It's the Teaching!!

Waiting for....Highly Effective Teachers

If you haven't seen the film, ***Waiting for Superman***, you may have at least heard the promotional trailer that features Geoffrey Canada, President of Harlem's Children Zone, as he says, with great gusto, that when you see a great teacher, you are seeing a "work of art!" Those of us who have aspired to this level of performance know well how difficult it is to teach another human being to read, write or think, and how deep the words, "I got it," penetrate our educator souls with joy. Most of us have been frustrated with policymakers or politicians who, even with the best of intentions, underestimate the complexity of the task of teaching. Yet, at the end of the day we know better than most that, "It's the Teaching!!" All the reforms that characterize education's pursuit of improved student achievement ultimately come back to the teaching. While other issues are surely significant, it really comes down to a rich repertoire of teaching skills in the tool box of caring educators who can connect with and challenge kids of all ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds.

As school leaders, we know too well students who are "curriculum casualities" because they fail to learn as a direct result of the poor instruction they receive. Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey from their latest, **Enhancing RTI, How to Ensure Success with Effective Classroom Instruction and Intervention**, cite research supporting the fact that, "*The majority of struggling students are performing at lower levels because of experiential or instructional inadequacies, not cognitive ones (Vellutino, Scanlon, Small & Fanuele, 2006)."* McREL's latest synthesis of mounds of research called **Changing the Odds For Student Success – What Matters Most** by Bryan Goodwin remind us of the devastating impact of poor teaching: the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher can translate into as much as one year's worth of additional learning per year. "The effects of bad teaching," he tells us, "tend to linger long after students have left their classrooms."

Maybe we don't conceive of ourselves as "works of art" or "poetry in motion", but no teacher sets out to be bad at the craft or harmful to children. So, assuming we all want to do good work and make our "good better and our better best," how do we support all teachers in becoming highly effective teachers? Maybe it would help if we could define what it means to be a highly effective teacher.

Back to **Changing the Odds** and the work of research University of Aukland Professor, John Hattie (author **Visible Learning – A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement**) who found: "it is teachers using particular teaching methods, teachers with high expectations for students, and teachers who have created positive teacher-student relationships that are more likely to have the above average effect on student achievement."

Godwin outlines five touchstones that comprise "what matters most" in increasing student achievement. The first touchstone, upon which the other four rest, is to "guarantee

challenging, engaging and intentional instruction." Godwin goes on to write that decades of research suggest three behaviors that distinguish highly effective teachers:

1) Highly effective teachers **challenge their students** – Good teachers not only have high expectations for all students, but they also challenge them, providing instruction that develops higher order thinking skills.

2) Highly effective teachers **create positive classroom environments** – One of the strongest correlates of effective teaching is the strength of relationships teachers develop with students.

3) Highly effective teachers are **intentional about their teaching** – Good teachers are clear about what they're trying to teach, then master a broad repertoire of teaching strategies to help students accomplish their learning goals. They not only know *what* to do to do to support student learning but *how*, *when* and *why* to do it.

So, what is a leader to do? You might have your teachers read the first touchstone section, about 9 pages, from *Changing the Odds* and hone in on the descriptors. Godwin poses three questions that an instructionally oriented principal might use to provoke deep reflection:
> 1) Do my stated expectations for students reflect a growth mindset for their learning?
> 2) Would my students characterize me as a warm demander, personal warmth with high expectations for student performance?
> 3) Am I clear with every lesson what I want students to learn and why I am using a particular instructional strategy?

Leading a Construction Project – Building Common Language

I remember a conversation I had with a highly experienced teacher in my early days as an administrator. I was proposing she and her English teacher colleagues develop a rubric against which to score student writing. Her response, "I don't need a rubric; I know an A when I see one!" Her response was a wonderful opening to a conversation on common language and shared understanding among teachers and students. That's really the purpose of a rubric. Fortunately, the use of rubrics to guide students in their writing and as a basis for evaluation is quite common today. Hurray! Still, however, we are less sure about a common language to identify effective instruction. Haven't you heard the phrase, "I know good teaching when I see it," slip from the lips of a confident teacher or dedicated administrator?

Developing a common language to describe the elements of effective instructional can provide a framework for a way to talk about instruction that is shared among teachers and administrators. Teachers united by a common language/model of instruction are better able to examine their teaching behaviors and become more intentional in crafting and delivering powerful learning experiences that engage students and increase achievement.

