



## Teacher leaders move colleagues from knowing to doing

In their book *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action*, authors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton (1999) discuss the reasons why what we do often doesn't match what we know. Although the authors' research was drawn from a corporate perspective, I was reminded of barriers to professional learning and changes in educator practice as I studied the Implementation standard more deeply.

The knowing-doing gap mirrors what is commonly called the implementation gap. It is the gap between our intended outcomes and actual actions associated with student achievement.

Professional learning that leads to changes in educator practice and increases student results is no small feat. The gap is a challenge that requires attention by educators and leaders at all levels if we are serious about increasing educator effectiveness and results for all students.

Pfeffer and Sutton (1999) describe three barriers to translating knowledge into action: knowing what to do is not enough; when talk substitutes for action; and when measurement obstructs good judgment.

Within the Standards for Professional Learning, the Implementation standard provides three attributes of effective professional learning that address these common barriers and support the implementation of new knowledge, skills, and dispositions into practice.

### Apply change research to move beyond knowledge acquisition

In much professional learning, the emphasis is on knowledge management — getting information on new practices into the hands of educators to make sure they know about emerging practices, strategies, and programs — instead of learning and implementation. The cycle of information gathering, knowledge sharing, and dissemination planning is common, yet knowing what to do is insufficient. Change research informs us that merely knowing about new practices seldom results in those new methodologies being incorporated into ongoing classroom practices.

Change efforts require varying lengths, degrees of stability, and combinations of support. By applying change process research, teacher leaders can integrate a variety of differentiated supports for implementation that align to teachers' individual needs and goals. Through dialogue and consistent communication, teacher leaders can help maintain high expectations, gather evidence to celebrate early successes, acknowledge challenges, and sustain a focus on goals and strategies.

### Sustain implementation to move beyond talking

While many “would rather talk, conceptualize, and rationalize about problems and issues than confront them directly,” implementation requires a focus on actualizing learning and sustainability (Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R., 1999, p. 28). Without



ongoing support, efforts are futile and produce little to no effect on student results.

Following a consistent and well-planned cycle of on-going individual and team support for moving professional learning into practice includes planning, implementing, analyzing results, reflecting, and evaluating the application.

Teacher leaders promote the sharing and refinement of problems of practice when they work closely with teachers to integrate new ideas into their practice and when they provide ongoing support by leading learning teams, coaching, modeling, observing, and guiding reflection and data analysis.

### Provide constructive feedback to avoid measurement obstructions

Poorly designed measurement practices can be a barrier to moving

professional learning into practice. For example, the focus may be on too many or the wrong behaviors for the intended outcomes, or the data collection tools may be misaligned or undefined. Other common barriers include providing no feedback; feedback that is received too late, such as at the end of the year; or feedback that is vague, unclear, or not useful to promote adjustment to practices. Teacher leaders and coaches can assist in this area by providing frequent, focused, and constructive feedback on clearly established expectations and defined behaviors that provide educators with

the information necessary to refine their practice. Staying focused on the right measures — increases in teacher effectiveness and student results — is a critical part of implementation.

Moving educators beyond the knowing and into the doing requires a level of deliberate intentionality. Teacher leaders support implementation efforts by applying what is known about change research, sustaining implementation through a variety of individualized models, and providing purposeful constructive feedback. In striving to this end, teacher leaders must remain steadfast in their roles to

build capacity among their colleagues, question the “why” whenever necessary, and advocate for a commitment to long-term changes in practices.

#### Reference

**Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R., (1999).** *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

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