PART ONE

Making the Case for Instructional Expertise

chapter
ONE

The Leader's Role in Developing Teacher Expertise

The visitor strolling through an herb garden sees what looks like a large-leafed weed. The herbalist sees comfrey, a remedy for burns. The patient can read only the second row on the eye chart. The eye doctor sees 20/100 vision and knows that glasses are needed. The teacher explains the rotation of the earth, sun, and moon. What do the principals observing that classroom lesson see? In our experience, not enough. At least not enough to inform the one most important aspect of their job as instructional leader, which is to provide useful, just-in-time feedback to the teacher and even more important, support the teacher's further professional learning guided by a clear picture of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses and grounded to a deep understanding of quality instruction.

Although the idea of teacher quality has received much greater recognition in recent years as the number one correlate of student achievement (Haycock, 1998; Peske & Haycock, 2006), the concept of teaching and instructional leadership expertise—particularly how one develops expertise—has received scant attention in educational policy and leadership circles. We take for granted that somehow teachers have acquired the deep subject matter and pedagogical expertise required to provide high-quality teaching for all

students. Or, worse yet, that great teachers are born with this amorphous "gift" for high-quality teaching without understanding and acknowledging how professionals deepen their practice over time. Furthermore, we too often fail to consider that even the best university teacher-preparation programs cannot cultivate the kind of deep expertise necessary to teach all students well in a one- or two-year program. Keeping in mind the big idea that teaching is a complex and sophisticated endeavor, school district leaders, principals, and teacher leaders must play a critical role in developing and cultivating the expertise necessary for high-quality teaching. This warrants a brief discussion of the expertise literature, particularly what we mean by *expertise* and how one goes about acquiring it.

The National Research Council's seminal work on how people learn presents a useful distinction between experts and novices in given disciplines that we see playing out every day in school leadership (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). By studying the differences between experts and novices in a variety of disciplines, Bransford and his colleagues found that experts ". . . have acquired extensive knowledge that affects what they notice and how they organize, represent, and interpret information in their environment" (p. 31). This deeper level of seeing and understanding enables experts to think more effectively about problems of practice within their specific discipline. And because a school leader's primary problem of leadership practice is how to improve the quality of teaching, the idea of expertise is particularly germane.

Although Bransford and colleagues' initial research on expertise was in disciplines other than school leadership, for example, physics, mathematics, history, and so on, our work with school and district leaders is completely consistent with their findings. If we start from the premise that extensive background knowledge affects what one notices and that the act of "noticing" is indeed an important skill for school leaders intent on improving instruction, then it begs the question of just how much school leaders notice when they go into a classroom. We have led hundreds of school and district leaders on classroom walkthroughs. We have found that there is a vast difference between expert observers and novices in terms of what they notice about the quality of instruction. Specifically we have found that

- Novice instructional leaders do not notice or think about key elements of instruction and often convey obvious misconceptions about or misuses

of those key elements. However, leaders with greater expertise can identify and discuss key elements with specificity; elaborate on what they see with specific examples, that is, evidence from the observed lesson; express wonder or questions about observations (for example, what is behind teaching decisions); and offer alternatives to teaching decisions or suggest ways to improve the lesson with specificity.

- Novices tend to make evaluative judgments more quickly based on superficial understanding. By contrast, experts tend to withhold judgment until they can describe in evidentiary terms what they are noticing along with important questions they may have that will guide further leadership actions.
- There is a vast difference between experts and novices in terms of what they wonder about and how they go about posing relevant problems of leadership practice based on what they did or did not notice. Experts in particular tend to be much more metacognitive in their formulation of next steps or specific leadership actions.

We know from experience there is not a widely shared view of what constitutes quality instruction—not among teachers, principals, or school district leaders. We think this poses a fundamental and challenging issue for educational leaders and policy makers. Without a shared understanding of what we mean by quality instruction, we have no basis from which to mount an improvement effort. This is an issue of expertise or in our case a lack of sufficient expertise necessary to improve the quality of teaching in every school and every classroom. The anecdotal observations that lead us to this conclusion also have been corroborated by extensive research by our colleagues at the University of Washington. Chapter Eight will offer a deeper look into this research, so for now we will assume prima facie that the expertise necessary to improve teaching practice is in short supply. This means the primary role of school and district leaders must be the cultivation of expertise to improve practice, including both teaching and leadership practice.

