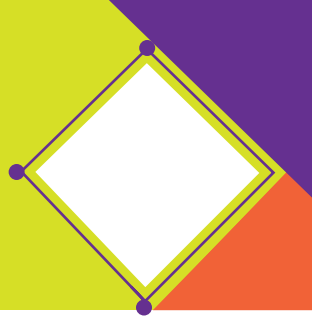# CHAPTER ONE

From Information Glut to Well-Known FACES

Introduction

About a decade ago we came to the conclusion that what mattered most in accomplishing school success on a large scale was *focus.* Too many priorities were coming and going as systems became both fragmented and constantly overloaded. So we did begin to focus—on literacy and numeracy, for example, first in the York Region District School Board, then in Ontario as a whole system, and indeed in our work around the world. It paid off in results, as we shall see, but we discovered something even more important in the course of this work. To focus best, teachers need to combine *technical expertise* with a strong *emotional connection* to what they are looking at. The key is how to make important things personally important to the individual on both cognitive and affective grounds. This is what *FACES* is all about.

We all know that the sheer volume of information is becoming overwhelming. As Eli Paris (2011) puts it in *Filter Bubble,* "900,000 blog posts, 50 million tweets, more than 60 million Facebook status updates, and 210 billion e-mails are sent off into the electronic ether every day" (p. 11). All human communication, from the dawn of time to 2003, is replicated in volume every two days!

It is not that more information makes us smarter. Nicholas Carr (2010), an early technologist himself, tells us in his book *The Shallows,* "[W]hat the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation" (p. 6). In *Distracted,* Maggie Jackson (2009) argues that there is so much going on that we are losing our ability for "deep, sustained, perceptive attention"

(p. 13). The result is that we are attracted to what is flashy and instantly stimulating, literally not being inclined to pay attention to what is important.

Instant and ubiquitous access to everything further dulls one's emotions. The meaning, for example, of 10,000 people dying in a monsoon in Bangladesh doesn't register. Yet, show one up-close picture of a small girl being swept to her death in the larger tragedy, and we are stirred. We are wired to feel things for people, not for numbers.

Education, of course, is overloaded with programs and data. The growth of digital power has aided and abetted the spread of accountability-driven data—adequate yearly progress, test results for every child in every grade, common core standards, formative and summative assessments galore. Not to mention that around the corner will be the demands of two new assessment consortia in the United States—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortia—both of which will issue reports in 2015.

It is not just the sheer volume of information that is daunting. It is the form in which the data arrive—can you imagine a devoted teacher becoming excited about the latest electronic report that serves up scores of disaggregated statistics? Our colleagues Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (2006) say that teachers are "data-driven to distraction." They have data all right, but it comes in waves of indigestible, dehumanized information. We say, as do Hargreaves and Shirley, that teachers' actions need to be "evidence informed," but more than that—they must be moved and inspired by the data, and helped to pinpoint the action that will be effective. They need, in short, to be able to put FACES on the data, and to know what to do to help the individual children behind the statistical mask.

What matters to most teachers is their children, their humanity—what we have called their FACES and what lies behind them. We asked over 500 teachers and administrators, "Why should we put FACES on data?" One teacher said playfully, "Because they are so damned cute." True enough for kindergarten, but overall our answer is "because it is so damned important." You need to care for students, but you also need to help them get better in the one thing that can serve them for life—their day-to-day learning.

As well as the need to connect to students emotionally, teachers need to be able to diagnose and act on their students' learning needs. In other words, teachers need to be knowledgeable experts

for each student. All of this is a tall and demanding order because effective teachers will need to combine emotion and cognition in equal measure. Weaken one of these links, and the learning possibilities collapse.

Toward Well-Known FACES

In this book, we distill what we have learned about getting to the human side of learning, while zeroing in on the knowledge base and expertise required for deep and widespread learning outcomes. What will be essential is not just to discover a passionate teacher here and there but rather how to generate emotional commitment and effective instruction on a very large scale—for whole systems. To do so you do need data, but you need to generate and use it in a way that makes the child come alive in the minds and actions of teachers. We and our colleagues have learned a great deal about how to do this.

   We know that lessons may be learned from leaders who have created and sustained district-wide improvement, lessons about the importance of uncommon persistence in the face of competing priorities, unfailing attention to the details of implementation, hard-nosed decision-making regarding where best to allocate scarce resources, ego-free leadership, and ongoing attention to evidence about what is working and what needs to be modified. Leading educational reform in your state, district, school, or division is not for the faint-of-heart, the impatient, or those who are easily distracted. This book offers critical and detailed lessons for those aiming to help schools do a better job on behalf of their students, lessons learned from those who are achieving state, district, school, and student success.

   Throughout each chapter, readers will find "Deliberate Pauses," which offer an opportunity to reflect on some of the questions that the chapter may raise. These questions and more are collected in Appendix H to use as a book study. In addition, we include in each chapter at least one "Narrative from the Field." These narratives are based on the stories that outstanding teachers and leaders have shared with us about an emotional connection or a cognitive insight they have gained in to a student's or a teacher's FACE. Finally, throughout the book we integrate case studies of real schools, districts, and a whole state that have achieved success.

Deliberate Pause

- How useful have your data been?
- Of all the data available, which are most critical?
- Which data are missing?
- Instead of using data, do players at every level "hope for" exceptional instructional practice within the mysterious black box known as the classroom?
- Give examples from your data that demonstrate you know that every child is learning at his or her maximum potential?

Since about 1990 a growing body of work has pointed to the use of data to inform decisions made by successful states, school districts, school administrators, teachers, and the broader community about the state of student achievement. However, one could say that a "faceless glut" of data is a both a political and a systemic pathological problem facing educators almost everywhere. With so much information available, can politicians and education leaders with the will to raise the common core state standards in their districts and schools find the right mix of simple-to-read data to overcome the inertia in their jurisdictions? Can they find a proven "how to" solution to drive achievement? If they find a solution, how can they ensure that every child learns, that every teacher teaches well, such that their systems and every school within their systems become high performers and therefore are accountable for the funding dollars they receive and for achieving their social-moral imperative? Let's see what's "out there" that might answer these questions.

