

TIPS FOR USING *Ideas Into Action #9: Exploring the “Cognitive” Personal Leadership Resources: Problem-Solving Expertise, Role-Specific Knowledge & Systems Thinking*

1. Learn how the resource is organized.

Refer to the **WHAT’S INSIDE** column on page 2 which identifies four main parts:

- **Part A** highlights the importance of the three Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) as essential foundations of leadership practice in the Ontario Leadership Framework.
- **Part B** digs deeper into the research perspectives of problem-solving, role-specific knowledge and systems thinking.
- **Part C** suggests “ten proven strategies” that have been found to be effective in strengthening the cognitive PLRs.
- **Part D** provides an annotated list of publications recommended by Ontario leaders.

2. Become familiar with the content and apply it to real-life scenarios.

One strategy for becoming familiar with the content is to apply it to authentic case studies such as those provided in *Leader of the Equitable School (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2012)*.

- Use the case studies as the basis for responding to the questions provided on page 2 of this tip sheet.
- Work on your own and then discuss your responses with a partner or small group.

The following are adapted versions of two of the cases:

Case Study One: Negotiating Barriers to Student Success (pp.14-15)

Michael is the only son of a single mother. His mother was educated in a district that she believes systemically stereotyped and discriminated against her. As principal or system leader you have received reports that Michael’s behaviour has become increasingly problematic and difficult to manage. He has difficulty paying attention and has exhibited increasing acts of spontaneous physical aggression toward staff and other students. There was a strong recommendation for testing and support. However, every time the mother is contacted, she flatly refuses support, refuses to have her son tested and dismisses the school’s concerns discriminatory, exaggerated or too trivial. She points to both her own experiences and current literature to state that any consequences that the school imposes on her child for his behaviour will be an act of racism. Meanwhile, Michael continues to be challenged both academically and socially in his day-to-day behaviours and other parents and staff are pressing you to act.

Case Study Two: Trouble with Penguins (p. 113)

This morning, as part of her discussion on families, one of the Grade 2 teachers reads a picture book *Tango Makes Three* to her students. The book is a delightful, true story about two male penguins in the Central Park Zoo in New York who find an abandoned egg, build a nest, keep the egg warm, and then nurture the newborn penguin until it is grown. The teacher’s intent was to help her students realize and appreciate the fact that families can have many different structures. This afternoon after school, you receive a phone call from an angry parent who informed you that the next time the teacher reads a book about homosexuality, she wants to be informed and have her child removed from the classroom.

- **Content Focus:** Exploring the Cognitive PLRs
- **Purpose:** Gain an understanding of research-based perspectives of the cognitive PLRs and their application to leadership in real-life contexts
- **Process:** Apply content to solve problems in authentic cases
- **Activity:** Read the case study, identify the problem, and answer questions as they apply to the

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APPLY THESE QUESTIONS TO THE CASES

- 1. Understanding our own thinking:**
How does Kahneman’s System 1 (fast thinking) and System 2 (slow thinking) align with your solution to the case study? (pp. 5-6)
- 2. Differentiate thinking to match the problem:**
Define technical problems and adaptive challenges in the case study. (p. 7)
- 3. Be knowledgeable about culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy:**
Khalifa indicated that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies entered discourse two decades ago. How does your solution incorporate the three criteria of relevant pedagogy? (p. 9)
- 4. Have knowledge about school and classroom conditions:**
 - Kugler & West-Burns describe seven areas that form a framework for culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. In finding a solution to the case study examine these seven areas. (p. 9)
 - Apply Leithwood’s four “paths” to solving the problem in the case study. (p. 11)
- 5. Systemness and coherence-making:**
What components of the Fullan & Quinn Coherence Framework apply to the case study? (p. 13)
- 6. Think Better:**
Use the Plus-Minus-Interesting (PMI) chart on page 14 to consider the “evidence” from all sides before making a commitment to a decision that solves the problem in the case study.
- 7. Solve the Right Problem:**
 - Apply ‘Root Cause Analysis’ to the case study. (p. 17)
 - Use the “5 Whys” protocol to uncover the problem in the case. (pp. 17-18)
- 8. Mitigate the Impact of Bias:**
What components of the case study should be addressed by naming implicit biases? (p. 20)
- 9. Strengthen Problem-Solving Know-How:**
Identify the potential four decision-making “villains” in the case that need to be countered. (p. 24)
- 10. Connect to Promote “Knowledge Flow”:**
Perkins identifies five features of the flow of knowledge in communities and organizations. Using the case study connect your solution to these five features. (p. 28)
- 11. Question to Open Minds:**
Using Stanier’s seven coaching questions, work with a partner to solve the case study. (p. 29)
- 12. Storytell to Move Hearts, Minds, Body & Spirit:**
Monarath indicates that “data can persuade people, but it does not inspire them to act ... you need to wrap your vision in a story that fires the imagination and stirs the soul.” Create a story that builds capacity to solve the problem in the case study and ensures the issue is resolved. (p. 30)
- 13. Grow Expertise:**
How does Duckworth’s “grit” relate to the case study? (pp. 35-36)
- 14. Apply Systems Thinking:**
Use the ‘Iceberg’ model as a thinking protocol to work through the complexities of the case. (p. 35)
- 15. Learn More:**
According to Coleman “...reading habits...can catalyze insight, innovation, empathy and personal effectiveness.” Scan the publications on pages 43-44 and the references on pages 45-48 and mark with a “star” the top ten resources that could help solve the problem in the case.
- 16. Adopt Good “Self-Care” Habits:**
Levitin suggests five ways that can serve as a “neural reset button.” Which reset button would you use to perform better while solving the case study? (p. 40)