IT TAKES EXPERTISE TO MAKE EXPERTISE

In various presentations to school district leaders we like to show a slide with pictures of well-known people (athletes, actors, musicians, doctors, scientists, and so on) who are the very best in their field. After displaying their images, we ask the following question: what do these people have in common?

Truthfully, these people may have many things in common but our particular teaching points are threefold:

1. These people all represent professions that have clear and accepted standards for professional practice. There is shared understanding among all in their profession (and often outside their profession as well) about what constitutes quality performance.
2. All of these professionals have improved their given craft with public scrutiny and feedback. Not one of these professionals practices his or her craft in isolation.
3. All of these professionals have had or continue to have extensive coaching. It is understood and accepted that the most powerful way to improve one's craft is through coaching by someone with high expertise.

We believe that K–12 education as often practiced is a quasi-profession at best because we do not in fact have common standards of professional practice. City, Elmore, and colleagues (2009) frame this best in a chapter titled "A Profession in Search of a Practice":

> We tolerate a kind of benign vagueness in how we talk about the core functions of teaching and learning that privileges good intentions over demonstrable effectiveness in our practice. We sanction unacceptably large variations in teaching from one classroom to another with rhetoric about teaching as "style," "art," or "craft." And we reinforce the public's stereotype of teaching and learning as a knowledge-weak practice by largely refusing to exercise anything but perfunctory control over who gets to practice in classrooms and what happens to people who are demonstrably incompetent. (p. 188)

Whether under the guise of academic freedom, local control, or perhaps just simply doing what we have always done, millions of students are taught every day by hundreds of thousands of teachers, supported by thousands of school and district leaders without a clear understanding and agreement on quality practice. Frankly, this is shocking to consider. Can you imagine leading a team of surgeons in a complex organ transplant without common, accepted, and well-understood standards of surgical practice? We have heard some argue that teaching is different because it's so individual and cannot be

measured by the kind of quantitative metrics we use for our athletes such as the lowest round of golf, final score of a basketball game, or by how many seconds by which one wins a swimming competition. However, even in professions in which subjectivity plays into the definition of quality, there are still common accepted standards of practice. The Nobel Prize for scientists, the Pulitzer Prize for writers and journalists, and the Academy Awards for actors have a subjective element of measurement, but make no mistake, each of these awards are based on common, accepted standards of professional practice.

In most other professions than teaching, one thing clearly stands out—expertise is understood and valued. There is complete acceptance that the way to become the best in your field is to nourish and nurture the development of expertise. In the 2009 Los Angeles Open golf tournament Phil Mickelson was the leader after the first round, posting a score well below par. In the second round he posted a score above par and fell out of first place. After his disappointing round, he placed a call to his coach who was living in Las Vegas at the time. His coach flew to Los Angeles and they worked together for hours on the driving range. Mickelson went on to win the golf tournament. What is accepted as standard operating procedure in most professions has been anathema in public education. Can you imagine a teacher, who after struggling with a particular lesson, calling his or her instructional coach to do some work on the "driving range"? Actually we can imagine this same kind of public coaching cycle taking place in our schools because we are in fact doing this kind of work every day with teachers and principals in schools across the country. However, it is still the very rare exception, not the norm. In far too many cases teachers have no access to coaching, and in cases when they do have access the coach does not have sufficient expertise to help grow the teacher's expertise. In too many other cases the conditions—structural, cultural, political, and so on—preclude a successful coaching relationship between coach and teacher. In all cases it goes back to the leaders' own expertise and their conception of how to grow theirs and others' expertise.

One effort to address professional practice that has swept schools across the country is the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs). Most everywhere we visit, there is a major PLC initiative underway. The concept of professional learning communities popularized by Richard DuFour is sound (Dufour & Eaker; 1998). Implicit in the creation of professional learning communities is the idea that continued learning is key to improving practice; that

learning is inherently a social process; and that learning can be facilitated—in fact accelerated—through well-developed and supported organizational structures. We believe that the idea of expertise is still not well acknowledged and explicated in the PLC literature but nonetheless the concept of adults studying practice together as a way of improving practice makes sense. Yet in school after school we visit, we see PLCs that have little influence on improving teaching practice, and in some cases the PLC is a structure that ultimately reinforces the current state of teaching. Because schools and school districts are in fact complex organizations, we need to be cautious about attributing one causal factor for the ineffectiveness we see when observing PLCs across the country. The truth is that there are many factors at play that ultimately lie at the heart of leadership. Yet one idea in particular that is worthy of deeper consideration is the idea of expertise. Before school leaders consider forming professional learning communities, there are two important questions to consider:

1. What role does expertise play in promoting group and individual learning?
2. How much internal expertise—in terms of internal to the group—is necessary to accelerate group and individual learning?

