Introduction

How we think about the *impact* of what we do is more important than focusing on *what* we do

Practices Trump Labels and Beliefs Trump Practices

In the winter of 2008, Dr. Viviane Robinson, a professor of education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, along with two of her colleagues, Claire Lloyd and Ken Rowe, released a study involving the impact of different leadership processes on student outcomes. They discovered, among other things, that school leaders' "impact on student outcomes will depend on the particular leadership practices in which they engage" (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 637). They identified five major dimensions of effective leaders: establishing goals and expectations; strategic resourcing; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. This finding caused Viviane and her colleagues to suggest that researchers and practitioners could elevate their attention from "a general focus on the impact of leadership, to examining and increasing the frequency and distribution of those practices that make larger positive differences to student outcomes" (pp. 637–638). Is it sufficient, however, to simply shift school leaders' focus to high-probability practices?

We think not. Clearly, school leaders don't have unlimited time, energy, and resources. Yes, they must have the basics of human relations, management, and financial acumen. So, as a matter of self-preservation, they have to figure out where their time, effort, and influence will count the most. They must decide where their leadership practice can make the biggest difference and have the greatest impact, and then deliberately set their course in that direction. So, yes, a focus on the higher-probability practices is a practical first step forward. However, by itself, it is insufficient. Why? Because a myopic focus on high-probability practices alone without an understanding of *why* school leaders are doing *what* they are doing and a focus on the

Effective school leaders talk about their mindframes and their beliefs and prove them through their practices and results.

impact of what they did condemns them to a professional life in which they wander aimlessly from one innovation or influence to the next. Conversely, a vision without a *how* (i.e., high-probability practices) is the definition of daydreaming. Effective school leaders talk about their mindframes (i.e., ways of thinking) and their beliefs and prove them through their practices (i.e., the hows) and results (i.e., the what).

Just as school leaders' practices trump the labels under which school leaders operate, there is yet one more ordinal shift: school leaders' practices are trumped by the way school leaders think about their role. In other words, the way school leaders think about what they do is more important than what they do (the particular leadership practices)—hence their mindframes, or ways of thinking. Another way of saying this is, school leaders' beliefs and values, their mindframes, explain their actions and maximize their impact on teachers, parents, and students. What are these particular "ways of thinking," and how are they evidenced within school leaders? A major theme in this book is to explore the answers to these questions.

In the interim, imagine two school leaders each engaged in many of the same things—managing a facility, attending to human relations, conducting professional learning/meetings, engaging in classroom walkthroughs, and so on. The difference between these two school leaders can be found in how they process and relay how they think about the interpretations that matter. Consider the following example to help illustrate our point. As a school leader, Joel spends much time on ensuring everyone in the school knows, adopts, and promotes the goals and expectations they have jointly determined; gearing the strategic resources to realize these goals; and ensuring that the curriculum and teaching are constructed and evaluated to align with the goals. Emma, also a school leader, is more focused on the impact of her adults in the school (teachers, assistants, front office, support staff, librarians): that the adults have exemplars of what is meant by impact; that they know what a year's growth looks like; and that the notion of impact includes achievement, social and emotional aspects, and that programs are adapted when they are shown to not have sufficient impact on a sufficient number of students. She, too, ensures an orderly and supportive environment, promotes and resources teacher learning to maximize this impact, and continually questions whether the goals and expectations are appropriate. It is more than the right focus, it is the ways of thinking about these foci to ensure that they have the appropriate impact on the students in the school.
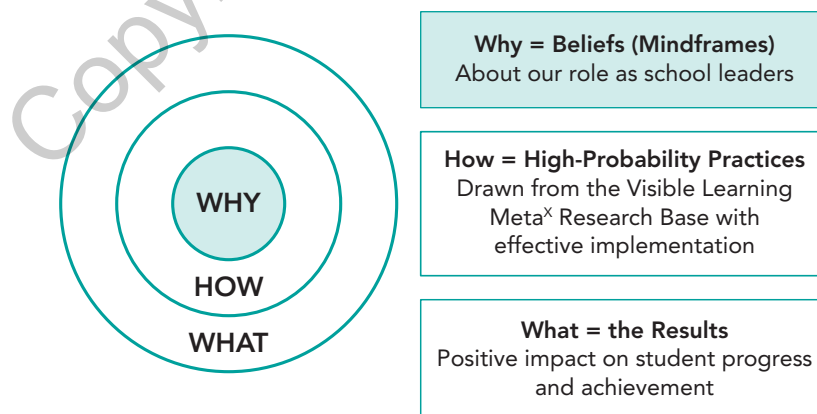
Simon Sinek and the Golden Circle