Both of us are researchers and, as well, one of us (Sharratt) is a leader-practitioner-consultant and the other (Fullan) is an external leader—an international authority on change and leadership. We have worked in many different states and districts across North America and beyond on full implementation or what we are calling "collective capacity-building." We examine here what it means to "put the FACES on the data"—the powerful notion of how to go deeper within focused assessment, by harnessing the value of only relevant data that tell teachers what to teach next for each student, and by doing so in a way that connects the emotions and the intellect of teachers and students.

An example of getting the right data and using it to direct student achievement is that of Luis, a boy in eleventh grade—out of the

classroom more often than in, due to highly disruptive behavior. Every week, often on a daily basis, he was suspended for rude, uncontrollable, aggressive behavior. He had been forced to change districts and schools many times. Not knowing what to do next, the vice principal at his latest school, in search of a deeper cause, recommended that Luis's literacy skills be tested. The results presented at an in-school case management meeting (see Chapter 4) showed that Luis was reading at a second-grade level. His teachers and his parents were shocked and disbelieving. His father said, "It's not true. Luis reads his texts every day in the car on the way to school." (Luis had been banned from riding the school bus.) Luis had been covering up and faking it for several years, acting out or withdrawing because he was being asked to read texts way beyond his level of competence.

After a lengthy case management meeting, it was decided that Luis would meet Miss Andrews, the high school's literacy coach, every day after school for a focused *word study* (see Glossary) and reading comprehension strategies lesson. Miss Andrews gradually built rapport and trust with Luis, and at the same time determined that Luis was attempting texts and recreational reading (such as *Harry Potter*) that were well beyond his skills and that he couldn't do his class work or homework. Being frustrated, Luis "acted out" belligerently, to the puzzlement of his teachers, who later began to avoid interacting with him. Over the next few months, after school, demonstrating patient work with Luis, Miss Andrews brought Luis to reading and writing, gradually increasing his competence and confidence. When Miss Andrews "chunked" high-interest, low-vocabulary texts with Luis, the words became sentences and the sentences in paragraphs had meaning for Luis. Now Luis reaches for a newspaper each morning, and not only does he look for the hockey scores, but he also reads the front page because he likes to learn about what's going on in the world. And in class? Luis's teachers learned to modify his written assessments, using simpler words that Luis could understand, and his scores rose gradually to grade level. Luis, and everyone around him, experienced much less frustration as a result. This is the story of a tragic situation in which a simple data-driven analysis and intervention resulted in a positive ending.

How many Luises and Vickys (see Narrative from the Field on page 6) fall through the cracks? It is not good enough to catch the

Narrative from the Field

Another positive story about caring and cognitive teaching, this time at the elementary school level, involves a teacher who didn't think her sixth-grade student Vicky could learn. After several weeks of working in cooperative learning groups and rotating roles within groups, Vicky, who has communication challenges and specific learning needs, was given the role of reporting to the class what her group had done. The teacher was quite anxious about Vicky's ability and how she would manage, so the teacher gave the groups the opportunity to pass the reporting to another child in their group if the child selected didn't want to do it. When it came to her group's turn, the group endorsed Vicky. She stood up and then clearly and confidently told the class what her group had done. After this, Vicky regularly shared her learning and ideas with her groups and her class. The story of Vicky challenged the teacher never to doubt a student's ability but to support each and to recognize each student's work and worth—and to become even better informed by "listening" to the data presented in the actions of other students.

—Linda Forsyth, deputy head teacher,
Perth and Kinross Council, Scotland

odd Luis and Vicky here and there. We must catch each and every student. FACES is about humanizing the teaching of each student and having the tools to do so systemically for all. This book helps you to reach all students without dehumanizing education in the process.

We begin by discussing the *14 parameters,* a district reform strategy that identifies the drivers and keys to implementation that has now been replicated in many jurisdictions worldwide. With the inclusion of a strong literacy-numeracy strategy, schools and districts that have deployed this strategy have reached and sustained success. We also speak about how the use of student achievement data is a powerful tool for improvement at every level—especially if improvement is noted and monitored on the basis of drilling down

Deliberate Pause

- How many students (in your state, school, and classroom) can read with fluency and *comprehension* (see Glossary) by the end of grade 1? How do you know?

into that data to individual student names and FACES in individual classrooms.

How the 14 Parameters Came to Be

In the book *Realization,* we discussed the 14 parameters, the key drivers that we have found to be important for schools, districts, and states to become places where high student achievement is expected and delivered year after year by energized staff teams of true professional educators. To summarize, in the late 1990s, when Bill Hogarth, director of education for the York Region District School Board, stated that all children will read by the end of grade 1, a literacy initiative was launched within the district's seventeen lowest performing schools, as determined by results of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (*EQAO*—see Glossary) standardized test for grade 3.

We draw frequently in this book on EQAO data. It should be noted that the level 3 and 4 threshold represents a very high standard which includes higher-order thinking skills and requires a student to achieve a score of 70% in order to meet the standard.

Of 150 schools in York Region at that time, 17 found a small staffing allocation within their overall staffing allotment, sufficient to have half-time literacy coaches in each school. There were two caveats concerning the role and the professional learning provided by the district: (1) the literacy coach had to be a respected, valued teacher selected from the school staff; and (2) the principal and the literacy coach had to attend monthly district professional learning sessions together.

The initiative became known as the Literacy Collaborative. It was driven by the Literacy Steering Committee, which comprised the superintendent of curriculum (Sharratt), curriculum coordinators, an appointed system literacy principal, and selected principals from the field. The Literacy Advisory Committee—composed of the elected chair of the board, Bill Crothers; director of education Hogarth; two field superintendents; Sharratt; an elementary and secondary principal representative; and the literacy principal—strategically guided the initiative—similar to Barber's guiding coalition, discussed later in this chapter.

