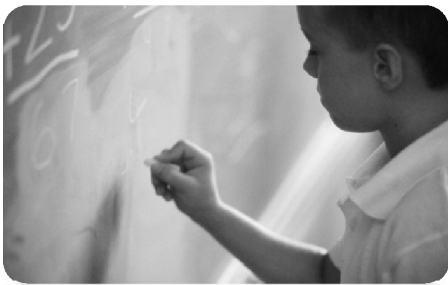


From Teacher Proofing to Teacher Effectiveness

EdgeNotes™



Fidelity to program...scripted lessons...benchmark testing...pacing guides for lessons..all of these efforts have resulted in an attempt to “teacher proof” the classroom by ensuring consistent actions in what is taught and how it is taught as prescribed by the program du jour. While accountability to standards is critical for increased achievement, what has been forgotten is a systematic plan to help teachers understand the rigor required by the teachers choose the appropriate resources that will enable students to attain mastery of the standards.

Relying upon “scripted” instructional programs assumes the role of teacher to be like that of a stage actor reciting lines to a captive audience. However, as any classroom teacher will attest, an instructional script cannot possibly indicate precisely how to respond to each of the over 3,000 discrete decisions that research suggests teachers face each day (second only to air traffic controllers). This problem is further exacerbated by the externalization of assessment in the form of benchmark testing that is completely disconnected from classroom-based assessments. Unfortunately, benchmark testing is too infrequent to be used as an assessment for learning. At the same time, it is classroom-based assessments that teachers use to make their instructional decisions, so it is important to develop teacher capacity to create quality assignments.

If scripted instructional programs and benchmark testing are not the answer to developing high quality teaching, what exactly would equip teachers to successfully meet the demands of standards-based accountability?

Research and experience suggest that highly effective teachers possess a specialized body of knowledge and skills in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Research identifies the following three types of teacher knowledge as being especially important.

Subject Matter Competency. The old adage, “you can’t teach what you don’t know” is more applicable than ever in today’s standards-based environment. The ability to understand critical skills, concepts, and academic vocabulary needed to master the standards; to effectively present new ideas and information that builds upon students’ prior knowledge; and to identify common misconceptions that inform good lesson design are all predicated upon deep academic content knowledge.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge. Highly effective teachers have a deep understanding of not only the latest developments in cognitive science (i.e. how students make sense of new information), but which instructional strategies work best to teach specific skills and concepts to students as they master the content. Knowing how to make learning culturally relevant and to scaffold learning using multiple strategies to enable students with varying levels of background knowledge and skills to access the core lesson are also critical in helping all students master rigorous standards.

Assessment Proficiency. The third key area of teacher knowledge involves an understanding of the purpose and application of assessment practice. Highly effective teachers understand that assessment is about more than

merely reporting on student grades or test scores. Rather, assessment in a standards-based context is about analyzing a variety of performance data to pinpoint student misconceptions or skill deficiencies for the purpose of adjusting instruction. Among other things this entails developing rigorous classroom assignments and questioning strategies that facilitate learning while providing authentic sources of data about student performance. If developed well, classroom-based assessment can complement benchmark testing and serve as a means for confirming student achievement rather than the only valued measure of student progress.

The bottom line is that to succeed in today's standards-based environment, teachers must have informed professional judgment that stems from a disciplined approach to developing these three areas of knowledge. In the end, if we develop these three areas, then what we can expect are teachers who are:

- critical consumers of their basal programs and textbooks;
- skilled practitioners of the strategies required to take students from an initial introduction of content to mastery of the concepts and skills in practice; and
- competent analysts who draw conclusions about specific misconceptions that students may be experiencing at any point in time.

While the desire to achieve consistency and establish accountability is an important goal, teacher proofing the classroom does not equate to achieving better results. By focusing on teacher effectiveness, districts have a much better chance of having all students succeed.

EdgeNotes is a free monthly e-mail publication dedicated to providing commentary on making research actionable to improve instruction.

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