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Preface

*You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you are going,
because you might not get there*

Yogi Berra (1998)

Education takes you places.

The relationship between access to quality schooling and longer life expectancy, greater happiness, greater earnings, and a whole host of other good things is long established and rarely disputed (Hamilton & Hattie, 2022; World Bank, 2018). The reverse leads to the reverse. A two-way street.

It's brilliant, then, that governments should invest so much in education. We deploy a global army of more than 84 million teachers to take children places. The effect of this investment has also been relatively strong. In 1920, only 32% of the world was literate; over the following 100 years, this has risen to 86% (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2016). Surely this is one of the greatest achievements of human history, greater than the Pyramids and all the other wonders combined. Maybe the greatest of all.

So why the need for this book?

Because it's still not enough. Despite the global investments in education, the returns are remarkably lumpy—among countries, between schools in the same country, and even teachers in adjacent classrooms in the same school! In the predominantly English-speaking world (e.g., the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), performance on international student assessments is only moderately better today than in 1970. Yes, things are improving. But the incline is too shallow, and with ever larger financial investment and increasingly overworked teachers.

Often the proposed answer to this question of educational lumpiness is more research and the design of shiny new programs to close the equity gap. However, we are going to speak sacrilege: maybe there is already enough research to be getting on with?

By our count, if you wanted to consume *all* of the existing publications on education improvement, you would need to work through 68 books and journal articles *per day* to do it in a single lifetime. This wouldn't give you enough spare time to put any of it into practice, and the research continues to grow by the hour. There are also already thousands of programs and protocols based on the existing evidence, many of which have extremely strong evidence of impact. They really do shine.

*We think the era of evidence collection is (largely) over. It's the era of **systematic implementation of the existing evidence that now needs to begin.***

Ergo, we think the era of evidence collection is (largely) over. It's the era of **systematic implementation of the existing evidence** that now needs to begin. In other words, what we really need most are good implementation processes and procedures. We need processes that enable systems, schools, and teaching teams to systematically discover their most pressing needs; to systematically select, localize, or design locally appropriate high-impact approaches, based on that vast existing evidence on effective shiny things; to then deliver to the designs systematically; and to then double-back (i.e., evaluate) in order to double-up (i.e., sustain and scale thy impact).

The idea is that these processes help schools and systems to bring the (truckloads of) pre-existing evidence to life, in a manner that supports locally relevant improvement, with locally available resources and local capabilities. For the avoidance of all doubt, this also includes local evidence collection in order to check that there was indeed impact.

Most of the existing research on effective implementation comes from outside education. There is a long history of it in industry, going back more than 100 years to the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor, Henry Gantt, and James O. McKinsey. Much of it is scientific—not in terms of generating complex formulas, but in how the thinking is done (i.e., in a stepwise fashion, with checking and cross-checking against data at each stage). It's systematic to the core. Albeit the system is applied to different contexts, with different needs and that it inevitably (and desirably) leads to different initiatives and different (positive) outcomes. Same, same but different.

Despite the growing evidence that the approach to implementation (i.e., whether you have an approach, whether it is “good,” and whether you actually follow it) is a major predictor of whether your improvement agenda is successful. Education has been a relative latecomer to the party. The first major handbook on education implementation did not hit the shelves until 2012 (i.e., Kelly & Perkins, 2012). Many more works have since been produced and this is strongly welcomed by us. However, they seem to fall into two broad camps:

- **Camp 1:** academic texts that wax lyrical on implementation process theory but that have limited practical application to schools and systems. Another variant of this camp is written in Malcolm Gladwell-like delicious speak. This may be a good (and fun) summer read but is challenging to put into action without developing your own process map and tools.
- **Camp 2:** practical primers that showcase some tools and approaches but not in enough detail that you could pick up the book and run with it. You still need to hire in the writer(s) or their teams to tell you the hidden extras or conjoin their processes with another body of knowledge.

What we felt was missing was a practical (but rigorous) step-wise process that takes educators all the way from discovering a pressing need to evaluating the impact of their selected high-probability interventions, and one that is crammed to the rafters with tools needed to support implementation and not just a couple of samples. So, we thought, why not write *that* book? And we did. And now you have it!

Building to Impact 5D is explicitly designed to be a field manual or playbook, something that you can pick up and use end to end or adapt to help you implement with rigor and impact. It combines the following:

- **Processes and practical tools** that we four (and our respective teams) already employ in our design, delivery, and evaluation work with systems, districts, and schools; and
- **A wide sweep of the global implementation science literature**, including a review of 50 implementation models and their respective tools as well as analysis of the available systematic reviews and meta-analysis on implementation success factors.