After one year, district scores began to improve with literacy as the priority; the scores from the seventeen Literacy Collaborative schools outperformed both state and district schools (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In year 2, the seventeen schools again outperformed the others.

When we examined the seventeen schools more closely, we found that nine of the seventeen were able to align and sustain their work on improvement. We called these "high-focus schools." The figures show that in years 3, 4, and 5, the nine "high-focus" schools advanced their level of achievement. Scores for the eight "low-focus" schools were inconsistent because they could not maintain their focus on increasing all students' achievement. What factors differed between the high- and low-focus schools to affect scores as they did?

To determine why nine schools improved so dramatically while the other eight started well but failed to sustain their performance, we analyzed the annual reports from the seventeen schools and interviewed leaders of the initiative to learn which schools had incorporated the

Figure 1.1 Grade 3 EQAO Reading: Percentage of All Students at Levels 3 and 4
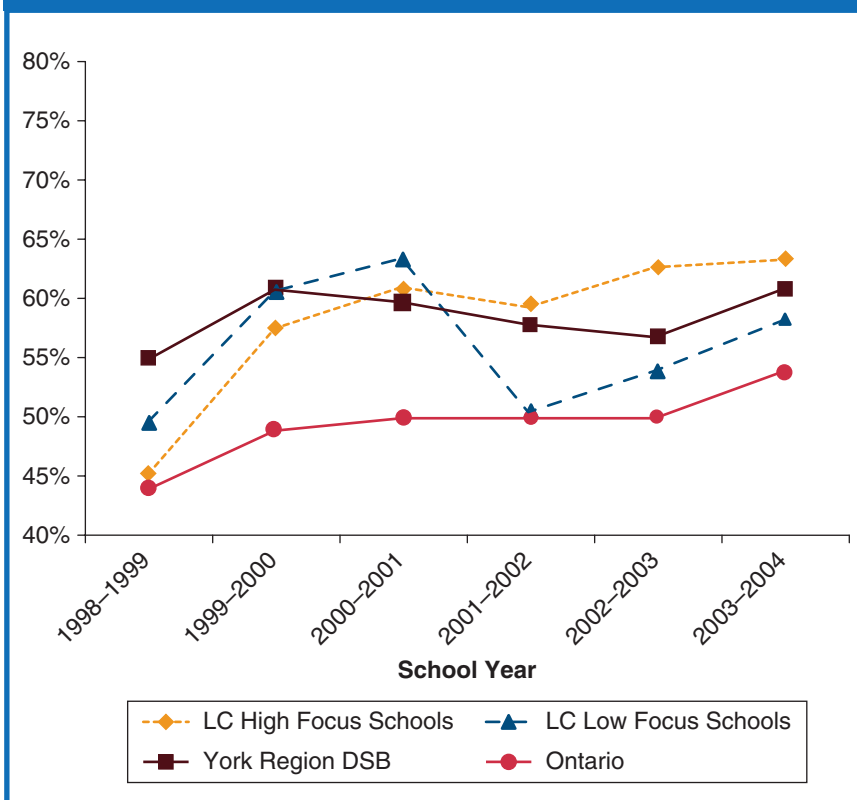
Note: A Level 3 score means the student has met the minimum standard of 70%, and a Level 4 score means the student has exceeded the minimum standard.

Figure 1.2 Grade 3 EQAO Writing: Percentage of All Students at Levels 3 and 4
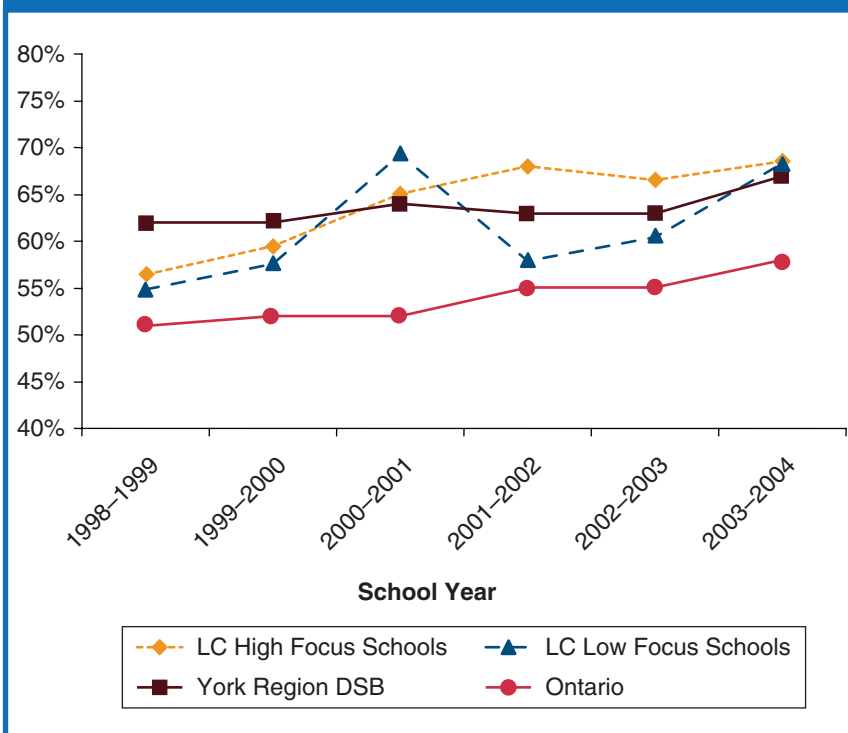
literacy coach and professional learning monthly sessions more fully and how they had done it. The nine high-focus schools (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2) that did especially well were initially among the lowest performing schools in the district, yet they moved beyond the state and district averages in a relatively short time and sustained their achievement levels. The explanation for better performance in our view lies in more carefully focused attention to the details in each of 14 improvement areas, or what we call the 14 parameters (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). It turned out, as we have found time and again, that it is not mere acceptance or endorsement of an idea or practice that counts but rather engaging in the actions that cause *implementation.*

Understanding the reasons for the gains, the district launched the parameter-based program broadly, K–12, by incrementally expanding the Literacy Collaborative. The low-focus schools refocused on increasing *all* students' achievement through intentional assessment

and instructional practices. Over time, the remaining elementary and secondary schools in the district followed and began to raise their students' achievement results.

