important to know that an administrator who is unwilling to look for resources sends the message that the employee's ideas are not respected.

Beware if the school is dirty, is in disrepair, or is unsafe! Unsafe, unappealing workplaces suggest to the employees in those workplaces that they don't matter much and that they don't deserve better. In other words, show respect for your employees by providing for them an appealing workplace. Almost one-third of the teachers leaving the profession cited unsafe and unclean environments as a reason for their departure. How people feel in their environment is as important as any other factor when looking at job contentment. Staff may not see these things as recognition. However, they will see a troubled environment as a lack of recognition of their value to the organization, and many will leave because of it (Ventrice, 2003).

The simplest way to respect members of your staff is to ask their opinion about the operations of your school or district. "What can we do to improve our reading program?" "Do you have any ideas how we could streamline our bus runs?" "Do you think all-day kindergarten is good for kids?" Administrators who make it a priority to treat their staff with respect, recognize invaluable contributions, and realize that teachers are their best allies will see great things happen (Connors, 2000).

You can demonstrate respect with simple, yet powerful actions. Try these:

- Treat people with courtesy, politeness, and kindness.
- Encourage coworkers to express their opinions and ideas.
- Listen to what others have to say before expressing your viewpoint. Never speak over, butt in, or cut off another person.
- Use people's ideas to change or improve work. Let employees know you used their idea, or, better yet, encourage the person with the idea to implement the idea.
- Praise much more frequently than you criticize. Encourage praise and recognition from employee to employee as well as from the supervisor.
- The golden rule does apply at work, or, as professional speaker Leslie Charles says, "Implement the platinum rule: treat others as they wish to be treated."

~ 3 ~

Wrapping It Up

I cannot teach anyone anything.
I can only make them think. —Socrates

Don't put recognition on your to-do list. It shouldn't be treated as any other task—not one you can cross off and be done with it. Recognition is a mind-set—a way of doing business and of relating to people every day. With a different way of looking at things, you can find ways to recognize folks in every employee interaction.

As you begin to prioritize recognition, bear in mind some basic tenets. Be consistent. You don't have to give everyone the same recognition or reward, but you do need to be fair. Recognition doesn't need to be the same, indeed it shouldn't be the same for all recipients, but it should have value consistent with the value of the contribution. Keep it up. Commit to recognition for the long haul. Frequent gestures of appreciation and esteem are more important and more sustainable than rare grand gestures.

What happens if we view recognition as a luxury? What if we don't commit to improving the morale and performance of our staffs? What difference will it really make if we don't take the time to validate their efforts? There is a consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor in determining student performance in school and in life is the quality of his or her teachers and the instruction they provide (Wong, 1999). Therefore, if it is our goal to provide the very best for our children, it is essential that we concentrate on retaining high-quality teachers in every school across the nation. Recognizing their efforts will help make them want to stay.

For those of you who like numbers, let me put it another way. A conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession is $2.2 billion a year. If the cost of replacing public school teachers who transfer is added, the total reaches $4.9 billion every year. For individual states, cost estimates range from $8.5 million in North Dakota to a staggering half a billion dollars for large states such as Texas (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). Recognition of your staff efforts can turn this around. It energizes a school. It creates loyal, motivated, and positive-thinking staff members who pass their enthusiasm on to their students. In addition, managing and leading a motivated staff is certainly easier than the alternative.

When we value our employees as people, it is easier to get them into the right mind-set. Find positive things in what people do, rather than spending your time looking for what's wrong. You'll find with this mind-set you'll have just as much to do, but it will be much more fun and rewarding for you and your staff.

Why is this important to you as a leader? Think of the times you have tried to get a staff to adopt a new program or to embrace a new way of doing things. A staff that knows you have their

best interests in mind and trusts you is bound to be more willing to try new programs and ideas, even if they are skeptical. In turn, staff members who try new things, who push themselves, are more likely to reach educational excellence than those who remain stubbornly committed to the status quo. Recognizing and cheering on your staff is in their best interest, in the best interest of their students, and in your best interest as well.

Education

This book provides school administrators with practical, easy-to-use, and inexpensive ways to reward and recognize the efforts of their staff. More than 100 ideas are divided into three categories based on the amount of effort they require. Recognizing and rewarding your staff can be as simple as writing a heartfelt thank-you note to a bus driver or as unexpected as taking a teacher's grading duty for a night.

This invaluable guide will help principals and superintendents everywhere bring out the best in their teachers and staff members. The best part is that rewarding and inspiring your staff will be rewarding and inspiring for you too.

Dr. Emily E. Houck is the former superintendent of the Scott Valley Unified School District in California.

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The Differentiated School

Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning

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Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
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With appreciation to
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what teaching can be and for modeling
professionalism at every turn.
You make us proud to call ourselves teachers.

The Differentiated School

Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning

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Acknowledgments

When we began to discuss the idea of this book, our intent was to tell the story of Conway Elementary School's remarkable change journey to illustrate the way in which a faculty can transform itself to teach with the needs of each individual student in mind. Along the way, we learned about—and ultimately also studied—Colchester High School, which was similarly engaged in a transformation for more academically responsive teaching.

We entered the lengthy and demanding process of authoring a book with our eyes open and with a pretty good sense of how that process intrudes on an author's life. By contrast, Joyce Stone, Bill Rich, and Brad Blanchette at Colchester High were conscripted into the writing process. They first gave us access to the school, faculty, and students. Then they answered thorny questions and picky ones. They sat for interviews. Then they pulled together documents at our request. Then they generated copy for us. That cycle repeated numerous times over many months through school years, holidays, and vacations until the book became the story of two schools that are unlike in many ways—and alike in all the really important ways. The book has a wider reach because of the addition of the Colchester story. That story would not have come to life without them.

And so, we offer enduring gratitude and respect to Joyce Stone, Bill Rich, and Brad Blanchette, who invested sacrificially in helping us with

this work while they continued to exemplify the best in educational leadership with their colleagues and for their students.

Introduction

Education, like all other professions, has a literature of best practice—a collective wisdom born of research and experience—that points the way to success. It's not a formula, of course. There is no recipe that guarantees infallibility. Humans are varied, messy in their wants and needs. Young humans are certainly no less so. There is no error-proof way to teach them.

Nonetheless, we know a great deal about teaching and learning. Research and practice have clarified, and continue to clarify, pedagogical principles and procedures that merit careful attention and application. In short, we generally know what more effective classrooms look like in comparison to less effective ones. We also recognize that it is devilishly difficult to move from the latter to the former.

The metaphor of adopting a healthy lifestyle works as a proxy for adopting a best-practice classroom. Most of us know intellectually that good health is fundamental to a robust life. Most of us also know principles and practices that enhance health. Certainly some grey areas and unanswered questions remain, but some habits we know we should cultivate: sleep enough, eat more fruits and vegetables, exercise, stay out of direct sun, eliminate smoking, and so on. We have plenty of research and experiential evidence to commend those practices—and most of us mean to incorporate them into our lives. Evidence and intentions

notwithstanding, however, it's perversely difficult for most of us to live healthy.

Junk food tastes good. It requires more thought to cook for health. It's tough to add 30 minutes of exercise to a schedule that's already on overload. A tan is nice—and, in fact, makes us look fit. Besides, we've lived with our foibles to this point, and we're still in pretty good shape. There are other folks who are a lot less fit than we are. Maybe when summer comes and there are fewer pressures, we'll be more attentive to a healthy regimen.

Many of us never get much further than worthy intentions to adopt practices that stand a high likelihood of improving our health. Even if the intentions are vivid in our thinking, it is a considerable journey from *meaning* to do better to *doing* better.

Sure, most of us make forays into a healthier life. We buy a health club membership—and go for a while. We go on a diet—until we are overcome by the desire for a hamburger and a shake. We use sunscreen—until it feels sticky or until we run out.

Few of us convert from comfortable and familiar habits to practices that seem as though they will forever define someone else but not us. The point is that change is aversive when it calls on us to reinvent ourselves—to shed the cocoon of the customary—even when we really know we would benefit significantly.

So what's the solution? Should health-related practitioners quit championing the cause of a healthy lifestyle? Should they simply give up on research and exhortations?

To do so would, we think, be unethical. The practitioners have information we need to know. They also have evidence that when folks follow their advice, the outcomes are worth the effort. So they have no option but to continue learning; to make their advice clearer, more palatable, or more compelling; and to provide better support for the change they commend.

So it is with educational leaders—whether those leaders are teachers, principals, researchers, curriculum coordinators, staff developers, or specialists. By assignment or conviction, they have information about what constitutes "healthier" educational practice. They too have little choice but to continue learning; make their advice clearer, more palatable, or more compelling; and provide better support for the change they commend.

The goal of this book is to help educational leaders more effectively support changes regarding effective classrooms for academically diverse

student populations—in other words, for differentiated instruction. Most of us are keenly aware of the range of learning needs represented in our students. Most of us know we miss the mark with too many students in our classrooms. (If we miss the mark with even one student, that's too many.) Yet most of us persist with one-size-fits-all teaching.

It's so hard to change the familiar classroom patterns. Anyhow, mostly we're good teachers. There are lots of classrooms less effective than ours. And the pressures are so great—standardized tests, too little time, too many students, parental expectations. It might make intellectual sense to pay attention to varied learning needs in the midst of all that, but in reality, that kind of teaching belongs to someone else. It's just not for me. Or at least not now . . . Maybe when things let up a little . . .

How does a leader promote change when the prevailing winds all seem to blow against it? Again, there is no formula, but there is a body of knowledge about school and classroom change. We know things that are more likely to work in favor of change and things that are more likely to impede change. A leader armed with that body of best-practice knowledge is in a better position than an equally well-intentioned leader who repeats the familiar, comfortable—and often ineffective—patterns viewed as leadership.

To support leaders who, in turn, want to support development of more classrooms that work better for more students, this book will take a three-pronged approach. It will clarify the goals and attributes of best-practice differentiation. It will highlight important principles of best-practice approaches to change. It will provide illustrations from schools and leaders who understand both differentiation and school change—and who have been effective in moving from comfortable and familiar ways of teaching to ways of teaching that support the academic health of a far wider sphere of learners.

To that end, Carol Tomlinson has drawn heavily on the work and reflective writing of Lane Narvaez, principal of Conway Elementary School, and Kay Brimijoin, faculty member at Sweet Briar College in Virginia and staff developer at Conway for more than six years, as well as on observations at the school and conversations with many of its staff. She has also drawn generously from the work and reflective writing of Joyce Stone, principal of Colchester High School; Bill Rich and Brad Blanchette, Colchester faculty members; observations and interviews at Colchester; and research data gathered by Cindy Strickland and Kristina Doubet, University of Virginia doctoral students at the time they spent two years researching the Colchester site.

The book is not about formulas or recipes. We and our key collaborators have a combined educational experience of nearly 150 years. If we ever had the illusion that there is a single right answer to successful teaching, we've long since abandoned it. What we do believe, however, is that the research-based body of educational knowledge matters, that we can learn from the experiences of others, and that it is possible to change schools and classrooms for the better if we do so from a solid understanding of why the change matters and how change happens.

For us, and for the other educators whose experiences we'll share in this book, the change journey has been both evolutionary and revolutionary, both frustrating and exhilarating, both depleting and renewing. In the end, it has been reconstructing in highly positive ways. We are not through learning, but we believe that what we have learned to this point is worth sharing. We hope you will think so as well.

1

Setting the Stage for Change Toward Differentiation

Students in today's schools are becoming more academically diverse. There are more students identified for more exceptionalities in special education, more students for whom English is not their first language, and more students struggling to read. There is a need to ensure challenge for advanced learners when accountability pressures focus on basic competencies, and a growing economic gap exists between segments of the student population.

It seems unrealistic to think that all those students will thrive in classrooms that disregard their learning differences. In fact, a look at indicators such as grades, student discipline, attendance, college acceptance, dropout rates, and standardized test scores confirms that school is not working well for too many students.

Differentiated instruction seems promising as a response to the variety of learning needs students bring to school every day. It makes sense to encourage teachers to be mindful of and responsive to their students' diverse learning needs. But what would the school leaders be asking teachers to do by encouraging them to differentiate instruction? What does differentiation look like? And would benefits to students and teachers be worth the tension and effort such a change would require? Are there avoidable errors that leaders should keep in mind?

What does it mean to lead for schoolwide change for differentiation?

Fostering Enduring, Deep Change

We often hear fellow educators say, "We're doing differentiation in our school this year. Could you come help us?" Not surprisingly then, we also hear, "Our teachers know about differentiation, but nobody seems to do much with it in their classrooms." We also visit classrooms where

"differentiation is happening," go to conference sessions, and even read books that revisit the truth that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

On the one hand, it's positive that educators are having a conversation about how to teach with an eye to individual learner needs. As we'll discuss later, there is more than ample evidence of a need for that conversation. Further, it speaks well of us as educators that we see and acknowledge the varying needs of our students. On the other hand, shallow approaches to differentiating instruction for academically diverse learners will serve neither the students nor the profession well.

Mandates for classroom change and drive-through approaches to staff development likely will do more harm than good. They may result in some modifications for some people over some period of time, but they are seldom catalysts for broad, widespread, and enduring change. In addition, surface approaches to deep issues trivialize problems and convince teachers that shortly the wind will shift and the gnats that are pestering them will go away until a new breeze blows through.

In this book, we hope to provide a more substantial way to think about substantial change on behalf of a substantial need in our schools. It is our intent to (a) clarify the tenets of "defensible differentiation," (b) specify key principles and practices of leadership for meaningful change in classrooms and schools, and (c) illustrate how it looks when educators commit to making durable changes in teaching—in this case, to implement differentiated instruction in classrooms throughout a school.

To set the stage for the rest of the book, this chapter will first highlight some key elements of defensible differentiation. Next, it will take a look at the complexity of educational change. Finally, it will introduce two schools that made differentiated classrooms a schoolwide reality and whose change journey will provide practical and concrete illustrations through the rest of the book.

Defensible Differentiation: What It Is and Is Not

There is a great deal already written about what we call "differentiated instruction." This section of the chapter will not try to repeat or even summarize that writing. What it will do is address some misconceptions by outlining what differentiation is and is not, and it will highlight essential elements of defensible differentiation. The point is to remind educational leaders (a term we use to include teachers and administrators who

are wise and informed pace setters for their colleagues) that solutions to educational problems do not lie in names or in labels but in quality practice. Calling something "differentiation" provides no guarantee of its efficacy for students. Leaders must continually be attuned to fidelity of practice and continually ask themselves and others, "How does what's happening here make sense for learners?"

Differentiation that's likely to make a positive difference for students will have some attributes and—more to the point—will not have others. Figure 1.1 suggests some misconceptions about differentiation that, turned into practice, can dilute or damage student outcomes. It also points to some indicators of defensible differentiation.

Key elements of effective differentiation are important for leaders to understand. They are the mileposts that change efforts should be moving toward—nonnegotiables of the model. Each of the nonnegotiables is aimed at one shared goal—greater academic success for the broadest possible student population. The nonnegotiables are respecting individuals, owning student success, building community, providing high-quality curriculum, assessing to inform instruction, implementing flexible classroom routines, creating varied avenues to learning, and sharing responsibility for teaching and learning.

Respecting Individuals

With genuine respect comes a desire to know a person more fully, understand him or her more deeply, and connect with that person. Respecting individuals looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Listening
- Asking for input
- Making time for the person
- Using positive humor
- Accentuating the positive
- Accepting the person "as is," while helping him or her grow
- Learning and demonstrating an appreciation for each person's culture and background
- Providing the best (respectful tasks—everyone's work is equally important and equally engaging)
- Expecting the best—always "teaching up"—pushing the student beyond where he or she believes achievement is possible
- Holding the person to a high standard
- Ensuring a positive environment for growth

Figure 1.1
What Differentiated Instruction Is and Is Not

What Differentiation Is Not	What Differentiation Is	Explanation
Just for students with labels	For every student	Every student has particular interests and learning preferences as well as a readiness level that varies over time and context. Each learner needs appropriate support.
Something extra in the curriculum	At the core of effective planning	Differentiation is not something you do when the real lesson is finished. It's integral to ensuring that each student has access to success with key content goals.
An approach that mollycoddles students—makes them dependent	Teaching up; supporting students in achieving at a level higher than they thought possible	Effective differentiation always enables a student to do more than would be possible without it, not less.
Incompatible with standards	A vehicle for ensuring student success with standards	A goal of differentiation is ensuring that each student succeeds with whatever is important for him or her to know, understand, and do.
Use of certain instructional strategies	Use of flexible approaches to space, time, materials, groupings, and instruction	Flexibility is a hallmark of differentiation, but no single instructional strategy is required to differentiate effectively.
Tracking in the regular classroom	The antithesis of tracking	Effective differentiation requires use of flexible grouping patterns so that students consistently work in a variety of groups based on readiness, interest, learning preference, random assignment, teacher choice, and student choice.
Assigning students to cross-class groups based on assessment data	Within a classroom	When students are removed from their classrooms and placed with students deemed similar in other classrooms, a kind of tracking is taking place. Real flexibility is lost.
All or mostly based on a particular approach to multiple intelligences	Systematic attention to readiness, interest, and learning profile	Learning profile is one-third of the domain of differentiation and consists of learning style, intelligence preference (there are two strong models addressing intelligence preference), gender-related preferences, and culture-related preferences. A single approach to intelligence preferences in the classroom is a narrow segment of the big picture of differentiation.

Figure 1.1—(*continued*)
What Differentiated Instruction Is and Is Not

What Differentiation Is Not	What Differentiation Is	Explanation
All or mostly based on learning style preferences	Systematic attention to readiness, interest, and learning profile	See note above. Attention to learning style is helpful for some students some of the time and helps teachers learn to be more flexible, but it leaves other needs unaddressed.
Synonymous with student choice	A balance of teacher choice and student choice	There are times when it's important for teachers to assign particular work to students because it will move them forward in key ways. At other times, it makes good sense for students to call the shots and learn about making wise choices.
Individualization	Focused on individuals, small groups, and the class as a whole	Although it is an aim of differentiation to focus on individuals, it is not a goal to make individual lesson plans for each student.
More problems, books, or questions for some students and fewer for others	Varied avenues to the same essential understandings	Struggling students don't often benefit by doing less of what they don't understand, and it's not helpful for advanced learners to do more of what they already know. Differentiation asks students to work with essential understandings at varied degrees of complexity and with varied support systems. Information-based tasks and skills-based tasks should be congruent with students' current needs.
Something a teacher does because it's the thing to do	Something a teacher does in response to particular needs of particular human beings	Differentiation should be responsive instruction, not mechanical instruction.
Something that happens all day every day	Something that happens when there is a need for it	At times, whole-class instruction is important and effective. Teachers need to build community as well as attend to individual needs.
Something a teacher does on the spot when it becomes evident that a lesson isn't working for some students (reactive or improvisational)	Something a teacher plans prior to a lesson based on assessment evidence of student needs (proactive)	The most powerful differentiation is based on pre-assessment and ongoing assessment of student progress toward key goals. The teacher uses the assessment information to make proactive plans to address student needs. Some improvisation is still needed, but it is not a dominant means of differentiation.

Owning Student Success

When a teacher owns the success of a student, that teacher operates with a "whatever it takes to make this work" approach. When a teacher owns the success of a student, that student cannot fall through the cracks. Owning student success looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Making sure students know what's required for success
- Viewing success as the only acceptable outcome
- Persistently studying student progress
- Adapting instruction to provide support for personal next steps
- Ensuring student access to information, materials, supplies, and support
- Being unwilling to overlook gaps in knowledge
- Being unwilling to let a student wait for others to catch up
- Teaching the student how to make wise decisions and choices that support success
- Giving useful feedback
- Ensuring student action on the feedback
- Finding another way to teach and learn
- Being a persistent, positive presence in the student's life

Building Community

A teacher who focuses on community building understands that teams don't just happen. They are built. Community building looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Modeling democracy in the classroom
- Speaking of students with respect
- Teaching students to be respectful of one another
- Pointing out legitimate student strengths
- Making sure everyone has an essential role to play
- Helping students experience and understand the power of positive interdependence
- Establishing positive shared experiences (building positive group memories)
- Making students aware of common goals with varied routes to achieving them
- Helping students learn how to help one another in productive ways

Providing High-Quality Curriculum

Teachers who understand the centrality of high-quality curriculum in differentiation know that students can become powerful learners only if what they are asked to learn is powerful. Providing high-quality curriculum looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Teaching for understanding (emphasizing the concepts, principles, and essential understandings of a discipline)
- Teaching for transfer (making sure students use what they learn in authentic contexts)
- Insisting on and supporting consistent growth in high-level thought
- Guiding high-quality discussions to explore important ideas
- Ensuring that students examine varied perspectives and the relative merits of those perspectives
- Helping students connect the important ideas of content with their own lives and experiences
- Vigorously supporting students in developing the skills and attitudes necessary to do quality work
- Starting with what the most able students need and supporting all students in success with that level of curriculum

Assessing to Inform Instruction

The teacher who emphasizes assessment to inform instruction understands that only by staying close to student progress can he or she guide student success. Assessment to inform instruction looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Systematically observing students at work
- Using pre-assessments to understand students' starting points—including status of precursor skills
- Using ongoing assessments to trace student progress and identify trouble spots
- Asking students to share interests
- Listening and looking for student interests
- Asking students about learning preferences
- Observing students working in different contexts and modes
- Asking students what's working for them and what's not
- Acting on student suggestions

- Using assessment information to plan for reteaching, teaching in a different mode, extending understanding, developing tasks, modifying time expectations, and so on

Implementing Flexible Classroom Routines

A teacher who strives for flexible classroom routines understands the power of using classroom elements to benefit learners and learning. Flexible classroom routines look, sound, or feel like the following:

- Allowing more time for students who need it
- Enabling students to move ahead who are ready to do so
- Using varied seating arrangements to support the work of individuals and small groups
- Systematically planning and using flexible grouping of students based on readiness, interest, learning preference, random assignment, student choice, and teacher choice
- Ensuring text and supplementary materials at appropriate reading levels
- Using varied support systems to ensure access to information
- Teacher instruction for the whole class, small groups, and individuals

Creating Varied Avenues to Learning

Teachers who provide varied avenues to learning understand that most students can learn most important things if they can do it in a way that works for them. Ensuring varied avenues to learning looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Teacher presentations in varied modes
- Student exploration and expression of content in varied modes
- Student suggestions for ways to learn
- Options for a variety of working conditions
- Tasks at different levels of difficulty and appropriate support to move to the next level of difficulty
- Whole-to-part and part-to-whole reminders
- Offering miniworkshops or clinics on key skills
- Interest-based options for how to apply essential knowledge, understanding, and skill
- Small-group instruction to target student interests and needs

- Periodic use of varied homework assignments to consolidate or extend learning
- Creative, practical, and analytical explorations of essential content

Sharing Responsibility for Teaching and Learning

Teachers who share responsibility for teaching and learning understand that students have valuable perspectives on teaching and learning, that a team approach to making the classroom work is more efficient than the teacher having to manage everything, and that students learn to take charge of their own academic success by being taught how to do so. Sharing responsibility for teaching and learning looks, sounds, or feels like the following:

- Ensuring student voice in establishing classroom guidelines
- Ensuring that students take responsibility for implementation of classroom guidelines
- Carefully defining and teaching classroom routines to ensure student success
- Consistent debriefing about classroom routines to help students compare how things worked with how they were supposed to work
- Guiding students in establishing classroom rules
- Helping students understand the teacher's work, goals, feelings about progress toward goals, and need for assistance
- Assigning "teacher roles" to students (passing out materials, providing help while the teacher works with small groups, designing interest centers, establishing due dates for projects, etc.)
- Teaching students to play those roles effectively
- Asking for student input on how the class is working for them and what could make it work better
- Teaching for student independence

This brief capsule of differentiation is not meant to be exhaustive. Readers should feel free to add elements, descriptors, misconceptions, and so on. The intent of this section of the chapter is simply to serve as a reminder that the kind of differentiation that is likely to make a difference in the lives and achievement of students is both fundamental to good teaching and very complex. As the book proceeds, it's important to have a sense of the scope and degree of change that defensible differentiation requires. Only in science fiction do individuals arrive at distant

destinations in an instant. Nonetheless, it's critical to have a clear sense of the destination, the distance to it, and the reason for going there in the first place.

To understand those things is to begin to develop a sense of why real change in schools is so challenging.

The Challenge of School Change: Why It's Hard to Go from Point A to Point B

The literature on school change is rich, varied, and multifaceted. Again, there is no formula or recipe for change, yet persistent themes arise in the literature. Two of those themes appear contradictory. The first is that in schools "real change is real hard" (Urbanski, 1993, p. 123). The second is that change is quite possible and not beyond the reach of ordinary educators in ordinary schools (Fullan, 2001b).

In fact, these two themes are not as oppositional as they may seem. A fair translation of the literature on school change is that we know a lot about what supports change and a lot about what discourages it. If we just did what we know to do, we'd generally find improved outcomes for students and their teachers. The challenge—as always—comes in living out the details.

For this book, we have drawn on the expertise of researchers who have devoted their careers to understanding the process of school change. Our intent is not to represent all that these experts have to say. Our intent is to capsule and spotlight key insights from that literature as it relates to change for more academically responsive classrooms.

Through the rest of the book, we'll be looking at principles and practices from the current best understanding of school change. These principles and practices offer no guarantees of success, yet they support educational leaders' efforts to be catalysts for schools and classrooms that can better help each student construct a promising future.

To establish a context for what follows in the book, Figure 1.2 provides some themes from the literature of school change that suggest why our efforts at change too often fall short.

This book focuses on how to support classroom changes that result in teaching that is more responsive to—more effective with—academically diverse student populations. The movement toward defensibly differentiated classrooms is a particularly complex kind of change. It affects virtually every facet of how teachers think about and carry out their

Figure 1.2
Factors That Contribute to the Failure of Change Efforts

Factors That Contribute to Failure to Change Classroom Practice	Brief Explanation of the Problem
Underestimating the complexity of the change	We are unaware of or unprepared to deal with implications of the change in classroom practice. We tend to deal with the change on a superficial level, tend to neglect fidelity to the change, and are often unprepared to deal with the fear, tension, loss, and conflict that inevitably accompany change. We often overlook what teachers perceive to be competing mandates.
Mandating change vs. providing a vision	It's profoundly difficult to change major life routines even when we have a good reason to do so. A mandate seldom seems like a good reason to the people receiving the mandate.
Insufficient leadership	Leaders for change are necessarily keepers of a vision, well informed about the vision, communicators, cheerleaders, taskmasters, diplomats, and ministers. Leading is a very different thing from telling.
Insufficient support and resources	The more the change effort affects actual classroom routines, the more support it requires. That implies long-term and reliable presence of information, coaching, feedback, collaboration, guided reflection, materials, and reassurance—to name a few elements.
Failure to deal with the multifaceted nature of change	It's easy to assume that we can merely ask people to change a practice. In fact, making change requires alteration in beliefs, attitudes, practices, use of materials, and the culture of the school itself. To neglect any of these is to undermine the possibility of change.
Lack of persistence	Significant change is evolutionary. It does not happen as a result of a few professional development sessions or because a school "does" the initiative "this year." It is likely that evoking significant change takes many years and then must be nurtured indefinitely.
Inattention to teachers' personal circumstances	Teachers have high-stress jobs as well as personal lives—and varied levels of professional expertise, varied approaches to their work, and varied ways of learning. Those factors must be accounted for to support change.
Lack of shared clarity about a plan for change	No blueprint for change will endure exactly as it was conceived. Nonetheless, it is critical to have a plan and to ensure that stakeholders understand the plan, what is expected of them in the plan, and what support will be available to them throughout the process.
Weak linkage to student effects and outcomes	It's easy, but unfortunate, to discuss a change initiative without ensuring that it remains focused on the students who will experience it. If a change initiative positively affects students, teachers will find a ready motivator to continue. If it does not, leaders need to reexamine the implementation or reconsider their direction. It's not about the initiative. It's about what it can accomplish.
Missteps with scope and pacing	We often ask teachers to do too much all at once. We move too fast and overwhelm people, or we move too slowly and lose momentum. The scope and pacing of change are critical to its outcome.

work. It is therefore demanding for teachers and demanding for those who provide leadership and support for that journey. As noted earlier, we believe such leadership includes administrators, classroom teachers, specialists, media specialists, counselors, and other key personnel with the potential to improve classroom instruction.

We examine change for differentiation at the school level rather than at the individual teacher or district level. We have made that decision for two reasons. First, it is always the case that some individual teachers and small groups of teachers seek out ways to alter their classroom practices as a matter of professional growth. Those teachers are gifts to the schools in which they work and the students with whom they work. The value of their efforts should never be underestimated and should always be affirmed and supported. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the degree of change needed in schools will result from one-teacher-at-a-time, self-initiated efforts. Second, although district-level change is certainly necessary for educational equity and excellence, it is far more difficult to achieve than school-level change. In any case, district-level change must ultimately happen on a school-by-school basis.

A major goal of this book is to clarify what we know about school change as it relates to change for defensible differentiation. It has made a world of difference for us to see the principles of change move from the pages of books and into faculty meetings, classrooms, professional development sessions, coaching sessions, collaborative teaming, and hallway conversations. Therefore, we have elected to illustrate the principles that guide effective school change as we have seen them play out in two schools that have accomplished buildingwide change toward defensibly differentiated classrooms for the purpose of improved school experiences and achievement outcomes for more students. In the final section of this chapter, we'll introduce the two schools that have helped us see change in action and that we believe will help readers of the book in similar ways.

Two Schools That Made Defensible Differentiation a Schoolwide Reality

Because, as the experts tell us, school change is both difficult and possible, it is important to examine settings in which people have come together to examine beliefs, change how they think about what they do, and ultimately change classroom practice to the benefit of students. In

this book, we'll share experiences from two such schools. The illustrations they provide help make concrete the more abstract principles of defensible differentiation and school change. Our goal is not to tell the story of either school in a linear way, but rather to select instances that illustrate key facets of the change process as each school developed classrooms designed to better serve each student.

A couple of caveats are useful here. First, these are not perfect schools. There is no such thing. The educators in the schools would be the first to say there are—and always will be—facets of their work they would like to change. What sets them apart, in fact, is not perfection but dogged determination to improve. Second, their work with differentiation is not finished. In both instances, the educators in the schools would be the first to say there is still hard work to do. Third, their change journeys have not been neat, tidy, or without conflict. The educators in both schools would be the first to say there have been periods when the journey seemed overwhelming.

That said, the educators in these two schools have done more things right and fewer things wrong along the course to change than is often the case in schools. For that reason, they have much to teach us about how deep classroom change can become a reality—and more specifically, how deep classroom change in regard to academically responsive or differentiated instruction can unfold. Figure 1.3 provides some basic demographic information about Conway Elementary School and Colchester High School.

Conway Elementary School

At the time when the Conway Elementary School staff began its formal work with differentiated instruction in 2000, Lane Narvaez had been the principal at Conway for five years. Prior to that, she had been a high school assistant principal for five years and a teacher at all levels. Ladue School District, in which Conway Elementary is located, is a high-achieving district with approximately 92 percent of graduates attending college. The district has one of the oldest merit pay programs in the country. These factors converge to create high parent expectations and a stable, well-paid teaching force with high standards and a strong work ethic.

On the one hand, it would be easy to look at Conway and conclude that working conditions were ideal and change would be easy to accomplish. In fact, Conway was a good place to work. It was characterized, however, by two factors that often work against change. One is a highly

Figure 1.3
Demographic Information on the Two Exemplar Schools

School	Conway Elementary School	Colchester High School
Location	St. Louis, Missouri	Colchester, Vermont
School District	Ladue School District	Colchester School District
Principal	Lane Narvaez	Joyce Stone
Grade Levels	K–5	9–12
Enrollment	Approx. 330	Approx. 855
Number of Faculty Members	29 (including music, physical education, specialists, and media)	65
Demographics	Suburban, 81%; Caucasian, 12% African American, 7% Asian, Hispanic, and East Asian; 5% on free or reduced-price meals; 25% identified for special education services; serves students from predominantly middle- to upper-middle-class homes	Rural and suburban; 97% Caucasian, 3% African American, Sudanese, Congolese, Bosnian, other; 19% on free or reduced-price meals; 16% identified for special education services; serves students from million-dollar homes and the two largest trailer parks in Vermont

aspirational, highly involved group of parents who can effectively derail change if they feel it will negatively affect the status quo. A second characteristic that makes change very difficult is that Conway was already widely known to be a "very good school." Given the aversive nature of change, when a teacher or a school has the reputation of being excellent, it is natural to eschew suggestions about making significant changes in practice. Why would a faculty undertake the rigorous and risky journey to an uncertain destination when their current place in the world is celebrated? If it's difficult to achieve commitment to school change among faculties in general, it is far more difficult to achieve buy-in for change in schools whose names are synonymous with quality. There is much to learn from the Conway faculty about making a very good school great.

Colchester High School

At the time when Colchester High School began its formal work with differentiated instruction in 2000, Joyce Stone had been principal at Colchester for one year. Prior to that, she had been a high school teacher for 24 years, an assistant principal and special education coordinator in

a rural district for seven years, and the assistant principal at Colchester for two years. At that point, Colchester High was a school in trouble both academically and affectively. Student discipline was poor, there were intractable divisions between academic "haves" and "have-nots," test scores were low, the dropout rate was high, and the community was growing increasingly uneasy with the school.

Unlike Conway, the Colchester faculty did not have a record of unimpeachable quality to shield them from a need to change. Nonetheless, it is profoundly difficult to bring about schoolwide change in a high school when that change requires pervasive alteration of teachers' perceptions about students, scheduling of classes, and classroom instruction. The faculty of Colchester has undergone an individual and group metamorphosis in all those areas. There is much to learn from them about rethinking fundamental aspects of schooling—even at the secondary level.

Outcomes of Change

Undertaking substantive change in a school is not—or ought not to be—for the sake of change. It should be designed with specific positive teacher, student, and schoolwide benefits in mind. It is toward those intended outcomes that the initiative should progress and against which the success of the initiative should be assessed both formatively and summatively. Over time, it is likely that some of the initial goals will change. Some may not be fully realized, and there may be unanticipated benefits as well.

Specific outcomes targeted by the Conway and Colchester faculties for their work with differentiated instruction will be discussed in Chapter 2. Here, we want to highlight positive outcomes of the change initiatives in the two schools during their first few years.

Sergiovanni (1999) reminds us that if we judge the success of a school solely on test scores, we set our sights too narrowly. Excellent performance would include good test scores but should also extend to student, parent, and teacher satisfaction, increased student engagement with learning, enhanced professional efficacy of teachers, and so on.

Both the Conway and Colchester faculties are appropriately proud of standardized test scores that show broad growth across the student population. They are also proud of other indicators of success. The suggestions of success noted for both schools in the following sections are just that—suggestions of success. These are not data derived from an experimental study but rather garnered in the course of living out several academic years in particular schools.

Indications of Change at Conway

At Conway, two achievement tests have served as benchmarks for academic improvement—the TerraNova and the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). The TerraNova is a nationally normed test administered annually to 5th grade students with test scores reported in terms of a Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) with a mean of 50 and a range from zero to 99. Because Conway students are generally high performing, the school uses an NCE of 65 as its indicator of comparison. Figure 1.4 shows pre- and postdifferentiation scores for Conway 5th graders. Although the table shows an increase in scores during the years of differentiated instruction, other factors played a role during the six years under study. First, enrollment decreased, causing smaller class sizes. Second, Conway's Voluntary Transfer Program ended, resulting in fewer students transferring to Conway from city schools. In order to determine the effect these variables had on test results, the general linear model was used to implement analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a regression. Results showed that differentiated instruction was associated with a significant difference in test scores. That is, student test scores were higher during the years that differentiation was in place.

The MAP is a state-administered criterion-referenced test that includes multiple-choice items, constructed-response items, and performance items. Scores are reported in five steps, with Step 4 (Proficient) and Step 5 (Advanced) indicating students are above grade level and have met state standards. MAP test results likewise show a dramatic and positive shift during the first three years of the differentiation initiative in comparison to the three years prior to the beginning of the initiative (see Figures 1.5 and 1.6).

A simple average of the percent of students who met the state standards during the three predifferentiation years in comparison with the first three years of the differentiation initiative shows communication arts pass rates moving from 61 percent to 69 percent, science from 71 percent to 76 percent, math from 64 percent to 79 percent, and social studies from 59 percent to 83 percent. The state scores were not only lower during the six years, but they also remained relatively static. Figure 1.6 also shows that the percentage of students scoring in the top level (Step 5) increased during the years of differentiation. It is also important to note that the number of students receiving Step 1 and Step 2 MAP scores (lowest levels) at Conway decreased during the first three years of the differentiation initiative.

Figure 1.4
Conway Elementary Predifferentiation and Postdifferentiation Student Scores for Grade 5

Scoring Category	Predifferentiation			Postdifferentiation		
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Percent of Students with Reading Scores ≤ 65	34%	41%	38%	19%	18%	24%
Percent of Students with Language Scores ≤ 65	40%	56%	52%	31%	39%	34%
Percent of Students with Math Scores ≤ 65	43%	58%	52%	31%	35%	34%
Percent of Students with Reading Scores > 65	66%	59%	62%	81%	82%	76%
Percent of Students with Language Scores > 65	60%	44%	48%	69%	61%	65%
Percent of Students with Math Scores > 65	57%	42%	48%	69%	65%	66%

Note: Scores based on TerraNova Normal Curve Equivalent of 65. The school uses 65 as a point of comparison because of the large number of students who score above 50, which is the typical point of comparison in schools.

Test scores from the 2004 and 2005 school years show this test pattern continuing. Using either the TerraNova or the MAP as the test measurement, Conway students demonstrated dramatic improvement in performance during the years of the differentiation initiative.

During the first three years of the differentiation initiative, Conway ranked as one of the state's top 10 scoring schools in reading, math, and social studies. In 2003, it was named a Gold Star School of Excellence by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and, in 2007, a No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in recognition of the school's high test scores, professional development initiatives, programming, and parent involvement.

Student, parent, and teacher response to differentiation was also largely positive. Those perspectives will be discussed in later chapters.

Figure 1.5
Percent of Students with Advanced and Proficient Achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program

Scoring Category	Grade and Subject	Predifferentiation			Postdifferentiation		
		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Levels 4 and 5 Conway	4th grade math	56%	64%	71%	83%	77%	79%
Levels 4 and 5 State	4th grade math	32%	35%	37%	37%	38%	38%
Levels 4 and 5 Conway	3rd grade science	71%	63%	80%	71%	73%	84%
Levels 4 and 5 State	3rd grade science	39%	35%	45%	45%	48%	48%

Figure 1.6
Percent of Students with Advanced Achievement on the Missouri Assessment Program

Scoring Category	Grade and Subject	Predifferentiation			Postdifferentiation		
		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Level 5 Conway	4th grade math	17%	16%	15%	24%	34%	24%
Level 5 State	4th grade math	5%	6%	8%	8%	8%	7%
Level 5 Conway	3rd grade science	15%	7%	23%	27%	27%	41%
Level 5 State	3rd grade science	6%	4%	10%	10%	9%	10%

Indications of Change at Colchester

Unlike Conway Elementary School, student achievement scores at Colchester were generally mediocre to weak when the differentiation initiative began. Results on the New Standards Reference Examinations (NSRE) indicated substantial growth during the first six years of the differentiation initiative at Colchester, as shown in Figure 1.7.

In addition to noteworthy increases in standardized test scores, the Colchester data suggest other equally important, and likely interrelated, outcomes during the first five to six years of the differentiation initiative. During this time, significant demographic factors, such as eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, did not change substantially. However,

- College attendance increased from 68 percent in 1999 to 74 percent in 2006.
- The number of Advanced Placement sections increased from six in 1999 to 13 in 2006. (The number of students achieving honors status on the NSRE between 1999 and 2006 rose in every subject tested—often dramatically (for example, from 17 percent to 29 percent of students achieving honors status in writing conventions, from 19 percent to 46 percent in math skills, from 15 percent to 25 percent in math concepts, and from 8 percent to 15 percent in math problem solving).
- Disciplinary interventions dropped by 42 percent between 2000 and 2006.
- Expulsions declined from seven in 2001 to one in 2006.
- The dropout rate decreased from 6.9 percent in 1999 to 1.03 percent over five years.
- Qualitative measures documented significant improvement in school climate for teachers.

Looking Ahead

On the surface, Conway Elementary School and Colchester High School appear to have little in common. Located in two different regions of the country, one serves younger students and one serves older students. One began the change journey as a school of excellence; one began as a school in trouble. One school's student population is relatively affluent; the other school's student population represents the haves and have-nots. As will become evident in later chapters, one school's principal

Figure 1.7
Percent of Students Passing the New Standards Reference Examination at Colchester

Assessment Area	Before Differentiation 1999	After Differentiation 2006
Reading Understanding	53%	61%
Reading Analysis/Interpretation	51%	66%
Writing Effectiveness	58%	75%
Writing Conventions	82%	84%
Math Skills	44%	72%
Math Concepts	33%	56%
Math Problem Solving	25%	52%

envisioned differentiation as a way to ensure challenge for the school's most able students; the other school's principal envisioned it as a means to ensure equity for the school's struggling students.

In the end, however, the two schools also share important attributes: courageous leaders with a clear vision and the will and skill to act on the vision, faculties willing to engage in sustained reflection, and a blueprint for change sufficient to the challenge of change. In the chapters ahead, we'll examine how the schools reconceived instruction to focus more effectively on individual learner needs, how they created guidelines for navigating this type of change process, and how the change played out in these two schools.



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Learn from the experts...

Administrators and teachers alike will find viable ideas and answers to questions as leaders at two schools share milestones and vignettes from their real-life experiences in converting entire faculties to this dynamic approach to teaching and learning.

The authors balance broadly applicable guidance with specific illustrations of how two schools—a middle-income elementary school and a mixed-income high school—experienced the change process in dramatically different ways. In both instances, the new approach to teaching and learning had sweeping, positive results for staff and students.

Carol Ann Tomlinson, Kay Brimijoin, and Lane Narvaez have combined their expertise with differentiation in schools—including professional development, research, leadership, coaching, and teaching—to highlight factors that contributed to the continuing success of school reinvention efforts such as

- Approaching change with the particular school culture in mind.
- Leading a staff toward change with appropriate pushes, pauses, and acknowledgments.
- Fostering continued growth in understanding and skill with differentiation in the classroom.
- Encouraging teachers to reinforce one another's strengths.
- Monitoring progress toward expanded flexibility in instructional approaches.
- Nurturing teacher leaders who can sustain the effort beyond one principal's tenure.
- Providing strong support and role models for deep and broad changes in the school's teaching practices and learning potential.

Every educator seeking to move beyond isolated efforts to differentiate instruction will find practical support and inspiration in this book. At the same time, you'll gain understanding about the key characteristics needed for deep, lasting instructional change that taps into the learning potential of all students in your classrooms and schools.

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ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION

SUPPORTING THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TEACHING

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CHAPTER 1

Supervision That Develops Expertise

Supervision has been a central feature on the landscape of K–12 education almost from the outset of schooling in this country. Witness the following comments from a 1709 document entitled "Reports of the Record of Commissions of the City of Boston" (cited in Burke & Krey, 2005, p. 411):

> [It should] be therefore established a committee of inspectors to visit ye School from time to time, when as oft as they shall see fit, to Enform themselves of the methods used in teacher of ye Scholars and Inquire of their proficiency, and be present at the performance of some of their Exercises.

