

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.

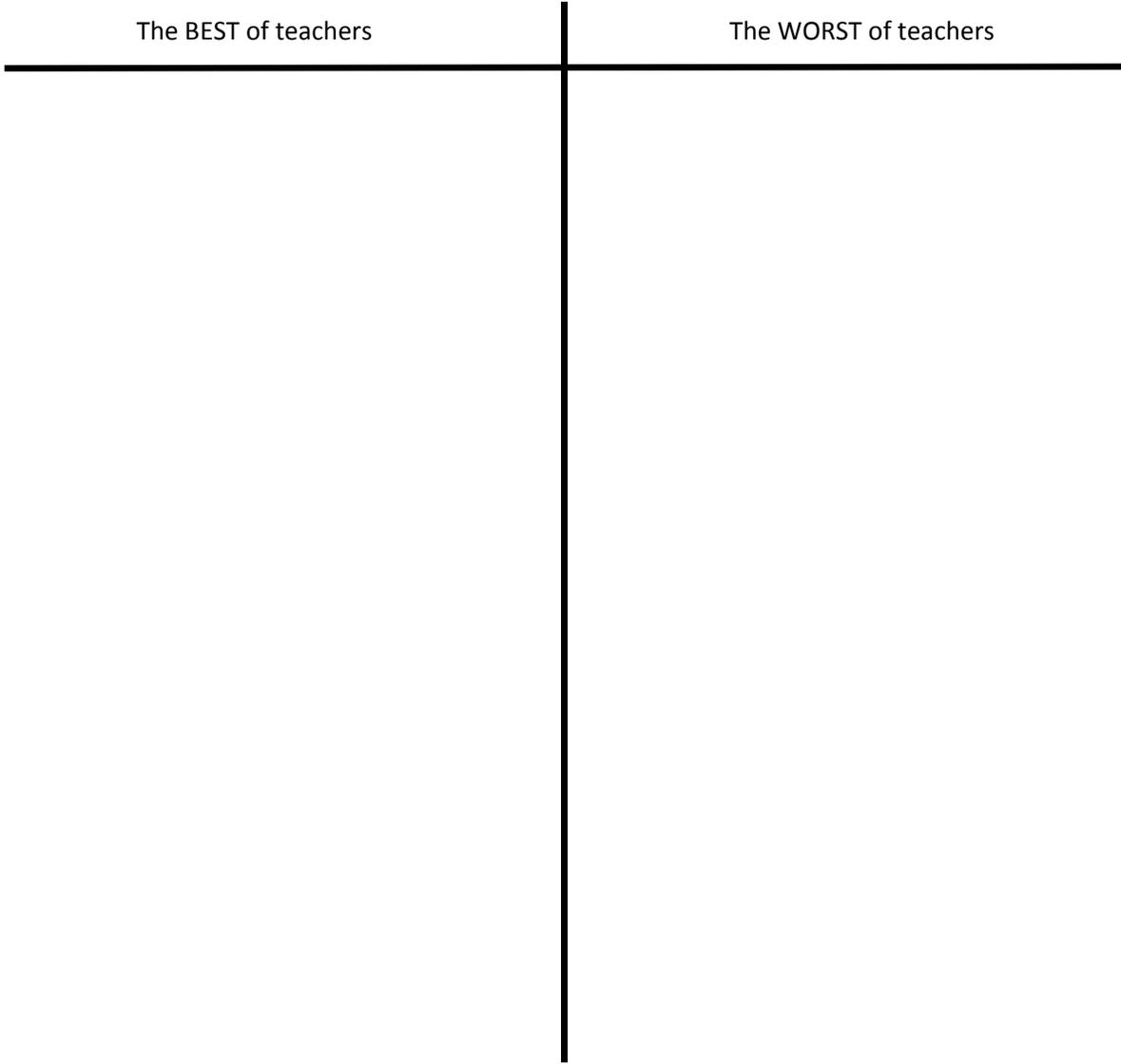
Hurry and put the teacher back in the classroom—a classroom without a teacher isn't just a place in which no learning occurs; it's dangerous.

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.