This idea—that one's thought about her or his impact of what they do precedes and guides their every action—is supported in the work of Simon Sinek (2009) and his thinking within his book *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action.* In this book, Sinek underscores the idea that "[i]t is not just WHAT or HOW you do things that matters; what matters more is that WHAT and HOW

you do things is consistent with your WHY" (p. 166), which is why a focus solely on practices alone, even high-probability practices, represents an incomplete recipe for success. Successful leaders talk about their Why and prove it with what they do. The main question for these leaders is why something should be done. Answering this question leads them to the question of how to do something (e.g., high-probability practices) and finally to what, or the results of those actions. Sinek (2019) more recently noted that leaders are not responsible for the results; leaders are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results. "And the best way to drive performance in an organization is to create an environment in which information can flow freely, mistakes can be highlights and help can be offered and received. In short, an environment in which people feel safe among their own. This is the responsibility of a leader" (p. 129). We argue that leaders are responsible for demonstrating their thinking about the importance of results (we prefer impact, to avoid any narrow notion of only or merely increasing test scores—there are so many more important results than just test scores), for helping to ensure all have similar notions of what they are aiming to impact, and for the degree to which they are successful and want and need to be successful. Leaders should ensure that the resources needed for learning are provided for all to make the needed impact—and celebrating it when it occurs.

Consequently, the complete recipe for success is depicted in Figure i.1, what Sinek (2009) refers to as the "Golden Circle" (p. 37). Success has its origins in the inner

THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

Why = Beliefs (Mindframes)
About our role as school leaders

How = High-Probability Practices
Drawn from the Visible Learning
Meta^X Research Base with
effective implementation

What = the Results
Positive impact on student progress
and achievement

Source: Adapted from Simon Sinek. See www.visiblelearningmetax.com for the Visible Learning Meta^X Research Base.

Figure i.1

circle and the question of why and then radiates outward from there by school leaders asking the questions of how and what.

If we apply this simple yet powerful model to the ideas of mindframes and their relationship to Visible Learning®, then we would populate Sinek's (2009) Golden Circle with the following language. Mindframes are our Why. They represent an internal set of beliefs we hold near and dear to our hearts—a belief that our primary role is to be an evaluator of our impact on student learning, use assessment as a way to inform our impact and next steps, collaborate with our peers and students about that impact, be an agent of change, challenge others to not simply "do your best," give and help students and teachers understand feedback and interpret and act on the feedback given to us, engage in dialogue, inform others what successful impact looks like from the outset, build relationships and trust, and focus on learning and the language of learning. The Visible Learning+™ strategies and processes are the How to our Why. And the What refers to the result—the outcomes we intend to accomplish or the evidence of our collective impact on student progress and achievement.

So, what is your Why? As school leaders, each of us has an internal set of Whys that drives our external actions. The problem is, most of us have probably not sat down and clearly identified why we do what we do. And, if we have gone through that exercise, we most likely have not determined the degree to which our personal Whys are aligned with what the research says makes the greatest difference to the learning lives of students. And, how do your Whys align with the 10 mindframes for school leaders presented within this book? The Whys or mindframes reflect a summary of the 25+ years of Visible Learning research. The underlying theory of action for these 10 mindframes is ensuring school leaders have the expertise to communicate and act on their interpretation of the diagnosis of school and classroom data, selecting high-probability intervention(s), implementing these interventions effectively, and evaluating the impact of the selected interventions on student learning.

Ensuring School Leaders Have Expertise in Diagnosis, Interventions, Implementation, and Evaluation

If you are familiar with the Visible Learning® research, you will recall that the average effect size (i.e., the degree of impact of a particular influence on learning) of a year's progress is $d = 0.40$. And given the "flaws" of the average, this is but a broad benchmark needing a lot of contextual debates when applied in a school.

When the various education interventions we have reviewed in our Visible Learning work are considered, the most significant comes from teachers and school leaders, with many achieving a much greater effect than a year's growth for a year's input, as is illustrated by the following examples:

- Working together to evaluate their impact (0.93)

- Moving from what students know now toward explicit success criteria (0.77)

- Building trust and welcoming errors as opportunities to learn (0.72)

- Getting maximum feedback from others about their impact (0.72)

- Getting the proportions of surface to deep learning correct (0.71)

- Using the Goldilocks principles of challenge (not too hard, not too easy, and not too boring) (0.74)

- Using deliberate practice to attain these challenges (0.79)

To get these effects, however, requires listening to the learning happening in the schoolhouse (e.g., during classroom walkthroughs, professional learning sessions/meetings, professional learning communities) and classrooms. It requires less talk by teachers and school leaders and more listening to student and teacher dialogue; students talking to teachers about what it means to be a learner in their classes, and what they believe are the indicators of learning and progress; more evaluation of surface (content) and deep (relating and transferring content) teacher understanding and knowing when to move from one to the other; and leadership expertise that builds on a deep understanding of what teachers already know and can do relative to scaling high-probability instructional practices throughout the school.

