

## Teaching is a Skill

*The information here came from a PD session at an Administrators' meeting ... I think it's useful for all teachers to read.*

Teaching is a skill.

Everyone can learn to do it better ... even if you're already good at it.

Most teachers can improve a lot more than they think they can. The focus of principals and other administrators should be to help them to do that.

Some thoughts for teachers:

- Do the students in your class know, at any given moment, what you are trying to teach? Do they know what the objective of the lesson is? If someone were to walk into your classroom and ask a student what the lesson is all about, would they know?

The answer should always be 'yes'.

- The richer the two-way feedback between the teacher and the students, the better kids do. Teachers should always be talking to students about how they're doing. Students should always be talking to the teacher about what they don't understand.

- To increase communication, teachers should try this. At the end of every class, ask students to write on a sheet of paper one thing they learned in the class, and one thing they're still confused about. Reading what they've written will give you a really good feel for how things are going, and what you need to do next. Add this to your list of formative evaluation methods!

- Teachers need to take risks, to try something new, without being afraid of failure.

*"If you keep doing things the way you've always been doing them, you'll keep getting the results you've always been getting". (One definition of insanity is continuing to do the same things over and over again the same way, expecting to get different results).*

- Knowledge about how to teach well is not enough ... unless you actually apply it. Similarly, professional development for you is not enough; teachers tend to teach the same way that all the other teachers in the school teach; new ideas need to be embraced by everyone.

- What are the routines and norms that affect the way people do things in your school? A normal part of any school *should be* teachers working together, observing each others' practice, and making suggestions to help each other. It's about *building a team*, using data and evidence to see where improvement is needed ... and having high expectations. Schools that work best have teachers who *work collectively* to improve their teaching practice. Teachers learn to do this in college, where they discover that they *have* to work with others and accept help, to be successful. No-one can do it alone.

- Improving teacher practice also requires external input. People who are knowledgeable about the teaching practice can help teachers to get better, by giving them suggestions about new things to try. That was true in college, and it's still true when you have your own classroom.

- A culture of improvement in a school is professional. It doesn't come from the principal; it has to come from the teachers themselves. Teachers have to feel that they have standards to live up to, and they have to do this for themselves. That's why teachers are professionals. Teachers (and principals) need to be relentlessly positive ... focusing on the positive, working on strengths and weaknesses to help everyone to improve.

A 'Culture of Improvement' in a school looks like this.

- Professional
- Positive
- Collegial
- Outcome focused
- Evidence based

There is pressure to improve, but there is also support for doing so. There is an acceptance that other voices need to be heard, including parents and students.