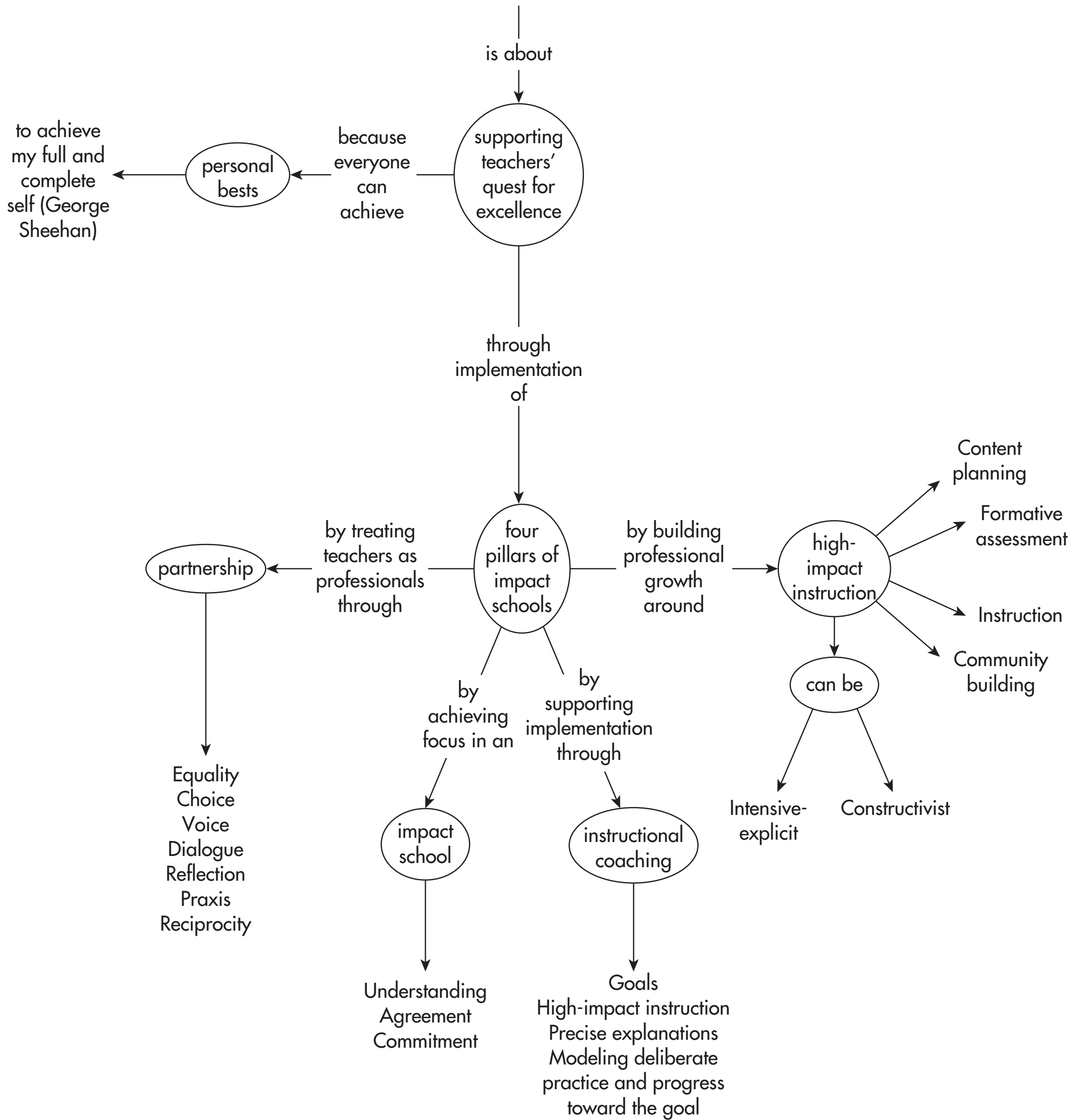
Chapter 1: Personal Bests
is about
supporting teachers' quest for excellence
because everyone can achieve
personal bests
to achieve my full and complete self (George Sheehan)
through implementation of
four pillars of impact schools
by treating teachers as professionals through
partnership
Equality
Choice
Voice
Dialogue
Reflection
Praxis
Reciprocity
by achieving focus in an
impact school
Understanding
Agreement
Commitment
by supporting implementation through
instructional coaching
Goals
High-impact instruction
Precise explanations
Modeling deliberate practice and progress toward the goal
by building professional growth around
high-impact instruction
Content planning
Formative assessment
Instruction
Community building
can be
Intensive-explicit
Constructivist

1

PERSONAL BESTS

The heroic human journey is to function as you are supposed to function, to achieve your personal best.

—George Sheehan, *Personal Best*

On and off for more than five years, I have referred to myself as a runner. I'm not very fast, I don't always stick to a routine, and I certainly don't stick to a healthy diet, but most weeks, I end up running.

My greatest running accomplishment is that even though my times were slow, I have completed three marathons. In fact, my times were so slow that in 2011 an 80-year-old runner, Ed Whitlock, ran the Toronto Marathon 1 hour and 40 minutes faster than my fastest time. That is, I'm almost two hours slower than someone who is 23 years older than me. The good news is that my time did beat Fauja Singh, a 100-year-old who also ran that Toronto marathon.

