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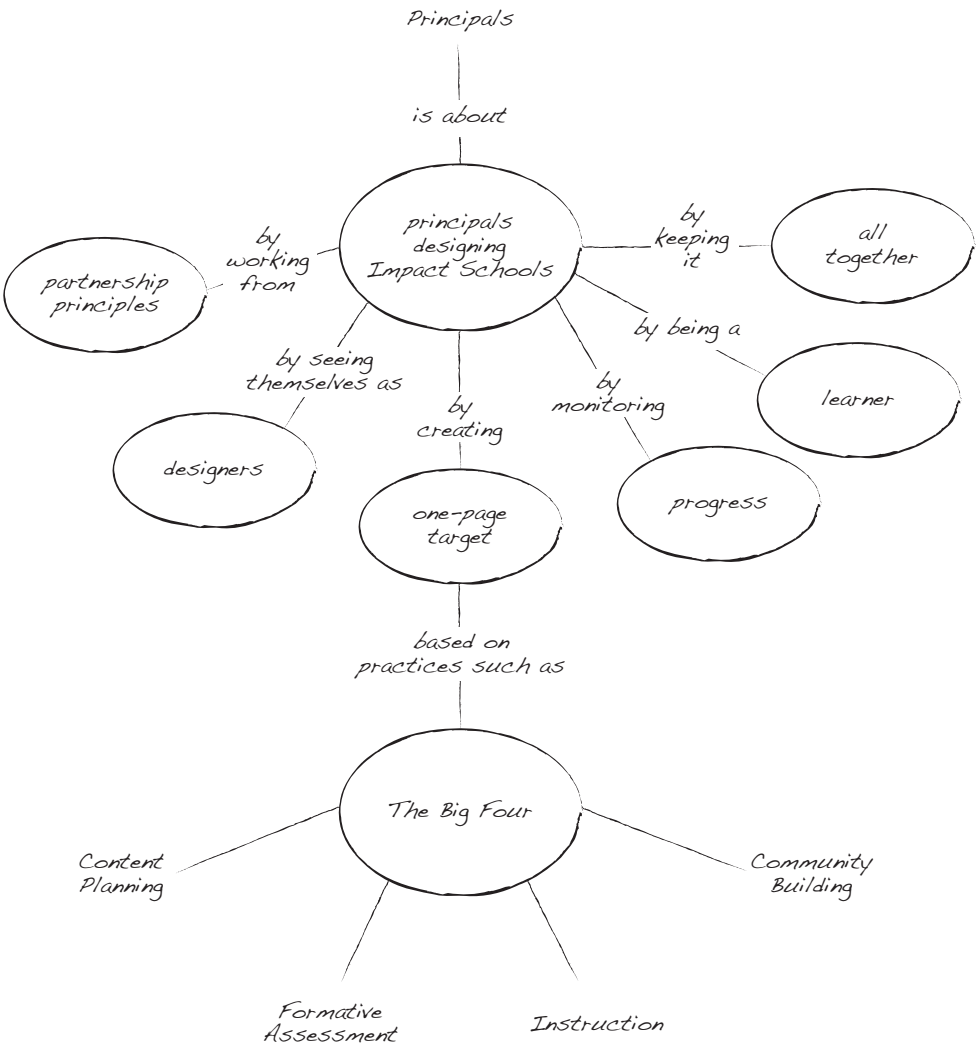
Principals



In 1996, I was involved in a fascinating project with Canada's postal service. I was asked to consult with managers across the country to help them become systems thinkers as they approached the retail aspects of the postal service—selling T-shirts, limited-edition stamp sets, post cards, expensive coins, and so forth—which fully made up 25 percent of the post office's business.

The project took me across western and central Canada as I interviewed more than 100 regional managers and directors about the challenges and opportunities they saw for their regions. In the process, I learned a lot of about leadership. A theme repeated in almost every interview: leaders who are respected are the ones who "walk the talk," people who are always willing to do whatever they ask their direct reports to do.

Since then, this concept has gained widespread acceptance. Peter Senge and his colleagues dedicated an entire chapter to the topic in *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations* (1999). The authors' research with the Society for Organizational Learning uncovered that "walking the talk" was essential because

> If managers are not authentic in their convictions and sincere in their behavior, there will be little trust, and consequently little safety for the reflection that leads to authentic change . . . People do expect perfection, but they recognize sincerity and openness—and their absence. (pp. 194–195)

When leaders walk the talk, by employing the partnership communication strategies described in Chapter 7, for example, they communicate that they are committed to the goals of a change initiative, and they are seen as credible, thereby winning their colleagues' respect. Further, leaders who walk the talk have a deep knowledge of the work done by people in the field. In schools, this means that principals understand good instruction and support and lead professional learning that makes an impact.

In Impact Schools, all the forms of professional learning are integrated, so teachers can master and implement the practices on the Target. Thus, instructional coaching, workshops, intensive learning teams, and all other forms of professional learning focus on a small number of high-leverage teaching practices. Additionally, principals' observations and evaluations of teachers similarly focus on the Target. Indeed, the principal plays the central role in translating the Target into the goal of every student receiving excellent instruction every day in every class. When it comes to ensuring that professional learning is

focused, effective, integrated, and leading to change, the principal is the hub of a rapidly moving wheel.

There is no way around this: if a school is going to be an Impact School, the principal must roll up her sleeves and be at the heart of the professional learning—co-planning what will happen, observing progress, and keeping the wheel rolling. The reason is simple: the voice of the principal carries more weight than anyone else's in a school. As Jim Collins and Jerry Porras (1994) uncovered when they studied the successful habits of visionary companies, in every work setting, people are most concerned by the person they report to directly. If a principal does not vocally, symbolically, and authentically stress the importance of instructional improvement, then it most likely won't happen.

There are simple but specific actions principals can take to keep professional learning on track and moving forward. Principals can take the partnership approach, modified in a way that accounts for the role principals play in leading change in schools. They can design opportunities for professional learning that makes an impact, and they can guide the development of an Instructional Improvement Target that stands at the heart of all professional learning activities. Principals can gain a deep knowledge of effective instruction by exploring comprehensive instructional models such as the Big Four. Principals will be more effective if they walk the talk by being the "first learner" in the school and if they manage projects and themselves effectively. Finally, principals can work with central office to ensure that their initiatives are sustained and supported. All of these practices are described below.

Leading Schools and the Partnership Principles

Equality

Whenever a boss and employee meet, their relationship is structurally unequal. Within the school setting, the same is true. The principal observes and evaluates teachers and makes ultimate decisions about what teachers do in the school, including, in some extreme cases, whether or not a teacher works at a school. In the overall structure of a school, the principal and the teacher are not equal.

However, this inequality is *only* structural. Indeed, if principals confuse structural inequality with true inequality—in other words, if principals start to think they are more valuable or important than others in the school because of the unique role they hold—they will lose the respect of their staff and almost always fail as leaders.

Principals adhering to the partnership approach recognize that although they have different roles than teachers, everyone is equally valuable. Leaders who genuinely win the respect of their staff are those who never miss an opportunity to demonstrate their respect for others. That respect is manifested in the six other partnership principles—choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity.

Choice

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are limits to choice, and freedom occurs best within form. The principal is the person who designs opportunities for freedom within form. He offers real choices that have real implications, but he recognizes and sometimes creates structures for those choices.

Let's look at an example. Imagine that Charlotte Mason Middle School has identified 90 percent time on task as an Instructional Improvement Target. The goal is written on the one-page Target that everyone helped created and strategies for increasing engagement are shared by coaches, talked about in workshops, and planned during intensive learning teams. The principal, Wendy Bower, conducts weekly observations of all teachers' classrooms, and she notices that Alex Short has on average about 65 percent student engagement. Wendy can handle this situation in a way that honors choice, or not.

When Principal Bower honors choice, she offers Alex lots of options. After explaining to Alex that in the observations she has conducted the average time on task score is 65 percent, she could offer several choices, such as suggesting Alex attend an upcoming workshop, read a book on engaging instruction, review a video program on the topic, or work with the school's instructional coach. Wendy could say something like, "Alex, how you do it is up to you, but we need to reach our goal. You decide what works best for you, and I'll check back to see how things are going." In this way, the principal keeps everyone focused on the Target, while providing real choices that honor the professionalism of teachers.

Voice

To honor voice, principals need to listen to teachers. Indeed, Chapter 7 presents simple strategies everyone can use to listen more effectively. Principals who see teachers as equals embrace the opportunity to hear what others think and feel. Indeed, I recommend principals make a point of having frequent one-to-one conversations with

teachers so that (a) teachers have a chance to communicate the joys and frustrations they're experiencing with their work, and (b) principals gather an understanding of what teachers think about what is happening in the school.

Here, again, the concept of freedom within form applies. Decisions must be made. Principals must lead team and school meetings that provide an opportunity for everyone to speak, but they also need to use dialogue structures and facilitation skills, such as those described in Chapter 6, to keep conversation focused on action and moving forward. Michael Fullan (2010a) calls this relentless leadership. When it comes to student achievement, principals need to keep the school moving forward.