We think you will find our 5D playbook most useful if you are working at a school system, school district (i.e., overseeing several schools), schoolwide, or within-school level, seeking to generate sustainable improvement at scale. If you are part of a teaching team or a professional learning community, there's also plenty within for you to draw from. But you may not have the time or resources to follow the process from A to Z, so we also offer guidance on which elements you can undertake in a lighter-touch way.

We are not at all precious about the specifics of how you undertake local inquiry and implementation activity using the *Building to Impact 5D* playbook. You obviously need to localize to your context, resourcing level, culture, and time constraints. What we are more precious about is that you have to stop and ask each of the questions detailed within the framework before deciding what to do next—and the answers to those questions need to be generated by far more than a hunch, instinct, intuition, or gut feeling. You need to find and use data, and you need to explicitly look for disconfirming data, not just selective facts that (conveniently?) fit your preintended course of action. We are very strict about this.

As you will soon discover, there are 18 separate questions and/or processes you need to work through to properly implement *Building to Impact 5D* but you can flex the duration of each to your context. This could mean that a district-level team might spend several weeks digging and exploring one or two of these questions and/or process areas, whereas a school-level team might push forward

much sooner (e.g., after a quick brainstorming session), provided everyone comes with their data! You might also move back and forth between different steps and questions, reconsidering earlier decisions as new information comes to light. This is to be expected and is completely normal. We do it all the time.

It takes great resolve and discipline to think and act systematically and not slip back into intuitive, hunch-based ways of operating.

Despite this flexibility, the systems, districts, and schools that we work with often say that “it’s really hard to continuously work like this.” Amen to that. It takes *great* resolve and discipline to think and act systematically and not slip back into intuitive, hunch-based ways of operating. Effective implementation isn’t easy. The deliberateness of thought is the important part, but it is also the cognitively fatiguing bit. It really does make your head hurt. That’s why we think there is perhaps a missing role in schools and school systems: the implementation specialist or implementation scientist. This is someone whose sole job (or main job) is to support their colleagues with the mental heavy lifting and who is deeply trained in these processes. You might think of them as a cross between an educational strategy consultant, a project manager, and a formative evaluator—all in one. Other forms of specialists already exist in our world: data specialists, governance specialists, leadership improvement specialists, assessment specialists, and so on. So, why not implementation specialists? Think about it.

And now to the credits. Many people have supported and enhanced our thinking as we codified the *Building to Impact* 5D framework. These include Arran’s colleagues (past and present) at Cognition Education: Shaun Hawthorne, Mary Sinclair, Brian Hinchco, Phil Coogan, Mel Sproston, Helen Butler, Lindsey Conner, Jenna Crawley, Christophe Mullins, Nigel Bowen, Durgesh Rajandiran, and Tina Lucas.

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Janet thanks her evaluation team at the Centre for Program Evaluation and the leadership team at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education where so much implementation occurs.

Doug thanks his colleagues at Creative Leadership Solutions, Arran for orchestrating the book, and John for his continued global impact on education.

We all thank Dylan Wiliam, who took the time to go through our manuscript to help us buttress and improve and who also wrote the foreword! And the brilliant team at Corwin who brought

this project to life, especially Jessica Allan, Lucas Schleicher, Amy Schroller, and Christina West.

Obviously, our thinking didn't emerge from the ether. It very much builds on and from the heavy lifting done by others, including Michael Fullan, Thomas Guskey, Abraham Wandersman, Sir Michael Barber, Russell Bishop, Viviane Robinson, Lant Pritchett, and (the aforementioned) Dylan Wiliam. We owe these folks a great intellectual debt. They may not agree with all in this book but their words and actions have been a major inspiration.

And now back to the start.

In addition to being one of the greatest catchers in baseball history, Yogi Berra was something of a sage, renowned for his "Yogiisms." When he said, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there," he was 10,000% right. And that's the whole point of *Building to Impact 5D*: to help you systematically decide on the destination, to then explore the different ways you could undertake the journey, to put one or more of those journey plans into action, to check whether it is working, and then to decide what to do next.

When you know where you are going, when you have a plan, and when you systematically check and revise, you will get there—albeit with unexpected twists and turns along the way.

If you want business as usual, move along. But if you seek deep and delicious impact, read on.

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