So, I'm not that fast and I am rounder than your usual runner, but I keep lacing up my shoes and going out on the road. Actually, I do more than that. I've had a personal coach help me develop some basic routines for my running. I've attended a running retreat at Furman University to learn more about my diet and cross training and the difference between speed, tempo, and long runs. I've tried diets, read numerous books, and run on trails, in the mountains, beside three different oceans, and down the country road behind our cabin.

The one question people ask me most about my running is one I struggle to answer. Why? Why do I keep running, trying to set a

personal record at 57, to maybe, just maybe, someday qualify for Boston. I've finally come to believe the answer is simple: I just want to get better. Indeed, I believe all of us feel a need to be doing just that—get better. We're wired to do that.

I began thinking about our universal need to get better after reading George Sheehan, the poet laureate for runners around the world. Sheehan, the author of *Personal Best* (1989), writes convincingly and beautifully that running is much more than a simple form of exercise. Running is a way to achieve a happier, more authentic, fully realized life. For Sheehan, running is a way to achieve a "personal best":

> My end is not simple happiness. My need, drive, and desire is to achieve my full and complete self. If I do what I have come to do, if I create the life I was made for, then happiness will follow. (p. 21)

Sheehan's thoughts, of course, are not just about running; they apply to any discipline. Indeed, the research being conducted by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2000) into self-development theory confirms Sheehan's beliefs that we are all wired to strive for personal bests. Meaning and happiness, these researchers are finding, arise from the struggle to improve, no matter what we do. Sheehan could be summarizing Deci's research when he writes that the struggle for excellence motivating a dedicated runner is also at the heart of a dedicated writer:

> "I am writing the best I can," said the author of some bestselling popular novels. "If I could write any better I would. This is the peak of my powers." It matters little that she cannot write any better. It matters, more than life, that she is doing it with all her might. (p. 22)

This quest for excellence that Sheehan and Deci describe is also alive in the hearts of great teachers. When teachers strive with all their might, their quest is to do all they can so their students can experience as much growth, joy, power, and learning as possible. This quest is no small thing. "It matters more than life," to borrow Sheehan's phrase, that teachers embrace the challenge to achieve a personal best every day, in every class, for every student.

The rewards of challenging ourselves are enormous. When we pursue excellence, we gain a deeper understanding of our purpose, a fuller knowledge of the contribution we make, and the satisfaction that comes from doing work that makes us proud. When teachers

strive to be the best they can be, they have a more positive impact on the lives of children, and their actions encourage their students to start their own journey—to strive for their own personal bests.

This book is a toolkit for teachers who know that "it matters more than life" to strive for personal bests.

Michael Covarrubias talks about why he teaches.

Video 1.1
www.corwin.com/highimpactinstruction

Support for Personal Growth

If teachers desire to be excellent, then why, some might ask, does it seem some are no longer interested in that quest? Why aren't more teachers excited about their opportunities to learn?

One reason why many teachers are not striving to be their best is that poorly designed professional learning can actually inhibit growth by de-professionalizing teachers, treating them like workers on an assembly line rather than professionals doing emotionally complicated knowledge work (Knight, 2011). If we are to get the schools our children deserve, we need to start by treating teachers as professionals. Fortunately, there is much we can do to recognize teachers as the professionals that they are.

The Four Pillars of Impact Schools

In my previous writing, I describe a type of school in which all professional development has an unmistakable impact on teaching excellence and student learning—an impact school. In such a school, everything is structured so that teachers can do the important work of striving for personal bests so that students can strive for their own personal bests.

Four factors make it possible for a school to become an impact school. First, professional learning must embody respect for the professionalism of teachers, by involving teachers as true partners in their professional learning. Second, professional learning should provide a clear focus for sustained growth, and teachers should be collaborators in writing their school improvement plan to ensure that everyone (a) understands, (b) agrees with, and (c) is committed to the improvement plan. Third, teachers should have sufficient support to help with implementation of new practices, often provided by instructional coaches. Finally, instructional coaches, principals, educational leaders, and teachers need to have a deep knowledge of high-impact instructional strategies that have a significant, positive impact on students' behavior, attitudes, engagement, and learning.

This book describes those high-impact instructional strategies. However, the other factors, which are described in detail in my two

previous books, *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (2007) and *Unmistakable Impact: A Partnership Approach for Dramatically Improving Instruction* (2011), also need to be taken into account if high-impact instructional strategies are to be implemented. In total, the three books provide a step-by-step guide educational leaders can use to dramatically improve the lives of the children (and adults) in their schools by dramatically improving instruction. The four pillars are as follows.

PILLAR 1: SEEING TEACHERS AS PROFESSIONALS

I've had the pleasure of working with educators in most U.S. states and Canadian provinces, and in other countries around the world. What I've observed wherever I visit is that when teachers truly feel respected, when their ideas and experiences are valued, they engage in meaningful, supportive conversations that lead to substantial improvements in teaching. For example, my colleagues and I at the Kansas Coaching Project at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning have watched more than 300 hours of video recordings of coaches and teachers collaborating during our study of instructional coaching in the Beaverton Oregon School District from 2008 to 2011. Again and again, the video shows educators talking about important and difficult topics and interacting with warmth and good humor. Together, in video after video, coaches and teachers engage in what Paulo Freire (1970) refers to as "mutually humanizing" conversations.

