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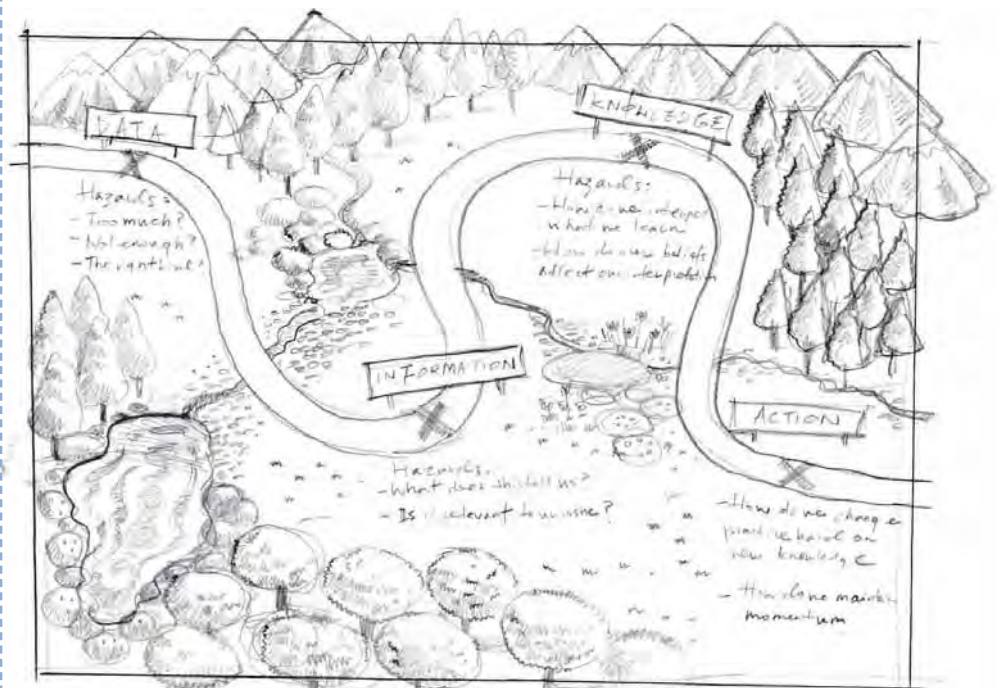
On the Path to an Evidence-Based School


"Information becomes knowledge when it is shaped, organized, and embedded in a context that gives it meaning and connectedness."

— Lorna Earl and Steven Katz

The expectation that evidence or data will be used to track and inform progress toward the achievement of goals has travelled from the halls of the corporate head office to the halls of the neighbourhood school. School administrators are expected to work with their staff and school community to collect, analyze, and make sense of data in ways that will inform the activities of the school and lead to greater student achievement.

However, while most of us understand the importance of engaging our staff in data analysis and interpretation, not all of us feel comfortable with the process. Somewhere along the path of turning data into information, then knowledge, then constructive action (Earl and Katz, 2006), many of us stumble into one or more of the hazards that seem to be present at every turn.





This book is organized using essential questions similar to those in the illustration on the previous page. This structure emphasizes that asking and answering questions are two key processes of an evidence-based school. When we ask the right questions and use a collaborative inquiry process to work out the answers, we are able to take meaningful, focused, and effective actions that benefit our students and community.

The five sections of this book are described in the table of contents on pages 3–5. The sections provide information you need and processes you can use to build a school culture focused on asking and answering questions that will lead to greater school effectiveness and student achievement. Where possible, these processes are differentiated to address the varying starting points, interests, and learning preferences of adult learners. The DVD in the back of the book includes

- blackline masters for use with school staff
- a study guide for reviewing material in the book independently or collaboratively
- 15 video clips that feature administrators reflecting on their work in developing strong evidence-based schools, classrooms, and boards
- connections to two assessment books for teachers—*Evidence to Action* and *50 Tools and Techniques for Classroom Assessment*—with suggestions for ways these resources can be used to facilitate teacher learning and collaboration

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With the exception of the two case studies at the end of this book, the vignettes provided throughout depict fictional individuals, schools, and situations.

SECTION 1: Getting Started

The Evidence-Based School

What does it mean to be evidence-based?

Consider these two individuals:

Bryan’s instructional approaches meet the needs of some of his students much of the time, and Bryan is proud of this. The problem is that when he is in a discussion with his principal, Bryan uses his successes as a club. He beats down any suggestion that he should examine student data and research summaries to determine why some of his students are not succeeding, and what he might do to change that reality. As far as Bryan is concerned, he has always known “in his gut” what good teaching looks like, and he doesn’t need theories to tell him how to teach. Bryan believes that those students who are not succeeding can choose to improve or they to fail.

Katya’s instructional approaches also meet the needs of a number of her students much of the time. Katya is delighted that something she is doing is clearly working for many, but she is curious to know what that is, how she can extend her students’ successes further, and what she can do to meet the needs of those students she is not currently reaching. Katya takes advantage of every opportunity to further her learning. She reviews and discusses student achievement data with colleagues, attends professional learning sessions directly related to her focus for professional growth, and experiments with the instructional practices she learns about, gathering evidence which she examines in an ongoing cycle of evaluation, reflection, and action.



What Is an Evidence-Based School?

In your school, you undoubtedly have staff members at a number of points along the continuum from Bryan, who relies on beliefs and instincts as his sole data source, to Katya, who is clearly an exemplary evidence-based professional.

The Administrator's Job in an Evidence-Based School

- Enlist the support of others by developing a team that will share the leadership responsibilities of the work.
- Bring all of your staff together in a thoughtful examination of the relevant data that inform a meaningful student achievement goal.
- Have processes in place that will engage teachers in collaborative inquiry around the meaning of data that have the potential to inform teachers' future actions and lead to greater student achievement.
- Ensure that the review of data actually leads to changes in the way things are done in the school.
- Use data to track progress toward achievement of the goal, giving particular attention to improvements that will support the school's most vulnerable students.



**Challenges in Creating an
Evidence-Based School**

➔ The Era of the Evidence-Based Decision

Why is society moving to evidence-based decision making?

It used to be that decisions were based on experience, intuition, and philosophical beliefs. It used to be that an expert was someone who had done the exact same thing dozens, if not hundreds, of times. While change is slow and “used to be” is often still current, even in some educational environments, times are changing.

Evidence-based decision making has long been recognized in the corporate world as resulting in increased focus, increased efficiencies of time and money, and (sometimes) increased effectiveness. So, it is hardly surprising that governing bodies, whether they are the governments that pay for health care or the taxpayers who fund our schools, want to know that important jobs are accomplished with full consideration of *all* evidence that might help achieve greater success.



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