

Foreword

Never before has the need been so great for classroom teachers to assume leadership roles that position them as problem solvers and change agents in their local schools. Teachers know students best, and the stories in this book provide compelling evidence of the impact accomplished teachers can and do have on students and their learning. *Powerful Classroom Stories from Accomplished Teachers* shows us how we, as teacher leaders in collaboration with other accomplished teachers, can ensure that schooling is improved. Teaching is our profession and it is our responsibility to strengthen it.

Teacher leaders know what the challenging questions are: How do we accommodate the needs of at-risk students while simultaneously responding to the needs of advanced learners? How do we reallocate human and fiscal resources to achieve balance in schooling across districts and states? How do we use test results and achievement data to better assess student learning? How do we identify highly qualified teaching in an effort to better prepare those who enter teaching through alternative routes so that all children have access to quality instruction?

But many accomplished teachers don't think about the answers to these questions. Many of us do not engage in the professional dialogue that leads to solutions to the challenges we face. Typically, our conversations begin and end with the problems in schools. We go into our classrooms, close our doors, and do what we have always done. Nor has teacher leadership been on the reform agenda. Education officials have consistently thought they might reform schools by bringing in a new program, a new model, and a new initiative from the outside. But history teaches us that what really transforms schools into learning environments for both students and faculty is a reform movement that starts from within the school and is driven by those who have the greatest stake in its success or

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failure. The power of improving education one school at a time is realized when a mixed team within the school—a true professional learning community—comes to the table to engage in meaningful dialogue about where they are, where they want to be, and what they themselves can do to get there. This is the only way to prevent any child from being left behind.

Too much of what goes on in schools is automatic. Leaders in education policy continue to get the same results because they continue to employ the same traditional methodologies. But this is not true of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). As members of a larger learning community, NBCTs engage in professional collaborations that contribute to the overall effectiveness of schools. They assume leadership roles, in addition to the direct instruction of students, that will help effect positive change in how teachers teach, how students learn, and how schools operate.

Achieving National Board Certification taught me that going into my classroom and closing the door is never going to reform education. Sharing my practice with other colleagues, educating parents and legislators about what constitutes valuable learning for kids, and continuing my own professional growth as a leader and a learner are essential to making schools better. Early in the certification process, I realized that automatic pilot does not maximize instructional time and certainly does not accommodate the individual needs of the students and the school.

The National Board Certification process had a metamorphic impact on my own teaching as well as on my colleagues' practice. We began to make radical changes in our instructional practices during the process, not just after completion. It gave me the language I needed to clearly communicate to and with other teaching professionals what was best for my students and why. Aligning our practice with the standards (for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do) helped us achieve that critical balance between content knowledge and pedagogy. It made us better teachers. This is why I recommend the National Board Certification process to educators everywhere. I know what it will do for their teaching and for their students. National Board Certification is by far the most significant influence on what I know and can do as a teaching professional. It has made me a leader. National Board Certification is not a destination; it's a journey. Leadership is the answer to the question, "After certification, what next?"

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is the impetus for helping teachers shape their conversations about teaching and learning and engage in professional dialogue that demonstrates what teachers and students should know and be able to do in the classroom. The five core propositions provide the knowledge base for how accomplished teaching should be defined. This definition includes commitment, knowledge, responsibility, reflection, and leadership. Accomplished teachers, those who can successfully lead the profession, are committed to students and their learning. They not only know their content but they know how to teach this to students in ways students can understand. They have a strong sense of responsibility for not only monitoring how students behave and learn but they also manage their students' growth and achievement. They reflectively analyze what they do as instructional leaders and why they do it, always modifying and maximizing what they learn through experience. And, finally, accomplished teachers are lifelong learners who can lead the teaching profession and improve schools from within.

I believe teacher leadership from the classroom is the missing piece to education reform. Teacher leadership is critical to moving U.S. education forward in these uncertain times. Teacher leaders must take a seat at the table of school change so their voices on teacher quality can be heard. As advocates for the professionalism of teaching and the need for increased student performance, we must build the profession as accomplished teachers and scholars. We must expand our roles as community leaders and education policymakers. We must improve schools from within, utilizing our expertise as teaching professionals and placing ourselves at the center of the education reform movement. As Adrienne Mack-Kirschner informs us all in this important book, "These stories represent what is happening in tens of thousands of classrooms. They hold within them the power of what could be if all teachers and schools provided opportunities for all children to experience powerful teaching and learning."

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