

The Not-So-Secret Secret

What does the research say about what successful, effective schools and districts are doing to make their gains? If we are going to focus on the educational growth and development of our students, where do we start? Where do we direct our energy in order to address the first three areas of education's public accountability charge (input, effectiveness, and output)? The answer is startlingly simple: We must improve teacher quality.

Although the teacher quality factor is frequently covered in intellectual conversation regarding student achievement, it remains bizarrely unaddressed in most comprehensive school reform initiatives, in which the search for salvation begins at an online store, a publisher's warehouse, or a vendor exhibit hall. Ideally, that first quest for a solution should have an inward focus. District administrators, school leadership teams, public officials, and anyone else interested in increased student achievement should turn their lens to the most basic element of schooling: the teachers themselves.

Research has long supported the claim that better teachers lead to higher student achievement. One study showed that children assigned to effective teachers for three years in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on standardized assessments than those assigned consecutively to three poor teachers (Jordan, Mendro, & Weersinghe, 1997). A study in Cincinnati, Ohio, found that teachers rated highest also showed the greatest gains in their students' proficiency exams; the opposite was true for teachers with low ratings (Miner, 2005/2006).

Some well-known educational experts have weighed in on the debate. Rick DuFour and Bob Eaker, the architects of the professional learning communities (PLC) concept, state flatly, "Schools are effective because of their teachers" (1998, p. 206). Charlotte Danielson, creator of the indispensable Framework for Professional Practice, echoes the sentiment: "High-level learning by students requires high-level instruction by their teachers" (2007, p. 15). Renowned educational researcher Robert J. Marzano concludes, "Regardless of the research basis, it is clear that effective teachers have a profound influence on student achievement and ineffective teachers do not. In fact, ineffective teachers might actually impede the learning of their students" (2003, p. 75). And Mike Schmoker, never one to beat around the bush, offers us this: "The single greatest determinant of learning is not socioeconomic factors or funding levels. It is instruction" (2006, p. 7).

The X Factor

Imagine, if you will, a garden-variety school classroom. It could be an elementary school or a high school; it could be public or private; it could be charter or magnet; it could be new or established; it could be in a poor or affluent neighborhood. First, turn off the electricity and eliminate all that technology—no computer, no DVDs. Now, remove the books. Take out the desks, the paper, the chairs, and the crayons. Picture the room barren of furniture and materials. How will the students learn? How will they grow and develop as thinkers, understand the concept of onset and rime, and make meaning of the scientific method, the writing process, the Pythagorean theorem, and the role of chlorophyll in photosynthesis?

More than likely, you have a relatively simple, succinct answer to the question of how the students would learn: The students and teacher would find a way to continue their learning by working together. Due to the innate craving to learn and the enthusiasm with which we were all endowed at birth, the paucity of materials provides challenges to overcome, not a complete roadblock. If students so desire, they will continue to learn.

Now, for the final step in this exercise, consider that same classroom. This time, remove the teacher.

No teacher?

No more learning.

Hurry and put the teacher back in the classroom—a classroom without a teacher isn't just a place in which no learning occurs; it's dangerous.

Silly, isn't it, that it's that obvious, that simple, and that elemental. We're not overstating the point when we say that teachers matter. Good teachers matter. The quality of the teacher is the "X factor." Everything in education depends on it.

We're willing to admit that the argument is not new. Witness this 1909 quote from the American Association for the Advancement of Science: "Given a good teacher, and locate him in a cellar, an attic, or a barn, and the strong students of the institution will beat a path to his door. Given a weak teacher and surround him with the finest array of equipment that money can buy, and permit the students to choose, as in the elective courses, and his class room will echo its own emptiness" (p. 787).

	Reflective Tendencies	Related Classroom Characteristics	Your Role as a Coach	Your Role as an Administrator
Unaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates little/no awareness of instructional reality in the classroom • Focuses on routine • Exhibits the best of intentions • Expresses confusion about own role in learning • Collaborates with colleagues on a superficial level • Defines problems inaccurately • Focuses on the <i>job</i> itself – the <i>act</i> of teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripted lessons – little/no teacher modeling • Passive learners – little/no interaction between students • Teacher relies on direct instruction and gives assignments • Little/no evidence of systematic, standards-based planning • No differentiation of instruction • Little/no awareness of effective time management • No link between instruction and assessment • Learning not relevant to students 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Unconditional Partner</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify strengths, limitations, and needs • Recognize potential • Build trust through interpersonal relationships • Share your personal experience of becoming aware of different instructional strategies • Create a collaborative environment 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Director</u></p> <p>Provides specific feedback to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage repeated future use of an effective instructional approach • Compliment an attempted use of an effective instructional strategy (with a specific suggestion for improvement) • Discourage future use of an ineffective instructional approach
OVERALL GOAL: To create awareness of the need for change and foster a desire to learn				
Conscious	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a consistent “knowing-doing” gap • Can ambiguously cite research to support current teaching methods • Makes excuses for problems • Demonstrates limited ability to evaluate problems • Becomes easily distracted from goals • Collaborates inconsistently with colleagues • Disregards others’ ideas • Focuses on <i>self</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction designed for teacher convenience • Short-term planning is evident, yet inconsistent • Teacher occasionally links assessment and instruction • Students are seldom engaged in active, meaningful learning • Little problem-solving from students • Occasional differentiated instruction • Instructional approaches pass through noticeable “swings” 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Motivator –Strategist</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise generously • Reach out to include teacher in collaborative work • Communicate and maintain a clear vision • Build confidence through short-term goal setting • Focus on small changes • Make daily contact, checking in often to talk about goals and progress towards them 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Navigator</u></p> <p>Provides specific feedback to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a focus for goal-setting • Encourage consistency in application of effective instructional practices • Redirect teaching behaviors toward the proper heading • Extend self-reflective efforts
OVERALL GOAL: To motivate and show how to apply pedagogical knowledge consistently				

Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepts responsibility for the success of all students and for own personal growth • Evaluates issues and situations objectively • Seeks to incorporate research-based concepts and strategies • Reflects upon teaching only <i>after</i> the event • Believes in only one “right” way of doing things • Struggles to identify solutions to long-term problems • Receives feedback well, then enters a critical loop • Collaborates on a limited basis with colleagues • Focuses on the <i>science</i> of teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular use of assessment to monitor student progress • Consistent application of best-practice instructional strategies • Teacher links standards with lessons taught • Teacher utilizes limited long-term plans • Functional at a glance, but gaps lurk 	<u>Mentor</u>	<u>Prompter</u>
	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To build on experience and help strengthen expertise</p>			
Refinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection occurs before, during, and after taking action • Recognizes that there are multiple “right” courses of action • Maintains a vast repertoire of instructional strategies • Engages in action research as common practice • Modifies lessons and plans to meet students’ needs • Pursues opportunities to work and learn with colleagues • Thinks globally – beyond her classroom • Focuses on the <i>art</i> of teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment drives daily instruction • Students largely responsible for their own learning • Multiple instructional strategies in use 	<u>Collaborator</u>	<u>Challenger</u>
	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To encourage long-term growth and continued reflection</p>			

- Validate ideas, actions, and instructional decisions
- Release responsibility and encourages independence
- Provide research from which to construct meaning
- Model open-mindedness toward multiple approaches and perspectives
- Collaboratively engage in diagnosis and action planning

- Provides specific feedback to:
- Encourage reflection to support effective instructional choices
 - Question the impact of certain instructional strategies
 - Consider alternative approaches or points of view
 - Propose continued professional learning

- Compliment creativity and originality
- Bring attention to hard work
- Stimulate discussions of personal vision and educational philosophy
- Practice “mirror-listening”
- Ask questions to drive personal reflection and growth

- Provides specific feedback to:
- Drive personal reflection
 - Introduce new ideas
 - Serve as devil’s advocate
 - Encourage involvement in leadership

Continuum Teacher Profiles

Mrs. C

At the beginning of the year, you share your expectations with staff that they all differentiate their instruction and link reading strategies into every content area. Mrs C, who teaches U.S. History, is eager and excited to get started, after attending a workshop on D.I. over the summer and creating a bank of reading strategies.

Your early conversations with Mrs C and opportunities to sit in on some team meetings indicate that she is progressing toward her goal. She relates that she is differentiating for students with varying reading abilities. When you enter her classroom for some informal observations, you notice the majority of her lessons are delivered via lecture, and when students get to work they're usually in pairs and addressing questions in the textbook.

Mrs C tells you she's partnered the students intentionally, but the other strategies she's learned really won't fit with the classes you observed because of the complexity of the content, some of the behavior issues she has this year, and the pace that she has to go in order to cover the curriculum. When you offer a couple of suggestions for her practice, she says, "I'm doing that here and there, but it hasn't really been working too well this year. But we're making progress."

In what stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection do you believe Mrs C operates?

What evidence do you have to support that hypothesis?

What would be your collaborative goal in building her reflective capacity?

What would be your collaborative goal in building her technical expertise?

What coaching strategies might you employ to meet that dual goal?

What sort of admin feedback might support this dual goal?

Mrs. W

This summer, Mrs W attended a 3-day workshop on brain research and associated strategies to improve student learning. She came back gung-ho, calling a department meeting at her house at which her team talked about the science of neural pathways and sensory imaging while sharing bbq'd ribs.

As the school year started, Mrs W kept the momentum going by hosting after-school workshops and discussions about this topic. Gradually, however, the attendance withered as other demands consumed her colleagues' time. Mrs W became frustrated and retreated to her own classroom to focus on ensuring that every lesson met the charge of brain-friendly design.