One reason why these conversations are productive and positive is that the coaches position themselves as equals with teachers. Michelle Harris, an instructional coach in the Beaverton coaching study, described how important she thought it was to see teachers as equals in the coaching process. For Michelle,

> The partnership approach is EVERYTHING in coaching. It wasn't until I knew those principles, believed in them, and began living them, that I actually felt like I was getting somewhere in my role as a coach. I had to believe that we were equals and that I could always learn something from my person in order to become an effective coach. (personal correspondence, August 17, 2012)

The partnership approach Michelle refers to is the theoretical foundation for the approaches to professional learning described in *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction*

(2007) and *Unmistakable Impact: A Partnership Approach for Dramatically Improving Instruction* (2011). In both books, I describe seven principles that educators should use to guide their actions if they want to position their colleagues as equal partners. The principles, described at length in both books, are as follows:

- **Equality.** Each of us is unique, but each of us is equally valuable.
- **Choice.** Although in almost every organization certain initiatives must be implemented, professional educators should be free to make meaningful decisions about their professional practice.
- **Voice.** Teachers should be encouraged to share their honest opinions while learning about, designing, and implementing their own professional learning.
- **Dialogue.** Educational leaders, professional developers, coaches, teachers, and other educators should interact in ways that foster a two-way sharing of ideas.
- **Reflection.** Professional learning should involve "looking back," "looking at," or "looking ahead" at one's practices.
- **Praxis.** Professional learning should involve real-life application of learning.
- **Reciprocity.** Everyone should be learning during professional learning, not just those "receiving" the learning.

The top-down approach of telling professionals what to do and expecting them to do it just as they were told almost always engenders resistance. Therefore, the partnership approach is important. As Edgar Schein explained in *Helping: How to Offer, Give, and Receive Help* (2009), "It is human to want to be granted the status and position that we feel we deserve, no matter how high or low it might be" (p. xi). Schein goes on to explain, "When a conversation has not been equitable we sometimes feel offended. That usually means that the value we have claimed for ourselves has not been acknowledged, that the other person or persons did not realize who we were or how important our communication was (as claimed by us)" (pp. 19–20).

Helping relationships are inhibited, Schein explains, when those being helped feel that they have been put "one down" and that helpers have placed themselves "one up." But this inequality can be ameliorated when instructional coaches see teachers as partners, professionals who can and should make significant choices about the work they do.

A second reason for positioning teachers as partners is because they engage in complex knowledge work that can't be, as Thomas Davenport

has written, "reduced to a series of boxes and arrows" (2005, p. 17). Davenport defines knowledge workers in *Thinking for a Living: How to Get Performance and Results From Knowledge Workers* (2005):

> Knowledge workers have high degrees of expertise, education, or experience, and the primary purpose of their job involves the creation, distribution, or application of knowledge. (p. 10)

Teaching perfectly exemplifies the knowledge work Davenport describes. Since teachers use their education and expertise to create, distribute, and apply knowledge, their professional learning must ensure they have sufficient personal autonomy so they can do that thinking. The partnership approach positions teachers as thinkers who can make their own decisions.

Finally, the partnership approach embodies an old idea—that we should treat others the way we want to be treated ourselves. If someone was helping us improve the way we do our work, we would likely want to have some choice in the matter, to have our ideas listened to, and to reflect on and apply the new knowledge to our lives. In sum, we would likely find it easier to accept that help if that person delivering it respected us, had faith in our abilities, and treated us as equals.

Schools can honor teachers as professionals by grounding professional learning in these principles and by positioning teachers as people who can and should shape their own professional learning.[1] Partnership, however, is only one pillar. Schools also need to get a clear picture of current reality and focus their professional learning on practices that, when implemented, will have the greatest impact on student learning and well-being. In *Unmistakable Impact* (2011) I describe how that learning might take place across a school.

PILLAR 2: CREATING A FOCUS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN AN IMPACT SCHOOL

Successful and lasting instructional transformation is too complicated to happen in a helter-skelter fashion, and schools will not make sustained improvements if they simply skip from one trend to the next. To lead sustained improvement, school leaders need to do at least two things. First, they need to ensure that there is a clear focus for professional learning. Second, they need to involve every teacher in articulating that focus so that everyone understands, agrees with, and is committed to the plan. In *Unmistakable Impact*, I describe a simple

process that educational leaders can employ to achieve these goals. It is briefly summarized below.

Understand. To ensure that everyone fully understands the goals and strategies of a school improvement plan, those writing the plan must strive to write it in its simplest form possible to ensure that everyone understands it. Plans that are long and complex are often too difficult for even their authors to understand, and we can't implement a plan we don't understand. Schools and districts that are creating impact schools, described in *Unmistakable Impact*, create a one-page Target document that summarizes the school's professional development goals for a significant period of time into the future, perhaps as far ahead as three or four years.

Agreement. To ensure that a large majority agrees with the Target, educational leaders should do two things. First, to ensure that every teacher has an opportunity to provide meaningful input into the writing of the Target, a team should be created to gather teachers' ideas about professional learning for their school. In small schools, with 10 or fewer teachers, all teachers and administrators can meet as a team to collaboratively write the Target. However, since most schools have more than 10 teachers, many schools will need to create a Target Design Team.

The Target Design Team is made up of a school's administrators and a small number of teachers, who represent their colleagues (one teacher member for every 10 teachers in a school). Teachers on the team interview their peers and ask them what they think the school improvement focus should be, and then share those perspectives when the first draft of the Target is created.

