

# The Trouble With Implementation

(and how to make it better)

1

*Right now, no agenda is shared before the meeting and no minutes are taken during/after the meeting. I would reverse that. Meetings will have more impact if you have the agenda beforehand, and we should take minutes to reflect and move on to the next steps that were decided.*

—Anonymous

## SUCCESS CRITERIA

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to identify the following:

- Why we have a need to over-implement
- How we can improve implementation
- Five questions to help guide your implementation
- How to overcome our overconsumption mindset

Add two of your own success criteria:

- 
- 

We are a world consumed with overconsumption. We are consistently hit with messages that we need new things to make us happy. When I was growing up, we lived in a house that our mom and dad built in

1959. Over the twenty years we lived in that house, which we recently sold after my mom passed, we had one green rotary phone hanging on the wall. Nowadays, the message is that we need to upgrade our phones every single year. We sit back and watch as others entertain us.

To some it is called progress, but to others it is called overconsumption. We passively consume curriculum, content, technology tools, and words at meetings as if we are playing the supporting role in our own lives. What makes it worse is that we consume because we have the fear of missing out (FOMO), so we begin to rally our troops in the war of overconsumption. This combination of FOMO and our need to consume new things contributes to why we over-implement and leads to the anxiety and exhaustion we feel.

What we all need is time to focus and cut down on the noise. We need time to breathe and engage in conversations that focus on deeper impact. We need time to feel inspired, time when we can curate new ideas and look for teachable moments, but we won't get that time back until we begin taking some things off our plates.



## CASE IN POINT

### The "More Is More" Philosophy

In my work, I coach school leaders and teams, facilitate workshops, and provide keynotes, both nationally and internationally. When I first began doing this work, I had lots of content that I felt I needed to cover. I had the "more is more" philosophy. For a full-day workshop I had at least a hundred slides. At the end of the day, my voice was raw from talking so much. But it took a road trip with colleagues to bring this into sharp relief.

A few years ago, I began working in partnership with the University of Oklahoma with several colleagues, facilitating sessions that included principals and assistant principals.

My colleagues and I would drive one hour and fifteen minutes to the venue, and during the car ride we would talk about the content for the day, even though we had already had a video call about it. At the venue, we would meet with the four coaches responsible for coaching participants within the group, and then I would meet with participants to facilitate the learning. At the end of the six-and-a-half-hour session, my colleagues and I would meet with the coaches for one hour to go over the pluses and deltas for the day. Then we would get in the car for

our hour-and-fifteen-minute drive back to the hotel, during which one of us read all the feedback out loud in detail. That was more than five hours of meeting for one session, which began to feel . . . excessive. However, during one of these car meetings, an important nugget of truth came out about how much *doing* I was doing during my sessions.

As we were driving back to the hotel, one of my colleagues asked me if I knew the ratio of my talking versus participants' talking. I said it was split evenly. I was wrong. I would speak for thirty minutes and give participants ten minutes to speak. I was consistently more concerned about covering content. I was hitting participants with everything, including the kitchen sink, because I felt that the more I gave them, the more they would see me as a credible source. This lined up with the written feedback I was getting from participants. While the audience noted that the information was great and I knew my stuff, some people wrote that they needed time to process. I thought they meant they needed to process it after they left, but what they really needed was for me to slow down so they could think during the session.

Upon reflection, our team worked to streamline our meeting time, and I changed the way I ran workshops. I still have the same time allotted as I did, but now I develop success criteria with the audience, talk for ten to fifteen minutes, and give them ten to fifteen minutes to process. And I took out a bunch of slides that did not matter. The result was more time for creative thinking and workshops that produced deeper conversations than ever before.

What are your thoughts on overconsumption in your personal life?

Do you have concerns about overconsumption within your school?

For those of you who are district leaders, how has overconsumption impacted you?

**CLUTTER  
CHECK**



## Educational Trends Over the Past Thirty Years

In the following chart, you will find a list of popular educational trends over the past thirty years or so. These educational trends are not just from the United States, because they have been found in and have impacted other countries as well. Take a moment to read through the list, and even add to it. This list has been broken up into the broad categories of districtwide/schoolwide, classroom, and leadership practices.