The factors we studied, the 14 parameters, are in effect the nitty-gritty of deep and sustainable collective capacity-building. Think of the 14 parameters as the specific reform strategies that—in combination (and over time, as the organization progresses to greater implementation of the 14 parameters)—"cause" classroom, school, district, and state improvement. The 14 parameters are listed in Figure 1.3. A self-assessment tool that can be used to track progressive implementation of the 14 parameters is provided in Appendix A.

We now know a great deal more about the 14 parameters—the fourteen drivers of reform and practice in successful school districts—and are even more convinced of their validity and efficacy. First, we learned and understood that effective change reform to increase student achievement involves precise planning and detailed work. We know that in order to improve student achievement individual school leaders must actively and diligently work to raise their school's assessment in each of the 14 parameters.

Second, from our initial results and further use of the 14 parameters in other jurisdictions across the globe, we developed a detailed self-assessment implementation tool (see Appendix A) so that schools, districts, and states could determine how well they "stack up" against the 14 parameters of successful schools and districts. The results of a district or school staff's self-assessment can become the outline of a purpose-built school improvement plan—specific to each school's needs and against which progress can be measured (see "Collaborative Inquiry," in Chapter 4).

Third, when we get some schools in a district to move ahead using the 14 parameters, we know we have the makings of a critical mass of instructional leaders who will lead to an almost inevitable tipping point toward system and school improvement for every school for every student in the district. We also know that reaching this point will cause some people in leadership positions to deviate from the plan—"too much work," "not my interest," "not my school"—being excuses and complaints they will use to distract motivation and remove resources from achieving the district's planned reform. With ongoing monitoring of all the assessments of

Figure 1.3 The 14 Parameters

1. Shared Beliefs and Understandings (adapted from Hill & Crévola, 1999)
   a. Each student can achieve high standards, given the right time and the right support.
   b. Each teacher can teach to high standards, given the right assistance.
   c. High expectations and early and ongoing intervention are essential.
   d. Teachers and administrators need to be able to articulate what they do and why they teach the way they do.
2. Embedded Literacy/Instructional Coaches
3. Daily, Sustained Focus on Literacy Instruction
4. Principal Leadership
5. Early and Ongoing Intervention
6. Case Management Approach: (a) Data Walls (b) Case by Case Meetings
7. Professional Learning at School Staff Meetings
8. In-School Grade/Subject Meetings
9. Centralized Resources
10. Commitment of District and School Budgets for Literacy Learning and Resources
11. Action Research/Collaborative Inquiry
12. Parental and Community Involvement
13. Cross-Curricular Connections
14. Shared Responsibility and Accountability

Source: Sharratt and Fullan (2005, 2006, 2009).

activity (see "Parallel Research" section) and listening throughout the system, leaders must ask key questions and confront factors that stand in the way of further implementation.

Fourth, the work can be and has been replicated successfully across contexts, as we illustrate throughout this book using case

studies from several jurisdictions in which we are currently working. We know that learning how to succeed on every parameter is the ongoing work of education leaders. It is not surface beliefs that matter; it is focused commitment, making tough resource allocation decisions, drilling down to put FACES on the relevant data, and "staying the course" that matter, no matter what pressures or new concepts the unfocused might launch.

Finally, we learned that new strategies are needed to increase the specificity of teaching and the opportunity to learn. Although it is ideal to use student assessment data to tailor individual student learning, school performance data must also be used to define the precise and intensive support for instructional improvement that is needed in each school. In other words, not only must teachers differentiate student instruction by using various forms of student achievement data to inform the instruction, but system leaders and school administrators must also use student achievement data to differentiate support to teachers and administrators whose tracked student achievement scores represent needs for targeted professional learning sessions. Only a laser-like focus on student achievement data will enable us to put the FACES on the data so that we can improve instruction for all our students—our ultimate vision—our moral imperative. Not coincidentally, such an approach can improve our teachers' and administrators' professional lives, as well—as system leaders and administrators, we put the FACES on their data too.

Parallel Research

Sir Michael Barber's *Deliverology 101* (Barber, Moffit, & Kihn, 2011) speaks authoritatively to the *how* of making change occur in large public organizations, such as education. As chief adviser on delivery for U.K. prime minister Tony Blair, Sir Michael created sustained positive change resulting in increased performance and/or increased satisfaction levels as reported by users and voters across England.

Sir Michael's analysis of what worked in making the changes, and why the changes became so deeply embedded, in many ways parallels the specific elements described in the 14 parameters. We refer to *Deliverology* several times throughout our text, but here are

a few instances of positive parallels with our findings and reform strategies:

1. Defining the organization's aspirations—what we call "shared beliefs and understandings" (parameter 1)

2. Defining the reform strategies—what we call the total concept of the 14 parameters, our drivers for reform—learning how to monitor and assess progress toward optimizing the organization's performance against the drivers that, when followed, will lead to increased student achievement

3. Creating and aligning the Delivery Unit with the drivers and bringing a relevant and influential leadership with authority over key resources onto the Delivery Unit—our matrix of scaffolded implementation of the 14 parameters (see Appendix A), from which we develop in this book specific assessment and instruction practices for schools, districts, or states

4. Ensuring an overarching guiding coalition of leaders (that is, the literacy steering and advisory committees) is in agreement, leading and continuously monitoring progress toward and detractors against the defined aspirations and the measurable trajectories and longer-term targets that represent those aspirations—our fourteenth parameter, "shared responsibility and accountability"—evident in "learning walks and talks" or the "learning fair" concept (see Chapter 5)

5. Training constantly for quality and to build organizational capacity to ensure sufficient understanding of and commitment toward continuing the program in spite of execution team changes at any level—our model of scaffolded leader and teacher professional learning from modeled to shared to guided to interdependent practice (see Appendix A)

6. Institutionalizing the solution through capacity building and by being so successful that the direction taken, and the many strategies on which it is based, become the new norm for the organization, replacing any and all previous conditions of mediocrity or worse—what we call "collective capacity-building" or "realization," such as in the way this book's case studies demonstrate how to incorporate perfected high-yield assessment and instruction strategies

As you can see, our work in reform implementation in education mirrors, in many ways, Barber's work in the Delivery Unit in England. In the discussion that follows, we speak more to our message of measuring and assessing how individual schools, districts, and states are performing and we speak to how we feel that putting the FACES on the data is a win-win strategy that creates changes in instruction and in achievement levels and that results in a culture of success for students and education professionals—a culture in which all stakeholders can be proud to participate.

