# Five Challenges to Effective Teacher Professional Development

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Imagine entering a school as a new principal in the footsteps of others before you who endeavored with various degrees of success to raise student achievement. The experiences and outcomes of those earlier efforts will influence the expectations people have for you. In turn, community expectations for your success or failure will affect the enthusiasm and optimism with which teachers and other stakeholders will greet and assist you as you begin the job. In many ways and for multiple reasons, what you achieve as principal may depend importantly on historically grounded *predispositions* that are already part of the social context, predating your arrival.

Ideas matter too. Whatever the context, the details of the specific *approaches, programs and proposals* leaders introduce affect how people respond. For example, a new principal might introduce a plan such as the following for professional development to improve instruction and raise students' test scores:

1. Engage teachers in groups to analyze student work and to identify particular weakness.
2. Based on these analyses, select a limited number of skills or topics as priorities for improvement.
3. Identify resources to expand time and funding support and shop around to find (or eventually craft) instructional resources and models to address the instructional priorities.
4. Work in groups to learn the new teaching materials and procedures, sometimes with professional development support from outside the school.
5. Plan and confirm the various logistics, especially scheduling, necessary to follow through with implementation.
6. Monitor implementation, make midcourse corrections, assisting teachers who need help, and put collegial pressure on teachers who seem not to be trying.
7. Monitor student progress and repeat the cycle with other targets for improvement.

Ask the leaders what they did in any school or district where test scores have risen dramatically,

and some part of the answer will often resemble this strategy.[1] What determines whether teachers are receptive to such a strategy and whether they work hard to make it successful?

*Leadership* is a major part of the answer. There are plenty of examples where school principals have introduced and promoted perfectly reasonable and detailed plans and strategies that many teachers never embraced or implemented in their classrooms. So, building on the importance of context and strategy, the focus in this paper is on five challenges to achieving and sustaining social and intellectual engagement in the *implementation* of professional development for school improvement. The challenges concern introducing new activities in ways that inspire buy-in; balancing principal control with teacher autonomy; committing to ambitious goals; maintaining industriousness in pursuit of those goals; and effectively harvesting and sustaining the gains. Together, these challenges are the core of the Engaging Professional Development (EPD) framework.[2]

We consider these challenges from two vantage points. First, they represent categories of *predisposition* that are essentially *features of the context*: individuals and communities in particular contexts tend to be predisposed to address these five challenges in particular ways due to their personalities and histories. Second, for any given context with its various predispositions, challenges arise in specific ways during the introduction and implementation of any particular plan or strategy.

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[1] See, for example: Fred Carrigg, Margaret Honey, Ron Thorpe. 2005. "Moving from Successful Local Practice to Effective State Policy: Lessons from Union City." In C. Dede, J. Honan and L. Peters, eds., Scaling Up Success: Lessons Learned from Technology-Based Educational Improvement. New York: Josey-Bass; M. S Casserly, J. Lewis, J. Jepson and J. Ceperich. 2002. Beating the odds II: A city-by-city analysis of student performance and achievement gaps on state assessments. Washington DC: Council of Great City Schools; M. Casserly, M. and J. C. Snipes. 2005. "Foundations for success in the great city schools." In C. Dede, J. Honan and L. Peters, eds., Scaling Up Success: Lessons Learned from Technology-Based Educational Improvement. New York: Josey-Bass.

[2] Several years ago, a framework incorporating these ideas became the centerpiece of the Tripod Project for School Improvement, which focused initially on classroom-level challenges of engaging students in learning. In this paper, we suggest how the same basic ideas can help leaders organize their thinking, and ultimately their actions, concerning the challenges of engaging teachers successfully in professional development for instructional improvement.

After introducing the five challenges, we show teacher survey findings suggesting that failure to successfully address the first three challenges are among the reasons when professional development programs fail. Next, we present a case study in which the focus is on a school's predisposition toward challenges in the framework. A progression of seven principals in twelve years fostered mistrust and control/autonomy imbalances in the relationships of teachers to administrators and hindered the capacity of administrators to lead the school into a period of ambitiousness and industriousness. Finally, a second case study portrays a school where the predisposition was more accommodating to new leadership and a talented principal lead the faculty to a new plateau of high achievement. The case study describes how that principal addressed each of the five challenges in the EPD framework.