From our observations at least one factor limiting the effectiveness of PLCs is an insufficient level of expertise within the group necessary to advance the learning of that group. Let's think about this in another context. Suppose a group of eight snow skiers come together as a learning community to study skiing with the expressed purpose of improving their skill level. This, of course, is step one—actually coming together with the expressed purpose of improving their knowledge and skills versus attending to their other adult needs. As it turns out, the skill level of the group ranges from novice to perhaps a beginning intermediate level. The group meets on the ski slopes every weekend during the ski season to ski together, watch each other ski, and offer tips for improvement as necessary. In between they read books on skiing and watch videos of expert skiers tackling challenging terrain. It is not unreasonable to assume that over time individual group members could improve their skills. Much of this would depend on how well the group functions, adherence to agreed-on norms, the amount of time dedicated to study and practice, and so on. There are indeed important organizational and sociocultural

aspects of learning that play out within and among group members. Suppose, however, that this group of skiers had access to at least one expert skier—whether within the group itself or as an outside coach to the group. There is no question this one change *could* accelerate the group's learning along with the skill development of each individual group member. This idea of access to expertise—either internally or externally—is a fundamental challenge for leaders interested in creating professional learning communities.

Notice we say that access to expertise—whether inside or outside—*could* accelerate group learning. Whether or not this acceleration actually takes place leads to another important idea: it *takes expertise to make expertise*. Bransford and Schwartz (2008) posit that there are two kinds of expertise involved in the idea that it takes expertise to make expertise. The first is *learning* expertise, which "... involves the degree to which would-be experts continually attempt to refine their skills and attitudes toward learning—skills and attitudes that include practicing, self-monitoring, and finding ways to avoid plateaus and move to the next level" (p. 3). Inherent in the concept of learning expertise is the idea of how coachable one is as a learner. The extent to which one can move more quickly along the continuum of novice to expert depends in part on how open one is to the kind of public scrutiny and critical feedback necessary in a coaching relationship. We will talk more about this in a moment because it has tremendous implications for leaders as they address their school or district culture.

Bransford and Schwartz call the second kind of expertise *teaching expertise,* which involves a variety of forms including but not limited to coaching. The key argument here is that simply being an expert in something does not guarantee that one is also good at teaching that expertise to others. The idea of two integral kinds of expertise—learner and teacher—significantly increases the level of complexity for school and district leaders. Not only do they need to consider how to nurture the learner's role in the acquisition of expertise, but they also need to find or develop experts—either internally or externally—who can actually teach others. This is complex and sophisticated leadership work whether one is a teacher leader, school principal, or district leader. If leaders do not understand this level of complexity, they run the risk of glomming onto structures and processes such as PLCs without giving careful consideration to the role of expertise—and more important, not knowing how to create conditions so that group and individual expertise can be developed in

the service of improved teaching practice. In ensuing chapters we will provide some tools to support leaders in this work, but first we want to go back to the idea of critical feedback and public practice—both essential concepts for the development of learner expertise.

If we accept the argument that public practice and critical feedback are essential components and catalysts for the development of expertise, then the culture of schooling—at least how it manifests every day in most American public schools—stands in stark contrast to the conditions necessary to grow expertise. Although most professions are characterized in part by public practice and scrutiny, American public education is epitomized by privacy and isolation. This phenomenon is widely recognized, has been talked about for many years, and has been great subject matter for researchers and reformers. Yet this inherent and historical way of doing business persists. There have been varied attempts at breaking through this isolation including the aforementioned professional learning communities and other like structures and processes. Still, the unfortunate reality is that in the vast majority of schools across the country today, public practice, scrutiny, and feedback remain anathema to the culture of schooling.