Reflection

Much of the joy and meaning of professional work involves using knowledge, imagination, wisdom, and ingenuity to wrestle with and resolve challenges through thinking and reflection. If principals or district leaders take this opportunity away from teachers, by doing the thinking for them and telling them what to teach and how, they deny them much of the joy of the job. When administrators honor the principle of reflection, they make sure that, whenever possible, teachers are the ones doing the thinking.

When people come together to really think through challenging issues, by brainstorming, synthesizing, and planning for implementation, when they are really involved in designing and acting on solutions, there is almost always a humane and encouraging positive energy in the room. Furthermore, people who create solutions are more committed to the solutions.

Dialogue

Sharing ideas between two people involves dialogue—two people thinking together. Indeed, I think dialogue is a necessary prerequisite for reflection to occur. Not much thinking occurs when people are told what to do, or at least not much constructive thinking occurs.

Principals can encourage dialogue at both the micro and the macro level. In one-to-one conversation, they can take a listening, rather than a telling, stance. This is not always easy, but by practicing the partnership communication skills described in Chapter 7, leaders can become skillful at entering into conversations as learners rather than teachers—that is, by taking a listening stance. As Safeway's VP

of marketing, Diane Dietz, has said, "people love to learn, but hate to be taught" (Liu, 2004, p. 58).

Across the school, principals can foster a culture of dialogue by facilitating group discussions in a manner that opens up conversation rather than shuts it down by using the facilitation skills described in Chapter 6. Principals can also increase the chances of authentic dialogue by setting up workshops and other learning opportunities to increase the communication skills of everyone in the school. Chapter 7, again, provides a starting point for what that learning might entail.

One powerful form of learning is to video record team meetings (assuming everyone accepts the idea) and then having everyone review the recording to see how they interacted. I can attest to the fact that it is a powerful catalyst for change.

Praxis

There are at least two things principals can do to create a setting where praxis is possible. First, they can ensure that all forms of professional learning are meaningful and relevant to teachers. Praxis isn't possible unless what teachers are learning is immediately applicable to real-life issues in the classroom.

Second, principals can ensure that teachers have the freedom to make real decisions about the way they teach. The more opportunity teachers have to creatively think through teaching and learning, the more they are able to think and plan how they are going to teach, and the more committed they will be implementing improvement plans. Praxis involves reflecting on reality so that you can act, and reflection isn't possible unless people are free to choose how to make sense of what they are learning.

Reciprocity

At one level, when principals honor reciprocity, they see themselves as learners in the school. Thus, they approach teachers humbly, expecting to learn from them every day. Indeed, when principals expect to learn from their teachers, in most cases, they are rewarded by learning an enormous about instruction, content, relationship building, students, and so forth. Reciprocity is a way for principals to communicate that they see the talent and expertise of their teachers, but at the same time it enables principals to expand their understanding of effective teaching practices, thanks to all they learn from staff. Roland Barth made this point back in 1990:

> In a school that is a community of learners, the principal occupies a central place, not as the headmaster or "head" teacher, suffering under what has been called the "burden of ascribed omniscience." Rather, the principal occupies a more important position of leadership as the *head learner,* engaging in, displaying, and modeling the behaviors we want teachers and students to adopt. (p. 513)

Beyond a more personal level, reciprocity should also occur at the organizational level, with principals creating structures that enable the school as an organization to learn. Thus, principals can meet one to one or with small groups of teachers, provide teachers with surveys, conduct teaching experiments, establish intensive learning teams, and do many other things to ensure that ideas are being surfaced and widely shared across a school. To create schools where organizational learning is the norm, principals need to constantly look for ways to learn what is happening with the school.

Principals as Designers

One primary task for principals, perhaps the primary task, is to design opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning that has an unmistakable impact on the way they teach and the way students learn. To accomplish this, principals need to embrace what Tim Brown (2009), CEO of the world-famous design firm IDEO, refers to as *design thinking*.

The idea of the leader as a designer has been raised in different ways by many others. For example, Collins and Porras (1994), after their study of visionary organizations, concluded that the most effective leaders are "clock-builders":

> The builders of visionary companies tend to be clock builders, not time tellers. They concentrate primarily on building an organization . . . The primary output of their efforts is not the tangible implementation of a great idea, the expression of a charismatic personality, the gratification of their ego, or the accumulation of personal wealth. Their greatest creation is the company itself and what it stands for. (p. 23)

Michael Fullan describes leadership similarly in *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008): "Perhaps the best way to view leadership is as a task

of architecting organizational systems, teams, and cultures—as establishing the conditions and preconditions for others to succeed" (p. 118).

Senge (2006), too, more than two decades ago, described leaders as optimally being designers:

> If people imagine their organizations as an ocean liner and themselves as the leaders, what is their role? For years, the common answer I received when posting this question to groups of managers was the "captain." Others might say "the navigator, setting the direction," or "the engineer down below stoking the flame, providing energy," or even "the social director making sure everybody's enrolled, involved, and communicating." While these are legitimate leadership roles, there is another, which in many ways, eclipses them all in importance. Yet rarely do people think of it.
>
> The neglected role is that of the designer of the ship. No one has a more sweeping influence on the ship than the designer . . . It's fruitless to be the leader in an organization that is poorly designed. (p. 321)

Principals as designers are the primary creators of opportunities that enable professional learning to flourish. They ensure that professional learning is aligned to support implementation of the Target, and they use the core questions below as guidelines for effective professional learning. This means, for example, that they ensure workshops focus on the Target and that the workshops are conducted by facilitators who use effective teaching practices.

As designers, principals also ensure that the right people are hired to be instructional coaches and that those people receive extensive support so that they can be successful. Principals also use "design thinking" to find essential resources such as time, money, and expertise. This might involve doubling up classes once a month to free up time for professional learning, as schools do in the Blue Springs District outside of Kansas City, writing for grants such as GEARUP or Striving Readers to fund professional learning, or partnering with universities or other school districts to tap into their expertise. All the time, as designers, principals must hold true to the goal of achieving implementation of the Target so that every student receives excellent instruction every day in every class.

Core Questions for Impact Schools

Goal: Students receive excellent instruction every day in every class.

School

- Do we have a one-page instructional-improvement plan that clearly describes the critical teaching behaviors that are most important for our students and teachers?

Principal

- Do I know precisely what it looks like when the teaching practices on the instructional improvement plan are used effectively by teachers?
- Do I know exactly how well each teacher is doing in implementing those practices?
- Do I know how to prompt teachers to use the school's professional learning opportunities to master the teaching practices in the Target?
- Do I know how to communicate clearly and positively so that staff are motivated to implement the Target?

Teacher

- Is the content I teach carefully aligned with state standards?
- Do I clearly understand how well my students are learning the content taught?
- Do my students understand how well they are learning the content being taught?
- Do I fully understand and use a variety of teaching practices to ensure my students master the content being taught in my class?
- Do my students behave in a manner that is consistent with our classroom expectations?

Workshops

- Do workshops focus exclusively on the teaching practices in the instructional improvement plan?
- Do workshop facilitators use effective teaching practices?
- Does each workshop conclude with teachers planning how to use their coach to implement the practices learned during the workshop?

Teams

- Do teams and professional learning communities focus exclusively on the teaching practices in the instructional improvement plan?

- Do teachers use coaches to help them implement the methods and materials developed during team meetings?

Coaches

- Do I have a deep understanding of *all* of the teaching practices in the instructional improvement plan?
- Can I provide sufficient support (precise explanations, modeling, observation, feedback, and questioning), so teachers can implement the practices?

The Target

Almost every school in the United States has a school improvement plan. Such plans usually focus on literacy and mathematics goals and include detailed explanations of new practices to be implemented, with objectives to be met, timelines, data, and other information. A great deal of time is spent drafting these plans, often involving multiple staff meetings, and the documents themselves can become quite lengthy statements (sometimes longer than 70 pages) about how schools should improve. Unfortunately, too often, school improvement plans do not make an impact on instruction. As Bill Sommers has said, the plan can become an addition to the wall of binders decorating the principal's office.

There at least two reasons why school improvement plans may fail to accomplish their intended purpose to be catalysts for dramatic improvements. First, if a plan is long, few will fully understand all of the information it contains, and many may not even read it. The human brain generally does not find it easy to understand and use large amounts of information—especially if the information is written in somewhat abstract language. Michael Fullan (2010b) puts this concisely: "fat plans don't move" (p. 24).

Second, if the plan is too complex, it is also hard for people to understand it fully. The person or people responsible for the program may understand the plan, but there is insufficient knowledge across a school for the coordinated kind of professional learning necessary for unmistakable impact. This means that there are multiple interpretations of the plan, with different teachers implementing it differently, and different administrators and other leaders supporting implementation differently. Thus, the focused collaboration that is essential for never occurs.