In the three centuries that have transpired since this proclamation of 1709, the world of K–12 education has changed dramatically. Along with changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment have come changes in perspectives on supervision and evaluation. In Chapter 2, we briefly trace these changes to provide a frame of reference for the recommendations made in this book. Throughout the remainder of the book, we lay out a comprehensive approach to supervision as well as address the implications of our approach for the practice of evaluation.

The Foundational Principle of Supervision

The recommendations in this book are grounded in one primary principle that we view as foundational to the evolution of supervision: **the purpose of supervision should be the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement.** Even a brief examination of the research attests to the logic underlying this principle. Specifically, one incontestable fact in the research on schooling is that student achievement in classes with highly skilled teachers is better than student achievement in classes with less skilled teachers. To determine just how much better, consider Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 Teacher Expertise and Student Achievement

Teacher Skill Percentile Rank	Predicted Percentile Gain for Student at the 50th Percentile	Predicted Percentile Rank for Student
50th	0	50th
70th	8	58th
90th	18	68th
98th	27	77th

Note: For a discussion of how these figures were computed, see Marzano and Waters (2009).

Figure 1.1 depicts the expected percentile gain in achievement for a student starting at the 50th percentile within classrooms taught by teachers of varying degrees of competence. A student at the 50th percentile will not be expected to gain at all in percentile rank in the classroom of a teacher of the 50th percentile in terms of his or her pedagogical skill. However, a student at the 50th percentile will be expected to advance to the 58th percentile in the class of a teacher at the 70th percentile in terms of pedagogical skill. The increase in student percentile rank is even larger in the classrooms of teachers at the 90th and 98th percentile ranks in terms of their pedagogical skill. Students in these situations would be expected to reach the 68th and 77th percentiles, respectively. Clearly, the more skilled the teacher, the greater the predicted increase in student achievement. Equally clear is the implication for supervision. Its primary purpose should be the enhancement of teacher expertise.

Although it is unreasonable to expect all teachers to reach the lofty status of the 90th percentile or higher regarding their pedagogical skills, it is reasonable to expect all teachers to increase their expertise from year to year. Even a modest increase would yield impressive results. Specifically, if a teacher at the 50th percentile in terms of his or her pedagogical skill raised his or her competence by

two percentile points each year, the average achievement of his or her students would be expected to increase by eight percentile points over a 10-year period.

We believe that when done well, the process of supervision can be instrumental in producing incremental gains in teacher expertise, which can produce incremental gains in student achievement. Additionally, we believe that the research provides rather clear guidance on how to enhance teacher expertise.

The Nature of Expertise

Relatively speaking, it was not that long ago that expertise was considered something that could not be developed. Rather, expertise was thought of as a natural by-product of talent. In his review of the historical literature on perceptions of expertise, Murray (1989) concluded that it was generally believed that talent was considered "a gift from the gods." About this notion, Ericsson and Charness (1994) note:

> One important reason for this bias in attribution . . . is linked to immediate legitimization of various activities associated with the gifts. If the gods have bestowed a child with a special gift in a given art form, who would dare to oppose its development, and who would not facilitate its expression so everyone could enjoy its wonderful creations. This argument may appear strange today, but before the French Revolution the privileged status of kings and nobility and birthright of their children were primarily based on such claims. (p. 726)

Talent bestowed by the gods, then, was considered the prime determiner of expertise. Over time, the fallacies in this perspective were disclosed. Ericsson and Charness explain that "it is curious how little empirical evidence supports the talent view of expert and exceptional performance" (p. 730). They note that over the centuries, the talent hypothesis was inevitably challenged once it became evident that individuals could "dramatically increase their performance through education and training if they had the necessary drive and motivation" (p. 727).

Akin to the talent hypothesis is the intelligence hypothesis: highly intelligent people have the capacity to learn more, quicker. Over time, this trajectory leads to expertise. Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) note that this hypothesis has little backing: "The relationship of IQ to exceptional performance is rather weak in many domains" (p. 364).

If expertise is not a function of talent or intelligence, what then *are* its determiners? Based on the research on expertise, we propose five conditions that must

be met if a district or school wishes to systematically develop teacher expertise: (1) a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice, (3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) recognition of expertise. We consider each condition briefly here and in depth in subsequent chapters. We further assert that these five elements are necessary and sufficient conditions to raise the level of teacher expertise across a district or school. Stated differently, if a district or school were to address these five elements, they would realize an increase in teacher expertise that would translate into enhanced student achievement.

A Well-Articulated Knowledge Base for Teaching

A well-articulated knowledge base is a prerequisite for developing expertise in a systematic way within any domain. Ericsson et al. (1993) note that the extant knowledge base has increased and is continuing to increase in a variety of domains. This accumulation of knowledge renders expert status more available to more people:

> As the level of performance in the domain increased in skill and complexity, methods to explicitly instruct and train individuals were developed. In all major domains there has been a steady accumulation of knowledge about the best methods to attain a high level of performance and the associated practice activities leading to this performance. (p. 368)

As is the case with most fields of study, education has experienced exponential growth in its knowledge base, particularly regarding effective pedagogy. There have been many attempts to codify this knowledge base (see Hattie, 1992; Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996; and Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). We have organized that knowledge base into four related domains:

Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors

Domain 2: Planning and Preparing

Domain 3: Reflecting on Teaching

Domain 4: Collegiality and Professionalism

These domains bear a resemblance to the very popular model of teaching proposed by Charlotte Danielson (1996, 2007). Her model includes the following domains:

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

Domain 3: Instruction

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

Although our domains bear some resemblance to Danielson's, there are significant differences in the assumed relationship between domains and the specifics within the domains. Danielson explains that her domains "are not the only possible description of practice" (p. 1). The same holds true for our model. That noted, we propose that our four domains not only represent a viable way to organize the research and theory on teaching, but also disclose some important causal linkages (see Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2 Relationship Among Domains

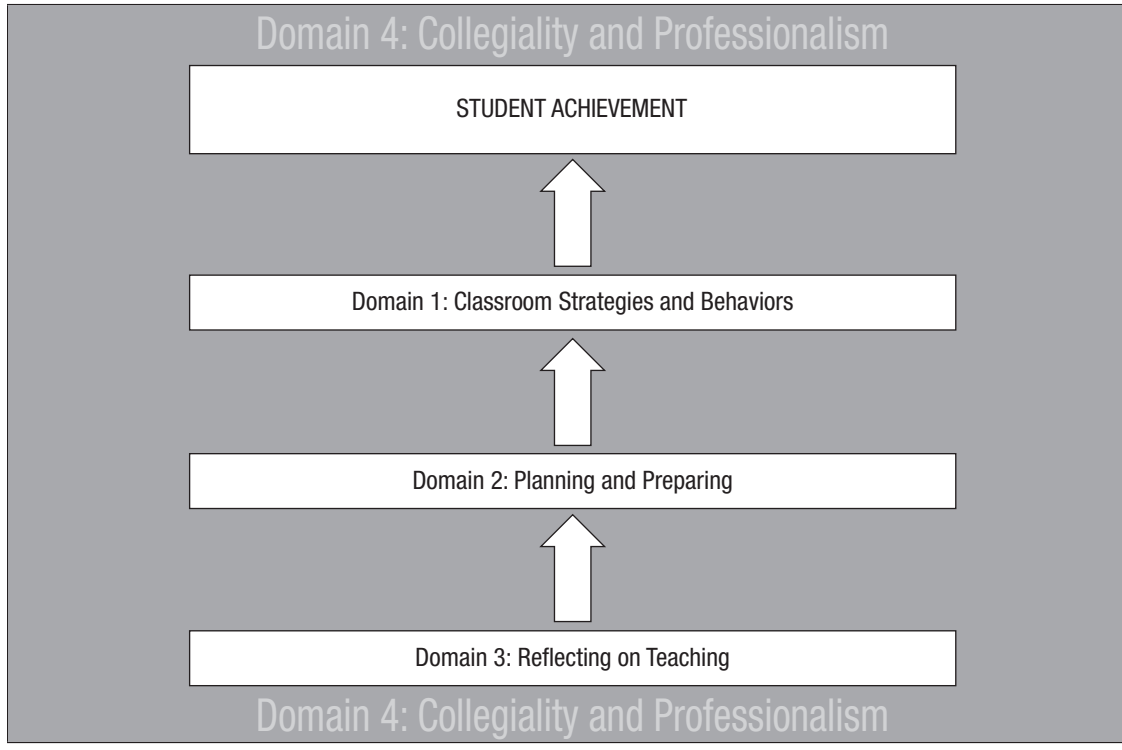


Figure 1.2 indicates that classroom strategies and behaviors (Domain 1) are at the top of the sequence and have a direct effect on student achievement. Stated differently, what occurs in the classroom has the most direct causal link to student achievement.

Directly below classroom strategies and behaviors is planning and preparing (Domain 2). As the name implies, this domain addresses the manner in

which—and the extent to which—teachers prepare themselves for their day-to-day classroom work by organizing the content within lessons and the lessons within units.

Directly below planning and preparing is Domain 3—reflecting on teaching. By definition, most of the elements in this domain are evaluative in nature, in that teachers are considering their areas of strength and weakness with the overall goal of improvement. This domain has a direct link to planning and preparing. Teachers will probably improve very little in their ability to plan and prepare without carefully reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses. Without growth in planning and preparing, teachers will experience little growth in the classroom strategies and behaviors they employ. Finally, little change in what teachers do in the classroom will likely result in little change in student achievement.

The fourth domain—collegiality and professionalism—is not part of the direct causal chain that ultimately leads to enhanced student achievement. Rather, it represents the professional culture in which the other domains operate. This domain addresses behaviors such as sharing effective practices with other teachers, mentoring other teachers, and the like. When this domain is functioning well, all educators in a district or building consider themselves part of a team with a collective responsibility for students' well-being and achievement. In Chapter 3, we discuss these domains in depth.

Focused Feedback and Practice

The second element necessary for a district or school to systematically develop teacher expertise is focused feedback and practice. In their comprehensive review of the research on expertise, Ericsson and Charness (1994) identify "deliberate practice" as the *sine qua non* of expert development. Deliberate practice is a broad construct with a number of important elements. As it relates to developing teacher expertise, Marzano (2010a) has noted that deliberate practice can be thought of as a multifaceted construct. One central feature of deliberate practice is feedback. As Ericsson et al. (1993) explain: "In the absence of feedback, efficient learning is impossible and improvement only minimal even for highly motivated subjects. Hence, mere repetition of an activity will not automatically lead to improvement" (p. 367). This assertion is quite consistent with the findings reported by Hattie and Timperley (2007) from their analysis of 12 meta-analyses incorporating 196 studies and 6,972 effect sizes. The average effect size for providing feedback was 0.79, which they note is approximately twice the average effect size (0.40) associated with most educational innovations.

For feedback to be instrumental in developing teacher expertise, it must focus on specific classroom strategies and behaviors (Domain 1) during a set interval of time. For example, a given teacher might focus on specific strategies or

behaviors from Domain 1 throughout a given quarter or semester. The feedback to that teacher during that quarter or semester would be on that specific strategy or behavior as opposed to the many other aspects of Domain 1 that could be the subject of feedback. The idea behind this degree of selectivity is that skill development requires focus. Feedback that involves too many elements or is too broad has little influence.

With focused feedback in place, teachers can engage in focused practice—another critical element of deliberate practice. Here the teacher practices the selected strategy or behavior experimenting with small variations in technique to determine what works best in his or her particular situation. We address specific approaches to focused feedback and practice in Chapter 4.

Opportunities to Observe and Discuss Expertise

One interesting aspect of expertise is that it manifests as nuanced behavior. Ambady and Rosenthal (1992, 1993) refer to this phenomenon as "thin slices of behavior." Relative to teaching, one can think of thin slices of behavior as the moment-to-moment adaptations a teacher makes regarding the use of specific strategies. Nuanced behavior, or thin slices of behavior, cannot be easily described but can be observed and analyzed. Consequently, opportunities to observe and discuss effective teaching are an important part of developing expertise among classroom teachers. If teachers do not have opportunities to observe and interact with other teachers, their method of generating new knowledge about teaching is limited to personal trial and error.

Although opportunities to observe and discuss expertise are not currently very common in K–12 schools, they are desired by teachers. In his book *A Place Called School*, which summarized data from 1,350 elementary and secondary teachers, Goodlad (1984) reported that "approximately three quarters of our sample at all levels of schooling indicated that they would like to observe other teachers at work" (p. 188). Similarly, in his article "Teacher Isolation and the New Reform," Flinders (1988) noted that although teachers work in isolation, they crave professional interaction with other teachers. This interaction involves both observing other teachers and interacting with them about teaching. Finally, the call for teachers to observe and discuss expertise is consistent with current discussions of professional learning communities (PLCs). As Louis, Kruse, and Associates (1995) note, one of the primary functions of the PLC movement is the "deprivitization" of practice.

In Chapter 5, we address ways to provide opportunities for teachers to observe and discuss expertise in depth. Briefly, though, we recommend that districts and schools provide opportunities for teachers to observe videotapes of other teachers, to observe expert teachers in their classrooms, to consult with

expert teachers face-to-face, and to interact with their peers face-to-face as well as through synchronous and asynchronous technologies.

Clear Criteria and a Plan for Success

A critical aspect of deliberate practice is clear criteria for success. Quite obviously, relative to expertise in teaching, classroom strategies and behaviors (Domain 1) should include specific criteria as to what constitutes effective teaching. In Chapter 3, we describe 41 categories of classroom strategies and behaviors within Domain 1. For each of these 41 elements, scales (i.e., rubrics) are provided that describe novice-to-expert use of the element. Using these scales, teachers can track the development of their pedagogical expertise on specific elements over specific intervals of time.

It is tempting to embrace the position that teacher effectiveness regarding the strategies and behaviors in Domain 1 should be the sole measure of teacher performance. This approach would be a mistake. While the reasoned use of classroom strategies and behaviors is certainly a necessary ingredient of expertise, the ultimate criterion for expert performance in the classroom is student achievement. Anything else misses the point. This is depicted in Figure 1.2. Note that student achievement is at the top of the causal hierarchy. Stated differently, the ultimate criterion for successful teaching must be student learning.

In Chapter 6, we provide a number of ways to collect and use student achievement data as part of the criteria for successful teaching. We make the case that achievement data should be value added in nature. Value-added achievement data measure how much students have learned over a given interval of time. One type of value-added achievement data that might be used is knowledge gain. For example, the differences between pre-test and post-test scores on some common assessment or benchmark assessment would constitute a measure of knowledge gain for each student. Currently, knowledge gain is being used as a criterion for teacher evaluation in some districts. Other indices that can be used include residual scores and students' self-report of their knowledge gain.

With clear criteria in place for the classroom strategies and behaviors in Domain 1 and student value-added achievement, teachers can construct professional growth and development plans. These plans operationalize deliberate practice in that they describe how teachers will meet their goals and allow them to monitor progress toward their goals.

Recognition of Expertise

One characteristic of expertise in any field is that it takes a long time to develop. In fact, according to some researchers and theorists, it takes at least a

decade—a fact that has been referred to as the "10-year rule" (Simon & Chase, 1973). Ericsson et al. (1993) have demonstrated the ubiquity of the 10-year rule. Regardless of the field, about 10 years of deliberate practice is required to reach expert status.

From the perspective of the 10-year rule, it is easy to conclude that acquiring expert status in teaching requires a high level of motivation on the part of aspirants. As Ericsson et al. (1993) explain:

> On the basis of several thousand years of education, along with more recent laboratory research on learning and skill acquisition, a number of conditions for optimal learning and improvement of performance have been uncovered. . . . The most cited condition concerns subjects' motivation to attend to the task and exert effort to improve their performance. (p. 367)

It is probably unreasonable to expect all teachers, even the majority of teachers, to seek the lofty status of expert. Indeed, the natural human condition appears to be to stop development once an acceptable level of performance has been reached. Ericsson and Charness (1994) explain: "Most amateurs and employees spend a very small amount of time on deliberate practice efforts to improve their performance once it has reached an acceptable level" (p. 730). How, then, could a district or school encourage teachers to continue developing their expertise?

We address this issue in Chapter 7. Briefly, we believe that educators are not motivated by money (although there is certainly nothing wrong with rewarding expertise financially). However, they *are* motivated by recognition of expertise. This idea is not new. National Board certification is designed singularly for this purpose.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, is credited with first outlining in 1985 how teaching might be further professionalized through the establishment of an organization that documented and recognized excellence in teaching. The Carnegie Corporation of New York endorsed Shanker's call by establishing the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. In 1987, the Carnegie Corporation funded the establishment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

Since its inception, NBPTS has grown steadily in popularity. For example, NBPTS certifications granted saw a surge between 2003 and 2007, with 63,800 granted during those years (Viadero & Honawar, 2008). Recent figures indicate that a total of 82,000 teachers have achieved national board certification or recertification (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2010; Estes Park News, 2010). Although there have been some challenges regarding the extent to which NBPTS certification is associated with enhanced student achievement

(see Sawchuck, 2009, 2010; Thirunarayanan, 2004; Viadero & Honawar, 2008), its popularity attests to the fact that teachers are motivated by recognition of their expertise. In fact, NBPTS certification actually costs teachers $2,500 to apply and complete the process, yet more and more teachers seek the endorsement every year. In our opinion, such recognition can and should be a regular aspect of the teacher's evaluation process in districts and schools. In Chapter 7, we outline a process whereby teacher evaluation not only recognizes and documents teachers' levels of expertise, but also supports their progress through those levels.

District Support for Developing Expertise

The initiatives described in this book are not easily implemented. They require a redistribution of resources at the district level. They also require a willingness on the part of districts to recognize expertise and a willingness on the part of expert teachers to stand and be counted as leaders. Although our suggestions are ambitious, they are not new. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond (2009) asserts "that all practitioners [should] have the support to become expert" (p. 64). Using different terminology, she calls for a massive refocusing of energy and resources across districts in the United States.

The need for districtwide effort to support teacher expertise has also been highlighted in a study of district leadership. Specifically, in *District Leadership That Works,* which reports on a meta-analysis of research on district leadership, Marzano and Waters (2009) identify five responsibilities of district administrators that had a significant correlation with student achievement. One of these district responsibilities was nonnegotiable goals for instruction. Marzano and Waters assert that one of the more powerful actions district leaders can take to enhance student achievement is to develop a system that encourages, supports, and recognizes teacher expertise.

Summary

This chapter provided the foundation for the recommendations made in this book. It began with the well-established generalization that teacher expertise is causally related to student achievement. The more skilled the teacher, the greater the students' achievement. The nature of expertise was briefly discussed, with an emphasis on the fact that it can be developed with deliberate practice over time. Five conditions for developing teacher expertise were briefly described: (1) a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice,

(3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) providing recognition of expertise. The chapter ended with a discussion of the importance of a districtwide emphasis on improving teacher expertise.

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- A well-articulated knowledge base for teaching
- Opportunities for teachers to practice specific strategies or behaviors and to receive feedback
- Opportunities for teachers to observe and discuss expertise
- Clear criteria for success and help constructing professional growth and development plans
- Recognition of the different stages of development progressing toward expertise

The focus is on developing a collegial atmosphere in which teachers can freely share effective practices with each other, observe one another's classrooms, and receive focused feedback on their teaching strategies. The constructive dynamics of this approach always keep in sight the aim of enhancing students' well-being and achievement. As the authors note, "The ultimate criterion for expert performance in the classroom is student achievement. Anything else misses the point."

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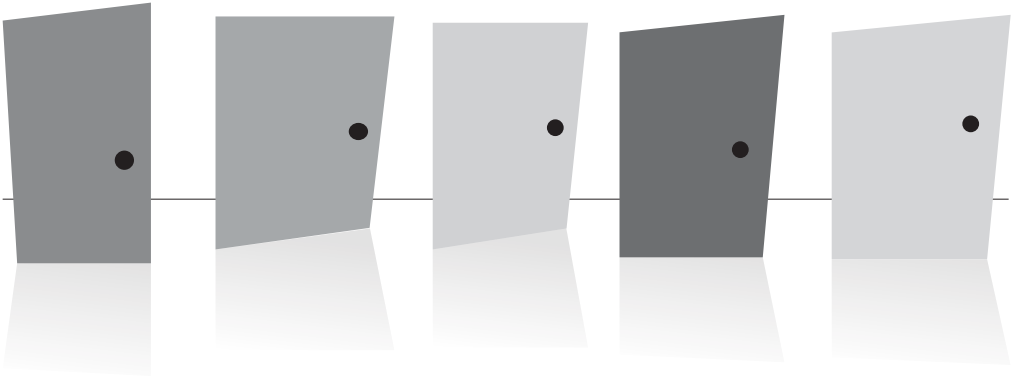


DONALD S. KACHUR

JUDITH A. STOUT

CLAUDIA L. EDWARDS

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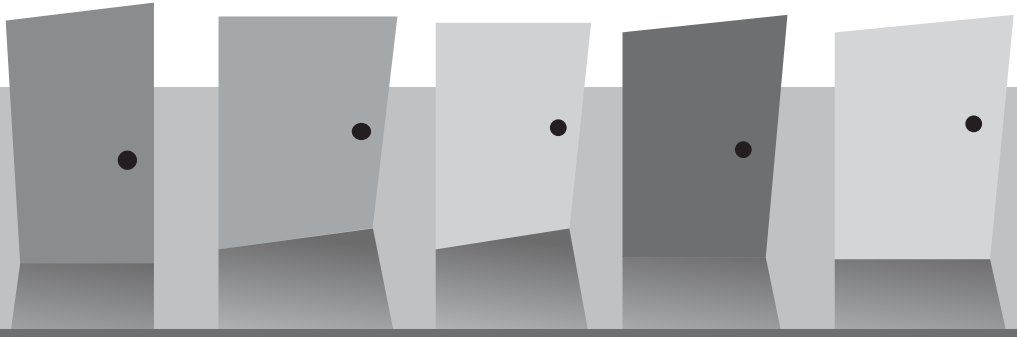


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DONALD S. KACHUR | JUDITH A. STOUT | CLAUDIA L. EDWARDS

ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 223111714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
Author guidelines: www.ascd.org/write

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- Sue Krapf, Principal, Benton Grade School K–4, Benton School District 47, Benton, Illinois
- Suzanne Lacey, Superintendent of Schools, Talladega County Schools, Talladega, Alabama
- Patrick Larkin, Assistant Superintendent for Learning, Burlington High School, Burlington Public Schools, Burlington, Massachusetts
- Kathy Larson, Education Consultant, Cooperative Education Service Agency #2, Whitewater, Wisconsin
- Sheila Maher, Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, Carrollton–Farmers Branch Independent School District, Carrollton, Texas
- Elba Maisonet, former Principal, Schubert Elementary School, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois
- Moriah A. Martin, Assistant to the Associate Superintendent, Office of Human Resources and Development, Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland
- Pat Martinez-Miller, Director of Faculty, UCLA Center X, Los Angeles, California
- Mike Matsuda, Coordinator, Teacher Support and Professional Development, Anaheim Union School District, Anaheim, California
- Brooke Morgan, Assistant Principal, Munford Elementary School, Talladega County School District, Talladega, Alabama
- Kay Musgrove, Executive Director, Tennessee ASCD, Franklin, Tennessee
- Jeff Nelsen, Targeted Leadership Consulting, Los Alamitos, California
- Meuriel Nystrom, Executive Director, Idaho ASCD, Lewiston, Idaho
- Deb Oda, Coordinator of Professional Development, South Junior High School, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, California
- Betty Olson, Principal, South Junior High School, Boise School District, Boise, Idaho
- Karen Olson, Principal, Crystal River Elementary School, Roaring Fork School District, Carbondale, Colorado
- Laurie Pallin, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Montville Public Schools, Oakdale, Connecticut
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- Stephanie Posey, Principal, Belleville East High School, Belleville Township High School District 201, Belleville, Illinois
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- Kathleen Schnefke, Literacy Specialist, Parkway Elementary School, Greenwich Public Schools, Greenwich, Connecticut
- Kathy Scott, Principal, Oxford Academy, Anaheim Union High School District, Anaheim, California
- David Shepard, Education Consultant, The Middle Matters, Lexington, Kentucky
- Mike Skelton, Principal, Jonesboro High School, Jonesboro School District, Jonesboro, Arkansas
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Preface

This is a book about classroom walkthroughs. More specifically, this is a book about teacher leadership throughout the classroom walkthrough process. This teacher leadership results in ongoing professional conversations about and growth in improving teaching and learning. Although walkthroughs have historically been regarded as the domain of school administrators, classroom teachers are finally becoming more directly involved in them. Teachers participate in planning, implementing, and evaluating walkthroughs, and they participate as observers and the observed. This is the story we want to tell.

When we first became interested in classroom walkthroughs, we were surprised by how widely this activity was being used as a school improvement tool yet how little the education literature contained on the topic. Initially, we were attracted to nationally known walkthrough models: Data-in-a-Day, Downey's Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through, Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) Process, Learning Walk Routine, Look 2 Learning, McREL Power Walkthrough, Instructional Rounds Network, Teachscape *Reflect* Classroom Walkthrough, and the UCLA Center X Classroom Walk-Through. Although they have different purposes and protocols, these models are used by many schools across the country to improve instruction and student learning. We studied these models for several years and gleaned similarities and differences as we presented the topic of classroom walkthroughs at local, state, and

national conferences. Those presentations confirmed that many educators were unaware of established walkthrough models or how variations of walkthroughs could serve as school improvement tools.

We realized that once administrators became interested in walkthroughs, they would each seek a model that best fit their unique school setting. We found that many schools across the country had implemented specific walkthrough models but modified them over time to better meet their needs and goals. This observation impressed upon us that, because one model seldom fits all school needs, the best model may be one that is locally modified or designed for implementation. Our original intent was to present readers with an introduction to a wide range of walkthrough models, which would help them acquire a broader sense of how they could be used. That interest became the incentive for our first book, *Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). Based on our review and study of various models used across the country, we shared ideas with school leaders that could be drawn from those examples for designing their own walkthrough models.

As we continued to interact with school personnel who were conducting walkthroughs, we found that schools where walkthroughs were sustained and where teaching and learning were improving actively involved their teachers in every aspect of the walkthrough protocol. The trend was shifting away from walkthroughs as something done *to* or *for* teachers to a process undertaken *with* teachers. School administrators were actively partnering with teachers in this educational enterprise. Teachers had an important voice in the design and implementation of the walkthrough protocols and were becoming observers rather than just being observed. These were exciting learning environments in which all staff benefited from opening classrooms for one another to observe, share ideas, discuss issues, and improve individual teaching practices.

Although we were interested in stories about what these schools were doing, we felt that the real stories were about how school leaders (administrators, teacher leaders, and other quasi- or nonadministrative staff) achieved the buy-in from classroom teachers to participate in the walkthrough process and view the visits as valued professional learning experiences. This book highlights

the stories and lessons shared by these school leaders. We learned how they overcame the cultural challenges of isolationism and teacher reluctance or resistance to successfully involve their teachers in walkthroughs.

We found school leaders who encouraged teachers to get involved in walkthroughs; teachers leading efforts for change and continuous improvement; and administrators and teachers deciding together to overcome so-called teaching isolationism by promoting greater exchange of teaching ideas. All of these measures contribute to improved student achievement. Some of the schools featured in this book were in their first or second year of actively involving teachers as observers in walkthroughs; others were already five or more years into such involvement.

None of the schools or districts identified in this book claimed that they had "fully arrived" in terms of classroom walkthroughs. Some settings retained pockets of teachers working largely in isolation and spending little time with colleagues to share ideas and address teaching and learning issues. All of these schools and districts are making significant progress, however. Some have achieved a collaborative culture. Teachers regularly participate in the walkthrough process and in subsequent professional conversations. These professional staffs share knowledge about the craft of teaching and explore solutions to challenging learning problems. Most of the schools we studied commented specifically about how their original vision of involving teachers in the walkthrough process changed and evolved as they evaluated the process. This ongoing evaluation of walkthroughs ensured that they met the intended outcomes for which they were designed.

Whether you are a teacher or a school administrator, this book was written for those of you interested in actively engaging classroom teachers in all aspects of walkthroughs. The schools we studied represent a fraction of the many schools that are successfully involving teachers as participants and partners in this process. We hope that your school will have a similar story.

In Chapter 1, "Defining Teacher Leadership in Classroom Walkthroughs," we introduce the concept of walkthroughs as an important school improvement tool. We identify the nature of our work for this book and introduce the schools

featured, including the criteria for their selection, how we identified them, and the information we sought from them. We demonstrate the rationale for teacher leadership at the building and district levels, and we share some of the initial questions school leaders are likely to raise when considering involving teachers in classroom walkthroughs.

In Chapter 2, "A School Culture to Support Walkthroughs," we review the features that contribute to a culture in which walkthroughs are accepted, valued, and successful. We share stories from schools explaining the leadership roles of the principal and teachers, the power of shared leadership, the necessity of having an environment of trust and safety, the importance of having a staff that is student-centered, the value of communities of learning, and the role of collaborative inquiry.

In Chapter 3, "Components of Successful Walkthroughs," we discuss the reasons why these schools implemented walkthroughs, the walkthrough models they used, their years of implementation, which teachers do the observing, and the frequency and length of walkthrough observations. We describe the components of teacher walkthroughs, including the focus and looks-fors, methods of recording observation data, and types of follow-up to observations. In particular, we highlight the importance of identifying and implementing steps to affect teaching and learning after teacher walkthrough data have been gathered and shared.

In Chapter 4, "Strategies for Getting Teachers Involved," we summarize the recommendations that schools and districts featured in this book have for those contemplating or actually planning to introduce walkthroughs. These recommendations include involving teacher leaders as advocates for the process; having a clear, definable purpose for the walkthroughs; introducing the process gradually and carefully into the school; ensuring transparency of the entire walkthrough protocol; developing norms to govern walkthrough behaviors; providing walkthrough training; arranging and scheduling walkthroughs and follow-ups; inviting volunteers to begin the process; focusing on students learning rather than teachers teaching; and conducting discussions on walkthrough data without being evaluative or judgmental of teachers.

In Chapter 5, "Additional Issues to Address," we focus on other issues or obstacles that schools may encounter throughout the walkthrough process. Some of these issues are teacher reluctance or resistance, teacher union concerns, coordinating and tracking the walkthrough process, announcing walkthroughs, connecting walkthroughs to other school improvement data and efforts, and evaluating the walkthrough process and measuring the effect it has on teaching and learning.

In Chapter 6, "Concluding Thoughts," we emphasize the value of adjusting walkthrough protocols if the walkthroughs are not meeting expectations. We also highlight the importance of including the Common Core State Standards as a major area of focus for walkthroughs. The meaningful sharing of ideas and experiences through walkthroughs is crucial to building a collective understanding of what the common core should look like in the classroom.

The appendixes include a list of all the schools and school districts featured in this book that have implemented teacher walkthroughs, questions that guided our study of these schools about their walkthrough processes, a sample survey for acquiring teacher input in designing a local walkthrough model, examples of teacher walkthrough observation forms, a step-by-step account of an illustrative walkthrough in practice, and a sample questionnaire for evaluating a classroom walkthrough process.

We hope this book inspires readers, particularly classroom teachers, to collaborate with their professional colleagues and investigate ways to design and implement a classroom walkthrough process that promotes a continuous renewal of teaching and learning in an atmosphere of collegiality and shared mission.

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Chapter 1



Defining Teacher Leadership in Classroom Walkthroughs

Teachers learn best from other teachers in settings where they literally teach each other the art of teaching.

—Judith Warren Little

Classroom walkthroughs have become increasingly popular as a valued tool for the continuous improvement of schools. We interpret classroom walkthroughs as brief, frequent, informal, and focused visits to classrooms by observers for the purposes of gathering data on educational practices and engaging in some type of follow-up. Walkthroughs differ from full-period observations in that they consist of short, quick snapshots. They enable observers to record information over time on features of classrooms including instructional materials and strategies, curriculum standards and lesson objectives, levels of cognitive interaction, student engagement, classroom resources and displays, behavioral management, and more. Walkthroughs differ from most short-term classroom visits in that the observers have a particular focus and set of look-fors in mind as they collect data for subsequent discussion and action.

For the most part, walkthroughs have been used by administrators to better acquaint themselves with the day-to-day operation of a school. However, we know that limiting walkthrough observations to administrators significantly limits the impact of this practice. To obtain all of the benefits of classroom walkthroughs, teachers must be involved throughout the process—from investigating potential implementation to developing the protocol itself to planning for evaluation and revision.

When teachers visit one another's classrooms to gather information on teaching practices and student learning, a wealth of shared knowledge is collected. We are firmly convinced that, in terms of the positions of the people doing classroom observations, the further those people are from the classroom (for example, district-level staff observing classrooms versus teachers observing one another), the less instructional practice will change. In other words, teachers working with their colleagues have the greatest effect on improving teaching practices.

The Rationale for Involving Teachers as Leaders in Walkthroughs

We found a number of important reasons why schools decided to include teachers in walkthroughs. The educators we interviewed were explicit in their belief that classroom observations are a valuable source of professional growth for teachers at every stage of their careers. These educators view walkthroughs as a means for teachers to observe, reflect on, and discuss their practices and to focus on individual, collegial, and schoolwide improvement. They know that the outcome of walkthroughs involving teachers will be greater consistency of instructional best practices across all grade levels and subject areas.

Moriah Martin, former staff development teacher at James Hubert Blake High School, points out that a "principal-only" approach to improving teaching and learning is not effective:

> We knew that if teachers did the walkthroughs, they would observe the teaching themselves and could better discuss and identify strong

teaching practices. If only principals were doing the observations and then talked about what they saw with the teachers, it would not only be very "top-down," but the school improvement process would not be owned by everyone.

Teachers observing teachers provides opportunities for the teaching staff to (1) note useful practices other than the ones they use; (2) ease the fear of trying something new; (3) feel motivated to improve their craft; (4) identify possible areas for their own professional development; (5) identify areas of practice for reflective dialogue with colleagues; and (6) accelerate improvement in student performance. Walkthroughs are another way for teachers to become responsible for their own professional growth and are an excellent complement to traditional professional development.

The Benefits of Teacher Leadership

Teachers and students directly benefit from teachers collaborating and participating in walkthroughs. Although peer observations can be threatening, when walkthroughs are implemented in a carefully planned, considerate, and respectful manner, the rewards are great. The process will enable members of your school community to engage in dialogue and reflection about teaching practices. Furthermore, we believe that student achievement is directly linked to collegial collaboration, which is clearly supported by classroom walkthroughs. The whole walkthrough process includes real conversations about teaching, an understanding and use of a common vocabulary, and teachers asking for and providing one another with assistance. Taken together, these benefits have the potential to raise the instructional capacity of a school to a higher level of continuous improvement and performance.

> We have professional expertise right in our own schools, and we need to take advantage of that, which teacher walkthroughs can help provide.
>
> *—Mike Matsuda, Coordinator for Quality Teacher Programs, Anaheim Union High School District*

Teachers have traditionally worked in relative isolation, as so-called independent artisans exercising their craft behind closed doors (Bloom, 2007). According to Richard Elmore (2007), privacy of practice produces isolation, and isolation serves as the enemy of improvement. Isolated teachers perceive others as self-reliant, and they are reluctant to ask for help or engage in instructional conversations. They often doubt themselves and believe they are alone in experiencing the challenges and frustrations of teaching. Isolation prevents teachers from disclosing personal strengths, challenges, and needs. By contrast, we promote opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers in action, capturing and sharing the very best practices in teaching and learning. They can work together to support one another's professional growth and development. According to Jeff Nelsen and Amalia Cudeiro (2009),

> Many teachers learn best by observing colleagues using the strategy they are attempting to learn themselves. Having each teacher observe several other teachers practicing a new strategy and discussing what they observed in the initial learning sessions can be a powerful support. It also gives teachers the opportunity to develop a common vocabulary around the new practices and sends a strong message that "We're all in this together." (p. 34)

Compared to other types of professional development, the walkthrough is the most enriching and stimulating. It is an opportunity to see "best" practices in action and debrief and reflect upon those observations with colleagues. What better way to learn? See how something is done, then discuss it to cement an understanding!

—Mary Lou Bettez,
7th/8th Grade ELA Teacher,
Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School

Involving teachers as observers in the walkthrough process can transform the entire school into a learning community and build a culture that values the engagement of teachers in continuous and sustained professional growth. No matter how schools tailor the process, the essentials are the same—teachers learning from teachers in a nonevaluative way, talking about their craft, and developing lessons as a result that will improve student achievement (Blatt, Linsley, & Smith, 2005).

As depicted by the examples in this book, we find that teachers are increasingly buying into the idea that walkthroughs are an effective tool for examining and continuously improving their practice. Teachers take charge of their own learning by collaborating with one another for personal professional development—learning from colleagues through observation, inquiry, dialogue, sharing, and practice. These walkthroughs help staff measure the progress they are making in implementing a new initiative, and they enable teachers to observe effective practices that confirm their own classroom behavior. They can also help teachers acquire new ideas and techniques through one of the most powerful means to learning—watching those ideas and techniques being enacted. Helping teachers feel comfortable with involvement in the walkthrough process is key to making it work for the entire staff as a true professional development and school improvement tool.

Featured Schools

The basis of the work for this book came from our two-year study of 40 schools that were conducting teacher walkthroughs—representing 30 school districts in 17 states and 6 schools from 1 school district in Canada (see Figure 1.1 and Appendix A). The evidence shows that including teachers in the walkthrough process occurs among all types and at all levels of schools. As we studied these schools, our interest was not only in the ways they involved teachers but also in how they created the interest and motivation for teachers to engage in the walkthrough process. We found schools with a variety of approaches to walkthroughs, and we selected schools for our study that

- Implemented a nationally known walkthrough model or designed a brand-new model.
- Were at various stages of implementation of walkthroughs.
- Included different grade levels (elementary, middle, and secondary school).
- Represented neighborhood, charter, and alternative schools.
- Were of various sizes in terms of numbers of teachers and students.
- Included many different populations of students in terms of ethnicity and poverty rates.

- Represented all the geographical regions of the United States.

Our primary means for identifying schools that met these criteria were the following:

- Contacting key individuals from the 18 classroom walkthrough models featured in the book *Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Teaching and Learning* (Kachur et al., 2010).
- Contacting a network of key educators across the country knowledgeable about schools where peer observations were occurring.
- Contacting executive directors of the ASCD affiliates, who in turn communicated the request to their members.
- Conducting Internet searches on walkthrough models and reports.
- Reviewing the literature on classroom walkthroughs.

In addition to traditional public schools, the study included a Native American school (Ganado Intermediate School), an alternative high school (Bridges High School), and a charter school (Arroyo Vista Charter School). The schools ranged in size from 80 to 2,690 students, with teaching staffs of 6 to 149. The schools represented wide variations of racial and ethnic mixes, and poverty rates ranged from 4 to 99 percent, based on free and reduced lunch program enrollment.

Data Collection

We asked the educators in these schools to share details about their teacher walkthrough processes from inception to evaluation. The educators we contacted included central office personnel, building administrators, and many different kinds of teacher leaders. Our primary purpose was to acquire stories and recommendations we could share with our readers who want to engage their teaching colleagues in the walkthrough process.

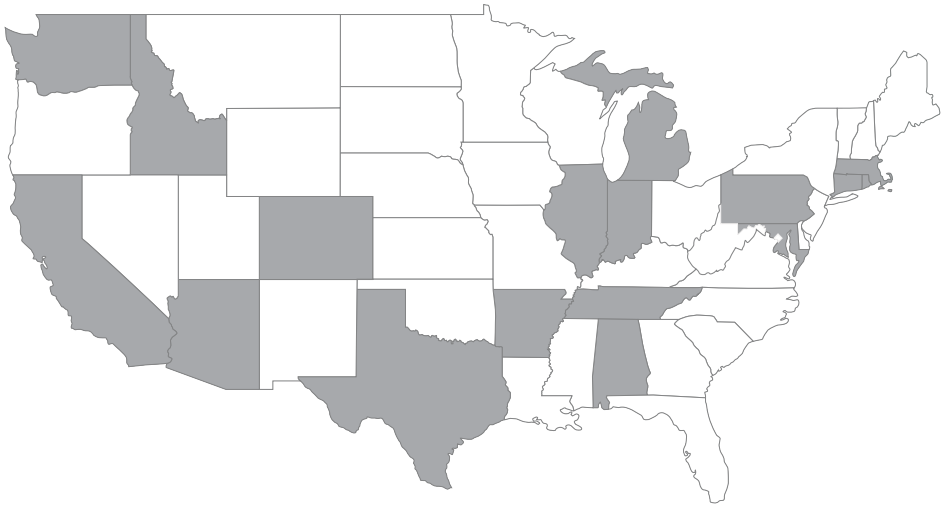
The educators with whom we communicated shared their experiences through questionnaires (see Appendix B), phone calls, and e-mails. One round of questions focused on what each school was doing to involve teachers in walkthroughs. The focus of those questions was primarily on the

- Reasons that led to involving teachers in walkthroughs.
- Walkthrough model used.
- Purpose of and participants in the walkthroughs.
- Walkthrough logistics (such as coordination, scheduling, tracking, frequency, and length of visits).
- Selection of the focus and look-fors in walkthroughs.
- Data gathering and follow-up to the observations.
- Roles and responsibilities of the principal in the process.
- Evaluation of the walkthrough process and measure of its effect on teaching and learning.

The second round of questions (see Appendix B) focused on how the schools established walkthroughs that involved teachers and how they addressed

FIGURE 1.1
Location of U.S. Schools in Walkthrough Study

Region	States
Northeast	Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island
Midwest	Illinois, Indiana, Michigan
South	Alabama, Arkansas, Maryland, Tennessee, Texas
West	Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Washington



challenges to implementing their walkthrough models. The focus of those questions was primarily on the

- Features of the school culture in place to support teacher leadership in walkthroughs.
- Benefits to the teachers, students, and school.
- Initial steps to implement walkthroughs.
- Connection of the walkthroughs to other school improvement initiatives.
- Issues and obstacles to overcome (such as trust, teachers unions, scheduling, and teacher reluctance or resistance).
- Preparation of teachers for walks (such as training and walking norms).
- Evaluation of the walkthroughs and subsequent effect on teaching and learning.
- Changes to walkthrough purpose, protocols, and practice over time.
- Recommendations for initiating and sustaining walkthroughs.

The information from the surveys and follow-up communications provided us with a rich source of ideas, issues, and recommendations. We believe that sharing what these schools learned will be of great value to those of you who want to involve teachers in the walkthrough process. Such information will contribute to your agenda as you consider the design, implementation, and sustainability of a teacher walkthrough protocol in your school.

Reasons given by schools for involving teachers in the walkthrough process were to

- Share teacher expertise about existing instructional practices and needs.
- Advance the school improvement plan.
- Establish accountability for school initiatives.
- Build team spirit among the teaching staff.
- Determine the progress made in implementing a new initiative after participating in professional development efforts.
- Advance the development of a real professional learning community.
- Track the progress being made in delivering a standards-based learning environment.

District-Driven Emphasis on Classroom Walkthroughs

We found that the initial driving force for some schools implementing walkthroughs was building-level leadership. We also found school districts where central office leadership expected all schools within their jurisdiction to involve their teachers as walkthrough observers. These districts either provided training in a particular walkthrough model for the staff or encouraged and supported individual schools as they explored and implemented their own walkthrough processes. A number of factors contributed to these districts fostering a systemwide teacher walkthrough initiative.