In most discussions of "what works" in education, the focus is on rules (for example, for class size) or on programs and their various components. These are clearly important. But no matter what the reform, implementation is key.[3] The central purpose of this paper is to suggest a manageable way to think systematically about the challenges school leaders face as they introduce new ideas and strive for effective implementation. The paper is part of a growing literature on teacher professional learning communities and factors that affect their successes and failures.[4]

[3] For a very good discussion of the importance of implementation see, for example, Ann C. Linn, Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison (Princeton University Press 2000). The book also includes an extensive bibliography on implementation.

[4] See, for example: Bumpers, Jane and Kristine K. Hipp eds., 2003. Reculturing Schools as Professional Learning Communities (Toronto: Scarecrow Education); Fullan, Michael, 2001 The Meaning of Educational Change, 3rd Edition (New York: Teachers College Press); DuFour, Richard and Robert Eaker 1998 Professional Learning Communities at Work (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development); Supovitz, Jonathan and Jolley B. Christman 2005. "Small Learning Communities that Actually Learn." Phi Delta Kappan. Vol. 86(9):649-51 (May).

**Five Challenges of Social Engagement: an Interdisciplinary Consensus**

Group dynamics in schools involve the interplay of students, teachers, and administrators with a range of differing capabilities, personalities and aspirations. Still, despite their differences, all of these actors share some very basic motivations. A short but very useful list includes the urge to belong and be accepted by others; the drive for autonomy (freedom, impact, power, personal "agency"); the compulsion to grow in competence, thereby expanding in capacity to achieve important goals; and to feel efficacious. Human beings—administrators, teachers, students and others alike—are attracted instinctively to opportunities that promise such rewards.

How ambitiously and relentlessly people work in social settings depends at least in part on the supply of such payoffs. Moreover, studies in seemingly unrelated literatures contend that which aspect of motivation is peaking in salience at any particular time tends to follow a logical sequence within the life cycle of a particular project or school year. With only slight variation, the sequence has appeared in multiple literatures (including child development, business marketing, social work, innovation diffusion and organization theory) where writers independently rediscover the same progression of social challenges to engaging people in collective work.[5] We argue in this paper that by distinguishing among the challenges in the EPD framework but also understanding their interdependence, school leaders will be prepared to engage teachers more effectively in the work of teaching and learning.

[5] Baron, Robert S., Norbert Kerr, Norman Miller. 1992. Group Process, Group Decision, Group Action (Briston, PA: Open University Press); Erikson, Erik H. (1963). Childhood and Society (New York: W.W. Norton & Company); Fox, Jerry R. 1985. "Mission Impossible? Social Work Practice with Black Urban Youth Gangs." Social Work. January-February; Kotler, Philip. 1986. Principles of Marketing, Third Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall); Rogers, Everett M. 1983. Diffusion of Innovations (New York: the Free Press). Several years ago, a framework incorporating these ideas became the centerpiece of the Tripod Project for School Improvement, which focused initially on classroom-level challenges of engaging students in learning (www.TripodProject.org).

**Challenge One*: Establishing trust and garnering interest.*** When a group initially forms, say a classroom at the beginning of the school year or a school faculty on the first day of a new professional development program, ***the need to feel trustful and secure and interested*** in the agenda is paramount. For example, students on the first day of class are preoccupied with assessing whether the teacher is going to be "nice" or "mean" and (secondarily) whether the class is going to be "fun." Similarly as adults, say teachers on a school faculty, we seek to feel comfortable with our colleagues and to identify ways that our goals might be met (or not) through participation in any given professional activity. In our efforts to fit well with others and to scope out the agenda, first meetings and first class days are occasions on which people tend to be on their best behaviors as they "get a feel" for the people and the agenda.

**Challenge Two: *Balancing external control and personal autonomy*.** Typically, the honeymoon is short lived. As the real work begins, forces grow upon individuals to accommodate to leadership directives or group pressures to make personal sacrifices or accommodations. Because there is a natural urge to resist control and maintain autonomy, there is ***a need for balance between individuals' desires to be autonomous and the requirements of groups and organizations to align activities for coordination and synergy.*** In a classroom, it is often the case that some students resist the rules. Then, teachers' responses teach students what the *real* rules of the classroom are going to be (versus those announced on day one) and students decide in what ways they will or will not try to comply. Similarly, teachers respond to pressures and make decisions to balance their own needs for autonomy, as against the rules, norms and procedures that school leaders and professional peers try to encourage or enforce.

**Challenge Three: *Fostering ambitiousness.*** For students in classrooms and teachers in schools, resolution of challenge two helps clarify which rules, rewards and resources are likely to

be stable features of the environment. Possibilities take on greater focus. Judgments concerning which personal goals are likely to be truly achievable become easier to make; students refine earlier impressions into more codified expectations for classroom life and, based on these expectations, ***focus their aspirations for personal achievement*** (for example, grades); teachers experience an analogous process in the school professional community. For example, they may commit to participate ambitiously in particular professional development activities to improve their instructional practices, or lean toward ambivalence, abstention or resistance.