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DISTRICTWIDE/ SCHOOLWIDE INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS	CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES	LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES
Open classrooms	Fixed grouping/flexible grouping	No Child Left Behind
Standards-based bulletin boards	Lectures/student talk	Building management
D.A.R.E.	Turn and talk	Professional learning communities (PLCs)
Portfolios	Jigsaw	Evaluations (Danielson, Focused Teacher Evaluation Model)
Project-based learning	DEAR time	Walkthroughs
Whole word versus phonics	Popcorn reading	Staff meetings
Packaged programs (Houghton-Mifflin, Scholastic, Readers and Writers Workshop)	Extrinsic behavior incentive charts (red, yellow, green; ClassDojo)	Schoolwide professional development
Running records	Sound walls	One-on-ones
Multiple intelligences	Flexible seating	Japanese lesson study
Bloom's taxonomy	Journaling	Differentiated supervision
Social-emotional learning	Understanding by Design	Snapshot feedback
Trauma-informed instruction	Small-group instruction	Instructional leadership
Leveled texts	Conferencing	Distributive leadership
Site-based professional development	Decodable texts	Site-based decision models
Social justice curriculum	Independent reading	Advanced certification
I-Ready	PowerPoint lessons	Various leadership standards
MAP assessments	Reading skills/strategies	Well-being leadership
Smartboards	Building knowledge	Look-fors
Blended learning	Correcting student work/ not correcting student work	Transparent/publicly shared data
Personalized learning	Daily homework/no homework	Instructional rounds
Math Talk	Exit slips	Transformational leadership
Common Core	Cold-calling	Community schools
High-stakes testing	Whole-class novels/ individual texts	Collective leadership
Singapore math	Direct/constructivist instruction	Leading for equity
Inquiry-based science	Socratic methods	Leading like a coach

The point here is not to evaluate the merit of each; hopefully, by the end of this book you will do that work yourself. It is to show that quite a lot has been created and implemented—with varying degrees of research support. Notice that often, concurrent trends were diametrically opposed to each other. Furthermore, some of these ideas, particularly those in the left column, can take a lot of time to implement effectively, often years.

The question becomes, how does a school district or individual school know where to devote its resources? For example, if you are a new leader and your data tells you that 65 percent of your student population is reading below grade level, this may not be the year to introduce project-based learning (that is, if the research shows it is a worthwhile endeavor; again, no judgment at this point). But for so many leaders there is this well-intentioned desire to give their children what they think is best for them all at once. One goal of this text is to help us all decelerate and reflect so we are making wise and informed choices. It is also to give educators the permission to say no to ideas that do not support their goals. More can be more, but often more is simply too much.

The list above is just a fraction of the trends we have seen in education around the world. On a separate sheet of paper, brainstorm different initiatives your school has started over the past few years. After you write your list, circle the ones that are still left. What does this have to do with de-implementation? Imagine all the time you or your team spent on initiatives that didn't last. If you didn't engage in them in the first place, think of the time you would get back.

## CLUTTER CHECK



## Five Reasons We Over-Implement

This chapter will share a plan for improving implementation, but first I thought it worthwhile to share some of the reasons we educators tend to over-implement. It is important to think about these causes because knowing them can help us identify them when they are happening. This awareness can help us all pump the breaks or interrupt patterns that feed educational hoarding.

### 1) Thin Content in Nice Packaging

Many of the programs we chase after claim to be evidence-based when they are not. Take, for instance, the assertion that many products make about being tied to brain science. In fact, when it comes to programs that claim to be brain-based, Craig et al. (2021) recently wrote,

“Brain images significantly impact lay readers’ belief in the veracity of the findings; McCabe and Castel (2008) found that individuals incorrectly rated findings as scientifically meritorious when brain images were included than when only text was provided” (p. 128). So basically, organizations would place an image of a brain to promote it being brain-based when it really wasn’t, and educators were more likely to choose the program not tied to brain research just because of the image.