Finally, school improvement plans often do not address the nuts and bolts of instruction. A plan might include powerful literacy or

mathematics programs for improvement, but if those programs are not implemented by teachers using effective teaching practices, they probably won't help students. No program will work until children are engaged. Educational change leaders need to give at least as much attention to instruction as they do to literacy or mathematics programs if they want to see significant improvements and achieve excellent instruction for every student, in every classroom, every day.

At the heart of the improvement plan in an Impact School is the Target, a simple, one-page document that clearly states the school's goals for instructional improvement. The Target can include student learning or behavioral goals or some other form of goal, but what matters is that the document is simple, clear, easily understood, and doable. Further, the Target should be written in such a way that it can be completely understood without any additional explanation.

Writing a one-page Target forces everyone involved to be extremely clear. There is no room for fluff when you only have one page, and there are no extra pages to hide a lack of clarity. This approach to improvement has been utilized by Kent Greens, chief knowledge office for SAIC, a high-tech research and engineering firm:

> We get people focused through one-page tools . . . If you can actually get everything on one page –and not just editing stuff out—that means the tool and the process caused you to reflect on what it is you want to do. If you limit the number of pages people have to explain themselves, it forces them to reflect first and think about what they're trying to do. That's very important. (Jensen, 2000, pp. 52–53)

Instructional Improvement Target

Community Building

(T) Posts expectations and ensures they are followed by students
(T) Interacts with at least a 3:1 ratio of interaction
(S) Are on task at least 90 percent or more
(S) Keep disruptions to no more than four each 10 minutes

Content Planning

(T) Creates and shares unit questions with students effectively
(T) Fully understands the standards for the course being taught

(T) Has created a learning map and shares it with students effectively
(S) Can paraphrase the guiding questions
(S) Can describing the plan for the unit as laid out on the map
(S) Have the questions and map open on their desk before class starts

Instruction

(T) Uses intensive-explicit teaching practices appropriately
(T) Uses constructivist teaching practices appropriately
(T) Uses cooperative learning, stories, effective questions, thinking prompts, challenging assignments, experiential learning, and other similar practices appropriately
(S) Maintain a pass rate of 95 percent or higher
(S) Enjoy learning in the classroom

Assessment for Learning

(T) Uses informal assessments effectively
(T) Knows how each students' learning is progressing
(S) Understand the learning targets for all learning
(S) Know how their personal learning is progressing

(T) = Teacher
(S) = Students

The Target does not have to be only written for instruction—although instruction is the focus of this book. Targets can be written for literacy or mathematics goals in school improvement plans. In addition, targets can be longer than one page, if necessary. The one-page limit is somewhat arbitrary. The important thing is that *every* educator in the school fully understands exactly what the Target means and the teaching practices that it embodies.

The Big Four

Student needs, teacher needs, school, district, or state goals may all influence what is included in the Target, but many leaders find it helpful to consider a comprehensive approach to improving instruction, such as Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (2007).

At the Kansas Coaching Project, we have developed a comprehensive approach to improving instruction based on an exhaustive reading of the research literature and our own experience working with numerous districts across Canada and the United States. We have given our model the nickname the Big Four because it is built around four critical instructional areas of (1) planning content, (2) developing and using formative assessments, (3) delivering instruction, and (4) community building. The teaching practices of the Big Four and tools for coaching and observing those practices are described in detail in *Instruction That Makes an Impact* (Knight, 2011). In many of the districts with whom we partner, we use the Big Four as a foundation for developing the Target.

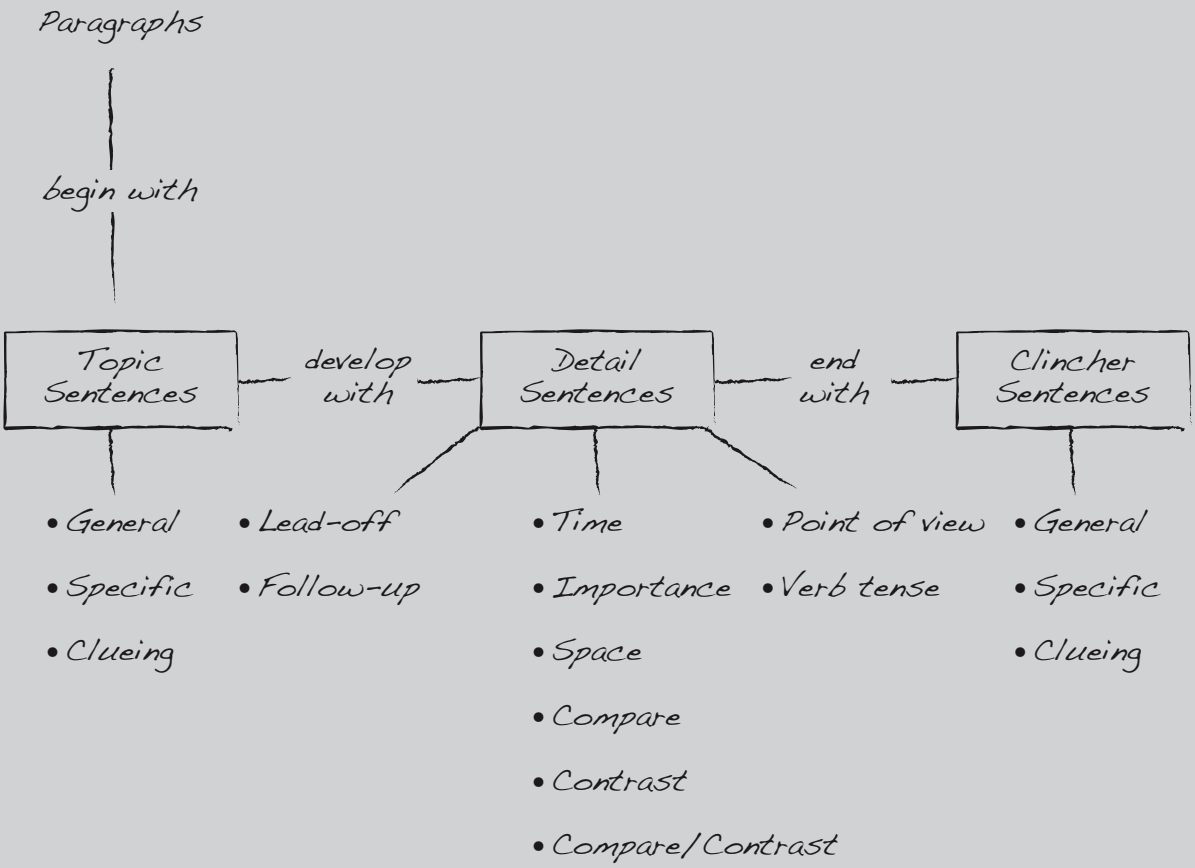
Content Planning

I like to explain the components of the Big Four by describing a course as a journey to be taken by the teacher and students. The goal or destination for the journey is provided by content planning. In the Big Four, this involves unpacking the standards and using them as a foundation for creating guiding questions that guide students to the knowledge, skills, and understandings they need to acquire. Content planning also involves creating learning maps for each unit—every journey needs a map—and sharing the map and questions frequently with students so that they remember the ultimate destination.

Sample Guiding Questions: Paragraph Writing Unit

1. Why is it important to organize our writing?
2. What are several sequencing patterns I can use to organize my writing?
3. What are topic, detail, and clincher sentences?
4. What are the different types of topic, detail, and clincher sentences?
5. What is the best way for *me* to put together the various types of sentences in paragraphs?
6. How can I use my understanding of point of view and verb tense to write better paragraphs?

Sample Learning Map: Paragraph Writing Unit



Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is the learner's GPS. When teachers use formative assessment, they answer the guiding questions developed during content planning by clearly stating the answers in discrete statements that describe everything a student needs to know, understand, or do to answer a question—I refer to these statements as specific proficiencies. Following this, teachers identify simple assessments (everything from whiteboards to graphic organizers to quizzes to thumbs up and thumbs down) they can use in the moment during teaching to gauge how well students understand what is being taught.

Formative Assessment

1. Identify unit questions.
2. Develop answers (what do my students need to know/need to be able to do to answer this question?).
3. Write specific proficiencies.
4. Identify informal assessments.
5. Use the assessments effectively.
6. Revisit, reflect, revise.

Instruction

The energy that drives the classroom journey is instruction. There are a multitude of practices that an outstanding teacher might use to reach, teach, and inspire students. Out of that multitude, we propose six high-leverage teaching practices that are fairly easy to implement and that can have a powerful, positive impact on student learning:

- *Effective questions* are questions that (a) address knowledge, understanding, or application domains of practice; (b) are open-ended or close-ended; and (c) promote convergent or divergent learning.
- *Thinking prompts* are provocative objects such as cases, vignettes, news articles, short stories, or quotations that teachers use to generate conversation and dialogue in the classroom.
- *Stories* are short anecdotes or narratives that teachers use to generate interest, anchor new knowledge, instill hope, provide a context, offer new perspectives, and build community.
- *Cooperative learning* involves group-learning activities that are mediated by students and in which students have shared goals and specific roles to perform.
- *Experiential learning* involves structured learning activities that simulate the knowledge, understandings, or actions students are learning so that students actually "live out" the content about which they are learning.
- *Quality assignments* involve authentic, appropriately challenging, student-centered activities that engage students and promote deep learning.

