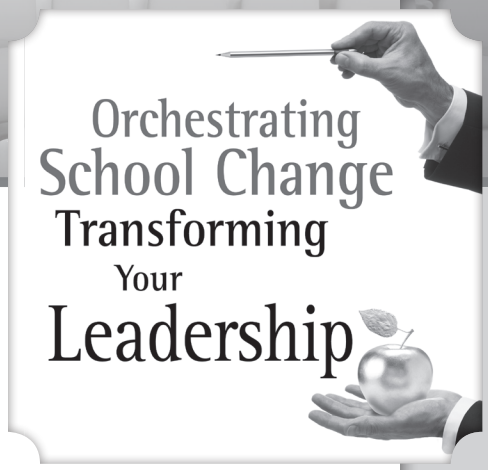

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Chapter

1

What Is School Orchestration, and Why Is It So Important?

As leaders, we are all focused on initiating, supporting, and maintaining effective changes in our schools to serve students in better ways. This book serves as your guide for making those kinds of significant and much-needed changes happen. As we begin our look into this kind of change, consider this all too common example of traditional change efforts:

Culver Elementary School: A Case Study

T.M. Culver Elementary School, a K–5 school with approximately 600 students in a suburban/urban part of the Midwest, boasts a relatively diverse population. Between 30–40 percent of students in Culver do not meet the state proficiencies in reading and writing, and a significant area of concern has been in mathematics. Culver's students, across all grade levels, do generally worse in mathematics than other students in similar elementary schools in the region.

The culture at Culver is relatively stable. The grade-level teams at Culver have always met regularly to discuss curriculum, instruction, and student discipline issues. Trust and congeniality seem to be high within, and among, the grade levels at Culver. Teachers enjoy friendly professional and personal relationships with each other, and turnover among the staff at Culver is relatively low.

Culver's principal, Shirley Russell, has been at Culver for seven years, and she has become increasingly concerned about overall

student performance in reading, writing, and especially mathematics. A few years ago, she directed her teachers to analyze the student performance data and meet in teams to address the performance gaps. These efforts have continued for several years, but Culver still has not met its targeted performance standards in mathematics. While they met their targets in reading and writing, Ms. Russell was still concerned that many students were not as successful as they could be in those areas either.

For one full year, Ms. Russell gathered data to illustrate her concern, with the hope that the data would also point to remedies. In order to help her clarify the problem, she spent large amounts of time in teachers' classrooms. She conducted informal walk-through observations and required formal teacher observations. A pattern in these observations began to emerge. Ms. Russell noticed that in the vast majority of cases, teachers were teaching to the whole group, even in reading. She rarely saw the teachers involve the students in conversations about their learning. Most of the teaching was "stand and deliver" by the teacher, and this information concerned her. She knew that with the move toward more intense learning standards, required by the state, the focus had to be on differentiating the work and engaging the students in longer, more sophisticated analyses of learning and application of skills. She knew that the "stand and deliver" approach to teaching would not address the intent of these new learning standards.

At the end of her year of classroom visits and analysis, Shirley Russell discussed her concerns with her leadership team, which consisted of grade-level representatives and special-area representatives. In these discussions, she mentioned what she was seeing in the classrooms and why different teaching strategies might address their student performance needs better.

This series of discussions with her leadership team culminated in the decision that professional development in differentiation strategies might address the concerns about whole-class teaching, and the lack of grouping and altering of work or processes to meet individual needs.

The leadership team agreed to study differentiation on their own for several months. Principal Russell sent two members of the team to a seminar on differentiation. In addition, the team began a book study on differentiation and met twice a month to discuss their readings, learning, and ideas for Culver.

At the end of this period of study, Ms. Russell's leadership team conveyed general enthusiasm for the extensive professional development in differentiation for the faculty. It was determined, by the team, that this professional development would begin in August of the upcoming school year. Principal Russell, excited that her team had come to this conclusion, jumped at the chance to begin initiating this professional development at her school.

Principal Russell knew that if she were to undertake this major initiative, her central office would need to be supportive. She met with key central office leaders and illustrated her concerns. The central office staff members were enthusiastic about the professional development and offered a small amount of funds to support the initial training.

The leadership team began the August training with an overview that lasted one-half day. Following this overview, two consultants, nationally known for their expertise in differentiation, conducted the training with the staff. This training lasted an additional two days. At the end of the training, Ms. Russell asked participants to complete a "ticket out the door." This informal evaluation revealed favorable responses to the training and general enthusiasm for the ideas presented in the training.