Research also shows that teachers, district leaders, and building leaders do not always vet what they use in their classrooms, districts, or school buildings. Craig et al. (2021) go on to write,

Pinterest is one vehicle that teachers commonly use to quickly and easily find and curate curriculum, lesson plans, and other educational ideas. Teachers report that Pinterest is among the top five websites they use for professional development, and education-related pins are the second most highly searched type of pin (Schroeder et al., 2019), with 87% of elementary teachers and 62% of secondary teachers reporting that they use Pinterest for math resources (Hu et al., 2018). (p. 129)

This does not mean teachers and leaders should stop using Pinterest. What it does mean is that teachers need to assess more of the ideas they like on Pinterest by finding a piece of valid research that supports the use of the strategy.

This has another side to it as well. I have found that district leaders, building leaders, and teachers get caught up in *who* is offering the nice packaging. What I mean here is that speakers who give keynotes and facilitate workshops come out with new material, and some educators blindly follow one speaker because they always like what that speaker has to offer. Like buying a favorite rock band’s new album, educators want to pick it up and use it without even taking time to question whether they need it.

Yes, I understand the irony of writing that as an author and speaker. Educators come to my workshops, and I always appreciate that they want to connect and learn, because I often learn from them as well. However, over the past couple of years, I have been intentional in asking audiences whether what I am offering is what they need. Don’t do it because I am offering practices grounded in research; do it because what I am offering is what your school or district needs. We all have a responsibility in overconsumption.

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## 2) Emotions Over Evidence

Educators are human, and humans get attached to things. It is very hard to part with things we like, even when we find out they're ineffective or harmful. Below are four examples of common areas where educators' practices and the research are misaligned.

"It is very hard to part with things we like, even when we find out they're ineffective or harmful."

### Zero Tolerance Policies

School districts are beginning to change their stance on zero tolerance policies and adopt more equitable discipline policies, but not everyone within a school agrees with that change. There are staff within schools, and proponents outside of schools, who strongly want to see all students disciplined and believe that zero tolerance policies are the best way to do that. However, the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) writes,

An extensive review of the literature found that, despite a 20-year history of implementation, there are surprisingly few data that could directly test the assumptions of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline, and the data that are available tend to contradict those assumptions. Moreover, zero tolerance policies may negatively affect the relationship of education with juvenile justice and appear to conflict to some degree with current best knowledge concerning adolescent development. (p. 1)

### MSV (the Three-Cueing System)

A few months ago, I was doing a series of webinars for the Universal Early Literacy Program, which is a part of the NYC Department of Education. During one of the webinars, we focused on de-implementation, and I asked participants what they would de-implement. Many responded on the topic of using meaning, syntax, and visual prompts to support students while doing running records in a K–2 setting. The coaches accurately stated that the science of reading does not support using these cues; "encouraging kids to check the picture when they come to a tricky word, or to hypothesize what word would work in the sentence, can take their focus away from the word itself—lowering the chances that they'll use their understanding of letter sounds to read through the word part-by-part, and be able to recognize it more quickly the next time they see it" (Schwartz, 2020).

I asked what they would replace running records that focused on miscues with, and we got into a deep discussion on phonemic awareness activities that would be more impactful. However, a few people spoke

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up and said, “But we really believe in this method!” The sense of loss was palpable, and at that moment evidence wasn’t enough.

### **Butterflies**

Let’s take a quick look at the example of butterflies. Yes, butterflies. For years when I was a principal, our staff had a conversation about what we could stop doing in our classes as part of a great school alignment of curriculum. Butterflies were taught in three different years, with essentially the same content, but no one wanted to stop focusing on butterflies, because they liked doing it.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Here is one more example, but this one works a bit in the reverse. Data shows that professional learning communities (PLCs) are effective, and wildly popular with leaders; so on that score, implementing them makes sense. However, citing a Boston Consulting Group Study (2014), Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) write,

Professional learning communities (PLCs) were one of the most disliked forms of professional development among surveyed teachers, even though providers and administrators were highly supportive of the approach. . . . A given PLC model may seem to offer a promising blueprint for collective inquiry and shared decision making. But if teachers see it as (just another) reform imposed on them from above, then they’ll likely experience it as such. The protocols and terminology may be new, but they’ll grumble about being forced, yet again, to go through the motions of meeting with each other, agreeing on group norms, defining shared goals, and so on. (p. 21)

The issue here is about how PLCs are being implemented. Based on this research, teachers view this as something being done to them, which is rarely an effective strategy. If PLCs are to be effective, then teacher voice is a must.