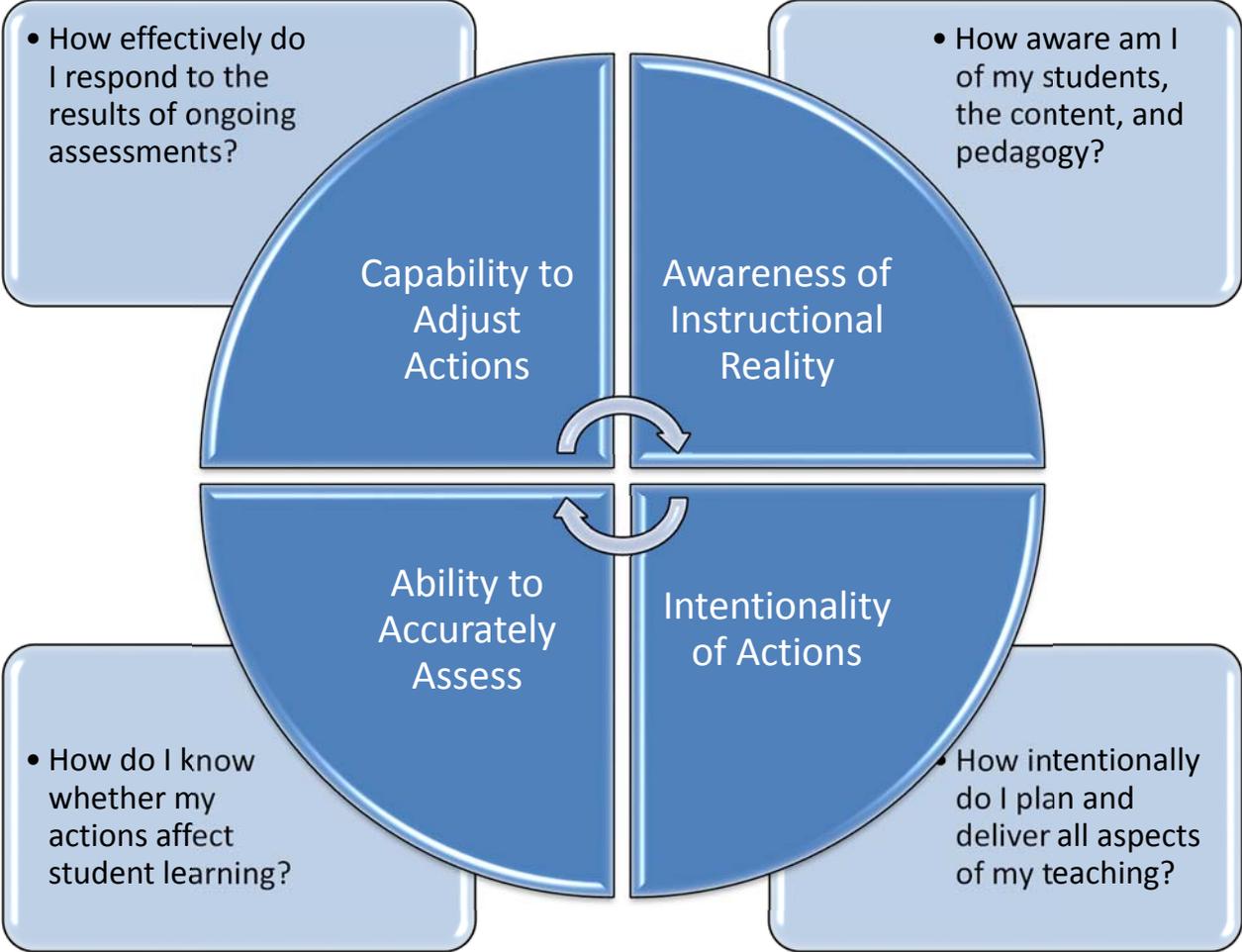
We're willing to admit that the argument is not new. Witness this 1909 quote from the American Association for the Advancement of Science: "Given a good teacher, and locate him in a cellar, an attic, or a barn, and the strong students of the institution will beat a path to his door. Given a weak teacher 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).