**Challenge Four:** ***Sustaining industriousness and resilience.*** Goals, however ambitious they might be, are only unrealized intentions. Achieving goals requires follow-through. The feelings of trust and interest, relations of power and autonomy and goals for personal achievement developed through tasks one, two and three above, become the backdrop for a period during which to ***work industriously toward goals and resist discouragement or disengagement due to boredom or setbacks*** is the central challenge. This period during which challenge four is peaking is probably the longest period of most program, project or school year cycles. The intensity and relentlessness with which people stay on track during this period determines what they ultimately achieve.

**Challenge Five:** ***Achieving mastery and consolidation***. Finally, project, program or school-year cycles end and the time comes for consolidation. Leaders and participants alike tend to focus on ***bringing appropriate closure***. Sustaining positive gains and making connections through which those gains might be the basis for further progress at later times is a central focus. Students write end-of-term papers and study for final exams, helping to consolidate understanding. Teachers finishing a professional development program review materials and make plans for integrating new ideas into future instructional routines. In various ways and to

varying degrees, students and teachers take stock and celebrate achievements, consider implications for future endeavors and pass along resources to other uses.

For each of the five challenges defined above, school leaders take strategic actions and hope people will respond in ways likely to foster success. With rows numbered to correspond to the five challenges, Exhibit 1 summarizes actions that school leaders might take to engage teachers in professional development work (column A). In addition, it summarizes actions that teachers take (column B) in their efforts to engage students. Column C summarizes ways that teachers and students might respond. Each response has an upside and a downside possibility. On the upside are trust, balanced autonomy, ambitiousness, industriousness and consolidation of positive gains. On the downside are mistrust, imbalanced autonomy, ambivalence, discouragement and squandered potential. The degrees to which these upside versus downside potentials are realized depend upon many things, including leadership.

------ Exhibits 1 and 2 about here. [Find them at the back of this paper.]------

School leaders play out their roles amidst idiosyncratic local conditions that set the stage for how people respond. Exhibit 2 reminds us of the complex chain of events that begin when a leader introduces an idea for instructional improvement. In Exhibit 2, the arrows from Circles i, ii and iii to Circle B, remind us that beliefs, capacities, responsibilities and community conditions in place before a leader introduces a proposal can affect the ways people respond to it. What leaders need to say or do in order to introduce an idea successfully can be very sensitive to such details.

**Why is Professional Development Often Ineffective?**

For the past several years the Tripod Project for School Improvement has surveyed students and teachers regarding the five challenges. Table 1 presents the findings from one

question. Specifically, the spring 2005 survey included a set of items after the following prompt: "*Recall the last professional development program at your school that had little or no effect on teaching or learning in your class. With that program in mind, please check all of the following responses that apply."*

Table 1 classifies the items under the first four challenges in the EDP framework. The subheadings under challenge 3 represent three of five *"conditions that promote ambitiousness and industriousness"* in the EPD framework (the two conditions not shown are "*relevance*" and "*peer support*"). Numbers in the table are percentages of elementary and secondary teachers, respectively, who checked any given item in response to the prompt concerning the last program that "had no little or no effect on teaching or learning in your classroom."

------- Table 1 about here. [Find it at the back of this paper.] -------

Notice that only 5 percent of elementary and 8 percent of secondary teachers responded that the program had little or no effect because, "I really tried to make it work, but it just didn't help my students." Similarly, very few teachers indicated that the program failed because, "It was going to infringe too much on my way of doing things," or because, "Doing it well would have been too much work." No more than 10 percent responded that, "I never thought it could work with my students." Generally, there is nothing in the answers to suggest most teachers tried to make the programs work and failed or believed that the programs could not have affected teaching and learning in their classrooms if implemented well.

Instead, it appears the programs that had little or no effect because they were never really implemented. First, related to challenge 1 (*trust & interest*), eighteen percent of elementary teachers and thirty-one percent of secondary teachers indicate that, "The way it was introduced didn't inspire me to try it." Second, related to challenge 2 (*autonomy/control*), twenty-seven

percent of elementary and twenty-nine percent of secondary teachers responded that, "Teachers were not held accountable for doing it." Third, related to challenge 3 (*ambitiousness*), twenty-eight percent of elementary and thirty-six percent of secondary teachers checked, "There was too little support and training." Finally, fully forty-percent of elementary and forty-two percent of secondary teachers checked, "It was just too much, on top of everything else the school was trying to do." The teacher surveys suggest that professional development fails not primarily because the ideas do not work when implemented or because teachers reject the approaches outright, but instead because the ideas are not implemented.