Second, to ensure that the Target addresses the most important factors for student and teacher learning, leaders should observe every classroom to get a clear picture of teaching and learning in the school. The observation should be a comprehensive assessment of learning and teaching in the entire school, not an evaluation of individual teachers (we discourage sharing the individual data with teachers).

One tool for conducting these observations is the 20-Minute High-Impact Survey (HI-20). The HI-20 assesses teaching and learning in the four areas described in this book: (a) Instruction, (b) Content Planning, (c) Formative Assessment, and (d) Community Building. Download a beta version of the HI-20 at www.corwin.com/highimpactinstruction.

Download the 20-Minute High-Impact survey at www.corwin.com/highimpactinstruction

After all observations have been conducted and every teacher has been interviewed, the Target Design Team meets to create a Target that addresses the issues pointed to by the observation data and that genuinely embodies the concerns raised by teachers during interviews.

Commitment. Once a draft of the Target has been created, principals meet with groups within the school to review the proposed Target and to ask teachers to vote on whether they agree with and are committed to implementing the draft Target. The vote must be anonymous, and teachers must be strongly encouraged to give their honest opinion. If the results suggest that a large majority of staff agree with and are committed to the Target, the plan can proceed.

If there is a lack of commitment or agreement, leaders should ask teachers to write down the modifications to the plan they feel are necessary before they are willing to agree and commit, and revisions should be made until the plan is one that everyone can support. Teachers who are especially opposed to the plan may be invited to join the Target Design Team to help create a plan that the large majority of educators in the school are excited about implementing.

Professional learning will only succeed when teachers understand, agree with, and are committed to the plan. If teachers are not committed, their involvement will be half-hearted. In addition, few teachers will commit to a plan if they don't agree with it, and educators can only agree with a plan if they understand it. The process described in detail in *Unmistakable Impact* is designed to ensure that everyone has a voice in creating a plan that everyone wants to see become a reality.

Once the Target has been identified, efforts turn to translating the Target into action. Such work, however, requires sufficient, meaningful support. Instructional coaches, described in *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (2007), provide that support.

PILLAR 3: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

For many of us, the journey toward a personal best, although highly attractive, can feel overwhelming, especially if we feel we are embarking on the journey all by ourselves. For example, teachers need a clear picture of the current reality in their classroom, but they may not know what data to gather to get an objective, accurate picture. They need a goal, but they may need help in defining an appropriate goal and measuring movement toward it. They need high-impact teaching strategies that can help them achieve their goal, but they probably don't know those strategies, or else they would already be using them. And they need someone who can help them learn and use those strategies until the strategies become habits of practice.

One person who can help with all of these important aspects of professional growth is an instructional coach (IC). An IC is a second set of hands, a second set of eyes, a learning partner who collaborates with teachers to identify goals, suggests teaching practices to learn, explains and models the new practices, and observes and supports teachers as they master and integrate those new practices into their teaching and meet their goals. An instructional coach provides the vital follow-up and support a teacher needs to implement new practices. "Coaching done well," Atul Gawande (2009) wrote, "may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance" (p. 53).

For more that a decade, my colleagues and I at the Kansas Coaching Project at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning have conducted research to design, develop, and validate instructional coaching. In *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (2007), I first described the theory and practice of instructional coaching. Below is a short description of what coaches do.

Ginger Grant talks about the power of one-to-one conversations during coaching.

Video 1.2 www.corwin.com/highimpactinstruction

Goals. To pursue a personal best in the classroom, teachers need a clear understanding of how well their students are learning. This isn't always easy. To see the classroom exactly as it is, teachers must have the courage to venture outside their comfort zone. Sheehan (1989) writes, "It's more comfortable not to try. But life is, or should be, a struggle: Comfort should make us uncomfortable; contentment should make us discontented" (p. 30). Real learning requires an honest assessment of current reality. The best teachers understand this and, consequently, they are never completely satisfied. They have a clear understanding of how their students are doing, and they restlessly strive to create better experiences and more learning for their students.

More than two decades ago, Robert Fritz (1989) wrote about the creative tension that lies at the heart of the quest for a personal best. Growth, he wrote, requires two factors: (a) a clear picture of current reality and (b) a clear goal that motivates an individual to move beyond that current reality. Knowing where we are and knowing where we want to go, Fritz argued, creates a tension that can only be resolved successfully through growth. Peter Senge summarized Fritz's ideas in *The Fifth Discipline* (1990):

> The juxtaposition of vision (what we want) and a clear picture of current reality (where we are relative to what we want) generates what we call "creative tension": a force to bring them together, caused by the natural tendency of tension to seek resolution. The essence of personal mastery is learning how to generate and sustain creative tension in our lives. (p. 132)

Instructional coaches begin the coaching process by partnering with teachers to set up the creative tension between a vision for the future and a clear picture of current reality that Robert Fritz described. First, to create a clear picture of current reality, ICs gather data on what is happening in a teacher's classroom. The data may be student achievement measures, student opinions gathered through surveys such as those developed by Harvard researcher Ron Ferguson at the Tripod Project,[2] or more frequently, video data gathered in a teacher's classroom using a Flip camera or some other camera, such as a Go Pro, iPhone, or iPad (Knight et al., 2012).

Instructional coaches share the data with teachers and ask them to review them. Using video has proven to be especially powerful since we have found that teachers (like most professionals) are often unaware of what their professional practice looks like until they see video of their lessons.