### **3) Time Mismanagement**

Time is the next challenge to proper implementation. This section will focus on meetings, which are an international phenomenon, because again and again, meetings of all types are the offender in time mismanagement. The reasons for this often boil down to redundancy, imbalance of topics, and the erosion of focus.

Like zero tolerance policies, running records using three cues, or butterfly curriculum, we all have one activity or initiative we value. What is one you value?

Activity/initiative you value \_\_\_\_\_

What is one piece of evidence you could collect to understand how it's working? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is one piece of evidence you could collect to understand that it's not working? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CLUTTER CHECK



**Redundancy**—This often happens when planning is reactionary and there is poor communication among key stakeholders. Add to that the fact that teachers may not feel comfortable saying they have already received information, and you have created the perfect storm for redundancy.

**Imbalance of topics**—The other day I was at a weekly curriculum meeting with a group of directors, building leaders, and instructional coaches. Everyone spoke about how they wanted to focus on student learning, and most people left the meeting feeling refreshed. Yet people were concerned the curriculum meeting would revert to old habits and focus only on reacting to a crisis or some other issue that the district felt took priority. It's not to say those issues were not important, but the problem was that they were not balanced with a focus on student learning. In surveying staff, there was time for both, but the challenges took over the learning.

**Erosion of focus**—The previous example dovetails with this issue of focus erosion. This means that a meeting that was earmarked for one thing over time has shifted into something else. In the worst-case scenario, venting and complaining may take up an inordinate amount of time. Or participants use the meeting time to take care of other important work. These outcomes are often due to ineffective planning, misunderstanding of participants' needs, or continuing something out of habit rather than purpose.

#### 4) Workaholic Cultures

When it comes to school culture, Gruenert (2008) writes, “Whenever a group of people spend a significant amount of time together, they develop a common set of expectations. These expectations evolve into unwritten rules to which group members conform in order to remain in good standing with their colleagues” (p. 57).

Over the years, I have heard school districts state that they care about mental health and well-being. However, some of these same school leaders expect teachers and building leaders to check email at night before they go to bed, work on Saturdays to engage in professional learning, or offer Saturday school for their students who are failing. Their culture rewards working long hours and focusing on many initiatives, even if it means becoming a martyr to get there.

I remember a superintendent who told his principals they should stop complaining because “those principals get paid a good salary and they should shut up and do their damn job.” He left a year later, but not before several of his principals moved to different school districts and the teachers and students they left behind got their next round of principals.

#### 5) Initiatives We Can’t Control

Most people will agree that there are too many top-down initiatives in education and that they exacerbate the problem of over-implementation. In countless surveys that I did during workshops and keynotes focusing on this work, the number one area teachers and leaders said we should de-implement is high-stakes testing. In fact, one time I was giving a keynote for school leaders from across the state of Arkansas, and the room also had many legislators there as well, and high-stakes testing came up in the anonymous survey because the leaders in the room wanted to send a message to their legislature.

Here’s the issue: we can be outspoken about high-stakes testing and its lack of merit (Farvis & Hay, 2020), but we can’t always get caught up in it within our own buildings and districts because it takes us away from the other work we could be doing. Don’t get me wrong: I was one of eight principals in New York State who wrote a letter to the State Education Department asserting that high-stakes testing should not be tied to teacher evaluation, but I also knew I needed to focus on the things I could control.

### Improving Implementation

We have spent the beginning of this chapter illuminating how and where implementation can go awry. Now let’s shift to how to implement

better. Yes, this book is about de-implementation, but in many ways, it is also about how we implement in the first place. First some information about the implementation science.