We learned in our initial study, and subsequent work has reinforced the idea, of the overarching value of quality leadership at the school level. The successful schools in our research were led by principals, vice principals, and part-time literacy coaches who understood and were committed to the specifics. For example, in the schools we studied, we found the following:

1. School leaders clearly understood the model and, most important, lived the shared beliefs and understandings (parameter 1) in the design.

2. School leaders clearly understood that they needed to attend to the components of the 14 parameters.

3. School teams did constant self-evaluation, striving to align beliefs and understandings among the principal, literacy coach, Reading Recovery teacher, and special education resource teacher as the leadership team who worked with all staff. This involved *accountable talk* (see Glossary) and corresponding action, with each other and with teachers, in an ongoing way—during the school day.

4. School leaders did not let the "distracters" divert their energies and focus—they stayed the course toward literacy and student improvement—holding their nerve until improvement results were realized—no matter what!

We discuss further, in Chapter 5, the specifics of what it takes to put the FACES on the data as an instructional leader. At this point, let's put more flesh on the concept by considering a case study.

Simcoe County District School Board Case Study

Beginning in the 2010–2011 school year, Sharratt worked with Kathi Wallace, the director (chief superintendent) of Simcoe County District School Board, and her assistant superintendents. The Simcoe County District is a large school district in south-central Ontario, Canada, with approximately 50,000 students and 111 schools, covering about 1,800 square miles. The senior team of nine supervisory officers was interested in reflecting on their journey in adopting a deep literacy and numeracy direction to align and focus their work in increasing all students' achievement. Together, they looked to *Realization* (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009) and, specifically, the 14 parameters reform strategy as it provided a microscopic look into their practice and provided answers about how to improve. The work began with a collaboratively built plan of attack—crafted uniquely for the work in Simcoe County—honoring their context and ongoing work in assessment and instruction.

Scrutinizing the data as a team was a first step, specifically, moving from vague percentages to detail by putting the number of students on each set of results. Then they determined the professional learning needs of this supervisory officer team so that they could go deeper into the data with their principals. The work included a commitment to focused homework (replicating these sessions with selected school leadership teams) between sessions.

Results were inconsistent and sporadic but began to show a slight improvement trend. On closer inspection, leaders realized that the sheer numbers did not bring to life the actual students that they knew. It was agreed that the system needed to pay closer attention to who the FACES were and where they were—especially the FACES of real kids that the numbers of students below standard represented. They revisited resource allocation, to tighten it and to ensure that value was added from the same resource spending (such as having a 1.0 full-time equivalent teacher-librarian in each school take on the important role of literacy coach). They developed "expected high-yield practices" in all schools with a related communication-implementation plan. Together they determined collective questions to ask in monitoring principals' and leadership teams' work in each school, and after training with Sharratt, the learning team implemented "learning walks and talks" (Sharratt, 2011) to move beyond simply visiting schools to "looking for expected practices" in classrooms—sharing their findings and determining professional learning needed across the system.

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One of the Simcoe senior team, Steve Blake, introduced his principals to *Realization* (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009), and it is with this introduction that the story of one school—one of many that we could choose in Simcoe County—begins. They recount their work to successfully put the FACES on the data by using the 14 parameters self-assessment tool as a lens for improvement.

> I'm not sure we would ever want to retreat . . . teaching and learning this way is too much fun!
>
> —Jeff Clark, principal

Brechin Public School has been using the 14 parameters approach to improvement since September 2009; it is a very positive "work in progress" with impressive initial results that demonstrate both the use of the 14 parameters as a self-assessment tool and how drilling down into the data puts the FACES on the data for everyone. Yes, it is a small school, but it does perfectly mirror any other school of its size within any district that has larger and smaller schools. The story here is "learning is the work" and how "assessment that drives instruction undertaken by every teacher in every class counts." Staff teams like those in Brechin and in the district believe that every child matters. And every example of good practice is worth a review.

Brechin Public School is a 200-student rural school located in Central Ontario, where at least 90 percent of students are transported by school bus every day. When Jeff Clark began as principal in September 2009, he was faced with very low 2008–2009 grade 3 and grade 6 EQAO reading, writing, and mathematics assessment scores; these scores had been inconsistent in previous years (Table 1.1). At a district principals' meeting, Jeff's colleague Shelley Clark (no relation, but everyone asks) reviewed *Realization* (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009), suggesting that the book's 14 parameters reform strategy framework would be the perfect starting point for rejuvenating a school in challenging circumstances. Jeff was sold on the evidence presented and began to work with Shelley on a strategy for improvement.

Beginning with the End in Mind

Why are we examining Brechin as an important case study? Did the work make a difference to all students at Brechin? Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show the scores of successive grade 3 and grade 6 classes. The year 2009–2010

Table 1.1 Percentage of Brechin Grade 3 and Grade 6 Students Scoring at EQAO Levels 3 and 4			
Grade 3	*Reading*	*Writing*	*Math*	*Number Assessed*
2005–2006	59%	52%	52%	29
2006–2007	60	55	75	20
2007–2008	42	26	21	19
2008–2009	22	33	39	16*
2009–2010	*76*	*90*	*100*	*21*

*16 of 18 were tested in 2008–2009; in other years, all students were tested.