After teacher and coach have reviewed the data, together they identify a goal. An appropriate goal could be a student goal related to behavior (fewer than four disruptions per 10 minutes), achievement (95% mastery of questions on exit tickets), or attitudes (90% of students will say they enjoy reading on our quarterly survey). Effective goals are (a) specific, (b) measurable, and (c) compelling to the people who set them. Most important, however, as Chip and Dan Heath wrote, the best goal "kicks you in the gut" (2010, p. 76); that is, the best goal truly matters to the individual setting the goal.

High-Impact Instruction. After the teacher and coach have identified a goal, they discuss strategies the teacher might implement in an effort to meet the goal. For this reason, instructional coaches need to have a deep understanding of teaching practices. This book describes those teaching strategies, organized around four areas: (a) content planning, (b) formative assessment, (c) instructional practices, and (d) community building.

Precise Explanations. Once a teaching strategy has been identified, the instructional coach explains the practice in a way that makes it easiest for the teacher to implement it. This is a two-part process.

On the one hand, when coaches describe new teaching practices, their explanations must be clear and easy to act on; teachers will struggle to implement practices they don't understand. For that reason, instructional coaches must have a deep, complete understanding of the practices they describe *and* be able to explain those practices so that everyone can learn, internalize, and use them. Support for the importance of precise explanations is found in Gawande's studies of

doctors and medical teams (2009) for the World Health Organization, which demonstrated that precise explanations embodied in checklists could save thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

Simply telling teachers how to implement practices is usually unsuccessful because it positions the collaborating teacher as someone who must passively consume practices; besides, few practices fit every classroom exactly the same way. Therefore, instructional coaches not only explain practices precisely; they also explain them provisionally. In other words, as coaches explain the aspects of a teaching practice, they point out that it may need to be adapted to best meet the needs of individual students and teachers. As they explain each aspect of a practice, instructional coaches stop and ask teachers whether or not the practice needs to be adapted in any way to meet the unique strengths or needs of students or their own strengths or needs. In short, they adopt Eric Liu's (2004) dictum that "Teaching is not one-size-fits-all; it's one-size-fits-one" (p. 47).

Modeling. While explanations can introduce practices to teachers, teachers usually need to see those practices in action to be ready to implement them fluently (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008). For this reason, modeling is an important part of the learning that is at the heart of instructional coaching. Most frequently, modeling occurs when a coach demonstrates a practice in a teacher's classroom. However, modeling can occur in several other ways. For example, the coach can demonstrate a practice in the teacher's classroom with only the coach and the teacher present, or the coach and teacher can co-teach. On some occasions, the coach and teacher visit another teacher's classroom, or the teacher visits another teacher's classroom while the coach covers the teacher's classroom. In yet other instances, modeling occurs when the teacher watches a video of the new practice.

Deliberate Practice and Progress Toward the Goal. Turning ideas into habits takes practice, feedback, and reflection (Syed, 2010). Thus, during the process of instructional coaching, teachers try out a new way of teaching, such as frequent checks for understanding, and instructional coaches gather data on how the new practice is being implemented and whether or not it is improving student behavior, achievement, or attitude. Instructional coaches might gather data from video recordings of the teacher or student, student survey data (such as that gathered from the Tripod survey), or achievement data from standardized or formative assessment, like that gathered from formative assessments such as exit tickets.

Instructional coaches gather data to monitor progress toward the goal and to provide an objective standard teachers can use to assess the effectiveness of the practice they are implementing. Thus, if coach and teacher have identified 90% engagement or 95% correct answers on a summative assessment as a goal, they monitor student performance until the goal is met. In addition, the teacher might review a checklist to determine, from her own perspective, how effectively she implemented a given practice.

Once the goal has been met, time on task is higher than 90%, for example, and the teacher is using the practice habitually and fluently, the coach and teacher can repeat the process by identifying another goal to be pursued.

PILLAR 4: HIGH-IMPACT INSTRUCTION

As I explained in *Unmistakable Impact,* a critical task for educational leaders is to identify those practices that have the greatest impact with the smallest effort. Peter Senge (1990) explains this in *The Fifth Discipline:*

> Small, well-focused actions can sometimes produce significant, enduring improvements, if they're in the right place. Systems thinkers refer to this as "leverage." . . . Tackling a difficult problem is often a matter of seeing where the high leverage lies, a change which—with a minimum of effort—would lead to lasting change. (p. 64)

In their exploration of successful change agents, *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* (2008), Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzler made a similar observation: "Enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few *vital behaviors.* Even the most pervasive problems will often yield to changes in a handful of high-leverage behaviors. Find these, and you've found the beginning of influence" (p. 23). The findings from our study of instructional coaching reinforce the findings of Senge (1990), Patterson and his colleagues, Sims (2011), and others. That is, when it comes to teaching, little changes can make a big difference. This book describes those practices.

Is This Constructivist or Intensive-Explicit Pedagogy?

The high-impact instructional strategies described here are "agnostic," so to speak, because they can be employed by teachers adopting either a constructivist or intensive-explicit ideology. How practices

are used should vary significantly depending on each teacher's approach. For that reason, I'll provide a brief review of the constructivist and intensive-explicit practices and a quick explanation of their implications for teachers using high-impact instructional strategies. I have written a longer treatment of these issues previously (Knight, 2005), and some of the ideas in that paper appear here.