> Every 10 years, our school is involved for three days with an on-site visiting accreditation team. It was frustrating to think that those visiting educators leave our school with a better understanding schoolwide of our instructional practices and needs than our own teachers. Our teachers should be the experts of their own school as to what is taking place and what is needed for school improvement. The walkthroughs are seen as one major vehicle for tapping their expertise.
>
> *—Patrick Larkin, former principal, Burlington High School*

In some cases, districtwide initiatives such as professional learning communities, lesson design specialists, formative assessments, and a student learning protocol were among the catalysts for walkthroughs. A key element for the creation of professional learning communities in Montville Public Schools in Connecticut was to create a culture in every school whereby all staff members learn from one another. Walkthroughs were considered a learning process to enable teachers to identify the instructional areas they wanted to improve and to identify practices to implement in their own classrooms. Anaheim Union High School District in California implemented a districtwide lesson-design initiative that filtered down to each school site. Each school was assigned an instructional design specialist to work with the faculty to develop a collaborative learning community focused on coaching, walkthroughs, and side-by-side lesson design. A districtwide emphasis on the use of formative assessments to

improve student achievement was an incentive for the Talladega County Schools in Alabama to explore walkthroughs that involved teachers. School leaders implemented the Instructional Rounds Network (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), which included cross-functional groups (composed of teachers and administrators or of people in multiple roles) examining formative assessment practices across the entire school district. Individual schools applied the same visitation model at the building level to achieve more immediate and direct impact on school improvement. The Cheney Public Schools in Washington State had a districtwide goal to ensure high-quality teaching and learning in every classroom. A cadre of 80 teachers from across the district was trained in the use of the Student Learning Protocol, a research-based professional development tool that helps teachers focus on instructional practices that make a positive difference on student achievement. Upon completion of the training, each building team of administrators and teachers determined how they could further support and implement walkthroughs using the Student Learning Protocol to inform and strengthen instructional practice.

> We do three types of walkthroughs: administrative walkthroughs that involve administrators from other schools and two teacher representatives from the school; teacher-team walkthroughs that involve 11 teachers trained to do the walks; and individual teacher walkthroughs, usually with those teachers visiting colleagues at the same grade level.
>
> *—Lorilyn Caron, Principal, Mohegan Elementary School*

External funding or state-level education initiatives accelerated interest in walkthroughs in several school districts. Sequatchie County Schools in Tennessee began investigating the use of classroom walkthroughs after the state was awarded Race to the Top funds. Those funds allowed a wide range of professional development opportunities on effective teaching from the Marzano Research Laboratory. That training included instructional rounds in which small groups of teachers make brief observations of their fellow teachers for the primary purpose of comparing and improving their own practice. Work with the Colorado Department of Education in their Closing the Gap pilot provided by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) was the incentive

for the Roaring Fork School District to initiate walkthroughs. The district's leaders wanted teachers to invest in the strategies for improved teaching practices presented in *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012). The walkthroughs were considered a means to establish a common approach among the teaching staffs in delivering high-quality instruction across schools.

Just the awareness of the effectiveness of a particular walkthrough model served as an incentive for several other school districts to invest time and energy into engaging teachers as walkthrough observers. In Burlington School District in Massachusetts, school administrators and department chairs from each of the district's schools initially participated in the Look 2 Learning (L2L) model. Classroom teachers who participated in the training shared what they learned at school staff meetings. As a result of the training, leaders in each school introduced faculty participation into the L2L walkthrough model. Similarly, after attending the Instructional Rounds Institute at Harvard University, school leaders at Carrollton-Farmers Branch School District in Texas created their own model of instructional rounds to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Today, the district has five Instructional Rounds networks composed of teachers, support staff, and administrators. Twenty-three host schools and a total of 53 teachers participate in these districtwide visits. Teachers at host schools also participate in internal rounds at the building level, where every teacher is involved to some degree.

A book study in one case and a new-teacher-induction program in another launched districtwide interest in walkthroughs. Staff in Carman-Ainsworth School District in Michigan studied *Classroom Instruction That Works*. The district offered training in the McREL Power Walkthroughs and expanded the pool of those trained to include teacher union leaders and teacher leaders from across the schools. The district leadership wanted to know if the strategies from *Classroom Instruction That Works* were actually being implemented in classrooms. Fontana Unified School District in California requires new teachers to visit classrooms across the district as part of its induction program. The districtwide walkthroughs have a great impact on novices when they visit a wide

range of teachers and have time to collaborate with their colleagues about the instructional strategies they observed.

Where to Begin?

Where does a school begin to engage teachers in the practice of classroom walkthroughs? We found that every school had a range of questions at the outset when considering teachers as leaders in the walkthrough process. When Susan Krapf, principal of Benton Grade School K–4 wanted to involve teachers in walkthroughs, she began by asking the following questions:

- Will my staff even want to be involved?
- Do they feel they have the time to add another thing to their plates?
- How do I sell this as a nonthreatening, beneficial learning experience?
- How will we fit this into our day?
- Would my teachers volunteer some of their prep time to participate in walks or cover for another teacher doing walkthroughs?
- Will the district hire substitutes to cover for my teachers conducting walks?
- How often will we do walkthroughs?
- When will teachers meet to talk about walkthrough observations?
- How do I manage to schedule walkthroughs to make them equally accessible to all teachers?
- What will we do with the information gained from the walkthroughs?

Principal Susan Green and her assistant, Joshua St. John, at Summit Middle School had the following questions in mind when they began considering involving teachers as observers:

- What will we do to eliminate potential teacher fear that the purpose of walkthroughs is evaluative?
- Will the walkthroughs be motivating or demotivating to teachers?
- How will we provide time for teachers to conduct walkthroughs and follow-up discussions?
- How will we achieve maximum participation?

- How will we develop a walkthrough documentation form for which all have buy-in?
- What meaningful data (look-fors) should be collected from the walkthroughs?
- Should walkthroughs be announced or unannounced?
- How will we measure the effectiveness of our walkthroughs?

The questions asked by these school leaders represent the questions raised by all schools initially considering the involvement of teachers in walkthroughs. In this book, we share ideas from the participating schools that will guide you in addressing similar questions. Before they will completely buy in to it, teachers must realize the professional value gained from engaging in the walkthrough process.

Success comes from administrators and teachers working together to develop and implement a walkthrough protocol designed to meet a school's improvement goals. We highly recommend that all teachers be involved in the process. Some will be early adopters and some will be more reluctant, but the integrity of the process is maintained when all staff have access to the decision making. We suggest administering a teacher survey such as the one in Appendix C to create a profile of staff views about classroom walkthroughs that you can use in designing your school's model. As with the implementation of any initiative, the process must be regularly evaluated to ensure there is observable improvement in teaching and learning.

Lessons Learned and Moving Forward

Until recently, classroom walkthroughs were an administrator's responsibility. Walkthroughs involving teachers now occur at all levels and types of schools—elementary, junior high/middle, secondary, charter, and alternative. Involving teachers in walkthroughs to observe the dynamics and instruction in other classrooms can have a significant impact on instructional practice. Walkthroughs open doors for educators across the entire school to observe, reflect on, and collaboratively discuss instructional practices and their effect on student learning. Walkthroughs are an excellent alternative or complement

to traditional and longstanding forms of professional development, whether they originate as a result of a district initiative or of school leadership planning.

The following chapters offer valuable information about how schools involve teachers in walkthroughs and how to overcome challenges that may arise when making this change to the school's culture.

Questions to Think About

Both teachers and administrators may introduce professional development ideas to the staff at their schools. Questions presented at the end of each chapter are intended to be considered from the point of view of all professional staff. Here are some questions to ponder before launching a walkthrough process involving teachers:

- What districtwide initiatives would be a natural catalyst for the implementation of walkthroughs?
- What benefits of walkthroughs appeal to faculty in your school?
- How can walkthroughs support overall school improvement efforts?
- What opportunities already exist in your school for your teaching colleagues to reflect on and discuss teaching and learning?
- What questions do you have about getting started with walkthroughs?

Our Recommendations

- Examine various models of walkthroughs to select or design a model that meets your school culture, needs, and goals.
- Promote the value of walkthroughs as a means to immediately observe the implementation of new teaching and learning initiatives.
- Link the walkthrough initiative to other school improvement initiatives so they are connected to and supportive of one another.
- Inform prospective teachers during the interviewing and hiring process that walkthroughs are part of your school culture and an important component of your school's professional development.
- Ensure support at the district level for the walkthrough process.

ENGAGING TEACHERS IN CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGHS



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Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs is a practical guide to the planning and implementation of brief but focused classroom observations that involve teachers in every step of the process. Drawing from their study of 40 elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States and Canada, the authors share advice from teacher leaders and administrators who have overcome the challenges and experienced the benefits of this professional learning activity, describing not only what these educators did but also how they did it. Dozens of examples show how schools—some using established walkthrough models and others designing their own versions—moved teachers from resistance to enthusiastic acceptance of the practice. Readers will learn how to

- Foster a school culture that supports walkthroughs.
- Implement the components of successful walkthroughs, such as focus and "look-fors," data collection methods, and meaningful follow-up strategies.
- Get all teachers involved and actively participating.
- Evaluate the walkthrough process and measure its effectiveness.
- Use walkthroughs to support professional development related to the Common Core State Standards.

Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs demonstrates that when teachers learn from one another in a cycle of continuous professional growth—through observation, shared inquiry, dialogue, and follow-up—they develop a sense of collegiality and common mission. By opening their doors to their peers, they also contribute to broader school improvement efforts that positively affect teaching and learning throughout the school.

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Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Web site: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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Enhancing RTI

How to Ensure Success with Effective Classroom Instruction and Intervention

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Introduction

We can all think of a time when we struggled in school to learn a particular skill or content area. Why did we struggle? What occurred to eventually help us overcome our obstacle to learning? In most cases, we were helped by a teacher who identified our instructional needs and then implemented one or more interventions to which we successfully responded. The result of that instruction and intervention was that we were able to improve our academic performance and self-efficacy.

The key to helping all children learn literacy and content is to believe in their ability to learn and then to explicitly guide their learning through systematic and intentional instruction and intervention. This approach combines continuous, "on-the-spot" evaluation of a learner's needs and his or her response to the implementation of evidence-based intervention strategies. If a child's response to the intervention is successful, a positive change in learning will occur. If no change in learning occurs, the teacher needs to further study the child and the initial intervention, instructional delivery, and materials. Based on new insights, the teacher can then plan a different treatment or intervention targeted to meet the child's needs.

This cycle—from assessment to instruction—enables teachers to observe students' responsiveness to the targeted interventions and to proceed with instruction that is supported by ever-evolving performance data. This Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) system is designed to change learner performance as a function of targeted instruction. The use of the RTI^2 model is desperately needed to ensure that equal access to learning is available for every child.

In the past, challenging content was reserved for the highest-achieving students. Struggling learners were excluded from chemistry, physics, and advanced history classes and were instead tracked into general science classes or classes on practical economics. Deprived of the opportunity to

delve into complex ideas, many students failed to develop the higher-level thinking skills that were fostered in the more challenging classes. Unfortunately, there was also a widespread belief that not all students could learn complex information. Current evidence suggests that with the appropriate instruction and intervention, virtually every student is capable of learning challenging content. The adage that "children learn what they are taught" especially rings true when instruction and interventions are in line with identified needs.

Teaching every child is hard work. With that hard work, though, comes a group of learners who are prepared to participate in society. This learning occurs in the classrooms of well-prepared teachers who are undaunted by student learning variations because they believe that each child is an individual and that individuals exhibit differences in growth due to many factors, including carefully selected instructional interventions. The intent of this book is to provide teachers with the knowledge and tools they need to implement a Response to Instruction and Intervention system in order to realize educational outcomes in line with the belief that all children can learn.

1

Choose Your Adventure:

How RTI^2 Affects the Educational Environment

Remember the series of "choose your own adventure" books that were popular in the 1980s? They offered decision points at key moments in the story, and the choice you made determined the outcome of the tale (and often the fate of the characters). With that in mind, let's play the school version of *Choose Your Adventure*.

> Adam is in the 5th grade in a public school somewhere in the United States. Here are some things to know about Adam: He is an active 10-year-old boy who plays baseball in the local Little League. He has an older sister who generally regards him as a bother (she's 13, after all) but loves him, nonetheless. Before his mother and father adopted him at the age of 7, he lived in foster care for a time with a member of his father's family. Adam's mom and dad first got to know him this way and soon decided that Adam needed to be a permanent part of their family.
>
> Adam's family is moving to another state because his mother accepted a job offer with better pay and benefits. They plan to enroll Adam in school and prepare him by touring the school with him, introducing him to teachers, and filling out all the forms with emergency contact information, known allergies, and the like. They were delighted to learn that the school system in the new state operates on a year-round schedule, with evenly distributed breaks of three or four weeks each quarter. His parents will be adding their names to the list of school volunteers, and Adam's dad is willing to be a guest speaker at the school's career day and discuss his work in the health care field.

Here's the key moment in the story where your choice factors in and may help determine the outcome:

- If you decide to send Adam to a traditional school, your adventure begins here on page 4.
- If you decide to send Adam to a school that offers a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, turn to page 5.
- If you decide to send Adam to a school that uses a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) approach, turn to page 7.

The Traditional School: "What's Wrong with Adam?"

After meeting the important people in the school (the principal, the custodian, and the lunch staff), Adam settles into his 5th grade class. His teacher, Ms. Riley, is experienced with this age group and has been a staff member at the school for 15 years. Adam likes his new class and soon establishes social relationships with his peers. He is quickly seen as an asset in any recess game and is well liked by other children, who say he is "nice."

The reading block is his least favorite time of day. He stumbles over words when Ms. Riley asks him to read aloud to the class, and his handwritten work is difficult to read. She notices that during some lessons, Adam gets boisterous and calls out to other students. He is scolded frequently for his outbursts and is already becoming a regular visitor to the principal's office—not the relationship he imagined when he first met her. Adam is soon placed in a remedial reading group named the Blasters, and he spends most of the reading block in the company of a paraprofessional who works with this group in another room to minimize distractions. They complete lots of workbook pages and worksheets, but they rarely spend much time with longer books.

Adam's incomplete assignments, missed homework, and mediocre written work soon take a toll. Two marking periods later, Adam is performing well below other students in the class, and Ms. Riley calls in Adam's parents for a conference. She informs them that Adam is in danger of being retained because he hasn't received passing marks in most subjects. Following the district policy, Ms. Riley draws up a learning contract that states that, because retention is a possibility, Adam is required to attend intersession, a mandatory two-week remediation period for struggling students. Adam and his family are discouraged because they won't be able to travel and visit family during this time, but they agree that anything that might help Adam be successful is worth the sacrifice.

Adam's social relationships also begin to fray. Because classmates increasingly view him as a problem (they have, after all, witnessed their teacher dealing with him this way), they begin to avoid him. Even his physical skills are not enough to overcome difficult relationships with peers. As Adam becomes marginalized, his behavior grows more problematic, and despite the attention of the paraprofessional, Adam's reading and writing do not seem to improve. The handwriting worksheets he completes have little effect, and he daydreams more often, missing more instruction. Countless meetings later, Ms. Riley brings Adam's name to the attention of the school's Student Study Team. "I've tried everything," she tells them, and they nod in sympathetic agreement. They've seen Adam on the playground, in the chair outside the principal's office, and taking a circuitous route to the bathroom. "What's wrong with this kid?" she asks.

The team completes the paperwork for special education testing, and Adam's parents sign it. They are concerned that he is not doing well and that their once outgoing boy is withdrawing into himself. Going to school has become a daily battle, and Adam's parents are at a loss as to how to deal with him. In the meantime, Adam must now attend mandatory six-week summer school. If he is unable to do so, he will repeat 5th grade with a new set of classmates.

Adam barely passes summer school and advances to the 6th grade. By this point, his special education testing results are in. Unfortunately, Adam doesn't meet the criteria for a handicapping condition. "I guess he's just a 'flatliner,'" remarks Ms. Riley. "I hope the 6th grade teachers know what to do with him. I tried everything." The 6th grade team members, resentful that he didn't qualify for special education, are bracing themselves. "We've all seen him around school," remarks Ms. Colón. "Wish us luck."

The RTI School: "How Can We Help Adam?"

After meeting the important people in the school (the principal, the custodian, and the lunch staff), Adam settles into his 5th grade class. His teacher, Ms. Riley, is experienced with this age group and has been a staff member at the school for 15 years. Adam likes his new class and soon establishes social relationships with his peers. He is quickly seen as an asset in any recess game and is well liked by other children, who say he is "nice."

The reading block is his least favorite part of the day. His teacher used some simple screening instruments on his first day, including the San Diego Quick (LaPray & Ross, 1969), a word list that targets decoding skills,

and a cloze assessment on simple machines that was based on a recent chapter from the science textbook. Ms. Riley knows that these screening instruments should not be used as factors in big decisions, but they provide a starting point for making initial instructional decisions. The results of the decoding assessment show that Adam is decoding at about a 3rd grade level. In addition, he struggled to complete the cloze assessment, accurately completing only 36 percent of the words and indicating that he had difficulty comprehending the passage. Ms. Riley knows that the next round of benchmark testing will occur in a few weeks, and this will offer a better opportunity to measure Adam's reading ability.

During the next few weeks, Ms. Riley has a chance to witness Adam's reading firsthand. While most of the reading instruction in her class comes from a core textbook, she has many books available in the class. Adam seems to drift from book to book when the class is engaged in independent reading time. Ms. Riley offers to help him locate books of interest, but to no avail. Adam consistently abandons books after a few pages, spending most of his time "looking" for a new book to read.

In the meantime, the results of the benchmark assessment are clear—Adam is reading well below his peers. Fortunately, the elementary school has a Response to Intervention program. Ms. Riley contacts the Title I teacher, Mr. Alonzo, who coordinates Tier 2 supplemental interventions for 4th and 5th grade. Three times a week, several students from these two grades meet with Mr. Alonzo for additional instruction. Adam's group is rarely larger than four students, and the lesson format is always the same: begin with a flashcard game to practice decoding, read a short informational or narrative passage that matches group members' reading level, discuss the content, and respond to comprehension questions. If there's enough time, they also do a bit of writing. Adam's handwriting is difficult to read, but the intervention lesson format really doesn't allow for additional instruction in writing.

Within the next few weeks, Mr. Alonzo and Ms. Riley meet with Adam's parents. They share their concerns about Adam's current reading status and describe the intervention they have implemented. Mr. Alonzo has collected further assessment data about Adam's progress and has already charted Adam's results from the flashcard drills and his rate of accuracy for the comprehension questions. Mr. Alonzo also plans to collect a measure of Adam's oral fluency rate.

Socially, Adam is holding his own. He misses some classroom instruction because he goes to work with Mr. Alonzo, but he manages to maintain

his friendships with peers. Ms. Riley notices that he is prone to some outbursts in class, especially during science instruction. He also continues to wander during independent reading time. After 16 weeks of Tier 2 supplemental intervention, Adam has not progressed far, and he and the classroom teacher meet again with Adam's parents. They all agree that he is not making the progress they had hoped for, and Mr. Alonzo's data collection on fluency, comprehension, and decoding bears this out. Adam's mom and dad agree that a Tier 3 intensive intervention, also implemented by Mr. Alonzo, might help. This involves the use of a phonics-based intervention program purchased by the district specifically for this level of support. As part of this process, Adam meets with Mr. Alonzo for 30 minutes every day.

Mr. Alonzo likes the intervention program because it works through a series of prescribed lessons, each accompanied by an online assessment tool that allows the teacher to chart results over time. The visual representations are a clear way to evaluate each student's progress. Toward the end of the school year, Adam begins to make some gains (especially in decoding), but his comprehension still lags, preventing him from reading more complex texts. Another meeting is scheduled, this time with the school's Student Study Team. Adam's parents are in attendance, and Ms. Riley begins the meeting by reminding everyone, "Our main job here is to figure out how we can help Adam learn." The team discusses the previous interventions and notes that Adam is not making the desired progress. They decide to refer Adam for special education testing, and Adam's parents consent.

Adam has demonstrated difficulty with the 5th grade curriculum but has made some progress. The results of his testing do not show that he meets eligibility requirements for a federally handicapping condition. His teacher recommends that Adam attend the six-week summer school so he can revisit 5th grade content. He is promoted to 6th grade but one of the 6th grade teachers says, "We're not quite sure what to do next. I guess we'll start fresh and see what happens."

The RTI^2 School: "How Can Focusing on Adam Help the System Improve?"

After meeting the important people in the school (the principal, the custodian, and the lunch staff), Adam settles into his 5th grade class. His teacher, Ms. Riley, is experienced with this age group and has been a staff member at the school for 15 years. Adam likes his new class and soon establishes

social relationships with his peers. He is quickly seen as an asset in any recess game and is well liked by other children, who say he is "nice."

The reading block is his least favorite part of the day. His teacher used some simple screening instruments on his first day, including the San Diego Quick, a word list that targets decoding skills, and a cloze assessment on simple machines that was based on a recent chapter from the science textbook. Ms. Riley knows that these screening instruments should not be used as factors in big decisions, but they provide a starting point for making initial instructional decisions. The results of the decoding assessment show that Adam is decoding at about a 3rd grade level. In addition, he struggled to complete the cloze assessment, accurately completing only 36 percent of the words and indicating that he had difficulty comprehending the passage. Ms. Riley wonders whether it was an issue of background knowledge or difficulty with reading comprehension skills, so she asks him about his science class at his former school. "We were learning about plant and animal cells," he reports, which suggests to Ms. Riley that at least part of the problem might be background knowledge.

The following day, Ms. Riley gives Adam another cloze assessment—one that uses a passage on plant cells. He scores higher this time—52 percent—but not as high as she had hoped; he should have been familiar with the content and needed a score of at least 60 percent to be considered at an independent level. Over the next few days, she gathers other information, including the Metacomprehension Strategies Index (MSI) (Schmitt, 1990). She administers this 25-item questionnaire at the beginning of the school year to all of her students so that she can make some initial grouping decisions. Because it is just Adam that she needs to assess, she conducts it as an interview in order to learn some other things about him as well. During the course of administering the MSI, she learns that Adam is friendly and has good oral language skills. He sometimes prefers to chat rather than answer the questions, but he is good-natured about finishing the interview. When Ms. Riley analyzes the results, she learns that her new student is good at self-questioning but has difficulty drawing on his background knowledge and verifying his predictions.

She knows that the next round of benchmark testing will occur in a few weeks, and this will offer a better opportunity to measure Adam's reading ability. However, given that she already sees some early signs of difficulty, she uses the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (QRI-4) informal reading inventory to delve deeper (Leslie & Caldwell, 2005). The word list and subsequent passages help her determine that Adam is reading at a

late 3rd grade level. During the assessment, Adam has difficulty answering implicit comprehension questions but does better on explicit ones. Ms. Riley appreciates the usefulness of QRI-4, a tool that one of the special educators in the school's RTI^2 work group shared with the 5th grade team.

Ms. Riley places Adam in a reading group with four other children at similar reading levels. Using text matched to their instructional level, Ms. Riley meets three times a week with this guided reading group and always devotes one reading to science content so Adam can catch up on content he missed. There are other groups who read at higher levels; she meets with them only once or twice a week. "I didn't always do that," she says. "I used to think it all had to be 'fair'—you know, equal. At some point I realized that the fairest system is when everyone gets what they need."

In the meantime, the results of the benchmark assessment are clear—Adam is reading well below his peers. Fortunately, the elementary school has invested in a Response to Instruction and Intervention initiative. Ms. Riley consults with Ms. Leung, the speech-language pathologist at the school, and describes her initial findings about Adam. Ms. Leung agrees that Adam might benefit from additional language instruction on asking metacognitive questions. Ms. Leung is in Ms. Riley's classroom once a week to meet with two other students who qualify for language services. After one of her sessions with the students who have identified disabilities, she listens for a few minutes to a guided reading lesson that Ms. Riley leads with Adam and a few others. Based on her observations, Ms. Leung shares a self-inquiry strategy that Ms. Riley begins to use with Adam's group: after previewing the story, give each student in the group a key question on a card:

- What do I already know about this topic?
- Have I read anything else by this author?
- What are two facts or ideas I expect to read about?
- I would be completely surprised if the author discussed _____.

The students answer their questions, and then each adds information to these initial responses. Ms. Riley records this information on her laptop so students can review their answers after they have read the story.

In addition, during one lunch hour a week, Adam meets with a book club hosted by the school's reading specialist. Called the Lunch Bunch, students in 4th through 6th grade who are experiencing reading difficulties due to motivation and interest are invited to participate in this club. Adam reads items of his choosing from a list developed by the reading specialist.

Adam likes professional wrestling magazines. He talks with other students who are reading the same magazine, and the reading specialist listens in on the conversation and brokers discussions about *lucha libre* (a style of wrestling) in general and Rey Mysterio (a popular wrestler) in particular.

Adam also participates in more formal Tier 2 supplemental reading instruction. The Title I teacher, Mr. Alonzo, works in Ms. Riley's classroom once a week during the reading block and provides additional small-group instruction for several students. He assessed Adam's phonics knowledge early on and learned that Adam had difficulties with phonics skills. Based on plans developed with Ms. Riley and consultations with the reading specialist and speech pathologist, Mr. Alonzo focuses on developing these skills in conjunction with written summaries of the material that Adam and the others read in class. Using both holistic and analytic measures, including conventions, words written, and the number of words per sentence, Mr. Alonzo collects data on Adam's writing samples every two weeks. Adam also takes part in scaffolded writing instruction activities such as modeled writing, Power Writing, generative sentences, and writing models (Fisher & Frey, 2007b).

After 20 weeks of Tier 2 supplemental instruction, Adam's responsiveness rate still concerns his teachers. Once again, the team meets with Adam's parents to discuss his progress and develop new supports. They examine data on Adam's work and look at comparative data from randomly selected, unidentified classmates. Based on his continued difficulties applying metacognitive strategies and creating summaries, the team agrees that Adam would benefit from Tier 3 intensive intervention support. As part of this process, the reading specialist, Ms. Robertson, will work directly with Adam.

A major principle of the RTI^2 program at Adam's school is that both supplemental and intensive interventions are paired as closely as possible with classroom instruction. Therefore, Ms. Robertson consults with Ms. Riley to discuss the social studies and science content that the class will cover. Ms. Robertson locates readings that align with the content in their textbooks, allowing her to preteach and reteach content that Adam will learn in his classroom. In addition, she uses reading passages on these same topics as a vehicle for reading comprehension instruction, as well as a basis for targeted phonics work. Importantly, a writing component is included in each lesson. Ms. Robertson notices that Adam seems to write more when he uses a laptop computer, so she encourages him to use one

in their work together. She also makes a point of sharing this successful accommodation with Ms. Riley, as an analysis of Adam's writing samples shows that he writes longer and more complex summaries on a laptop than he does by hand.

During the 12 weeks of Tier 3 intensive intervention and support, Adam's grades in all subject areas improve. Though he is not at the top of the class, Ms. Riley and Adam's parents are pleased with his solid *B* average. This school has also established a mechanism for analyzing support results and advising next year's teachers. The school's RTI^2 committee meets monthly to look at data for individual students in Tiers 2 and 3. They also compare incidence rates by grade level and discuss possible Tier 1 refinements to core instruction for students who receive intervention services. In fact, many of the instructional practices used with Adam, including assessment instruments, grouping strategies, and leveled readings, are the product of previous work by this committee. Ms. Riley, a member of the team, says, "I have a more solid classroom now than I did five years ago. I've always been a good teacher, but now I'm a more responsive one."

The last two meetings of the year also include designing continued support for students advancing to the next grade level. Because Adam will be entering 6th grade, the committee's grade-level representative and Ms. Riley discuss possible support for Adam. Ms. Riley shares successes (using a laptop, previewing content in advance of the class, receiving extra support to complete longer assignments, and having high-interest independent reading material). The 6th grade team has implemented an academic recovery period once a week so that assignment support is available to any student who needs it. The committee recommends that Adam attend the extended school year program to keep him engaged in reading and writing and to avoid the summer slide during which achievement levels decline from a lack of instruction or engagement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007).

In contrast to traditional summer school, the extended school year program provides extra days for students to master content standards from the regular school year (more information on extended school year programs can be found in Chapter 4). Adam's family agrees that this is a good plan. Adam, who has had a positive experience with his new school, has a good attitude about himself as a learner. "The best thing about this school," he says, "is that they don't let you fail."

Which Adventure Did You Choose?

Figure 1.1 contains a summary and synthesis of the actions taken by the teachers and the school in each of the three possible scenarios. Admittedly, deciding where to place Adam is a rhetorical dilemma. We can't imagine that anyone reading this book would choose the first scenario. However, we do expect many readers to nod their heads in sad recognition of their own personal experiences as educators, parents, or students. In the past, special education prereferral processes were regarded as a foregone conclusion for struggling students. Unfortunately, there has been a long tradition of thinking, "There's something wrong with this kid, and whatever it is, he doesn't belong in my class."

The second scenario is a more enlightened one that is commonly seen in many education communities as states implement RTI plans, and well-meaning teachers and administrators follow guidelines to examine a student's responsiveness to intervention. When the student fails to respond positively, the process for special education testing is initiated. However, we believe that there remains a largely untapped potential to improve this process by capitalizing on the collective wisdom of educators and families, which explores the spirit of the law while operating within its guidelines. We have all witnessed what committed educators and families can accomplish when the artificial barriers set up by strict role definitions are intentionally blurred. Response to Instruction and Intervention seeks to expand the lens so that both the classroom and individual students benefit from this collaboration. To this end, we intend this book to serve the following purposes:

- Define *Response to Intervention*.
- Examine a model that integrates instruction and intervention (RTI^2).
- Clarify misconceptions about RTI^2.
- Extend the RTI^2 approach across subject areas and grade levels.
- Offer best practices and practical considerations regarding the implementation of RTI^2.
- Discuss how to strengthen school improvement efforts using RTI^2.

Figure 1.1

A Comparison of the Interventions and Supports in the Three Scenarios

The Traditional School *What's wrong with Adam?*	The RTI School *How can we help Adam?*	The RTI^2 School *How can focusing on Adam help the system improve?*
Behavioral referrals	Informal classroom assessments	Informal classroom assessments
Benchmark assessments	Student conference	Student conference
Remedial reading group with paraprofessional	Benchmark assessments	Instructional plan developed by classroom teacher
Parent conferences	Tier 2 intervention, assessment, and progress monitoring	More informal classroom assessments
Learning contract	Parent meetings	Differentiated reading groups with increased time
Intersession attendance	Commercial Tier 3 intervention program, assessment, and progress monitoring	Benchmark assessments
Teacher meetings	Student Study Team with parents	Consultation with special educator
Student Study Team	Special education testing	Lunch Bunch book club
Special education testing	Summer school	Tier 2 intervention with consultation (special educator, Title I teacher, reading specialist, and classroom teacher)
Summer school		Parent meetings
		Individual instruction
		Tier 3 intervention aligned to classroom instruction
		Tier 3 feedback loop to classroom teacher
		RTI^2 committee to examine school improvement
		Grade level meetings to design continued support for the following year

The Takeaway

At the end of each chapter, we will reiterate key points in a feature we call "The Takeaway." This short bulleted list is meant to be both a summary and a means for you to check your own understanding of the information we have presented. In this chapter, we addressed the following ideas:

- Earlier iterations of the prereferral process were often seen as a necessary formality that almost always led to special education testing.
- Response to Intervention (RTI) plans shift the focus to examine interventions that might prevent referral for testing.
- Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI^2) plans seek to capitalize on the RTI approach as a means of continually examining classroom instructional design. Consultation and collaboration with other professionals and families is essential.

ENHANCING RTI

How to Ensure Success with Effective Classroom Instruction & Intervention

Are we missing the opportunity to reach struggling learners from the very beginning? Are we hastily—and unnecessarily—referring students to intervention programs that substitute for high-quality core instruction? What if we could eliminate the need for intervention programs in the first place?

Response to Intervention (RTI) programs are only as powerful and effective as the core instruction on which they're built. High-quality instruction, then, is the key ingredient that helps all students excel, and it's at the heart of Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey's unique approach to the RTI model—Response to Instruction and Intervention, or RTI^2.

In *Enhancing RTI*, the authors argue that students learn best when classroom instruction and supplemental intervention mirror each other in both content and purpose. This book provides K–12 teachers with the knowledge and tools they need to implement a cohesive RTI^2 system that helps all children learn by proactively addressing their needs. To this end, you will learn how to

- Integrate and align core instruction and supplemental intervention.
- Assess your own classroom instruction, in addition to your students' responses to it.
- Strengthen existing school improvement efforts within an RTI^2 framework.
- Utilize systematic feedback to raise student achievement.

Fisher and Frey maintain that the RTI^2 model not only promotes active student learning, but it also, when done right, promotes a culture of hardwired excellence at all levels of instruction.

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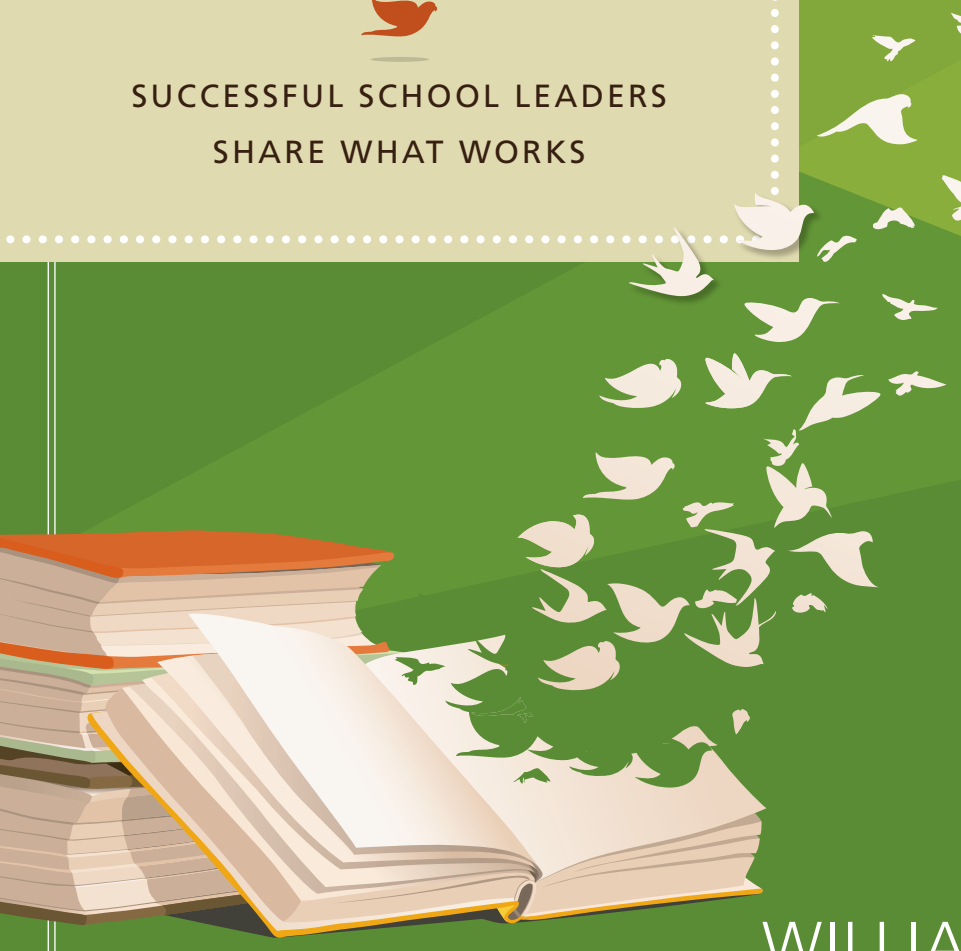
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ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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This book is dedicated to the leaders in our schools—teachers and principals alike—who do this important work every day.

INSIGHTS INTO *Action*



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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.

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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.

Combing 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

1

Turning Vision into Reality

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

A Living Vision

"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

Figure 1.1 | **Principal Daily E-mail**

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 everywhere. (Chinese proverb)

Have a great day!

Dr. Sterrett

useful information and administrative minutiae while also tying in the overarching 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

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

Figure 1.2 | **Monthly Meeting Format Example**

What	Who	Duration (approximate)
Refreshments and conversation	Teams (or departments) rotate each month	First 10 minutes
Opening agenda (purpose of the meeting)	Principal	2 minutes
Recognitions: "Woody Bear award" to a staff member; example highlight clips of teaching, testimonial	Principal, teachers	8 minutes
Introduction of stated instructional focus	Principal or teacher leader	5 minutes
Teamwork on the specific related focus area	Led by team (or dept.) teacher leader; all teachers participate	50 minutes
Wrap-up (optional), review of objectives, closing	Principal or team leader	5 minutes
	Total duration	**1 hour 20 minutes**

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.

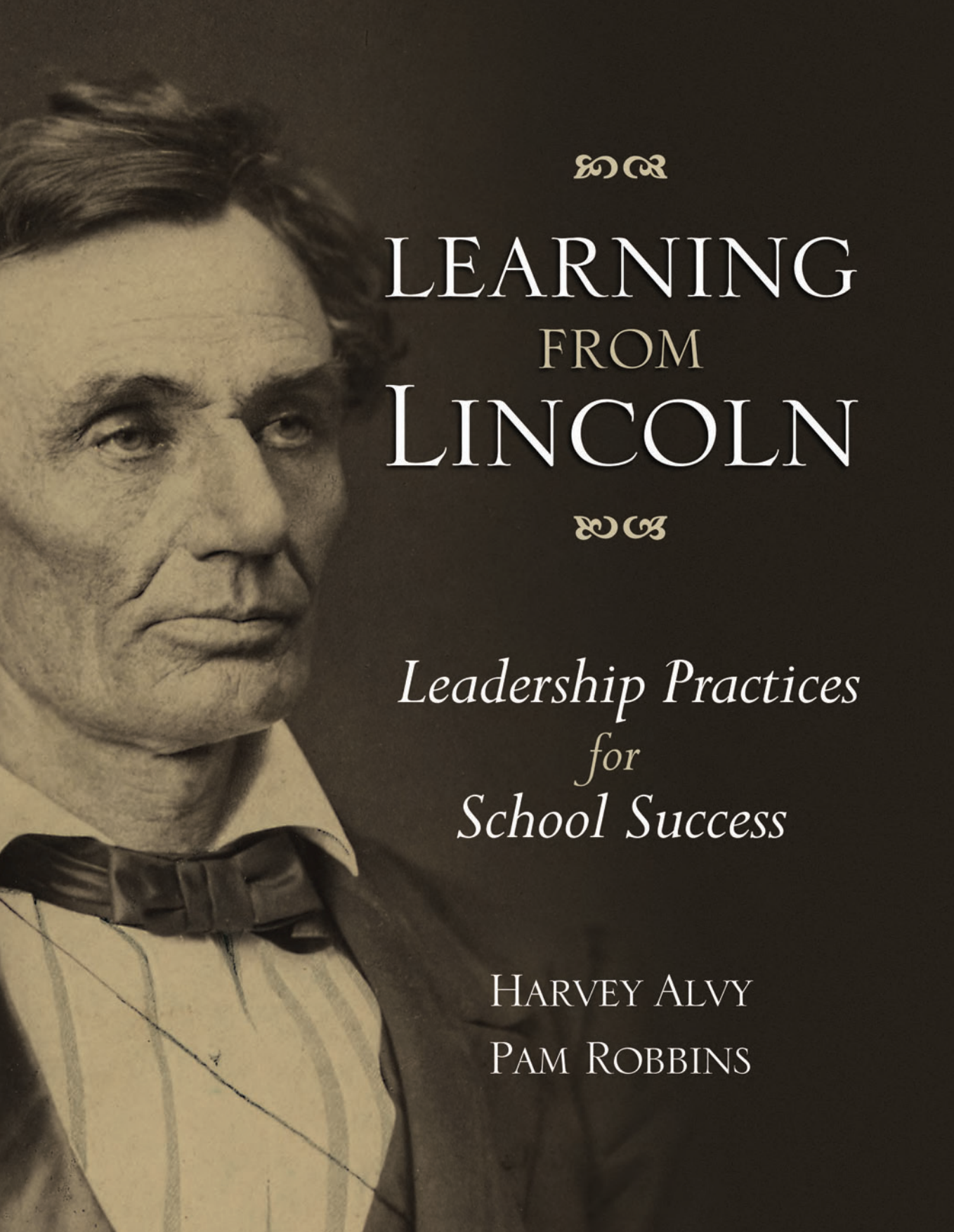
Each chapter includes Action Items and In-the-Field Activities to extend the discussion, help you apply the book's insights and strategies, and enable you to realize actual growth in your school.

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.

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ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Web site: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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To Our Parents

Dan Alvy, a man of integrity,
and Cooper Union student 71 years after
Lincoln's "Right Makes Might" address

Rebecca Pearl Alvy, a champion
of all children

David J. Robbins, a lifelong leader
who believed that, in the end,
"it's all about relationships"

Muriel Robbins, a teacher,
counselor, and musician who continues
to inspire us with her wisdom, energy,
and personal example

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Introduction

Abraham Lincoln. His life and work evoke possibility, humility, hope, and moral leadership. Frederick Douglass may have said it best. On April 14, 1876, Douglass was the keynote speaker at the dedication of the Freedmen's Monument in Washington, D.C. On this occasion, Douglass said of Lincoln:

> Though high in position, the humblest could approach him and feel at home in his presence. Though deep, he was transparent; though strong, he was gentle; though decided and pronounced in his convictions, he was tolerant toward those who differed from him, and patient under reproaches. . . . The hard condition of his early life, which would have depressed and broken down weaker men, only gave greater life, vigor, and buoyancy to the heroic spirit of Abraham Lincoln. (Oakes, 2007, pp. 270–271)

Lincoln's leadership helped a nation continue a journey toward equality—a journey that has not yet been completed.

As school leaders, we, too, are embarked upon an unfinished journey, a journey characterized by possibility and guided by the sacred proposition that "all men are created equal."* Lincoln's words and deeds related to equality and possibility serve as a beacon for all school leaders—principals, teachers, and superintendents—illuminating a keen focus on what is important in their work to help students realize the gift of democracy. Lincoln's beliefs

* To represent historical documents authentically, the term *men* appears in context; for the present day, we will, of course, be referring to men and women.

and actions also have profound implications for 21st century initiatives and challenges, such as closing the achievement gap and reducing the high school dropout rate. Lincoln knew that realizing possibility for every individual could not occur without the desire and opportunity to learn. His life story portrays that reality. Rising from humble roots, Lincoln achieved his goals through hard work, dedicated and focused independent study, and perseverance. In his classic biography of Lincoln, Benjamin Thomas (1952) notes:

> Education seemed to him the most important question a people could consider, for every man should have sufficient education to enable him to read the history of his own and of other countries, [then quoting Lincoln] "by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions . . . to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction derived from all being able to read the scriptures and other works, both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves." (p. 29)

Lincoln's words echo the beliefs of other well-known educational pioneers, such as Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann, and female trailblazers, such as Catherine Beecher and Emma Hart Willard.

Story after story about Lincoln highlights his incredible ability to focus on the important work and put personality differences aside. Integrity was fundamental to Lincoln, and he adhered to values he held sacred, despite adversity or lack of popularity. He possessed strong beliefs about matters of principle. Although critics and allies complained that he was too cautious and slow to implement principles, Lincoln believed that his deliberate nature and political know-how strengthened his hand when he moved forward. He also regularly sought out opposing views in seeking to better understand an issue. He consistently demonstrated acts of caring with sincerity and healing words. He worked tirelessly on problems that deeply concerned him. He was able to look across the horizon of time and envision a desired future.