Community Building

Community building, the final component of the Big Four, ensures that the journey is a smooth ride. Community building involves developing and teaching clear expectations for all activities and transitions in the classroom, reinforcing those expectations by frequently praising students and calmly, consistently, and fluently correcting them when necessary. Additionally, community building is enhanced when the teacher communicates a deep respect for students and empowers them to communicate a similar respect toward everyone they meet. A focus on community building also involves making the classroom more interactive and engaging.

Mechanical and Metaphorical Learning

A simple distinction lies at the heart of the Big Four. I break learning into two categories: mechanical learning and metaphorical learning.

Mechanical Learning

Mechanical learning refers to learning whose goal is for the student to master content, skills, or information exactly as it is presented. Mechanical learning has right and wrong answers. For example, if a teacher is teaching grammatical concepts, the goal might be to ensure that all students will remember the grammatical concepts in exactly the same way. Thus, all students would know that a subject of a sentence is "a noun that says what a sentence is all about." Similarly, if a teacher is teaching math facts, his goal might be for all students to remember that $4 \times 4 = 16$.

Metaphorical Learning

Metaphorical learning refers to learning where students need to be free to interpret or make sense of learning in their own way. Mechanical learning has no clearly right or wrong outcomes. For example, if students are learning to interpret poetry, the teacher might want them to come to their own conclusions about what a poem means. Similarly, a teacher might want students to develop their own ways of solving problems. With metaphorical learning, the teacher's goal is to ensure that everyone learns the material in the way that is uniquely appropriate for them.

Both mechanical learning and metaphorical learning occur all the time in the classroom. When a teacher is encouraging mechanical learning, her goal is to ensure that all students have the same picture in their mind as she does. Consequently, when teachers use the Big Four practices for mechanical learning, they use them to confirm understanding and ensure mastery. For example, if during mechanical instruction a teacher is using questioning techniques from the Big Four, she would likely use close-ended, right-or-wrong questions during direct instruction.

When a teacher is encouraging metaphorical learning, on the other hand, their goal is to ensure that all students create their own picture of the content they are learning. Consequently, when teachers use Big Four practices for metaphorical learning, they use it to provide opportunities for students to construct their own knowledge. For example, if a teacher is using questioning techniques from the Big Four, they would likely use open-ended opinion questions during constructivist classroom dialogue.

Whatever approaches to instruction a school embraces, the distinction between these two types of learning is important. Similar distinctions have been referred to, for example, as *convergent* and *divergent thinking* (Guilford, 1967) or *procedural* and *declarative knowledge* (Anderson, 1976). Whatever the term used, the important point is that instructional practices be used in a manner that supports the kind of learning that is aimed at. When educators construct a target, this fundamental distinction must be kept in mind.

The Big Four is only one approach to improving instruction, and in any school, the Target must be tailored to meet teachers' and students' unique needs. It doesn't matter whether a Target utilizes the ideas of Danielson (2007) or Hattie (2009) or the Big Four—or any other instructional approach or a hybrid of practices. What matters is that the approach enables the development of a Target that (a) is easily understood by every teacher, (b) encourages all teachers to be committed to the Target, and (c) helps teachers teach in a way that increases the chances that every student receives excellent instruction every day in every class.

Creating the Target

There are likely as many different ways to draft a Target as there are Targets, but a few simple ideas should be kept in mind. First, every educator should have an opportunity to provide authentic input into

the document. Second, the Target should challenge every educator to become a more effective instructor. Third, the Target should describe teaching practices that will genuinely help meet students' needs. Fourth, the Target, when completed, should describe a compelling set of goals that are easily understood and that everyone is committed to achieving.

Guiding the development of the Target is one of the most nuanced challenges facing an instructional leader. If teachers are going to commit to the Target, they must play an active role in its development. As discussed in Chapter 2, people want to be involved in the thinking that leads to initiatives, and they will are likely to embrace goals that they help create. However, many teachers do not fully understand how they go about doing their work. Often, we are not the best judge of what we need, simply because we are inside the work, not watching from the outside. Thus, the complexity. Teachers need to co-construct their practices, but they may not fully understand what they need to do.

When guiding the development of the Target, the principal's job, then, is to walk the tight rope between freedom and form. On the one hand, they must actively solicit, listen to, and act on the ideas and concerns of teachers. On the other hand, they must ensure that the Target addresses the issues that have highest leverage for improving student learning.

To help with this process, we recommend that principals establish a Target Design Team, a group of teachers and administrators who work with the principal to create a Target that all (or at least almost all) teachers are committed to achieving. This section will cover (a) who should be on the team as well as the (b) inspiration, (c) ideation, and (d) implementation stages of the process.

Who Should Be on the Team?

The Target Design Team is a group of administrators and teachers who will facilitate the development of the target. Although administrators and teachers have very distinct roles, they are both charged with the task of gathering data to support the development of the Target.

My friend Doris Williams, a retired, highly successful high school principal from Harford County, Maryland, advised me that the principal must have the right people on the team if she wants the team to be successful. Doris identified four characteristics that she considers essential for effective team members.

First, team members should be positive, someone whose good humor is infectious and encourages others to be positive. Second, team members should be credible. "You need to have people on the team," Doris said, "that the staff respect and listen to. If your team isn't respected, it will be hard to make progress." Third, team members should be open to new ideas. If Target Design Team members latch onto a plan and are unable to see others' perspectives, they won't create a plan that others feel they own. Finally, since the work of developing the Target must be responsive to everyone's thoughts and concerns, team members should be flexible so that they can change direction whenever that is best for the project.

Tim Brown, in *Change by Design* (2009), describes a three-step process that designers use to create innovative products: (a) inspiration, (b) ideation, and (c) implementation. That process provides a great framework for describing how a team might create a Target.

Inspiration

During the inspiration stage of product development, designers identify the challenge, issue, or opportunity that "motivates the search for solutions" (Brown, 2009, p. 16). To find inspiration, Brown suggests we "go out into the world and observe the actual experience of . . . [people in action, in our case, teachers and students] . . . as they improvise their way through their daily lives" (p. 41). The goal here is get a clear idea of some unmet need, some opportunity that exists in people's lives.

Creating a Target involves a similar goal—to identify teacher and student needs that should be addressed by the Target—and "going out into the world" can be similarly effective. In most cases, however, administrators and teachers "go out into the school" in different ways, with the administrators on the Target Design Team conducting observations of teachers and students, and the teachers on the Target Design Team meeting with their colleagues to hear what they have to say about the design process.

Administrators

Administrators who conduct observations need to explain repeatedly that they are not evaluating teachers; they are gathering information for the development of the Target. Indeed, a primary goal for observations should be to get a picture of which practices are working especially well so that they can be implemented more widely in the school. Since observations are often seen as "evaluative" outside the

context of a confidential coaching relationship, we do not recommend that teacher members on the team conduct observations. Design Team teachers have other ways of gathering inspiration, described a few paragraphs below.

Administrators can learn a lot about teaching practices during observations. Thus, administrators might check whether teachers employ guiding questions, whether lessons are aligned with state standards, and whether formative assessments are used. Similarly, they can identify which teaching practices teachers are using (cooperative learning, effective questions, thinking prompts, etc.) by teachers. Finally, observers can note whether or not behavioral expectations have been taught and whether they are reinforced through sufficient praise and fluent corrections.

Observing students also yields valuable data. Administrators can watch to see if students understand and are following the lesson's plan, and if they understand how well they are progressing in the class. Observers can also watch to see how well students respond to various teaching practices and how many students respond to and correctly answer questions posed during the class. Administrators on a Design Team in Cecil County Maryland reported that they learned a lot by asking children a few simple questions, included below, during observations.

Questions to Ask Students

1. What are we learning today?
2. How are you learning it?
3. How will you know when you understand it?
4. What will you do if you need extra help?

Finally, data on student behavior, such as what percentage of students are engaged or on task and how often students disrupt learning, can be very informative. If time permits, administrators can also conduct interviews to gather other data. These conversations may not produce an accurate picture of reality because, as my friend Doris Williams has told me, "Whenever a principal talks one to one with a principal, teachers will always feel they are being evaluated." During one-to-one conversations, administrators might ask how well their curriculum aligns with the state standards or ask teachers for their thoughts on teaching strategies or different approaches to assessment.