INTENSIVE-EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

I coined the term "intensive-explicit instruction" (IE) (Knight, 2005) to refer to a number of approaches to instruction variously referred to as direct instruction (Hattie, 2011; Roehler & Duffy, 1984), explicit instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011), explicit, direct instruction (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2008), and strategic instruction (Ellis, Deshler, Lenz, Schumaker, & Clark, 1991). Teachers use intensive-explicit instruction to efficiently and effectively teach content and significantly increase the likelihood that students will master that content. Intensive-explicit instruction is *intensive* because it involves teaching practices that ensure students are engaged in learning and actively mastering content (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Ellis et al.). It is *explicit* because it involves teachers clearly modeling covert thinking (Roehler & Duffy) and providing detailed feedback as students move toward mastery of content (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009; Kline, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1991).

The principal goal for teachers using IE is for students to understand, remember, and generalize content they teach. During IE, as John Hattie (2008) has written about direct instruction, "the teacher decides learning intentions and success criteria, makes them transparent to the students, demonstrates them by modeling, evaluates if they understand what they have been told by checking for understanding, and re-telling them what they have told by tying it together with closure" (p. 206). Similarly, in *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching* (2011), Anita Archer and Charles A. Hughes define explicit instruction as follows:

> Explicit instruction [is] a structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills. It is called explicit because it is an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures. Explicit instruction is characterized by a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby students are guided through the learning process with clear statements about the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill, clear explanations and demonstrations of the instructional target, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved. (p. 1)

CONSTRUCTIVIST INSTRUCTION

Constructivist instruction is grounded in the belief that, as Brooks and Brooks (1993) stated, "each of us makes sense of the world by synthesizing new experiences into what we have previously come to understand" (p. 4). Piaget (1954) first named this process of individually fitting new information into our prior knowledge by overcoming incongruities between old and new knowledge "assimilation." For Piaget,

> No behavior, even it if is new to the individual, constitutes an absolute beginning. It is always grafted onto previous schemes and therefore amounts to assimilating new elements to already constructed structures. (Glaserfield, 1995, p. 62)

Lev Vygotsky built on Piaget's concept of assimilation by proposing a second important concept within constructivist instruction, the "zone of proximal development." According to Vygotsky (1978), the zone defines "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing . . . functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (p. 86). The zone is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Simply put, the zone is the gap between a person's current intellectual level and his or her potential level.

Constructivist teachers provide scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) to enable students to develop their full potential within their zone of proximal development. In addition, constructivist teachers facilitate discourse and dialogue to provide students opportunities to assimilate new learning into their prior knowledge (Mariage, 2000). Within constructivist instruction, then, a teacher is more of a facilitator than an expert.

Brooks and Brooks (1993) helped clarify constructivist instruction by creating a list of constructivist traits. Specifically, they suggest that constructivist teachers

a. "encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative" (p. 103);

b. "use cognitive terminology . . . when framing tasks" (p. 104);

c. "allow student responses to drive lessons, shift instructional strategies and alter content" (p. 105);

d. "inquire about students' understandings of concepts before sharing their own understanding of those concepts" (p. 107);

e. "encourage students to engage in dialogue" (p. 108);

f. "provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors" (p. 115); and

g. "nurture students' natural curiosity through frequent use of the learning cycle model" (p. 116).

COMPARING APPROACHES

During IE, the teacher guides students to a predetermined right or wrong outcome. The teacher's goal is that students will create a picture of knowledge in their heads that is similar to the picture the teacher holds in his or her head. By comparison, during constructivist instruction, the teacher presents many opportunities for students to assimilate learning into their prior knowledge. The teacher's goal is that students will create their own pictures of what they are learning.

The teaching strategies in this book can be employed from either perspective, but they should be employed in significantly different ways by IE versus constructivist teachers. Intensive-explicit teachers, for example, ask a lot of questions and use questions to gauge whether or not students have mastered the predetermined content. Constructivist teachers, on the other hand, ask only a few questions, usually to seek students' opinions, not right or wrong answers.

In addition, cooperative learning, for example, serves very different purposes within the two approaches. During IE, cooperative learning is employed to increase and confirm mastery of content; thus students might work together to ensure that they have a complete, accurate understanding of some information. During constructivist instruction, on the other hand, cooperative learning is used so that students can tackle complex problems, engage in dialogue, and progress at their own pace. During constructivist instruction, cooperative learning often arrives at unpredictable points as students mediate their own learning.

Some teachers are entirely committed to constructivist practices, while others entirely subscribe to an intensive-explicit ideology. My belief is that both approaches have their place. When my goal is to ensure that students master content as I teach it, such as learning grammatical terms, phonetic sounds, or math facts, I adopt an intensive-explicit approach. When my goal is to provide an opportunity for students to make their own sense of what they are learning, such as interpreting a poem, solving a problem, or writing a personal vision, then I adopt a constructivist approach.

What matters is that teachers determine what approach works best for their students and then use the appropriate high-impact strategies. In the pages of this book, I will explain where and how each high-impact strategy can be used for each approach.

What You Will Find in This Book

PART I: PLANNING

Part I describes high-impact planning, simple strategies teachers can use to

a. create guiding questions that point to the essential knowledge, skills, and big ideas to be learned;

b. identify what is to be assessed and how it will be assessed;

c. create a learning map depicting what is to be learned; and

d. integrate the questions, assessments, and maps into lessons so that every student understands what they are learning and how well they are progressing.