The implications are straightforward, at least in principle. Programs that have minimal impact have not been implemented because leaders have failed to do the following:

- Select and introduce ideas in ways that *foster trust (feelings of security) and interest, not mistrust or lack of interest.*
- Assign responsibilities and manage accountability in ways likely to *achieve a balance of leadership control and follower autonomy, not too much or too little of either control or autonomy*.
- Plan, initiate and monitor implementation in ways that *inspire ambitious goals, not ambivalence and lack of commitment.*
- Support ongoing implementation in ways that *motivate industriousness in the face of setbacks, not discouragement and disengagement.*
- Recognize, celebrate and reward accomplishments in ways that *sustain and consolidate positive changes, not squander them though confusion and incoherence.*

Of course, to assert that these things are important is much easier than to explain how to do them. As the example of Revolving-Door Middle School (see below) and the issues on Exhibit 2 (above) illustrate, local preconditions can pose substantial barriers both to the introduction of new ideas and to their implementation.

## Two Case Studies

This paper is part of a larger project using the Engaging Professional Development (EPD) framework as a lens for understanding leadership differences in very successful versus less successful schools. As such, we have visited a number of schools over the past year, speaking to administrators and groups of teachers about successes and failures in professional development. The following pages describe two of these schools. The first is a school where recent history has predisposed it toward a balance of too little administrator control and perhaps to much teacher autonomy, discouraging administrators from introducing ideas around which improvement efforts might be organized. The second example is a school that has improved over the past several years because of a strong principal whose leadership has effectively attended to the challenges in the EPD framework.

### Case One: Revolving-Door Middle School

Revolving-Door Middle School [obviously, a pseudonym] sits in a blue-collar suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Two-thirds of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Roughly one-third are African American and most of the rest are whites. When we visited, it was the third straight year the school experienced a complete turnover of administrators. Indeed, there had been seven principals in 12 years. Student performance on state tests of reading, writing and science was similar to other districts with comparable student populations, but in math it was lower. For all these subjects, scores at the end of 2004-05, around the time that we visited, were lower than in recent years. The school's rating on the state report card was "academic watch," the second lowest designation, and the school had not made adequate yearly progress (AYP). Nonetheless, teachers expressed pride in their stability as a staff and in their strong sense of commitment to one another and students. One says, "What am I most proud of? We try to build

a family instead of just professionalism." Another says, "Everyone on this staff says they are a family and that's what we feel. People leave and come back."

In this school, capacity to achieve trust and interest in new ideas varies depending upon the messenger: teachers trust peer leaders who have been at the school for a long while, but they do not trust that administrators will stay long enough to follow through on new initiatives or enforce new directives. Peers, not administrators, are the sources of influential ideas. A teacher says, "How do I find out about new ideas? Teachers bring them in. I walk across the hall to see what works. We're willing to admit when things aren't working [which she says administrators have not been willing to do]. We all do the same things."

The Vice Principal believes that suggestions from new administrators would be unwelcome. She says, "This year has been a difficult year for administration. We have all come in here new and have not at this point tried to implement very many new initiatives. We are new folks, and they are sick and tired of relearning new people." She continues, "This year was just to get to know you and it was not successful. We took on a lot of extra burdens trying to build relationships. Especially regarding discipline, we took too much on. A student not doing a writing assignment should not be a referral to the principal. It's a classroom issue. But we took it on this year. It's been completely ineffective—constant referrals, more of the same, an unbelievable amount. And yet, we still have the reputation of being unsupportive." For this school, turnover in administration has produced too little administrator control with perhaps too much teacher autonomy, and the strategy of the current administrators has even further undermined administrators' influence.

Consequently, teachers' responses to control-autonomy questions focus on control *by peer leaders*: "Buy-in regarding a new program? If someone introduces a new idea and I get into

it, or even if I don't *but the majority of the school does*, then I realize there has to be a unified front. We can't even have five or six teachers in the building who don't buy-in—that can undermine the rest of the building. If I am in the minority on an issue, I still realize I have to support the majority in the building. It's detrimental to have some people doing this thing, and others doing something else." As another explains it, "We do things as a collective. There's not peer pressure, but people go along—if everyone agrees, then everyone else agrees. Kind of go with the flow."