Once the school year began, Ms. Russell began supporting the implementation of differentiation in small steps or low-prep strategies. She assumed that because she had discussed the idea so thoroughly with her leadership team, all teachers understood the goals of the training. Russell pressed for implementation of low-prep strategies by communicating directly with teachers in informal conversations. She sought opportunities to troubleshoot the initiative with her staff

and encouraged all reluctant or hesitant teachers to get on board with trying differentiated strategies. Almost all of the conversations Ms. Russell had with her teachers during September or October were generally positive and no real opposition was voiced. Principal Russell was thrilled and scheduled her November follow-up training.

The November differentiation training was conducted by the same two national consultants and lasted two additional days. At the end of the training, respondents were again asked to give their feedback. At that time, feedback was generally positive again. At the completion of the training, Ms. Russell announced that she would be in classrooms to support the implementation of differentiated strategies.

During November and December, classroom visits were conducted by Ms. Russell. As she visited classrooms, she began to notice the implementation of differentiated strategies was inconsistent. Some teachers were implementing only one or two strategies. Other teachers, however, were not seen implementing any visible differentiated practices. She was alarmed as the feedback from the training had been so generally positive. She decided to visit team meetings to support the implementation of the training. During these meetings, she reminded teachers of the practices they should be implementing. Again, during these meetings there was no overt opposition to the practices she was promoting.

By January of that year, Russell had not noticed remarkable improvement to the practices she had seen in September and October. In fact, it seemed that most teachers had adopted one or two differentiated strategies and were using them over and over, not pursuing any deeper exploration of sophisticated measures taught in the extensive training. In fact, Ms. Russell began to hear, for the first time, open resentment to the lack of involvement in the original decision as well as the changes that were being required of teachers. During team meetings with Ms. Russell, relationships seemed awkward and a bit strained. Principal Russell began targeting teachers who she thought were most oppositional to the practices and started to spend more time in their classrooms to send them the message

that the changes were important. She was direct with these resistant teachers, requiring them to implement the differentiated strategies immediately. Principal Russell began documenting these teachers in writing and sending them to other teachers' classrooms to observe differentiated strategies. These efforts yielded few changes with the reluctant teachers' practices.

In addition, parent complaints began to emerge. Apparently, teachers were communicating to parents their dissatisfaction with the new instructional practices, stating that they were expected to do too much, there was not enough time to plan, and that students were confused about the new strategies. Parents began questioning the changes and openly questioned the intelligence of making such instructional changes. Principal Russell held firm with the intent of the differentiated practices professional development and asked the parents for patience as they made the changes.

What Happened at Culver Elementary?

Does this story seem familiar? This all too typical case requires us to consider these questions:

- Why was the change at Culver Elementary never fully actualized?
- What was going on in the culture of the school to be so resistant so quickly?
- What evidence did Ms. Russell have to assume things were going well?
- What evidence could she have collected to get a better feel for the changes?
- Why didn't the training result in actual ongoing implementation of the strategies?
- What support did the teachers need from Ms. Russell? What did they get?

Shirley Russell worked hard to implement differentiation at Culver Elementary School, and she had data to support the need. She followed what seemed to be a natural, seemingly logical path for leading the changes. Yet, in spite of her best efforts, this initiative fell flat as so many often do in our schools. She was never able to put together a system of support and responses to move the initiative forward, toward full, lasting implementation. Russell's orchestration resulted in more "noise" than lasting, balanced music. This example illustrates the need for a different kind of leadership—a maestro's orchestration of different elements, which together create a symphony of sustained improvement.

The word "orchestration" is meaningful to all of us who are dedicated to leading and facilitating school improvement. Central to the idea of orchestration is the concept of "masterminding"—the engineering, directing, arranging, and organizing of projects of significant merit. An artistic reading of the word reminds us that orchestration is highly correlated with the concept of "choreographing"—the conceiving, planning, and directing of a "dance" having multiple complex and synchronous components. If we take these ideas associated with the word *orchestration*, we learn much about our roles in nurturing, supporting, and demanding long-lasting change in our schools.

To be effective and efficient school leaders, we must view ourselves as orchestrating (masterminding and choreographing) improvement in our schools. Indeed, to orchestrate requires a maestro, someone who is an artist of considerable skill. This maestro must demonstrate artistry in choreographing the complexities of a major initiative and designing supportive efforts to keep the initiative alive and thriving as a communal effort. The maestro must, at the same time, show great skill in masterminding the day-to-day efforts to spotlight progress and improvement to all of the stakeholders in this community improvement. These two ideas are central to orchestrating change in schools. Therefore, if you find yourself in the middle of orchestrating numerous significant changes and critical initiatives for the benefit of students in your schools, this book is your resource. No matter the initiative, no matter the level—elementary, middle, or high school—any work, if it is worth doing, requires careful and thoughtful orchestration if it is to succeed.