Grade 6	*Reading*	*Writing*	*Math*	*Number Assessed*
2005–2006	73	42	65	26
2006–2007	47	45	39	38
2007–2008	42	58	58	12
2008–2009	48	33	52	24*
2009–2010	*82*	*68*	*59*	*22*

*24 of 27 were assessed in 2008–2009; in other years, all students were assessed.

Source: Jeff Clark, principal.

results (in italics) are the first-year results of the new reform strategy at Brechin Public School.

Table 1.1 shows erratic, low performance from 2005–2006 to 2008–2009 by students assessed in both grades 3 and 6.

In Table 1.2, the actual number of students below standard in grades 3 and 6 from 2005–2006 to 2008–2009 is startling. In Tables 1.1 and 1.2, the year 2009–2010 results (in both percentages and actual numbers) show dramatic improvement. In our view, the percentage means nothing; the number of students—the actual number of FACES—is what matters. Every FACE counts to us!

Table 1.3 offers two interesting insights. First, in any discussion of successive class or cohort scores, there is often an issue with the perceived

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Table 1.2 Number of Brechin Grade 3 and Grade 6 Students Scoring below EQAO Levels 3 and 4

Grade 3	Reading	Writing	Math	Number Assessed
2005–2006	12	14	14	29
2006–2007	8	9	5	20
2007–2008	11	14	15	19
2008–2009	12	11	10	16*
2009–2010	5	2	0	21

*16 of 18 were tested in 2008–2009; in other years, all students were tested.

Grade 6	Reading	Writing	Math	Number Assessed
2005–2006	7	15	9	26
2006–2007	20	21	23	38
2007–2008	7	5	5	12
2008–2009	12	16	12	24*
2009–2010	4	7	9	22

*24 of 27 were assessed in 2008–2009; in other years, all students were assessed.

Source: Jeff Clark, principal.

academic strength of one class versus that of its predecessor or the following class. It is interesting in this case to follow the two cohorts available to us. Prior to the new Brechin Public School Improvement Plan, cohort 1 had EQAO reading and writing scores that dropped from grade 3 to grade 6, whereas it was able to hold its EQAO math score—while low, it was sustained. Cohort 2, which appears to be only slightly stronger in grade 3 reading and writing than cohort 1 but much stronger in math, does remarkably well with the strategies of the new plan focused on intentional instruction in reading and writing. The cohort does not appear to do as well in math, in fact dropping off from its grade 3 EQAO performance. The timing of consistent professional learning regarding math in the latter part of the 2009–2010 school year and what is clearly an erosion of skills acquisition in grades 4 and 5, are explanations offered for cohort 2's math scores.

Table 1.3 Brechin Same-Student Scores in Grades 3 and 6			
Cohort 1	*Reading*	*Writing*	*Math*
Grade 3 (2005–2006)	59	52	52
Grade 6 (2008–2009)	48	33	52
Cohort 2	*Reading*	*Writing*	*Math*
Grade 3 (2006–2007)	60	55	75
Grade 6 (2009–2010)	82	68	59

Source: Jeff Clark, principal.

Of course, the school and the district are keen to know if the progress was sustained into the 2010–2011 school year, and if the next same-student cohort enjoyed success like cohort 2. Pretests this year indicate that students are on a very positive trajectory. Having just written that, the most recent EQAO results are now available for the 2010–2011 school year. Grade 3 reading increased 23 percent and grade 6 writing increased 20 percent above 2009–2010 results. Amazing? Not really, when you read the case study and examine the whole-school approach to intentionality and consistency of instructional practice. Table 1.4 summarizes the astounding improvement that the cohort of students who were in grade 3 in 2007–2008 made when they were in grade 6 (in 2010–2011) in reaching the target of all students attaining Levels 3 and 4.

Table 1.4 Improvement of Same Cohort of Students in Reaching Levels 3 and 4 on EQAO Provincial Assessments, 2010–2011			
EQAO Area Assessed	*Grade 3 (2007–2008)*	*Grade 6 (2010–2011)*	*Percentage-Point Increase in Achievement of Levels 3 and 4*
Reading	42%	75%	33%
Writing	26	80	54
Math	21	42	21

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What Was the Starting Point for Improvement?

Beginning in 2009–2010, staff members and Jeff held difficult discussions about the previous year's results and shared their beliefs and understandings about engaging all learners to their maximum achievement. They collectively agreed they didn't want to be at the "bottom" but weren't sure what to do—so they decided to learn together, to take responsibility and to be accountable for the poor results, and to make a positive difference for their kids. Scrutinizing the EQAO results coupled with knowing their learners, the staff team chose literacy learning—in the area of reading, first, as the focus for 2009–2010. So their new School Improvement Plan stated:

> All students will be able to respond to and reflect on a variety of texts by making inferences, extending understanding, analyzing, identifying, and extending points of view. Students will make connections when they are responding by using schema, questioning for deeper thinking, understanding the message of the story, internalizing what their thoughts are and how their thinking has changed, and thinking about other people's point of view.

Instructional Reform Strategies

The action plan was to build-in an increase in the teaching capacity of staff by aligning every aspect of the school's work with essential practices in assessment and instruction. Staff deconstructed the District Improvement Plan for Student Achievement in order to develop common understandings of the needs assessment and data analyses required to align their own school plan. Then, using the 14 parameters self-assessment tool (Appendix A), staff completed the assessment, identified needs, and formulated action plans to use 10 of the 14 parameters and proceeded to integrate these into the School Improvement Plan.

Going deeper, they then collaborated on divisional literacy planning documents (K–2 Primary, 3–6 Junior, and 7–8 Intermediate) that outlined clustered curriculum expectations to be addressed, reading strategies, writing forms, content units, assessment dates, and a timeline for teacher reflections on progress. It was a focused, whole-school approach to improvement. To equip students to make meaning in reading, they collectively agreed to common teaching targets. They agreed that they *must*

- Reach 100-percent consistency in the use of proven high-yield reading comprehension strategies

- Practice shared, modeled, guided, and independent reading, explicitly teaching skills and providing authentic, relevant, and engaging student tasks
- Base instruction on the clustered expectations (learning goals) of the Ontario Curriculum for all language strands (see Chapter 3)
- Develop and implement comparable learning experience across like grades and a continuum of knowledge and skills between grades
- Use common terminology from kindergarten to grade 8, taken from *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003)

What Was Strategic?

