Foreword

Research about education is replete with contradictory findings. Teachers unions, found to be agents of reform in one study, are judged to be obstructionists in another. Small class size, shown by one scholar to positively affect student performance, is judged by another to make little or no difference. Data about teacher training lead some analysts to predict that alternative routes to certification will improve the quality of the teaching force and others to warn of their dire consequences. One finding, however, has emerged reliably in study after study for the past 25 years: The principal is key to building a better school. A strong and supportive principal can enable a faculty to succeed in the most challenging conditions; a weak or authoritarian principal can undermine the work of even the most able and committed teachers.

Although it is possible to identify strong principals, it is not obvious what makes them so. And despite some reformers' claims of a leadership formula that works for all principals in all schools, none exists. Each person and each setting is different, and a principal who seeks to be an instructional leader must chart a course that is right for a particular school and faculty. Eleanor Drago-Severson never overlooks this complexity. She begins by celebrating the variety that exists among schools, principals, and teachers, and then she richly describes and astutely analyzes the ways in which exemplary principals understand and undertake their work as instructional leaders.

By studying various types of schools—public, Catholic, and independent—in an array of communities, Drago-Severson demonstrates that differences in resources, mission, and policy environments deeply affect what a principal in a particular school can and must do. The principal of a Catholic secondary school has different options and opportunities than the principal of a comprehensive public high school. But Drago-Severson does not stop at these institutional and social differences, for she further understands that the teachers in any school differ as well, bringing to their work different kinds of experience and different levels of personal development. Just as a successful teacher adapts instructional approaches

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to the developmental stages of individual students, a successful principal recognizes and responds to teachers as a diverse group of learners at different stages of readiness.

Regrettably, public education has long been organized to discount differences among teachers. The egg-crate structure of the school, in which each classroom is separate and each teacher autonomous, has led not only to isolation among teachers but also to practices that treat teachers as if they are all the same. Thus teachers routinely are expected to do the same job on the first and last days of their career. Drago-Severson reminds us, however, that teachers differ markedly from one another and that relying on a uniform strategy to improve their work is sheer folly.

Robert Kegan's theory of adult development stands at the center of this book, and Drago-Severson makes fine use of it in her explorations of principals' work with teachers. As many readers know all too well, staff development programs in most schools pay little or no attention to the learning needs and capacities of the individual teacher. They are, as Drago-Severson explains, designed to be "informational"—convey facts, build skills, and inculcate procedures—rather than "transformational"—to effect fundamental changes in how teachers conceive of their work and roles. Drago-Severson convincingly illustrates how individual teachers' capacities to be changed depend, in part, on their own stage of development—development that does not track neatly onto years of experience in the classroom.

A principal seeking to support and promote teachers' learning must recognize that within a school's faculty, there are certain to be teachers at various stages of adult development, which means that they will bring to their work different ideas about what they need and how they might improve. Some teachers will primarily seek explicit rules and surefire approaches ("instrumental knowers"); other teachers will try to understand what authorities want and work for their approval ("socializing knowers"); yet other teachers will take responsibility for their own work and seek opportunities to reflect on it ("self-authoring knowers"). Devising strategies for professional development that simultaneously accommodate the demands and needs of teachers at all developmental levels presents a significant leadership challenge. These 25 principals' descriptions and explanations, which Drago-Severson skillfully compares and contrasts, enable the reader to see how strategies can be tailored to particular settings and individuals. By focusing closely on the experience and reflections of Sarah Levine, one principal whose work Drago-Severson studied intensively, we can see how deliberate and sustained principals' efforts must be, as they simultaneously support and challenge their teachers as learners.

From these principals' accounts, Drago-Severson identifies four "pillars" of practice that support effective, differentiated approaches to adult learning and professional development in schools: establishing teams, providing leadership roles for teachers, promoting collegial inquiry,

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and relying on mentoring for the induction of new teachers and the further learning of experienced teachers. The approaches are notable because they not only accommodate teachers' needs for professional growth but also create opportunities for interaction among teachers at different developmental levels. Implicitly, these approaches acknowledge that all teachers are not the same; some are ready to take on special roles with their peers—as leaders of teams, facilitators of discussions, and mentors.

At the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, my colleagues and I have found that the majority of new teachers today have no intention of remaining in the classroom for a lifetime. Some expect to teach for a few years before moving on to different lines of work. Others plan to remain in education (but not the classroom), taking on specialized roles as administrators, instructional coaches, curriculum coordinators, or staff developers. Unlike teachers from the generation of teachers about to retire, new teachers entering classrooms today expect to work in teams, to have access to leadership roles, to reflect with colleagues about their work, and to rely on expert teachers for guidance. They are eager to work in the very kinds of schools Drago-Severson depicts here. Unfortunately, however, few schools are organized to meet such expectations, and, as a result, many promising teachers will abandon teaching for other workplaces that are more responsive and encourage them to grow. If schools are to become new centers of learning that effectively support teachers at all levels of experience and development, it will be because principals take the lead in making them new centers for learning. As principals set out on this challenging path, this book will surely help them find their way.

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