Chapter

6

How Do I Develop Targeted Professional Development to Sustain the Initiative?

Having a vision for the initiative is a huge tool for the maestro, as it guides the kinds of relationship-rich, results-focused conversations that must take place during the years of implementation. Also significant to the school leader is how people learn the knowledge and skills in order to implement the changes. Professional development conjures up mental images in many teachers and school leaders. Some of those images are not necessarily positive. Ask around, and the effective school leader will find that much of professional development seems misguided, unfocused, bloated at the beginning of the initiative, and not created or orchestrated to maintain the energy and skill needed to institutionalize the change.

This is a conundrum to the school leaders. We know that targeted adult learning is vital to the implementation of any initiative. At the same time, we often design and implement it poorly! Beautifully crafted and carefully managed, professional development can at once be energizing, coalescing, and gratifying. Indeed, it can be exactly the "just in time" punch that teachers need to continue to implement necessary changes—provided the professional development has been designed with long-term sustenance in mind.

Consider the concept addressed in Chapter Four—detailing the life span of the initiative. In that chapter, we outlined that life span as being in three distinct but interrelated phases: Initiation, Implementation, and Institutionalization. Figure 6.1 summarizes those changes. Notice the addition of adult learning to the scheme.

Figure 6.1 The Life Span of a School Initiative

Professional development is the foundation on which the life span of the initiative rests. The school leader must know and be committed to the exact content, process, and context of professional development that is needed at this moment in time to move the initiative forward—at any point in the initiative's life span and throughout the work until the change is fully institutionalized.

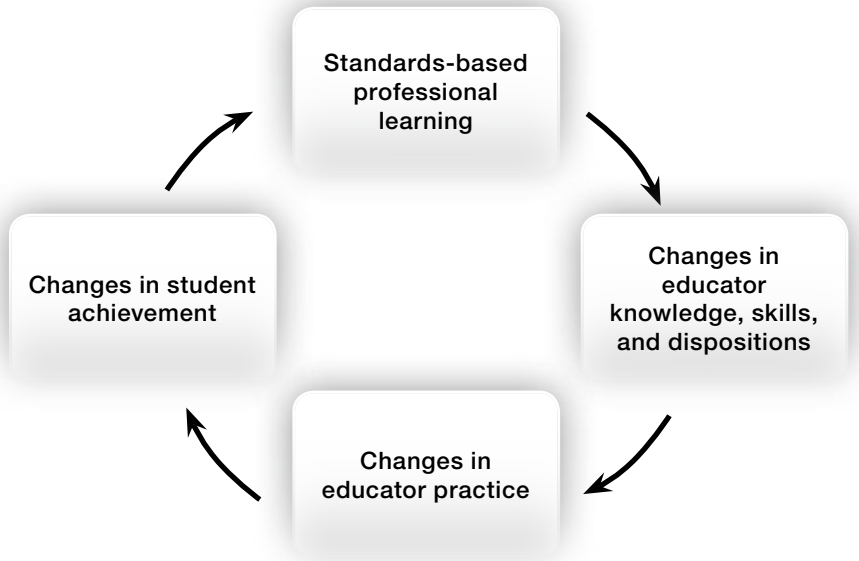
Concepts and Skills in This Chapter:

- Standards for quality professional development
- Powerful, school-based professional development designs that work
- Building in daily learning to support the initiative
- Gradually releasing the responsibility to teachers to apply their learning
- Coalescing school teams around learning to sustain the initiative

The Standards for Professional Development

In 2011, Learning Forward, an international organization dedicated to quality professional development, published the Standards for Professional Learning. Calling it "professional learning" instead of professional development, the organization wished to redirect the focus to efforts educators make in their continuous improvement, placing importance on the idea of adult learning more than ever before. For our purposes, we will continue to call it professional development because the term is still most recognized in the field. Figure 6.2 illustrates their premise behind the power of professional development (Learning Forward 2011).

Figure 6.2 Professional Learning



The leader's goal in designing and delivering professional development, then, is to ensure that the professional development will focus on changes in learning and application, so students will benefit.