Timetables were changed. The staff scheduled in a structured daily 100-minute uninterrupted literacy block at every grade level, with effective balanced literacy (see Chapter 4) as the instructional framework for teaching language.

All teachers were expected to deliver a program of modeled, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing based on *assessment for, as,* and *of learning* (see Glossary). The part-time literacy coach provided ongoing dialogue and support, articulating and demonstrating proven practices and identifying and providing resources.

A data wall (see Chapter 3) was used to visually update student achievement so that teachers could readily identify which students required strategy intervention and which needed in-class extended activities. Strategies were shared and implemented. Case management meetings (see Chapter 4), based on students' *developmental learner profiles* (see Glossary), including student work samples, were embedded and provided rich, ongoing discussion, with interventions consistently planned, implemented, monitored, and assessed. *Leveled books* and *mentor texts* (see Glossary) were purchased. The use of assistive technology for students identified with special needs became a priority focus to help differentiate or support curriculum content and assessment.

Teacher Buy-in Led to Engagement

Just as Jeff and the teachers focused on using the available student achievement data to inform instruction, he used data and the School Improvement Plan to inform professional learning. Professional learning was created for all, where universally valuable, and for individuals where

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specifically needed; it was prioritized and timetabled. Also, he amended schedules to provide required time and support for staff to study and implement *Guides to Effective Instruction* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003) together.

Staff meetings quickly shifted focus from administrative items to literacy professional learning. Essential strategies were broken down to promote clarity and successful implementation in all classrooms, with staff sharing their own *big ideas* (see Glossary) and common understandings, and discovering new big ideas through the use of professional resources such as literacy webcasts (see, for example, www.edu.gov.on.ca).

They also planned weekly 35-minute demonstrations of the teaching-learning cycle (see Appendix D) during instructional time, with outstanding teacher leadership provided by staff members who had had previous professional learning in the pathway process. These pathways were informed by student achievement data and planned based on curriculum expectations and *learning goals* (see Glossary). Teaching strategies were determined by *teacher moderation* (see Glossary), and pre-assessments and post-assessments were analyzed to determine growth of individual students and the success of the specific strategies implemented.

All teachers were involved in visiting literacy demonstration sites early in the year, numeracy sites during the third term, and collaboratively focusing on improvement strategies after each visit by continuing to co-plan and co-teach (see Chapter 4). All teachers also participated in monthly half-day professional learning sessions with the literacy coach to build capacity in essential literacy and numeracy practices and in how this work in literacy and numeracy intersected—language being the common denominator. Joy Nelson, the school's literacy coach, consistently supported teacher efforts in classrooms and during staff meetings. Through scheduling and additional support and funding from the district superintendent, Steve Blake, and the provincial program staff, staff members felt supported

- In the implementation of specific literacy strategies by the literacy coach (see Chapter 4)
- With additional targeted text resources in a centralized book room (see Appendix A, parameter 9)
- In the effective use of learning goals and success criteria (see Chapter 3)

Triage Worked: Evidence of Success

The staff team together set targets that could be monitored and measured using the focused assessment tools available—the 2009–2010 EQAO results, PM Benchmarks (assessing reading comprehension, decoding, and fluency) for K–3, and CASI (assessing comprehension, attitudes, strategies, and interests) for junior–intermediate classes (grades 4–8).

The EQAO grade 3 and grade 6 standard assessments were beginning to show improvement. But this was not enough for the staff. Triangulating the data from the other two assessments with the EQAO assessment data gave the staff a richer view of how each student (FACE) was doing. There were gains in achievement levels in PM Benchmarks for primary reading (Table 1.5) and in CASI results for junior and intermediate students (Table 1.6).

Table 1.5 Percentage of Students in Grades 1–3 at or above Level 3 (Standard) on PM Benchmarks				
	Fall 2009	*Spring 2010*	*Fall 2010*	*Spring 2011*
Grade 1	35%	54%	63%	63%
Grade 2	74	79	42	50
Grade 3	55	65	68	84

Source: Jeff Clark, principal.

Table 1.5 shows that during the 2009–2010 school year, 64 students in grades 1–3 moved 491 benchmark levels, and during the 2010–2011 school year, 61 students in grades 1–3 moved 439 benchmark levels.

Table 1.6 Number of Students in Grades 4–8 at Each Level of Learning on the CASI Assessment				
	Fall 2009	*Spring 2010*	*Fall 2010*	*Spring 2011*
Level 1 (lowest)	15	2	8	4
Level 2 (below standard)	35	29	41	40
Level 3 (at standard)	20	39	40	48
Level 4 (above standard)	3	4	6	10

Source: Jeff Clark, principal.

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Table 1.6 shows that 22 of 35 Level 2 students successfully moved to Level 3 (at standard) in 2009–2010, and 15 of 41 Level 2 students successfully moved to Level 3 (at standard) thus far in 2010–2011.

Anecdotally, at the beginning of the next school year of intense work, 2010–2011, teachers reported that students began their new grades being able to demonstrate the following:

- *Prior knowledge* of terminology, concepts, and reading strategies (see Glossary)
- The use of language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, view, and represent
- More critical thinking about big ideas

Most important, because all teachers learned to use the same terminology and to implement strong instruction with support, they could clearly express their excitement in sharing these precise observations about students' improvement. In other words, teachers could name the students' improvement with specificity—putting the FACES on the improvement data. These teachers and Jeff proudly write:

We have been successful in aligning instructional strategies and assessment for, as, and of learning to support all students. We have tried to "hasten slowly," ensuring that student and staff learning is *scaffolded,* with *learning goals* and *success criteria* [emphasis added; see Glossary] achieved before moving to the next stage of development. During principal literacy walks and supervision, much small-group, modeled, and shared reading and writing and guided reading have been noted. There is an ever-increasing use of technology in our classrooms to support accessing the curriculum and providing *differentiated instruction* [emphasis added; see Glossary]. Learning Goals and Success Criteria, generated by both teacher and students, engage teachers and students. There is a lot of evidence of observation leading to conferencing, whether teacher with student or peer to peer. Student achievement data are being regularly collected to inform practice, and essential instructional and assessment strategies are being utilized effectively.