The administrators seem not to understand the key role of peer leaders. When asked about plans for the next year, the vice principal said that a key strategy would be to work with teachers who seem likely to resist things that the administration plans to introduce. This perspective seems blind to the fact that individual teachers in this school are part of a strong community, beholden to the power of *curriculum leaders* and *team leaders* who make the major decisions, both formal and informal, on behalf of other teachers. Curriculum leaders and team leaders are well positioned to deal with resisters, once they themselves accept a new administration proposal

At the same time, some teachers yearn for administrative leadership. Commenting on the lack of leadership influence from administrators, a teacher says: "Administration needs to be available, in the hallways, in the classrooms, popping in, saying hi—we don't have that here, so people feel, if no one is going to watch me, why should I care?" Continuing, "The last principal tried to get teachers to walk kids to class. We did it for the first couple of weeks, and there were few fights in the hallway. But teachers didn't want to do it. [So some stopped] and nothing ever happened. This sets a tone for the rest of the staff that if you don't do what you don't want to do, nothing is going to happen to you. This was an effort introduced by the principal, but not with

buy-in originally from leaders."

Concerning challenges 3, 4 and 5—ambitiousness, industrious and consolidation—there is not much professional development activity to report. Aside from a curriculum mapping exercise the previous year that teachers say went well because it was very unrestrictive, the school lacks a coherent well-directed strategy for raising student achievement. Teachers have instructional routines and the curriculum leaders and team leaders support these in various ways. Leaders maintain the social structure, including a strong sense of community. Moreover, they profess to care deeply about students. But as teachers without administrative leadership or outside support, they do not have the wherewithal to set the school on a strong upward trajectory of improvement.

Among the main things they lack is stable leadership that is capable of attending effectively to the five challenges upon which we are focused here in this paper. For example, if the administration chose this year to push for literacy instruction across the curriculum, could they introduce it effectively? Achieve accountability with a balance of control and autonomy for teachers? Inspire teachers to embrace ambitious goals and to implement the new program relentlessly, resisting discouragement? Would teachers take seriously administrators' overarching vision for school improvement? Without leadership that can meet these challenges, Revolving-Door Middle School seems unlikely to harvest more fully its potential as a professional community that educates children well.

**Case Two: Relentless Elementary School**

Relentless Elementary School [a pseudonym] is a small elementary school in Northern Ohio where almost eighty percent of students are nonwhite and more than that percentage qualify for free and reduced lunch. Similar to Revolving-Door Middle School, the staff prides itself in a

strong sense of "family." However, different from Revolving-Door Middle School, they accept their principal as their leader. She arrived four years ago to lead a faculty that she largely inherited. For the first two years, she worked hard to dismiss two teachers she regarded as problems and ultimately succeeded. A strong leader of professional development, she has focused the staff on particular instructional challenges and been supported by several programs that the district has provided. Test scores rose significantly in the year after she arrived and have stayed high for the past three years, though reading scores dropped a bit in the year before our visit.

**Challenge One*: Establishing trust and garnering interest.*** How does this principal introduce ideas so as to get buy-in (trust and interest)? The principal and teachers independently emphasized the importance of the way professional development is introduced in the school. When a new initiative is one being promoted by the district, the principal takes two lead teachers with her to the district trainings, and then creates 2-hour slots where the three educators present the new material to the rest of the staff. The teacher-to-teacher nature of this presentation—with the principal in the mix—is seen as particularly effective. As one teacher reported, "It's expected that the administration will bring in new things. We may not adopt all of it. . . . The bottom line is getting kids to learn. That's our philosophy. If the principal says it's a good idea, 'This is what colleges and universities around the country are doing,' we try it. Usually there are some good points we can keep with us. . . .We've always been a group that assesses the children. Teach and assess. We've adapted to what the district is doing. One of the keys to our success is to ask, 'Is this working?' We're quick to change when we need to." Thus, the culture of the school is one where teachers expect the principal to introduce new and useful ideas and are mostly predisposed to be open, but all agree they will not persist with ideas that do not prove effective.