So that observation data are consistent, observers from the Design Team must identify what will be observed and practice their observations until they are able to do them reliably. When consultants from the Instructional Coaching Group (ICG) collaborate with school districts, they show video recordings of teachers teaching and provide principals with practice until they are able to gather data reliably. Often, ICG consultants also go into the classroom and conduct observations with administrators until the data gathering is consistent. The Big Four Observation Tool, in the Impact School Toolkit in Resource B, is one tool administrators can use to be consistent.

Teachers

While team administrators observe teachers and students, team teachers gather a different kind of valuable data by having one-to-one conversations with colleagues. Again, it is important to point out that these interviews are anonymous and serve to gather information because if teachers feel they are being judged, they are less likely to offer their honest opinions. We suggest that teachers explain to their colleagues that they want to speak for all educators, and, therefore, are trying to learn everything they can during the conversations. Every educator needs to know that everyone has a voice in the creation of the Target.

One-to-one conversations can serve at least three purposes. First, teachers will have a lot of questions about the Target writing process, and no matter how well an e-mail or other written communication is crafted, no form of communication is more effective than one-to-one conversations in these types of situations. Teachers from the Target Design Team should begin by sharing a quick overview of the Target process, emphasizing that (a) each teacher's voice counts, and (b) the goal of developing a target and all that follows is to provide meaningful, useful, respectful, focused professional learning done well over a sufficient period of time, with sufficient support so that it can really be implemented. After the brief explanation, teachers should be given ample time to ask questions until all their questions have been answered.

Second, the conversation provides an opportunity for teacher colleagues to strengthen relationships through one-to-one conversations. (Just listening to others does a lot to strengthen relationships, but all of the partnership communication strategies described in Chapter 7 can significantly shorten the gaps between people.) When teachers feel a connection with someone on the team, they are more likely to trust the overall Target development process.

Third, one-to-one conversations will also yield valuable data that can used to shape the Target. Teachers might start by asking about students' strengths and weaknesses or about the challenges and rewards of teaching. We suggest an overriding question, "What would you like to see on the Target that you think would be a truly worthy goal?" There are a variety of questions that could be used for these interviews in the coaching section of Resource A.

Finally, in addition to information gathered during observations, other student data, such as standardized test scores, tardiest, number of students repeating classes, dropout rates, student discipline referrals to the office, and other data, can prove to be very useful. Once observations, interviews, and data are collected, the Target Design Team can begin the process of sharing the data with staff and begin drafting the Target.

Ideation

"Design thinking" expert Tim Brown (2009) explains that during the ideation phase of product development, designers generate, develop, and test ideas. Much the same work occurs when schools are developing their Instructional Target. Administrators and teachers explore, develop, and test possible practices and goals to be included on the Target.

The core activity during this stage is to identify different student and teacher goals (for example, a 90 percent engagement during lessons for students, or 100 percent alignment with state standards during instruction) and various teaching practices that can be used to achieve those goals (e.g., thinking prompts and effective questioning to increase engagement and content planning to align lessons with standards).

When possible, and when she is a skilled facilitator, the principal should lead the ideation discussions. If facilitation is not the principal's strength, others, such as the instructional coach, may lead these discussions. While it is more efficient to hold the ideation conversations in large groups, I have found that the gain in efficiency isn't worth what is lost in terms of every teacher having a voice. Therefore, I suggest that ideation meetings be held with small groups of teachers, perhaps grade-level teams or subject-matter teams within a school.

During these meetings, the facilitator will use many of the Partnership Facilitation methods described in Chapter 6. The first goal is to share the data gathered during the inspiration stage and check with teachers to see if everyone shares the same understanding of the

school's student and teacher needs. (The methods described in Chapter 6 for reporting back on interviews during intensive learning teams can be used here.)

The second goal is to introduce practices that might be included in the Target to address student needs. During this part of the conversation, the principal or other facilitators should come prepared to share a variety of best practices, but she should be equally prepared to hear the ideas of teachers about practices to be implemented.

The final goal is to create a draft of goals and practices, a first draft Target. The Target will likely need to go through several revisions until the staff embrace it fully. This will require a number of meetings. (To ensure that those meetings are productive, the facilitator should employ the partnership facilitation skills described in Chapter 6 and the partnership communication skills described in Chapter 7.)

At the end of each Target discussion meeting, the facilitator (most likely the principal) should gather data on (a) whether or not teachers agree with the Target, (b) whether or not teachers are committed to working to achieve the target, and (c) what changes everyone suggests for the Target. One way to do this is to give every participant two differently colored sticky notes and explain that the group will have a chance to cast a secret ballot regarding the Target. Explain that sticky notes of one color should be used to demonstrate the extent to which they agree with the current Target, and the other color should be used to communicate how committed they are to working on the Target. Explain also that each vote is confidential, so everyone should vote and fold their notes so that no one else can see them.

Along with the sticky notes, hand out a piece of paper, or large index cards, and say, "Please let us know what we can do to improve the Target. If you're not voting as and 8, 9, or 10, use this card to communicate what it will take to move you there." If participants do not agree with or are not committed to the Target, use their comments to revise the Target until it is one that everyone, or almost everyone, agrees with and is committed to. Once everyone has voted, gather the cards and sticky notes. Then, put them all on chart paper to show (a) whether or not the team agrees and (b) whether or not they are committed.

Implementation

The third stage of Tim Brown's (2009) three-step process takes up the most time. Implementation is the goal of all professional learning in an Impact School. Indeed, there is little reason to conduct any professional learning that doesn't make a positive impact. Principals create the conditions for implementation by ensuring that all forms of

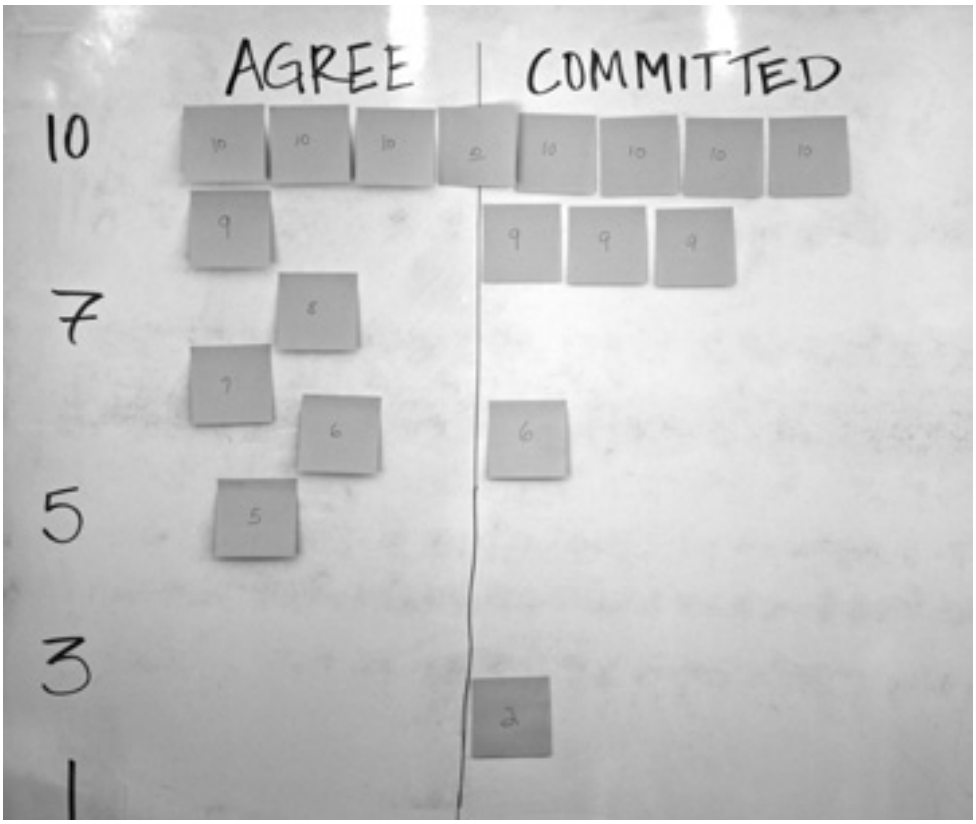


Photo by Jennifer Ryschon-Knight.

professional learning focus on the Target. At the same time, they see themselves as culture shapers, creating a culture of experimentation, learning, and growth (Killion & Roy, 2009). Much of this book centers on implementation.

This is only one way of creating a Target, and even this method varies each time it is used. What matters is that all teachers have a chance to shape the Target until they are willing to work to achieve the goal. There are quicker ways to create the Target, but unless everyone is actively involved in its creation, the chance of implementation is slim. When everyone is involved, however, the Target can become a clear goal that an entire school is committed to achieving.

Observing and Monitoring Teacher Progress

An essential part of project management is monitoring progress. Someone has to keep track of how well the project is moving forward

so that adjustments can be made if things aren't proceeding as expected. In schools, the person who monitors progress is typically the principal. To do this, the principal needs to understand two things. First, she needs to know exactly what it should look like if teachers are effectively implementing the practices in the Target. Second, she needs to know how close every teacher is to achieving the goals in the Target.

