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Preface

Nothing has promised so much and been so frustratingly wasteful as the thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classroom.

—Michael Fullan

A friend of mine has a rare kidney disease. Her prognosis is good as she goes in for treatments and meets with her doctor regularly to examine her progress. Her doctor meets with other physicians to discuss her test results and they share their perspectives, insights, and approaches in treating cases like hers. Her doctor is confident that she is receiving quality care based on the combined knowledge and experience of their team. These doctors dedicate a half day every week to review cases, look at new information emerging from research, and determine the most promising treatments for their patients. By focusing on consistent collaboration and communication, rather than functioning as solitary practitioners, the physicians improve their individual and collective practices.

We expect our doctors to regularly evaluate and monitor our health and to select the best available plan for improvement—and we demand that they eliminate treatments that don't work and replace them with more effective ones. But we rarely make the same demands of our schools and our teachers. Professionals in other fields, from medicine to financial management to law, engage in ongoing learning opportunities. The time has come for schools to engage teachers in learning the way other professions do—continuously, collaboratively, and on the job.

Fortunately, examples of how to do this already exist, as many countries are working to improve their education systems by investing

in teacher learning as a major engine for student achievement. The highest-achieving countries on international measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), have been particularly focused on developing teachers' expertise both before and after they enter the profession and throughout their careers (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

Noted educational researchers Linda Darling-Hammond (2003) and Vivien Stewart (2011) have studied the professional learning opportunities provided for teachers in the high-achieving nations of Finland, Sweden, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom and have found that their teacher learning programs share many features, including

- teacher learning opportunities sustained over time;
- time for teacher professional learning embedded into the school day;
- teacher learning opportunities involving active learning and collaboration;
- professional learning activities embedded in context and focused on specific content to be taught to specific grade levels; and
- teachers who are involved in decisions about curriculum, assessment, and professional learning content and activities.

In these countries, professional development is not something that is done to teachers. It is a process focused on improving student learning, and it requires teacher engagement and active teacher learning.

Unfortunately, while there is understanding about what constitutes effective teacher professional learning, multiple studies (Birman et al., 2007; Blank & de las Alas, & Smith, 2008; Murray, 2011; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010) have demonstrated that American teachers do not receive the kind of high-quality teacher professional development common in many other nations. For too long, teacher professional development practices have treated educators as passive recipients of information and schools have expected little change in classroom practices. In-service training, consisting of workshops, speakers, and short-term courses, remains the dominant mode of teacher professional learning in most schools in this country. Often called "one-shot" or "drive-by" professional development, traditional in-service training has been criticized by researchers and school

teachers and leaders as ineffective in bringing about substantive improvements in teacher knowledge, teacher instructional practices, and student learning. Traditional in-service professional development has consumed tremendous resources over the past two decades, with few corresponding results for teachers and students.

Not only do most schools continue to rely upon fragmented, ineffective one-day or two-day activities; few learning opportunities for teachers also feature the intense emphasis on content, repeated chances for practicing what is learned, and meaningful ongoing conversations about instruction that positively influence teacher learning, classroom practice, and student achievement. Schools lack the structures or cultures to support the kind of job-embedded, sustained, contextual, collaborative teacher professional learning that leads to substantive improvements in teaching and learning. What we all want for our students—a variety of learning opportunities that engage them in experiencing and solving real-world problems, using their own experience, and working with others—is often denied to teachers when they are learners.

For our schools to achieve on a wide scale the kind of teaching that has a substantial impact on student learning, much more intensive and effective professional learning than has traditionally been available is required. If we want all students to possess the higher-order thinking skills they need to succeed in the 21st century, we need educators who possess higher-order teaching skills and deep content knowledge. In this book, I explore how school leaders can work to create meaningful, effective professional development programs in their schools to develop the structures and capacity needed to bring about real change. Professional development is supposed to contribute to change in the classroom, and when it doesn't we waste time and resources and compromise teachers' trust that time engaged in professional development is well spent. Workshops, speakers, and conferences can raise awareness and enthusiasm, and can impart knowledge, but they rarely provide the opportunities for reflection, discussions with colleagues, and continued support that are needed to bring about real instructional change.