In our view this presents a major leadership challenge for school leaders who are intent on improving teaching practice. Although we hear leaders lament about this challenge time and again, there is often a troubling disconnect. We often hear leaders wish that their teachers were more willing to open their classrooms, invite feedback, and work together to improve practice. It is in this state of wishful thinking that school leaders search for structures and processes such as PLCs, all the while neglecting to understand that their instructional leadership plays a fundamental role in this work. Too many school leaders see their role as being the purveyor, supporter, and cheerleader for new structures and processes without understanding their more integral role in the improvement process. In subsequent chapters we will explore this integral role in depth but for now we want to discuss the leader's role in creating a culture of public practice. Simply stated, the extent to which leaders make their own practice public is the extent to which they can help teachers confront their own vulnerabilities, which is a necessary prerequisite to making one's practice public.

Let's examine how school district leaders can do this. As an example, let's explore Public Practice School District (PPS), an urban school district of

twenty-five thousand students that shares a contiguous boundary with one of the larger urban school districts in the country. The majority of the students are Hispanic with large numbers of English language learners (ELLs). PPS had a history of poor student performance with approximately five out of ten students reading at grade level according to their reading achievement scores on the state-administered assessment. District and school leaders tried a number of different programs and approaches but were missing a systemic effort, rooted in a clear theory of action, and supported by well-developed strategies and actions. The superintendent and his executive staff understood that the only way to improve reading achievement was to improve the quality of teaching, and that meant teachers had to be open and willing to examine their own practice, learn new strategies, and incorporate those new strategies into their existing practice. In fact, in some cases teachers had to be willing to completely overhaul their previous practice for a new and improved practice—much like professional baseball players and golfers must do when their swings are no longer sufficient to perform at the highest level. The superintendent and his staff could have outsourced this improvement effort to principals but they recognized that as district leaders they were responsible for modeling the kind of practice they wished to see in schools. By practice in this case we are not referring to the actual quality of teaching but to the process of making one's practice public. The superintendent understood that many teachers were never going to invite coaches into their classrooms to work on teaching practice until the principal was able to create the conditions necessary for self- and public reflection. This meant that principals had to make their practice public as well.

For the first year of the reading improvement effort district leaders, principals, and newly identified K–12 literacy coaches met monthly to learn new reading strategies from leading outside experts. What happened in between these monthly meetings was most important. The district leaders, including the superintendent, the assistant superintendents, and other central office staff, went to schools to teach reading lessons, employing one or more of newly learned reading strategies. These reading lessons were not meant to be exemplars nor were they. The idea of the superintendent and assistant superintendents teaching lessons was meant to model what we mean by making practice public, by exposing and being willing to talk about their own practice, and being metacognitive about what they were doing in terms of specific

teaching moves and inviting teachers and principals into the observation and analysis. As we will discuss in later chapters, this co-inquiry and co-learning stance on the part of district leaders is most critical for leaders who want to create a culture of public practice.

Throughout the course of the year the large group studied together and after much district leader modeling, principals were expected to teach reading lessons in their own schools as a way of modeling how professionals come together to study and improve practice. The superintendent understood the concept of reciprocal accountability, which meant that first and foremost district leaders had to build the capacity of principals and literacy coaches and tackle the pervasive culture of privacy and isolation. This is akin to the work farmers and gardeners do all of the time as they tirelessly ready the soil for planting. They understand the importance of soil preparation.

After a period of "soil preparation," the PPS reading improvement effort moved to a more embedded professional development model with literacy coaches working actively in teachers' classrooms, with teachers and coaches coming together in what we call *studio classrooms* to study and model practice, and with principals and district leaders continuing to model, monitor, and lead. (We provide a much deeper look at this type of professional development in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.) Eventually the PPS district also formalized a *professional learning community* strategy; however, this strategy was an outgrowth of a culture that had already (1) made a fundamental shift from private to public and (2) developed a strong foundation of expertise among many teachers, coaches, and principals. In an already established culture of public practice PLCs can more easily serve the intended purpose of improving practice.

It is clear that leaders who are intent on improving teaching practice must be mindful of *learning expertise* and all that is required to nourish and support its development. At the same time they must pay equal attention to Bransford and Schwartz's notion of *teaching expertise.* In fact, the same thoughtful consideration that should be paid to the recruitment, assignment, induction, and ongoing support for teachers of children should be given to teachers of adults. In far too many school districts there is no systemic and strategic approach to developing the expertise necessary to be effective teachers of adults. It is no wonder that professional development for teachers in these districts is often isolated, episodic, and disconnected from teachers'

daily practice. Even in school districts where district leaders have acknowledged the need for coaches to embed professional development into daily practice, there often is still a disturbing lack of foresight in terms of the recruitment, assignment, induction, and ongoing support necessary to ensure an effective coaching model.

