INTRODUCTION

Our work over the last decade and a half has been driven by a perpetual rallying cry: What you get to learn in America's public schools should not depend on who you are lucky enough to get as a teacher or a principal. It should not depend on what your family earns or whether you draw a good number in a lottery. It should not depend on whether you have mastered the business of "doing school" before you enter kindergarten or are encountering a book for the very first time as a five year old. Finally, it should not depend on what your teachers believe about the color of your skin or the capacities predicted by the neighborhood in which you live. But, of course, in many American schools, what you get to learn does depend on those things.

American policy makers and reformers have sought to close the gap in student learning and the quality of schooling for years. Each new wave of studies and legislation seems to fix its hopes on one or two new right answers—keys that will break the code and reveal what all of us in the field should do. When we first wrote about the challenges of confronting mediocre teaching, the answers of the moment involved testing-testing-testing (teachers and students), ensuring that teachers were appropriately credentialed or "highly qualified," and labeling failing schools so parents could flee them. Stimulating competition to improve schools through vouchers and charters was another favored solution to ineffective instruction and poor results. Putting teachers in "professional learning communities" or teams that could collaboratively analyze data and design new approaches to help students also seemed to hold great promise. So did RTI and Differentiated Instruction, Project-Based Learning, and Direct Instruction. Combinations of these reforms and programs carried out with skill and conviction have produced islands of excellence amidst a vast churn of initiatives, compliance, and confusion. By themselves, however, they have not resulted in widespread and sustained improvements in achievement.

Now we have entered the decade of much-heralded reforms to teacher evaluation. Like others before them, they are driven by the worthy vision of an expert instructor in every classroom. Years of research documenting the impact of good teaching back that vision. Federal funding and its accompanying mandates have provided fuel and a sense of urgency. Across the country Race to the Top states and coalitions of districts have been revamping their teacher performance standards and their evaluation procedures. They have debated or adopted complicated evaluation tools for assessing and rating teaching—all with the goal of "weeding out" the poor performers. They have embraced a new set of technical answers and "right ways" of doing business: performance rubrics, scoring sheets, 10-minute walks and sampling, tablet-based programs for data entry and sending quick feedback, portfolios, and SMART goals.

These "new" teacher evaluation systems also contain variations on what some educators consider a radical prospect and others consider a long overdue need. Student results or the outcomes of teaching must be used in some fashion when evaluators determine a teacher's rating and future employment. Countless hours have been spent arguing about the portion of a rating that will be determined by student performance: Should it be 50 percent or more? Should it count for only 30 percent

of the final grade? Many more hours will be spent in trying to determine exactly how to measure impact. What is fair? What adjusts for differences in groups and resources? What takes into account all the variables teachers cannot control? The debate about *how* to link outcomes to teacher decisions and actions essentially obscures *why* we care about them. A good teacher can make an extraordinary impact on a child's life. That impact matters. Effective teaching is teaching that helps learners make substantive progress toward meeting curriculum standards. No child deserves to spend a year with someone who willfully or accidentally specializes in ineffective teaching.

First reports on how well new evaluation systems have done in identifying and "weeding out" teachers who do not perform at the highest levels have been discouraging. In states ranging from Florida to Michigan, 97 percent of teachers were rated as effective or better (Anderson 2013). We suspect that data from subsequent years will show little change in that pattern in most of the states surveyed but hope we are wrong.

The disproportionate attention to the technical aspects of teacher evaluation creates considerable noise and confusion. It may satisfy funders' and politicians' hunger for action, but it diverts attention away from some fundamental issues that educators and outsiders alike need to confront:

1. Do evaluators really believe that every adult and child in their schools is capable of changing and growing? If they don't yet believe that, can they act as if they do until the hope becomes a reality?
2. Are evaluators really convinced that the extraordinarily hard work required to name and take action against ineffective teaching will yield benefits for students? Do they believe that outcome is worth the cost in time and emotional energy?
3. Do the people who are supposed to making substantive judgments about teaching have rich and deep enough knowledge about pedagogy and data analysis to enable them to do so fairly and credibly? If not, are they willing to put in the time and effort to improve their own understanding and skills?
4. Have the institutions that should be preparing leaders to improve instruction provided the practical strategies, on-the-job experiences, and feedback that would enable evaluators to become skilled diagnosticians and problem-solvers?
5. Do district leaders provide the guidance, standards for leadership performance, support, and feedback to enable evaluators to stay the course in the face of political pressure? Are they willing to focus their own efforts and minimize the disruptions they can create?
6. Are politicians, school boards, and "helpful partners" willing to put aside a raft of competing (and often unimportant urgencies) to find and stick with a limited number of worthwhile priorities? Or does every new fad split our attention and pull instructional leaders away from their schools?