Chapter 2, Guiding Questions, describes a method teachers can use to develop their own understanding of the objectives and content that they will be teaching in their classes. In addition, guiding questions enhance student learning by providing clear explanations of what will be learned in a unit. Effective guiding questions address state or core standards, identify how students should learn and understand content, explain how content is meaningful or important, and identify critical concepts, ideas, or content structures to be learned.

Chapter 3, Formative Assessment, introduces an easy and powerful method for designing and implementing assessment for learning in the classroom. Used effectively, formative assessment increases student engagement, enables students to see how well their learning is progressing, and surfaces essential data that enable teachers to see how well their students are learning. The chapter also describes 18 easy-to-use informal assessments that teachers can use every day to determine whether or not students have learned their content. Finally, the chapter describes how teachers can use the data gathered from ongoing assessment for learning to rethink their lessons and their assessments and in-class assessment practices.

Chapter 4, Learning Maps, describes a variety of approaches to mapping (cluster maps, mind maps, concept maps, thinking maps,

and content structures), explains how teachers can use graphic organizers to map out what students will learn in a unit, and describes how teachers should share learning maps and guiding questions with students on the first day of a unit, during a unit, and at the end of a unit. Also, the chapter describes how all students can use learning maps to note essential information and for ongoing review of learning.

PART II: INSTRUCTION

Part II introduces five high-impact instructional practices that teachers can use to engage students, to increase student mastery of content, and to empower students to make connections and apply their learning to their lives.

Chapter 5, Thinking Prompts, describes how teachers can use video clips, photographs, newspaper articles, popular songs, and other devices as catalysts for discussion, dialogue, and higher order thinking in the classroom. Thinking prompts capture student attention through the use of media and topics that are especially relevant to students. Thus, they enable students to see connections between new content to be covered and their own way of seeing the world, and they can promote positive cultural norms and a positive learning environment in the classroom.

Chapter 6, Effective Questions, describes different kinds of questions that can be used as catalysts for student thinking, classroom conversation, and dialogue. During direct instruction, closed-ended, right-or-wrong questions are often most effective. During constructivist instruction, open-ended, opinion questions are often most effective. The chapter also distinguishes between three levels of questions, knowledge, skill, and big ideas, and discusses effective questioning techniques.

Chapter 7, Stories, describes how teachers can use stories to link abstract learning to concrete, personally relevant narratives to connect new learning to prior knowledge, to create positive learning communities, and to increase students' interest in whatever lesson is being learned. Teachers can use stories to illustrate important ideas being delivered, especially since stories are often the part of a lesson that students recall most vividly. Teachers should use stories to illustrate content that is especially noteworthy, so that students can carry away strong recollections of important material.

Chapter 8, Cooperative Learning, describes learning that is mediated by students rather than the instructor. Thus, in cooperative learning, students work in groups or pairs to teach themselves what is being learned. Teachers can use cooperative learning as a way for

groups to cover material, problem solve, brainstorm, and explore or invent new ideas. Cooperative learning can also be used to inject variety into lessons, to increase engagement, and to provide a setting for students to learn important social skills. Finally, cooperative learning can involve groups of any size, from two students to very large groups.

Chapter 9, Authentic Learning, describes how teachers can design assignments that are optimally challenging for students. Effective, challenging assignments are (a) matched to the learning goal, (b) designed to produce authentic learning, (c) personally relevant and optimally challenging (not too easy; not too hard), (d) differentiated according to student strengths, (e) designed to promote appropriate levels of thinking, and (f) produce a meaningful product.

Authentic learning also describes experiential learning that provides students with opportunities to see how well they can use the new concepts they are learning, reminds them of the concrete attributes of a particular phenomenon being studied, or allows students to gain new insights into their thoughts, assumptions, and behaviors.

PART III: COMMUNITY BUILDING

Part III describes six powerful teaching strategies that teachers can use to build a safe, productive, joyous learning community in their classrooms.

Chapter 10, Learner-Friendly Culture, describes strategies for shaping a classroom culture that promotes safety, joy, well-being, and learning. Strategies include co-constructing classroom norms, attending to student behavior, and creating a positive physical learning environment in the classroom.

Chapter 11, Power With, Not Power Over, distinguishes between "power over," during which teachers try to force students to comply with demands, and "power with," during which teachers interact respectfully and provide students with choices in order to foster meaningful learning.

Chapter 12, Freedom Within Form, describes steps teachers can take to encourage students to creatively and freely experience learning while also providing structures that allow that creativity to progress productively. Too much freedom can lead to anarchy, but too much structure destroys learning.

Chapter 13, Expectations, describes why effective community building begins with establishing clear expectations for activities and transitions. In addition, the chapter describes the three critical elements of expectations: action, talking, and movement.

Chapter 14, Witness to the Good, describes how teachers should reinforce student behavior by noticing and commenting when students act consistently with expectations. The chapter also includes information on building connections with students and fostering positive emotions in classrooms.

Chapter 15, Fluent Corrections, describes how teachers can attend to students and correct them consistently when they act in ways that disrupt their own or others' learning.

Each chapter begins with a learning map, similar to the learning maps described in Chapter 4, that visually depicts the key concepts in the chapter. Each chapter also contains these features:

- **Turning Ideas Into Action,** suggestions for how students, teachers, coaches, and principals can use chapter ideas to improve instruction
- **What It Looks Like,** with suggestions on how to observe for the teaching practices described
- A summary of the chapter under the heading **To Sum Up**
- A **Going Deeper** section that introduces resources readers can explore to extend their knowledge of the ideas and strategies discussed

Each chapter also contains QR codes with links to videos from the Teaching Channel, which I have chosen to illustrate the practices I describe here. Some video links are taken from my program, Talking About Teaching, and others are Short Cuts, where I highlight other teachers doing amazing practices. Finally, throughout the book, I include numerous checklists to clarify precisely how the high-impact teaching practices should be implemented.