The BEST of teachers

The WORST of teachers



The Reflective Cycle



The Continuum of Self-Reflection

| <p>Unaware Stage</p> <p>Capacity-Building Goal: To build deeper awareness of students, content, and pedagogy</p> | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Teacher's Reflective Tendencies | Leadership Roles | Differentiated Coaching Strategies | Transformational Feedback (Directive statements) | Strategic PLC Support |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates little or no awareness of instructional reality in the classroom • Engages in little or no self-initiated reflection • Defines problems or challenges inaccurately • Sees surface-level events and classroom elements • Collaborates infrequently with colleagues • Focuses on routine • Exhibits the best of intentions • Expresses confusion about own role in learning • Focus is on the job itself—the <i>act</i> of teaching | <p>Administrator: Director</p> <p>Instructional Coach: Unconditional Partner</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make frequent contact, checking in often to talk about goals and progress toward them • Build confidence through short-term goal setting • Celebrate successes immediately • Model a strategy or lesson • Whisper Coach while co-observing another teacher's class • Write lesson plans together • Co-teach a lesson • Debrief a lesson together • Record a lesson, provide clear look-fors, and debrief the video together • Engage through side-by-side reflective journaling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you did this ____, the students did this ____. It worked because ____. Do that again! • I noticed you used ____ and it was effective because ____; use it whenever you want your students to ____. • When you did this ____, the students did this ____. Tomorrow try ____, and tell me what happens. • Your lesson was successful today because ____. • You (or your students) struggled today because ____. Next time that happens, try this: ____, and tell me what happens. • You appear frustrated with ____ and I noticed you ____ several times. Tomorrow, try to take note of how many times you _____. Then let's chat further. • I observed ____, which is not what you/we were going for in that lesson; try ____ to get the lesson back on track. This usually works because ____. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a specific task during team meetings • Front-load the upcoming content/meeting with an article, video, or 1:1 discussion • Debrief immediately following the meeting to support understanding and next-steps • Facilitate collegial idea-sharing through professional learning protocols • Strategically partner this teacher with a colleague (in particular one in the Action Stage) to build reflective capacity |

The Continuum of Self-Reflection

| <p>Conscious Stage</p> <p>Capacity-Building Goal: To work with greater intentionality in addressing student needs, content, and pedagogical practices</p> | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Teacher's Reflective Tendencies | Leadership Roles | Differentiated Coaching Strategies | Transformational Feedback (Leading prompts) | Strategic PLC Support |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a consistent “knowing–doing” gap • Reflects when prompted by others • Offers external explanations for problems or challenges • Makes generalizations in observations about classroom reality • Collaborates inconsistently with colleagues • Tends to operate with strong habits and comfortable practices • Becomes easily distracted from goals • Disregards others' ideas • Focus is first on <i>self</i> | <p>Administrator: Navigator</p> <p>Instructional Coach: Motivator and Strategist</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make daily contact, checking in often to talk about goals and progress toward them • Build confidence through short-term goal setting • Celebrate successes immediately • Meet weekly for collaborative planning • Engage through Interactive journaling • Invite participation in small group discussions around common problem of practice • Model a strategy or lesson in the teacher's classroom • Co-plan, co-teach, and debrief a lesson together • Provide opportunities to observe in other classrooms – utilizing clear look-fors • Record a lesson, provide clear look-fors, and debrief the video together | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your goal is _____. How can I help you keep that focus and support your efforts? • I see you were using _____ today. Keep that focus! What worked well today? • Tell me about the purpose of today's activity. What is your evidence of success? • Today, your students were successful at _____. What did you do that directly led to their success? • I noticed _____ today. How might the outcomes change if you tried _____? Give it a shot and let me know how it goes. • Yesterday I observed your students _____; today, they are _____. How do you determine your daily lesson structure? • Tell me more about the planning that went into today's lesson. Why did you select the strategy you chose for this lesson? • How do you use what you know about your students to drive lesson planning each day? • When you did _____ today, I observed several students _____. How will you shift tomorrow's lesson to change the outcomes? • How does this lesson connect to prior and future student learning objectives? • What misconceptions might students have during tomorrow's lesson? How will you address that in your planning? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the use of data (pre and post) to clarify cause-and-effect relationships • Analyze student work samples as a team • Promote team lesson planning • Facilitate collegial observations to see strategies at work in various settings • Utilize protocols to guide discussion and promote engagement • Strategically partner this teacher with a colleague (in particular one in the Refinement Stage) to grow reflective capacity |