As citizens of Lincoln's tomorrow, we are, in a very real sense, renewed and inspired by his character, strength, and example. Lincoln represents the American dream. Moreover, his ideals captured the consciousness of the world. David Lloyd George, a former British prime minister, once said of

Lincoln, "He is one of those giant figures, of whom there are very few in history, who lose their nationality in death" (Carwardine, 2006, p. 323). It is a risk for our nation, and the world, to forget Lincoln's meaning.

Additionally, Lincoln's life offers another magnificent gift: his experiences serve as an entrée into the study of leadership practices and their consequences. Lincoln's life and leadership provide profound examples and lessons for school principals, teacher leaders, district leaders, and other individuals with leadership responsibilities.

This book is dedicated to the following question: What can educational leaders learn from an in-depth study of Lincoln's leadership experiences to achieve success in today's schools? The format invites the reader to study the Lincoln example, to examine stories of his leadership capacity, and then to reflect upon the meaning they convey and to generate 21st century applications. Thus this enduring example of past leadership will provide navigation tools for the arduous path to success in the future—by taking the reader on a journey anchored in cherished values and norms of collaboration and competence, and strengthened by an uplifting spirit of hope.

Lincoln's life serves as a context from which this book highlights 10 leadership qualities and skills that are important for school leaders. Through careful study of these vibrant leadership skills, demonstrated by Lincoln's example, the reader has an opportunity to examine theory through story and its timeless implications for day-to-day leadership practices and challenges. As readers analyze theory and practice, they can reflect also on Lincoln's successes and failures, wise decisions and missteps, to better understand the opportunities and challenges of today. Our vision as authors is that by studying Lincoln's example, his behaviors, and the 10 leadership qualities embodied in his beliefs and actions, school leaders will learn important lessons to clarify their own personal visions and to promote a shared vision that aligns their actions with the deeply cherished values of others, enlisting commitment and energy to a noble cause—the success of *each* student. This cause will serve as a compass to advance decision-making capabilities and to demonstrate daily acts of trust, rapport building, and respect that increase the competence and confidence of constituents and culminate in long-term success.

The 10 leadership qualities and skills we will discuss:

1. Implementing and sustaining a mission and vision with focused and profound clarity
2. Communicating ideas effectively with precise and straightforward language
3. Building a diverse and competent team to successfully address the mission
4. Engendering trust, loyalty, and respect through humility, humor, and personal example
5. Leading and serving with emotional intelligence and empathy
6. Exercising situational competence and responding appropriately to implement effective change
7. Rising beyond personal and professional trials through tenacity, persistence, resilience, and courage
8. Exercising purposeful visibility
9. Demonstrating personal growth and enhanced competence as a lifetime learner, willing to reflect on and expand ideas
10. Believing that hope can become a reality

Not surprisingly, the literature on school leadership practices linked to organizational success stresses many of the same qualities and skills (Cotton, 2003; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; *Educational Leadership Policy Standards,* ISLLC, 2008; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 2007; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2006; Robbins & Alvy, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2009) as those exemplified by Lincoln. Many of these critical qualities also are supported by research beyond the field of education (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Collins, 2001, 2005; George, 2007; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Zenger & Folkman, 2002). For example, stories abound regarding Lincoln's penchant for walking and talking with his military officers on and off the battlefield to develop situational awareness to guide future military and political actions and to gain a sense of empathy for the psychological and emotional states of those fighting the battle to achieve the desired future reality. Principals who spend time "in the trenches" can accomplish similar valuable outcomes. Both

examples illustrate the critical link between leadership behaviors and organizational productivity resulting in superior staff (and student) performance.

To fully convey the power of these leadership qualities and skills, we devote a chapter to each of the 10 areas. We cite examples of the qualities and skills from Lincoln's life to illustrate the leadership concept being examined, and we use Lincoln's own words and actions, and the words of historians or his contemporaries, to support the leadership principle. As readers reflect on Lincoln's leadership skills, they should remember that the 10 areas of focus are interrelated. For example, without perseverance, the mission and vision of preserving the Union could not have been accomplished. Following each historical analysis of Lincoln's skills, we examine implications for 21st century leadership. Thus, the analysis of leadership based on Lincoln's life serves as a platform for school leaders to help them reflect upon the *past*, to refine and expand their *present* leadership practices, and to project the *future* implications for working with all the stakeholders in the school community.

It is important to note that the goal of this book is not to have readers attempt to replicate Lincoln's style and behavior. Leaders must find their own paths to success, exercising self-awareness and developing strengths, and working to improve weaknesses. They must learn from their own stories and discover why they have a passion for leadership. Each one of us, as leaders, must take a personal and distinctive journey if we are to succeed. We must be honest concerning what we learn from our journeys to lead authentically (George, 2007). However, we can find inspiration—and learn how to lead—by studying the courage and example of others.

A final critical point. This text tries to avoid venturing into the fog that sometimes obscures the reality of Lincoln's life—the successes and failures—with the myth of the perfect leader that began to emerge at the moment of his martyrdom. The reader should know, however, that the passion and inspiration for this work rest partially on questions that are unavoidable when examining Lincoln's life story—questions such as these: How could an individual from such humble beginnings, with a total experience of one year of formal schooling, rise to such heights? How did Lincoln remain resilient in the face of so many personal setbacks, including the death of his mother when he was 9, the loss of two children, bouts of depression throughout his life, and the

incomprehensible tragedy of the Civil War? Lincoln was seemingly able to labor on individually, and he carried a nation with him. This ability to grow and persevere despite adversity is a compelling characteristic and worthy of study. Finally, Lincoln's life is inspirational because it represents hope. Lincoln believed in people and in the possibility that great accomplishments could be realized if people believed in the power of ideas and the power of individuals to become better persons (Ferguson, 2007; Phillips, 1992).

It is with this backdrop that we venture into the past to understand our present reality and to illuminate our future.

CHAPTER ONE

Implementing and Sustaining a Mission and Vision with Focused and Profound Clarity

> By *itself*, preservation of the Union was an empty concept to Lincoln, unless the Union remained dedicated—or could forcibly be rededicated—to its founding principle that all men are created equal.
>
> —Richard Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery*, p. 7 (emphasis in original)

Defining leadership, especially great leadership, is a difficult task. In their classic book *Leaders*, Bennis and Nanus (1985) state:

> Multiple interpretations of leadership exist, each providing a sliver of insight but each remaining an incomplete and wholly inadequate explanation. . . . It's as if what Braque once said about art is also true of leadership, "The only thing that matters in art is the part that cannot be explained." (pp. 4–5)

Yet, despite the difficulty of coming to a consensus on how we can measure successful leadership, there is almost universal agreement that *success in carrying out the mission and vision of an endeavor—a cause—should be a primary gauge of leadership success*. Jim Collins (2005) in *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* hails the qualities of what he describes as "Level 5 leaders." These leaders are "ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work—*not themselves*—and they have the will to do (whatever it takes) to

make good on that ambition" (p. 11, emphasis in original). In another context, Collins states that these leaders display "a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will" (p. 12). Not surprisingly, Collins (2005, May) cites Lincoln as a Level 5 leader who "never wavered" despite the devastating casualties at the "victorious" Battle of Antietam in 1862 and who resolved to continue the war to preserve the original mission of the Union and the evolving mission toward emancipation.

In fact, Lincoln used the limited victory at Antietam as the opportunity to publicly announce that the Emancipation Proclamation would be issued on January 1, 1863. His judgment in using Antietam as the opportune time to introduce the proclamation is an example of Lincoln's genius for seizing the moment and gauging what the majority of the Northern population, although reluctant in some quarters, was ready to accept. Opportune timing is, of course, a critical skill for all leaders.

When analyzing Lincoln's focus and clarity concerning mission and vision during the Civil War years, it is helpful to consider his thinking on a macro level (large scale) related to national interests and on a micro level (local scale) related to individual opportunity. For example, on a macro level Lincoln was in charge of several critical wartime responsibilities: "He performed or oversaw five wartime functions . . . in diminishing order of personal involvement: policy, national strategy, military strategy, operations, and tactics" (McPherson, 2008a, p. 5). Other macro responsibilities related to keeping the Northern states' and—maybe more strategically important—the border states' morale and national will focused on victory based on a just cause. Thus, communication with newspapers, politicians, the Congress, and foreign countries needed to be managed successfully to maintain the resolve to win.

On the micro or local level, Lincoln believed that the war would decide whether individual opportunity as part of the democratic experiment would succeed. Thus he often viewed the events of the war on a personal level emanating from his own worldview and experiences concerning possibility: a democratic nation will reward individual merit and transform lives. Lincoln sought opportunities to engage in conversation every day with soldiers or citizens to press the national interest, the importance of the war, and reasons to

continue the fight. For example, he said the following to a regiment of Ohio soldiers returning home from battle on August 22, 1864:

> I almost always feel inclined, when I happen to say anything to soldiers, to impress upon them in a few brief remarks the importance of success in this contest. It is not merely for today, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all of our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. (Basler, 1953–1955, Vol. VII, p. 512)

Mission and Vision Concerning the National Interest

In the United States, the chief executive serves as both the president of a nation and the military commander in chief. Presidents constantly face the realization that military strategy must align with national goals. Otherwise, during wartime, achieving military objectives may not be worthy of the struggle and ultimate sacrifice that war necessitates. Thus, a mission should not have loose ends—a military victory must lead to and support a nation's overarching mission. To illustrate, consider the final paragraph of Lincoln's annual message to Congress on December 1, 1862:

> Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We—even we here—hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless. (Basler, 1953–1955, Vol. V, p. 537)

What is most striking about this document is the far-reaching consequences that Lincoln believed the war would have—not only for the United States, but for the world. Today, words such as "the last best hope of earth" may sound jingoistic, but in the 1860s American democracy was still a relatively new experiment, less than 100 years old. Lincoln saw democracy as a fragile experiment, and one in which success was not yet assured. The Civil War would determine the fate of democracy; Lincoln knew this.

The year 1862 was only a few generations removed from the revolutionary period in which a democracy had emerged, carved out of a British colony ruled by a European monarch. Heroes of the revolution were still alive when Lincoln was a youth.

The 1862 annual message also reveals Lincoln's development concerning the issue of slavery. Before the war, he was firm about holding to his interpretation of the Constitution—permitting slavery in defined states and territories but refusing to compromise on the expansion of slavery. And, although he considered various solutions concerning the abolition of slavery (including the very controversial option of supporting the foreign colonization of former slaves), the 1862 message provides insight into his development on the slavery question and the postwar possibilities of ex-slaves. These possibilities led, eventually, not only to emancipation, but also to Lincoln's public suggestion on the White House balcony on the evening of April 11, 1865, that some qualified former slaves in Louisiana should have voting rights. Voting rights for former slaves was a radical notion at the time. Not coincidentally, John Wilkes Booth swore to carry out his deadly conspiracy upon hearing Lincoln's words at the White House on that same evening. Booth acted three days later.

The "last best hope" idea also provides insight into Lincoln's vision of how each group suffers when one group is maligned. This was not a new idea for Lincoln. In 1855, when discussing the hatred of the Know-Nothing Party for immigrants and blacks, Lincoln wrote to his best friend, Joshua Speed:

> I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except

> negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics." (Basler, 1953–1955, Vol. II, p. 323)

A compelling mission and vision should have personal meaning to all those who may be affected by the idea. Clearly, that was the case with Lincoln.

As commander in chief, Lincoln knew that to accomplish the mission, his war aims could not succeed simply by keeping Confederate troops off Northern soil. In fact, he never referred to, or verbally talked about, two separate nations or a separate "Confederate States of America." He did not refer to a "North" and "South" of Union and Confederate troops. Lincoln maintained that certain states were in rebellion against the Union; they were *not* the Confederate States of America. Also, he was firm about the military mission. When Union general Meade told Lincoln that his troops had succeeded in keeping Lee off Northern territory at Gettysburg in July 1863, a frustrated and angry Lincoln stated, "The whole country is our soil" (Donald, 1995, p. 446). And when Union general Hooker suggested taking Richmond after the Battle of Chancellorsville, Lincoln firmly noted that "Lee's Army, and not Richmond, is your true objective point" (Donald, 1995, p. 439). As Winik (2001) states, "No man was more fervent in his belief in the Union, no man loved his country, North as well as South, as much as Lincoln. And no man was more concerned about not simply winning the war, but about keeping the country and the nation together" (p. 242).

Later generations recognized the unique mission and challenge that Lincoln faced as much more than saving a union; maybe later generations could see Lincoln's vision better than those who witnessed the events of the Civil War years. For example, one of the most profound and clearly articulated explanations of Lincoln's mission occurred during the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial in 1922. Andrew Ferguson (2007) points out that in Germany, Bismarck helped to consolidate and create a union, as did Garibaldi in Italy; but in Lincoln's case it was a *particular kind of union* that was being fostered. Ferguson notes that at the dedication ceremony on May 30, 1922, the president of Tuskegee Institute, Robert Moton, the son of slaves, eloquently described the Lincoln achievement:

> The claim of greatness for Abraham Lincoln lies in this, that amid doubt and distrust, against the counsel of his chosen advisors, in the hour of the nation's utter peril, he put his trust in God and spoke the word that gave freedom to a race, and vindicated the honor of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. (p. 266)

Thus we see that Lincoln's purpose was realized because he understood the mission and vision and wavered from neither. The mission of union and equality could be realized only if a vision emerged of a nation that not only treated people equally but also could implement the democratic principles necessary to extend freedom and possibility to all.

Maybe the best historical example of a mission statement, with a rationale and an aligned vision clearly noted, is the Gettysburg Address (see Figure 1.1), which Lincoln delivered at the dedication ceremony for a national soldiers cemetery at Gettysburg. For the thousands who witnessed the address on November 19, 1863, and the millions who have studied the address since, the brief 272-word document leaves no doubt of the mission—equality and union; and the vision—a new birth of freedom and a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Edward Everett, the most renowned orator in the United States at the time and the primary speaker during the Gettysburg dedication, was one of the few to immediately realize the significance of Lincoln's remarks. Three days after the event he wrote to Lincoln, "I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours, as you did in two minutes" (White, 2009, p. 609).

In addition to articulating a concise mission and vision, the Gettysburg Address points to other leadership qualities that characterize Lincoln. For example, the humility of successful leaders is often a most admired trait, a trait that helps build collaboration and respect among colleagues. Is there a more humble phrase in the English language than Lincoln's statement "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here"? Hence, the greatness of the Gettysburg Address, to some extent, is a result of the humility that Lincoln felt in honoring "the brave men, living and dead" who sacrificed for the nation. We return to the Gettysburg Address in later chapters.

Figure 1.1

The Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

—Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln's Life and Work: Implications for School Leaders

Successful school leaders possess a strong sense of responsibility and a deep and unwavering commitment to developing and carrying out a shared mission and vision, aligned with deeply held values and beliefs that focus on equity, social justice, democracy, and creating those conditions under which profound levels of human learning can flourish. Though much has transpired in our world since Lincoln's time, he nonetheless continues to "model the way" for leaders in general (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 14). We glean from his work and his life precious attributes, such as focus and humility, that we aspire to emulate. And from his endeavors and accomplishments we find guidance for our own work as school leaders. From his struggles we derive lessons about adhering to deeply held beliefs, practicing ethical leadership, putting the cause first and personalities aside, and steadfastly pursuing leadership work dedicated to the conviction that all individuals are created equal, deserving of and desiring a genuine opportunity to leave their mark on the world.

If carrying out the mission and vision of an endeavor—a cause—is a primary gauge of successful leadership (Collins, 2005), then a starting point for the school leader's journey is self-knowledge. Leaders must know the causes they think and feel most passionately about. Bill George (2007) reminds us, "First, you have to understand yourself, because the hardest person you will ever have to lead is yourself" (p. xxxviii). Lincoln may have reflected deeply on issues before taking a firm stand, but once his mind was made up, he remained steadfast in carrying out the mission. Lincoln understood himself, and in the face of adversity he did not waver from his core values and beliefs. This does not mean that he saw little value in opposing viewpoints. If anything, these views helped further clarify his own. For example, late one evening in the White House, while preparing remarks, Lincoln sought an audience to listen to a draft of his writing. William O. Stoddard, a personal secretary, recalled that Lincoln said to him:

> "Sit down, I can always tell more about a thing after I've heard it read aloud, and know how it sounds. Just the reading of it to myself doesn't answer as well, either." . . . Stoddard then stated, "I don't know, Mr.

> President, that I'd care to criticize anything you'd written." The President replied, "Yes, you will. Everybody else will. It's just what I want you to do. Sit still now, and you'll make as much of an audience as I call for." (Wilson, 2006, pp. 182–183)

Leaders can derive from this poignant example a core leadership competency related to self-knowledge: before developing a meaningful *shared* vision and mission, it is essential to first understand, articulate, and write out a *personal* vision. Doing so helps to clarify and galvanize thoughts and feelings. Through these actions a leader discovers the following:

- What drives me and ignites my passion and commitment to pursue a shared vision?
- What are those core values that underlie my fierce resolve to do whatever it takes to advance the organization's purpose and to ensure that every individual within the organization thrives?

Knowing what motivates oneself is a critical first step in the journey to create and realize a shared vision and mission. The shared vision and mission articulate, with profound clarity, organizational members' treasured values and their understanding of a desired future state, and serve to motivate every member of the organization to act in order to make that future state a reality. The earlier example of Lincoln speaking to a regiment of Ohio soldiers illustrates how the act of pursuing a shared vision and mission transcends the present and influences future reality. Leaders might, upon reading Lincoln's words to the soldiers, reflect by asking the following questions:

- What do I want to perpetuate in our schools, not merely for today but for all time to come?
- Though, as leader, my "temporary residence" may be the schoolhouse or the central office, what do I want future leaders who occupy the space to do or say to continue the work that I have begun?
- What do we want any one of our children or children's children to experience here?

Reflecting on History and the Moment: Implications for the Future

Lincoln's life, work, and words communicated the notion that a compelling mission and vision should have personal meaning for all those who may have been affected by the ideas embodied in his historical words. Further, Lincoln's purpose was realized because he understood the mission and vision and wavered from neither, seizing the historical opportunities to achieve his goals. His personal attributes—especially humility—helped build the collaboration, trust, and respect critical to accomplishing his purpose.

Interestingly, the current and much respected literature and research on leadership behaviors and their relationship to school and student success often mirror the attributes of Lincoln's example (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Thinking about the implications for the future, consider the leadership work in which you are currently engaged and ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the goals such that they will transcend time?

- Who are the other significant players, critical to the accomplishment of the goals embodied in the vision or mission? What is their level of commitment and expertise?

- What personal leadership attributes do I possess that will help galvanize collective action toward the accomplishment of the vision?

- How will the vision and mission make the life and future of every child better and more promising?

- What thoughts inspired by Lincoln's legacy will influence my life's leadership work and practice?

Being able to accomplish great things as leaders requires specific character traits, qualities, and skills. Among the traits often mentioned as typifying Lincoln are empathy, humility, the ability to communicate, the capacity for growth, perspective taking, and a sense of humor. As a leader you may wish to reflect on your own character traits, leadership qualities and skills, strengths (and weaknesses) that will fuel (or diminish) your capacity to serve. You can use the following form to record your thoughts and perceptions.

Leadership Attributes and My School's Mission and Vision		
Leadership Qualities, Traits, and Skills Critical to My School Leadership Role	**How These Qualities, Traits, and Skills Connect to Accomplishing the Mission and Vision**	**Self-Assessment: My Strengths and Weaknesses**
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Use the following space to jot down any other ideas, insights, or new perspectives from this chapter that you wish to add to your repertoire as a school leader.

LEARNING FROM LINCOLN

Leadership Practices for School Success

What can 21st century educators learn from the example of a 19th century president? In this intriguing and insightful book, authors Harvey Alvy and Pam Robbins show how the legacy of Abraham Lincoln can guide today's education leaders—principals, teachers, superintendents, and others—as they tackle large-scale challenges, such as closing the achievement gap, and everyday issues, such as communicating with constituents. The authors identify 10 qualities, attributes, and skills that help to explain Lincoln's effectiveness, despite seemingly insurmountable odds:

1. Implementing and sustaining a mission and vision with focused and profound clarity
2. Communicating ideas effectively with precise and straightforward language
3. Building a diverse and competent team to successfully address the mission
4. Engendering trust, loyalty, and respect through humility, humor, and personal example
5. Leading and serving with emotional intelligence and empathy
6. Exercising situational competence and responding appropriately to implement effective change
7. Rising beyond personal and professional trials through tenacity, persistence, resilience, and courage
8. Exercising purposeful visibility
9. Demonstrating personal growth and enhanced competence as a lifetime learner, willing to reflect on and expand ideas
10. Believing that hope can become a reality

Chapters devoted to each element explore the historical record of Lincoln's life and actions, then discuss the implications for modern educators. End-of-chapter exercises provide a structure for reflection, analysis of current behaviors, and guidance for future work, so that readers can create their own path to success—inspired by the example of one of the greatest leaders of all time.

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Robyn R. Jackson

ASCD®
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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To Sheri,
who is still very much the boss of me.

NEVER underestimate YOUR teachers

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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

(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.

1

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 magazines. 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, discussing 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.

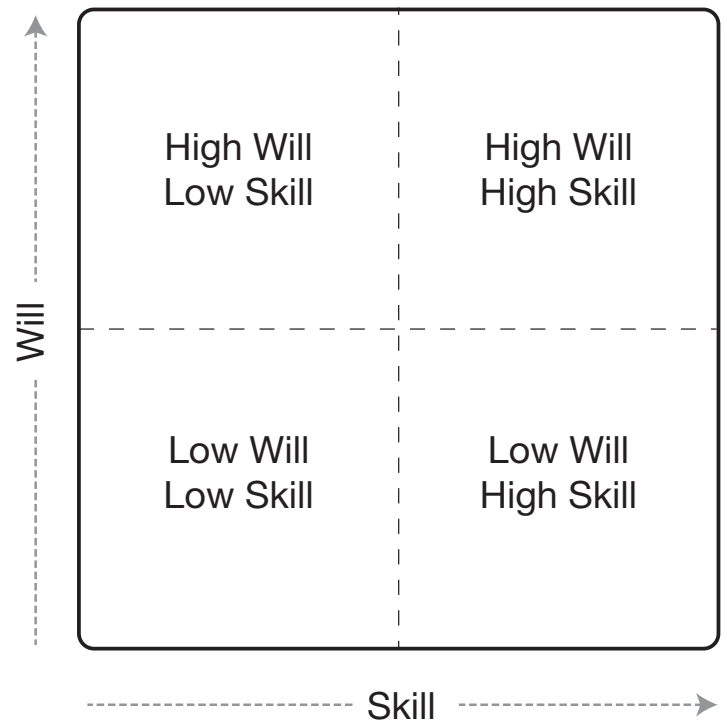
An individual teacher's will is affected by countless factors, including working conditions, personal problems, relationships with colleagues, passion about a particular subject, district constraints, school climate, and student attitudes. Will can fluctuate throughout the course of a career, a school 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

Figure 1.1 The Will/Skill Matrix



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.

TEACHER TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS	LOOKS LIKE
High will/low skill	Enthusiastic; idealistic; willing to learn	Seeks feedback and explores new strategies and ideas, but implementation is inconsistent and ineffective
Low will/low skill	Discouraged; not invested; "retired on the job"	Does not volunteer or contribute; passive; tries to stay beneath the radar
High will/high skill	Motivated and skillful	Easily identifies and implements appropriate strategies; explores new ideas, seeks feedback, and refines practice; takes on challenges
Low will/high skill	Skillful but disinterested; "seen it all"	Unreceptive to feedback; resists efforts to try new approaches; saboteurs

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

CONSIDER	KEY QUESTION	INDICATORS OF HIGH SKILL	INDICATORS OF HIGH WILL
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.



Understanding Teacher Skill and Teacher Will *continued*

CONSIDER	KEY QUESTION	INDICATORS OF HIGH SKILL	INDICATORS OF HIGH WILL
Classroom summative assessment data	*How many of the teacher's students have mastered the standards?*	• Analyzes data/ results and targets areas for improvement (students and instructional practice).	• Takes ownership of data/results and uses them to improve instruction.
Informal conversations	*How does the teacher view his or her practice?*	• Understands where students are and what they need to do to move forward. • Has a good sense of pedagogy; instruction is driven by overarching, instructionally sound principles.	• Takes ownership of student progress. • Shows enthusiasm for new ideas. • Likes/enjoys students and families.
Participation on teams, committees	*How does the teacher interact with colleagues?*	• Makes valuable contributions; shares resources. • Implements team feedback in classroom.	• Seeks input from colleagues and is appreciative of support and feedback. • Shares ideas and the work of the team.

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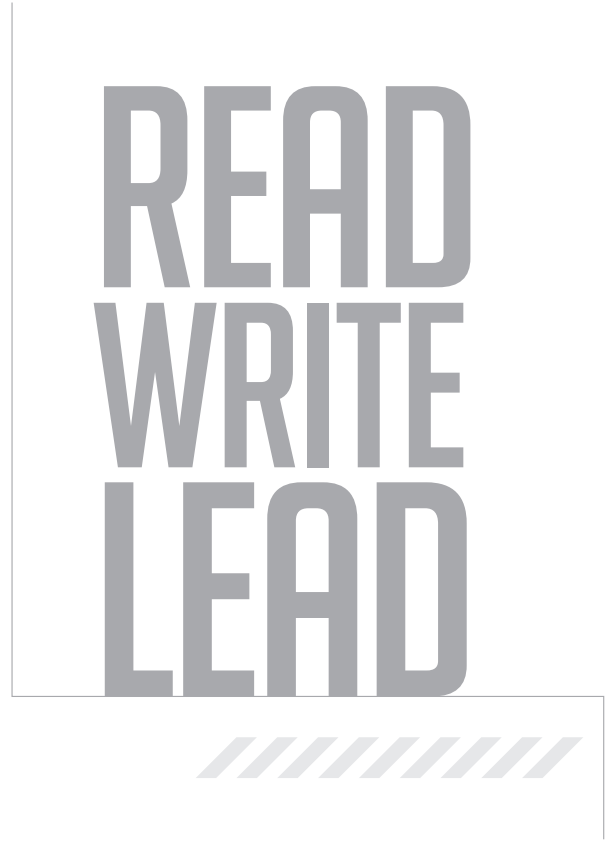
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For Frank



READ, WRITE, LEAD

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I am deeply appreciative of the entire ASCD team. From start to finish, the entire process has been immensely supportive. Acquisitions editor Genny Ostertag gently but firmly guided me in responding to the manuscript with great sensitivity and intelligence. Magnificent copyediting was done by Kathleen Florio and superb project management was carried out by Darcie Russell, who worked tirelessly to ensure every aspect of the book was as excellent and accurate as possible. An early conversation with Richard Papale, former publisher and now acting chief program development officer, continued to inspire me throughout the writing. Georgia Park, senior graphic designer, did a terrific job with the cover and interior design. As well, the talented design and typesetting team, production department, and all those at ASCD who worked to make the book as complete, organized, and attractive as possible deserve a big round of applause.

The process of writing requires determination and hard work, and—to keep going full speed ahead—breaks, good food, and good fun are also necessities. For that I am most thankful to my dear family and friends. Especially, spending time with Peter, Claudine, Katie, and Brooke always brings me joy. So does time with treasured friends in Seattle and across the country. Special mention goes to Harriet Cooper for her beautiful gift of our lifetime friendship. Finally, this book is dedicated to my husband Frank for his unwavering love, support, and generosity, which have made it possible for me to continue to teach and write and to live an interesting life.

Introduction: Why This Book, and Who Is It For?

This is a book about literacy and leadership. Through a lifetime of working in schools, one of my most powerful insights and core beliefs is that *teachers must be leaders, and principals must know literacy.* Without a synergy between literacy and leadership and a committed, joint effort by teachers and principals, fragile achievement gains do not hold. Although much has been written about leadership and learning as well as literacy and learning, little has been written about the crucial interconnection between literacy and leadership for ensuring that all students become effective readers and writers. That partnership is at the heart of successful schoolwide literacy and at the heart of this book.

This is a book about sustainable school change through professional learning. It is not professional development, per se, that leads to increased achievement but rather shared learning in a high-trust, schoolwide environment where everyone is committed to learning more and doing better for all students and teachers in the school. It is an embedded schoolwide culture of thoughtful professional learning, gained through informed debate, dialogue, and reflection, that leads to classroom application of more effective literacy instruction and assessment and, ultimately, higher student achievement, engagement, and enjoyment. In particular, it is the creation and sustained activity of Professional *Literacy* Communities, permeating all aspects of school life, that lead to improved student achievement across the

curriculum. Although such cultures and communities of deep and ongoing learning are uncommon, they are essential for enduring and meaningful change. Any lasting improvement in literacy through implementation of the Common Core State Standards in the United States, the provincial curricula in Canada, or international benchmarks will depend on such collaborative communities.

This is a book about hope, learning energy, and possibilities. Key to its premise is the belief that each of us has the potential, if we become highly knowledgeable and committed to high levels of success for every student, to make change through our individual and collective actions, and that ultimately we can change the outcome for students, even in our most challenging schools. What has often been missing from our collective work is the unrelenting commitment to the belief that through our own agency and efficacy we can change preconceived expectations and results for students. Sometimes this means stepping out of our comfort zones to advocate for saner practices.

Ultimately we want students and teachers alike to become self-determining learners who set and then carry through on their own worthwhile goals and objectives, some of which extend beyond themselves. It's slow, plodding, messy work that is often discouraging, but it's essential for improving the lives of our students, many of whom deserve more than what they are getting in our still segregated schools of the 21st century.

This is a book about effective literacy practices and becoming literate. Although the latest standards raise the bar for student achievement and give us a clear blueprint for what we need to be teaching, the "how" of that teaching is not defined, which puts a huge responsibility—ready or not—on schools and districts. Furthermore, most often there has been no consistent or coherent professional development plan provided for changing local, national, and global education. Implementing standards in a manner that will actually improve education for all our students is up to us, so it's critical that we have the knowledge to do so.

My aim is to demonstrate what actions, habits, processes, and reading and writing practices are most crucial to teach and assess, and how to apply those literacy practices in a manner that engages all students and is respectful of their needs, interests, and cultures. It is not literacy practices, per se, that matter but practices that lead to developing literate and thoughtful individuals. These individuals are students and teachers who don't just

know how to read and write but who are well read and knowledgeable; able to think, analyze, and support opinions and arguments through facts, experiences, and reasoning; and able to clearly articulate their thinking through writing and speaking. What matters is becoming literate to lead a full and meaningful life.

This is a book about how good teachers can become remarkable teachers. Through stories of teachers in diverse schools and examples of collaborative reading and writing work with students and teachers, this book demonstrates how literacy change happens. It specifies what it takes for us educators to move out of our comfort zones and shift our existing beliefs and practices to become more effective, efficient, and joyful teachers—all with the end goal of increased student learning across a whole school. It also highlights teachers who have become increasingly adept at combining advocacy and leadership in their instructional roles, and it presents their voices.

This is a book about effective leadership practices. A unique aspect of this book is that the focus on leadership includes teacher leadership, along with principal leadership, as essential to whole-school achievement. How teacher-leaders develop and their influence on a staff's cohesiveness and collaboration—and, ultimately, student and teacher achievement—are delineated. The necessity of a strong and active school leadership team and how that works are also fully discussed.

This is a book about how dedicated principals can become outstanding instructional leaders. Evolving stories of principals in diverse schools provide insights into the knowledge and practices that make it possible for a principal to begin to create a whole school of highly effective literacy teachers and teacher-leaders. Included are suggestions for how to coach a principal on what to look for in a classroom and how to give effective feedback that moves teachers and learners forward, so that the process of observing teachers, working with them, and coaching them in their own classrooms becomes a positive and respectful one for principals and teachers alike. And, most important, numerous examples show what it looks like and sounds like to create a highly effective, ongoing professional collaboration among the principal, teachers, and students that raises achievement and possibilities for all.

This is not a book about school reform. That is, this book is not about changing a whole system of schools through policies, politics, prescriptions,

and new assessments proposed by states or the federal government. Historically, such efforts have cost billions of dollars and have had, at best, mixed results. Rather, this book is about school change and how thoughtful, committed educators can make a lasting impact through teaching and leading well—one school, one principal, one teacher, and one student at a time. This is a story about how worthwhile change can be sustained and how changes in one school can jumpstart change in other schools. This is a book for those of us who have an unwavering commitment to do the necessary and hard work of getting better at what we do and who have learned that a "quick fix" eventually just brings us back to the starting line. This is a book for those of us who believe that one person can make a difference that matters, and that it's essential that we at least try—and try and try again.

This is a book of stories, struggles, solutions, and strategies. Both practical and personal, my hope is that the classroom and school accounts of practicing teachers and leaders will inspire and inform you. Furthermore, my hope is that you will learn specifics for applying effective reading, writing, and thinking practices across the curriculum and come to understand the critical, intersecting role that smart and sensitive professional leadership plays. Conversations with many educators are honestly recounted in their own voices; in a few cases I have used pseudonyms. This is not an all-encompassing book. I have chosen to highlight the stories, factors, data, strategies, struggles, and successes that seem most critical for improving and sustaining schoolwide literacy achievement.

This is a book about joy in teaching and learning. Although we educators will continue to be bombarded by new initiatives and constraints—pressures such as unwieldy standards, complex performance evaluations, value-added data analysis, high-stakes testing, and more—it *is* still possible and necessary to find joy in what we do and to pass on that joy to our students. We must! As I was completing this book, an impassioned parent whom I encountered at an airport told me this:

> My daughter is about to go to college. She has a high grade point average and has taken many advanced placement classes, but she finds no joy in learning in most of her classes. She demonstrates little curiosity or the desire to discover information on her own. All the test prep and focus on standards and testing have leached the fun out of learning. Is she prepared for college? She's passed the courses, but, sadly, she no longer loves to learn.[1]

Her comments reminded me that if we just graduate students who have fulfilled requirements but lack curiosity and a desire and ability to be self-sustaining learners, we have failed. Many of the accounts in this book show how we can rediscover joy in our work for our students and ourselves.

This is a book for all educators—teachers, teacher-leaders, principals, coaches, literacy specialists, interventionists, administrators, curriculum directors—for all of us who want to do a better job in the schools where we work. It is for those of us who believe we have a shared responsibility to educate all children. Ultimately, of course, this is a book for our students and about how we can serve them better and ensure they learn more, no matter where they happen to live or go to school. Change is difficult and challenging, but with a dedicated and highly informed staff, great things can and do happen for students, teachers, and principals. I invite you, my esteemed reader, on the learning journey.

Quick Wins

Seeing ourselves as teacher-leaders and leader-teachers is a new role for most of us and a challenging one. Throughout the text, in addition to stories, strategies, data, and change processes related to literacy and leadership, many "Quick Wins" are provided in the margins of every chapter. These are practical, everyday ideas that are easy to implement, yield quick and reliable results, and help us educators to deal more effectively and efficiently with the nuts and bolts and nuances of effective teaching and leading.

Change is slow, and we need to be able to see some sign of progress and results for our efforts as soon as possible. A quick win promotes confidence that incremental progress is important and that long-term change is possible. As one principal noted, "Recognizing quick wins buys you a lot of money in the bank. The staff knows you're on their side. As a principal, quick wins are really important for moving the school forward."[2]

1

Literacy and Leadership: Change That Matters

Every one of us who deeply cares about equal educational opportunities for all students tries to solve the problem that won't go away: *How do we create schools and classrooms where all students thrive and become highly literate?* Despite reams of research, billions of dollars for new programs, a renewed focus on testing and evaluation, and massive professional development efforts, not much of substance has changed for a large proportion of our students, especially students of poverty and our Latino and black students.

Many of our schools remain segregated, with accompanying inequality of funding, while other schools are resegregating by race and class.[1] Income disparity has become a greater factor than race or color in the achievement gap.[2] In addition, the high school dropout rate in our cities is as high as ever, with students who are poor and minority much more likely than their affluent peers to drop out; the number of students of color who get to two- or four-year colleges, let alone earn a degree, is still dismally low; and teachers and principals are caught in the crossfire of who's to blame.[3]

For most of us who are conscientiously doing our jobs as best we can in a demanding culture of cumbersome rules and regulations, exacting standards and evaluations, growing diversity in students' language and culture, increasing class sizes—and working with the often devastating consequences of poverty on students' learning—it's important to stay focused on what we can do. This is no easy matter. It's easy to get discouraged and to blame factors outside our control for our students' low achievement. Despite pockets of success where students in some high-challenge schools beat the odds and become high achievers, placing the blame for low achievement on factors that we cannot control is still quite common.

What keeps me going and encouraged in the complex world of teaching and leading is the core belief that what we do greatly matters, not just to the future of our students, but to our nation and the world. John Dewey wisely stated more than a century ago, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."[4] What keeps me teaching and leading is the belief that one persistent, knowledgeable, caring person can and must make a difference. A statement by playwright Arthur Miller resonates: "The longer I worked the more certain I felt that as improbable as it might seem, there were moments when an individual conscience was all that could keep a world from falling."[5] At the very least, one person's commitment can change the projected results for one learner; and for that learner, whether it be a child or a teacher, the experience can be life changing. Such stories are woven through this book.

My goal in writing this book is to demystify the process of "getting better," to show through individual and collective stories, actions, practices, demonstrations, and shared experiences in diverse classrooms and schools how worthwhile literacy and leadership change can happen, one person and one school at a time. Highly knowledgeable teachers and leaders can and do create a culture of collaboration, professional learning, and trust that becomes the oxygen that breathes life and hope into learning. We can become energized and excited by the work itself and the results we get. We can replace fear with joy. We can create a whole school and community working together for a greater good. So how does that happen? A bit of background first.

Learning from Teaching and Leading

I am a teacher-learner with 45 years of experience in instructing, assessing, coteaching, coaching, leading, and learning in diverse schools and classrooms. I have been a classroom teacher of most of the elementary grades, a reading specialist, a Reading Recovery teacher, a teacher of children with learning disabilities, a mentor teacher and leader, a literacy coach, a staff developer, a literacy change agent, and an author of many books and resources for educators.

Since 1997 I have been conducting residencies in schools across the United States and in Canada. Most of these schools are diverse; that is, they

serve large populations of students of color, second language learners, and highly transient students. Often these are also schools with large numbers of students from low-income households. I created this residency model when I realized no one was demonstrating for educators—showing them the what, why, and how of effective teaching and assessing practices—beyond the one-day or one-week inservice training sessions on how to use the newest adopted program or implement the latest standards.

In the teaching residencies, most of which occur over the course of a week, I assume responsibility for the classroom; that is, I do the teaching while the classroom teacher and other teachers are released to observe. Using what I call an Optimal Learning Model (described in detail in Chapter 2), I begin with demonstrations and shared experiences before gradually handing over responsibility to the teacher to "try and apply" with my coaching support. Fundamental to the residencies are the daily ongoing professional conversations in which we debrief, question, and discuss our work.

Over many years my perspective has expanded from the classroom to the school and, sometimes, the district, and from a focus on literacy to a focus on *literacy and leadership*. I have learned much about what works, why it works, and what needs to be done to raise and sustain whole-school achievement. Like you, I am still learning. I am passionate about improving the literacy and learning lives of students, as well as for us educators. I continue to rely on tried-and-true practices and to seek and try out new ideas based on my experiences, knowledge about literacy and leadership, collaboration with colleagues, professional reading, reflection, and current and relevant research.

Literacy Insights

My experience working in schools and collaborating and presenting at educational workshops and institutes has taught me that what works best for sustainable, long-term gains are interactive opportunities with school teams. Those teams include teachers and their principal, and, perhaps, coaches and curriculum specialists. Although literacy is the focus, the emphasis is on literacy in the context of whole-school achievement, as well as literacy that is supported by beliefs that align with robust practices and strong leadership. Likewise, I have learned that workshops dedicated solely to literacy—without consideration for whole-school learning—often leave individual teachers and principals satisfied with implementation of specific reading and writing

strategies. However, even when such implementation is successful, the change that occurs is often superficial and limited; a new activity or strategy has been added to the teaching repertoire, but nothing more.

Lasting change depends on an entire staff working together to develop shared beliefs and to align them with research-based practices that move a whole school of learners forward, grade to grade, teacher by teacher. For example, I have observed that most teachers and principals hold and act upon a part-to-whole learning model and a belief system that supports teaching skills and strategies mostly in isolation. Yet teaching isolated skills actually slows down and diminishes the impact of the learning experience. To maximize full learning potential, our most vulnerable students in particular must experience how the skills are relevant and fit into a meaningful and authentic whole. Until a staff develops a belief system that contextualizes and integrates the teaching of skills and strategies into meaningful and whole texts, achievement continues to lag. Moreover, without well-developed and articulated shared beliefs, schools continue to rely too much on programs and resources to determine what to teach rather than seeking out resources that support their well-founded beliefs.



Meeting as a Professional Literacy *Community*

I have also learned that not only must the professional learning be ongoing (scheduled weekly and monthly), but professional conversations have to become infused into the daily life and culture of the school. That is, in addition to Professional *Literacy* Communities (which are discussed in detail in Chapter 6) in both horizontal and vertical teams at and across grade levels, the day-to-day work of the school must include supportive visits and conversations between and among the principal and teachers, observations and coaching by and with teachers and the principal, time for team planning, older students tutoring or coaching younger ones, and an ongoing, free flow of conversation about reading, writing, teaching, leading, assessing, and learning.

From researchers Kathy Au and Taffy Raphael, I have learned the need for building a staircase curriculum with clearly defined and high enough literacy benchmarks at every grade level.[6] Until teachers and principals see what excellence looks like and sounds like at every grade level and can articulate with deep understanding what they are seeing, expectations and progress for students will fall short. Developing benchmarks is a messy, complex task that requires knowledgeable teams to be able to look at student work, determine significant strengths and weaknesses, and set worthwhile goals. Once established, those reading and writing benchmarks need to align and increase in depth from grade to grade. Also, as teachers and leaders we need to ably demonstrate effective literacy practices through thinking aloud as we show how we read, write, speak, listen, analyze, and solve problems across the curriculum. At the same time, we need to establish clear objectives in a manner that is meaningful and relevant and likely to lead to increased student understanding and application.

Perhaps most important to the school change process, I have learned that literacy is not a strong suit for many principals even when they have solid leadership and organizational abilities. For example, I have worked with elementary school principals who were former music teachers, physical education teachers, and high school principals. They did not recognize the key literacy specifics to look for when they went into K–8 classrooms, and many could not effectively assess if the work was at a high enough level. Offering useful feedback and appropriate support to teachers was, consequently, limited. As a result, I created virtual literacy residencies, in the form of a video-based, embedded professional development series, as a companion for principals—as well as coaches and teachers—so that, as a staff, educators could view, discuss, analyze, plan, and apply effective literacy practices to the classroom.[7] Without deep knowledge about literacy, principals remain restricted in their quest to raise reading and writing achievement across a whole school.

Leadership Insights

I didn't know much about leadership when I began demonstration teaching in weeklong residencies. My first residencies involved a multiyear contract with one typical school in a high-needs district. I conducted two weeklong writing residencies each year at the school, one in the fall and one in the spring. The results were humbling. After four years there were

some outstanding teachers of writing, as documented by high achievement scores on state and district tests, along with excellent daily writing. There were some teachers who hadn't moved much, and we still had a couple of resisters who hadn't budged. The principal was a strong leader in the sense that she knew a lot about literacy, entrusted many professional development decisions to a teacher-led team, and held regular professional development meetings. But—and this is a big *but*—she rarely got out of her office to go into classrooms. When I would return each spring, I learned that she didn't know that several teachers weren't teaching writing every day—an agreed-upon school belief—or that teachers hungered for affirmation for taking risks as writing teachers, or that one teacher was actively working against change of any kind. Also critical, because of the principal's absence from classrooms, she was unable to provide the feedback and coaching that are necessary for supporting teachers and staff in their efforts to continually improve.

