
Preface

HOW AND WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

Over the last four years, I (Simon) have been working alongside my team, and hundreds of schools, to pioneer a simple and effective approach to teacher professional learning. The research is clear that if we want to improve student outcomes, then helping teachers to get better at what they do is one of the most important responsibilities for leaders, schools and systems/districts. The driving questions from the beginning were simple: *How can we enable overloaded teachers to keep getting better at their craft? How can we build an effective and simple approach to school-based professional learning?*

I had been working with multiple networks of schools across Australia and western Canada in the area of evidence-informed school improvement. Many of these schools were deeply committed to shifting professional learning towards being school-based and practice-focused, but they were struggling to find a way to make it both rigorous and doable for busy practitioners. They had allocated the time for practice improvement and even set up teams and structures, but they were struggling to make it work on the ground.

My team and I have been co-designing, field-testing and implementing a shared process for enhancing expertise within the busy context of school workplaces. We started by examining the critical elements suggested by the best available evidence on effective professional learning (e.g. Cordingley et al., 2015; Timperley et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2009). We identified that the process would need to be job-embedded, support disciplined collaboration, be informed by research, involve intentional experimentation, and generate evidence of impact. We also drew on emerging insights from behavioural science on how to best support adults to make small but important changes to habits and routines (e.g. Duhigg, 2014; Heath & Heath, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). In short, the process was designed to enable educators to pursue a sustainable and incremental

XVI TEACHING SPRINTS

change approach to practice improvement. Our hypothesis was that if we could help teachers to work on manageable, evidence-informed changes, then these small shifts (what we call Teaching Sprints) could add up to significant improvements in expertise over time. Each small Sprint would only last for about four weeks, but the cumulative effect on teacher expertise, over multiple cycles, could be extremely powerful.

It's been an iterative research, design and development process of trialing, gathering feedback, learning from mistakes and re-testing the model in the field. I got things wrong more times than I would care to admit. I'm very grateful to my school and system partners, who partnered in this co-design and implementation learning journey. From 2017 we also ran three Sprints summits in Sydney to bring together our global community and share our insights into implementing job-embedded, evidence-enriched professional learning models. These gatherings, and the generosity of spirit, were crucial in helping me refine my own thinking.

I am thrilled to now be able to share our collective learning – the Teaching Sprints process – and can't wait to see how you adapt it to improve the quality of professional learning within your unique educational contexts.

I've written this book as a team effort. Since late 2018 I've been working with Bron Ryrie Jones, a brilliant teacher and university teacher educator who has been integral to my effort to refine the Sprints model into something that can work with diverse educators working in a broad range of contexts. We have benefited from the input of an incredible faculty of facilitators and Teaching Sprints practitioners, who have all helped us to pioneer and refine this approach. In this book we have tried to weave together our perspectives and incorporate the rich insights we have gleaned from working shoulder-to-shoulder with frontline educators who have been exploring how to get better at getting better.

We are excited to also welcome you into the Teaching Sprints Community of educators – now 10,000-plus strong and growing all around the globe. We hope that you will find this practical guide a helpful resource as you progress on your practice improvement journey.

Towards better learning,

Simon Breakspear

April 2020