### The Science

Grant (2016) writes, “It’s widely assumed that there’s a tradeoff between quantity and quality—if you want to do better work, you have to do less of it—but this turns out to be false” (p. 37). So where do fresh ideas, the need to keep old ones, and implementation interconnect? It begins with the science of implementation.

Nilsen et al. (2020) suggest, “The birth of implementation science is usually linked to the emergence of evidence-based medicine and practice in the 1990s” (p. 2).

They go on to suggest there are five categories of theoretical approaches used in implementation science (p. 3):

- Process models
- Determinant frameworks
- Classic theories
- Implementation theories
- Evaluation frameworks

What I am offering to readers here is a process model or, more specifically, a planned action model. Nilsen et al. (2020) say,

Planned action models are process models that facilitate implementation by offering practical guidance in the planning and execution of implementation endeavours and/or implementation strategies. Action models elucidate important aspects that need to be considered in implementation practice and usually prescribe a number of stages or steps that should be followed in the process of translating research into practice. (p. 4)

In reviewing numerous implementation models, I came across one that I feel fits well for implementation. It’s referred to as the Practical, Robust Implementation and Sustainability Model, also known as PRISM.

### A Model for Implementation

Feldstein and Glasgow (2008) write, “A conceptual framework for improving practice is needed to integrate the key features for successful

“Yes, this book is about de-implementation, but in many ways, it is also about how we implement in the first place.”

program design, predictors of program implementation success, factors associated with diffusion and maintenance, and appropriate outcome measures” (p. 228).

They go on to write that their “primary focus is the health care practice, but the model is also applicable to other settings where health interventions may be delivered, such as work sites or school-based settings.” When thinking of adaptation, we should consider that this level of implementation has implications regardless of whether we live in Australia, the Netherlands, or the United States.

So let’s take some time to look at PRISM. I have adapted it to fit the educational needs of good implementation.

### PRISM

The intervention, or the new initiative under consideration, is first broken into two main categories: the organizational perspective and the organizational characteristics. Each is considered from both the staff and student perspective, taking into account Senge’s principles that focus on systems thinking and building a shared vision. Schools cannot have a shared vision if they do not account for and understand the perspective and characteristics of their community. These are then followed by additional elements that need to be taken into consideration. See Figure 1.1, followed by an explanation of each part.