In many ways teacher professional learning is more important now than ever before. As both Thomas Friedman (2007) and Tony Wagner (2008) have powerfully argued in recent years, students need to learn more complex material in preparation for further education and work in the 21st century. Teachers, therefore, must learn instructional approaches that develop the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected

world. Ensuring student success necessitates new types of instruction, conducted by teachers who understand content, learning, and pedagogy; who can adapt to the diverse needs of their students; and who can build powerful connections between students' experiences and the goals of the curriculum. These types of transformations demand significant learning on the part of teachers and will not occur without support and guidance. Efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice and the capacity of schools to promote teacher learning. If teachers are not engaged throughout their careers in learning experiences that enable them to better serve their students, both teachers and students suffer.

Realizing the magnitude and importance of the challenge, the public, politicians, and educators have made high-quality professional learning opportunities for school teachers a priority in modern educational reform proposals (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). For example, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires states to make "high-quality" professional development available for all teachers and this has led to substantial resources being devoted to teacher professional development at the local, state, and federal levels; for example, in 2007–2008 the federal government spent almost \$2 billion on professional development for teachers (Desimone, 2009). In addition, The Teaching Commission (2006) has cautioned that "targeted professional development is essential to help teachers meet the demands of recent reforms" (p. 11). Finally, both President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have made professional development a priority in their Education Agenda (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Teachers are not just born; they can be developed. Enhancing the effectiveness of professional learning is the leverage point with the greatest possibility for strengthening the knowledge and teaching practices of educators. For most teachers, professional learning is the most accessible avenue they have for developing the knowledge and skills required to better meet the needs of their students. If teachers are not engaged throughout their careers in new learning experiences that enable them to better serve their students, both teachers and their students suffer. It is the responsibility of every school and every school leader to make teacher growth and development a priority. All school leaders, from superintendents to principals to department heads, must possess a strong resolve to create and maintain the conditions and culture needed to build capacity in the individual and the school. Effective professional learning is learning from the work

teachers do. It involves reflective dialogue, observing and responding to one another's teaching, collaborating to implement new strategies, sharing effective teaching approaches and materials, and engaging in research focused on common issues of practice. It not only involves dialogue and collaboration among teachers within a specific school, but also includes teachers connecting with and learning from educators from around the world through the creation of personal learning networks.

The information, ideas, and recommendations in this book are purposely aligned with Learning Forward's revised Standards for Professional Learning (2011). The seven standards, developed from the literature on best practices for effective teacher professional learning, serve to guide the decisions and practices of all educators charged with designing, managing, implementing, and evaluating professional learning in schools:

- **Learning Communities**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement occurs within adult learning communities committed to continuous improvement.
- **Leadership**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement requires skillful leaders who develop organizational capacity and implement designs to support professional learning.
- **Resources**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for teacher learning.
- **Data**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement uses a variety of data to plan, develop, and assess teacher professional learning.
- **Learning Designs**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement uses research-based learning strategies to achieve its intended goals.
- **Implementation**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement applies research on change and sustains support of implementation of professional learning for long-term change.
- **Outcomes**—Professional learning that improves teaching practices and results in enhanced student achievement aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

While this book is a balance of research, theory, and practice, it is primarily intended to be a practical resource that educators can use as they work to create meaningful, effective professional learning programs in our schools. For the school principal, it can serve as a comprehensive resource to help them extend and refine their ability to lead effective professional learning. For the superintendent and other central office leaders, it can provide the information needed to give them a sense of the complexity of professional learning and the factors that influence its effectiveness. For the director of professional development, it has the necessary detail and practical information to serve as a guide in creating an effective professional learning plan for the district. And for the teacher-leader, it emphasizes the importance of teachers taking ownership of their own learning and provides practical details regarding how teacher-leaders are an essential part of designing and implementing effective professional learning programs. Finally, most graduate programs in educational leadership, educational administration, or supervision and curriculum have entire courses or sections of courses devoted to leading professional development programs, and this book has excellent potential for use in these settings.

