

Preface

We have been working on district-wide reform for over 30 years, and on whole-system reform (province, state, country) since 1997. In the course of this work, capacity building has come to play a central role—strategies that develop individual and collective knowledge, competencies, and dispositions essential for improvement of student learning.

In this book we delve more specifically and comprehensively into what capacity building looks like and how to achieve more of it—what we call the nitty-gritty of doing it. This is important in its own right because the term *capacity building* can easily become superficial and vague in its use.

But we have a deeper interest and purpose, which is how to institutionalize and sustain capacity building for every teacher and every student—what we call realization—the 14th parameter that crystallizes the environment created by satisfying the demands of the other 13 parameters that formed the basis of our original model. Thus having worked with capacity building for two decades, the next strategy question is how to embed it in large systems.

In Chapter 1 we set the frame by reviewing the main core elements of capacity building and its relationship to realization. Chapter 2 talks about the nitty-gritty of capacity building, and Chapter 3 is about the day-to-day modeling, sharing, and guiding of effective practice.

In Chapter 4 we consolidate system-wide capacity building as interdependent practice, or realization. It is here that we introduce the system as a whole, including the role of the state or province. In Chapter 5 we worry about the barriers to going deeper, and in Chapter 6 we take up the question of whole-system reform involving the school, district, and state levels as a means of sustaining realization.

This book melds theory and practice. We have always had a strong knowledge base, but theory is advanced best through purposeful action. We can no longer tell where theory begins and practice ends or vice versa. When the system has achieved realization, theory and practice become seamless.

Capacity Building

A Journey of Deepening Discovery

Since about 1990 there has been a growing body of work that points to common characteristics and strategies that successful school districts use to raise student achievement. In Rosenholtz's (1989) study of 78 elementary schools, she classified schools as "stuck," "moving," and "in-between." She also found that a disproportionate number of stuck schools came from certain districts; likewise, moving schools were clustered in certain other districts. This prompted her to write a chapter on stuck and moving districts (two of the eight districts were in the latter category). Here is an excerpt:

The contrast between stuck and moving districts, nowhere more apparent than here, underscores how principals become helpful instructional advisors or maladroit managers of their schools. It is also clear that stuck superintendents attribute poor performance to principals themselves, rather than accepting any responsibility to help them learn and improve. This again may indicate their lack of technical knowledge and subsequent threats to their self-esteem. If districts take no responsibility for the in-service needs of principals, of course, principals become less able colleagues, less effective problem solvers, more reluctant to refer school problems to the central office for outside assistance, more threatened by their lack of technical knowledge, and most essential, of substantially less help to teachers. Of equal importance, with very little helpful assistance, stuck superintendents symbolically communicate the norm of self-reliance—and subsequently professional isolation—that improvement may not be possible, or worthy of their time and effort, or that principals should solve problems by themselves—lugubrious lessons principals may unwittingly hand down to poorly performing teachers, and thus teachers to students. (p. 189)

As we headed into the new century, evidence appeared to be coalescing around what it would take for districts to achieve district-wide success, at least in literacy and numeracy (see Fullan, 2007, Chapter 11). Togneri and Anderson's (2003) study of success in five high-poverty districts found six clear and consistent strategies at work:

1. Publicly acknowledging poor performance and seeking solutions (building the will for reform)
2. Focusing intensively on improving instruction and achievement
3. Building a system-wide framework and infrastructure to support instruction
4. Redefining and distributing leadership at all levels of the district
5. Making professional development relevant and useful
6. Recognizing that there are no quick fixes (p. 13)

2 Realization

Anderson (2006) also reviewed the research on district effectiveness and named 12 key strategic components:

1. District-wide sense of efficacy
2. District-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction
3. Adoption of and commitment to district-wide performance standards
4. Development and adoption of district-wide curriculum approaches to instruction
5. Alignment of curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and assessment to relevant standards
6. Multimeasure accountability systems and system-wide use of data to inform practice, hold school and district leaders accountable for results, and monitor progress
7. Targets and phased focuses of improvement
8. Investment in instructional leadership development at the school and district levels
9. District-wide, job-embedded professional development foci and supports for teachers
10. District-wide and school-level emphasis on teamwork and professional community (including, in several cases, positive partnerships with unions)
11. New approaches to board-district relations and in-district relations
12. Strategic relations with state reform policies and resources

One would think, then, that we have a growing consensus on the key factors for success and that it is just a matter of going to town on what we know. Such are the subtleties and complexities of capacity building that while it seems so obvious, implementation is never straightforward.