#### Organizational Perspective

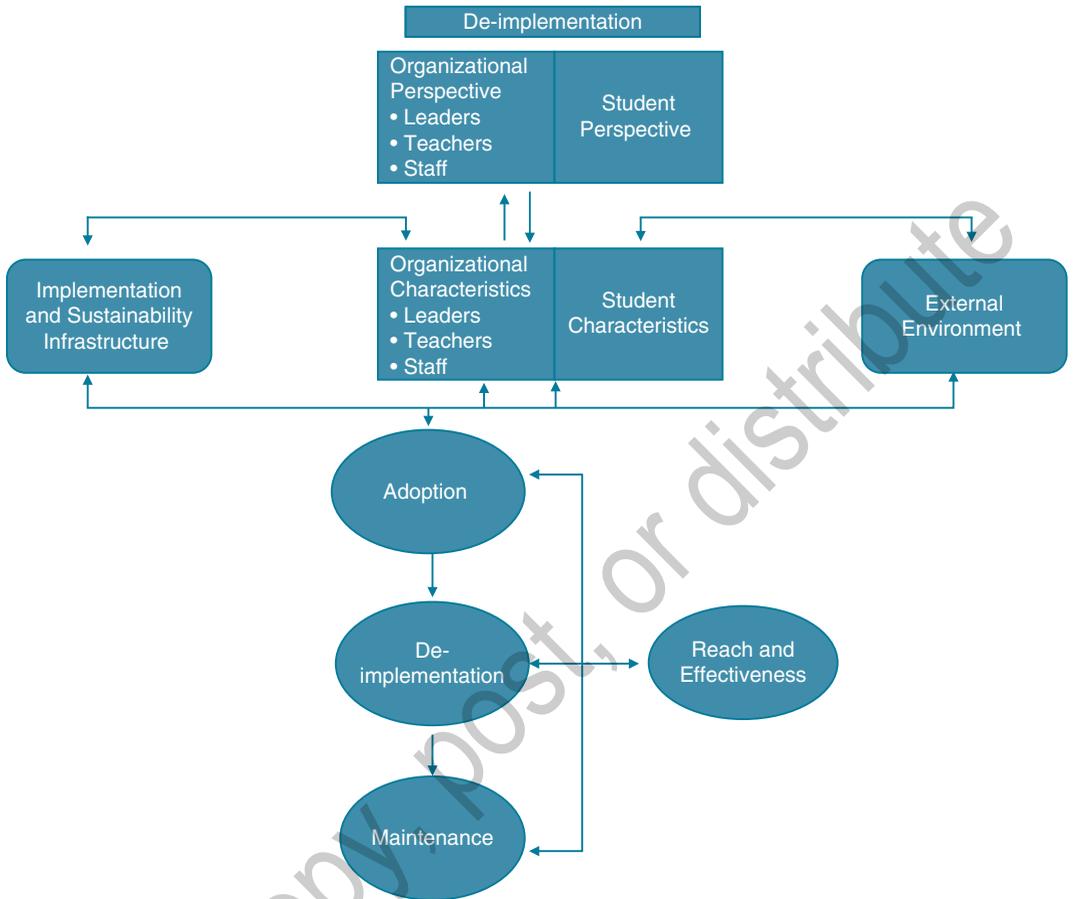
**Staff perspective**—What does a proper implementation of strategies and programs mean for the organization? How will leaders, teachers, and staff support it, and how will it help them be more impactful? Please remember when considering staff and student perspectives, this is not just building based but needs to be considered for district initiatives as well.

**Student perspective**—Many schools have been approaching the student perspective by using surveys. However, empathy interviews are a growing trend for many school leaders and teachers. Empathy interviews take into consideration cultural perspectives of students, as well as those students with exceptional abilities. Example questions:

- How do you feel you best learn in the classroom?
- What makes learning difficult/challenging for you?
- What strategies do I use in the classroom as a teacher that help you understand the content better?

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Figure 1.1



Adapted from: Feldstein, A.C., Glasgow, RE (2008). A Practical, Robust Implementation and Sustainability Model (PRISM) for Integrating Research Findings into Practice. The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety.

### Organizational Characteristics

**Staff characteristics**—What characteristics of the organization help support the work or become a barrier to getting the work done? Issues of funding or high turnover rate of leaders and teachers may be two such barriers.

**Student characteristics**—How have the characteristics of students been considered when it comes to the implementation of new initiatives? Example considerations:

- Different modalities needed in the learning process that account for both those students who can immediately participate and those who need time to reflect before they participate
- Knowledge dimensions, like factual, procedural, conceptual, and metacognitive (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

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Understanding the perspectives and characteristics of our stakeholders is important, because if we lack that understanding, our ideas will often fail.

**Implementation and sustainability infrastructure**—A shared conviction that an instructional leadership team can have a positive impact on student learning (DeWitt, 2021). That is part of the infrastructure that we must consider to do the work of implementation.

**External environment**—How much support do schools get from their boards of education or their school community?

**Adoption**—How will this work get adopted? What are the reasons for adopting this particular initiative? How will this initiative help our school community improve? In what ways will our school roll it out?

**Implementation**—Are instructional leadership teams using a structured approach to implement new initiatives? (See cycle of de-implementation and program logic model in Chapters 4 and 5 as examples.) Does that cycle of de-implementation focus on having a positive impact on student learning? Or is it about making adults work harder on things that may not have impact at all?

**Maintenance**—Maintenance means taking time each month during faculty meetings, PLC meetings, or department meetings to focus on the program. Every initiative must include maintenance. Too often schools implement and never provide follow-up professional learning about the strategies and program.