As stated in the report "Teaching the Teachers" from the Center for Public Education, research suggests that the instruction needed to prepare students for college and 21st century careers is not the instruction most

teachers currently use in their practice. In other words, teacher learning is the linchpin between the present day and the new academic goals. Merely keeping students working bell to bell is not enough; teachers have to learn new ways to teach, ways to teach they likely never experienced themselves and that they rarely see their colleagues engage in. Creating this type of teacher development is one of the biggest challenges school districts face today. Professional development in an era of accountability requires a change in a teacher's practice that leads to increases in student learning. The Center for Public Education report on professional development finds that for teachers to successfully change an instructional practice, they must try it 20 times. When a new strategy is not immediately successful, teachers are not guaranteed to use it again unless they have support. Coaching is the best way to ensure that these necessary shifts are being implemented, reflected upon, supported, and tried again until it becomes a regular part of a teacher's practice (Gulamhussein 2013).

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning function in concert with each other to help educators increase their own effectiveness so students will achieve more. The seven Learning Forward standards are listed in Figure 6.3 (Learning Forward 2011):

Figure 6.3 Standards for Professional Learning

Standards for Professional Learning	Core Elements of Each Standard
Learning Communities: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.	A cycle of continuous improvement is inherent in all teams. Members of the team have collective responsibility and act on it. Members hold each other accountable for actions and results.
Leadership: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.	School leaders advocate and plan for high-quality professional development. Leaders create ways to support the long-term professional development to support the initiative. School leaders model their own learning for their teachers and staff.

Standards for Professional Learning	Core Elements of Each Standard
Resources: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.	Leaders must prioritize all of the resources available, including time, human, fiscal, material, and technology—in order to support the initiative over time. Leaders must also coordinate resources, to ensure that the right resources are being supplied to the needs of the initiative.
Data: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.	School leaders have to find access to all forms of data, including student performance data, teacher data, and overall system data, and put these data in the hands of teachers to analyze learning and performance. The evaluation of professional development must be ongoing, using data which demonstrate levels of evaluation ranging from learning, to application, to performance.
Learning Designs: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.	There are multiple models for professional development that can work effectively in schools. The learning designs (models) must be carefully selected and managed to promote long-lasting adult engagement.
Implementation: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.	School leaders must know and understand how change occurs and apply those concepts at their schools. Implementation must be sustained over time.
Outcomes: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.	Professional development must be standards-based. School leaders must ascertain how the professional learning is aligned with not only educator evaluation performance standards but also student learning and curriculum standards.

(Adapted from Learning Forward 2011)

The effective school leader understands that all seven of these standards must be fully in place in order for educators within the school to reach their full learning potential. These standards, then, describe the attributes of effective professional development that must drive the initiative toward full institutionalization. These standards may be used by the effective school maestro to not only design but also orchestrate high-quality professional development that sustains the initiative over time. School leaders should regularly review and use the standards as a planning and management template for their professional development in their schools.

School-Based Professional Development Designs That Work

There are numerous factors that influence the design (what it looks like) of professional development at schools. These factors include the goals of the learning, the amount of trust and collaboration among the adult learners, their familiarity with the content of the professional development, the urgency and the magnitude of the change, and the resources, to name a few of the most important. Consider the factors and the questions shown in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4 Factors That Influence Professional Development Design

Factors	Questions Raised
Goals	• Knowledge? • Awareness? • Practice? • Reflection?
Trust and Collaboration	• Trust among the staff? • Trust with the leadership? • Trust in the work?
Content Familiarity	• Readiness of the staff? • "Distance" from the practice?

Factors	Questions Raised
Urgency	• How critical is the change viewed? • How much time can be spent on implementing the change?
Resources	• Time? • Funding? • Access to materials?

For example, if the goal for the proposed professional development is knowledge about a new practice, the initiative is at its first beginning stages of work. The staff members are ready for the change in terms of their own knowledge level, and there is some urgency to get the new knowledge to the teachers. In these instances, training is a viable professional development model and may be the best design for the adult learning (and most efficient, in terms of expended resources). However, if there is a high amount of trust and collaboration among staff members and they have a history of working together on problems and learning, training may not capitalize on these contextual elements. This may be especially true if the initiative is in full implementation; as during full implementation, training often does not address the kinds of management and practical issues that teachers desire when in full throes of work in the change. In these circumstances, other professional learning designs may be desired, especially those designs that put teachers in informal groups to learn, set their own goals, and hold each other accountable for implementation and sharing of results from their classrooms. The following table develops some effective designs for professional development (Gordon 2004; Joyce and Calhoun 2010; Learning Forward 2011). No single design for professional development is better than another—it depends on the circumstances, goals, and the factors fully described earlier. The school maestro must carefully weigh the five factors mentioned in Figure 6.4 and then select the model that seems best suited for results at his or her school at the particular time of the initiative's life span shown in Figure 6.5.