Here is a typical example. We'll call this district Chance Public Schools, which is a medium-sized school district with an enrollment of nineteen thousand students. The district has three comprehensive high schools, four middle schools, and nineteen elementary schools. Chance School District leaders came to the conclusion that instructional coaching for teachers is a worthwhile investment. Rather than basing the size of the investment on a thoughtful plan, grounded to a clear theory of action and long-term strategy for the development of expertise, district leaders based this investment solely on a recently identified pot of available dollars. District leaders determined in April that they had enough funding to hire thirteen coaches for the following school year. With no thoughtful plan in place and guided by a prevailing mental model that school allocations must be equal, district leaders decided to hire a half-time coach for each school. Chance principals were all notified of this decision at a district meeting with the superintendent. They were told that the human resources department would work out a selection process after deliberations and a memorandum of understanding was put in place with the local teachers' association.

In May, the principals were notified that they could create their own internal process to select the instructional coach. They could involve other teachers in that process but ultimately they had the authority to make the appointment. Assuming that most principals would appoint an existing teacher to that role, principals were reminded that this would be a half-time appointment only, which meant that the teacher-coach would have to continue with a 50-percent teaching assignment. Principals went about making these individual decisions during the rush of end-of-school-year activities and with the pressure to have their teacher assignments and master schedule all completed before they went on vacation at the end of June.

Because no forethought was given to the expertise required to be an effective coach, principals were given no guidance in terms of subject matter expertise. In other words it didn't matter whether a teacher (soon to be coach) had a particular content expertise. Principals were told to identify a strong

teacher who was well respected. Because Chance leaders had no widely shared understanding of what they meant by quality instruction, their individual conception of a "strong teacher" was not necessarily shared by other principals across the district. By the close of the school year in June, most of the principals had made their appointments. Several principals had to wait due to impending retirements, teacher leave issues, and other factors that affect the timing of human resource decisions. In all cases a half-time coach was identified before the start of school in September. When teachers came back to work in August they were notified by the principals that they would have an instructional coach supporting their efforts during the upcoming school year.

The Chance Public Schools coaching investment totaled a million dollars based on an average annual teacher cost of $77,000 including benefits. This large sum of money was invested without any thought given to the issues of learner and teacher expertise discussed in this chapter. There were several middle and high schools in which the coach had a language arts background and was asked to support all of the teachers regardless of their subject area. In several other secondary schools principals made the determination that the coach should at least focus his or her efforts with like–subject area teachers. In one high school the coach also taught Advanced Placement Calculus so she worked only with the math teachers throughout the year. Because the only guidance principals received was to select a strong teacher, and because *strong* was not defined in terms of subject matter expertise and the expertise necessary to be an effective teacher of adults, the quality of the coaches varied greatly. Because nothing was done to create the prerequisite conditions for instructional improvement of the kind that occurred in our prior example, Chance School District leaders were essentially rolling the dice on a one-million-dollar investment. Contrast the Chance District leaders' strategy—or lack thereof—with what occurred in our Public Practice School District at the inception of their reading improvement effort. We have already discussed how the PPS leaders went about creating the conditions necessary to grow learner expertise. However, prior to the official kick-off of the reading improvement effort the PPS district had assigned a group of coaches called TOSAs (teachers on special assignment) to the curriculum and staff development department while some individual schools purchased their own TOSAs. There was no single job description or training focus for the TOSAs. Consequently, they were used in a variety of capacities

with most assuming administrative duties. There was absolutely no strategy for how the TOSAs would actually improve teaching practice. This was before they began the reading improvement effort. When PPS launched this effort—unlike the Chance School District—their leaders did have a specific focus, guided by a clear theory of action and concomitant strategies to improve the quality of reading instruction. A strong, sustainable, and embedded instructional coaching model was one of those strategies. Consequently, the district sent all of the TOSAs back to the classroom prior to beginning their improvement effort in order to free up funding to hire a very different kind of instructional coach.