In truth, not much writing progress was sustained, and looking back, I realize we didn't accomplish much for the amount of time, resources, and energy invested. My background was as a teacher, and instruction is what I knew. In those early residencies, I spent the entire morning instructing and coaching in a primary classroom and the entire afternoon instructing and coaching in an intermediate classroom. Although the principal was required to be part of the residencies, observing and participating with the teachers, I hadn't yet seen the principal as the linchpin in school literacy achievement.

The hardwiring of my thinking changed after I acknowledged and took responsibility for our failure to attain and sustain schoolwide achievement in those first residencies. I came to realize the crucial role of principal-as-literacy-leader in improving school achievement. In all residencies since then, I devote the entire afternoon to mentoring the principal, and that has made a big difference in our short- and long-term outcomes. (See www.regieroutman.org for more information about the residency model.)

I also learned that teachers need encouragement, demonstrations, and responsive coaching to step up to the plate as leaders. Once we teachers learn how to take on a leadership role and embrace it, the culture, collaboration, and achievement in a school change in many positive ways. Professional conversations go on all day long, between and among grade levels; the principal is seen as a supportive partner and not just an

evaluator; teachers are eager to be coached and to share their ideas and questions; trust and respect increase throughout the building, and all students begin to thrive.

On a personal level, I learned that we educators need courage, stamina, and unrelenting determination to lead. A few years ago, in cooperation with Seattle University, I conceived and organized with five esteemed colleagues the first Urgency and School Change Conference. It was a huge challenge and undertaking, which included inviting notable national and international keynote speakers. Never having put on a national conference before, my colleagues and I were learning along the way. Early on in the process, when my husband and I were on vacation and unavailable, one of our most dedicated group members panicked that we would not be able get the number of attendees we needed to cover our considerable expenses. Meaning well, she communicated her fears to other members of our group, and the group concluded we should cancel the conference. Returning from vacation, I learned I had a benevolent but serious mutiny on my hands. I called each group member and spoke at length with each one.

Through persuasion, optimism, and sheer grit, I convinced them all that we would have a highly successful conference—and we did! It didn't matter that I didn't know with certainty if we could pull it off. What mattered was that without collective support and all of us confidently working toward the same worthy goal, we had no chance for success. I learned that people want to be convinced that the work they're doing is important, that their role is crucial, and that they can depend on the designated leader to help them reach the goal line. I also learned that as a leader I had to be willing to live with tension and uncertainty while doing everything possible to see a commitment through and ensure a successful outcome.

I further learned that being a decisive teacher-leader is very different from being a teacher-collaborator. At first I would allow our weekly planning calls to go on too long, listening hard and with an open mind to all viewpoints and trying to get our group to consensus. But often we had no consensus, and although it was difficult at first, I learned to say something like this: "Based on all the viewpoints that have been presented and discussed, it seems like such-and-such makes the most sense, so we're going to do thus-and-so." As a teacher, I was not used to making the final, important decision for a group of peers; my work in schools has always been based on a collaborative mindset and plan. That is, after presenting and discussing

possibilities and options and reviewing data, the teachers and the principal decide the course of action that they believe is best.

So I understand firsthand how risky and hard it is for teachers to move into the unconventional role of teacher-leader—for example, to be willing to stand up and say, "This is what I'm seeing at our school. This is an important issue we all need to talk about, and here's what I'm thinking may be a possible solution." And I know from working with principals how difficult it can be to move into the role of respected instructional teacher and coach when their own literacy knowledge may be limited and their time in classrooms has been mostly dedicated to evaluating teachers. My hope is that this book will be a catalyst for moving the literacy and leadership connection to center stage, jump-starting significant professional conversations, increasing expectations for what's possible for all learners, and accelerating literacy and leadership for whole-school achievement and lasting change.

Prepare People for Worthwhile Change

Change is difficult for most of us, especially when the change is unexpected and pushes the boundaries of our comfort zones. Successful and lasting change depends on solid trust, high expertise by the change agents, excellent resources, sufficient time and practice for adjusting and learning, and a whole host of complex factors. It also depends on taking the time to reflect on where we are and where we want to be. A personal story gives some perspective on the process.

Recently my reliable MacBook Pro, my writing partner and preferred tool for all my composing, stopped functioning well. That is, programs were taking a long time to upload, I had to do more and more "force quits" because of constant freezes, and the constant starts and stops were interfering with my being able to work efficiently. Full disclosure: technology is not my strong suit, although I am constantly improving, thanks to occasional and ongoing help from a specialist, known in Mac lingo as an "Apple genius." Rhett Johnson has been the "genius" who patiently showed me what to do to move forward and who was my personal IT guy for almost a decade. He taught me what I needed to know that I couldn't figure out on my own and boosted my information technology confidence so that I could begin to troubleshoot some issues myself. Over many years, he earned my trust; that is, I came to depend on his ready support when I was confused and scared and knew that he would guide me through the rough patches

with kindness and specific hands-on help, and without passing judgment on my "slow" learning.

However, I was unprepared for what happened when Rhett told me he'd need to "clean up" my desktop and reinstall the operating system and all my programs to get everything working efficiently again. What he didn't tell me was that some programs would look and operate somewhat differently because he was installing the latest versions. When I went back to use my rebuilt computer, I panicked. The familiar was now unfamiliar; the habitual actions and routines I depended on had shifted. I became physically uncomfortable and mentally exhausted trying to adapt to my new computer landscape. Truth be told, I wanted things exactly as they had been before the upgrade. I didn't see the new change as an advantage, and I was peeved at Rhett for making changes without my permission—all of which I told him.

> *Rhett*: "If I'd told you that some of your programs would be different and require some new learning, what would you have said?"
>
> *Regie*: "Keep everything exactly as it is."
>
> *Rhett*: "I want you to try out what you now have. I think you'll find that most of the changes are for the better, and with practice you'll actually see that. However, if you find you're not happy, I'll put everything back the way you had it."

All of us require an IT person—an intelligent, instructive, intentional, and inspiring teacher and leader, a guide-on-the-side to expertly shepherd us through a worthy change process. Because I trusted Rhett, in spite of my discomfort I believed him. In fact, I did come to appreciate and prefer the upgrades. Change and the unknown can be threatening to us, especially if those changes occur in an area where we do not have high confidence. Without colleagues we trust for support, we are unlikely to fully participate in a manner that benefits our students or us.

My recent computer experience caused me to deeply reflect on the school change process. I have organized those thoughts into a reflection sheet for thinking about leading a successful change effort. See "Prepare for Change" as a catalyst and self-reflection tool for sparking conversations and actions in your school and district. (See Appendix A for a related reflection sheet to use for an assessment and planning activity.)

Quick Win

Focus first on those teachers who are ready for needed change and willing to accept and work through the accompanying challenges. Give them full support and resources to be successful. They will positively affect a large percentage of the "wait and see" teachers, which also helps minimize distractions from naysayers.

Prepare for Change

- **Prepare people for the change process.**
  - Be explicit and transparent: here's what we're doing and why.
  - Communicate high and realistic expectations.
  - Allow sufficient time.
  - Maintain continual focus on the K–5, 6–8, 9–12 continuum.
- **Infuse optimism.**
  - Promote a "We can do it" spirit.
  - Be honest about tension in the change process—both the hard parts and the benefits. Infuse creative tension: paint a clear picture of where we are and where we want to be. People need to see the goal.
- **Build in ongoing support and collaboration.**
  - Provide PLCs and ongoing PD focused on literacy and shared learning.
  - Encourage coaching opportunities—release time to observe others and to coteach, attend grade-level meetings, and facilitate common planning times.
  - Make space for failure and problem solving.
  - Allow for sufficient pacing of the learning, including adequate practice time.
- **Establish a schoolwide culture that promotes trust and risk taking.**
  - Recognize people's strengths, interests, and needs.
  - Include personal and professional celebration.
- **Lead the change effort.**
  - Model your own thinking, questioning, and wonderings publicly.
  - Respect and listen to all viewpoints.
  - Recognize that, at some point, the leader has to decide.
  - Allow sufficient time and emphasis for the change effort.
  - Help people adapt and move forward.
  - Stay focused on the main goals.
- **How do we know we're learning more and getting better?**
  - Assess the depth and frequency of professional conversations.
  - Note the increase in knowledge and effectiveness of reading and writing practices.
  - Count the number of people on board with the change effort.
- **How do we know students are learning more?**
  - Collect evidence of everyday literacy work and communications, across the curriculum.
  - Gather evidence of students as self-determining learners.
  - Conduct assessments—formative, interim, summative.
  - Regularly review student work and data together.

In particular, my computer experience and many years of being an educator have convinced me that *without teachers and other stakeholders seeing and understanding the need for change, it is not likely to happen*. One teacher noted that the only reason her school agreed to examine how they were teaching writing in their failing school was fear of an instructional mandate from the district. Initially they did not believe that a whole-school professional development model based on authentic writing for audience and purpose would change anything.

For staff buy-in to occur, establishing the need for change must be agreed upon collaboratively. What is most compelling is to identify the need through data that teachers can see, interpret, understand, and talk about as a whole school. We have to "own" the data so the reason for change becomes transparent and even urgent. In addition, the professional development plan must be clear, reasonable, and well thought out, and it must include sustained time for shared learning and application of learning.

Put in Place a Solid Infrastructure

A school's infrastructure is the operating system that provides the expectations and tools for procedures, actions, collaboration, and language that all educators agree to abide by as members of the school community. Worthwhile change is unlikely to take hold without these foundational procedures and structures in place to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the school. For example, without operating structures, many teachers wind up focusing on nuts and bolts of daily operating procedures, such as the master schedule and lunch.

When we educators are not apprehensive of the uncertainty that ensues from a disorganized or inadequate infrastructure, we can invest our full energies toward improving instruction and learning, and we are more flexible and willing to make worthwhile changes on behalf of our students. An underperforming or dysfunctional school must be made whole before serious learning can take place, and that wholeness starts with getting predictable structures in place.

Chief among these organizational and interactional elements of infrastructure are the following:

- Delineation of roles and responsibilities for teachers and leaders
- Common language and understandings about key literacy concepts and literacy beliefs and practices

Quick Win

Address the most pressing needs of the staff first—before addressing curriculum expectations. Those needs might include issues related to recess, buses, lunch, or common planning times. Knowing that as leaders we will immediately work toward resolution of pressing issues builds trust and energy for teaching and learning.

- Data review and response with examination and disaggregation of the data as a foundational step in beginning the school change process
- Schedules and room layouts that promote collaboration, coaching, and interaction between and among teachers and students
- Leadership and literacy groups such as a schoolwide leadership team, grade-level teams, and subject matter teams
- Resources (e.g., curriculum, texts, technology, educational specialists, classroom libraries, tutors) that give instructional support to all students to meet the school's and community's literacy aims
- Norms for optimal functioning and expectations for how we act with each other—organized groups and professional development (especially PLCs—Professional *Literacy* Communities)

Ideally, infrastructure would also include social services and community partnerships.

A strong infrastructure includes not just the tangible structures in the list, but also the intangible, psychological ones, such as these:

- A safe and orderly school culture of high trust and respect for all
- Equal opportunity for all students to learn
- A collective responsibility for the school's students

Quick Win

Look at the building layout as a way for improving trust. Do all you can to shape it so people can readily interact and easily run into each other, which encourages spontaneous discussions "on the fly" and builds collaboration and trust.

Because the ultimate purpose of a sound infrastructure is increased student learning, an expansive definition of infrastructure must include learning conditions that make student success more likely, such as fairness, some choice, meaningful dialogue, small-group work, daily routines, and well-managed classrooms. High-quality standards and curriculum are necessary, of course, but successful implementation is contingent on infrastructure, which is essential for accelerating and sustaining achievement.

Focus on Worthwhile Instruction and Learning

Without collective knowledge of how, what, and why to teach and lead, our work to improve our schools will not result in improvement, despite the presence of optimal organizational structures and processes. My teacher research and experience strongly suggest that without adequate literacy and instructional knowledge, change is superficial, at best. Our finest intentions can still keep us marching in place.

For example, for a teacher of writing who has a low level of knowledge, looking at student writing samples and analyzing them can be mostly a waste of valuable time; what the teacher can identify as strengths and needs is severely limited. That is, the focus is primarily on improving the mechanics of writing, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, without attention to craft, organization, and style, with the end result that student writing doesn't improve much overall. In addition, limited knowledge of teaching reading leads to an overreliance on core programs and teaching skills in isolation. Superficial teaching of reading comprehension and an undervaluing of the role of access to books students can and want to read also result. Scant time is provided for actual reading practice and enjoyment of reading texts, and students remain dependent on teachers, so they often do not become confident, self-directed readers.

Another common, time-consuming practice that may or may not have significance is crafting an inspirational vision, mission, or goals statement. Without a realistic plan of execution K–12, that important vision statement doesn't affect literacy achievement very much. Execution of the vision depends on clear understanding of the vision's goals, highly effective teaching and leading, and ongoing assessment—ideally across the entire district.

Making a worthy vision a reality includes but is not limited to a mindset and actions that value and focus on things such as these:

- Students before standards
- Students viewed as capable of high achievement
- Relevant, engaging, and challenging curriculum
- Common language and curricular understandings
- Celebrations before evaluations
- Formative assessments
- Coherence, consistency, and thoroughness at and across grade levels

One of the helpful things about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is that we get the full literacy picture K–12 in terms of expectations for students, learning outcomes, and samples of student work. This is a huge plus. So is the focus on bigger ideas underpinned by concepts that gradually become more complex but are meant to continually build on each other. Members of a self-sustaining school are keenly aware of the full picture of literacy, what comes before and after their grade level. But this is

atypical for schools. A former middle school principal speaks to the narrow focus that is common in many schools:

> The two years I facilitated a K–12 curriculum committee for our cluster, the high school English department chair headed up the committee and had never seen 1st grade writing. The fluency of those young writers made her head spin! YES! All grade-level teachers should observe what great teachers can do with our youngest students.[8]

The caution is not to rely too much on any set of standards, resources, or research. The only way to achieve a healthy working balance is to become highly knowledgeable. That is, regardless of the curriculum or standards in place, we must know how and why to expertly instruct, assess, and adjust for optimal student learning and engagement. For many of us, our teacher and leadership education and ongoing professional learning have not adequately prepared us to be excellent at our craft.[9] One of the major goals of this book is to increase educators' effectiveness for the purpose of accelerating and enriching student learning.

Establish a Culture of Professional Trust

The importance of trusting relationships in creating a healthy school culture of high achievement cannot be overstated. Without trust, we cannot become a whole school of successful literacy learners, teachers, and leaders. Trust is the glue that makes all things possible. Without it, even worthwhile changes will not stick. Where trust is missing, fear is often present, and fear is a guaranteed antidote to learning. An absence of fear on the part of teachers and students is a prerequisite to raising expectations; feeling safe; having open and honest, healthy debate; and finding joy in learning. It is well-founded trust that allows us to be vulnerable and to take risks even when it may seem scary to do so.

I will never forget when a teacher spoke up for the first time in our after-school Professional *Literacy* Community. Victor was a teacher who struggled mightily with our change process in teaching writing and with moving his students forward. Although he attended every PLC meeting, took notes, cooperated with peers, and seemed attentive, it was impossible to know what he was thinking. That particular day, after he volunteered his thoughts aloud to the whole group, I said, "Victor, it's wonderful to hear your voice. What took you so long?" I have never forgotten his response.

He said, "I've been watching you. I had to be sure I could trust you." It was our third year working together at the school. He was now finally willing to fully participate in our whole-school change process, and his students finally began to make modest gains. The lesson here is that we cannot learn from people we do not trust. It's one of the reasons that it's so important to spend time getting to know people on a personal level before beginning to work with them in earnest.

Although having high knowledge of content and pedagogy is necessary for others to trust us, "We cannot trust even well-intentioned people if they are not good at what they are doing."[10] Being good at what we're doing includes being able to work effectively with *adult* learners. Two other stories come to mind.

A first-time principal replaced a successful and well-liked one in a high-achieving school, and I was surprised by the ongoing difficulties the new principal encountered. She was highly knowledgeable in literacy and educational issues and had published several articles about literacy in respected journals. I found her easy to talk to and assumed she would do well. Yet her first year was fraught with painful issues as several skilled teachers reacted badly to her critical stance when she was observing in classrooms and communicating with the staff. Rather than beginning by noticing what these teachers were doing well, the principal chose to focus on what needed improvement. In so doing, she alienated many teachers and had to work long and hard to regain trust.

Another example is when a highly knowledgeable classroom teacher became her school's literacy coach. Everyone expected that she would excel in her new role, but her critical though well-intentioned stance toward her peers led teachers to stop requesting her coaching support. Eventually, with feedback from others and more experience, she learned how to interact with adults in a highly positive and constructive manner. Although she ultimately became successful and highly regarded as a coach, that initial loss of trust took several years to rebuild.

Professional Trust: What It Is and Why It Matters

I first heard the term *professional trust* described by an excellent principal who stated, "Professional trust means that everyone on staff is committed to all students and trusts that all teachers will do an effective job."[11] That definition infers a trust between and among teachers at all grade

levels and content areas and encompasses the belief that next year's teacher will continue to move students forward in a timely and expert manner. In other words, we all commit to being accountable for making sure our expectations and results for students are high enough, and we continue to build upon students' learning from previous grades and schools within our district. Without professional trust, schoolwide achievement is not possible or sustainable. And it is important to remember that *personal trust precedes professional trust and is its foundation.* Victor, in the aforementioned story, eventually came to believe (though he didn't say it in these exact words): "I can depend on you not to harm me or be dishonest. I can depend on you to accept me. I can trust the words you speak." Once we had that personal trust, professional trust began to develop. Without schoolwide trust, we educators are not likely to say what we don't know, to express our fears, or to speak up even when it's risky but important to do so.

Quick Win

Build professional trust across grade levels. For teachers who don't have a grade-level colleague they can team with, help them team with a teacher at a different grade level. Kate Gordon, an insightful literacy coach who facilitated such a partnership, noted the win-win situation: "The teacher who felt isolated now feels so accepted in the building, and the other teacher has found the team member that she has been missing for years."

Take Action to Promote Professional Trust

In a professional development meeting at a recent residency, it became apparent that a couple of teachers—one, in particular—were holding the school back. As a whole school, we were examining typical grade-level writing samples from our end-of-the-year writing assessments from the previous school year. The purpose was to note strengths and needs as a school and to see where we were doing well and where we needed to step up the writing instruction. After two years of an intense focus on writing, the school as a whole was making excellent strides as documented by evolving beliefs aligning with more effective practices, everyday writing, interim assessments, district assessments, and application of school-established benchmarks and the Common Core State Standards. In that professional development meeting, we celebrated the specifics of what was going well and then moved to where we could do better. Although it was difficult to do so, in the midst of our guided process of reviewing typical writing samples by grade level, I said something like the following to the staff:

> There's no blame game here, but the writing at one grade level looks very similar to the writing at the adjacent grade level. Unless we have steep enough steps between grade levels, we will not get the high schoolwide achievement we are seeking. So each of us needs to do whatever is necessary to ensure we are doing right by our students at our grade level.

In actuality, a couple of weak teachers were causing some teachers at other grade levels to carry more than their fair share of responsibility for moving students forward as writers. Although the staff was evolving to a high level of personal trust, the lack of movement in one particular grade level was eroding full professional trust. Overall, these were kind and caring teachers, and they were generous in sharing ideas with others and welcoming colleagues into their classrooms, but those carrying the heavier load were also feeling frustrated that not all their peers were moving forward in a timely manner.

After that PD meeting, one teacher in question approached the principal and requested a meeting with me. The teacher stated she knew she needed to do a much better job and wanted help on how to improve. With the principal present and with her prior approval, I said to the teacher:

> You've had enormous support now for more than two years. Your principal, the literacy coach, and staff have bent over backwards to give you materials, demonstration-teach in your classroom, coteach with you, give you constructive feedback orally and in writing, and help you move forward in countless ways. Now it's your turn to do the hard work required to become an excellent writing teacher. Put together a plan for what you're saying you're going to do next, and show it to your principal. Review the videos we've been watching, do the professional reading, go over your notes from past residencies, observe other teachers. It's up to you now.

I believe there comes a time when we must take a tough but fair approach to teachers who don't measure up after they have had excellent mentoring and lots of ongoing opportunities and support over time. Ultimately, it's about all of us truly assuming the responsibility to do our academic and personal best for our students through our deliberate and skillful actions.

In 40-plus years of working in schools, I have found there are few teachers—less than 5 percent—who do not improve. In my experience, it is almost always a rigid personality type that cannot change or does not want to change, but again these are rare instances. Sometimes these are teachers who are just waiting it out, believing and hoping that the present initiative or fad will eventually go away, as previous ones have. I have come to believe that after giving these teachers plentiful support, either they step up to the plate or we kindly find a way to minimize the damage. As leaders

we have a professional responsibility to have hard, honest conversations when necessary. We cannot afford to have any "urgency killers" in our schools—those who fail to be personally accountable for their actions and students' low achievement and who take on the role of resisters, naysayers, or gossipmongers.[12]

A culture of trust provides the emotional infrastructure that makes risk taking and openness to change possible. As I've stated before, nothing sustainable is possible for whole-school literacy achievement without that personal and professional trust. As well, when we try to change too many things at once, we can become overwhelmed and may even wind up taking a step or two backward. When our anxiety goes up, we are reluctant to consider doing things differently. We often see this when a new and ambitious leader steps into an organization. Even if almost everyone acknowledges the need for change, if the leader moves too fast and before trust is established, the best of intentions can backfire. And once trust is broken, it's extremely difficult to reestablish. Here, the adage "slow down to hurry up" is apt; within a trusting and respectful culture, all things are possible and possibilities are limitless.

Patience is a necessity. Sometimes it may feel to us like a teacher is barely moving along; but for someone who has been teaching the same way with limited results for her whole career, even a small change, such as trying to give directions to students more succinctly, feels huge. It can also take time for teachers—even veterans who are unaware of what they don't know—to realize that change is needed and to act upon that knowledge. Noticing and recognizing teachers' efforts so they will be willing to risk making even the smallest change can spur them on. Acknowledging a teacher's comment of "I didn't know that" with a response such as "It takes courage to say that. Thanks for speaking up" encourages the teacher to take a risk. Of course, eventually we need to push for faster change and progress, but in the beginning, celebrating even the smallest victories can pay big dividends.

Quick Win

Find ways to acknowledge all that is good and kind in students, families, colleagues, staff members, and community.

It is also true that we cannot always wait for our colleagues to be ready. To make needed changes that have a positive effect on student learning, we have to rely on those who are ready for change and continue to model and expect the same for those who are reluctant or fearful. For a few colleagues, unfortunately, that readiness never comes. Once we've examined the data and are clear on what's needed to move forward, we have an obligation to move ahead in a thoughtful manner while providing the needed support

that successful and worthy change requires. However, we will not have even an opportunity for successful change if we fail to acknowledge the need for change, establish a solid infrastructure supported by a foundation of trust, and fully commit to the change process.

Become a "Positive Deviant"—A Force for Helpful Change

Over many years, I've observed and concluded that one of the most crucial factors—if not the most decisive one—that influences how well students achieve is the *expectations mindset* that we educators hold. I have never been in a school where expectations by the adults are too high. A school culture of low expectations is so pervasive that often we don't even notice it. Too often we have convinced ourselves that outside factors—not we educators—are responsible for low achievement. Although poverty, crime, inadequate parenting, and a host of society's ills prevent us from reaching and teaching every student every day, we must try—and continue to try and try again—to do right by and for all our students.

In addition to an excuses-and-deficit mentality that reinforces low expectations, a collective lack of a sense of agency often hampers our efforts; that is, many of us don't really believe we have the wherewithal to significantly influence student learning and achievement.[13] In his leading-edge book *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*, prominent physician Atul Gawande describes how the outcomes for some intractable diseases have drastically improved through hard-working, informed individuals who possess a mindset that does not accept failure and who work relentlessly to ensure things get better. Gawande uses the phrase "positive deviants" to refer to those who do whatever it takes to "make a worthy difference" and positively change the status quo. I adopt that term for us as committed educators. In schools where all students are viewed as having high learning potential, there is no blame/complain game. Instead, there is a collective, unwavering will and a collaborative effort to do whatever it takes to guarantee that all our students engage in meaningful learning. That collective will includes becoming as knowledgeable as possible about all aspects of literacy, leadership, and learning. Furthermore, worthwhile and sustainable change requires that we educators hold the belief that we have it within our power to positively influence our students' learning and life destinies. Our first step as educators is to acknowledge that we can do better for those we

Quick Win

Hire teachers who are curious, and assess their willingness to learn more and be part of a continuously learning culture of high expectations and ongoing collaboration. That positive mindset will make it easy for them to quickly adjust.

serve, even when we are teaching under challenging conditions. Despite the presence of real constraints that remain outside our control and that influence our students' ability to engage and achieve, there are actions we can take—individually and collectively—that can positively influence our students' abilities so they enjoy increasing success. First among these is altering our mindset as to what's possible.

Develop a Mindset for High Achievement

Our ability and willingness to see possibilities where adversity and diversity coexist determine how successful we will be as educators. We may care about our students, work hard, and be knowledgeable about literacy, but kindness, hard work, and knowledge do not suffice for raising achievement.

Recently I was at a high-needs school where two 1st grade teachers held very different expectation mindsets about the capability of their students. It was the second month of school, and both teachers had received all their students (with the exception of those new to the school) from the school's only kindergarten teacher, who taught two half-day classes. Although almost all the exiting kindergartners at the school were readers and writers, as confirmed by teacher observation and detailed data, the two 1st grade teachers viewed and perceived this group of students very differently.

One praised the kindergarten teacher and told her how thrilled she was that her job as a 1st grade teacher was much easier because the incoming 1st graders knew all their sounds and letters, formed letters correctly, and could fluently write a page or more of meaningful text. She was excited about how far she would be able to take her students and that she could focus on meaningful content from the start.

The other 1st grade teacher saw her students differently and described their performance as "very low" and as "sweet children with behavior problems." She noted that they could not write well, requiring her to take dictation for some. She was discouraged by how hard she perceived it would be to move her students forward. Although she expressed hope that her students would become better writers and readers, unless she could alter her mindset to a more positive one, her students' literacy progress would be constrained by her low expectations.

The first teacher in this story lived her school life as a positive deviant. She did whatever it took to move her students forward, including advocating for them, partnering her 1st graders with students in an

intermediate-grades class who acted as peer tutors, assessing them day by day to be sure they were moving forward, and refusing to let any political and school issues distract her from a laserlike focus on high literacy achievement for every student. At the end of the school year, most of her 34 students were joyfully reading and writing texts well beyond grade level, as judged by various assessments, including school and district benchmarks and exemplars from the Common Core State Standards, standardized interim writing assessments, everyday reading and writing samples, and student self-assessments. Her high expectations for all children, her sense of agency that she could propel all students forward, and her whole-part-whole, meaningful instruction made excellent results likely, and she got them.

The second teacher worked diligently and had good intentions, but at the end of the school year her students' reading and writing competencies, as a whole, lagged far behind the first teacher's. In spite of her participation in embedded, high-level professional development dedicated to improving student learning, collaborative work across grade levels to develop shared literacy knowledge, a strong and supportive principal and literacy coach, and a school culture of increasing trust, the second teacher was unable to sufficiently modify her expectations mindset in a manner that would help most of her students soar. Her beliefs and low expectations about what her students could and could not accomplish remained static.

So, how do we get all staff members to alter their views for what's possible for students? It's no easy matter, and it starts with changing the culture of the school. By *culture* I mean the trust levels, collaboration, sense of agency and urgency, shared beliefs, knowledge level, feedback, and infrastructure that support high-level, embedded professional development aimed at improving reading and writing achievement across the curriculum, each and every day. By *culture* I also mean determining what kind of change is worthwhile and what mindsets, structures, systems, resources, and practices we need to keep in place, what we need to modify, and what we need to replace. By *culture* I further mean creating a whole-school community that works together to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and enjoyment for teachers, leaders, students, and their families. Much of this book centers on achieving a culture that supports optimal learning.

I have thought a lot about why the second teacher never became part of the school culture of high expectations and why she seemed to lack any

sense of urgency. I believe, above all, she lacked the determination, commitment, and curiosity to learn more, which require welcoming divergent conversations and thought as well as openness to doing things differently. Lacking those characteristics herself, she was unable to instill them in her students and thus thwarted their optimal progress.

At a minimum, the interview and hiring process for new teachers and leaders must include, as a crucial component, finding out what the applicant is curious about, is studying, is thinking about, and is hoping to learn. Responses to the questions "What are you reading professionally?" "Who are some of your favorite authors?" "What are you wondering about?" and "What are you passionate about?" can tell us volumes.

Quick Win

Give a potential hire a professional article to read; then base part of the interview on discussing that noteworthy article, which will give some insight into whether the person is a good fit for the school's learning culture.

Teach with a Sense of Agency and Urgency

A sense of complacency is the air we breathe in too many schools—our low- and high-achieving schools alike. In low-performing schools, we too often accept the fact that students are routinely two and three years below grade level. In high-performing schools where many students may come from affluent backgrounds, teachers often take credit for students' high test scores that may more realistically be the result of the wide literacy and learning opportunities families have provided to their children.

A story comes to mind. When teaching in a residency focused on reading, I was struck by the engagement and curiosity of a 1st grade student who enthusiastically responded to a nonfiction story about dogs of war that I had just read aloud to the class. (The book is *Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine and a Miracle*.[14]) His participation at all levels—answering thoughtful questions, understanding vocabulary, and contributing to our shared writing summary—stood out among his peers. So I was surprised and disheartened to learn and to observe that this boy was the oldest and most struggling reader in the classroom. Because he did not yet know his letters and sounds, he was pulled out to work with an interventionist 30 minutes a day, during which he was drilled with flash cards and unavailable to benefit from high-quality classroom instruction in language arts.

As an alternative I suggested using vocabulary and pictures from the nonfiction book he appeared to relish—words and phrases such as *Humvee*, *war zone*, and *stray dog*—to teach him his letters and sounds, which I believed he would learn rapidly if meaning were attached to them. I remember feeling outrage that this intelligent boy was not receiving the support

that would propel him forward. His teachers were kind and caring, but they did not yet see this student as highly capable. Moreover, their actions did not indicate an urgent need to hold themselves accountable for his lack of progress or to do whatever it took to ensure his immediate and fast progress as a reader.

Believing we have the wherewithal to increase achievement for all students is a big shift for many of us. As already stated but important enough to be restated, a lack of agency on the part of adults—that is, the belief that we cannot influence the learning and achievement of some of our students—is one of the major factors holding these students back.[15] Additionally, teaching with a sense of urgency is required.

Teaching with a sense of urgency means making every minute count. When teaching with urgency, we teach with a sense of relevancy and purpose, keep most demonstration lessons to 10 to 15 minutes, adjust our pacing, assess as we teach, and constantly rethink and revise as we go along. Teaching with urgency does not mean rushing through lessons; it does mean being mindful that how and what we are teaching in every instructional moment is worthwhile for our students. *We're not in a race to the top; we're on a journey to excellence.*

Ask Uncommon Questions

The questions we ask ourselves while planning, teaching, assessing, and reflecting show what we value, and ultimately those questions play a large part in determining our effectiveness as educators and "positive deviants." By effectiveness, I mean the beneficial and lasting influence and effect we are able to have on student engagement, learning, and achievement. That effectiveness does not come about through strict adherence to a particular learning target, standard, program, or set of criteria. The latter are important, of course, and can help us become more intentional and specific in our teaching and leading. However, the learning targets and objectives must not supersede our primary emphasis: the mental and emotional well-being and growth of our students. I believe that highly effective teachers ask different questions than typical teachers do—before, during, and after instruction. In fact, we are constantly questioning everything we do: *Why does this matter? Could it be otherwise? What other considerations are necessary? Is there a better way? How could we do this differently and more effectively?*

Before I teach literacy in any school residency, I spend many hours thinking and planning, on my own and with the teacher in whose classroom I will be demonstrating and coaching. Although I always have the curriculum, standards, and specific learning goals in mind, the students take precedence over those, and my primary planning questions to myself run along these lines:

- What topic, actions, and activities will fully engage the hearts and minds of the students so they will invest their full energies?
- What outstanding and relevant literature and resources will inspire and inform the students through rich language and ideas from various authors, genres, and formats?
- How can we best support all students to move their learning forward and encourage their success and independence?
- How will we know students are understanding and learning what we are teaching?

Some administrators and teachers complain they get "push back" if they try to deviate in any way from standard protocols and required resources. However, focusing on particular standards, learning targets, and outcomes does not guarantee a positive effect on student learning. As one principal from Wisconsin wrote to me:

> Requiring teachers to rigidly adhere to a prescribed protocol for instruction can leach the life out of what makes learning so enjoyable: the interactions between teacher-student, student-student, and classroom-global community.[16]

Here's an example of what I'm talking about, taken from my work with the members of a K–12 school team who were committed to doing better for their mostly underachieving students in a large urban district. The leaders and teachers proudly described how anyone could walk into any classroom and know immediately by what's posted on the walls exactly what standard and learning outcome every teacher was focused on for that day. In particular, they took great pride in the standardization they had achieved; that is, all teachers at a grade level were working on the same goal. However, when I asked, "How is that working for you? Is student achievement going up?" they responded that a large proportion of students were still one to three years below grade level.

And here's another example. Recently an elementary coordinator wrote me of her concern that the district leadership expects teachers to know exactly what the learning target is for every learning task and to have those posted. Yet the same teachers do not know what knowledge their students possess or lack, and the teachers are not highly skilled in assessing their students or in knowing how to give effective feedback. This all too common practice of following procedures, standards, and resources without question, which can sound good and look impressive on the surface, may do considerable harm to students by taking the focus away from their most pressing learning needs and interests. We have only so much time, and we must apportion it wisely.

There is a big difference between posting clear learning goals (perhaps as "I Can" statements) and simply copying something from the district pacing guide. Learning goals can be linked to district and state standards, as well as student needs, but we educators have to be both knowledgeable and articulate to use learning goals so they actually help students learn more.

Keep in mind that in our role as positive deviants—that is, as productive teachers and leaders who put students at the forefront of all we do—we must advocate for and behave with a mindset that puts students first. That means asking questions that are uncommon for some of us as educators.

Uncommon Questions

- What do we really need to be doing, saying, and providing to ensure students understand, value, and can apply the academic expectations we set for and with them?
- What are we doing, saying, and providing that may work against optimal student learning?
- Are we emphasizing the wrong end goal(s)?
- Are we overly focused or overly invested in a structure, a process, standards, or a program?
- What might we do differently?
- What else do we need to consider?
- Are we succumbing to "group think" and failing to consider important alternatives?
- Does our instructional emphasis build on the student's self-esteem, transferable knowledge, and self-monitoring abilities?

Instead of thinking first about naming and posting learning targets, think first about making worthwhile learning visible, explicit, and comprehensible for students. We can, in fact, teach our colleagues and ourselves how to think, question, and teach more responsively. We must ensure that we are doing enough excellent demonstrating for learners—for example, through our explanations and thinking aloud, which show exactly what we expect students to be trying and applying in their own work. In addition, we must provide sufficient shared experiences and guided practice if we expect learners to be successful. Once we as educators are highly knowledgeable and are clear and articulate in our instructional intentions, posted learning targets can become somewhat redundant. At this point, we can find out what students are learning and why they are learning it by asking them.

Become a Teacher Who Also Leads

At schools where teachers are expert at their craft and students are high achieving, those teachers are also, almost always, teacher-leaders. To be clear, we are not talking about those teachers whose goal is to move into administration. A teacher-leader's primary job is still as a teacher of a group of students, but the job goes far beyond the classroom walls. It means seeing ourselves as concerned for all the school's students and being willing to share what we know, coach and coteach, help implement new initiatives, partner with teachers who may be at a different grade level, set up unconventional learning situations, speak up honestly in meetings when it's important to do so, and keep the good of the whole school uppermost in all our actions. Much of this book is about becoming a highly effective teacher who also leads, which is a necessity for raising and sustaining achievement schoolwide.

Becoming a teacher-leader requires extensive knowledge of relevant research and best practices and how to apply that knowledge in the classroom, superb skills in communicating and working with others, a mindset that puts students before standards, plus courage and stamina. That is, these are teachers who are willing to share what they know, collaborate with others, stretch their thinking, stand by their principles, advocate for their students, and see themselves and their work as part of a larger school purpose. Becoming a teacher-leader also means being willing to step outside our comfort zones and outside our classrooms. It means questioning the status quo when necessary, checking the research to ensure it applies to

Quick Win

Dress for success. The way we present ourselves sends a message to students and the public about our pride in our profession.

our specific population and context, looking carefully at the data and using them to improve learning, and suggesting and advocating for alternative approaches when necessary.

It can be difficult to take a stand on established policies that are harmful to the teaching profession and ultimately to our students' achievement and well-being, but sometimes there's no one else to do it, and we have to at least try. Jonathan Kozol wisely states, "Look for battles big enough to matter but, at the same time, small enough to win some realistic victories."[17] We'll never know if we can win an important battle or a small victory unless we confront the issues in a constructive manner and offer alternative actions.

An example of a courageous teacher-leader is Lori Johnson. When her district became overinvested in an evaluation program that was yielding numerical data that were not useful for improving reading instruction, she lobbied her superintendent, led the formation of a district advisory group, and caused the district to take another look at the program that was taking too much time away from instruction and that did not support what Lori knew and practiced regarding excellent reading instruction. She did all this in a highly professional and positive manner while recognizing and affirming district leaders and their intentions. The result of her unrelenting efforts—which was possible in no small measure because of the ongoing moral support of her principal, DeAnna Finger—was that her school was granted flexibility with how to use the required assessment. Like many teacher-leaders, Lori was a reluctant one. She did not start out seeking to be a leader. She felt compelled to speak out and take action because of what she believed—from years of professional study and teaching experience—her students most needed to develop as readers.

Here's another example. Sharlline Markwardt is an English language development (ELD) teacher who took a stand and lobbied her district for a "push-in" model rather than the traditional "pull-out" model for second-language learners. She invited her principal and the district's director of curriculum and instruction to observe firsthand the results she was getting when she supported her English language learners (ELLs) in the regular classroom, and those results included impressive data.

Working closely with the classroom teacher, Sharlline differentiated the curriculum all students were receiving to scaffold the learning for her English language learners. Not only was she then able to change the model

at her own school, but she also convinced the district to change the model in every school. She offered and followed through on mentoring ELD teachers in other buildings by inviting them to observe her teach, debrief through professional conversations, and follow up with districtwide professional development. Sharlline notes:

> I knew something had to change, that what we were doing wasn't working. In looking at the whole-part-whole model, I realized that teaching ELD in a pull-out was about teaching just parts and not wholes. A classroom teacher took a chance on me and my idea of doing a language assessment on her whole class. What we found was that all of the non-ELD students scored somewhere on the language acquisition range, so we took the plunge, with administration support, and implemented ELD within content area teaching. The results have proven to be not just positive for ELD students, but the non-ELD students' writing improved as well.[18]

Becoming a teacher-leader also means speaking with clarity and knowledge, and communicating and collaborating in a respectful and effective manner. The teacher-leader who is able to be a force for positive change strives for a mindset of "we-we," not "we-they," and recognizes that all of us want students to succeed even if our means to that success differ. It is our close relationships with other teachers and administrators that give us our political power to make change. I have never seen a teacher who maintains low expectations for students or poor relationships with peers and administrators rise to become a leader who makes a positive and lasting impact in a school or district.

Perhaps most of all, we need to stay focused on solutions, stay upbeat (become a positive deviant), see our colleagues positively and as having good intentions, continue to generously share ideas, and listen to others with an open mind. Laurie Espenel is a teacher-leader who possesses all of these characteristics, along with being an excellent communicator. Having a strong relationship with her principal enabled Laurie to serve as a positive buffer and an advocate for both the principal and the teachers. In speaking of her role as teacher-leader, Laurie says:

> It's a role I come by naturally. I've never been afraid to bring up an issue that needed resolution. Also, the staff trusted me. I knew the feelings of much of the staff. Taking on the role of teacher-leader opened the

> principal's door wider so there's better communication. The principal was more accessible because teachers' concerns were addressed in a way that made them feel they were being heard.[19]

Become a Leader Who Also Knows Literacy

My biggest learning lesson in working in diverse schools for the last two decades is this: *Teachers have to be leaders, and leaders have to know literacy.* I learned this lesson the hard way when, after focusing all my residency efforts on working with teachers, I realized the principal often did not know how to fully support teachers—what to look for in the reading-writing classroom, what to say to teachers to help them move forward, and most of all, what highly effective literacy instruction, learning, and assessment entailed. Although I had been demonstrating effective reading and writing practices with students in classrooms and then coaching teachers to take on that responsibility, I realized that nothing of significance would be sustained schoolwide until the principal could assume the role of effective literacy coach as part of being a strong leader.

A principal cannot bring a whole school of teachers from good to great without becoming a highly knowledgeable literacy expert, as well as a trusted leader and colleague. Without the principal knowing what's most important to look for and listen for in the literacy classroom and how to give honest and useful feedback and support to teachers, teachers and students won't improve much in ways that matter.

Barb Ide, a former elementary and middle school principal who works as a school improvement coach in a high-poverty urban school, is an excellent example of a principal who greatly increased her effectiveness when she expanded her leadership role to include literacy. She talks about how that increased knowledge—along with learning how to better support, trust, and communicate with her staff—changed things for teachers, students, the school, and herself as a leader:

> A new leader going into a successful school needs to observe and pay attention to the established culture. I followed this protocol in my first two schools, and it was a good decision! At my next school, I was sent in as a change agent and made a mess of things because I was accustomed to collaboration and trust. When some of the faculty met me with suspicion and resistance, I reacted with a heavy hand. I made a

> rookie mistake by hearing only the contrary minority rather than seeking out the innovators and prospective leaders. After a couple of difficult years I shifted to a focus on literacy and delighted in our staff as we combined effort for positive change. An indicator of progress over the seven years at that school was the number of teacher-leaders who emerged, due in part to the literacy experience anchored in a culture of trust. Nearly a dozen future principals, assistant principals, and literacy coaches spread their wings with first-hand knowledge of the power of curriculum teams (PLCs) guided by a schoolwide focus.[20]

Sustainable, worthwhile change in our schools is not easy, but it is possible and necessary if we are to serve our students well and fairly. A premise of this book is that it is all of us working together as smart, inquiring, trusting educators with our primary focus on deep knowledge of literacy, instruction, assessment, and learning—not the latest standards, curriculum, evaluations, or tests—that matters most. For the high achievement, engagement, and joy in learning we all seek, not just for our students but for ourselves as well, it *is* within our power to make a worthy and lasting difference.

