

PREFACE

CLARITY is being explicit about precision in practice through research done, experiences lived, and knowledge gained from collaboratively working side by side to improve the outcomes for all students. CLARITY of expectations is reflected by equity and excellence in every system, in every school, and in every classroom.

I began the work on explicitly bringing CLARITY to my improvement research as a practitioner, first by modeling a belief that *literacy is everyone's business*, and second by demonstrating in practical ways that distinctive moral imperative. This book is about *the what and the how*—the practical, tangible ways of bringing CLARITY to increasing all students' achievement. Bringing CLARITY to expected, effective practice *is everyone's business!*

My leadership journey to realizing CLARITY in delivering effective practice began by stating the obvious: **illiteracy is unacceptable**. The percentage of illiterate citizens currently around the world is too high. Astonishing as it may seem in the 21st century, 12% of the world's population is considered functionally illiterate, with only basic or below-basic literacy levels in their native languages. Seven hundred eighty-one million people across the globe still cannot read or write. One hundred twenty-six million youth, worldwide, are illiterate (International Literacy Association, 2018).

The absolute need to achieve “every graduate a literate graduate” compels me to think not simply about the right of all students to read, write, do mathematics, and to think critically, but about “the how” of how to achieve this worthy goal. We have a moral imperative to increase levels of literacy around the world, starting in our classrooms. Hence the beginnings of CLARITY. I define literacy as the development of a continuum of skills, knowledge, and dispositions that prepare all learners for a changing world community. It **begins** with the fundamental acquisition of skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, representing, responding, and in mathematics. It **becomes** the ability to understand, think critically, apply new knowledge and skills, and communicate effectively and creatively in all subject areas in a variety of multimodal, multimedia ways and for a variety of purposes (adapted from York Region District School Board, 2007).

As John Hattie said in his Jack Keating Memorial Lecture in June 2016,

Literacy and numeracy remain the critical bases of any educated person, and while many would (correctly) argue that these are attributes of narrow excellence; they are the building blocks of the wider excellence many aspire toward. Literacy and numeracy are capabilities which facilitate higher learning, not necessarily ends in themselves. (2016c)

Canada considers both equity and excellence in determining a clear path forward in learning, teaching, and leading. Ontario, Canada's largest and most diverse province, supports that focus. It should be no secret why Canada's 15-year-olds ranked #2 in reading, #4 in science, and #5 in collaborative problem solving in the worldwide 2015 PISA survey. Our nation is resolute in its determination to reduce the percentage of the population who are illiterate.

To that end, this book is about the CLARITY needed—that teaching is informed by learning about learning, underpinned by CLARITY of foundational literacy skills and being supported by consistent, persistent, insistent leadership. We remember:

- Hope is not a strategy!
- Don't blame the kids or the parents.
- Our work is all about learning: having relevant assessment data that improves instruction for all—every student, every day.
- It is critical to have a laser-like focus on every FACE in order to increase achievement.
- Prepackaged, purchased solutions don't work. What works? Teacher and leader capacity building for assessment that informs instruction.
- It's not random acts of self-improvement or "Choose Your Own Adventure" that improve schools or systems. What works is relentless, focused direction. Leadership commitment to "the work" matters. Leadership commitment to equity and excellence matters. "The standard you walk past is the standard you accept" (Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison AO, Australia, 2013).
- Leaders must be present and "in the moment" continuously.

Ontario educators focus on precision in classroom practice and building collaborative cultures, where co-learning is valued as the format for collective capacity building. As that requires both technical (first-order) and cultural, embedded (second-order) change, this means that collaboration is about purposeful work focused on what can influence students' growth and achievement.

We know first-order changes (structural frameworks and organizational structures) are foundational but do not represent silver bullets for change in themselves, unless second-order changes (adaptive changes to implement a pervasive culture of learning) focused on impact are embedded (Planche, Sharratt, & Belchetz, 2008; Sharratt & Planche, 2016). Educators everywhere need to move to making second-order changes that promote precision in practice and measure increased student achievement. You will find guidance for **how to do this** throughout this book.

A precondition for improving schools is the existence of a culture focused on learning in which professionals

- talk about practice
- share their “craft knowledge” as co-learners and as Knowledgeable Others
- conduct Learning Walks and Talks in classrooms daily
- support and celebrate each other's successes unconditionally

Without purposeful culture, no meaningful improvement—no Professional Learning, no curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student self-assessment, no co-teaching, no parent involvement, and no sustainable change—is possible (Barth, 2006).

Empowerment, recognition, satisfaction, and success in our work—all in scarce supply within our schools globally—will never stem from “going it alone” as a masterful teacher, principal, or student, no matter how accomplished one is. The culture must lead to engagement; engagement must move those involved to empowerment. Success comes only from being an active participant within a masterful group of colleagues. Leaders and teachers teaching with and learning from each other is the only answer (Barth, 2006).

The contents of this book are divided into the three “big ideas” that reflect the flow of my thinking: Part I: Learning (Chapters 1, 2, 3); Part II: Teaching (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7); and Part III: Leading (Chapters 8, 9, 10), a progression that provides CLARITY for me and hopefully for you.

During 2016, 2017, and 2018, thousands of teachers and leaders participated in Professional Learning sessions with me on system and school improvement, during which I had opportunities to ask the classic knowledge-building and Collaborative Inquiry questions:

1. Given what you know now, what are you still wondering about?
2. What are you thinking you can do with the knowledge you have gained?
3. To what can you commit tomorrow to make a difference for each student?

Each chapter begins with a sample of these Wonderings that identify the *what* and introduce the *how*. All chapters conclude with a Deliberate Pause to Create CLARITY and participant Commitments that are meant to establish CLARITY of first- and second-order changes necessary to achieve our collective goal of all students progressing toward at least one year's growth for each year of school (Hattie, 2012). Further resources for the text can be found online at **resources.corwin.com/CLARITY**.

Throughout the book, I have co-written vignettes and case studies and captured quotes from my colleagues. My narrative co-authors are gifted and talented teachers and leaders who make the theory of the 14 Parameters for improvement come to life in their detailed descriptions of what constitutes successful practice. They are practitioners who do this work and reflect on it every day, providing CLARITY for all of us.