During your observations in the classroom, you were impressed with Mrs W's ideas, the variety of lessons, and the tenacity with which she approached her classroom instruction. She begged for feedback from you, requesting ideas to support some of her students that weren't showing the degree of growth she had been expecting. As the year progressed, she began to question herself and wonder if what she was doing was indeed working, and lamented more than once that her teammates weren't on board with her in this venture. She continued to provide articles on brain-based strategies to her teammates, placing them in their mailbox every month or so.

In what stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection do you believe Mrs W operates?

What evidence do you have to support that hypothesis?

What would be your collaborative goal in building her reflective capacity?

What would be your collaborative goal in building her technical expertise?

What coaching strategies might you employ to meet that dual goal?

What sort of admin feedback might support this dual goal?

Mr. D

Every morning when you arrive at work, Mr D is already on his second cup of coffee and has been in the staff workroom for an hour. He is likely the hardest-working member of the staff, putting in long hours, volunteering for multiple committees, and seems to have fantastic relationships with students – they're always decorating his room for birthdays, requesting his classes, and joking around in the hallways. A veteran educator, Mr D is described by colleagues who say, "Yup, that's Mr D."

Mr D attends team meetings, often brings donuts, and is the group secretary, keeping copious notes and emailing them right away. When you sit down with him to set an instructional goal, he deflects the conversation to the activities he's leading and the structure of his advisory class. Eventually, he suggests a goal of "becoming more efficient loading grades into the computer."

In the classroom, Mr D follows the teacher guide-book with military precision. He assigns tasks and keeps a log of missing assignments that students must report to a lunchtime study-hall to complete. His students' test scores lag behind those of his colleagues in the building, but he shrugs, "I taught it and they did the work; I can't explain why they didn't do well on the test. They're good kids."

In what stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection do you believe M. D operates?

What evidence do you have to support that hypothesis?

What would be your collaborative goal in building his reflective capacity?

What would be your collaborative goal in building his technical expertise?

What coaching strategies might you employ to meet that dual goal?

What sort of admin feedback might support this dual goal?

Mr. M

During staff meetings and collaborative sessions, Mr M is known for phrasing his contributions in student-centered language. He attributes much of the success his students have on the state assessments and end-of-course exams to their work ethic, their dedication, and ability to solve problems cooperatively. At times, his colleagues wonder if he just keeps getting “the high groups.”

Mr M considers school-wide initiatives thoughtfully. He seeks a balance between administrators’ pushes and the students’ needs. He is willing to take on additional responsibilities, but with a careful eye on how they’ll impact his class, the team, and the entire school community. You sometimes wonder if Mr M doesn’t overthink some issues in his quest to achieve educational perfection.

For a larger guy, Mr M uses a pretty soft-spoken approach in his classroom. Midway through the year, your observations reveal that he uses a variety of instructional strategies, he spends considerable time meeting with small groups of students and conferring with individuals while the rest of the class is engaged in productive work. When he does gather the class’ attention, it’s usually to provide a key reminder or to reveal that he’s identified a misconception that several students have displayed – and he asks the class to seek an explanation for the correction. Verily, his class seems to run itself.

In what stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection do you believe Mr M operates?

What evidence do you have to support that hypothesis?

What would be your collaborative goal in building his reflective capacity?

What would be your collaborative goal in building his technical expertise?

What coaching strategies might you employ to meet that dual goal?

What sort of admin feedback might support this dual goal?

Administrative Feedback by Stage: Building Teachers' Capacity for Success (Hall/Simeral, ASCD 2008)