Robert Marzano has launched an online learning tool that advocates for the development of a common language/model of instruction. He writes that the elements essential to a common language/model of instruction must:

- Accurately reflect the complexity and sophistication of the teaching/learning process
- Identify the key strategies revealed by research for effective teaching
- Go beyond a narrow list of "high yield" strategies (he would include his own 9 from *Classroom Instruction that Works*)
- Identify which research-based strategies are appropriate for different types of lessons or lesson segments
- Include rubrics or scales with clearly defined continuums of implementation and evidence sufficient to impact student learning
- Allow for flexibility for districts to adapt and adopt the model to reflect local needs and priorities yet retain the common language.

Once a school or district has agreed upon a common language/model of instruction and can describe characteristics of expert performance through the use of that language, walk throughs can become a much more precise source of feedback, evaluations can become much more growth provoking and teachers can engage in more deliberate practice.

Marzano defines "deliberate practice" as a mindset that requires teachers to precisely attend to what they are doing in the classroom in order to identify what is working and what isn't, and determine why students are learning and not learning. Teachers can identify "thin slices" of teaching behaviors, derived from a common language of instruction, to focus on specific areas for improvement. Through the agreed upon and shared common language, feedback comes through various forms: self-assessment, peer, and supervisor.

Common Language/Model of Instruction – Where to Begin?

It is hard to gauge what knowledge teachers possess about instructional frameworks or research-based instruction design. Godwin reminds us that greater variability among teachers' practice exists within a single school site than across a district. One teacher's practice in teaching, say Algebra, can vary greatly from the teacher next door. One teacher may craft a learning objective and draw students into interacting with new knowledge through an anticipation guide, while another down the hall tells students to turn to a specific page in the text book and read the information on their own.

One place to begin the discussion may be in visiting or revisiting what years of research has told us about the effective elements of instructional design. There are many variations on the same theme by an array of authors and consultants that are probably familiar in some way to your teachers:

Madeline Hunter's 5-Step/7-Step	Explicit Direct Instruction	Gradual Release of Responsibility	Marzano's Lesson Segments
Hunter's *"basic white sauce of teaching"* that is a staple to any teaching (and culinary) masterpiece: 1) Anticipatory set; 2) Objective and Purpose 3) Input; 4) Modeling; 5) Checking Understanding 6) Guided Practice; 7) Independent Practice. *Note: *Hunter never intended that all elements would appear in every lesson or in a particular sequence.* **Some of our San Diego county districts work with Action Learning Systems and their *"Direct Interactive Instruction"* and WestEd and its *"Teach4Success."* Hunter's Phases of instruction are linked closely to these two frameworks for instruction.	•In ***Explicit Direct Instruction: The Power of the Well-Crafted, Well-Taught Lesson*** by John Hollingsworth and Silvia Ybarra (founders of DataWorks), draw upon the work of renowned researcher Jeanne Chall and the success of the teacher-centered approach, particularly with struggling learners. They do not argue for a *"stand and deliver,"* or *"sage on the stage"* approach, but a systematic design of information delivery and student engagement. The EDI lesson components, along with strong emphasis on checking for understanding, are: 1) learning objective; 2) activate prior knowledge; 3) concept development; 4) skills development; 5) lesson importance; 6) guided practice; 7) lesson closure; 8) independent practice.	Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey of San Diego State write about the *Gradual Release of Responsibility* as a framework for instruction that unites all their work. This model structures a shift of responsibility from the teacher to student through these phases: 1) a focused lesson or "I (teacher) do it," 2) Guided Instruction or "We do it," 3) Productive Group Work or "You do it together" 4) Independent Performance or "You do it alone."	Marzano has developed a framework based upon ***Fundamental Lesson Segments***: 1) Routine Segments - •Learning Goals •Feedback •Rules and Procedures; 2) Content Specific Segments – •Interacting with New Knowledge •Practice and Deepening Knowledge •Generating and Testing Hypothesis, 3) Segments Enacted on The Spot – •Student Engagement, •Adherence to Rules and Procedures •Teacher/Student Relationships •High Expectations **These are more fully discussed in ***The Art and Science of Teaching*** and at his website: http://www.iobservation.com/Marzano-Suite/Protocol/

Reviewing these and drawing upon what teachers already know and understand about effective lesson design and instructional practice can begin the conversation that will lead to "Our Common Language for Instructional Design."