**Challenge Two:** ***Balancing external control and personal autonomy*****.** How does this principal balance leadership control with teacher autonomy? As indicated above, much of her first two years at the school were consumed by a battle to replace two resistant teachers; she has a low tolerance for teachers who refuse to participate appropriately as members of the staff. The primary mechanism for enforcing accountability is frequent, very purposeful communication. The principal says, "We're expected to comply with the district. I have to embrace it; model it; be enthusiastic. I walk them through it. I reinforce what we are supposed to be doing in weekly [grade-level] meetings and also when doing classroom observations." A teacher says, "Our leader works hard herself. She has high standards. You know she is also working. She models for us. The enthusiasm she shows." The principal pays attention to individual teachers, "You have to know your people. Which buttons to push. For some people I might write a note and put it in their box. Others I might approach verbally: 'Please make sure you're there.'" A teacher says, "We get lots of feedback from the principal—for example, the new standards—she makes sure we're really using them." Concerning autonomy, teachers are invited to offer opinions and to expect their opinions will be taken seriously. In addition, the principal agrees implicitly not to strictly enforce some rules, such as the rule that rubrics should be posted in classrooms and reflected in the comments on student work. She says, "You have to pick your battles."

**Challenge Three** (***Fostering ambitiousness) and*** **Four** ***(Sustaining industriousness and resilience).*** How does this principal support ambitiousness and industriousness? In the Effective Professional Development (EDP) framework, we say that people are more likely to be ambitious and industrious when the five conditions that support ambitiousness and industriousness are satisfied. Specifically, (1) that success seems feasible on goals that are clearly defined, (2) the goals seem important, (3) the experience is enjoyable, (4) supervisors are both encouraging and

insistent, and (5) peers are supportive. The professional climate in this school satisfies all five conditions.

The principal is an enthusiastic proponent of improvement through targeted programs, rigorously implemented. She and teachers agree on the value of weekly meetings where she participates with each grade level team. Together, they examine student work, discuss student progress, and discuss new initiatives. She works one-on-one with some teachers to keep them focused on new instructional approaches. She works hard to keep morale up by convincing them that success is within their control and the work is important.

Much attention is paid to sustaining the school's reputation for high scores on state tests. When asked about the source of their determination to achieve high scores, teachers respond, "Partially us, partially the principal. We are being judged. We want to do well. We all have a competitive streak. Have to keep up our reputation. They keep upping the bar. We've scored 100 percent proficient in some areas. Now you have to get more advanced. We do better than many suburban schools (but they look down on us in a way). We experience joy in seeing our children succeed."

In general, the teachers feel that although there are too many new approaches each year and that they would rather see the results from one before starting something new, the new programs have been very well-supported by the district and the principal both in terms of professional development, and importantly, materials. They emphasize that this was very much not the case in their previous jobs. At this school, they are not expected to just figure things out for themselves after one workshop.

Other than the somewhat spotty use of rubrics, the only examples identified of "failed" programs are the use of computers in instruction (there was very little support until recently) and

there was a teacher evaluation program that required an enormous amount of bookkeeping and was scrapped after one year.

**Challenge Five:** ***Achieving mastery and consolidation***. How does this principal achieve coherence and consolidation? Under this principal's leadership, teachers at the school have a clear understanding of their mission and also of the methods by which they work together to achieve it. Coherence with regard to particular programs comes from the ways that programs are managed and monitored during implementation and from the ways that the effective elements from programs are ultimately integrated into the school's core instructional regime. Describing the principal, one teacher says, "She has a lot of enthusiasm and goals in her mind. She reminds us that when you get tired this school doesn't sleep." Then, when working through the fatigue leads ultimately to high test scores, this principal remembers to celebrate with cookouts and other events.

**Conclusion**

This paper concerns the interplay of trust, accountability, ambitiousness and persistence in the *implementation* of almost any strategy for school change or teacher professional development to improve instructional practice. It proposes an *Effective Professional Development* (EPD) framework built around five challenges that principals and other school leaders face when trying to improve instruction. Leaders can use the framework to diagnose, anticipate or plan for implementation challenges. The paper demonstrates the utility of the framework first in classifying teacher survey responses concerning failed professional development programs. Teachers' responses suggest that when new initiatives founder it is less due to the initiatives' merits or characteristics, and more due to the ways in which the initiatives are introduced, managed and supported. Too many initiatives are poorly introduced, not

embedded in systems of accountability, poorly supported with training, and crowded by competing demands on time and attention.

In the background of the EPD framework, issues associated with all five challenges "hang in the air" as part of the local environment. To various degrees, school communities are predisposed to be trustful or mistrustful; cooperative or caught-up in power struggles; ambitious or uncommitted; persistently industrious or easily discouraged; cohesive or chaotic. When historically rooted predispositions foster mistrust and reluctance to submit to control by new administrators, a school may be in a posture to stagnate.