NOT SO FAST

So a district should get the standards right, align curriculum to them, conduct assessments on the new alignment, provide solid and continuous professional development on curriculum and instruction, set up a data system that can be used for both assessment *for* and *of* learning, and engage with the local community and state reform policies. It may surprise many readers that these steps by themselves are not sufficient and, at best, may represent a waste of resources or, at worst, do more harm than good.

The experience of the San Diego Unified School District is a good place to start with respect to the “not so fast” theme. Coming off a highly successful experience in District 2 in New York City from 1988 to 1996, Tony Alvarado was hired as chancellor of instruction in 1997 to join a new high-profile superintendent, Alan Bersin, in San Diego. In a sense the question was, if you could take the best knowledge and add resources and political clout, could you get results in a large urban district within a four-year period and then keep going, in this case moving from success in 45 schools (District 2 in New York) to 175 schools (San Diego)? The answer, incidentally, is yes, but it would require good strategies and a good deal of finesse, which as it turned out were not present in the San Diego strategy.

The San Diego story is one of the most closely watched reform initiatives in the history of urban school improvement. We draw here on the excellent account by Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006). The San Diego strategy was well detailed and explicit from day one and consisted of three components:

1. Improved student learning: closing the achievement gap
2. Improved instruction: teacher learning through professional development
3. Restructuring the organization to support student learning and instruction

In concluding this chapter, we like Pfeffer and Sutton's (2006) observation about Toyota, that over their decades of success Toyota "shows *no leadership effects*" (p. 211, italics in the original). By this they mean that interdependent practice is so embedded and reinforced by so many interlocking people and actions that given leaders could come and go without there being any negative impact. Toyota's culture had a built-in capacity to replenish itself. This is realization.

Here's the problem, in too many schools we think implementation means a few enthusiastic people doing it. . . . Don't say that we're doing collaboration, for example, if we don't have 90% of our faculty consistently, collaboratively scoring student work. Don't say that we're using high-yield teaching strategies, such as questions or cues or advanced organizers or similes and metaphors, if 90% of our faculty doesn't use them on a regular basis.

(D. Reeves, Teacher Moderation:
Collaborative Assessment of
Student Work, September 10, 2007,
Ontario Literacy and Numeracy
Secretariat Webcast).

Figure 4.4 Sample Guided Reading Folder (Outside) Continued**VISUALIZING**

- Describe the main character in your story. You can use illustrations to support your answer.
- Where and when does the story take place? Describe what you see in your mind when you read the book. Use evidence from the book to support your answer.
- What would a map of the area look like?

DETERMINING IMPORTANT IDEAS

- What is the author's message in this story? Why do you think he\she wrote the story?
- Talk about an important decision that a character in your book had to make. Do you agree or disagree with their decision as the solution to their problem?
- What are the most important ideas presented in the story?

QUESTIONING

- What are some questions you have for the author?
- Were there parts of the book you didn't understand? What puzzles you?
- Did you have any questions about the book that were answered as you continued to read?
- List at least 3 questions that you have and try to guess/predict the answers.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Does this book make you think about an event that happened in your life, a relationship that you have, or a decision that you had to make?
- Does this story remind you of anything that is going on in our world today?
- Does this story remind you of a movie, a television program, or another book that you have read?

MAKING INFERENCES

- Make a guess on how a character in the story is feeling after an important event in the story. What in the book makes you think this?
- How did the characters feel about one another?
- What do you think will happen next in the story?
- How do you think the story's problem or conflict will be fixed?
- What do you think a character in the book is going to do next in the story?
- Did you hope an event in the story wouldn't happen, but it happened anyway?
- Was it easy to predict the events of the plot? Were there any clues about what was going to happen next?