Implementing an initiative or new idea is not like posting on social media. You can't just do it once and hope that people will like it, follow it, or reshare it. It requires maintenance.

“Implementing an initiative or new idea is not like posting on social media. You can't just do it once and hope that people will like it, follow it, or reshare it. It requires maintenance.”

**Reach and effectiveness**—What evidence is being collected to understand the reach and impact of the strategies and program?

If you are thinking that is a lot of work, think of the time and money spent on the resources and training for a program only for it to be partially implemented. If school and district teams went through this process every time, they would probably make better choices when it comes to what they implement.

In the Clutter Check that follows, we are going to take the perspective and characteristic sections from PRISM and perform a temperature check to get an understanding of where your school or district is in those two areas. Although each prompt says, “In this school . . .” districts can replace the word *school* with *district*.

**CLUTTER  
CHECK**

1. In this school, we carefully consider initiatives before we implement them.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

2. In this school, teacher voices are valued in the decision-making process before initiatives are implemented.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

3. In this school, we focus our efforts as much on what can be taken off our plates as on what we need to put on our plates.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

4. In this school, mental health and well-being are not just talked about, but we also take actionable steps to alleviate the stress we feel.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

5. In this school, leaders have a voice in the decision-making process before initiatives are implemented.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

6. In this school, student voices are considered before initiatives are implemented.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

7. In this school, our initiatives are learner focused.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

8. In this school, learning is the focus of our mission and vision statements, and we can list several ways we are intentional with this focus.

1  \_\_\_\_\_  5

## A Quick Guide for Good Implementation

In a private communication, Tom Guskey, an assessment, grading, and self-efficacy researcher and expert, sent me six questions he has found helpful in better implementation. You will see these again later in the book, because they will also help us in the de-implementation process. These questions partner well with PRISM when considering Senge's principles of developing systems thinking, creating a shared vision, and engaging in team learning. In the table below are the six questions along with some commentary to help you go deeper.

<b>What are the specific goals of the program?</b>	What are you hoping to accomplish through this initiative? What will you gain within this specific focus? How will this program empower people?
<b>How valuable or important are those goals?</b>	Are those goals worth implementing yet another initiative in your school or classroom? Are they focused on student learning?
<b>What evidence would you trust to verify those goals were met?</b>	What evidence will you collect to understand successful implementation?
<b>Would all stakeholders in the program trust the same evidence?</b>	Teachers, leaders, and students often trust different evidence.
<b>How soon would you expect to attain that evidence?</b>	Guskey has said in the past that teachers want to see that a strategy works within weeks and not months.
<b>How much "improvement" is sufficient (cost-effectiveness)?</b>	How does this implementation lead to improvement? Has it been cost-effective?

## Addressing Our Assumptions

To do this work, leaders and their teams need to address the assumptions they have in a few different areas. Assumptions are things we believe to be true or effective without looking at the evidence to see if that is so. Senge (1990) refers to this phenomenon as mental models. He writes, "Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world or how we take action" (p. 8). Schools are places where so many different assumptions are happening simultaneously.

For example, when the Common Core State Standards were being adopted, there was pushback from teachers, leaders, and parents in certain states across the United States. It got to the point that people hated it so much that they held deep assumptions that anything related to the Common Core was bad and needed to be dumped. The reality is that there were valuable parts to the Common Core too, but negative assumptions clouded the judgment of those educators who didn't like it.

As we go through the process, those conversations about assumptions will be vital. It's important to remember that it's not as much about what we like and don't like as it is about what practices are low value and what practices add value to the impact we are trying to have on student learning.

Some of these assumptions are as follows:

- There is one way that learning should look.
- Teachers who leave after the bell aren't as hardworking as teachers who stay in the evening.
- If a leader goes in on weekends, they are much more invested in their school than those who don't work weekends at all.
- Students who are quiet in class are not learning at the same level as those students who raise their hands and are engaged.
- Lecture is harmful to student learning.
- Parents who live in poverty don't care about education as much as wealthier parents do.
- A colorful classroom is an engaging classroom.

