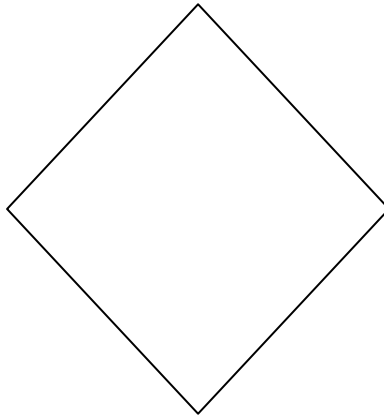


What Great Teachers Do *Differently*



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*Teaching Is
The Profession
That Makes
All Other
Professions
Possible*

What Great Teachers Do *Differently*

Why Look at Great? –

It's People Not Programs –

10 Days Out of 10 –

Don't Have To Repair – Always Do Repair -

High Expectations For Students?

Make Every Decision Based On Our Best People –

Revenge v. Prevention –

Have A Great Ability To Ignore –

Roll Of The Dice?

Great Teachers Make It Cool To Care –

Understand Who Is The Variable -

Accept Responsibility –

Understand They Are The Filter –

Focus On Behavior, Then Focus On Beliefs –

In Every Situation Ask Who Is Most Comfortable
and Who Is Least Comfortable -

What Is The Purpose?

**Will This
Actually Accomplish
The Purpose?**

**How Will
The Most Positive And
Productive People
Feel About This?**

**Raise
The
Praise**

**Minimize
The
Criticize**

Predicting the Future of Education

Todd Whitaker

Reprinted from Principal Leadership magazine, March 2005

Preview: Despite constant search for reform solutions, the future of school improvement depends on people, not programs. Schools must hire excellent teachers and strive to make all teachers as good as the best teacher in the school. Outstanding principals know that their primary role is to teach teachers how to provide a high-quality education for students.

Recently, I was asked to speak on the topic of futurism at an upcoming leadership conference. When I asked for some specifics about what they wanted me to do, I was told to talk about what is needed to be successful in education for upcoming generations. My first response was "I don't know anything about the future." Then, after hesitating only briefly, I added, "Well, on second thought, the only thing that I know for sure about the future I learned in elementary school many years ago. I learned that any day now we are going metric and we have to be prepared. Other than that, I do not know anything for sure about the future."

The fate of the metric system in the U.S., despite my teacher's promises in fourth grade, makes me hesitant to make predictions, but I did begin to reflect seriously about our ability to have schools that can develop students for the 21st century and I think having good teachers is the key.

Teaching Skills for the 21st Century

We do not need all of our teachers to reach some mystical level. We just need all of our teachers to be like

our best teachers. In my mind, that is what we need to have a great school. What do you think? Would it improve your school if all of your teachers were as good as your very best staff members? If so, how can we do it?

So when are we going metric?

It's People, Not Programs

When I speak to teachers and principals, I often ask whether anyone has ever been in a poor-lecturer's class room. Routinely, every hand in the audience is raised. Then I ask the group, "Which of those three words is the problem: poor, lecturer's, or classroom?" And to help out, I always eliminate door number three: classroom. So basically, I ask what the real problem with a poor-lecturer's classroom is, and the answer is consistently a resounding "lecture"! Although the overwhelming response is lecture, it is also overwhelmingly wrong. The answer is poor! Have you ever been in a goodlecturer's classroom? Of course, we all have. That should tell us that the answer is not lecture. Yet, we all repeat the chant that lecture

is bad basically because someone told us that it is. Realistically, every teacher in a school uses lecture some of the time. It is just that some of them are effective with it and others are not. However, instead of understanding and acknowledging those differences in effectiveness, we tend to latch onto the issue being the instructional practice rather than the person.