Chapters 1 through 5 provide the foundational knowledge practitioners need to design, implement, evaluate, and sustain effective professional learning in schools. In Chapter 1 I discuss why global and societal shifts make teacher professional learning particularly important today, and reflect on why conventional professional development methods are inadequate in addressing the learning needs of schools and teachers. In Chapter 2 I present current models of professional learning action and examine the characteristics of effective professional learning activities.

The revised Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning “describe the context, content, and processes for effective professional learning” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 19), and it is essential that each school leader focus on these three areas to create and sustain an effective teacher professional learning program. While the context, process, and content emphasis are not as prominent in the 2011 Standards as in the 2001 Standards, “they remain a foundation for the seven 2011 standards” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 19). Learning Communities, Leadership, and Resources standards define the essential context for effective teacher learning and are examined in Chapter 3. Without the appropriate context in place, even the most thoughtfully planned and implemented professional learning activity will fail. Content—establishing the goals of professional development

activities and how to assess them—is the focus of Chapter 4. Content, which encompasses the Data and Outcomes standards, refers to the “what” of professional learning and consists of the learning needs of students, and the specific knowledge, skills, and teaching approaches to be acquired by teachers to better meet those student needs. Process—the “how” of professional learning—is the topic of Chapter 5. Process encompasses the Learning Designs and Implementation standards and involves the types of professional learning activities, and the way those activities are planned, organized, implemented, and followed up.

With a foundational understanding established, I proceed to discuss eight powerful professional learning strategies in Chapters 6 through 13: lesson study, Critical Friends, action research, school rounds, mentoring, peer coaching, online professional learning, and personal learning networks. Many professional learning approaches exist; I have intentionally limited my discussion to just the eight listed earlier for four reasons. First, each of the eight strategies is consistent with research-based principles of effective teacher professional learning. Second, practitioners have found these strategies to be effective in bringing about improvements in instructional practices and student learning, the very outcomes that are the goals of professional learning activities. Third, these strategies are representative of a variety of approaches with some being group approaches (lesson study, Critical Friends, action research, and school rounds), some being individual or pair approaches (mentoring and peer coaching), and some being approaches leveraging technology (online professional learning and personal learning networks). Finally, by limiting the focus to eight strategies I am able to examine each one in detail rather than just provide the cursory descriptions found in other works on the subject.

Each strategy chapter provides the detail and guidance school leaders need to use the approach in their schools. Specifically, every strategy chapter includes the rationale behind the strategy, the essential features of the strategy, suggestions for implementing the strategy, resources for learning more about the strategy, and examples of the strategy in action. Some designs will appear more daunting than others, particularly if your school is in the early stages of becoming a learning community. However, we can’t wait to implement the strategies presented in this book. Our students will be more engaged, and will learn more, when we create and sustain a context supportive of adult learning, when we intentionally focus the content of professional learning on student needs, and when we carefully choose strategies that help teachers meet those needs.

Following the eight chapters on strategies, I devote Chapter 14 to the very practical concern of how school leaders can overcome the teacher resistance involved in moving to new professional learning practices. Finally, in Chapter 15 I summarize the take-home messages from the book and emphasize the urgency educators must have in making teacher professional learning a priority. I hope this book will serve both as a source of information about teacher professional learning and a “how-to” manual that can be adapted to the particular characteristics and circumstances of individual schools. We are unlikely to seek the services of mechanics, surgeons, or plumbers who are not current with the latest knowledge, products, and procedures in their fields. Our students deserve the same from the educators who serve them. Effective teacher learning programs in our schools are a necessity, not a frill. It is time to engage all teachers in a lifelong process of professional growth. The stakes are too important to ignore: our schools, our children, and our future.