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# Preface

**I**n this age of dwindling resources and high-stakes accountability, many schools and districts are feeling pressed for time and squeezed for funds; they are being forced to teach more content in the same amount of time and, most tragically, cut their staff-development budgets in ways that curb opportunities for teacher learning. Yet, according to *The Report of the Task Force on Teacher Leadership* (2001),

No single principle of school reform is more valid or durable than the maxim that student learning depends first, last, and always on the quality of the teachers. Experts may disagree about how highly to value the size of a class or school, how the system functions, or whether it is adequately funded—but nobody’s list of education’s priorities fails to place teacher quality at or very near the top. (p. 1)

Hence, even under these current conditions, school districts must focus on the continued learning of their teachers.

Our purpose in this book is to help educators—including teacher leaders, principals, coaches, district staff-development directors, and superintendents, as well as state policy makers—understand how to cultivate powerful job-embedded, professional development opportunities from within the four walls of the school, particularly when time and money are tight. In designing professional development, educators who use this book will learn to accomplish much more with less and garner a higher return rate on staff-development investments they do make.

Our intent is to provide an overview of a number of different strategies that work well for job-embedded professional development and share creative ways to find time and resources to make these different strategies a reality in a school. Rather than providing an in-depth look at one particular strategy or tool, we have collected information about many powerful forms of professional development, so educators can make informed decisions about which strategies are most important for the particular purposes of their work. In crafting this text, we hoped to cultivate a greater

**H**ave you ever wondered

- Why is teacher professional development often ineffective?
- What would it take to improve teacher professional development and, subsequently, improve schools?
- What is job-embedded professional development, and what might it look like?

Have you ever heard a teacher say

- I just sat in a three-day workshop. I could have learned what they taught me in three hours!
- How did you do that?
- Can I have a copy of your . . . ?
- I wish they would let us be involved with deciding what we should do next. We are the ones that can make it happen!
- That would be great but there just isn't enough time in the school day!

Have you ever looked at an exemplary teacher and wondered why others didn't know the same strategies?

Have you ever had anyone tell you that the problem with schools is that they forgot to build the back porch?

Our guess is that you are nodding yes, perhaps with the sole exception being the very last question about the *back porch*. In Chapter 2, we will more thoroughly explain this phrase, which we and others have used as a metaphor for the kind of conversational space and professional learning culture we would like to encourage in schools.

The purpose of Part I of this book is to address these and other age-old teacher professional development dilemmas by examining

1. what we know about teacher professional development in general and job-embedded professional development in particular (Chapter 1);
2. how and why we need to create a space in schools for job-embedded professional development (Chapter 2); and
3. how to find the time and resources to make job-embedded professional development a reality in your school (Chapter 3).



## 4 Learning Needs

The fourth building block recognizes the importance of attending to teacher learning needs as we provide opportunities for job-embedded learning. Research indicates that change takes time and support (Banilower & Shimkus, 2004; Fullan, 2001a, 2001b). Instructional change that is real, lasting, and meaningful requires shifts in school culture. Professional development during this era must encourage a set of qualitative shifts in the way schools work. The development of teacher professional knowledge and instructional changes that will help all children learn takes time. Laura Desimone (2009) and Hilda Borko (2004) argue that attending to teacher learning needs requires differentiating between passive learning, which is typically listening to a lecture, and active learning, which includes the process of observing expert teachers or being observed, engaging in interactive feedback and discussion, reviewing student work, and leading discussion.

Similarly, drawing specifically on the work of Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1995), the most powerful combination of teacher activities that will ultimately create shifts in practice is a combination of five professional learning needs that, when addressed, lead to changes in teaching practice. These needs include

1. developing understanding of research-based practices, possible innovations, and the underlying theory and evidence that elevates them to being worthwhile of educator attention;
2. providing opportunities for demonstration or modeling of the practice;
3. affording teachers the time to practice the innovation;
4. creating opportunities for feedback and coaching; and
5. creating collaborative conditions that encourage reflection on the outcomes of the work.

By attending to each of these five professional learning needs, we create a *theory of change*, which identifies the steps, the connections between learning activities, and the outcomes that occur at each stage. Professional development is stronger when a theory of change guides the planning process, and defining a theory of change allows educators the power to improve their instruction and, ultimately, improve learning for all students.

In sum, there exist four different types of building blocks that are necessary for effective job-embedded professional development: knowledge source, knowledge type, orientation, and learning needs. Table 1.1 summarizes these different types of building blocks and illustrates what is

### Exercise 2.1 Assessing Your Current Teacher-Leadership Context

Use the Likert scale to rate the role teacher leaders play in your school.

<i>Teacher leaders . . .</i>	<i>1 Not involved</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3 Somewhat involved</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5 Highly involved</i>
Redesign instruction based on student assessment.					
Share ideas with colleagues.					
Are a mentor to new teachers.					
Help make personnel decisions.					
Create partnerships with community, families, and universities.					
Facilitate professional learning communities.					
Select professional development.					
Present workshops to colleagues.					
Influence school budgeting.					
Collaborate with peers.					
Lead school committees.					
Collaboratively reflect on teaching practice.					
Initiate school activities.					
Influence school policy.					

Based on these ratings, what recommendations would you have to strengthen teacher leadership at your school?

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## SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- *What is the degree of comfort that exists with these tools at your school?*

To build the PLC in a way that actually leads to job-embedded learning, we highly suggest that you engage your faculty in learning about, thinking about, and shaping the way to create job-embedded learning at your school. Buy in is critical from the PLC participants. Additionally, if this type of job-embedded learning is new to your school, be sure that the school leadership feels comfortable with sharing responsibility for teacher learning with the teachers themselves.

- *How ready is your school's culture to implement the tool?*

Given that teacher and administrator collaboration is central to PLC success, understanding and developing relationships that support professional learning is important. The kind of culture that best supports job-embedded learning of this type is one characterized as collegial. Collegial contexts typically possess the following characteristics:

- Establishing and maintaining a vision
- Building trust
- Harnessing power to positively influence group dynamics
- Enhancing collaboration
- Recognizing the importance of diversity
- Becoming critical friends
- Documenting learning to keep the group accountable
- Gaining comfort with change
- Using data to inform work
- Building connections with school leadership

- *How would you carve out time to use these tools in your building?*

By turning over the responsibility and accountability for professional learning, districts and school leadership are not excused from guiding professional development. School leadership will be instrumental in assuring that the necessary time exists to support this work. One way that those outside the school can help is by facilitating the exploration of new bell schedules that provide learning time for teachers during the day. School boards could reconsider how they allot professional learning time in the school calendar. Title I, II, and VI money can be used in new and innovative ways to support the development of professional learning communities within the school day.

- *What resources would you need to successfully use these tools?*

In turning over the responsibility and accountability for professional learning, school and district leadership will also need to identify ways to