If the answers to any of these questions are "no," then we all need to examine our own roles in sustaining mediocrity.

Throughout our years of work with school districts, charter schools, and private schools across the country, we have repeatedly seen that the problem of inadequate learning cannot and should not be blamed on teachers alone. When children in one classroom do not have the same high-quality opportunities to learn as their peers, then all the adults responsible for their learning share the blame—and the obligation to change:

- The administrators, department heads, lead teachers, specialists, coaches, and consultants whose job is to help classroom teachers maximize the impact of their instructional decisions
- The grade-level or content-alike teams that tolerate broken promises and cover for or ignore low expectations and ineffective practice from some members
- The evaluators who do not have the competence or conviction to name problems and help teachers make the choice to fix those problems or to change careers—and therefore rate everyone as proficient
- The district-level leaders who do not support evaluators by holding high expectations, providing training and support, and backing them up when the going gets tough
- The central office behaviors that lead to Organizational ADD, fragmenting school leaders' focus and draining their time and energy
- The boards (and communities that elect them) that generate fear-based, politicized cultures that favor the narrow self-interests of adults bent on protecting their turf over the interests of children.

The problem of mediocre learning is an intricate and complicated one, a nested one with many layers suggested by the background rings in Figure 1.1. Strengthening teacher evaluation is one of the ways we can tackle this problem and take responsibility for improving our own profession, though certainly not the only one. Many variables, not the purview of this handbook, also affect students' opportunities to learn at high levels: rich and challenging curriculum such as that proposed by the Common Core Standards, access to technology, safe neighborhoods, freedom from hunger and fear, family and community engagement, to name just a few. But if we are going to invest considerable effort in teacher evaluation, what must happen?

Taking skillful action against ineffective teaching requires three key capacities, the "3 C's" illustrated in Figure 1.1:

Conviction:
    Holding and consistently acting on a set of positive beliefs and stances about adults' and children's ability to learn and about one's own responsibility for acting when performance is not good enough
**Competence**:
    Knowing and using research about teaching and schools and a repertoire of evaluation skills and strategies to help all adults perform at high levels
Control:
    Providing and using adequate processes, standards, structures, and resources to make teacher evaluation substantive, meaningful, and effective

Figure 1.1 Confronting the Sources of Mediocrity
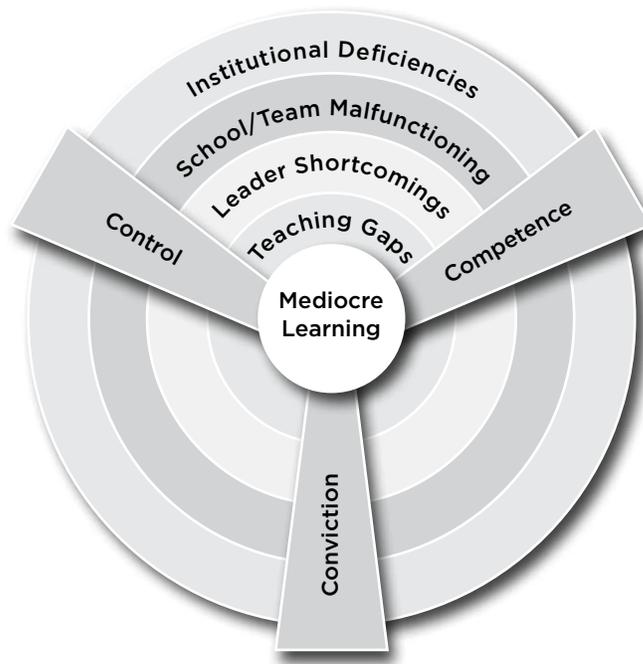
All three capacities must be present and working together for performance evaluation to be successful.