EDUCATION

READ, WRITE, LEAD

Breakthrough Strategies for Schoolwide Literacy Success

Literacy is a skill for all time, for all people. It is an integral part of our lives, whether we are students or adult professionals. Giving all educators the breadth of knowledge and practical tools that help students strengthen their literacy skills is the focus of *Read, Write, Lead.*

Drawing on her experience as a mentor teacher, reading specialist, instructional coach, and staff developer, author Regie Routman offers time-tested advice on how to develop a schoolwide learning culture that leads to more effective reading and writing across the curriculum. She explains and demonstrates how every school—including yours—can

- Implement instructional practices that lead to better engagement and achievement in reading and writing for *all* students, from kindergarten through high school, including second-language and struggling learners.
- Build Professional *Literacy* Communities of educators working together to create sustainable school change through professional learning based on shared beliefs.
- Reduce the need for intervention through daily practices that ensure success, even for our most vulnerable learners.
- Embed the language of productive feedback in responsive instruction, conferences, and observations in order to accelerate learning for students, teachers, and leaders.

In their own voices, teachers, principals, literacy specialists, and students offer real-life examples of changes that led to dramatic improvement in literacy skills and—perhaps just as important—increased joy in teaching and learning. Scattered throughout the book are "Quick Wins"—ideas and actions that can yield positive, affirming results while tackling the tough work of long-term change.

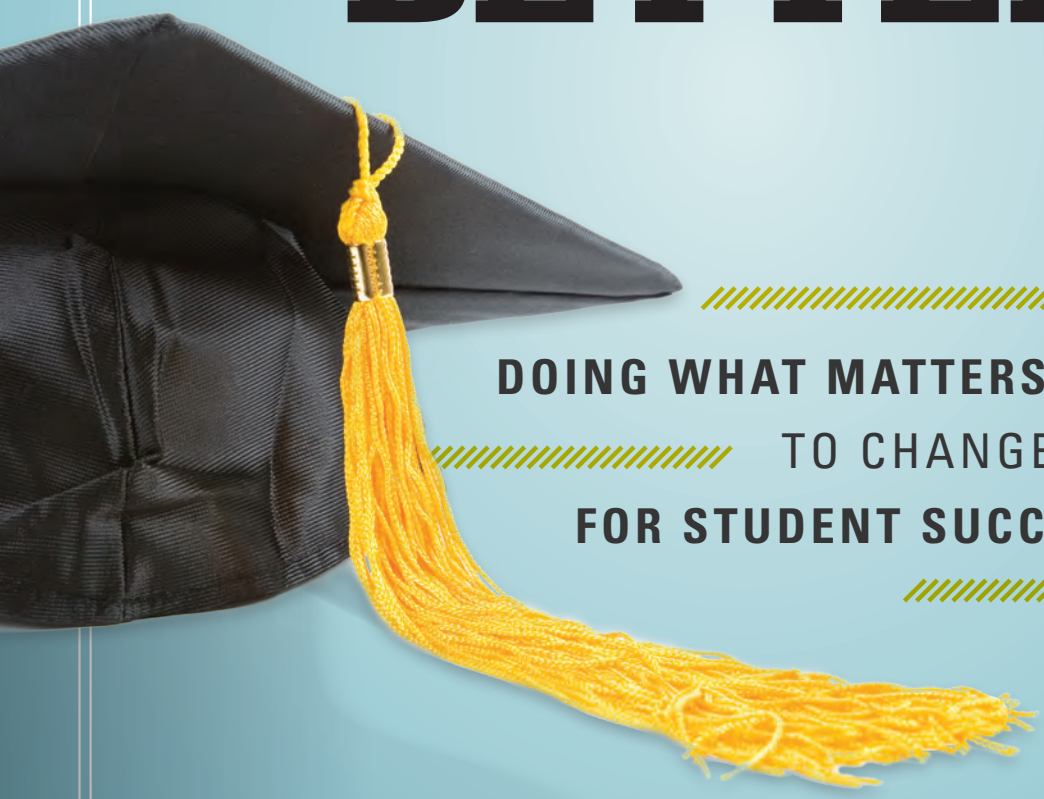
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ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

McREL
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
Aurora, Colorado USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
Author guidelines: www.ascd.org/write

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 S. Parker Road, Suite 500, Aurora, CO 80014-1678 USA
Phone: 303-337-0990 • Fax: 303-337-3005
Website: www.mcrel.org • E-mail: info@mcrel.org

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Without the support from these people, this book would not have been possible.

Introduction

I would not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Overwhelming and discouraging—that's sometimes how this business of improving schools can feel.

I spend a good deal of my time at education conferences, where I've logged many hours in exhibit halls. At most big shows, these halls fill warehouse-sized rooms and feature row upon row of vendors selling new gadgets, programs, tools, you name it—a veritable cornucopia of education solutions.

I often see educators roaming the aisles of these halls with furrowed brows, their heads swimming with new ideas from the sessions they just attended, now being confronted with a bazaar of products and programs, all claiming to deliver results for kids. Add to that the countless articles, reports, books, and blogs, and the whole overload of information can be overwhelming, if not entirely distracting.

In 2009, I was part of a team of researchers at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), a nonprofit education research and development organization with funding from the Stupski Foundation, that launched a major, yearlong effort to capture what's currently known about

what it takes to ensure the success of all students, and especially of children of color living in poverty.

Hoping to wrap our arms and minds around all that has been written, presented at conferences, and offered to educators in the name of improving student outcomes, we eventually identified and read more than 1,000 studies and reports related to seven components of school systems and the learning needs of underserved students. After reviewing this body of knowledge, we compiled eight reports, which provide the underpinnings of this publication. Each report addressed one of the following topics: college readiness, curriculum, pedagogy, student supports, assessment, leadership, system diagnostics, and underserved students. (The reports are available as free downloads at www.changetheodds.org.)

While synthesizing and compiling this research, we arrived at an important conclusion: to improve the chances of life success for all children, educators and policymakers don't need *more* guidance; in fact, they may actually need *less*.

Distilling Simplicity from Complexity

In some ways, the countless studies, articles, and reports on education create a phenomenon similar to what radio broadcasters refer to as signal-to-noise ratio—a measure of how much the true signal, be it Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* or late-night talk radio, is corrupted by static. Like the crackles and whistles that break up the signal of a faraway AM radio station, the preponderance of data in the field of education may drown out the big ideas—the key underlying principles of what's most important when it comes to improving the odds of life success for all students. Rather than add to the noise, this book attempts to sort through the complexity of schooling to identify a handful of "first principles" that, when intentionally and effectively applied, transform school systems.

The goal here is not to simplify complexity into vapid platitudes. I'm mindful of the observation of H. L. Mencken, who once wrote, "There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong." Instead, the goal is to work through the complexity to identify key principles at the heart of what it takes to help all students become successful learners.

How the Odds Are Stacked Against Underserved Youth

The odds of success are significantly stacked against many students, especially those born into poverty. One measure of how well our education system is serving students is graduation rates, the statistics of which paint a grim picture:

- Nationwide, nearly one-third of all students fail to graduate with their peers (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).
- One-third of those who do graduate are ill prepared for either employment or college (Greene & Foster, 2003).
- Only one-half of black, Latino, and Native American students graduate on time from high school (Greene & Foster, 2003).
- In some urban communities, graduation rates are as low as 17 percent (Neuman, 2009).

For individuals, the consequence of these failures can be catastrophic:

- The poverty rate of families headed by dropouts is more than twice that of families headed by high school graduates (Baum & Payea, 2004).
- A dropout is more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison as a high school graduate and nearly 20 times as likely as a college graduate (Harlow, 2003).
- Over a lifetime, dropouts earn an average of $260,000 less than high school graduates (Rouse, 2005).
- The life expectancy for high school dropouts is five years shorter than for college graduates (Commission to Build a Healthier America, 2009).

From Beating the Odds to Changing Them

Like Geoffrey Canada, founder of the Harlem's Children Zone, we believe the goal of U.S. educators shouldn't be simply to help a few kids beat the odds and make it out of poverty, but rather to *change the odds*, and to do it for all kids (Tough, 2009). The question is: What will it take?

Others have, of course, attempted to tackle this question. In the book *Changing the Odds for Children at Risk: Seven Essential Principles of Educational Programs that Break the Cycle of Poverty* (2009), University of Michigan researcher Susan Neuman identifies several early childhood programs, out-of-school interventions, and community support systems that have been shown to mitigate the effects of grinding poverty on student achievement. However, her book focuses on interventions that come from *outside* the school, primarily because she feels that schools have not been as willing to change and adapt to student needs as community-based organizations (Changing the Odds for Students at Risk, 2008).

Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to Change the Odds for Student Success attempts to build on Neuman's work to include interventions that schools *must* perform to change the odds for students. The underlying premise is that schools should be at the center of any effort to meet the needs of all students, if for no other reason than they are where millions of U.S. students are currently educated. These students need better opportunities *today*. Thus, the approach of this book is to determine principles and practices that can be employed *right now* to change the odds for students.

Building on *What Works* to Identify *What Matters Most*

In this book, I attempt to go beyond merely identifying "what works." The problem is not that too few programs "work," but rather that too many only *appear* to "work." Several years ago, Wade Carpenter, a professor at Berry College in Georgia, counted 361 "good ideas" that had appeared during a 10-year period in the pages of the respected *Phi Delta Kappan* (Carpenter, 2000). After reviewing the preponderance of seemingly good ideas (which included, among others, whole-language instruction, performance assessment, block scheduling, looping, and de-tracking), Carpenter wrote the following:

> It's embarrassing. It really is. Not to mention depressing. These are only a few of the "good ideas" that were discussed in the pages of the *Kappan*—silver bullets that would enhance, reform, and even save American education. . . . It is embarrassing because all these "good ideas" have produced very limited gains. It is depressing because nearly all of them really were good ideas. But the results of all this research and publication have been less than impressive. (p. 383)

In preparing this book, I've also been mindful of what New Zealand researcher John Hattie calls the "hinge point" effect size of $d = .40$ (Hattie, 2009). An effect size is the measure of the strength or overall impact of a program or intervention being studied. Hattie writes that an effect size of .40 is strong enough for educators to see "real-world change" in student achievement (p. 17). It's also the point at which an innovation exceeds the average effect size of teacher influence on student achievement—that is, between $d = .20$ and $d = .40$. Using this metric, many programs and approaches that appear to work are actually no more effective than average classroom teachers left to their own devices. By using Hattie's "hinge point" as a cutoff, this book attempts to identify *what matters most*—those programs and approaches that stand clearly above the rest.

Finding the Touchstones

Over the years, McREL has conducted several meta-analyses and research syntheses to identify what works in a variety of areas—from instruction to extended learning, from school to district leadership. This research has appeared in such publications as *Classroom Instruction that Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), *School District Leadership that Works* (Waters & Marzano, 2006), and *District Leadership that Works* (Marzano & Waters, 2009). These studies provide a foundation for this book as they do, in fact, call out many practices that meet Hattie's "hinge point" test.

By looking at what works in classrooms, schools, and after-school programs, as well as what works for at-risk students and school and district leaders, this book aims to identify key or "first" principles for changing the odds for students. Educators would do well to continually return to these "touchstones" to gauge the merit and value of their endeavors.

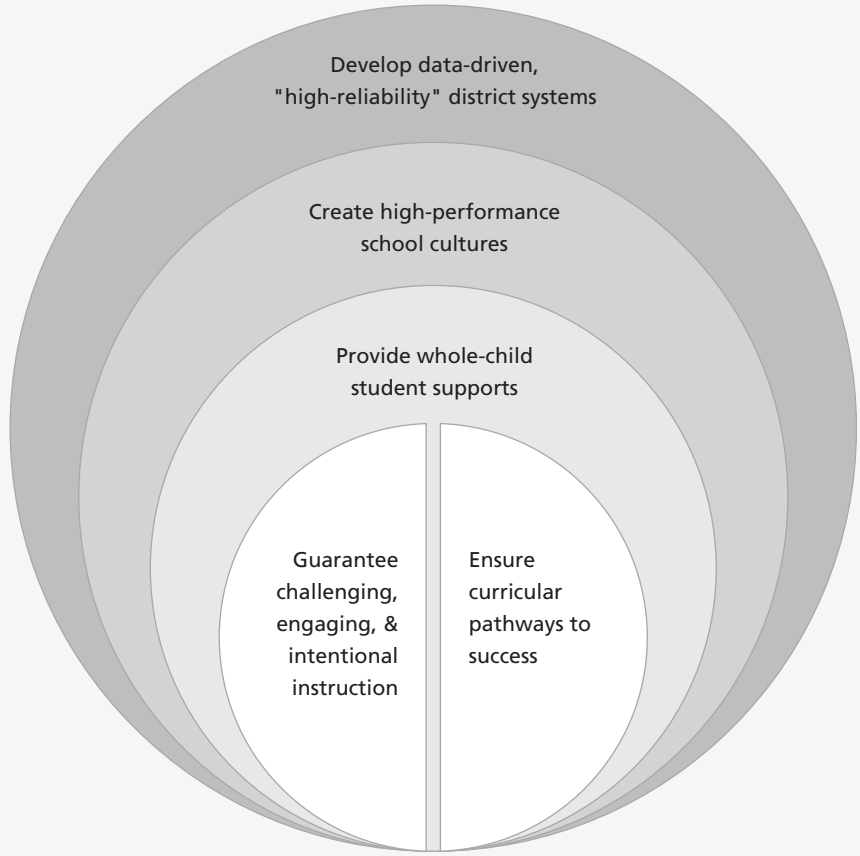
The What Matters Most framework (see Figure I.1) identifies those areas that, when addressed properly, are most likely to have positive effects on student success. Stated differently, they are high-leverage, high-payoff areas for school systems. Briefly, the components of the framework, which are described in more detail in the following chapters, are as follows:

- **Guarantee challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction.** At the core of effective systems are teachers who challenge students, develop

positive relationships with them, and are intentional in their use of a broad repertoire of teaching strategies.

- **Ensure curricular pathways to success.** High-performing systems guarantee that all students in every classroom, no matter what their aspirations, are provided with both *challenging* and *personalized* learning experiences that prepare them for life success.
- **Provide whole-child student supports.** To help students meet high expectations, school systems need to provide cognitive, emotional, and learning supports to address a variety of student-level factors that

Figure I.1
What Matters Most Framework



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are crucial to their success, such as home environment, background knowledge, and motivation.

- **Create high-performance school cultures**. Effective schools ensure high-quality learning experiences in every classroom. At the same time, they develop a culture of high expectations for learning and behavior, which is an even more powerful predictor of student success than socioeconomic status.
- **Develop data-driven, high-reliability district systems.** High-performing school systems put data systems and processes in place to ensure consistently high-quality learning experiences for all students and follow established procedures for providing real-time responses to student failures.

These five areas may seem unremarkable. Indeed, one might look at them and say there's nothing terribly new about any of them. After all, haven't we known the importance of something like good instruction for decades? Perhaps, but what *is* remarkable is the powerful effect that getting all five of these areas right could have for students. For years, educators and policymakers have hoped to find some new approach, program, or innovation that can "solve" the challenge of how to prepare all students for life success. Yet the real solution appears to lie not in something *new*, but rather in a relentless focus on doing effectively what stands out from decades of research about how to improve student outcomes. In other words, changing the odds for student success does not require a wholesale reinvention of the system, or some new technology-driven innovation, but rather a clear focus on simply doing what we've learned about what matters most for raising student achievement.

If It's So Simple, Why Isn't It Being Done?

If we've known what works for so long, why haven't we put it into action? Here are some possible reasons why.

Urgent but Unimportant Concerns Distract from What's Most Important

Sometimes, even the most dedicated, thoughtful, and passionate educators can find themselves tinkering at the margins—wrangling over such things

as what color to paint the school library or the merits of a lice awareness campaign—rather than focusing on what's most important.

At other times, educators may implement so many new programs that it's hard to sort through them all to know which ones work, and to what end. Several years ago, a team of Chicago researchers led by Tony Bryk encountered a school where the principal, in an effort to do what she thought was best for students, relentlessly pursued every new funding opportunity and program she could find (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998). She sent her teachers to nearly every professional conference in the city, and filled her school with computers, books, and other tools. Bryk and his colleagues noted that "all of the activity and 'stuff'" even impressed a local TV reporter, "much as a Christmas tree laden with ornaments dazzles a child." In the end, though, none of the "stuff" did what it was supposed to do—raise student achievement. Efforts were fragmented and incoherent, and did little to "strengthen … the core of the school." Though the teachers were consumed with activity, they were not focusing on what matters most. Returning to the Christmas tree metaphor, the researchers concluded that "it was as if the branches of the tree sagged from the weight of all the ornaments, while the trunk was withering and the roots were dry" (p. 115). Being clear about what matters most can help schools become more conscious and thoughtful about each new ornament they place on the tree. Educators should ask themselves: Is this program or initiative worth it? Does it address a critical need, or will it just create a shiny new distraction?

Right Focus + Poor Execution = Limited Effects

As the old saying goes, the devil lies in the details. Some ideas, though simple in *principle*, can be extremely difficult in *practice*. (The Golden Rule comes to mind.) Indeed, researchers often have trouble discerning whether programs are ineffective due to faulty design or poor implementation.

Education systems are hardly alone in their struggles to do what "everyone knows" needs to be done. We might just as easily ask why automakers, airline companies, and banks do not apply the "open secrets" of success in their industries. Consider airlines: It's an open secret that, to remain one of the most profitable airlines in the nation, Southwest Airlines buys only one type of airplane to minimize training time and maintenance costs, does not

offer "frills" such as movies and meals, operates out of second-tier (and thus cheaper) airports, and does not offer reserved seats, which reduces airplane downtime at the gate, thus maximizing revenues per plane. Other airlines have tried to copy these strategies but have never succeeded as effectively as Southwest, which logged its 37th consecutive profitable year in 2009 while its competitors rang up billion-dollar losses (McCartney, 2010). What Southwest has learned is that by focusing on the "big stuff" and getting it right—that is, by identifying clear, simple principles at the heart of an organization—it is better able to sweat the "small stuff."

Failing to Put All the Parts Together

We've probably all had one of those head-scratching moments upon completing a home assembly project when we've stepped back to proudly gaze upon our creation—only to notice that an extra part, with no purpose we can discern, is still left in the box. Sometimes the missing part goes by unnoticed. We hold our breath as our child tears down the driveway on his newly assembled tricycle and exhale only when we see that it works just fine. At other times, though, we discover that, like the seemingly insignificant distributor cap atop a car engine, one tiny, missing part can keep the whole thing from functioning.

When it comes to education, the five components of the What Matters Most framework are all necessary to ensure its best results—there are no superfluous parts. Sure, if we leave one out, the system will still operate—kids will continue to come to school, the bells will still ring, and the buses will still arrive in the parking lot. But unless all five of the areas are properly addressed, school systems will be operating at less than optimal levels. Worse, they may undermine their thoughtful, diligent efforts in other areas: For example, a team of great teachers delivering the very best instruction possible can still get disappointing results from students if they're being taught a curriculum that is poorly designed, sequenced, or aligned. And even the most engaging after-school programs can fail to deliver results if students are not identified and directed toward those programs.

At the moment, it's difficult to find many examples of school systems that have successfully put all of the components of the What Matters Most framework together in a consistent and coherent way. Certainly, there are

examples of amazing teachers doing amazing things in their classrooms, of phenomenal schools producing impressive results for students, and of inspired communities wrapping their whole embrace around students to support their success. But these examples rarely occur in concert—or occur in isolated islands of excellence. Thus, the cumulative benefit for students of doing them all well is lost.

The power of a simple organizing framework, like the five areas identified in this book, lies in helping educators to survey the entire system they've assembled to determine whether they may have left any important "parts" still in the box.

What *Can* Be Done: How to Use This Book

As I noted earlier, the good news that emerges from our survey of research is that the powerful effects of the five areas of the What Matters Most framework suggest that changing the odds for student success *is* indeed possible. The challenge, of course, is getting everything right. Doing so requires more than just adopting a new program or following some rote, step-by-step sequence to success. It requires changes at all levels of the school system—something people have been advocating (with limited success) for years.

The ever-changing nature of school systems, of course, complicates matters. Each year, new students enter our schools while others leave, teachers come and go, new regulations are handed down and old regulations … well, they never quite seem to go away. This unpredictability and complexity can make systems change in education a frustrating (some might say futile) enterprise. There are several ways this book can help to make our efforts more fruitful.

Staying Focused on What Matters Most

One way to free ourselves from letting urgent matters consume all of our time is to discipline ourselves and our organizations to spend more (if not most) of our time in the classroom and in faculty and school board meetings addressing what matters most. By calling out first principles for changing the odds for students, this book can help educators answer the question: "In light of the hundreds (if not thousands) of things we might do, are we doing what matters most?"

Consider the approach Southwest Airlines takes. The company clearly articulates a few simple strategies to drive its success. "I can teach you the secret to running this airline in about 30 seconds," Southwest CEO Herb Kelleher has said. "This is it: We are *the* low-fare airline. Once you understand that fact, you can make any decision about this company's future as well as I can." Kelleher gave the example of someone wondering whether to serve chicken Caesar salad on the flight to Las Vegas. His response to such a question is simple: if serving it "doesn't help us become the unchallenged low-fare airline, we're not serving any damn chicken salad" (Heath & Heath, 2007, p. 29).

By staying focused on a few simple principles, Southwest has been able to develop a company culture of people who believe in, internalize, and act on simple principles for success, thus getting the details right. Colleen Barrett, who became president of the airline after Kelleher retired, wrote in the company's in-flight magazine that "we often say that other airlines can copy our business plan from top to bottom but Southwest stands apart … because of … the collective personality of our employees" (2010, p. 12). Southwest employees' widespread commitment to superior execution of the company's business strategies is, in Barrett's words, the company's "secret sauce" (p. 12).

Reflecting on the Southwest story in their book *Made to Stick* (2007), Chip Heath and Dan Heath observe that "a well-thought-out simple idea can be amazingly powerful in shaping behavior" (p. 30). Getting the details right, *especially* in complex systems, appears to require simplicity. Simplicity, however, doesn't mean dumbing down, overlooking nuances, or making things easy. Nor does it mean plastering the walls with vapid platitudes that are the equivalent of encouraging people to whistle while they work. What's needed is an approach of *elegant* simplicity, one that calls out the core ideas of what's most important in order to help everyone understand, internalize, and do what's right, even when there's no supervisor or instruction manual to guide them.

Getting Everyone on the Same Page

As Heath and Heath note in their book, even the best-laid, most complex battle plans in military operations often turn out to be the equivalent of giving a friend move-by-move instructions for playing a game of chess for you: After

only a few moves, the instructions are rendered useless by the unpredictable nature of an opponent's moves. In the heat of battle, so many unpredictable things happen that a well-crafted plan often becomes useless after about 10 minutes. Military planners have learned that complex operations don't require staggeringly complex plans with decisions that branch off in all sorts of directions. Rather, complex operations require a clear, simple statement of the commander's intent.

The What Matters Most framework and its component parts can provide a school system with the equivalent of a commander's intent, helping everyone to get on the same page about what needs to be done, every day, to ensure student success. This book can help everyone in a school system—from teachers to principals to district office administrators to policymakers—understand what they can do to ensure that this happens. Throughout this book, you'll find examples and resources to help you visualize how you can change the odds for students in your classrooms, schools, and districts.

Inspiring "Everyday Innovation"

What you *won't* find in this book are lots of step-by-step, how-to instructions. Southwest Airlines at one time "literally burnt" its thick customer service manuals and replaced them with "simple guidelines," recognizing that the key to its business lay not in creating prescriptive processes and guidelines, but rather in helping employees to understand what needs to be done and then trusting in their creativity and ingenuity to get it done (Braun, n.d.).

Similarly, the underlying premise of this book is that the key to changing the odds for students lies not in creating a raft of new rules, processes, or guidelines for educators; it lies in providing educators with a few clear, simple principles and then empowering them as professionals to use their creativity and professionalism to get the job done.

Encouraging everyday innovation may be, for some, a radically different way to think about school change and improvement efforts. It does not attempt to direct people's energies into getting their heads around sweeping new plans or adopting bold new programs. Rather, it recognizes the simple truth that improvement is, by definition, about doing things *better*. It's about everyone—including district staff, principals, teachers, food service workers,

and other support staff—getting clear about what's expected of them and finding new ways, every day, to do what they already do, only better.

Checking Yourself and Your Organization: Have You Left Anything Out?

Entrusting employees to do what's right doesn't mean throwing out *all* processes or telling everyone to just do what they think is right. Southwest pilots, of course, still go through preflight checklists before taking off. In his book *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right* (2009), Atul Gawande, a surgeon from Boston, describes in vivid detail the lifesaving benefits of using checklists to address complexity in such fields as medicine and aviation. For example, just as a simple, preflight checklist dramatically reduces airplane disasters, a simple pre-operation checklist, which includes asking the patient his name and verifying the procedure to be performed, dramatically reduces embarrassing, painful, and costly surgical mistakes.

Borrowing a page from Gawande, this book offers a series of checklists—items that people at all levels of the education system should examine to ensure they're doing the things that matter most. The point of these checklists is not to stifle creativity or ingenuity, but rather to recognize the complexity of education and help readers make sure they are addressing what matters most in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Moreover, these checklists are not offered as the final word on what to do, but rather as a beginning point for helping you think about how you might design and incorporate your own checklists into your classrooms, schools, and districts.

Offering checklists might appear to contradict my earlier point about the ineffectiveness of step-by-step instructions. Or perhaps you may find them a bit insulting. After all, how, you may ask, can you boil down what you do as a teacher or principal to a simple checklist? You can't. And this book doesn't intend to do that. As Gawande points out, checklists don't tell us what to do. They are not formulas. Rather, they help us ensure that we've got all the information we need, that we're being systematic about our decision making, and that we're not overlooking anything important. When it comes to endeavors with "true complexity—where the knowledge required exceeds that of any individual and unpredictability reigns," dictating every move "from the center will fail," writes Gawande (2009, p. 79).

People need to have the flexibility to use their own professional insights and creativity to develop their own everyday innovations and responses to challenges as complex as changing the odds of success for all students. At the same time, letting everyone operate as autonomous free agents, relearning mistakes and reinventing wheels along the way, doesn't make much sense, either. What's needed is "a seemingly contradictory mix of freedom and expectation—expectation to coordinate, for example, and also to measure progress toward common goals" (p. 79). Gawande adds that "ticking off boxes is not the ultimate goal" of checklists, either; rather, the goal is to "embrace a culture of teamwork and discipline" (p. 161).

Thinking Systemically While Acting Systematically

My colleagues at McREL and I arrived at the phrase "thinking systemically while acting systematically" a few years ago when considering the complexity of school improvement. We recognized that there are no silver bullet solutions or overnight success stories in education. Real change happens slowly, over time, when schools and districts build on successes, one after another, in a process of continuous improvement.

As Mike Schmoker notes in *Results: The Key to Continuous Improvement*, one of the biggest mistakes schools and districts make is "taking on more than we can manage" (1996, p. 61). Improvement efforts are most successful when organizations remain focused on simple changes, building on them as they progress toward a coordinated, systemswide response. Thus, it would be a mistake to read this book and plunge right into tackling all of the issues discussed at once. Rather, you should view this entire book as a large checklist of sorts that can help you to identify aspects of your work that you are already doing well, those you might tackle tomorrow or in the next few months, and those that could become part of a two- to three-year plan for classroom, school, or district improvement.

The chapters that follow describe in greater detail the simple, underlying principles related to each component of the What Matters Most framework. Ultimately, the key purpose of this book is to help you get to what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once referred to as "simplicity on the other side of complexity"—a place of clarity about what matters most for student success,

so that you and your colleagues can be both *systemic* and *systematic* in your approach to changing the odds for student success.



1

Guaranteeing Challenging, Engaging, and Intentional Instruction

Imagine two students in early autumn. Like millions of other students across the United States, they enter new classrooms, where the usual first-day-of-school routines unfold. They find their way to their assigned seats or maybe scramble to sit next to friends, neatly arrange their new pencils and notebooks, write their names in their textbooks, and look up at their teachers, ready to learn.

At this moment, the two students are identical, performing exactly at grade level. Over the course of the year, though, a silent tragedy will befall the first of these two students. It's an all-too-common tragedy, one that happens to thousands of students each year. This student will steadily fall behind his peers. By the end of the year, he will be a half year below grade level. If his newly acquired academic deficits are not addressed, they may never go away. Worse, they may begin to snowball in subsequent grades as his confusion leads to frustration, apathy, and eventually dropping out of school.

Meanwhile, an altogether different experience unfolds for the second student. During the year, as the autumn leaves fall and then winter snow covers the ground, eventually melting around budding flowers, her learning accelerates. As she leaves school in early summer, this student has leapt a half year *ahead* of grade level. For her, school and learning have begun to "click" like never before, and new learning opportunities are unfolding. Though she was once unsure if she'd be able to attend college, it has now become her personal goal.

What happened to these two students to make their lives take such different turns? One simple variable: their teachers.

As Stanford economist Eric Hanushek (2002) has determined, the difference between a good and bad teacher can translate into as much as one year's worth of additional learning for a student *per year*. Highly effective teachers—those in the top fifth of all teachers—help students learn, on average, the equivalent of a *year and a half* of learning in a single year, while those in the bottom fifth only impart an average of a *half year* of learning.

Recently, the *Los Angeles Times* analyzed performance data of more than 6,000 elementary school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District to estimate the effectiveness of their teachers. It found that "highly effective teachers routinely propel students from below grade level to advanced in a single year" (Felch, Song, & Smith, 2010). Overall, students in the classrooms with the most effective teachers—those in the top 10 percent—ended the year 17 percentage points higher in English and 25 points higher in math than students stuck with teachers in the bottom 10 percent.

The effects of bad teaching tend to linger long after students leave their classrooms. In a groundbreaking study, William Sanders analyzed the achievement of more than 100,000 students and found that the residual effects of poor instruction show up years later in diminished student achievement scores (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). He also determined that students who have the misfortune of receiving a string of ineffective teachers for three years in a row scored as much as 50 percentage points lower on statewide assessments than those students who benefited from a three-year string of effective teachers.

Unfortunately, this scenario is common. Researcher Robert Pianta and his colleagues (2007) closely examined the educational experiences of 994 students from across the United States in grades 1, 3, and 5 and found that 9 percent of students received poor-quality instruction and emotional support in all three grades. (Conversely, only 7 percent of students spent all three years receiving high-quality instruction and emotional support.) And which unlucky students were most likely to receive poor instruction? Disproportionately, they were low-income students. In other words, the very students who stand to benefit most from high-quality instruction tend to be the ones most disadvantaged by poor teaching.

That's the bad news.

The good news is that teacher distribution and teacher quality are variables that can be changed. Thus, one of the most important ways that school systems can change the odds for students is to ensure that every child receives the benefit of a great teacher, every year, and in every classroom.

What Makes a Teacher Effective?

There's little mystery as to what makes one teacher more effective than another. After reviewing hundreds of meta-analyses on teaching effects, John Hattie (2009) concluded that "the current mantra, that *teachers make the difference*, is misleading" because "not all teachers have powerful effects on students"; indeed, he notes that "it is teachers' variability in effect and impact that is critical" (p. 108). Hattie concludes that "it is teachers *using particular teaching methods*, teachers *with high expectations for all students*, and teachers *who have created positive student–teacher relationships* that are more likely to have the above average effects on student achievement" (p. 126). Decades of research suggest that the following teacher behaviors, which serve as the touchstones for this chapter, distinguish highly effective teachers:

- **Highly effective teachers challenge their students.** Good teachers not only have high expectations for all students but also challenge them, providing instruction that develops higher-order thinking skills.
- **Highly effective teachers create positive classroom environments**. One of the strongest correlates of effective teaching is the strength of relationships teachers develop with students.
- **Highly effective teachers are intentional about their teaching.** Good teachers are clear about what they're trying to teach and then master a broad repertoire of instructional strategies to help students accomplish their learning goals. They know not only *what* to do to support student learning but *how*, *when*, and *why* to do it.

Setting High Expectations and Challenging Students

In 1965, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, in a now famous experiment, told a group of teachers that some of the students in their classrooms had been

identified by a special Harvard test as being on the brink of rapid intellectual and academic development (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). Unbeknownst to the teachers, the test didn't exist at all; the students had simply been randomly labeled as having special aptitudes. By the end of the experiment, many students who had been randomly labeled as special were demonstrating higher IQs than their peers—results that Rosenthal and Jacobson termed the "Pygmalion effect." The researchers concluded that, just as Henry Higgins's high expectations of Eliza Doolittle became a self-fulfilling prophecy in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, teacher expectations can transform student performance.

In a review of 800 meta-analyses of education research, John Hattie (2009) notes that while some researchers have questioned the findings of the original Rosenthal experiment, 674 studies conducted since that time have confirmed its key conclusion: that teacher expectations do, indeed, have a powerful effect on student achievement.

Exactly *how* teachers convey their expectations remains a critical variable, though. For example, the effects of simply praising students—one obvious way that teachers might convey high expectations to students—appear to be minimal (Hattie, 2009).

Carol Dweck, a Stanford psychologist, has determined that praising students by telling them they are smart may actually have a detrimental effect on their achievement. Dweck and her colleagues conducted an experiment in which they divided students into two groups. They consistently praised students in the first group for their ability, telling them, "Wow. You got … eight right. That's a really good score. You must be really *smart* [emphasis added] at this." The second group, they praised for effort: "Wow. You got … eight right. That's a really good score. You must have *worked* [emphasis added] really hard at this" (Dweck, 2006, pp. 71–72).

The group of mostly adolescent students, according to Dweck, began the experiment "exactly equal" (p. 72). Yet afterward, the students praised for innate ability began to develop a "fixed mindset"; that is, they believed that achievement was based on innate smarts, not earned or developed through effort. These students began to reject more challenging tasks, fearing that if they tried and failed at them, they would no longer be perceived as smart or special. On the other hand, 90 percent of those students praised for their effort

were willing not only to accept challenging tasks but actually enjoyed them.

Dweck concluded that one of the ways great teachers stand out from others is that they tend to have a "growth mind-set." They view achievement not as innate, but rather as changeable—the result of hard work. In contrast, "teachers with a fixed mindset create an atmosphere of judging. These teachers look at students' beginning performance and decide who's smart and who's dumb. Then they give up on the 'dumb' ones." On the other hand, "great teachers," Dweck writes, "believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning" (p. 190). Dweck points to Jaime Escalante, the Los Angeles teacher whose story was told in the film *Stand and Deliver*, as someone who saw the potential in his students, regardless of their previous performance, not only to learn but to excel at calculus.

Exercising the Brain

If you were to announce to a personal trainer, "Sorry, I can't lift weights because I'm not very strong," your trainer would no doubt tell you that lifting weights makes your muscles stronger and thus able to lift more weight. What Dweck is saying, and what current brain research is confirming, is that the same principle applies to the brain. Like a muscle, it becomes stronger the more it's used.

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, for example, recently discovered that intensive remedial reading instruction not only improved the reading skills of struggling readers, it actually *changed their brains* by fostering the growth of new white-matter connections. These new connections appear to help students drown out distracting thoughts so they can focus more on reading. Marcel Just, one of the study's principal researchers, said that this and similar findings show that "we're not at the

Encouraging Growth Mind-Sets

In *Mindset* (2006), Dweck offers many examples of things teachers can say to reinforce the message that it's *effort*, not smarts, that counts. Here are a few:

- "You put so much thought into this essay. It really makes me understand Shakespeare in a new way."
- "That homework was so long and involved. I really admire the way you concentrated and finished it."
- "That picture has so many beautiful colors. Tell me about them."

The key to all three above examples is that they focus on children's efforts, not their personality attributes or traits (e.g., their ability to grasp Shakespeare when most kids don't understand him, their perfect score on a homework assignment, or their ability to draw rainbows, which could dissuade them from drawing other things).

So what about when kids fall short? Dweck recommends that teachers respond with the following sorts of phrases:

- "Everyone learns in a different way. Let's keep trying to find the way that works for you."
- "I liked the effort you put in, but let's work together some more and figure out what it is you don't understand."

Source: From *Mindset* (p. 178), by C. Dweck, 2006, New York: Random House.

mercy of our biology. . . . I think that's a fruitful way to think about life and society in general" (Roth, 2009). The bottom line appears to be that Thomas Edison's well-worn adage that "genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration" is now being supported by modern brain science, which is finding that great minds can be made, not just born.

Building Strong Relationships with Students

Dweck has observed that great teachers both "challenge and nurture" their students. As an example, she cites Dorothy DeLay, the famous violin instructor (who counted Itzhak Perlman among her pupils). One of DeLay's students once remarked, "That is part of Miss DeLay's genius—to put people in a frame of mind where they can do their very best. Very few teachers can actually get you to your ultimate potential. Miss DeLay has that gift. She challenges you at the same time that you are feeling nurtured" (Dweck, 2006, p. 192).

In 1969, Judith Kleinfeld, then a Harvard doctoral student, traveled to Alaska "eager to do research that mattered, to find ways of improving education for children who were not doing well in school" (1972, p. 29). Hoping to identify which teaching styles had the most positive impact on Native Alaskan students, she spent a year observing classroom interactions between teachers and students in two boarding schools.

Over the course of the year, Kleinfeld identified four types of teachers. The first type she calls *traditionalists*—teachers who set high expectations for students but viewed developing personal relationships with them as outside their professional purview, offering little academic or emotional support to help students meet expectations. Kleinfeld described one such teacher as follows:

> Mr. W is a nervous man with a perpetually strained facial expression. . . . During the observation, Mr. W. stood behind his desk lecturing. . . . He placed a summary of the main concepts of the lecture, highly technical terms, on the board. The . . . students dutifully wrote down the words.
>
> In a later interview, Mr. W. voiced serious concern for . . . students and noted that their main problem in the class was vocabulary. They couldn't understand what he was saying. . . .

> Mr. W. mentioned, "[Some] students are afraid of me because I yell at them. Well, I do jump on them when they are slack on work" (p. 29)

The second teacher type Kleinfeld characterized as *sophisticates*—aloof and undemanding. The third type—warm but undemanding—were *sentimentalists*. Only those belonging to the fourth group—the *supportive gadflies*—were successful with students. Teachers in this group combined "high personal warmth with high active demandingness" (p. 29). In the classrooms of these teachers, students actively participated in discussions and were willing to work hard for their teachers, with whom they had developed a positive, mutually respectful rapport. In short, this group of teachers demonstrated the power of the old saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

In a later publication, Kleinfeld coined a new term for supportive gadflies—*warm demanders* (1975). Since that time, dozens of scholarly articles have used it to describe the widely affirmed quality of effective teachers: setting high expectations while nurturing student growth. Hattie's recent examination of 800 meta-analyses on student achievement lends further credence to this concept, finding that one of the strongest correlates of teacher effectiveness is teacher–student relationships. Hattie found that the top teacher–student relationship variables associated with higher levels of student achievement are as follows:

- Nondirectivity (i.e., encouraging student-initiated and -regulated activities)
- Empathy
- Warmth
- Encouragement of higher-order thinking

Building Relationships with Students

In the movies, relationships form easily, often during a montage scene while perky music plays in the background. In real-life classrooms, though, it takes much more day-to-day effort to develop strong bonds with students. Here are some tips for developing positive teacher–student relationships.

- Talk casually with students about their interests before or after class.
- Greet students by name as they enter the classroom. (This may be especially important for "problem students," with whom it's easy to inadvertently limit interaction.)
- Comment on important events in students' lives—for example, congratulating a student on a good performance in the school play.
- Consciously seek to make eye contact with every student in the room.
- Freely move about your room, deliberately seeking to move toward and be close to all students, especially those who are struggling.
- Use "get-to-know-you" activities at the beginning of the school year.

Although some of these tips may seem obvious, it's easy for them to fall by the wayside in the crush of daily events. It can also be easy for teachers to skip these sorts of

Continued on next page ›

Building Relationships with Students (continued)

"touchy-feely" exercises in order to get down to the "business" of teaching. However, teachers need to recognize that these sorts of relationship-building efforts can make their job of teaching much easier, so it's worth investing time and energy in them.

Source: From *Dimensions of Learning: Teacher's Manual,* by R. J. Marzano and D. J. Pickering, with D. E. Arredondo, G. J. Blackburn, R. S. Brandt, C. A. Moffett, D. E. Paynter, J. E. Pollock, and J. Whisler, 1997, Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

This final bullet point—encouragement of higher-order thinking—bears highlighting. In the 1950s, a team of cognitive psychologists led by Benjamin Bloom developed a six-level "taxonomy" (later revised in the 1990s) for classifying intellectual behavior. By classifying learning from its simplest to most complex levels (i.e., remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating), Bloom's taxonomy represents one way to measure the extent to which teachers are providing their students with intellectually challenging classroom experiences.

Over the past few years, McREL has collected data from more than 27,000 classroom observations that offer a dismaying glimpse into the level of instruction that appears to be occurring in the nation's classrooms. In well over half of these observations, student learning reflected the two *lowest* levels of Bloom's taxonomy: remembering (25 percent) and understanding (32 percent). Meanwhile, students were developing the higher-order thinking skills of analysis (9 percent), evaluation (3 percent), and creation (4 percent) in *less than one-sixth* of the classrooms observed.

Certainly, not all learning can focus on higher-order thinking; teachers must develop students' ability to recall and understand basic concepts before they can move on to more critical thinking. Nonetheless, the fact that so much of what goes on in classrooms appears to be focused on low-level thinking suggests that high expectations and challenging instruction may be the exception, rather than the norm, for most students.

A final point to be made with regard to teacher–student relationships is that they should not be seen as a substitute for, but rather as a *complement* to, setting high expectations for learning. For some students, especially those who resist learning simply because they want

to have some control over their own activities, a little empathy and nondirectivity can go a long way. That's what Jeffrey Cornelius-White, a professor at Missouri State University, concluded after conducting a meta-analysis of research on teacher–student relationships. He found that person-centered learning—that is, teachers' displaying warmth, empathy, and "nondirectivity"—was associated with large increases in student participation and motivation to learn. He noted, in particular, that for students who are oppositional or resistant to learning, "avoiding power struggles through empathy and the encouragement of self-initiated learning seems to help" (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 131).

However, Cornelius-White also observed that some students' resistance to learning stems from their simply wanting to avoid effort. For these students, no amount of cajoling, nurturing, or sweet talk will likely goad them into taking their studies seriously. Indeed, Cornelius-White found in his meta-analysis that a stronger student–teacher relationship "appears to have virtually no effect" in persuading students who are simply avoiding effort to try harder (p. 131). These students don't need more empathy or warmth, they need some "tough love" that helps them to overcome their own low expectations—or fixed mind-set—for themselves (for an example, read the sidebar about Marva Collins on p. 26). Instead of letting students think they're OK just where they are, growth-minded teachers tell it to students like it is, letting them know where they're falling short and then giving them the tools and support they need to step up their learning efforts.

Teaching with Intention

Conveying high expectations and building strong relationships with students, while essential to effective teaching, are still not, by themselves, sufficient: they are

A Resource for "Warm Demanders"

In his book *Teach Like a Champion* (2010), Doug Lemov, managing director of Uncommon Schools, a network of urban charter schools, lays out a taxonomy of instructional practices drawn from his observations of outstanding urban teachers. The no-nonsense teacher profiles from which these strategies are drawn exemplify the "warm demander" model of teaching—setting high expectations for behavior and learning while at the same time making it clear that they expect all students to meet these expectations and that they, themselves, are willing to do whatever it takes for their students to succeed.

Video examples of these teachers at work in the classroom are available on the Uncommon Schools website at http://www.uncommonschools.org/usi/aboutUs/taxonomy.php.