Four Key Reflections

The successful improvement strategies identified by staff were as follows:

1. A focus on *balanced literacy* (see Glossary) gave the staff a clear vision and a shared sense of purpose. It helped "unclutter" their work and clarified their communication with colleagues, students, and parents.

2. Networking with a like-partner school, Rama Central Public School with principal Shelley Clark, was integral to developing and revising a comprehensive literacy plan based on *Realization* (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009), while networking with other principals regarding evidence-proven practices offered a constant stream of new thoughts.

3. Literacy coach (see Chapter 4) support of teachers and having the literacy coach as a coleader on the school leadership team contributed significantly to the school's success in the first year and catapulted their ability to continue through year 2. "The professional learning and collective capacity-building that occurred was amazing, as essential instructional practices were illustrated and implemented," emphasized one teacher.

4. Success breeds success. Being able to share increased targeted student achievement results on the 2009–2010 primary and junior EQAO assessments was an enormous boost to the staff and community—a valuable validation of the staff's conscientious commitment to "doing something positive" for all students.

"The entire school community knew we were on the right track!" Hand in hand with success was willingness—the very real willingness of the staff to take a risk with the new principal in attacking the problem together and to put into very public practice the idea that learning is the work (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, p. 12).

Where from Here?

The School Improvement Plan, 2011–2012, is staying the course and will become even more closely aligned with the Simcoe County District Improvement Plan, in which the "Reach Every Student" goal states that "all students will have access to differentiated instruction and assessment

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that is responsive to the unique needs of the learner to support students' high achievement and learning for life." The "Close the Gap" goal "ensures that achievement trend data will be analyzed to inform class-room instruction and specific interventions for all students." The "Assessment" goal states that all students will participate in instruction that is informed by *assessment for, as,* and *of learning* (see Glossary). Steve, Jeff, and Shelley as leaders, continue to commit to the process:

> We will continue to personalize our comprehensive literacy plans as adapted from *Realization,* working to deepen our implementa-tion strategies on each of the 14 parameters. This work will con-tinue to guide and support our staff, students, and school community. Specifically, we will continue to build collective capacity in teacher practice in the implementation of the Ontario Curriculum, in assessment for and as learning, and in the gradual release of responsibility in our comprehensive literacy program. We will continue to set high expectations for teacher and student learning, and we will ensure engagement of staff in a focus on the teaching-learning cycle. There will continue to be timely and tiered interventions delivered in a team approach, and data will continue to be used to inform instruction to improve student achievement.

Sustainability

Jeff reports that it seems relatively easy to envision sustainability of the progress made as a staff and as a school but notes that their dedication to the moral imperative—the focus on literacy learning, and the shared beliefs and understandings with colleagues—has been and will continue to be tested. It certainly appears that patience, endurance, compassion, and continuing to put the FACES on the data will all be needed to stay the course.

However, the school has made significant progress in embedding the 14 parameters in its classroom practice and school culture. It has experi-enced increased use and explicit teaching of literacy strategies that benefit all students, and a supportive and collaborative staff model that shares responsibility and accountability for all students. A huge shift has occurred in instruction, from rote learning and recall to developing the *big ideas* in ensuring conceptual understanding (see Glossary), making connections, reorganizing information, thinking critically, and engaging

in a *critical literacy* stance (see Glossary) that compels social action. The staff has also seen a shift from a singular summative evaluation to multiple and varied opportunities for all learners to demonstrate the full range of what they know and can do.

At the district level, Simcoe County results from the 2010–2011 EQAO reveal that the focused intervention has made a difference at the grade 3 level. In grade 3, reading scores have increased by 3 percent and writing, by 5 percent. These are impressive results in a large school district. The district's focused work to put FACES on the data continues at every grade level.

Sources: Steve Blake, superintendent of education; Jeff Clark, principal; and Shelley Clark, principal, Simcoe County District School Board, Ontario, Canada.

Deliberate Pause

- What is your plan for improvement—how do all staff commit?
- What resources do you have available to implement this focused work?
- Are your instructional coaches offering added value to the professional learning of administrators *and* teachers?
- What lessons learned at Brechin Public School apply to your context?

Narrative from the Field

An audible silence struck the conference room. He had just shown the assembled school district administrators and principals the standard testing data they knew so well, but with a twist that changed their comfort level. He translated the cold district data showing the percentage of students falling into the "below standard" and "meets minimum standard"—data each member of the audience could repeat by rote—into very challenging new school performance data highlighting the precise number of student FACES each year who failed to reach the minimum standard. They could see the number of students who failed in their group of schools and they could see how many failed in their own schools.

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She picked up the pieces. She showed how first one school district, then another, had used the 14 parameter strategy, and how they adopted the concerted, determined but inclusive leadership style that focuses on managing available resources to transform student achievement results. She showed them that this combined process—implementation strategy and leadership style—built "capacity" in the process. This collective capacity-building was successful because it improved student achievement results and also produced higher classroom teacher satisfaction measures—Realization was occurring. The conference room silence was broken by the buzz of very real and keen interest. They got to work.

So far we have had only a taste of what it means to move from a page of statistics to the flesh, blood, and destiny of individual children. And we have shown that it can be done for all students in a school and in a district. In Chapter 2 we go deeper to demonstrate the power of putting FACES on the data. Then in the rest of the book we work through the heart of our model—the integration of assessment, instruction, leadership, and ownership.