If principals are going to observe teachers, they need to have a clear understanding of what to observe and how to observe reliably. This means that they must be the first learners in a school, the first people to deeply understand the practices in the Target. Additionally, all administrators who conduct informal and formal observations need to make reliable observations so that teachers get consistent feedback regardless of who conducts the observation.

Several outstanding books have been written on how to conduct teacher observations. Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel, for example, in *Instructional Rounds in Education* (2009), describe how networks of educators can "learn to see" and "unlearn to judge" as they observe classrooms. The authors describe observing teachers as follows:

> Classroom observation . . . is a discipline—a *practice,* in the sense that it is a pattern of ways of observing and talking and is designed to create a common understanding among a group of practitioners about the nature of their work. A central part of that practice is deciding in advance *what* to observe, *how* to observe, and, most importantly *how to talk about what is seen.* (p. 86)

Carolyn Downey, Betty Steffy, Fenwick English, Larry Frase, and William Poston in *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through* (2004) propose a five-step walk-through observation structure:

> *Step 1: Student Orientation to the Work.* Do students appear to be attending when you first walk in the room?
>
> *Step 2: Curricular Decision Points.* What objective or objectives has the teacher chosen to teach at this time, and how aligned are they to the prescribed (district or state) written curriculum?
>
> *Step 3: Instructional Decisions Points.* What instructional practices is the teacher choosing to use at this time to help students achieve the learning of the curriculum objectives?

Step 4: "Walk-the-Walls"—Curricular and Instructional Decisions. What evidence is there of past objectives taught and/or instruction decisions used to teach the objectives in the classroom?

Step 5: Safety and Health Issues. Are there any noticeable safety or health issues that need to be addressed?

The jury is out for many on whether three minutes is sufficient to gather enough information about teacher and student progress. What matters is that principals take the time needed to accurately observe how close teachers are to the Target. Precise observations are necessary if they are going to yield adequate, useful information. The Impact Toolkit in Resource A includes a sample observation form created for the Big Four.

If a principal is looking for community-building behaviors, for example, he might look for such data as (a) ratio of interactions, the percentage of positive comments made by a teacher compared with the number of corrections; (b) disruptions, the number of times students interrupt the teacher or other students' learning during a set amount of time (often 10 minutes); or (c) time on task, the percentage of students who appear to be engaged during a set amount of time (often 5 minutes).

Classroom Management

- ❒ Time on task: _____ percent
- ❒ Ratio of interactions: Reinforcing _____ : _____ Corrective
- ❒ Disruptions: _____/minute
- ❒ Expectations posted: Yes _____ No _____

Principals can also gather a great deal of data by having one-to-one conversations with teachers about how their year is progressing. In particular, they can often learn a lot more about how close a teacher's lessons are to the state curriculum by talking with the teacher than by observing a lesson since a conversation provides time to discuss the planning for an entire unit.

As principals gather data on what is occurring in each teacher's classroom, they also need to keep track of everyone's progress. We suggest using a teacher progress map, also included in the Impact Toolkit, and depicted in the figure below.

Teacher Progress Map

Date:

Teacher	*Behavior*	*Content*	*Instruction*	*Formative Assessment*
Teacher				
Teacher				
Teacher				
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Teacher				
Teacher				
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The teacher progress map enables principals to document how close every teacher is to achieving the Target. For example, a teacher might be observed as having "limited use," "some use," or "mastery" of the community-building practices in the Target. The teacher progress map is used as a planning tool for professional learning. It provides a quick snapshot of where the entire school is as it progresses toward the target. Looking over the map, a principal can quickly see, for example, that professional learning needs to be designed to deepen staff's knowledge of formative assessment.

Community Building

Limited Use

Code your teacher as *limited use* if any of the following factors are observed.

- Time on task is less than 80 percent.
- The teacher has not created and posted expectations.
- The ratio of interaction is less than 1:1.
- Disruptions are more than 10 in 10 minutes.

Some Use

Code your teacher as *some use* if none of the limited use factors are observed and at least one of the following factors are observed.

- Time on task is above 80 percent but less than 90 percent.
- Expectations are posted but are not followed by students.
- The ratio of interaction is more than 1:1 but less than 2:1.
- Disruptions are five to nine each 10 minutes.

Mastery

Code your teacher as *mastery* if the following factors are observed.

- Time on task is 90 percent or more.
- Expectations are posted and followed by students.
- The ratio of interaction is 3:1 or more.
- Disruptions are zero to four each 10 minutes.

Principals as First Learners

Over the years, Gandhi's comment "be the change you want to see" has become a cliché of the first magnitude. You can buy it printed on post cards, "Gandhi vine-green" T-shirts, and even on "bohemian

ceramic latte mugs." The phrase has become a cliché because it touches on a deep truth. People wear it on their t-shirts or send it as a post card because they know it is true. If we want to see change, we need to do the change, walk the talk. This applies in schools as much as anywhere else. If we want students to be learners, then teachers need to be learners. If we want teachers to be learners, then principals need to be learners.

It can be hard for principals to be the first learner in their school as they already have a very full schedule. Principals are constantly at the mercy of urgent issues, requests for reports, parents with questions, teachers with concerns that need to be addressed right away, and students whose misbehavior has to be addressed immediately. Realistically, if there is a fight in the cafeteria, no responsible principal will ignore the problem and sit in her office fine tuning her slides for an upcoming workshop.

But if principals do not walk the talk by being first learners, there is much less of chance that significant, positive change will occur. If principals don't lead by making their own learning a core priority, teachers, who are also busy dealing with their own urgent issues, will think, "Well, if this isn't important to my principal, why should it be important to me?" Given the realities of their jobs, for principals to find the time to be learners requires that they manage their projects and themselves effectively. At the end of this chapter, several strategies are offered to help accomplish that.

Understanding the Target

One major reason why principals need to be the first learners is that they must have a deep understanding of all of the practices on the Target. For if professional learning is to have a positive impact, all leaders of professional learning must have a deep understanding of what everyone is learning. Impact requires deep knowledge.

One place where deep knowledge is necessary is formal and informal observation of teachers to monitor their progress in implementing the Target practices. If principals conduct observations without understand precisely what the practices should look like their feedback may be confusing or even counterproductive. Furthermore, if several administrators are conducting observations and provide inconsistent feedback, teachers will likely become frustrated and less motivated to implement recommended practices. "If the admin group doesn't even know what this looks like," a teacher might think, "how am I supposed to do this?"

There are no shortcuts to developing a deep understanding of the Target. Learning about the Target requires reading, attending workshops, talking about the practices, and confirming one's understanding with others who are learning the same practices, including other administrators, coaches, and teachers. Some leaders even contact authors of books they have read to double check their understanding. Indeed, one reason why the Target is only one page is so that the range of possibilities for professional learning is limited enough so that leaders can have a deep knowledge of everything it describes.

In my experience, too little time is often provided for meaningful professional learning for principals. Sometimes, it is assumed that the principals will understand the practices well enough. Unfortunately, I have found that when it is assumed that principals have a deep understanding of the practices, they usually don't. Michael Fullan refers to this as "superstitious learning." If administrators are going to have a deep understanding of the Target, they need to have a lot of professional learning in the practices on the Target.

Leaders in Greeley, Colorado, have recognized how important it is that principals have deep knowledge of the practices on the school improvement plan. In order to support a new reading initiative, principals in Greeley attended 12 days of workshops. The knowledge they gained during theses workshops significantly deepened their knowledge, and had a profound, positive impact on their ability to support teachers as they implemented the reading program. When I interviewed coaches in Greeley, the coaches said that it was night and day how effective they became after the principals had received the training since the principal's observations now were useful and motivating for teachers.

Workshops

A common occurrence during workshops is for the principal to introduce the speaker, stay a few minutes, and then leave the room to work on what is apparently "more important" work. When this happens, there is often a noticeable shift in the way in which everyone in the room approaches the workshop. If you have led a workshop where this occurs, you know that the room just feels different when the principal isn't there.

I suppose that the presence of the principal might encourage some teachers to be more attentive (if the boss is in the room, we need to look like we're working), but I don't think this is the main reason why the room feels different when the principal leaves. By leaving,

the principal communicates that he doesn't think the workshop is important, at least not important enough for him to stop doing what else he had planned to do.

Sadly, in many cases, principals are correct. If the workshop is not going to lead to any real change, if it isn't tied to a clearly understood, comprehensive instructional improvement plan, it is not a good use of the principal's time. However, such a workshop is also not a good use of teachers' time. Indeed, one of the reasons why teachers have such a low opinion of workshops is that they do not find them to be useful. If workshops do not make an impact, if the principal doesn't even bother to stay, many teachers rightfully ask, "Why are we here?"

When workshops provide learning on practices on the Target, when they are delivered effectively by people who respect teachers and who use effective teaching practices, and when they are supported by instruction coaches who can help teachers translate learning into practice, then the workshops can make an impact. Workshops that do not meet these criteria should not be held.