The case of "Revolving-Door Middle School" illustrates how preconditions that include years of high turnover by administrators can distort the climate for school change in ways that discourage administrators from being leaders. Teachers at Revolving Door Middle School trust one another but not their new administrators. They are accountable to one another but very autonomous as a group in relationship to administrative control. Historically rooted mistrust of administrators and lack of administrator control (versus collective teacher autonomy) intimidates the administrators against even trying to lead for change. Professional development projects that administrators in other schools might have proposed as contexts for ambitious instructional improvement were not proposed at Revolving-Door. The reasons, it appears, include that mistrust and control/autonomy imbalances seemed insurmountable barriers to the school's new administrators.

In contrast to Revolving-Door Middle School, the principal at Relentless Elementary School faced fewer obstacles when she arrived. The case study describes conditions in her school and how she attends to the challenges in the EPD framework. From five years under her tutelage, teachers are now predisposed to trust not only that this principal will introduce useful

new ideas, but also that she will respect their views about whether to adopt particular programs and when to stop using them. She learns new programs along with the teachers so that she can help them with implementation. She meets weekly with grade-level teams to review student work, discuss instructional issues and make clear her expectations. In terms of the EPD framework, she introduces new ideas (challenge 1) in ways that teachers find appealing; imposes control (challenge 2) in ways that show respect for teachers; inspires ambitiousness (challenge 3) by training teachers well and showing enthusiasm for their work; maintains industriousness (challenge 4) by actively helping teachers succeed as a professional community and refusing compromise in reaching for high standards; and (challenge 5) she manages the school in ways that sustain gains and foster a sense of coherence and integrity for both individual programs and the school as a whole.

Exhibit 1

**Leadership *actions* that school leaders (Column A) and teachers (Column B) might take in relationship to the five challenges defined in the text and ways that followers might respond (or not) with regard to positive *engagement* (Column C).**

| | A | B | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| | ***School Leaders' Actions*** re: a prof development program. | ***Teacher's Classroom Leadership*** over the course of a school year. | Engagement Responses to Leaders by school teachers and students. |
| 1. | Select and introduce ideas for professional development. | Begin the school year with classroom icebreakers. | Feel trustful and interested, versus mistrustful, insecure or uninterested. |
| 2. | Assign associated responsibilities and define accountability for participation. Design feedback and monitoring mechanisms. | Establish rules and classroom management routines. | Achieve a balance (versus imbalance) of personal autonomy in relationship to the power and control of the leader, teacher or group. |
| 3. | Refine and clarify school and personal goals for instructional improvement. | Define goals for learning. | Resolve to be ambitious about achieving goals, versus ambivalent, lacking commitment. |
| 4. | Implement activities and help teachers to be successful; monitor and assist the unsuccessful or disengaged. | Implement teaching and learning activities and work with students to help them succeed. | Be relentlessly industriousness & resilient, versus discouraged and disengaged. |
| 5. | Codify, celebrate and reward accomplishments. | Recognize, celebrate and reward accomplishments. | Achieve, consolidate and sustain positive changes, versus getting lost in confusion and lack of coherence and squandering gains. |

## Exhibit 2: How Leadership and Teacher Engagement Mediate the Link from Instructional Improvement Proposals to Improved Student Learning