The theory of action for such school leaders can be summed up by the phrase "School Leaders are to DIIE for!," that is, school leaders need to be expert at Diagnosis, Interventions, Implementation, and Evaluation. To be expert at diagnosis requires understanding how students and teachers are performing from multiple evidence-informed interventions so that if one does not work with the students and teachers, the school leader changes to another. It also involves knowing the interventions that have a high probability of success, knowing when to switch from one to another, and not using "blame" language to explain why students are not learning, as the problem of students not learning is more likely an adult not choosing the right teaching intervention rather than a student problem. To be expert at implementation requires a commitment to fidelity (i.e., adherence to the intervention curriculum); quality of delivery (i.e., the skill with which school leaders and/or facilitators deliver intervention material and interact

with teachers); intervention adaptation (i.e., changes made to the intervention, particularly material that is added to the intervention); and dosage (i.e., the number of intervention professional learning sessions needed to efficiently and successfully implement the intervention). To be expert at evaluation requires knowing the skills of evaluating, having multiple methods, and working collaboratively and debating with colleagues to agree on the magnitude of the effect needed for an intervention to be successful. It requires what Clinton (Chapter 1) claims is a deep embedding in evaluative thinking.

The bottom line is, if students are not learning, then it is because we are not using the right teaching and/or school leader strategies; we have our expectations of success too low or far too high, and we have to make the necessary changes to these strategies to then realize our ambitious expectations. Such a theory of action places a number of demands on our teachers and school leaders, namely, that they begin with Why by communicating from the inside out; have a high level of cognitive decision-making skills that maintains a tight alignment between their Whys and how they do things and the results they achieve; are able and willing to say "I was wrong in my choice of a particular intervention and need to change what I do or say" or "I was right in my choice of interventions as they led to me successfully teaching these students"; and engage with others in collaborative inquiry about their diagnosis, interventions, implementation, and evaluation based on the evidence of their impact.

What is the VISIBLE LEARNING® Model?

The Visible Learning® school change model of professional learning is based on the principles that have developed from the Visible Learning research and two books—*Visible Learning* (Hattie, 2009) and *Visible Learning for Teachers* (Hattie, 2012)—as well as numerous articles and white papers. It takes the theory of this research and puts it into a practical inquiry model for schools to ask questions of themselves about the impact they are having on student achievement.

The Visible Learning research is based on John Hattie's meta-meta-analysis of more than 1,600 meta-analyses to date, composed of more than 90,000 studies involving more than 300 million students—possibly the world's largest evidence base to improve student learning. From that research, Hattie identified more than 270 factors that have an impact on student achievement. "Visible Learning seeks to get to the crux of this multitude of findings from educational research and identify the main messages by synthesizing meta-analyses. The aim is to move from 'what works' to 'what works best' and when, for whom, and why" (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p. xviii). The 270+ (and growing) influences produced from the many meta-analyses have been assigned to one of nine domains: student, curricular,

home, school, classroom, teacher, student learning strategies, instructional strategies, and implementation method. Then, each domain is further divided into subdomains—thirty-two in total in order to drill down into specific influences and the degree to which these influences accelerate student achievement.

How should educators use the Visible Learning research? The Visible Learning books serve as a *basis for discussion* on using evidence to inform your teaching and leadership practice, and the systems in which these practices are supported. One example might be the degree to which the school has developed a clear picture of the type of feedback culture and practice that they aspire to have. This can assist teachers to optimize their feedback and heighten students' awareness of the benefits of effective feedback. Similarly, it can help school leaders optimize their feedback and boost teachers' awareness of the benefits of feedback. Both of these actions serve to create an awareness of *how* feedback might be getting through to each of these key stakeholders.

Why This Book?

Over the past several years, it has been our privilege and pleasure to attend presentations or read books or articles by each of these authors whose work appears in this collection. As we listened and read, we were struck by the consistency of their message. Inasmuch as these authors had their own unique ways, as well as different ideas regarding the most effective strategies to produce a significant impact on the learning lives of students, their individual Whys for school leaders were remarkably similar. In addition, the concepts underlying their work kept returning to the same themes. They truly seemed to share a common belief about the way school leaders should view their role in order to bring about a year's worth of learning for a year's worth of teaching and leading.