The Continuum of Self-Reflection

| Action Stage Capacity-Building Goal: To build on experience and help strengthen expertise through accurate assessment of instructional impact | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Teacher's Reflective Tendencies | Leadership Roles | Differentiated Coaching Strategies | Transformational Feedback (Open-ended prompts) | Strategic PLC Support |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Commits to taking steps to affect student learning outcomes. •Engages in reflection before and after teaching •Evaluates problems or challenges objectively •Notices trends and themes in student performance and classroom elements •Collaborates on a limited basis with colleagues •Seeks to incorporate research-based concepts and strategies •Gravitates toward a particular structure or strategy •Struggles to identify solutions to long-term problems •Craves feedback from trusted partners •Focuses on the <i>science</i> of teaching | <p>Administrator: Prompter</p> <p>Instructional Coach: Mentor</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze data together • Analyze student work samples together • Collaboratively engage in diagnosis and action planning based on beliefs of how students learn • Provide research from which to construct meaning • Invite participation in small group discussions around common problem of practice • Foster idea-sharing through collegial observations • Model new strategies in gradual-release model • Record lesson and discuss video analysis • Model open-mindedness toward multiple approaches and perspectives • Encourage participation in professional book club • Interactive journaling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the purpose of today's activity? Was it successful? How do you know? • Which parts of today's lesson went well? Which parts didn't? Why? • What was the goal of today's lesson? How did you determine that goal? • Today I observed you _____. Did that contribute to your goal? How can you tell? • Why did you choose to _____ today? Was that strategy effective? How do you know? • What other strategy could you have used today to achieve your goals? • How do you predetermine what your evidence of success will be for a lesson? • Do your anecdotal observations of student learning align with more formal assessment data? • If you could teach this lesson again, what would you do differently? Why? • Which students were successful achieving today's learning target? Which students struggled? Why was that so? • What does the student work from today's lesson tell you about _____ as a learner? • What can you tell me about _____ as a learner? How can you find out more? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for all teachers to share methods in team meetings • Engage in healthy debate about the pros and cons of various pedagogical strategies • Maintain a focus on data analysis during team meetings • Incorporate professional learning (new and deeper instructional strategies) as a regular component of team meetings • Strategically partner this teacher with colleagues (in particular those in the Unaware Stage) to build leadership capacity |

The Continuum of Self-Reflection

| <h2 style="margin: 0;">Refinement Stage</h2> <p style="margin: 0; font-weight: normal;">Capacity-Building Goal: To encourage long-term growth and continued reflection through responsiveness to ongoing assessments</p> | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Teacher's Reflective Tendencies | Leadership Roles | Differentiated Coaching Strategies | Transformational Feedback (Challenging prompts) | Strategic PLC Support |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepts responsibility for the success of each student and for ongoing personal growth. • Reflects before, during, and after taking action • Modifies lessons and plans to meet students' varied needs • Dissects lessons and learning to reveal options for improvement • Pursues opportunities to work and learn with colleagues • Maintains a vast repertoire of instructional strategies • Recognizes that there are multiple "right" courses of action • Thinks globally, beyond the classroom • Focuses on the <i>art</i> of teaching | <p>Administrator: Challenger</p> <p>Instructional Coach: Collaborator</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze data and student work samples together • Analyze school-wide data together • Stimulate discussions of personal vision and educational philosophy • Serve as devil's advocate to challenge thinking • Record lesson and discuss video analysis • Facilitate idea-sharing through collegial observations • Encourage leadership of small group discussions around common problem of practice • Encourage book club facilitation or leadership • Arrange for student-teacher hosting opportunities • Encourage conference participation and publication submission • Interactive journaling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today your students did __ and you immediately responded with __. How did you plan to address that misconception? • In the middle of today's lesson, you abruptly changed course. What led to that decision? Was it a successful move? How do you know? • How do you know when students are learning in the middle of a lesson? What do you look for? • How do you identify specific learning styles of the students in your room? • Explain the thinking that went into planning a lesson like this. How do you know which strategies to select? How do you decide which activities to choose? • To what extent are you collaborating with your colleagues to plan and deliver your lessons? How can you become more intentional in partnering with your teammates? • Your lesson today reminded me of a recent article I read in <i>Educational Leadership</i>. I'll put a copy in your box – I would love to hear your thoughts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign and/or encourage formal leadership roles within the team or department structure • Encourage sharing and modeling of the thinking behind this teacher's decisions and actions in the classroom during team meetings • Encourage leadership of a team action-research project • Strategically partner this teacher with colleagues (in particular those in the Conscious Stage) to build their reflective capacity |

Continuum Teacher Profile

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."

1. In what stage on the Continuum of Self-Reflection do you believe Mrs C is currently operating?

2. What evidence do you have to support that hypothesis?

NOW WHAT?

Name: _____ Today's date: _____

Directions: You've just completed a fabulous, informative, and inspirational workshop. Armed with new information and practical strategies, WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR IMPLEMENTING THESE APPROACHES to increase your effectiveness in your professional responsibilities? For the overarching SMART goal, write at least two specific Action Steps that you WILL attempt.

My SMART Goal: By _____, _____

WHY did I set this goal? _____

HOW will I accomplish it?

Action Step #1: _____

Action Step #2: _____

Action Step #3: _____

WHO will support me (and in what manner)? _____