Unaware	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To create awareness for change and foster a desire to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I noticed you used <i>Strategy X</i>, and it was effective; use it whenever you want your students to <i>XX</i>. • Terrific job attempting <i>Longer Wait Time</i>; next time, <i>count to five in your head before calling on a student</i>. • I observed <i>four students engaged in side-talk</i>; try asking them to <i>turn to their partner</i> to regain their focus. • You have a real talent for <i>complimenting students</i>; use that to <i>praise their ideas, not just penmanship</i>. • In this lesson, you were <i>suggesting great reading strategies</i>; however, <i>few students stopped working to listen</i>. Try this: <i>Insist that all students drop everything when you ring a chime in the room</i>. • Judging by the look on your face, <i>that transition did not go as smoothly as you planned</i>; come see me when you get a minute and we'll talk about some strategies to use. • There are students in this class <i>working on tasks that are giving them a lot of difficulty</i>; it's time to start <i>investigating methods for meeting individual students' needs</i>.
Conscious	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To motivate and show how to apply pedagogical knowledge consistently</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I noticed you used <i>Strategy Z</i>, and it was effective. Why do you think it worked so well? • Let's talk about goal-setting. <i>Classroom management</i> seems to be an area that you're working on; perhaps that is a good place to start our conversation. • I see you're attempting <i>Strategy Y</i>; what support can I provide to help you keep that focus? • Yesterday I observed your students <i>working cooperatively</i>; today they are <i>working independently</i>. How did you determine the lesson structure for these classes? • One of your individual goals is to <i>increase active student engagement rates</i>; during my time in class today I observed 15 minutes of <i>lecture format</i>. How can you get back to your successful strategies? • This was a fun lesson to observe. Did the students <i>understand the Learning Objective</i>? How do you know? • Your <i>interaction with students</i> was <i>very positive and encouraging today</i>; keep it up! You'll see the gains! • Three students <i>seemed perplexed by your questioning</i>; why do you think that happened? What can you do?
Action	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To build on experience and help strengthen expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I noticed you used <i>Strategy L</i>; was it effective? How do you know? • Terrific job <i>asking higher-order thinking questions</i>; did that contribute to a <i>deeper understanding of the material</i>? How can you tell? What does this tell you about your <i>questioning strategies</i>? • When and how do you decide <i>which questions to ask students</i>? • What are some strategies you can use to <i>engage some of your reluctant writers</i>? • I know you <i>gave a pre-assessment before this math unit</i>; how closely is this lesson <i>related to the results of that formative assessment</i>? • Today your students were <i>busy with a lot of worksheet tasks</i>; you have told me you believe in <i>paper-and-pencil activities</i>. How can you better blend that goal with the students' goal of meeting learning targets? • You told your students <i>not to talk during the review activity</i>; what would happen if you allowed them to <i>investigate their answers together</i>? Would they be any less prepared for the final test? • Many of your students <i>received papers from you with comments you wrote</i>; do you think a lot about the <i>feedback you give students</i>? This might be a good topic for a Book Club – would you be interested?
Refinement	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To encourage long-term growth and continued reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In today's lesson you <i>asked terrific follow-up questions</i>; are these <i>planned in advance, or off the cuff</i>? • I read a great article in <i>Educational Leadership</i> about <i>this</i>; I'll put a copy in your mailbox – let me know what you think about it. • During this lesson, your teaching <i>engaged students in a variety of formats</i>; however, there were still two students that <i>appeared disengaged throughout</i>. What is your explanation, and what can you do differently to reel them in? • I'm not sure I understand the <i>way you've grouped students for this assignment</i>; can you explain your thinking to me? • I observed virtually the same lesson yesterday in <i>Teacher G's</i> classroom, and she <i>did it a different way</i>. This might be a good idea to participate in a lesson study to compare methods and results. Would you like me to facilitate that discussion? • This was a good example of <i>bringing the lesson to life</i>; would you be willing to share it (and its results) with your grade-level colleagues?

Coaching Strategies by Stage: Building Teachers' Capacity for Success (Hall/Simeral, ASCD 2008)

Unaware	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To create awareness for change and foster a desire to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a specific instructional problem to build awareness around • Establish rationales – Why do we do what we do? Use specific questioning • Utilize personal belief and reflective questionnaires • Advocate journal keeping • Provide opportunities for the teacher to get into other classrooms to observe • Get in the classroom • Seek additional opportunities to spend time with teacher building rapport • Facilitate opportunities to exchange ideas with others during guided meetings
Conscious	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To motivate and show how to apply pedagogical knowledge consistently</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide <i>daily</i> feedback highlighting instructional strengths • Examine and discuss student data • Develop a detailed action plan • Focus on short-term, attainable goals that will have long-term impact • Provide support for instructional goals and best-practice strategy • Meet weekly to lesson plan with the teacher – guided planning • Model, model, model specific techniques and provide ample time for discussion • Design meetings around a specific instructional topic
Action	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To build on experience and help strengthen expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite teachers to participate in small group discussions • Use the Apprenticeship Model • Observe and provide specific feedback • Videotape and analyze together • Foster idea-sharing through collegial observations • Use reflective questioning • Create a dialogue journal – coach and teacher or team journal • Encourage participation in a professional Book Club • Encourage teachers to attend workshops and share their learning • Analyze individual student data together • Publicly recognize teacher expertise • Help teacher develop a system for storing and organizing information
Refinement	<p>OVERALL GOAL: To encourage long-term growth and continued reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a wide range of resources from which to draw ideas • Encourage teacher to facilitate or initiate a Book Club • Analyze group data together • Establish a team action research project • Encourage participation in conferences, seminars, and publications • Arrange for the teacher to host a student teacher • Promote talent development • Encourage leadership (if this is a strength)



PRESCRIPTION

Patient Name: _____

School: _____

Date: _____

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Used upon authority of Pete Hall, author, *Building Teachers' Capacity for Success* (ASCD, 2008). For more information, please contact Pete at 208-755-3139, petehall@educationhall.com, or @EducationHall (Twitter)