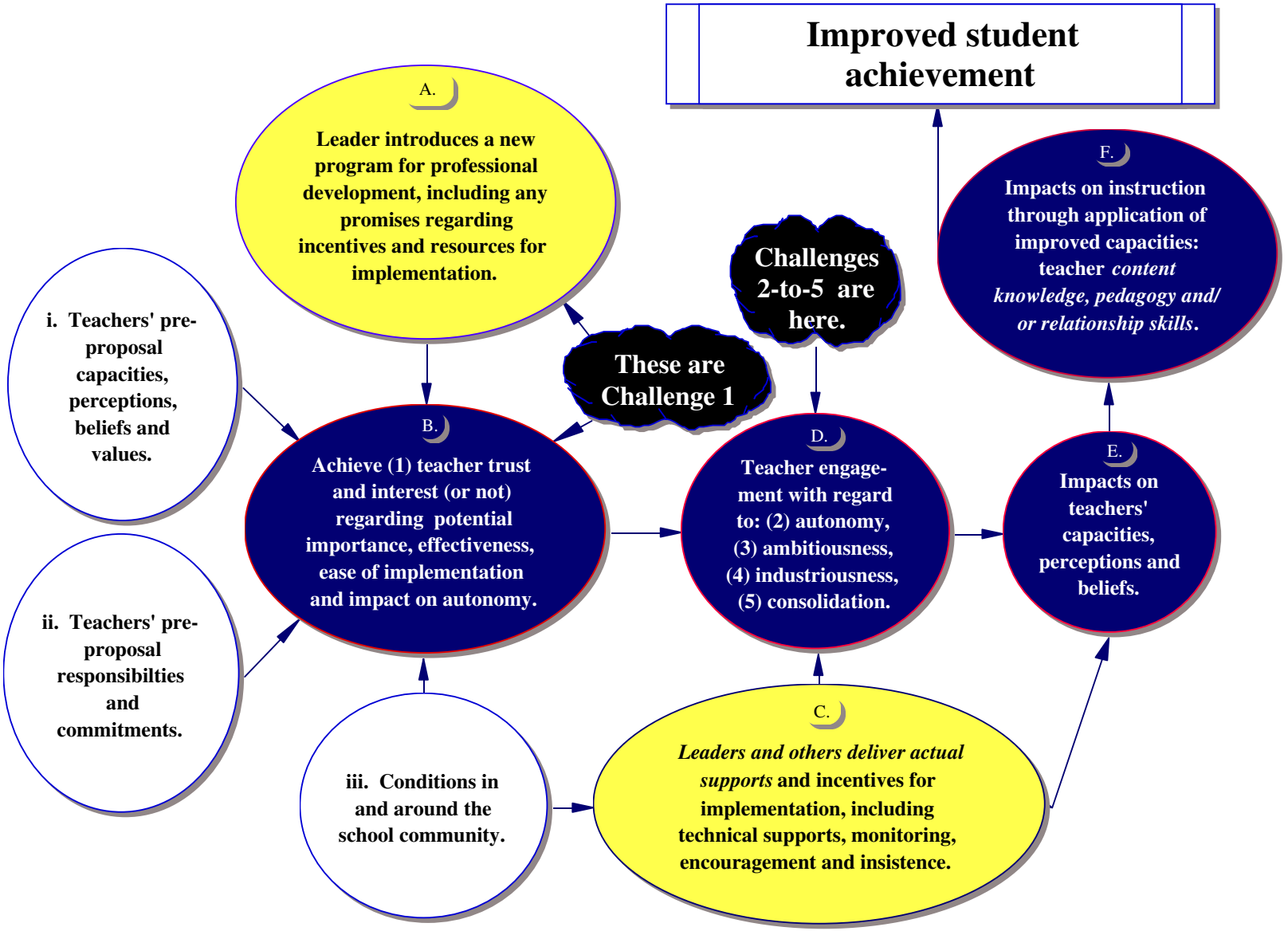


**Table 1: Reasons for Ineffective Professional Development**

Percentages of elementary and secondary school teachers checking each listed statement, in response to the following direction: ***"Recall the last professional development program at your school that had little or no effect on teaching or learning in your class. With that program in mind, please check all of the following responses that apply."***

| | **Percentages that checked the response** | |
|---|---|---|
| **I. Trust & Interest vs. Mistrust & Disinterest** | **Elementary** | **Secondary** |
| The way it was introduced didn't inspire me to try it. | 18 | 31 |
| Too many other things were going on, so I didn't pay a lot of attention to it. | 19 | 19 |
| I never thought it could work with my students. | 6 | 10 |
| The goals of the program were not clear. | 21 | 29 |
| **II. Balanced vs. Imbalanced Administrator Control & Teacher Autonomy** | | |
| Teachers were not held accountable for doing it. | 27 | 29 |
| It was going to infringe too much on my way of doing things. | 1 | 4 |
| **III. Ambitiousness vs. Ambivalence** | | |
| **A. Feasibility of Success** | | |
| There was too little support and training. | 28 | 36 |
| The people responsible for training me weren't very good. | 19 | 21 |
| **C. Enjoyment/Difficulty** | | |
| It was just too much, on top of everything else the school was trying to do. | 40 | 42 |
| It didn't fit well with other things I was doing. | 13 | 19 |
| Doing it well would have been too much work. | 3 | 8 |
| ***D. Supervisor Support and Press*** | | |
| Our principal never really took it seriously. | 4 | 10 |
| **IV. Industriousness vs. Discouragement & Disengagement** | | |
| I really tried to make it work, but it just didn't help my students. | 5 | 8 |
| I started trying to implement it, but then lost interest. | 14 | 9 |

Sample: 212 teachers from 17 secondary schools and 78 teachers from 19 elementary schools who completed this section of the Spring 2005 Tripod Project Teacher Survey. Teachers represent roughly one quarter of secondary classrooms and one third of elementary school classrooms where students were surveyed. Since responses were voluntary, the numbers here are only suggestive of what a truly representative tally would show. The teacher survey was to be completed online, so nonrespondents are those who, for whatever reason, did not go online to complete the survey.