Thus far policy makers have been focused on improving what we call control: the systems, structures, and resources that guide or limit what you can do as an evaluator. They have encouraged new regulations that then necessitate new contracts, new standards, new procedures, and new rubrics and formulas for rating. Whatever their promise, all these changes will only be as effective as the people who implement them.

In earlier Skillful Leader volumes, *Confronting Mediocre Teaching* and *Confronting the Conditions that Undermine Learning,* we have written extensively about the role of conviction: holding beliefs and having the courage to act on them. In this handbook we focus the majority of our attention on competence. We have tried to compile what we have learned from studying skillful leaders at work, the practical strategies and habits of mind that help you do this part of your leadership job well. Evaluation is hard. Finding the time is enormously challenging. Staying the course can be daunting. The more skilled you are at data collection and analysis, problem diagnosis, communication, and the design of interventions, the more your conviction will grow about its potential to discriminate between levels of performance and improve opportunities for children.

Chapter 2 outlines the shifts in mindset and standard operating practices that need to be in place before you can effectively evaluate for impact on student learning. Chapter 3 introduces the action cycle for taking on ineffective teaching. These two

chapters can form the foundation of your supervision and evaluation work no matter where you are on the continuum of evaluation reform.

Chapters 4 through 7 are all about how to carry out the key actions in the cycle. In Chapter 4A to C, you'll find strategies for using multiple sources of data to examine how well teaching is working to help students learn. There are suggestions for looking at teaching-focused data sources such as lesson plans, assessments, assignments, and tasks, as well as technology use and learning-focused data sources such as grading, achievement data, and progress reports. Acknowledging growing attention to professionalism and professional responsibilities, 4C suggests data sources and questions to help you examine and document those non-classroom responsibilities.

Chapter 5's sections A to G delve into the challenges of diagnosing problems in instruction and non-classroom responsibilities. Each section from B to F examines a specific teaching function such as managing the classroom, planning, and assessing, or setting and communicating high expectations that is found in almost all major evaluation systems currently being used across the country. Section G looks at diagnosing problems of professionalism.

Chapter 6 introduces a continuum for thinking about how you define and communicate problems to teachers. Each section of this chapter contains samples of what a skillful leader might say or write when communicating early worries (6B) or concerns (6C) or presenting a formal problem statement either in an evaluation document, a letter or memo, or an email (6D). In these sections you will recognize some familiar prototypes and cases from volume one, *Confronting Mediocre Teaching*. Sally Friendly, Frank Steel, Donna DeLimits, and others come back to serve again as useful examples of situations we all encounter.

Chapters 7 and 8 are all about selecting and designing interventions to break the cycle of ineffective practice and help teachers change. Chapter 7 presents a continuum of ways to intervene well before you get to the stage of needing to write a formal improvement plan for a teacher. We look at understanding how to match the intervention to the situation, the problem, and the individual and consider when and how to use oral or written suggestions, written recommendations, goal setting and Mini-Plans^{sm} to provide timely and targeted feedback and direction. Chapter 8 lays out when, why, and how to design improvement plans and includes a considerably modernized sample plan for Sally Friendly, who now faces the challenges of implementing Common Core curricula.

This is a handbook focused on producing growth—not on firing people. However, sometimes efforts are unsuccessful or an offense is too serious. The final two chapters deal with tracks to dismissal, resources that you may need if you find yourself dealing with issues of insubordination, contract violations, and the like that require progressive discipline rather than evaluation (Chapter 9) or if all other efforts to change the ineffective practice have failed (Chapter 10).

At the end of our courses on supervision and evaluation over the years, we've often asked new administrators to answer this question: "What do you want the people you supervise and evaluate to say about you after you're gone?" Their initial answers are usually consistent. They want to be seen as fair. They want to be seen as

knowledgeable and competent. Then the groups divide. Some want to be remembered as supportive, accessible, or as good resources for helping teachers do their work well. Others want high expectations for students and adults and the ability to inspire others to rise to new levels to be their legacy. The debate crystallizes the challenges of teacher evaluation. Are they mutually exclusive? We think not. The commitment to name what is not working and offer help is a tribute to all the phenomenal teachers who show us what is possible in America. In the fundamental act of standing up and taking skilled action against ineffective practice, you offer the ultimate statements of conviction and focus. You assert that:

- Every child deserves an expert instructor
- Good instructors are made, not born
- Adults can grow, but . . .
- Time is short and children come first