The superintendent and his key leaders then determined how much they could invest in the coaching model. However, that specific determination was predicated on the larger investment decision necessary to launch and sustain a multiyear commitment to improve the quality of reading instruction. In other words, the amount the district could invest in hiring instructional coaches was directly related to the amount they could invest in the overall effort, understanding that a successful effort required simultaneous investments such as bringing in outside experts and coaches and purchasing instructional materials, classroom libraries and substitute teachers to cover classes while teachers studied together. Guided by examples of the very best instructional coaching models across the country, Public Practice leaders developed a comprehensive job description that paid particular attention to the kind of expertise necessary to be a successful coach. They advertised the coaching positions inside and outside of the district. Prospective candidates had to teach a lesson so that district leaders could assess the level of subject matter expertise—in this case, reading. Prospective candidates also had to go through an extensive interview process so that PPS leaders could ascertain their level of *teacher expertise* in terms of supporting adult learning. Because they had only enough money to hire nine coaches initially, they assigned those coaches directly to the assistant superintendents instead of having the school principals hire their own part-time coach, as in the case of the Chance School District. This allowed the assistant superintendents to deploy coaches thoughtfully and strategically with the sole intent on developing teacher expertise in reading instruction. Without being conscious of the expertise literature per se, the PPS superintendent and his executive leaders certainly understood the concept that it *takes expertise to make expertise.*

BUILDING SHARED UNDERSTANDING

In the truest spirit of *you cannot lead what you do not know,* it is incumbent on school leaders to develop their own expertise about quality instruction. Leaders charged with the improvement of teaching practice must understand and be able to explicate what good practice looks like in order to lead and guide professional development, target and align resources, and engage in ongoing problem solving and long-range capacity building. This is part one of a two-part instructional leadership equation. It is foundational and sequential. Without developing this expertise school leaders can struggle to provide the leadership necessary to improve teaching practice.

The challenge for school leaders lies in the fact that simply developing a more expert understanding of high-quality teaching doesn't mean they can successfully lead the improvement process. This brings us to the second part of the leadership equation, which is still about expertise, but a very different kind of expertise. Successful school leaders have to develop their expertise in multiple disciplines. They must have enough expertise to recognize quality instruction. This provides the guidepost—the "north star" so to speak—for their leadership efforts. They must also develop the leadership expertise necessary to influence and mobilize action within complex organizations amidst a prevailing culture designed to blunt most attempts to improve individual and collective practice. This is akin to effective classroom teachers who must have both content and pedagogical expertise in order to successfully educate all students. In the case of the leadership discipline, leaders' content expertise is their deep understanding of quality instruction, and their pedagogical expertise is in knowing how to guide, support, nourish, and nurture teachers in their own improvement effort.

Since the mid 1990s there have been a number of emergent structures and processes designed to develop this kind of leadership learning. One of the first such structures and processes was the learning walkthrough. The learning walkthrough grew out of the work of Community School District 2 in New York City under the leadership of Anthony Alvarado. Much has been written about District 2 that documents what is arguably one of the most successful school district improvement efforts to date (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Stein & D'Amico, 1999). One hallmark of the District 2 improvement strategy was the very public nature of teaching. District leaders

routinely spent time in classrooms with school principals observing instruction and mapping out specific improvement efforts that were then linked to carefully developed and implemented professional development for teachers and principals. The premise behind the learning walkthroughs was to make teaching a public practice, develop a deepened and shared understanding of that practice, and use this emerging knowledge to implement specific improvement efforts.

Since the beginning of our work at CEL in 2001 we have seen as many locally developed variations of learning walkthroughs as there are butterflies. The only common denominator is a leadership decision (typically at the district level) that having administrators in groups going into classrooms is a good thing. And in the spirit of deprivatizing teaching practice, having other adults in classrooms on a regular basis can be a good thing. However, the expectations for what these walkthroughs are supposed to accomplish—including the set-up, delivery, and follow-up—vary significantly from district to district. Accordingly, in many cases these locally designed walkthrough processes do little to improve leaders' expertise and as a result do little to improve teaching practice. We will delve much deeper into the walkthrough process in Chapter Four.

Over the last several years City, Elmore, and colleagues (2009) have addressed the expertise issue through a structure called *instructional rounds,* in which leaders are afforded opportunities to increase their knowledge of instruction and their expertise in terms of how to lead for the improvement of that instruction. In terms of developing a common language and a shared understanding of quality instruction, leaders are taught how to stay in the descriptive versus evaluative mode as they observe classroom teaching. This is premised on the concept of medical rounds, in which over 90 percent of the doctors' conversations are descriptive (describing the patient symptoms) versus evaluative (making a specific diagnosis). As we have already mentioned, one of the differences between novice and expert observers of instruction is the ability to withhold judgment until they can describe fully in evidentiary terms what they are seeing. As City, Elmore, and colleagues (2009) assert, this ability to stay in the descriptive mode is the way to develop shared understanding and separate the observation from the person. This is indeed a powerful way to deepen leaders' knowledge of quality teaching.