As the first learners in schools, principals can do more than attend workshops; they can lead or co-facilitate sessions. Leading workshops is an outstanding way for principals to communicate their commitment to professional learning. Also, few activities can deepen your knowledge more about teaching practices than preparing and delivering a workshop. If the principal is the first leader, leading workshops is a great way to demonstrate that.

Principals can create more opportunities to learn by having one-to-one conversations during which they ask teachers about their experiences in the classroom. Each day offers a new opportunity for learning, and when principals come to teachers with an authentic desire to hear and learn from them, they show that they deeply respect the professionals in their school.

Making It All Happen

All of the ideas presented in this chapter won't do any good if they aren't implemented. And, the person who will lead the charge when it comes to implementation within a school is the principal. For that reason, principals must be able to manage projects successfully. Fortunately, many valuable strategies have been developed to help people stay organized and keep projects focused and on track. These strategies generally break into two categories: self-management and project management. Each is described below.

MITs

There are simple strategies we can use to control our time rather than letting it control us. The first is to identify what Leo Babauta (2009) refers to as "MITs," that is, Most Important Tasks. If you want to get important work done, you need to be clear on what that work is so that you don't get distracted by other less important tasks.

For many principals, it is often the most important tasks that they do not feel they have time to do, such as conducting drop-in observations, meeting one to one with teachers or students, attending workshops or team meetings, deepening their knowledge, or preparing to lead a workshop.

To ensure that we do what is most important every day, Babauta suggests that we identify no more than three MITs for each day and commit to doing them—no matter what. Babauta writes,

> Here's the beauty of MITs: Usually, the small, unimportant tasks that we need to get done every day (email, phone calls, paperwork, errands, meetings, Internet browsing, etc.) will get in the way of our important longer-term tasks—but if you make your MITS your top priorities each day, the important stuff will get done instead of the unimportant. (2009, p. 58)

Untouchable Time

We can make it easier to ensure that our MITs are completed by employing a second strategy, untouchable time. *Untouchable time* refers to significant periods of the day when you are not to be interrupted. For example, principals may set aside untouchable time every day so that they can spend two periods observing teachers.

To make untouchable time work, principals need to explain to everyone in the school that they need to set aside specific points in the day to do what is necessary to create an impact school. Office staff, in particular, must learn to guard that time. Of course, in the event of an urgent, absolutely essential concern (the president is on the phone to congratulate the principal for winning an award as one of the top schools in the nation, for example) the principal will need to be interrupted.

Principals may want to explain to their superintendent and fellow principals that they will not be available during certain times a day to focus on priorities, such as teacher observation, and that if they must be contacted immediately, then others should phone the school rather than use e-mail you so that they can be contacted wherever they

might be. However, everyone needs to know that during untouchable time, the principal should almost always be unreachable.

Managing Email

Most principals spend at least 15 to 20 hours a week on e-mail, and they may grow to hate it. They hate the feeling of falling behind and watching their inbox fill up with more and more urgent requests. Then, they find it doubly troubling to never catch up, spending too much time apologizing for late replies. I know the experience. In the past, in fact, I've gone several months in a row, many times, never getting to the Zen-like purity of an empty inbox.

Scott Belsky, the author of *Making Ideas Happen* (2010), suggests that the best way to control e-mail (and the single strategy that has had the most positive impact on my personal management skills) is to reply to all e-mail in order from the top to the bottom everyday at a certain time. No matter what the e-mail asks, don't skip it. Deal with whatever is in the inbox, in the order it arrives, as quickly as possible. To accomplish this, replies need to be short (four sentences or less), and people need to spend less time thinking about what they have received. Just read it, deal with it, and fire it off.

When I sit down to do e-mail, at specific times, usually at the end of the day, my goal is to clean out the inbox, no matter what. Whenever possible, I forward tasks to others who might be able to respond. When doing so, I ask the person to copy me on the reply, so I know that it has been done.

My short replies are not as detailed and well thought through as they used to be before I adopted Belsky's (2010) approach, but I am still careful to give a prudent response to every e-mail, and I believe people prefer a prompt, even if shorter, response to a more detailed e-mail that arrives too late to be used. Plus, this approach allows me more time to do my MITs, and I love the look of an empty inbox.

Keeping a Physical Inbox

David Allen, in *Making It All Work* (2008), suggests that whenever we receive any request that requires a written response, or some similar task, we put it into an inbox. You can also put notes to yourself in the box, listing tasks that you have to do, such as "Write thank you note to Alison for October 10 meeting," or "Talk with Alan about the state of the lawn beside the school." Then, twice a week, deal with

everything in the box. Just like your e-mail, start at the top and power through until you're done.

This accomplishes at least two things. First, it ensures that you stay on top of tasks, which feels great. Second, by putting tasks in the inbox right when you get them rather than tending to them as they pop up, you can stay focused on your MITs. Then when the time comes to clear the inbox, you can do it with gusto.

Some principals need two inboxes, one for urgent issues and one for issues that can wait. The urgent issues can be addressed each day, at the end of the day, and the issues that can wait can be addressed at the end of the week. As one principal explained to me, having only one inbox means that "too many things will be dropped." The urgent must be addressed, and that won't happen if we wait until the end of the week, especially if we let the inbox fill up and never get to the bottom.

Filing Notes by Month, Not Topic

Scott Belsky (2010) suggests a simple and powerful strategy for staying on top of notes: simply date our notes and put them into a folder labeled with the current month, filing them chronologically. Then, if you need the notes, you can go back to your electronic calendar, find what month you were meeting on the topic for which you need the notes, and pull out the file to get the notes. The method is quick, efficient, and it keeps piles of paper from sprouting up around your office.

You may need to adapt this system by creating a few separate folders for particular types of documents, but the goal, always, is to keep your system simple. If your notes are not confidential, you can place them in your inbox, and file them each time you empty your inbox. Confidential files need to be placed in a locked file immediately.

Keep Plans Written Down, Not in Your Head

David Allen (2008) has written persuasively about the power of writing out your plans for all of the projects in your life. Allen points out that we would never plan our days by relying on our brains to remember all our appointments. We write every appointment down, and then we rely on our calendar to ensure we don't miss something important.

Allen suggests that we do the same with all of our projects—for Allen, any activity that consists of more than a few tasks is a project, whether it occurs at home or on the job. Using this approach, we

write down each of the projects we need to do, and then we write down all the individual tasks that need to be completed for each project. In this way, we can see everything that has to be completed, and by getting it out of our heads and onto paper, we can do a better job of staying on top of all projects.

Photo by Jennifer Ryschon-Knight.

Getting projects out of your head and onto paper has at least two advantages. First, breaking down step by step all of the actions necessary to complete a project dramatically increases how quickly a project moves from conception to completion simply because it removes all the time wasted trying to figure out what the next step will be.

Second, when I physically lay out all of the projects I plan to complete, I get a clear idea of whether or not I can actually accomplish them. Usually, I have too much to do. After seeing every project, I realize that some things have to be put on the back burner or given up altogether. A critical part of project management is trying to do only what is possible; trying to do more than is possible sets you up for unavoidable failure.

Getting Support From Central Office

Without the support of central office staff, a principal will really struggle to make the idea of an Impact School come into fruition. There is much that central office leaders can do to support principals as they go about the hard work of designing an Impact School. In many ways, the degree of support received from the central office can make or break a principal's attempt to lead reform.

Time

Perhaps the most important thing district leaders can do is to find time for principals to do the work of designing Impact Schools. If they want their schools to be Impact Schools, the superintendent, associate superintendents, directors, coordinators, and other central office staff must be intentional about creating time for principals. Here are some suggestions for how to do it.

1. Limit the number of meetings scheduled, so principals are not required to be out of the building too often. Leaders should ask themselves, at all times, if a meeting is really necessary, or if the topic of the meeting can be addressed via e-mail. Before calling a meeting, people should also always ask whether or not the meeting is really necessary. The habit of holding weekly meetings should be reconsidered because it often leads to meetings that really do not have a purpose.
2. Limit the length of meetings. Scott Belsky (2010) recommends that no meeting ever run longer than one hour and that whoever leads the meeting should start promptly and end when the hour is up or the agenda has been addressed.
3. Limit paper work. Many principals I've collaborated with say that if they could just eliminate paper work, they would have enough time to do the job they were hired to do.
4. Explore the possibility of hiring administrators to support principals by doing much of the necessary paperwork, so principals can focus on instructional leadership.

Supporting Development of the Target

It is essential that the superintendent, associate superintendent, and central office directors and coordinators support the Targets that

are developed by the schools in their district. If schools invest a great deal of time creating a Target only to have new initiatives promoted by district leaders push the Target to the side, teachers' commitment to any new initiative will be significantly eroded. The superintendent or other leaders at central office need to create a unified team working toward the same end. If the central office is organized into silos, or the breeding ground for self-serving political fights, that lack of unity will manifest itself in schools.

