

Preface

Social, economic, and political forces are driving the calls for change. Once again the burden to innovate and implement the changes has fallen on our schools. Meaningful educational changes must ultimately occur in classrooms. School leaders play an important role in buffering teachers from external forces; at the same time, they press for improved instructional practices. In today's vernacular, this has been labeled as instructional leadership. In this book, we expand the image of instructional leadership to include inquiry and action. We present the *inquiry-minded, action-oriented principal*.

The danger of creating a new image is in replacing one set of jargon with another. Our challenge is to go beyond describing the general and the obvious to uncover what an *inquiry-minded, action-oriented principal* looks like in practice. We introduce Lee, who represents a real-life principal placed in an all-too-common situation. We map Lee's journey using a *collaborative inquiry-action cycle* to operationalize the image of an *inquiry-minded, action-oriented principal*.

We have chosen to make teaching and learning our focus because the core of any school improvement effort is instructional improvement. The business of schooling is teaching and learning; if change does not happen in the classroom, it is not happening at all. Thus, Lee's efforts are directed toward what teachers do in classroom.

WHO MIGHT USE THIS BOOK

The framework and concrete examples we present in this book can be of practical use for school leaders. You may have picked up this book for any of the following reasons:

- You may be a *current principal*, hungry for new strategies to work with your teachers to bring about necessary changes in their classrooms. This book provides a process for engaging your school

community in both inquiry and action to bring about the improvements in learning that you seek.

- You may be an *aspiring principal* who is curious about what it looks like to be an effective school leader. This book provides both pictures of an effective principal in practice, as well as the skills, knowledge, and disposition you'll need to become such a leader.
- You may be a *district leader* or a *state policy maker* pressed to raise student achievement outcomes. For district leaders, this book provides a ready-made professional development series for your principals. For state policy makers, this book can serve as a basis for dialogue with district leaders who struggle to meet the achievement mandates.
- You, like us, may be *professors* and/or *professional developers* of all the groups noted above. As teachers of aspiring school principals, we find that current school principals are hungry for tools of change, as are district leaders and policy makers who aim to foster systemic change. We wrote this book to facilitate our work with these groups. We hope that you will also find value in using it in your work.

In addition, we believe that all school personnel can find the content of our example chapters to be useful because we anchor the framework in the hot-button issues of curriculum, assessment, and instruction. For example, Chapter 4 explicates a case of how schools can use data.

WHO WE ARE

Our professional experiences as practitioners, professors, and policy makers have informed this book. Specifically, Lee, our principal protagonist, emerges from the years two of us spent as K–12 school principals and the research that all three of us conduct in schools. The *collaborative inquiry-action cycle* and the illustrative examples are products of our research in schools, our evaluations of educational programs, and our years of K–12 classroom teaching experiences. Our years as professors working with practicing and aspiring principals and policy makers have added to our knowledge and understanding of how schools work and the changing pressures they are under. Our work with the national and state departments of education and professional organizations, as well as local school boards, expands our perspectives. Two of us have watched our children's passage through the public school system; the other is currently watching his children in the process. We have each lived in, around, and with schools our entire lives—we know schools. The result is a book that

describes and illustrates the means to become an *inquiry-minded, action-oriented principal*.

HOW WE ORGANIZED THE BOOK

The book is divided into three sections: *From Challenges to Possibilities*, *The Collaborative Inquiry-Action Cycle in Action*, and *Making It Happen*. We set the stage in Chapters 1 and 2, first identifying the forces that challenge current school improvement efforts. Chapter 1 also summarizes the current literature on school leadership, specifically exploring the *myth of the great principal*. In Chapter 2, we offer a framework with possibilities to meet these challenges—the *collaborative inquiry-action cycle*.

The next three chapters illustrate the cycle in practice, with three independent yet connected examples. Chapter 3's example addresses a *case of curricular alignment*. Chapter 4 provides a *case of data informing practice*. Chapter 5 demonstrates a *case of changing instructional practice*. These cases, with charts, inventories, rubrics, and illustrations, provide models of how the cycle can actually be used in real schools.

The last two chapters make up the *Making It Happen* section. Chapter 6 looks across the three cases and offers analytic insights into *what roles* the principal takes on to enact the collaborative inquiry-action cycle. Finally, in the last chapter, we put Lee and the cycle to the reality test. We ask *does it really work?* We reflect on and evaluate the *collaborative inquiry-action cycle* in practice.

Each chapter begins with a vignette of our principal Lee. The vignettes capture Lee's hopes and anxieties concerning an experience that should be real to readers. From Lee, our middle school principal, we learn what it feels and looks like to be an *inquiry-minded, action-oriented principal*. Lee's actions in the concrete examples illustrate the framework and process amidst the current educational context. This glimpse of Lee's professional life offers insights into the ways the principal responds to and uses new and complex forces that carry demands and expectations for schools and school leaders. Because Lee is a composite of the various school principals we know, have been, and have seen, we recognize that this leader may appear larger than life. Lee's every thought and action, however, derives from at least one practicing principal from our experiences.

We hope that our framing of school improvement and leadership, as well as the examples of Lee in action, will stimulate and provoke further thought. At the end of each chapter, we supply questions and exercises to guide both individual reflection and group discussion. Various audiences may adapt these questions to fit their specific settings, interests, and needs.