The issue with ineffective teachers is almost always the person, not the practice or program. I was working with a principal recently who was struggling with one of his least effective teachers. He was concerned about the teacher's professional appearance. I acknowledged that professional appearance is something that was quite important to me, but that it seldom was the cause of a person's effectiveness or lack thereof. I asked the principal, "If this teacher started dressing better, would that change the dynamic in the classroom?" The principal reflected for a moment and then answered sadly, "No. If he wore a tuxedo to class every day, he still would not be able to engage the students." Exactly. There is no reason to focus on something that is

a peripheral issue when the heart of the issue is the ineffectiveness of a staff member.

Another principal shared a concern about a teacher who arrived late to school on a regular basis. When I asked him what the problem was, he responded that the teacher was arriving late to school.

So, I asked more specifically: Is the problem that other teachers are upset? Is the problem that promptness is important to you? Is the problem that a parent complained? What is the real problem? The principal then answered, "The problem is that students are left unsupervised." I said, "That is the problem! If you get her to school on time but she lingers too long in the teachers lounge, you have addressed a problem, but not the problem."

Many times we think that programs are the problem or that programs are the solution. That is one reason we are so quick to jump on new ideas – open classrooms, whole language, block scheduling, etc. None of these ideas are wrong, and none of them are right. It all depends on the effectiveness of the staff members who are implementing them. The only reason to implement a program is to refine or enhance the skills of our staff members. The program itself is never the solution or the problem.

Two Ways to Improve Our Schools

Although we look at myriad changes, there are only two

ways to improve our schools. Hire better teachers or improve the ones we have.

These are the only two things we can do. There have never been other solutions, nor will there ever be. Effective principals are quite aware of these being the key elements to school improvement, and we cannot choose one or the other. To be a great school we have to do both.

We need all of our teachers to be like our best teachers.

There is no question that the most important people in the school are the students. Obviously, they are the focus of everything that takes place in a school. However, one thing that truly outstanding principals are aware of is that their primary role is to teach the teachers. As a principal, the best way to have an exceptional learning environment for students is to have outstanding teachers working with them in the classroom. It is not the students who are the primary focus of outstanding principals. It is the teachers.

An opening in his or her teaching staff is the single most precious commodity a principal can ever have, and the quickest way to improve your school is to hire great teachers every time you get an opening. Just as the only way to improve your average grade in a class is to have your grade on your next assignment be better than your average grade, the most significant way to have rapid improvement in a

school is to add teachers who are better than the ones that left. Although all principals have occasion to employ new staff members, the kind of staff members that great principals hire and the way and diligence by which they do it are what make our most effective peers different in the employer arena.

By nurturing the talents of newcomers and increasing the skills of veteran staff members, a principal has the recipe to continually make their school better. Without having a clear focus on these elements, other areas of attempted improvement will continue to be limited in their effectiveness.

What Is The Future?

Now that we have put aside our meter sticks because the revolution may not be quite so near after all, what do we do? The first thing we must do is realize the power we have to affect our schools by improving our teachers. Within every school's walls, there are role models who can help everyone be more effective. Rather than feel the need to reinvent the wheel, let's work on refining the ones we have. If the goal is to help all teachers be as good as our best teachers, a logical place to start is by giving everyone a chance to observe and learn from quality. Use the positive role models you have to help others maximize their talents. Many people have never seen great teaching, and they may not even know what it looks like or that it even exists. There is little chance to reach a new level if you cannot visualize what it

would look like if you got there.

One of the great joys of being a principal is observing your best teachers. Expand the wealth throughout your school by having everyone participate. You will raise the level of respect that other staff members have for your very best teachers.

If teachers do not have a chance to regularly observe in the classrooms of peers, they may not have any idea

how good your best teacher is or how poor your worst might be. There is no chance that two ineffective teachers can help a new staff member be effective. If they knew how, they would be effective themselves. However, when we do have an opportunity to infuse new talent into our schools by adding a new teacher, one of the best things we can do is give them a chance to regularly interact with and observe our current top staff members. A wise man once told me, "You

have to put your mules in horse races so at least they can see how fast four legged creatures can run." I guess this is true whether or not they are running kilometers.
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