1 Elements and Principles of the Integrated Model

If our teaching is to be an art, we must draw from all we know, feel, and believe in order to create something beautiful.

—Lucy Calkins

It was 110 degrees in Scottsdale, Arizona, when the three of us sat down with a bottle of wine on a shaded patio to talk about the challenges teachers were having implementing professional learning communities (PLC), differentiated instruction (DI), and response to intervention (RTI). In our initial conversation we compared the three elements to objects such as a fork with its three prongs, a set of puzzle pieces that interlock with other pieces, and an umbrella's ribs that support and connect at the crest. But nothing seemed to click until, while researching, we came upon the elements and principles of art.

Our experiences and our discussions led us to believe that teacher buy-in is paramount to effecting change. That's honestly the single most important aspect of learning. We knew from our experiences with educators that we needed to help people connect the three components of this model to something common—something with which they were familiar—in order to understand how everything fits together.

When you read this book, you are going to see that we have adapted the elements and principles of art to help us organize our thoughts and clarify ways the book can be used in school communities. This book is a collaborative work among three colleagues who each have a passion for teaching, and through their discussion, they have learned that they share a common

thread: All three of us recognize that not only are many administrators and teachers challenged by PLC, DI, and RTI, they are also at a loss as to how these approaches are interrelated. We would never claim to be experts in all areas of education, but we have been blessed with opportunities to learn from amazing educators around the world, and we have taken the time to locate and apply the best research from experts in education to lay out the *what, why,* and *how* of integrating PLC, DI, and RTI. It is our desire to share those experiences and knowledge with you—our new colleagues.

We visualize this work as an artist views a tapestry, a thoughtful, intentional piece that is aesthetically pleasing in form, texture, and unity. In education, our bottom line is the academic, emotional, and social well-being of our students. The diverse communities in which we work consist of many textures that shape our understanding. The learning spaces and our philosophy regarding pedagogy shape our values and are the threads that bond us in a natural way.

THE FIVE CATEGORIES

In keeping with our "tapestry" theme, we have organized each chapter around five categories: *threads, essence, fabric, design,* and *frame.*

Threads

- What PLC, DI, and RTI are
- The research behind each one
- Who said what about each one, and why she or he said it

Essence

- What's in it for me
- 21st century skills
- Making it rigorous

Fabric

- Defining components of PLC, DI, and RTI
- Walking the walk

Design

- Talking the talk
- How/when to implement

- Why we should integrate it
- How to integrate it

Frame

- Nonnegotiables
- What's in, what's out

Threads

Threads are the filament or group of filaments that make up fabrics. For hundreds of years, they have constituted a way of holding things together to make pieces strong and durable. Threads vary in thickness for different types of sewing. For us, research is the connecting thread, and it has a number of filaments and fibers that change over time. When spun aptly and with integrity, it yields a PLC, DI, or RTI program that can run either independently of the other two or concurrently with them.

Essence

Essence is the nature of a thing. It is what is formulated as universal in the mind and in the language. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between an essence and its existence in the fact of its being. His description was later revised to mean that essence is what a person follows from the choices he or she makes. The creation of a tapestry essence includes the choices the artist makes when selecting colors, textures, shapes, and lines. In the field of education, teachers can make informed choices only if they know why they should use particular strategies, programs, and research; how those would work in their classrooms and with particular children; and ultimately how the strategies, programs, or research will affect them personally and professionally. In other words, teachers need the answer to the question, "What's in it for me?"

Fabric

Fabrics are flexible materials consisting of networks of natural or artificial fibers often referred to as thread or yarn. Fabrics appear to be some of the oldest materials in the world. Fabrics have long since been a staple in our society, from keeping us warm to showing our status in society to being used as a form of currency. Properties of fabrics include absorbency, heat conduction, and strength. Fabrics can become softer when washed. They can be creased and folded. Fabrics with poor elasticity can be easily wrinkled; they must be cared for to keep their luster.

PLC, DI, and RTI are analogous to the fabric in our tapestry. Each has a specific purpose and is a staple for the 21st century classroom. They are characterized by flexibility, contextual or natural learning, networking, and when implemented consistently and appropriately strengthen teaching, learning, and leadership.

Design

Design is the groundwork or the basis for creating every object, system, or product. As a process, design can take many forms, depending on what is being designed and who is doing the designing. As a verb, *design* refers to intentionally developing a plan for a product, structure, system, or component. As a noun, *design* refers to a plan that, when implemented, is the basis for a final product. The final product in its broadest sense can be anything from tapestries to websites.

Like design, teaching can take many forms. If the background knowledge, support system, and personal experiences of the educator are insufficient to support it, the focus for teaching can sometimes be too broad. Our PLC, DI, and RTI tapestry model guides teachers and school districts in developing a design that has a narrower focus that is less complicated and more achievable. The intent is to provide a long-lasting and integrated structure that interfaces with existing curricula.

Frame

Frames are enclosures that showcase and/or protect paintings, photographs, pictures, tapestries, or other products. Frames must be selected with care. Some of them are so elaborate that they overshadow the subject matter, while others are nearly undetectable due to the composition of the frames. In some instances the elaborateness of the frame is burdensome and causes the pane of glass shielding the product to shatter, leaving the picture unprotected. With the introduction of digital photo frames in the late 20th century, we were able not only to frame and protect photographs, but also to view them in real time, make editing decisions, and share audio and video clips.

Similarly, some education frameworks are so cumbersome or complicated that they do not serve the needs of teachers and students, or the framework itself overshadows the subject to be taught. This text is formed with the intent to show what it means to be immediately responsive to the needs of teachers and students, providing a framework that serves them and enlightens the subject matter.

WEAVING THE TAPESTRY

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each address one of the three programs—PLC, DI, and RTI, while Chapter 5 shows how these elements can be combined. Each chapter includes structures and activities to help educators implement the elements, and two appendices provide specific protocols and forms that readers may copy and use in their schools.

In addition, because time, choice, and voice are critical factors in growth and development, and in an effort to ensure there is growth and development for teachers and students, we have developed a list of nonnegotiables for each chapter. These include the following:

- Teacher-student conferring and goal setting
- Teacher-to-teacher shared decision making and problem solving
- Teacher-administrator collaborations, walkthroughs, and feedback
- Analysis and comparison of state and national standards
- Ongoing assessment
- Continuous reflection
- Faithful implementation, with a two- to three-year commitment to the process

These nonnegotiables offer additional connections among PLC, DI, and RTI as educators seek to answer questions such as "What happens in our school when a student does not learn?" and "What happens in our school when a student already knows the material I am teaching?"

REFERENCES

Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.