To ensure that the district leaders and the schools are on the same page, central office staff must be in frequent communication with principals. Indeed, the associate superintendent responsible for instruction should make frequent visits to schools to discuss how instructional improvement is progressing. By visiting schools, leaders can show everyone in the school that they are committed to the project and that the district intends to stay the course.

Communication between central office and schools also ensures that district leaders are able to share information about programs, practices, or priorities that are considered non-negotiable. If the superintendent, the state, or the board determines that something is essential, for example, content planning that involves guiding questions and learning maps, that practice must be reflected in the Target. Effective communication can ensure that what is created at the school level can be 100 percent supported at the district level.

Perhaps more important, central office must clearly communicate that it is OK for schools to focus on a smaller number of practices so that they can be easily implemented. A major barrier to effective professional learning is the intense pressure everyone in schools feels to respond to every concern at the same time. Here is how one superintendent described it to me in a recent e-mail:

> Principals (via NCLB and in the near future the reauthorization of ESEA) are held to stringent accountability standards. The accountability is tied to high-stakes testing, which is tied directly to a school's ability to educate students through a myriad of state standards. When schools fail to meet these standards, schools, school leadership, and school systems are at risk of facing sanctions, including in some cases state takeover.
>
> It is difficult to get everything accomplished and even more difficult to "narrow" the focus for fear that if something is missed, that will be the area of failure. Therefore, many schools develop a plan that takes the approach of attempting to cover *every* area of deficit with 8–10 strategies for addressing

each area. These plans are overwhelming to manage and ineffective; however, they take solace in the fact that they feel that they are comprehensively addressing *everything*.

Federal, state, and district leadership reinforce this type of response. For example, schools receiving Title I funds must submit their school plan, which is reviewed for *all* of the components that are mandated to be in a comprehensive plan . . . the requirement of a *myriad* of data that support the plan (including agendas, sign-in sheets, and minutes for *every* event, including parent nights and back to school events).

District leadership is often guilty of asking school leaders to "show," through some sort of school planning document, the process that they have used to thoroughly review *all* data as well as multiple goals, objectives, and strategies for each area of need. (Personal communication, July 12, 2010)

The pressure brought to bear on principals leads many of them to fear committing what leadership expert Bill Sommers calls a CLM (Career Limit Move). District leaders must fight to make sure that they don't demand that principals do the impossible. They must run interference and clarify with principals that they are expected to identify and focus on key priorities until those priorities are accomplished.

I have been told that bus drivers in a major U.S. city are told that they are free to have three accidents every year, with no negative consequence. The drivers are told this so that they can drive confidently to each stop on time, knowing that they will not suffer consequences for a fender bender even if it is their fault. In other words, the drivers get to do their work in a safety zone, and that safety allows them to in the long run be more successful.

Central office can provide similar support to principals as they venture out to create an Impact School. Leaders can tell principals that the hard work of creating an Impact School will likely lead to some false steps, some mistakes. To decrease the fear principals might have, leaders can tell them they are forgiven in advance so that principals can attack their work with the necessary drive and courage.

Provide Support

Designing a Target may demand that a principal acquire a new set of skills. Principals may need to learn about new instructional practices, methods for gathering data during drop-in observations, partnership facilitation skills, partnership communication skills, and so forth. That is a lot to ask of anyone person, especially when that person is also

responsible for putting out fires and keeping the school running smoothly. To create an Impact School, principals need support.

One option is for principals to have their own coach or mentor to help them acquire the skills they need. Since the partnership approach to improving instruction may require new skills, traditional support, such as retired principals, will only work if the mentors themselves have the skills. Principals may need to work with someone outside the district until the capacity is developed for support within the district.

An absolutely important form of support is funding. Without a budget for substitute teachers, training, materials, and coaching, the job of leading an Impact School may be next to impossible. Professional learning cannot happen if we continue to try to make it happen without paying for it. New initiatives demand more time and more resources, and money is necessary for that to happen.

District leaders would love to provide significant funding, but they face hard decisions about finances all the time. The important message here is that if professional learning is deemed important, it must be a priority financially, too. When little is expended to support professional learning, little should be expected.

Learning

Perhaps the most important form of support central office staff can offer principals is to be learners along with principals, teachers, and students. Thus, everyone from the superintendent on down should attend workshops, develop deep knowledge of the high-leverage practices describe on schools' Targets, and clearly understand the Targets developed at every school.

Given the other demands of their time (Bill Sommers refers to the killer Bs of budgets, busses, and boards), leaders need to apply the management strategies described above, so they can make it their goal to have a deep understanding of every practice on every Target in every school. When leaders are learners, everyone in the school is more likely to get caught up in the infectious joy of learning.

To Sum Up

Partnership

Although a principal's role puts the principal in a structurally unequal position for relationships, the inequality is only structural. Principals working from the partnership perspective see everyone as equal.

Principals as Designers

When principals use "design thinking," they work creatively to ensure that professional learning is aligned, resources are available for professional learning, and the right people are in place to lead various aspects of professional learning, such as coaching.

The Target

In Impact Schools, almost all of the professional learning (teacher evaluations, workshops, intensive learning teams, and coaching) is focused on implementation of the Target—a one-page document that summarizes both the achievement and behavior goals for students and the instructional improvement goals for teachers.

The Big Four

This comprehensive framework, to be described in *Instruction That Makes an Impact* (Knight, 2011) involves teaching practices for content planning, formative assessment, powerful instruction (cooperative learning, stories, effective questions, thinking prompts, challenging assignments, and experiential learning), and community building. The Big Four provides a point of departure for developing an instructional improvement target.

Creating the Target

Principals should involve all the staff and the Target Design Team in the development of a Target that everyone considers meaningful.

Observing and Monitoring Teacher Progress

Walk-through tools and teacher evaluations should focus on the practices identified in the Target. Observations must be conducted so that teachers get reliable, frequent feedback on their progress. Principals can use a tool such as the teacher progress map to keep track of implementation of the Target.

Principal as First Learner

Principals must understand the Target, be active participants or leaders of workshops or intensive learning teams, and do everything they can to model the kind of approach to learning they hope to see in their teachers (and students).

Making It All Happen

Principals need to use powerful strategies to ensure they find the time to do all the high-leverage work involved in being instructional leaders.

Getting Support From Central Office Staff

Central office staff, especially the superintendent, must support the Target 100 percent. Leaders must find ways to decrease pressure and increase support for principals in Impact Schools.

Going Deeper

Michael Fullan

Many of the ideas in this chapter and throughout the book are the direct result of my reading of Michael Fullan's work. If instructional leaders have time to read only one book about instructional change and leadership, I highly recommend Fullan's *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy* (2010b). Fullan's most recent books, *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole School Reform* (2010a) and *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008) are also extremely informative. Briefly, Fullan provides a theoretical framework for understanding change and leadership and explains how to translate that theory into practice.

Other Leadership Books

Dennis Sparks' *Leading for Results: Transforming Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in Schools* is a concise and incredibly useful summary of many important ideas of about leadership. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee's *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (2004) is the definitive work on emotional intelligence and leadership. Stewart D. Friedman's *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life* (2008) guides readers through self-coaching activities to help balance work and home priorities.

Design

Tim Brown's *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (2009) is a practical introduction to the specifics of "design thinking." Brown explains how the lessons

learned by his firm, IDEO, one of the leading design firms in the country, can and should be applied by any change leader. Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Business at The University of Toronto, in his *Design of Business: Why Design Thinking Is the Next Competitive Advantage* (2009) provides a more theoretical explanation of what design thinking is and why it is important.

The Target

My book, *Instruction That Makes an Impact* (Knight, 2011), will offer a detailed explanation of the Big Four teaching practices. Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (2007) and John Hattie's *Visible Learning* (2009) are two other well-known comprehensive models for improving instruction. Bill Jensen's *Simplicity: The New Competitive Advantage in a World of More, Better, Faster* (2000) is a great book about creating simple plans, such as a Target. Nancy Mooney and Ann Mausbach's *Align the Design: A Blueprint for School Improvement* (2008) is a practical and smart guide to its topic and would help anyone developing a Target.

Monitoring Progress

Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel's *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (2009) describes how communities of educators can collaborate to conduct rounds similar in structure to doctors' rounds in hospitals. The authors' ideas about instructional core, what to observe when watching teachers, and how to discuss what was observed would be beneficial to anyone charged with the task of monitoring progress toward the Target.

Making It All Happen

Scott Belsky's *Making Ideas Happen: Overcoming the Obstacles Between Vision and Reality* (2010) is hands down the best personal organization and time management book I have read. However, it owes much to David Allen's *Making It All Work* (2008). Allen is the premier productivity guru, and his strategies are widely adopted.

Leo Babauta's *The Power of Less* (2009) is another useful book. Many of Babauta's ideas may also be found on his extremely useful blog, Zen Habits: http://zenhabits.net.