"It's important to remember that it's not as much about what we like and don't like as it is about what practices are low value and what practices add value."

As an individual, partnership group, or team, what are some assumptions you would add to this list when it comes to schools, learning, and students? Write five of them below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## CLUTTER CHECK



## Anticipating Roadblocks

What is interesting here is that our assumptions can become a roadblock to doing this work. In *Think Again*, Grant (2021) writes about the desirability bias, which is when “we allow our preferences to cloud our judgment” (p. 103). During this implementation and de-implementation work, we must make sure that our judgment is not clouded in such a way that we want to get rid of initiatives we don’t like—that may actually work—and trade them in for other initiatives that may not work at all.

In the beginning of the book, I asked you to write down three of your beliefs about student learning and school and then add the relevant actions you take in support of those beliefs and the distractions you think prevent you from achieving them.

Please go back to that list of distractions. Again, an assumption is an idea or belief you possess without having any evidence to support it. I am going to ask you to question any possible assumptions as we end this section with a Clutter Check.

### CLUTTER CHECK



In this Clutter Check, please write the distractions, and then on the following line, write the possible assumption you are making. Often what we perceive to be distractions may be helpful actions we just view as too challenging. Or those distractions may just need to be viewed through a different lens.

For example, faculty meetings are often seen as a distraction because people do not view them as helpful. Many faculty meetings are just a venue where a school leader shares information that could have been emailed. However, if that faculty meeting was flipped to center on a goal that focused on impacting student learning, perhaps the meeting would not be seen as a distraction. The power of the three beliefs activity is that when a group shares their beliefs, along with their relevant actions and distractions, the team can collaborate to look at those distractions through a new lens. Through discussion they can honestly share that faculty meetings are a distraction and brainstorm ways to improve that issue. This, of course, takes a team that strongly believes in psychological safety.

Now it's your turn. Write the distractions, and then think of any possible assumptions you may be making.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Possible assumption:

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Possible assumption:

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Possible assumption:

## Monitoring Our Minds—Mindset

Rhinesmith (1992) defines mindset as “a predisposition to see the world in a particular way . . . a filter through which we look at the world” (p. 63). At the beginning of this chapter, in the “Case in Point” section, I provided a personal story on how I had to change the way I presented content during a two-day workshop I was facilitating. Additionally, in the “Emotions Over Evidence” section, I wrote about several procedures that leaders and teachers value but that may need to be replaced with something more valuable. To do this work, we must be open to reducing or replacing something we have long valued.

### TIPS TO CONSIDER

- Collect evidence of impact to see if those strategies you value are working.
- If you are feeling exhausted, trust the feeling. If you find that you run out of time because you overplanned, consider planning less and provide more time for students and teachers to process information.
- COVID-19 taught us how to shift from one minute to the next, but we are always at risk of reverting to old habits, especially when we consistently hear about COVID learning loss. Covering more and cramming information won't make up for a loss. Covering less and going deeper with it will.

## In the End

If schools do not begin to set boundaries, those outside of schools never will. A good way to persuade decision-makers up and down (particularly up) the organizational line is with evidence. Therefore, it is important for us to understand that implementation should be an evidence-based process that makes us highly selective about what we bring into our schools. For us to dive deep into this process, we needed to look at implementation science and use a model that helps us be thoughtful about this work. The Practical, Robust Implementation and Sustainability Model (PRISM) I introduced can be an impactful tool. PRISM allows teams to consider possible blind spots in their process.

I want to highlight here the external environment focus. Sometimes the external environment may be the parents or the larger school community. Instructional leadership teams should not only consider these groups but also understand how to communicate to them any improvements the school may be engaged in. Family engagement, for example, is not optional in the work of creating schools where children succeed. Failure to pay attention to this could mean the undoing of a promising endeavor.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might the PRISM method be helpful for your team when it comes to implementation and de-implementation?
2. What aspect of PRISM was the most useful for you?
3. What are your thoughts on the research that focuses on organizations and publishers using brain images to persuade buyers that they are credible sources?
4. What are some challenges your team is concerned about when it comes to de-implementation?