Elmore's instructional rounds model also addresses the second part of our leadership equation, which is how to seize on a deepened understanding of instruction to actually lead for instructional improvement. This is facilitated in part by learning how to construct a viable theory of action that forces leaders to think about how their specific strategies and actions are going to result in accomplishing their vision for improvement. In our work with networks of superintendents and principals, we, too, have found that attention to theory of action is an important starting point in leading for instructional improvement. We found that all school districts—even very small ones—all suffer from what Elmore calls *organizational clutter*. Our like phrase is MIS—multiple initiative syndrome. We are amazed at how many school district initiatives are operating at any given point in time, often on separate tracks, administered from deeply entrenched organizational silos, and with no relationship to a single improvement effort. And this isn't just the province of large urban school districts. We see this in suburban and rural districts as well. A strong theory of action can serve as a filter from which to develop specific strategies and actions. In our superintendent and principals networks we tackle the theory of action work by learning how to engage and sustain an ongoing cycle of inquiry with real leadership problems of practice. We will discuss this work in greater depth in the ensuing chapters but first we want to conclude this chapter by going back once more to part one of our leadership equation—how to help leaders develop a deeper understanding of high-quality instruction—because this expertise remains foundational for improved teaching and learning.

In our work with school and district leaders—in formal, informal, and ad hoc networks—we have learned the importance of teaching them how to describe what they are seeing in classrooms. The skill of noticing and wondering precedes analysis, theorizing, and evaluating. It is a prerequisite knowledge and skill and in too short supply across the national school leadership ranks. We teach leaders how to script lessons as a starting place in this process. Similar to Elmore and his colleagues' networks, we encourage leaders to stay in the descriptive mode as a way of building a common language, shared understanding, and separating the observation from the person. That said, we have been searching along the way for how to accelerate this foundational learning, knowing (as per our two-part leadership equation) that developing expertise in the observation and analysis of instruction doesn't mean leaders can actually lead for instructional improvement. And given the urgency to eliminate

long-standing academic achievement gaps, we don't have years to wait while leaders slowly accrue this important foundational learning. We grappled with the following question: by providing an instructional framework that clearly identifies quality teaching practice, is it possible to accelerate leaders' learning of quality instruction while still fostering the critical elements of individual and group learning involved in the instructional rounds process? In other words, is it possible to teach leaders how to stay in the descriptive mode while using a lens to help them focus their observations?

The answer to these questions has been a resounding yes. In fact, we now argue that just like an astronomer who uses a telescope to see the planets and constellations in greater detail and sharper focus, a quality instructional framework can help leaders sharpen their lens in terms of what they notice and wonder about when they walk into classrooms. Chapter Two will offer an in-depth examination of our Five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning framework. In the spirit of the astronomer, we offer this framework as a way of helping school leaders see more. In and of itself it won't help them reach the stars but at least they will know in which direction to shoot.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we introduced the concept of expertise drawn from extensive research in the learning sciences. We discussed the difference between *learner expertise* and *teacher expertise* and argued that school district leaders who are intent on improving instructional practice must address both of these important concepts in their strategic planning. We introduced an argument that *it takes expertise to make expertise* and provided examples of how school district leaders can nurture and then seize on the development of internal expertise. We argued at length the importance of making our *practice public* as a starting place for significant improvement efforts. We also introduced our two-part instructional leadership equation that first places great importance on developing a shared vision and common language for high-quality teaching and then focuses on how leaders can use that emerging picture of high-quality teaching to lead for instructional improvement. The ensuing chapters will build and expand on this leadership equation by providing a clear picture of what we mean by high-quality teaching and then provide numerous examples, tools, and protocols for leaders engaged in the daily practice of instructional improvement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the idea of "expertise" fit with improvement efforts in your school or district?
- In your role as a district, school, or teacher leader, how do you currently develop your own and others' "learner expertise" and "teacher expertise"?
- How are you developing a shared vision and understanding of quality instruction in your school or district?