We were convinced that school practitioners throughout the world who had the opportunity to explore the work of these experts would come to the same conclusion: There is coherence in their collective Why. We recognized, however, that most teachers and school leaders have neither the resources to attend professional conferences on a regular basis nor the time to devote to becoming students of the work of a variety of authors. Ultimately, we concluded that bringing the ideas of these educational thought leaders together into one book could be a tremendous resource for educators who are working to help their students achieve at ever-higher levels. We were thrilled when this outstanding collection of educational writers and thinkers agreed to contribute to the project.

It is important to note that each of these authors has had his or her own learning enriched and extended by observing the practices of exemplary schools and teachers

and school leaders within them. These educators are truly school improvement leaders in their own right, and they represent a tremendous storehouse of collective wisdom. Thus, we hope this book will accomplish several objectives. First, we hope it will be a valuable tool for educators who are doing the hard work of improving their schools. We believe this collection offers them both a coherent conceptual framework and specific practical strategies for moving forward with their improvement efforts. The following table identifies, chapter by chapter, the author, the mindframe (i.e., the Why) the author is addressing, and the various high-probability influences (i.e., the How) the author has selected to illustrate strategies for bringing her or his identified mindframe to life.

Chapter	Author(s)	Mindframe	Influences Discussed
1	Janet Clinton	"I am an evaluator of my impact on teacher/student learning"	1. Formative evaluation 2. Questioning
2	Dylan Wiliam	"I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps"	1. Mastery learning 2. Feedback 3. Collaborative learning (also discusses: • Self-regulated learning • Clear goal intentions)
3	Jenni Donohoo	"I collaborate with my peers and my teachers about my conceptions of progress and my impact"	1. Collective efficacy 2. Mastery learning 3. Appropriately challenging goals
4	Michael Fullan	"I am a change agent and believe all teachers/students can improve"	1. Collaborative learning 2. Collective efficacy 3. Leadership
5	Zaretta Hammond	"I strive for challenge rather than merely 'doing my best'"	1. Teacher estimates of achievement 2. Collective efficacy 3. Formative evaluation
6	Peter M. DeWitt	"I give and help students/teachers understand feedback and I interpret and act on feedback given to me"	1. Teacher–student relationships 2. Teacher credibility 3. School leadership

Chapter	Author(s)	Mindframe	Influences Discussed
7	Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Dominique Smith	"I engage as much in dialogue as in monologue"	1. School climate 2. Collective efficacy 3. Microteaching
8	Laura Link	"I explicitly inform teachers/students what successful impact looks like from the outset"	1. Teacher clarity 2. Mastery learning 3. Formative evaluation
9	Sugata Mitra	"I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others"	1. Questioning 2. Strong classroom cohesion 3. Collective efficacy
10	Jim Knight	"I focus on learning and the language of learning"	1. Formative assessment 2. Piagetian programs 3. Prior achievement

Second, we hope it will help bridge the gap that sometimes exists between researchers and practitioners. The intended audience for these authors is not other researchers, but teachers and school leaders who are engaged in the challenges of school reform on a daily basis. Each contributor has worked closely with schools; identified high-probability practices that, when implemented effectively, will have a positive impact on student learning; and now hopes to share his or her insights with educators throughout the world. As stated previously, each of our authors had their own unique ways, as well as different ideas regarding the most effective strategies to produce a significant impact on the learning lives of students. Toward that end, we note that this notion of authors' "unique ways" and "different ideas regarding strategies" raised a potential point of confusion for the reader that we wish to address prior to your reading of these chapters. The confusion appears in Chapters 1 and 10. Specifically, in Chapter 1, Professor Clinton prefers to use the phrase "formative and summative evaluation," while Dr. Knight, in Chapter 10, prefers the phrase "formative assessment." Inasmuch as we recognize and honor these two experts' personal preferences, for our purposes we view the two phrases as often being synonymous. When Michael Scriven (1967) invented the term, he never used the words *testing* or *assessment*—it was formative and summative evaluation. Moreover, when we are asked to explain the difference between formative and summative evaluation (e.g., assessment), we believe any evaluation (e.g., assessment) can be interpreted formatively or "summatively." As Robert Stake said, using a culinary metaphor, "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative" (Scriven, 1991a, p. 19). We note that too often, discussions using formative

assessment rush too quickly to tests and measures, whereas it is more critical that school leaders use evidence (data, teacher and student voice, experience, artifacts of lessons, observations, etc.) to inform their thinking.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we hope that this book will convince school leaders that they should recognize, honor, and utilize the talent that is all around them, if we only had the courage to do so, and focus the narrative in schools around what is meant by impact, the Why to then inform the How. Our claim is that the greatest influence on student progress and learning is having highly expert, inspired, and passionate teachers and school leaders working together to maximize the effect of their teaching and leading on all students in their care. There is a major role for school leaders: to harness the expertise in their schools and to lead successful transformations.