A Closer Look: A "Warm Demander" in the Classroom

In *Mindset*, Carol Dweck describes the "tough love" teaching approach of Marva Collins, an educator in inner-city Chicago who took her 2nd grade students from well below grade level—struggling to get through the basic readers—to reading at a 5th grade level (e.g., Tolstoy, Frost, Shakespeare, and the like). The following exchange between Collins and an apathetic, openly defiant student named Gary, who, as this exchange opens, has refused to come to the blackboard, offers a compelling glimpse into Collins's no-nonsense, nurturing classroom demeanor.

Collins: Sweetheart, what are you going to do? Use your life or throw it away?

Gary: I'm not gonna do any damn work.

Collins: I am not going to give up on you. I am not going to let you give up on yourself. If you sit there leaning against this wall all day, you are going to end up leaning on something or someone all your life. And all that brilliance bottled up inside you will go to waste.

[*Gary relents to going up to the board but then digs in his heels again, refusing to work*.]

Collins: If you do not want to participate, go to the telephone and tell your mother, "Mother, in this school we have to learn,

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but two legs of a three-legged stool. The third leg of this stool is intentional use of instructional strategies. Without all three legs, the stool will not stand. It is not enough for teachers to believe their students can succeed and to show them that they care; they must also know what they're doing in the classroom. Or to be more precise: they must know *why* they're doing what they're doing in the classroom.

Going Beyond *What* Works: Knowing *How, When,* and *Why* It Works

Over a decade ago, researchers at McREL identified nine categories of instructional strategies that have a high probability of enhancing student learning (see Figure 1.1). Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock first reported these findings in their book *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (2001), where they noted that "no instructional strategy works equally well in all situations" (p. 8). Simply using the strategies at random will not raise student achievement; teachers must also understand *how*, *when*, and *why* to use them. In our work to help teachers improve their instructional practices, teachers often arrive at an "aha moment" when they come to understand what has been missing from their professional practice: intentionality.

By understanding *why* instructional strategies work, teachers are better able to put them to use. Effective teaching requires understanding not only what to do but also why to do it: Why am I giving a pop quiz? What am I hoping to learn about my students? Why am I breaking students into small groups? What am I hoping students will learn? Why am I giving a particular writing prompt? What am I hoping to have students demonstrate? As Figure 1.1 shows, understanding the *why* behind the

what of the nine strategies reveals a simpler, smaller set of objectives that teachers must accomplish in the classroom.

Let's examine each of these nine categories of instructional strategies in greater detail.

Identifying Similarities and Differences. Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) note that the process of identifying similarities and differences appears to be "basic to human thought" (p. 14); attaching new information to existing knowledge and memories is, after all, the heart of learning. However, research shows that novice learners often fail to make connections between what they're learning and what they've already learned (Gentner, Loewenstein, Thompson, & Forbus, 2009). Moreover, what connections novice learners do make tend to be superficial (for example, identifying similar characters or story settings, rather than deeper, structural similarities in plot or themes). Thus, one of the key reasons—the *why*—for teachers to help students identify similarities and differences is to support their acquisition of new knowledge by helping them connect what they're learning to what they already know—familiar constructs, concepts, and processes.

Summarizing and Note Taking. According to brain researcher John Medina, one key to learning is actually *forgetting*—that is, weeding out extraneous information in order to make room for new knowledge (Medina, 2008). The process of summarizing information aids in knowledge acquisition because it helps students separate the wheat from the chaff of what they're learning. Note taking can also help students filter information (summarizing what's important and writing it down) and assist in the long and perilous journey that new information takes before finding a home in students' brains. Most new information that we process, Medina explains, gets lost long before it can make it into our

A Closer Look: A "Warm Demander" in the Classroom (continued)

> and Mrs. Collins says I can't fool around, so will you please pick me up."

As Dweck recounts, that day, Gary started writing and never looked back. By the end of the year, he was analyzing *Macbeth* using references to Socrates and Greek mythology.

Source: From *Mindset* (pp. 200–201), by C. Dweck, 2006, New York: Random House.

Figure 1.1
The Why Behind the Classroom Instruction that Works Strategies

Strategies	Why They Work
Identifying Similarities and Differences	• Supports acquisition of new knowledge by linking to prior learning • Deepens knowledge with critical thinking (analysis)
Summarizing and Note Taking	• Focuses learning on important content • Deepens knowledge with critical thinking (analysis), review, and revision • Demonstrates understanding and identifies misconceptions
Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition	• Motivates learning through positive reinforcement • Motivates learning by developing growth mind-set in students
Homework and Practice	• Motivates learning through development of good work habits • Deepens knowledge through application • Demonstrates understanding and identifies misconceptions
Nonlinguistic Representations	• Supports acquisition of new knowledge through visual learning • Deepens knowledge and supports recall through visual learning
Cooperative Learning	• Motivates through "positive interdependence" • Deepens knowledge by "talking through" problems and strategies
Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback	• Focuses learning on important content • Motivates by personalizing learning • Supports acquisition of new knowledge by surfacing misconceptions
Generating and Testing Hypotheses	• Motivates by accessing "mental set" for problem solving • Deepens knowledge through critical thinking (evaluating, creating)
Questions, Cues, and Advance Organizers	• Focuses learning on important content • Motivates by increasing student curiosity, interest in topic • Supports acquisition of new knowledge by linking to prior learning • Deepens knowledge through critical thinking (analyzing, evaluating)

long-term memory. However, when we repeat or reinstate new information—within 30 minutes of first learning it, say, then again within a few days, and ultimately within a few months—we are far more likely to remember it. Thus, notes taken during class can serve as a handy way for students to review and reengage in material they've previously learned.

Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition. Carol Dweck's research makes a strong case for the value of reinforcing and recognizing effort. Good teachers understand this and know that the biggest *why* behind reinforcing effort and providing recognition is to help students develop a growth mind-set and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Homework and Practice. Although sometimes maligned, homework and practice have benefits for learning when teachers understand *when* and *why* to give at-home and in-class assignments. As Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) note, homework can serve two key purposes: letting students practice newly acquired skills and deepening their knowledge of new concepts. According to Harris Cooper, who reviewed research on homework, "Homework probably works best when the material is not complex or extremely novel" (1994). This being the case, it probably should not be used to *teach* new or complicated concepts. Homework and practice also provide educators with the opportunity to see where students are struggling and correct their misconceptions. However, according to Cooper, homework should not be graded or used as punishment, because doing so can rob students of one of the potential benefits of (and a *why* behind) the strategy: building intrinsic motivation to learn. One of the key benefits of students' doing independent work is helping them to see, as Cooper puts it, that "I must enjoy this; I'm doing it and the teacher isn't standing over me."

Nonlinguistic Representations. Medina (2008) writes that "vision trumps all other senses" (p. 221). Human beings are hard-wired as visual learners—a fact with profound implications for teaching and learning. Medina notes, for example, that "if information is presented orally, people remember about 10 percent, tested 72 hours after exposure. That figure goes up to 65 percent if you add a picture" (p. 234). Thus, the *why* behind the use of nonlinguistic representations in the classroom is pretty obvious: to tap into students' predisposition for visual-image processing, helping them to better recall new information later.

Cooperative Learning. Research suggests that when cooperative learning works, it does so because it gives students an opportunity to "talk through" material with their peers and thus learn more deeply than they might through individual reading or listening (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.). By talking through material, students become more conscious of the strategies they use to get to an answer and thus appear better able to retain new knowledge and skills. In addition, students can be more motivated to learn when a sense of solidarity develops among the group. These benefits of cooperative learning suggest that the *why* for this strategy is to help students deepen knowledge by processing it together and to motivate them to learn through what researchers call "positive interdependence."

Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback. Like summarizing, setting learning objectives focuses teaching and learning on important content, thus aiding knowledge acquisition by filtering out extraneous concepts. It also serves to build intrinsic motivation among students. In the early 1980s, Stanford psychologists Albert Bandura and Dale Schunk conducted an experiment with 40 elementary-age students. One group set "proximal" personal learning goals (e.g., aiming to complete six pages of instructional items during each class session), another group set "distal" learning goals (e.g., aspiring to complete all 42 pages over seven sessions), and yet another group set no goals but was told to complete as many pages as possible. Children who set "proximal" learning goals showed more motivation to learn (such as by solving math problems without being asked) and performed far better on a test of their skills than students who set "distal" goals or no goals at all. Finally, effective teacher feedback—that is, feedback that offers guidance on students' performance measured against clear criteria and explains why answers are correct or incorrect—serves to correct misconceptions before they become too deeply rooted. Thoughtfully delivered feedback can also motivate students to try and try again until at last they succeed—which is, after all, the very essence of a growth mind-set.

Generating and Testing Hypotheses. In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (2010), Daniel Pink recounts the surprising findings of an experiment conducted by Henry Harlow at the University of Wisconsin in 1949. Harlow and his fellow researchers gave a group of eight rhesus monkeys some simple mechanical puzzles to solve. Almost immediately, the monkeys began to solve the puzzles without anyone showing them how.

Moreover, they actually appeared to *enjoy* solving the puzzles despite receiving no reward for doing so. The truly odd part of the experiment, though, occurred when Harlow and his colleagues gave the monkeys raisins as an incentive to solve the puzzles. The addition of the raisins, which Harlow thought would further motivate the monkeys to solve the puzzles, backfired. Once bribed with raisins, the monkeys began making more errors and solving the puzzles less frequently. The insertion of the external reward appeared to have undermined their intrinsic motivation to solve the puzzles. Researchers have since confirmed a similar phenomenon among humans, finding that people have a natural predilection for problem solving (which may explain the strangely addictive nature of jigsaw puzzles) and don't need external bribes to be persuaded to solve them. Students, too, are intrinsically motivated to solve problems. Thus, in addition to teaching higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation (or how to think like scientists in the science classroom), a key *why* behind asking students to generate and test hypotheses may be, again, motivation—that is, tapping into students' natural bent for problem solving.

Questions, Cues, and Advance Organizers. Questions that teachers ask in the classroom, cues (i.e., "hints" about what students will learn), and "advance organizers" (stories, pictures, and other introductory materials used to "set up" learning) can help students connect new knowledge with old and focus their learning on what's important. Moreover, questions, when asked correctly, can also encourage higher-order thinking among students by prompting them to evaluate and analyze new knowledge. Thus, the *why* behind this strategy is twofold: (1) to aid in knowledge acquisition by helping students connect new with existing knowledge and (2) to help

A Closer Look: Motivating with Classroom Mysteries

In the late 1980s, CBS aired a buddy cop show called *Houston Knights*. Many episodes of the short-lived series would open with a scene that *revealed* the killer or criminal. The show would then follow the hapless pair around as they tried to figure out what the audience already knew. The suspense-killing construction of the show likely explains why it ran only two seasons. It also offers some insight into why many lessons fail to interest students—and what we can do about it.

While researching what makes for good scientific writing, Robert Cialdini, a professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University, observed that good science writers don't come right out and reveal their findings. Rather, they develop a sense of suspense, posing a scientific quest as a mystery—for example, what are the rings of Saturn? Ice? Dust? (The answer is both—ice-covered dust.)

Inspired, Cialdini began creating mysteries in his own classroom. For example, to teach about the power of counterarguments in resisting persuasive appeal (a yawn-inducing topic if ever there was one), Cialdini poses this mystery: How did U.S. tobacco companies in the late 1960s reverse a three-year decline in sales and boost cigarette consumption while spending *less* on advertising?

Continued on next page ›

A Closer Look: Motivating with Classroom Mysteries (continued)

Cialdini has since found that students stay in class even after the bell rings to hear the answer to a mystery. "All of us have heard of the famous 'Aha!' experience," he writes. "Well, the 'Aha!' experience becomes much more satisfying when it is preceded by the 'Huh?' experience. This is why the same student who will fall asleep reading vital course material will stay up until 4 a.m. reading a mystery novel."

The appeal of mysteries may also explain the power of such teaching strategies as cues and questions and generating and testing hypotheses to increase student interest. Used effectively, these strategies can tap into students' natural inclination to solve problems, puzzles, and mysteries and thus can hold their attention until well after the bell rings.

Source: From "What's the Best Secret Device for Engaging Student Interest? Hint: The Answer's in the Title," by R. B. Cialdini, 2005, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 24*(1), 22–29.

them deepen knowledge by encouraging higher-order thinking about it.

Reflecting on the *Why*

Adding the *why* to the *what* of the nine strategies might seem, at first, to "complexify" the elegant simplicity of the nine strategies. However, digging deeper into why the nine strategies work reveals some common themes and patterns among the strategies, which in turn suggest four key objectives of effective teaching:

1. To motivate and focus learning
2. To introduce new knowledge
3. To deepen and expand knowledge
4. To check for understanding and guide learning and reteaching

The example in Figure 1.2 describes how a teacher might use these objectives and the nine instructional strategies to design an intentional approach to teaching.

Intentionality: Beginning with the End in Mind

The idea of beginning with the end in mind is, of course, not new. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have long extolled the power of "backward design"—starting not with textbooks or favorite lesson plans but rather with what students need to learn and then deliberately choosing texts, lesson plans, and other classroom activities to meet their learning needs (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

Carol Ann Tomlinson, a University of Virginia professor and arguably the leading proponent of differentiated instruction, relates the following anecdote of one teacher's epiphany regarding intentional instruction. After observing the teacher's class, in which

Figure 1.2
Teaching with Intentionality: An Example

Here's an example of how an intentional teacher might use the nine instructional strategies to fulfill key teaching objectives in the classroom.

Objective: Motivate and focus learning

Strategy: Setting objectives to focus learning on important content

When planning a unit for a 9th grade reading class, Ms. Jones uses a standard from the Grade 9–10 Common Core English Language Arts for Reading: Literature for her learning objective: *Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.*

To introduce these concepts, she selects Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"—a story known for its irregular chronology of events and twist ending—to teach plot structure. Borrowing a page from Robert Cialdini (see sidebar on p. 32), she introduces the unit as a chance for her students to learn some of the "secrets" of what makes one film a blockbuster and another a sleeper, or one book a best seller and another find its way to an editor's circular file. She tells her students that by the end of the unit, they'll have a chance to apply these secrets in writing their short story. Knowing that her students are more motivated to learn when they set concrete, personal learning objectives, she asks them to identify what they hope to learn during the unit.

Intentional teaching:
A checklist for lesson and unit planning

Motivate and focus learning

- ☐ Learning objectives identified, articulated
- ☐ Strategy to interest and motivate students
- ☐ Feedback that encourages growth mind-set

Check understanding, correct misconceptions

- ☐ Regularly check for student understanding and offer timely, criterion-based feedback

Introduce new knowledge

- ☐ Strategy to link new to prior knowledge
- ☐ Strategy to access visual mode of learning

Deepen and expand knowledge

- ☐ Strategy to practice, apply, and deepen learning
- ☐ Strategy to encourage critical thinking

Strategy: Using cues, questions, and advance organizers to generate student interest

Ms. Jones understands that students learn by connecting what they are learning to what they already know and that she can use cues, questions, and advance organizers to help students make these connections. She uses the following questions and ensuing class discussion as an advance organizer:

- Has anyone read a good book or seen a good movie lately? What made it good?
- Was it just the characters, or what happened to them?
- Did unexpected events occur that held your interest?

(continued on next page)

Figure 1.2 (continued)

Objective: Introduce new knowledge and develop understanding

Strategy: Identifying similarities and differences to help students access prior knowledge

Ms. Jones also knows that identifying similarities and differences is an effective way to help students connect new knowledge to existing knowledge, so she draws two columns on her smart board: one that reads "What makes a plot interesting" and another that reads "Examples from fiction and film."

Strategy: Using summarizing and note taking to support acquisition of new knowledge

Knowing that summarizing and note taking support students' acquisition of new knowledge by filtering out extraneous content and also helping them to later revisit what they've learned, Ms. Jones asks them to create the same two columns in their notebooks. Through a guided discussion with frequent checks for understanding, she has the class fill in both columns, identifying, with multiple examples from previous in-class readings as well as popular films and books, plot elements that make stories interesting, such as parallel plots, flashbacks, frame stories, complications, and plot twists.

Objective: Extend and apply knowledge

Strategy: Generating and testing hypotheses to develop critical-thinking skills

Ms. Jones knows that her students need to deepen their understanding of the new concepts they've learned and that her learning objective calls for critical thinking (e.g., "*analyze* how an author's choices…"). Thus, she engages her students in the higher-order thinking activity of generating and testing hypotheses. She reads to the class the first part of the story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," in which the main character, Peyton Farquhar, a prisoner, is standing on a bridge, about to be hanged. She asks students to predict what will happen next.

Strategy: Using nonlinguistic representations to access visual learning and deepen knowledge

Ms. Jones understands the power of visual learning to deepen understanding and support memory, so after the class reads the story, she uses a graphic organizer to engage her students in creating a visual story line. They identify the events as they occur in the story—starting at the bridge, then flashing back in time to Farquhar's agreeing to sabotage the bridge, then jumping back to the present with Farquhar escaping the noose around his neck and fleeing his captors, before finally (spoiler alert!) returning to the moment the story started. Farquhar, the noose still around his neck, is hanged, his escape having been only a figment of his imagination. Using a graphic organizer, they rearrange the events in actual chronological sequence and show how one chain of events—Farquhar's imagined escape—branches off from reality.

Strategy: Using homework to expand knowledge and test for misconceptions

Ms. Jones understands that homework is best used to expand, practice, or apply knowledge. Having introduced several plot concepts, she now asks her students to read additional stories and identify, in written homework, the plot concepts they exemplify. She collects the homework and engages in a class-guided discussion of the plot structure concepts they found in the stories. This gives her a chance to see if students have misperceptions about the plot structure concepts they're learning.

Figure 1.2 (continued)

Strategy: Using cooperative learning to motivate learning and deepen knowledge

As a capstone to the unit, Ms. Jones wants to give her students an opportunity to engage in the higher-order thinking activity of *creating*. Over multiple class periods, she asks each student to write (and rewrite) a short story that demonstrates the elements of plot structure they've learned, followed by written commentaries in which students discuss, using specific examples, the key plot structure elements in their stories. Knowing that cooperative learning is most effective when it's framed around problem solving, holds students accountable for individual work, and occurs in groups of two to four students, she creates writers' workshops of four students, who work together to review one another's creative work against a rubric (see below) for evaluating plot structure in the stories they've written.

Objective: Check for understanding and correct misperceptions

Strategy: Reinforcing effort and providing recognition

Ms. Jones understands the importance of reinforcing effort, not mere talent or aptitude. So she provides each group with a grading rubric—one that makes it clear that she will evaluate their stories not on the basis of the students' innate cleverness but, rather, on how well they demonstrate the plot concepts they've learned and what they did to utilize feedback from their peers and teacher. She directs students to rewrite their stories and writers' notes based upon the feedback received from their peers and from herself. She grades the final stories and commentaries and to provide additional recognition, anthologizes them into a class collection of stories.

the teacher asked students to read a book, draw one of the characters, write alternative endings, and design a new cover for the book, Tomlinson asked why she had designed her lesson the way she did. After some probing from Tomlinson, the teacher suddenly understood what she had been missing: intentionality. "Oh my gosh!" she exclaimed. "I thought all they were supposed to do was read the story and do something with it!" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 37).

Hattie's synthesis of meta-analytic research affirms the value of teaching strategies—when used thoughtfully to achieve clear instructional purposes. He concludes that students are most apt to learn at high levels when teachers clarify learning intentions for their students and themselves, select the most fitting strategies, and "provide appropriate feedback to reduce the gap between where the student is and where they need to be" (2009, p. 199).

Using the Touchstones: Putting Popular Teaching Approaches to the Test

In the introduction to this book, I noted that the key principles discussed in each in chapter can serve as "touchstones"—something educators can use to gauge the merit and value of their endeavors. Let's test that assertion.

If the principles of high-quality instruction that we've called out in this chapter—conveying high expectations, fostering meaningful relationships with students, and delivering intentional instruction—really are what matters most when it comes to teaching, we should expect to find that strategies or approaches that incorporate all three "touchstones" are effective. Conversely, those strategies that neglect one or more of the touchstones should fall short of the mark.

Let's take a closer look at three common teaching approaches to see what the research says about them and whether our touchstones help to explain why they may—or may not—be delivering results in classrooms.

Is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Really Different … or Just Good Instruction?

While sifting through research on what it takes to change the odds for students, especially those of color or in poverty, our McREL research team began with the following assumption: Given the volume of scholarly discourse around the need to adapt teaching styles to the needs of underserved students—an approach often dubbed "culturally relevant pedagogy"—we assumed that we would find significant evidence, examples, and guidance pointing to the need for teachers to employ a different, perhaps unique, set of *instructional* practices with underserved children. In other words, if one might normally use teaching strategy x—say, identifying similarities and differences—to teach a particular topic to nonminority or middle-income students, does the research suggest that the effects of poverty or culture dictate using a different strategy with underserved students?

After reviewing hundreds of research articles on pedagogy, we found very little experimental research to support altering teaching methods according to students' ethnic or cultural backgrounds (see, for example, Flowers & Flowers, 2008; Nasir, Hand, & Taylor, 2008). Judith Kleinfeld, the originator of the

"warm demander" concept mentioned earlier in this chapter, has similarly concluded that "after more than 25 years of research on cultural differences in learning styles, psychologists have been unable to show that one method of teaching works better for children of one cultural group while a different method of teaching works better for children of a different cultural group" (1994, p. 151).

Kleinfeld acknowledges that some ethnic groups do occasionally display different ability patterns. For example, she notes that Alaskan Natives tend to demonstrate especially high levels of visual and spatial skills while performing less well on tests of English verbal ability. However, she concludes, "Just because different cultural groups have different cognitive strengths does not mean that teachers should narrowly match their teaching styles to these patterns of abilities" (p. 151). As evidence of this observation, she points to a study that she conducted early in her career.

The study was designed, she thought, to demonstrate the importance of aligning instruction with students' unique, cultural learning styles. Ethnographic research at the time suggested that Native Alaskan students had strong visual memories, developed perhaps to remember small visual cues needed to navigate the vast and seemingly monotonous landscape of the Arctic tundra.

So, Kleinfeld and a colleague developed two sets of lessons for teaching the classification of animals and their place on the food chain: one was verbally oriented, the other visually oriented. They delivered both lessons to Native and non-Native students, fully expecting to find the visual lessons boosting learning for the Native students. And that is exactly what they found. However, they also found that while the Native students "did learn more with the visual lesson … the Caucasian children benefited the same or more!" (p. 155).

Kleinfeld notes that similar efforts to identify strategies that are more effective with particular ethnic or cultural groups—for example, using cooperative instead of competitive learning with black students—have arrived at the same conclusion: The strategies tested are simply more effective for *both* groups of students.

That's not to say that teachers shouldn't attempt to put learning in context for students. Kleinfeld describes the experiences of one teacher whose first

attempt to teach science to Native students in a remote Alaskan village consisted of a "boring lecture on calories and energy transformation" (p. 155). After getting to know his students better, he designed a lesson that asked students to visit a local steambath (an important fixture of village life) to observe the transition of water from solid to liquid to vapor. His students came back to class engaged in their learning and excited to talk about what they observed. One might conclude that the lesson worked because it was culturally relevant, but that would miss its real strength. On a deeper level, it worked because it connected what students were learning to their prior knowledge (namely, their experience with steambaths) and focused on developing higher-order thinking skills (e.g., analysis and evaluation). Both strategies are simply good instruction.

The bottom line: Effectively teaching all students does not require wildly different strategies; rather, it requires skillful and intentional use of existing proven practices.

The Curious Case of Differentiated Instruction

At this point, some readers may feel this chapter has given short shrift to the practice of differentiated instruction, which is aimed at meeting the needs of diverse learners and is an idea much in vogue in education circles. Carol Ann Tomlinson, one of the foremost proponents of differentiated instruction, writes that teachers who practice differentiated instruction in their classrooms

> accept and build upon the premise that learners differ in important ways. Thus, they also accept and act on the premise that teachers must be ready to engage students in instruction through different modalities [learning styles], by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity. (1999, p. 8)

The logic behind this statement seems airtight. For years, such psychologists as Howard Gardner (2006) have contended that people learn in different ways. Some are visual learners, others are bodily-kinesthetic or linguistic learners, and so on. Each student, the theory goes, has a preferred learning style and comes to school every day with a unique set of prior knowledge and skills. Following this logic, the best response to this diversity of learning styles and

aptitudes is for teachers to differentiate instruction, teaching students in ways that match their individual readiness levels and learning styles.

It all seems very logical, but there's one problem: To date, no empirical evidence exists to confirm that the total package of differentiated instruction (i.e., conducting ongoing assessments of student abilities, identifying appropriate content and instructional strategies based on those abilities, using flexible grouping arrangements for students, and varying how students can demonstrate proficiency in their learning) has a positive impact on student achievement (Hall, 2002).

One reason for this lack of evidence may simply be that no large-scale, scientific study of differentiated instruction has yet been conducted. And as any researcher will tell you, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The lack of research itself may be due to the fact that differentiated instruction is such a large undertaking that it's difficult to implement well and thus difficult to study well. Indeed, some of Carol Ann Tomlinson's own research has found that even in those schools that claimed to be implementing differentiated instruction, few teachers appeared to be opting for differentiation in any form (Tomlinson, Moon, & Callahan, 1998).

Another explanation, however, could be that, while seemingly logical, differentiated instruction is based on some flawed premises. Some of the underpinnings of differentiated instruction, including adapting instruction to student abilities, aligning teaching to student learning styles, and providing instruction based upon individual students' interests, have yet to be confirmed by careful research. Here are a few salient research findings that Hattie (2009) cites:

- A meta-analysis of 61 studies of "aptitude–treatment interactions"—that is, grouping students according to ability and providing them with appropriate instructional support—found that these interventions provide more benefit to higher-achieving students than to lower-achieving ones and, thus, may exacerbate achievement gaps (p. 194).
- More than 400 studies found that aligning instruction to student learning styles has effects only slightly above what would be expected from normal teaching. And even these moderate effect sizes are in

doubt according to Hattie, who notes serious methodological flaws with many of them. One concern with adapting instruction to learning styles, according to a pair of researchers who conducted a meta-analysis of 39 studies, is the "considerable overlap" in individual learning styles, which calls into question whether reported learning style preferences "could really be deemed preferences" at all (Kavale & Forness, 1987; cited in Hattie, 2009, p. 195).

- Six hundred studies of individualized instruction (i.e., instruction based on students' individual interests and past learning experiences) found these efforts to be "only slightly better than regular classroom instruction" (Hattie, 2009, p. 198).

The Trouble with Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles

In his book *Why Don't Students Like School?*, cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham observes that "children are more alike than different in terms of how they think and learn," adding that, "as far as scientists have been able to determine, there are not categorically different types of learners" (Willingham, 2009, pp. 113–114). He cautions, for example, against assuming that just because a student is naturally gifted in music he should be taught commas by being asked to write a song about them or that a child with bodily-kinesthetic aptitude should be asked to contort herself into the shape of a comma.

Willingham notes that Howard Gardner himself, the father of multiple intelligences theory, "disavows this idea, and he's right to do so" (p. 125). The problem with this line of thinking is that these different abilities—whether it's musical talent or being physically coordinated—have nothing to do with learning about commas. Similarly, "mathematical concepts have to be learned mathematically and skill in music won't help," writes Willingham (p. 125). So too, one might add, a baseball coach is unlikely to help a child with a weak arm (but who is good at math) make a better throw from third base to first base by asking him to write mathematical formulas of an orb in flight.

So what does all this mean? Is differentiated instruction a bad practice? Should teachers who are having success with it in their classrooms (and, undoubtedly, there are many) stop doing it?

Not at all.

These findings don't imply that differentiated instruction (or approaches similar to it) never works, just that it doesn't work *consistently*. Indeed, Willingham himself writes in a passage on this point that bears repeating:

> I am not saying that teachers should not differentiate instruction. I hope and expect that they do. But when they do, they should know that scientists cannot offer any help. It would be wonderful if scientists had identified categories of students along with varieties of instruction best suited to each category, but after a great deal of effort, they have not found such types, and I, like many others, suspect they don't exist. (p. 126)

So what's one to do with students of different abilities? Certainly, everyday teachers face the challenge of trying to educate children of different abilities. In a single classroom, a teacher is likely to have students with learning disabilities grouped with students who have been identified as gifted and talented. Those differences are impossible to ignore. Teachers, no doubt, often find that when they teach a lesson, not all kids immediately grasp the content the first time around—maybe a quarter, a third, or even half of the students don't get it.

The point to draw from the research here is that learning style differences are unlikely to explain why those students didn't comprehend what was being taught the first time around. Moreover, given the lack of research to support learning style preferences, there's no reason to label or group students according to these so-called abilities or design lessons specifically for them.

Certainly, providing math manipulatives that illustrate volume or more visual ways of presenting cell mitosis can help struggling students better understand these concepts. It's likely, though, that these techniques will help *all* students. The fact that some higher-performing students may bring to the classroom more background knowledge, vocabulary, or motivation probably goes a long way toward explaining why they may understand the concept of volume when it's taught in an more abstract way (i.e., "length times height times width equals volume"). This doesn't mean, however, that they won't also be more likely to understand and remember a concept when they encounter it in a more visual or tactile way.

Educators might still reasonably embrace differentiated instruction, with the caveat that it's not easy to do well. That appears to be the conclusion of a

recent practice guide from the What Works Clearinghouse on implementing Response to Intervention to improve students' reading abilities. The guide cites the "low level" of evidence for differentiated instruction, yet still calls teachers to use the approach in their classrooms (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009, p. 17).

The What Works Clearinghouse report notes, however, that there is *moderate* evidence (that is, a number of high-quality correlational studies) that supports the practice of regularly screening students and monitoring their progress. And *strong* evidence exists from scientifically based research to encourage the practice of placing students who are falling behind in small, homogeneous groups where they receive one to three hours per week of intensive, supplemental instruction, including one-on-one tutoring (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009). Bear in mind that these groupings are not permanent labels applied to students—they are based on real-time assessments of how students are learning and should be reconfigured regularly when students demonstrate that they no longer need the extra support.

The Bottom Line: Differentiation in Moderation

One challenge, of course, in writing about differentiated instruction is that most likely, if you ask 10 teachers to define it, you'll probably get 10 different definitions of what it is. For some, it's simply the practice of teaching all students well the first time, checking for student understanding with formative assessments, identifying those who are falling behind, and providing them with some additional instruction. Research from the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide suggests that this is a prudent approach to differentiate instruction.

Some advocates of differentiated instruction, however, call for something a bit more complicated—for example, creating different options for different learning styles (e.g., verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal) based on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. As we'll see more in the next chapter on curriculum, such tweaks or infusion of student choice in the curriculum may provide some benefit in terms of motivation. Some students may find it more interesting to use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast plants and animals, for instance, while others may feel

more inclined to write about their "life as a plant" (Tomlinson & Cunningham Eidson, 2003).

So if experienced teachers wish to infuse student choices into their lesson plans and feel confident that each choice will require students to demonstrate similar levels of learning, they might reasonably get a little fancy, so to speak, with their lessons. Students may even benefit some from these extra flourishes. However, for some teachers, especially beginning teachers, adding this layer of complexity to teaching may feel like attempting to bounce down a treacherous, double-black diamond ski slope meant for experts when they've only just recently made their way off the bunny hill. For these educators, teaching is complicated enough without adding the additional, and, research would say, unnecessary, burden of trying to adjust instruction to students' so-called learning styles.

The bottom line is this: yes, teachers should differentiate the *intensity* of instruction according to student needs and mastery of content. They can, however, safely disabuse themselves of feeling obliged to adapt every lesson to differences in students' learning styles. The former, simpler approach to differentiation will do just fine.

The Ugly Duckling: Direct Instruction

John Hattie (2009) writes that he often finds his teacher education students have been "indoctrinated with the mantra 'constructivism good, direct instruction bad,' and are thus, stunned, if not indignant, when they learn that more than 300 studies of Direct Instruction have found the approach to be among one of the more effective in teaching" (p. 204). (It should be noted here, though, that only *one* study of Direct Instruction has measured up to the high bar of the What Works Clearinghouse, meeting the Clearinghouse's exacting standards for medical-style research complete with random experimental and control groups; this study, which examined the impact of Direct Instruction on 164 special education preschool and kindergarten children, found only small effects for the approach with its limited sample of students [What Works Clearinghouse, 2007]).

Hattie notes that contrary to popular conception, Direct Instruction (with capital letters, as in the program developed by Dr. Siegfried Engelmann, Dr.

Wesley Becker, and colleagues) is *not* simply didactic instruction or a teacher droning on in the front of the room—think the monotone lecture on the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act from Ben Stein's character in the 1980s' comedy *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Rather, Direct Instruction is an intensely *intentional* process of instruction that involves teachers' becoming clear upfront about learning objectives, making them transparent to students, demonstrating them through modeling, monitoring student progress by moving around the room and constantly interacting with students, giving students opportunities for independent practice, and pulling the entire lesson together with a thoughtful "closure" that helps students make sense of what they've learned.

In contrast to these positive findings, researchers have found that less-structured and more student-guided approaches to instruction can be harmful for struggling students. One analysis of 70 studies conducted by Richard Clark, a researcher at the University of Southern California, found several experiments in which lower-aptitude students taught with less-guided or -structured instructional methods actually tested significantly *lower* on post-test than pre-test measures. In other words, they experienced a loss of learning while exposed to unguided instruction. Higher-ability students, on the other hand, achieve at higher rates with less-structured instruction, presumably because they have already acquired their own effective learning techniques.

In unusually strong language for the staid, equivocating world of peer-reviewed journals, Clark and his colleagues, Paul Kirschner and John Sweller, conclude that "after a half-century of advocacy associated with instruction using minimal guidance, it appears that there is no body of research supporting the technique." They add, "In so far as there is any evidence from controlled studies, it almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance during the instruction of novice to intermediate learners" (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006, p. 83).

At this point, astute readers may wonder: "Wait, didn't you say earlier that *nondirectivity* is one of the teacher characteristics most strongly correlated with higher levels of achievement? But now you're saying that Direct Instruction works. So which is it? Directive or nondirective?"

Admittedly, this is the kind of conflicting guidance that drives educators crazy and may cause them to hate research. But there is less conflict here than

may appear on the surface. It all has to do, again, with intentionality—namely, what kinds of knowledge and skills we're trying to teach to students.

Research suggests that direct, teacher-led instructional approaches work best when the purpose is to introduce *new knowledge* to students. For example, rather than let students flail about trying to rediscover what Pythagoras figured out centuries ago about triangles, it's best simply to teach them that if they want to know the length of a right triangle's hypotenuse, $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$ works every time. A meta-analysis of 15 scientifically rigorous research studies of the effects of various mathematics instruction techniques on low-achieving students conducted by Scott Baker, Russell Gersten, and Dae-Sik Lee confirms this: They found strong effects for teacher-led instruction in mathematics (d = .58) and negligible effects for teachers who emphasized real-world applications of mathematics (d = .01). They concluded that "low achievers seem not to do well at authentic problem solving and discussion of mathematical concepts without solid preparation in the underlying mathematical foundations" (Baker, Gersten, & Lee, 2002, p. 68).

That's not to say, of course, that a teacher wouldn't use real-world applications to generate student interest in the topic—showing, for example, why a carpenter, surveyor, or astrophysicist might be interested in determining the length of a triangle's hypotenuse. The point here, though, is simple and commonsensical: When you need to teach new knowledge to students, it's best simply to *teach* it to them.

Cognitive psychologists also know that new knowledge exists in a fragile state in students' minds. A teacher can't simply throw out a new idea and hope it sticks. That's where application, practice, and higher-order thinking come into play—to help students deepen their knowledge, attaching it to their previous knowledge and applying it to novel situations that are meaningful to them. Less-directive, problem-solving approaches give students the opportunity they need to practice and apply their new knowledge. Just as we've all experienced suddenly turning into misspelling, ungrammatical dolts when someone watches over our shoulders as we type, students need some room to experiment and problem solve independently to deepen their understanding of new knowledge. That's where some nondirectivity can be helpful.

Incidentally, less-directive opportunities for independent practice are, in fact, built into Direct Instruction methods. Direct Instruction advocates

themselves point out that neglecting to give students opportunities for independent practice is usually to blame when students are unable to recall information later or cannot apply their learning to new or novel situations (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). So, in the end, it appears that both directive and nondirective approaches are effective—when applied to proper ends and at proper times in the learning cycle.

That thought returns us to the heading of this section. We're all familiar with the story of the ugly duckling—the cygnet that's seen as ugly when it's among other ducks but grows into a beautiful swan. Like the ugly duckling, directive instruction has taken its share of abuse in academia and teacher education programs—probably because the method and its purposes are not fully understood. But when properly implemented and understood, Direct Instruction (the formal method) specifically, and teacher-directive instruction techniques more generally speaking, can have a powerful effect on student learning.

Using the Touchstones to Make Sense of the Data

So what are we to make of all this?

Three popular approaches—culturally relevant pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and constructivism—that remain in vogue in education circles don't have much solid research evidence to commend them. On the other hand, the ordinary and sometimes disparaged Direct Instruction approach has a large body of evidence (albeit not yet *scientifically based* evidence) to support it. Our three touchstones may help to explain why this may be the case.

First, in the case of Direct Instruction, by compelling teachers to set clear, challenging learning objectives, engage with students to monitor their progress, and use teaching strategies clearly tied to learning outcomes, Direct Instruction may, in effect, compel teachers to demonstrate the touchstones of effective teaching:

- **Setting high expectations and delivering challenging instruction.** Teacher expectations for students have a powerful influence on student achievement. The best teachers see intelligence not as something that is innate to, or fixed within, students but as something that can be nurtured and developed.

- **Fostering engaging learning environments and meaningful relationships with students.** Effective teachers are *warm demanders,* pressing students to achieve at high levels while developing strong, nurturing relationships with them.
- **Intentionally matching instructional strategies to learning goals.** The best teachers are clear about what they are trying to teach to students. They consistently monitor student progress toward learning goals and use appropriate teaching strategies to close the gap between what students know and what they are expected to learn.

This is not to say that Direct Instruction is the only approach that works in the classroom. To the contrary; as I noted in the introduction, the purpose of this book is not to propose lockstep, one-size-fits-all solutions, but instead to call out the deep principles of success in classrooms and schools. The point here, then, is simply to say that the documented success of Direct Instruction is likely the result of its helping teachers to attend to the things that matter most in the classroom.

Moreover, holding up other instructional approaches to the touchstones may help explain why they fall short—if not in theory, at least in practice. Indeed, the real message to draw from the dearth of evidence supporting differentiated instruction and culturally relevant pedagogy may be this: The extent to which teachers differentiate instruction in their classrooms is *not* a key variable in student success. Differentiated instruction and culturally relevant pedagogy may be more of a means to an end, a way to address these three touchstones of teacher success.

Teachers who exemplify all three of the aforementioned touchstones of good instruction will almost assuredly deliver great results for students. Take away any one of them and teacher effectiveness, along with student success, will decrease. For example, if teachers differentiate instruction yet fail to develop strong nurturing relationships with students, they won't be as successful as teachers who differentiate instruction *and* develop positive relationships with students. Similarly, if they deliver what they believe to be more culturally relevant pedagogy but set low expectations for learning, they're unlikely to raise student achievement. On the other hand, when differentiated instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy, or any other instructional approach

does work, it's likely because teachers are delivering instruction that reflects all three touchstones.

In the end, the simple takeaway message from this chapter is this: Simply nurturing kids and "loving them up" won't produce learning. Nor will simply setting high expectations. Teachers must do both—challenge *and* nurture students. At the same time, they must know *why* they're doing *what* they're doing in the classroom. Take away any one of the touchstones—regardless of the instructional approach teachers may be using in the classroom—and you'll get mediocre results at best. Put them all together and you're bound to succeed.



> From the very first chapter of *Simply Better*, Bryan Goodwin debunks popular myths about some of the most popular educational fads, while clarifying what should be our highest priority: identifying effective practices on the basis of evidence—not superficial appeal or popularity. It turns out that the most effective reforms are often the oldest and most well-known, which we continue to scant in favor of pedagogic fads and misconceptions. There is much of value in these pages, and all of it written in clear, highly engaging prose.
>
> –Mike Schmoker, author of
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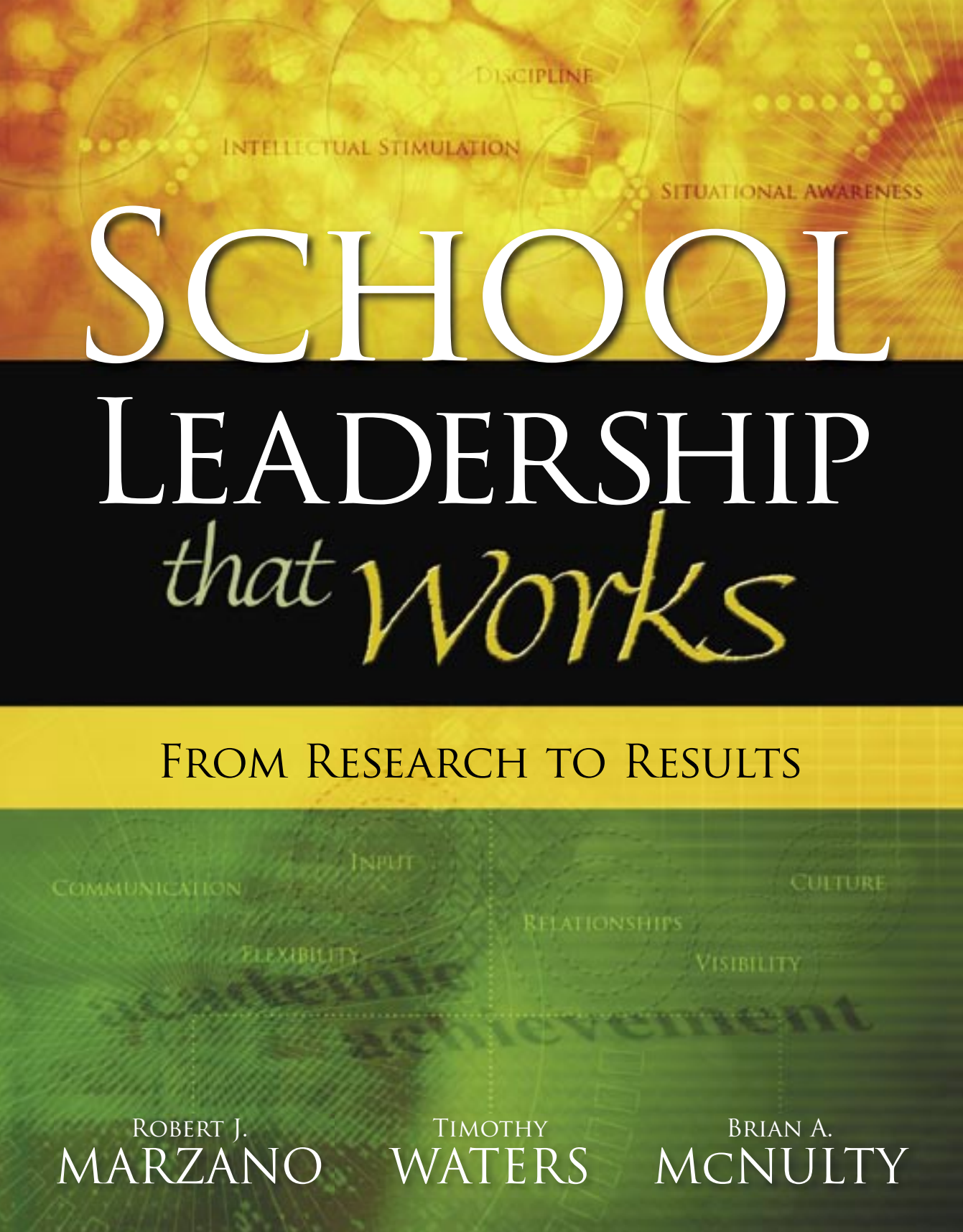
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Aurora, Colorado USA

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Telephone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Web site: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
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Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning
2550 S. Parker Road, Suite 500 • Aurora, CO 80014-1678 USA
Telephone: 303-337-0990 • Fax: 303-337-3005
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School Leadership

That Works

From Research to Results

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Preface

Unlike many other books about school leadership, this one blends practical advice and research. Most books on the topic address one or the other, but not both. We believe that, at this particular time in the history of K–12 education in the United States, a book like this one is not only useful but also necessary because calls for research-based practices have never been as strong as they are now. Similarly, calls for school leadership that translates into enhanced student achievement have never been as strong. To answer both calls we conducted a meta-analysis of the research on school leadership spanning 35 years and found studies from 1978 to 2001 that met our selection criteria. Additionally, we conducted a factor analysis of a survey derived from our meta-analysis and administered to more than 650 building principals.