Turning Ideas Into Action

Students

1. Consider involving students in writing a school improvement target by interviewing students or by including students on the Target Design Team.
2. Consider using student survey data, from a survey such as the Tripod Survey, when gathering data on current reality in schools.

Teachers

1. Consider committing to striving for personal bests.
2. Write a personal vision that states exactly what you want to accomplish in your life and work.
3. Hold your school accountable once it has identified a Target.

Instructional Coaches

1. Strive to be your best in at least three critical areas:
   a. Master the teaching practices, such as those described in this book, that are the focus of your instructional coaching.
   b. Master the components of instructional coaching described in *Instructional Coaching* (2007).
   c. Communicate and lead effectively by deeply understanding the partnership principles, communication strategies, and leadership tactics described in *Instructional Coaching* (2007) and *Unmistakable Impact* (2011).

Principals

1. Communicate with central office district leaders to ensure that they support your pursuit of the Target.
2. Resist the pressure to implement new practices before the Target has been achieved.
3. As with your instructional coaches, communicate and lead effectively by deeply understanding the partnership principles, communication strategies, and leadership tactics described in *Instructional Coaching* (2007) and *Unmistakable Impact* (2011).

What It Looks Like

In an impact school, all professional learning leads directly to improvements on teacher effectiveness, and student development, growth, and happiness. A comprehensive tool for looking at all of the high-impact teaching strategies, the High Impact Instruction 20-Minute Survey (HI-20) is available online at www.corwin.com/highimpactinstruction.

To Sum Up

- Professionals in all fields find meaning in the challenge of striving to achieve a personal best.
- When teachers strive to achieve a personal best, their students benefit because instruction improves and because they may be inspired by their teachers' love of learning.
- If teachers are to experience professional learning that helps them strive for a personal best, the school must be organized in a way that supports their learning.
- In impact schools, the entire staff comes together around achieving a Target for improvement that each teacher understands, agrees with, and is committed to implementing.
- In impact schools, teachers receive the support they need to translate the Target into action from instructional coaches who collaborate with them to assist them in setting goals and identifying practices to achieve those goals by explaining and modeling those practices and by observing teachers and exploring implementation data until teachers achieve their goals and are fluent and habitual in their use of new practices.
- The high-impact instructional strategies described in this book, organized around the themes of Instruction, Content Planning, Formative Assessment, and Community Building, are the practices that I believe have the most positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student development, growth, and well-being.

Going Deeper

Teachers as Professionals. My two books *Instructional Coaching* (2007) and *Unmistakable Impact* (2011) describe the partnership principles and an approach to professional learning that begins with respect for the professionalism of teachers. Thomas Davenport's *Thinking for a Living* (2005) provides a description of the characteristics of knowledge workers. Daniel Pink's *Drive* (2009) is an engaging summary of Edward Deci's self-determination theory and other theories of motivation.

Schoolwide Change. Michael Fullan's work on educational change, nicely summarized in *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy* (2009), was the major influence on my book *Unmistakable Impact*. Readers interested in leading instructional improvement

would benefit greatly from reading his work. Randy Sprick's work on comprehensive school reform focused on behavior has also greatly influenced my thinking. Other books worth reviewing are Michael Schmokers' *Focus* (2011) and Wayne Sailor, Glen Dunlap, George Sugai, and Rob Horner's *Handbook of Positive Behavior Supports* (2010).

Instructional Coaching. My book *Instructional Coaching* (2007) provides an overview of the theory and practice of instructional coaching. Cheryl Jones and Mary Vreeman have published *Instructional Coaches & Classroom Teachers: Sharing the Road to Success* (2008). Robert Hargrove's *Masterful Coaching* (2008) makes the distinction between pull and push coaching. Stephen Barkley's *Instructional Coaching With the End in Mind* (2011) is another valuable resource for instructional coaches.

Other useful books on coaching in general include Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison's *Taking the Lead: New Roles for Teachers and School-Based Coaches* (2006), Nancy Love's *Data Coaching: Using Data to Improve Learning for All: A Collaborative Inquiry Approach* (2009), Lucy West and Fritz Staub's *Content-Focused Coaching* (2003), and Art Costa and Robert Garmston's *Cognitive Coaching* (2002).

Other Comprehensive Models of Instruction. Several other comprehensive models of instruction have been published recently, and many have influenced the writing of this book. Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (2007) provides a rich description of aspects of instruction and is used internationally as a method for observing teaching. Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College* (2010) describes easy-to-learn teaching techniques designed to increase student engagement and learning. John Hattie's *Visual Learning* (2009) and Robert Marzano, Jane E. Pollock, and Debra J. Pickering's *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (2001) both offer meta-analyses of effective instructional practices. Finally, Jon Saphier, Mary Ann Haley-Speca, and Robert Gower's *The Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skill* (2008) is a comprehensive and practical overview of instructional practices.

Notes

1. You can read about research conducted on the partnership approach at http://instructionalcoach.org/research.
2. See www.metproject.com for more information on the Tripod survey.