To answer those who rightfully will want to know the specifics of our methodology and the assumptions underlying our conclusions, we provide what we consider to be all requisite technical information in a series of notes beginning on page 124. To provide practical guidance for those who face the daily challenges of leading a school, we translate all of our findings into specific recommendations for practice. We believe that our advice will help those interested in our research methodology better understand our purpose and focus. Alternatively, we believe that our discussion of the research will help those interested in our practical advice understand the solid research base underlying our recommendations.

For those who want to more closely examine their own leadership challenges, we offer McREL's Balanced Leadership Profile 360™, a subscription-based online survey and professional development tool based on the 21 principal leadership responsibilities described in this book. You may access the principal self-assessment

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Part 1

The Research Base

1

In Search of School Leadership

Each school day more than 53.6 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b) walk into more than 94,000 K–12 schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002a) in the hopes that the 13 years of schooling they will experience will dramatically enhance their chances of success in the modern world. Indeed, evidence of income in 2001 supports these hopes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (March 2002), the earning potential (that is, the median income) of a student who graduates from high school is $19,900, compared with $11,864 for a student who does not. If the high school graduate completes college, that earning potential increases to $37,203. A master's degree increases the figure to $49,324. A doctorate raises annual income to $63,952, and with a professional licensure, it reaches $71,606. School, then, can be the door to advancement—at least financial advancement—in our complex society. For a particular school to be the launchpad to the levels of success sought by students, however, it must operate effectively.

Whether a school operates effectively or not increases or decreases a student's chances of academic success. Marzano (2003) has shown that students in effective schools as opposed to ineffective schools have a 44 percent difference in their expected passing rate on a test that has a typical passing rate of 50 percent. To illustrate, consider two schools—School A and School B. In terms of how they are run, School A is effective and School B is ineffective. (In Chapter 6 we consider the specific characteristics of effective versus ineffective schools.) Now assume that the two schools have a typical population of students—some with many advantages in their home environment and background experiences; some with few if any advantages; most somewhere in the middle. If students in both schools take a

test that has a typical passing rate of 50 percent, we would expect 72 percent of the students in the effective school to pass the test and only 28 percent in the ineffective school to pass—a difference of 44 percent. This is depicted in Figure 1.1. (For an explanation of this scenario, see Technical Note 1 on p. 124.)

Although the difference in expected student achievement in "effective" versus "ineffective" schools is dramatic, the difference is even greater when we contrast "highly effective" schools with "highly ineffective" schools—more specifically, the top 1 percent of schools with the bottom 1 percent. This scenario produces a difference in passing rates of 70 percent. In the top 1 percent of schools we would expect 85 percent of students to pass a test that has a typical passing rate of 50 percent; in the bottom 1 percent of schools we would expect only 15 percent to pass that same test. (See Technical Note 2 on p. 129 for a more detailed explanation.)

FIGURE 1.1
Percentage of Students Expected to Pass or Fail a Test in Effective Versus Ineffective Schools

	Expected Pass Rate	Expected Fail Rate
Effective School (A)	72%	28%
Ineffective School (B)	28%	72%

The central question addressed in this book is this: To what extent does leadership play a role in whether a school is effective or ineffective? That is, How much of a school's impact on student achievement is due to the leadership displayed in that school? We begin with some past and current beliefs about leadership.

Past and Current Beliefs About Leadership

If we consider the traditions and beliefs surrounding leadership, we can easily make a case that leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school. In fact, for centuries people have assumed that leadership is critical to the success of any institution or endeavor.

The concept of leadership dates back to antiquity. According to Bass (1981), the study of leadership is an ancient art. Discussions of leadership appear in the works of Plato, Caesar, and Plutarch. Additionally, leadership is a robust concept that "occurs universally among all people regardless of culture, whether they are isolated Indian villagers, Eurasian steppe nomads, or Polynesian fisher folk" (p. 5).

Theories of leadership abound. They include approaches such as the "great-man" theory, which suggests that, for example, without Moses the Jewish nation

would have remained in Egypt and without Churchill the British would have acquiesced to the Germans in 1940; trait theories, which contend that leaders are endowed with superior qualities that differentiate them from followers; and environmental theories, which assert that leaders emerge as a result of time, place, and circumstance. Regardless of the theory used to explain it, leadership has been intimately linked to the effective functioning of complex organizations throughout the centuries.

The traditions and beliefs about leadership in schools are no different from those regarding leadership in other institutions. Leadership is considered to be vital to the successful functioning of many aspects of a school. To illustrate, the list below depicts only a few of the aspects of schooling that have been linked to leadership in a school building:

- Whether a school has a clear mission and goals (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Duke, 1982)
- The overall climate of the school and the climate in individual classrooms (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Griffith, 2000; Villani, 1996)
- The attitudes of teachers (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Oakes, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979)
- The classroom practices of teachers (Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; McDill, Rigsby, & Meyers, 1969; Miller & Sayre, 1986)
- The organization of curriculum and instruction (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Cohen & Miller, 1980; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Glasman & Binianimov, 1981; Oakes, 1989)
- Students' opportunity to learn (Duke & Canady, 1991; Dwyer, 1986; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989)

Given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school. To illustrate, a 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity (U.S. Congress, 1970) identified the principal as the single most influential person in a school:

> In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. The principal

> is the main link between the community and the school, and the way he or she performs in this capacity largely determines the attitudes of parents and students about the school. If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success. (p. 56)

Given the perceived importance of leadership in schools and the central role of the principal in that leadership, one might assume that suggestions regarding leadership practice in schools are based on a clear, well-articulated body of research spanning decades. Unfortunately, this assumption is incorrect for at least two reasons. First, far less research on school leadership has been done than one might expect. To illustrate, in a review of the quantitative research from 1980 to 1995, Hallinger and Heck (1996) identified only 40 studies that address the relationship between school leadership and student academic achievement. In our analysis of the research over the last 35 years, we found more than 5,000 articles and studies that address the topic of leadership in schools, but only 69 that actually examine the quantitative relationship between building leadership and the academic achievement of students. (We discuss our study in depth in Chapter 3.) In spite of the relative paucity of empirical studies on school leadership, books recommending leadership practices for educational administrators abound.

Second, the research that has been done on school leadership is quite equivocal, or at least is perceived as such. For example, some assert that it provides little specific guidance as to effective practices in school leadership. As Donmoyer (1985) explains:

> Recent studies of schools invariably identify the principal's leadership as a significant factor in a school's success. Unfortunately these studies provide only limited insight into how principals contribute to their school's achievements. (p. 31)

Others assert that the research does not even support the notion that school leadership has an identifiable effect on student achievement. For example, a recent synthesis of the research on school leadership concluded that statistically there is almost no relationship between school leadership and student achievement. Specifically, as a result of their analyses of 37 studies conducted internationally on the impact of building leadership on student achievement, Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) report almost no direct relationship. We deal with this particular study in Chapters 2 and 3. However, taken at face value, the findings from this study would lead one to conclude that little effort should be put into developing leaders at the school building level.

A Different Perspective

The conclusions we offer in this book stand in sharp contrast to those suggesting that the research on school leadership provides no guidance as to specific leadership behaviors and to those suggesting that school leadership has no discernable direct effect on student achievement. Our basic claim is that the research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement. A logical question is, How can we make such claims in light of the previous statements regarding the research (or lack thereof) on school leadership? The answer lies partially in the research process we employed—a methodology referred to as meta-analysis—which is specifically designed for synthesis efforts such as ours.

The Nature and Function of Meta-Analysis

There have been a number of calls for a new paradigm of research in educational leadership (see Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Hill & Guthrie, 1999). These calls come at a time when the methodology of meta-analysis has provided impressive advances in the art and science of synthesizing studies within a given domain.

The term *meta-analysis* refers to an array of techniques for synthesizing a vast amount of research quantitatively. The technique was formally developed and made popular by Gene Glass and his colleagues in the early 1970s (see Glass, 1976; Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981). Since then, individuals in a variety of fields have used meta-analysis to construct generalizations that were previously unavailable (see Hunt, 1997). For example, in his book *How Science Takes Stock: The Story of Meta-Analysis,* Hunt provides compelling illustrations of the successful use of meta-analysis in medicine, psychology, criminology, and other fields.

In simple terms, meta-analysis allows researchers to form statistically based generalizations regarding the research within a given field. We discuss some of the more technical aspects of meta-analysis in Technical Note 3 (see p. 130). Here we briefly consider some aspects of meta-analysis that are particularly important to our assertions about the research on school leadership and our reasons for using this particular methodology.

At least two questions might come to mind about our decision to use meta-analysis. First, why did we choose to synthesize the research of others as opposed to conducting a study of our own? That is, why didn't we study the relationship between school leadership and student achievement by examining a number of high- and low-performing schools and the leadership in those schools instead of

examining the research of others? The answer is that any study we would have conducted, no matter how well constructed, would have contained "uncontrolled error" influencing its outcome.

As an example, assume we had been able to identify 10 principals who were strong leaders and 10 principals who were weak leaders and randomly assign them to serve for three years in 20 schools with about the same average academic achievement. In educational circles, this type of study would be considered strong. In fact, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, passed by an overwhelming margin in both houses of Congress in December 2001 and signed into law on Jan. 8, 2002, recommends the use of research designs (like our hypothetical example) that employ random assignment to experimental and control groups as a form of what it refers to as "scientifically based research" (see Goodwin, Arens, Barley, & Williams, 2002). However, educators quickly note that using a design like our hypothetical example is not only impractical from a resource perspective (for example, how can you find 20 principals willing to work for three years in a school to which they have been assigned?), but unacceptable from an ethical perspective (how can you in good conscience assign 10 principals to schools knowing that they are weak leaders?). Nevertheless, for illustrative purposes, let's assume that we employed this rather "tight" empirical design. Even with this tight level of control, the findings from the study might be strongly influenced by uncontrolled factors, such as substantive differences in the background and experience of the teachers and in the family circumstances of the students in the various schools. Such factors are sometimes referred to as "sampling error."

In practice, it is impossible to control all the error that might creep into a study. This is precisely why researchers assign a probability statement to their findings. That is, when a researcher reports that her findings are significant at the .05 level, she is saying that her findings could occur 5 times in 100 or less if they are a function of some type of uncontrolled error. If she reports that her findings are significant at the .01 level, she is saying that there is even less of a chance—1 in 100 or less—that her findings are a function of this uncontrolled error. Meta-analysis helps control for this error by examining findings across many studies. Doing this tends to cancel out much of that uncontrolled error. Whereas the findings in one study might be influenced positively by the background of the teachers, let's say, another study might be influenced negatively by this same factor. Across many studies the effect of this factor tends to cancel out.

The second question our use of meta-analysis might prompt is, Why did we use a quantitative approach to synthesis research as opposed to the more traditional approach others have used (for example, Cotton, 2003)? Indeed, every doctoral

dissertation and every master's thesis in education attempts to include a comprehensive review of the research relative to its specific research topic. However, these reviews typically use what is referred to as a narrative approach (see Glass, 1976; Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981; Rosenthal, 1991; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1982). With a narrative approach, a researcher attempts to logically summarize the findings from a collection of studies on a topic by looking for patterns in those studies. Unfortunately, the narrative approach is highly susceptible to erroneous conclusions. To illustrate, in a study of the quality of narrative reviews, Jackson (1978, 1980) found the following:

- Reviewers tended to focus on only part of the full set of studies they reviewed.
- Reviewers commonly used crude and misleading representations of the findings of the studies.
- Reviewers usually reported so little about their method of analysis that no judgment could be made about the validity of their conclusions.
- Reviewers commonly failed to consider the methods used in the studies they reviewed.

To examine the difference between reviewing research using a narrative approach versus a meta-analytic approach, Cooper and Rosenthal (1980) conducted a study in which 40 graduate students were randomly split into two groups. Both groups were asked to examine the same seven studies on gender differences in persistence. Their basic task was to determine whether the seven studies supported the hypothesis that gender is related to persistence. One group used the narrative approach and the other used a rudimentary form of meta-analysis. What the two groups were not told was that, statistically, the seven studies considered as a set supported the hypothesis that gender and persistence are related. The vast majority of graduate students in the narrative group incorrectly concluded that the studies did not support this hypothesis, whereas the vast majority of graduate students in the meta-analysis group correctly concluded that the studies did support the hypothesis. Discussing this study, Glass, McGaw, and Smith (1981) note that these are "strikingly different conclusions for equivalent groups trying to integrate only seven studies" (p. 17). They go on to hypothesize that conclusions based on narrative reviews of vast amounts of research are probably strongly biased by the conventional wisdom to which the synthesizer subscribes.

In summary, we chose to synthesize the research on leadership using a quantitative, meta-analytic approach because it provided the most objective means to answer the question, What does the research tell us about school leadership?

Our Basic Findings

After examining 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students, and 14,000 teachers, we computed the correlation between the leadership behavior of the principal in the school and the average academic achievement of students in the school to be .25. We discuss the meaning of this correlation in depth in Chapter 3; however, we briefly consider it here. We should first caution that reducing the findings of a meta-analysis, particularly one that claims to be as comprehensive as ours, to a single correlation is at best an oversimplification of the findings. In fact, Glass, commonly considered to be the founder of modern-day meta-analysis, warns against this practice (Robinson, 2004). With this caution noted, we consider the average correlation found in our meta-analysis because it is still the most commonly used currency for discussing meta-analytic findings in educational research.

To interpret the .25 correlation, assume that a principal is hired into a district and assigned to a school that is at the 50th percentile in the average achievement of its students. (See Technical Note 1, p. 124, for further explanation.) Also assume that the principal is at the 50th percentile in leadership ability. We might say that we have an average principal in an average school.

Now assume that the principal stays in the school for a few years. Our .25 correlation tells us that over time we would predict the average achievement of the school to remain at the 50th percentile. But now let's increase the principal's leadership ability by one standard deviation—from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile. This increase might have occurred as a result of the principal's attendance at an extended set of courses or seminars on leadership offered in the district. Our correlation of .25 indicates that over time we would predict the average achievement of the school to rise to the 60th percentile. This increase is depicted in Figure 1.2. In terms of the average achievement of students in the school, this is substantial.

To further examine the interpretation of the .25 correlation, let's increase the principal's leadership ability even more—from the 50th percentile to the 99th percentile. In other words, the leadership training the principal attends is so powerful that it places the principal at the top percentile in leadership behavior. Our correlation of .25 indicates that over time we would predict the average student achievement of the school to rise to the 72nd percentile. This is depicted in Figure 1.3.

Taken at face value, these findings are compelling. A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students. Most teachers, parents, and students would be thrilled to see the average performance of their school increase 22 percentile points—even 10 percentile points.

FIGURE 1.2
Predicted Increase in Student Achievement When Leadership Ability Increases from 50th to 84th Percentile

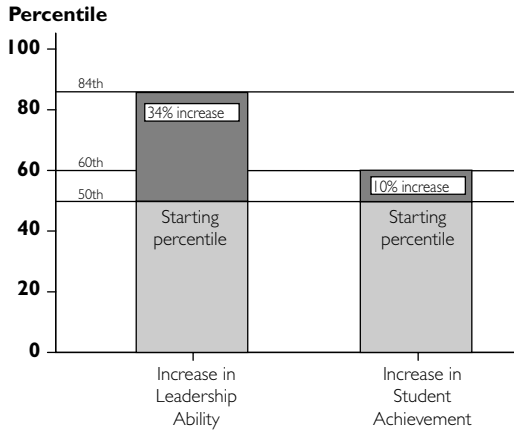
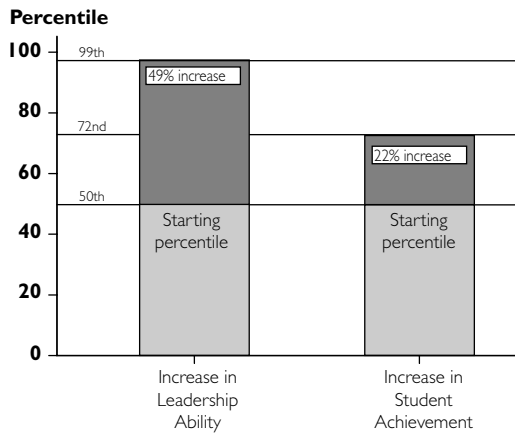


FIGURE 1.3
Predicted Increase in Student Achievement When Leadership Ability Increases from 50th to 99th Percentile



Toward Research-Based Principles of School Leadership

Our meta-analysis was designed to determine what 35 years of research tells us about school leadership. We report our findings in Chapter 3. However, we didn't stop with the findings. Rather, we wove those findings into what we consider to be perhaps the most rigorous and comprehensive set of principles regarding school leadership to date. The reader should note that we purposely avoid the use of the word *theory* in describing our conclusions. Anderson (1983) explains that a theory is a precise deductive system that allows one to accurately predict behavior given knowledge of the variables within the theory. Principles are general rules for behavior but do not constitute a precise predictive system. We offer principles as opposed to a theory in accordance with the most current thinking in educational research. Again, to quote Glass in his article marking the 25th anniversary of meta-analysis, "We need to stop thinking of ourselves as scientists listing grand theories, and face the fact that we are technicians collecting and collating information" (2000, p. 12). Glass credits Meehl (1978) as first pointing out that the "soft social sciences" such as education simply cannot conceive, test, and advance theories in the same manner as the hard sciences such as physics, chemistry, medicine, and the like. This is

not to say that educators should not use the results of studies to develop general rules or principles of behavior to guide them in specific situations. This is precisely what we have attempted to do.

Summary and Conclusions

Leadership has long been perceived to be important to the effective functioning of organizations in general and, more recently, of schools in particular. However, some researchers and theorists assert that at best the research on school leadership is equivocal and at worst demonstrates that leadership has no effect on student achievement. In contrast, our meta-analysis of 35 years of research indicates that school leadership has a substantial effect on student achievement and provides guidance for experienced and aspiring administrators alike.

USING DATA

To Focus Instructional Improvement

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ASCD
Alexandria, Virginia USA

1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
Author guidelines: www.ascd.org/write

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USING DATA

To Focus Instructional Improvement

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1

Debugging the School

How is it that some schools make progress and others do not? In other words, what do highly effective schools do that makes a difference? The answer is fairly obvious. Effective schools use information that is available to them to continuously improve. Those improvements might be related to the culture of the school, the cleanliness of the facility, or the instructional program. The data—information—focus the efforts of the staff members on areas of strength and need.

The problem is not that some schools have access to information and others do not. Schools are awash in information about most aspects of their operation. Some schools just choose to ignore the information that is available to them. Other schools take a look at the information, perhaps take the time to acknowledge the problem, and then do nothing further about it. And still other schools examine the data, develop an intervention plan, and then fail to implement or monitor the plan. This book examines schools that function differently—schools that make a difference by using information available to them to continuously improve, specifically in the area of instruction. Starting with the assumption that opportunities for improvement always exist, we must purposefully seek out errors, understand their causes and effects, and then fix them for continuous improvement to occur. In the parlance of computer programmers, this process is called debugging. As such, continuous assessment can be used by virtually any educational system to study and then improve the experiences and outcomes of the people who teach and learn there. We are not saying that continuous instructional improvement is easy; we are saying that it is worth the effort.

Why Focus on Instruction?

The primary function of schools is to facilitate learning, which is accomplished through instruction. From years of study, the educational community knows quite a bit about effective instruction: that the climate can enhance or reduce learning (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), that learning is a reciprocal process that occurs between teacher and student (Brophy, 1982), and that teacher expertise matters (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Shulman, 1987). This last point has been made abundantly clear through a large-scale longitudinal study of the economic repercussions of access to high-quality teaching. Three economists (not educators) drew from two sources of data—federal income tax records and standardized test scores—from 1988 to 2009. These two data sets are readily available, but not commonly linked. The economists' ingenious approach? Investigating the economic impact of a high-value teacher (top 5 percent) on the lifetime earnings of a student. Their analysis revealed that having a high-value teacher for one year correlated with a $50,000 lifetime earnings increase for that student (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). They further reported that these students were more likely to go to college, and that the girls were less likely to become teenage mothers. By definition, not every teacher can be in the top 5 percent; it is mathematically impossible. But the most encouraging news is that replacing a low-value teacher (bottom 5 percent) with an average one equated to overall lifetime earnings that approached $1.4 million dollars per class of 27 students.

The economists' study speaks well to the continuous investment that should be made on the quality of instruction. Increasing teacher expertise positively affects the quality of life for our students long after they have left our classrooms. Replacing a low-value teacher doesn't need to be swapping out one individual for another; "replacing" could mean effectively supporting each teacher's professional growth. What if the instructional skills of every teacher were increased? Consider the effect this change would have on students. Do you know any teachers who aren't eager to become more expert at what they do? If so, they are in the minority of your collegial group. As educators, we all desire to be better at our job today than we were a year ago. We want to hone our teaching skills. But after the first few years of practice, during which we work out the obvious kinks of classroom management, lesson planning, and organization, where do we turn?

Our answer is that a climate exists within a successful school where data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, informs instructional expertise. In too many schools and

districts, data analysis is viewed as something separate from the daily life of the classroom. In too many instances, data analysis is reserved for a professional development session or scheduled for professional learning community discussions. These events are finite, with a start and stop time, and are only fitfully carried into the classroom. The challenge, as we see it, is to view data—not intuition, not anecdotal reports—as the tools we use to get better at teaching students. To get better at teaching requires us to relentlessly focus our attention, with laser-like precision, on instructional practice and improvement.

Focusing on Instructional Improvement

The first three phases of the instructional improvement model we propose have a lot in common with other systems that have been developed (e.g., Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010). More specifically, any instructional improvement system should begin by *surveying the information available within a school*—both hard and soft data—which is the focus of Chapters 2 and 3. Collecting hard and soft data require that school teams and their leaders develop assessment literacy, meaning that they come to understand what the assessments do and do not measure as well as the validity and reliability of the collected information.

In addition, a systematic approach to instructional improvement requires that *data are analyzed to identify patterns of strength and need*. The vast amounts of data that are available can overwhelm school teams to the point that they become paralyzed in the analysis phase and are unable to use the analysis to move to action. We have found it important in this phase to take time to celebrate successes and achievements. Although instructional improvement is about continuous progress, taking time to recognize areas of growth builds the capacity of the teams while reinforcing the notion that their efforts are rewarded.

The third part of a traditional approach to instructional improvement focuses on using the insights that were highlighted through analysis to *develop goals and objectives* that can drive the school improvement process forward. In high-performing schools, teachers and leaders engage as a community in all three phases of this process, from data collection to analysis and goal development. Developing specific and shared goals helps focus the efforts of a school and guides decisions about professional development and spending priorities, ensuring that there is significant community stakeholder involvement and investment in the outcomes.

Unfortunately, at this point in the process, many instructional improvement efforts end. In some situations, school teams meet at the beginning of the year, review their data from the previous year, and develop goals based on observed patterns. Then the school year starts and the well-meaning adults within these systems become busy as they do their best to meet the goals, but are unable to continue to assess the success of the implementation in all areas that affect students, faculty, staff, administration, and curriculum. The situation could be worse. Imagine a school where the principal independently analyzes data and then announces the goals for the year to the faculty and staff. Or worse yet, the leadership team receives information from the state assessments and files it away in a drawer, meaning to look at it later.

Despite good intentions, it's no wonder that some schools fail to improve. Instructional improvement is not the sole responsibility of the principal or even the leadership team. It is a shared responsibility of all the school's stakeholders, including students, parents, community members, classified staff, faculty, and administrators. It's also not about the plan itself. Simply writing goals and objectives for school improvement and sending the list to the district office or state department of education will not likely change the experience students have in school.

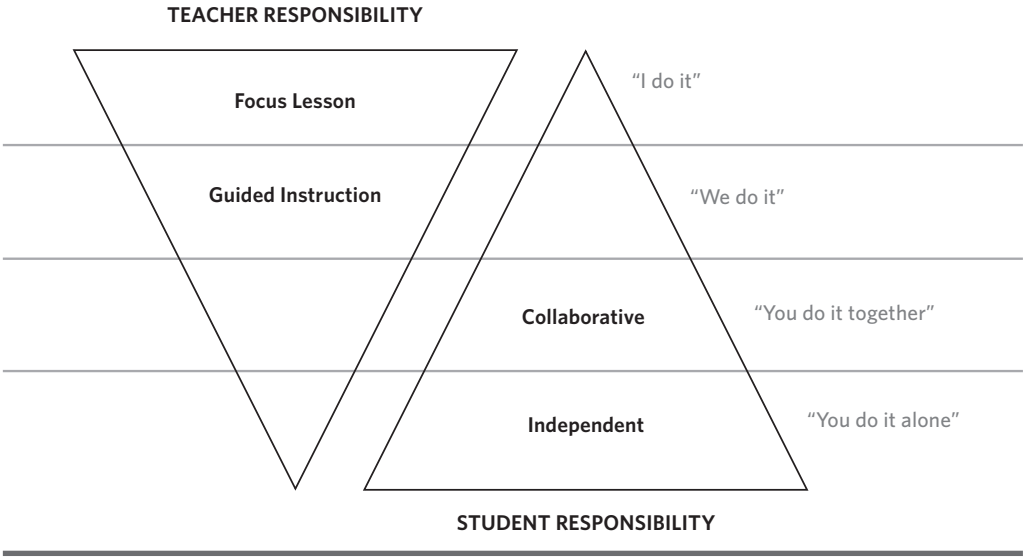
Following a Process

Developing an improvement plan is vital and will be addressed in more detail in the coming chapters. Let's temporarily put that to the side so we can highlight what happens *after* the plan is developed. Most conventional plans acknowledge that implementation and monitoring are important, yet offer few details on how that might be accomplished. Some teams assume that, once crafted, the details of the plan will fall into place. But then the inevitable occurs—competing priorities overwhelm the best of intentions and the plan is derailed. We contend that implementation and monitoring are all about building, maintaining, and extending the competence and confidence of everyone involved. And to do so, administrators need to see themselves as learners and to understand what it means to be a learner.

When it comes to developing our own students' competence and confidence, we turn to a gradual release of responsibility instructional framework (Fisher & Frey, 2008a). The framework is informed by the reading comprehension work of Pearson and Gallagher (1983) who provided a means for describing the shifting levels of cognitive responsibility

between teacher and student as the learner gains knowledge and skills. Our own work has further expanded this view by including other vital aspects of instruction, including setting purpose and fostering collaboration among peers. Concepts and skills are introduced to students through focus lessons that include statements of purpose as well as modeling, demonstrating, and thinking aloud by the teacher. The cognitive responsibility shifts a bit toward students during guided instruction, when they get an opportunity to apply the skill or concept under the watchful gaze of the teacher, who is available to help when understanding breaks down. Students use these skills and concepts in collaborative learning arrangements, where vital opportunities to make mistakes are paramount. As competence and confidence grow, the student is able to assume an increasing level of cognitive responsibility to learn independently and continue building knowledge. Figure 1.1 contains a diagram showing the shifting cognitive and metacognitive responsibility at each phase of learning.

FIGURE 1.1
Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Framework



Source: Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility* (p. 4). Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Used with permission.

The same principles for learning apply to adults. Our collective competence and confidence require the same kinds of scaffolds and supports. As with a classroom instructional framework, these concepts and skills rarely roll out neatly in a single lesson but are built over many lessons that occur over days, weeks, and even years. One notable difference in this instructional frame when we are teaching and learning with K–12 students versus when we apply it to support work with a faculty team is that the roles of "teacher" and "student" are not so clear cut. Within the context of instructional improvement, the "teacher" may be an instructional leader, the reading coach, or the 5th grade team, and the "student" may be the instructional leader, the reading coach, or the 5th grade team. Depending on what is being taught and learned, the roles should shift fluidly. We'll look at each phase of the gradual release of responsibility through the lens of instructional improvement.

The focus lesson

Purpose is established for the group, driven by the data or the need for the data, and it is essential for stakeholders to know exactly what is being done and why. For example, a school might analyze data and determine that mathematics achievement among students with special needs has stalled. An agreed purpose might be that the mathematics teachers need to learn more about the principles and application of universal design for learning (UDL). To accomplish this, the teachers and the principal might schedule several professional development sessions with the district math coordinator to build their skills. In these sessions, the teachers will have an opportunity to witness how UDL principles are used within the discipline. The math coordinator uses videos and lesson examples to model and demonstrate these applications and to think aloud about how she determines when, where, and for whom they are best suited.

Guided instruction

What does or does not occur after focus sessions has a direct effect on whether there is implementation. Joyce and Showers (2002) demonstrated that for professional knowledge to transfer to classroom practice, a system of follow-up support and instruction must exist. We believe that, in many cases, the transfer is expected to happen too quickly and teachers are expected to collaborate with one another too soon. Complex instructional practices like UDL, for example, are rarely immediately put into play. Yet without action, teacher collaboration and discussion of practice cannot occur. In many cases, what needs to happen after the initial focus lesson is some guided instruction. Guided

instruction occurs when small groups of learners try out newly learned skills with an expert analyzing their learning using questions, prompts, and cues (Fisher & Frey, 2010b). In the instructional improvement process, guided instruction might include work sessions with a team of teachers.

For example, the primary and intermediate grade teachers who participated in the initial professional development sessions with the district math coordinator decided to break into smaller groups to work with the special educators assigned to their grade bands. K–2 general education teachers worked together to analyze their math curricula to identify possible areas to improve using UDL principles, while the special educators for each grade level guided their understanding. During the work session, one of the special educators recognized that several math teachers possessed the misconception that one UDL accommodation alone would meet the needs of all students with special needs. She used questions, prompts, and cues to draw their attention to what they knew about individual students. The general educators soon realized that because of their students' diverse needs, more than one accommodation would be necessary to realize the UDL principle of making information perceptible.

Collaborative learning

In this phase, learners work together to refine their collective understanding of a concept or skill. Collaboration is essential to learning because it is the phase where errors can and should occur on a regular basis. Errors are critical to the learning process, as they illuminate what we know and still don't fully understand. This phase also primes learners for subsequent instruction, as they become more attuned to locating information to fix errors. In the case of the primary math team, they tried out the materials they had created using UDL principles in their own classrooms and then met in their professional learning community to report on their progress and areas of difficulty. During the course of their discussion, teachers brought examples of student work to analyze together. Teachers found that most of the targeted students had performed better than expected using the materials, but they also discovered that in two cases the students performed worse. The team members suspected that although they had designed and implemented the UDL accommodations adequately, they did not agree on the underlying mathematical concept they were teaching and consequently testing. Confounded by these findings, the teachers invited the school's math coach to do some follow-up guided instruction with them on the finer points of using mathematical models to explain concepts.

Independent learning

Learning is always iterative, in that it always moves forward and serves as a gateway to new inquiry. Our march toward learner independence is so that the learners we are charged with teaching can resolve problems outside the classroom. Similarly, in a continuous instructional improvement process, educators are increasingly able and willing to apply concepts and skills to new situations over time. But to do so, they need to have a sense of competence and confidence, also known as self-efficacy. For instance, 1st grade teacher Kim Larson discovered that she had a talent for and interest in using UDL principles and began to use these as a lens for looking at her curriculum. In time she attended several webinars and conference sessions on universal design for learning. After reading a book on UDL, *Teaching Every Child in the Digital Age* (Rose, Meyer, Strangman, & Rappolt, 2002), Ms. Larson used an online tool to analyze curriculum for barriers as part of the professional development for teachers new to their school (see http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/tools/curriculumbarriers.cfm). By combining her experiences with learning about UDL and applying these principles in her own classroom, Ms. Larson has evolved from being strictly a learner to facilitating the learning of others. In the next section, we will look more closely at how a middle school has woven the processes of gathering and analyzing data with those that focus on professional development cycles to foster continuous instructional improvement.

Instructional Improvement in Action

The faculty and staff of Mountain View Middle School met in late August to review student performance data. This school educates more than 1,000 students in grades 6–8, with 62 percent of the students qualifying for free lunch and 35 percent classified as English language learners. Within three years, the students at Mountain View made considerable progress. The achievement gap was closing, and students were performing at higher levels than ever before. The school attributes the gains to a systematic instructional improvement effort that starts with regular reviews of data and the development of goals and objectives that drive its curriculum and professional development work.

At the start of the school's data review session, the facilitator invites faculty and staff to a campfire—a metaphor for the interactions they will have with one another. The room is arranged in a circle of chairs, with tables and materials pushed to the outer perimeter. Faculty and staff are invited to share their celebrations, news, and greetings

from the summer. The facilitator of this meeting is the mathematics department chair, Marc Rose. In other meetings, different faculty and staff members have served as the facilitator. Mr. Rose reminds participants that it's impossible to drive by looking only in the rearview mirror, and that the purpose of data is best served when it is used to determine where to go next. Following a 20-minute campfire conversation, Mr. Rose transitions the conversation to the purpose of their work at that time: understanding and analyzing the data, formulating the right questions, and figuring out the next steps. Two questions are posted on chart paper on the wall:

- What do we know from the previous school year's data?
- How does this information compare to prior years?

Participants are invited to walk around the room and discuss the data charts. These visual displays of data will be added to the data room at school and will remain on the walls as a reminder for at least the next three years. Groups of five to six people (across content areas and grade levels) view the data charts and write questions about the data they are reviewing on sticky notes and affix them to the charts. Some of the questions that are asked include:

- Why did 6th grade have the lowest math scores?
- What changed to ensure that writing conventions improved consistently over the past three years?
- How can we maintain our 96 percent attendance rate?
- How do we attribute the decline in suspensions?

As they finished the carousel walk of posted data charts, participants were invited to return to the campfire to debrief. Each participant was provided a copy of the data and individuals were invited to share and explain what they noticed from a quick review of the data. The questions from the charts were then used to guide the debriefing.

The carousel and debriefing process required about an hour. In the past, this process took longer mainly because participants were not accustomed to looking at data, and some people became defensive about the implications of the data. Although no specific names were attached to the data, grade levels and subjects were identified. The principal had worked hard during the past couple of years to ensure that instructional improvement was viewed as a supportive process that resulted in celebrations and accomplishments.

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Rose invited participants to share celebrations relating to the data and everyone laughed, clapped, and passed around snacks. The range of celebrations from this meeting is noteworthy as many of the participants included information about past areas of focus in their comments. For example, Brenda Smith (a clerical staff member) said, "We've really maintained our attendance. Remember when these meetings focused on getting our students to school? Now, look at us! They're here, and it makes that part of my job easier so that I can get to some other things that need to get done."

Building on Ms. Smith's comment, Spanish teacher James Jimenez added, "And when they're here, they're learning a lot more. Just look at writing conventions. That was our focus last year. We all said that we would integrate a little bit of this into our content areas, and look what we did. We more than met the goal."

The celebratory conversation continued for several more minutes, with accolades for specific staff members and students. Mr. Rose then turned the group's attention to the next step—pattern analysis. In groups of four or five, participants were invited to brainstorm questions about the patterns they were noticing and to write these questions on chart paper. Groups were given 10 minutes to brainstorm and record ideas and were then asked to choose the three most important questions to share with the whole group. English teacher Debbie Fadol recorded the questions on a large chart. When all the questions were listed, people were asked what they noticed as a result of this exercise. They were reminded not to jump to conclusions or solutions, but rather to focus on the trends across the questions.

Cathy Lancaster, a 7th grade social studies teacher, focused on the achievement in mathematics saying, "We've come a long way and made a lot of progress. But I think it's time we tackle something that is a bit harder for us all: math. I've even said to my students, 'I'm not so good in math' and referred them to the after-school program and faculty for help. Last year we took on writing conventions, and we all agreed to do that. In retrospect, that was easy. It's time to focus on math, which means that we're all going to need to learn some math so that we can help our students. I know that this sounds strange coming from me, but if I learn the math itself, I'll figure out a way for students to practice in my social studies classes."

Mr. Rose asked for comments, all of which supported Ms. Lancaster's proposal to focus on math and the need to continue the work on writing conventions. Bob Villarino, science department chair, added, "We look at data all year long. And we use our

formative assessments to guide what we do with individual students. But I agree with Cathy. We should make math our big push for this year. Let's drill down and see what we can do."

During the next phase of their conversation, teachers looked at item analysis reports on mathematics. In reviewing the math data, two specific strands were identified because of the low percentage of successful students. Both the measurement/geometry and the statistics/probability strands were areas of noted deficiency. These two areas account for 33 percent of the test, so they have a significant affect on student achievement. As groups of teachers reviewed individual student test scores, they began to notice that there was a significant population of students that scored proficient in nearly all strands of the math test with the exception of two strands: geometry and statistics. As they continued investigating the data and looking for patterns, Ms. Lancaster interrupted the groups, excitedly announcing, "These students are all within one to five questions from moving into the next proficiency level. That means we could really change this trend with some attention to the issue. And, we can all focus on statistics in our classes. I can easily do that in social studies, and so can a lot of other teachers. I would like to learn a bit more about this to be sure that I'm teaching it right, but I'm excited. This is way more doable than I first thought."

Within this meeting, staff and faculty agreed to goals and objectives, including:

- Goal: Students at Mountain View Middle School will improve their math scores in statistics/probability and measurement/geometry.
  - » Objective 1: The target intervention group will increase scores on the measurement/geometry strand of the math test to 65 percent by the end of the school year.
  - » Objective 2: The target intervention group will increase scores on the statistics strand of the math test to 75 percent by the end of the school year.
  - » Objective 3: The target intervention group will score 80 percent or higher on the specified strands of the benchmark tests that are given every four weeks.
  - » Objective 4: The target intervention group will score at least 8 out of 10 on weekly measurement/geometry and statistics quizzes that will include content and academic vocabulary.

In some school systems, this conversation and the identification of these targets would be seen as significant progress. And they are. In other schools, a discussion about data and the development of a target group for systematic intervention simply does not, or

cannot, happen, and that type of environment is not sufficient to improve instruction. Our goal in this text is to share strategies for developing and implementing systems that allow for continuous improvement of instruction.

Thankfully, the staff and faculty of Mountain View Middle School understood that their data review and analysis along with the development of goals and objectives were just the first steps. As part of their discussion, they also identified the learning that would need to occur if they were going to meet the objectives. They also understood that they needed to focus on the curriculum, and not just in the math classes, to accomplish these goals. The staff and faculty acknowledged the tension that exists in adding something to the curriculum while trying to maintain momentum on the previous years' goals. They scheduled additional assessments to review later in the year, and they planned quick, focused observations in classrooms, also called learning walks or walk throughs. In other words, they knew that the success of their school improvement would be an ongoing process, not a single event.

During a subsequent meeting, the county math coordinator gave a presentation to the entire staff. The purpose of the professional development event was posted on the wall: "To expand our collective understanding of statistics such that we can integrate statistics practice in lessons at least weekly." The visitor modeled several lessons from different content areas and showed a video clip from an art class in which students were asked to calculate statistics from survey results they had collected from patrons at a local museum. The presenter paused the video several times to think aloud about the process the teacher was using and to name the procedures that were helpful in building student learning.

During the week that followed the professional development event, teachers met in their course-alike groups with the principal and district curriculum coordinator. The principal said, "It's hard on my calendar to be in each of these meetings, but I need to learn from this process and I need to ask the right questions as I guide this process." In the course-alike meetings, groups of teachers considered the effect of the additional focus on statistics on their pacing guides. They were not provided an answer, but were guided in thinking about how to address the goal and objectives that they developed at the start of the year.

In addition, teachers met in their professional learning communities to look at data that included the math benchmarks as well as data about student performance in their own classes. These meetings were not routinely attended by site administrators. Each

group maintained notes about the meeting so that the group members could look back on their discussions. As teachers collaborated with their colleagues, they consolidated their understanding and planned interventions for students who were not making progress. Individually, teachers implemented their curriculum, developed and used formative assessments to gauge student understanding, and were observed by their principal and various walk-through teams.

Quality Assurance

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, an underlying assumption of continuous instructional improvement is that problems exist and are not readily apparent to the user. Our job as educators is to seek them out, analyze them, and find a way to address them. Some problems are surprisingly easy to fix, but most are not. In fact, the ones that are most entrenched can be the most difficult to address, precisely because they have become part of the fabric of the school. Exposing these problems, examining them closely, and fixing them can extend over many months and years. The time commitment alone demands that there be a process for gauging progress. This process, called quality assurance, is "the planned and systematic activities implemented in a quality system so that quality requirements for a product or service will be fulfilled" (ASQ, 2012). In an organization as complex as a school, monitoring the processes related to instructional improvement is crucial because it is so easy to become consumed with daily demands and lose sight of the longer view.

We will end each chapter of this book with a section called quality assurance. This section is meant to serve as a reminder to do the parallel work of ensuring that there is a means for making the kinds of mid-course adjustments that will necessarily occur, without losing sight of the goals your school set out to achieve. In this first chapter we discussed the components of a gradual release of responsibility instructional framework, and its application to adult learning in schools with faculties that strive for continuous instructional improvement. We concluded with a description of one middle school as the staff members located and identified a problem, and then charged themselves with the task of fixing it. Before reading the next chapter, please take some time to reflect on the following questions designed to debug your school:

- What is the history of instructional improvement at your school or district?
- What efforts and initiatives have worked well? Why do you believe that is so?

- What efforts and initiatives have failed? Why do you believe that is so?
- What lessons should be carried forward as your school or district engages in continuous instructional improvement?

EDUCATION

USING DATA To Focus Instructional Improvement

Data. Does the word make you cringe? Does it evoke feelings of guilt? Are you unsure how to distill it and use it effectively?

Grab this book and learn how to empower yourself and your school community with information gleaned from your school's data. Experienced educators and authors offer simple instructions that can help focus school improvement efforts and result in increasing teacher expertise—a factor that positively affects the quality of life for students long after they have left the classroom. Accepting responsibility for such far-reaching influence requires educators to adopt instructional improvement as a standard by which a school needs to operate and as a means to collaborate and interact with one another. More than that, though, instructional improvement is an important component of successful schools.

Learn how to improve instruction by

- Collecting the right data—the right way.
- Incorporating relevant data into everyone's daily life.
- Resisting the impulse to set brand-new goals every year.
- Never settling for "good enough."
- Anticipating changes—big and small, local and federal.
- Collaborating and avoiding privatized practice.
- Involving all stakeholders in identifying problems, setting goals, and analyzing data.
- Agreeing on what constitutes high-quality instruction and feedback.

The challenge is to understand that data—not intuition or anecdotal reports—are tools to be used in getting better at teaching students. And teaching students effectively is what schools are all about. Following the guidance in this book, overcome uncertainty and concerns about data as you learn to collect and analyze both soft and hard data and use their secrets for instructional improvement in your school.

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