

# *The Skilled Teacher and The Classroom Equity No One is Talking About*

A Call to Action for The American Education System

By: Bradley Williams



Education is simple. After all, it is merely the process of which approximately thirty humans with varying linguistic, academic and socio-emotional needs work communally to navigate the independent task of communicating, comprehending and storing invisible information that must travel efficiently from one brain to another across an inflexible timeline. What could possibly go wrong?

Who are we kidding. Education is complex, difficult and frustrating. As a human process, there are hundreds of identifiable variables that directly impact each student's ability to learn during any given lesson. We can point to linguistic factors such as primary language, expressive confidence or comprehensive sentence length. We could look at academic factors such as current reading level, prior knowledge or recent assessment performance. We could even consider socio-economic variables such as the number of parents in the home, whether or not a student had breakfast or any number of other ethnically immutable factors. All of these present unique challenges that must be overcome to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity for success. However, during a lesson, as a teacher is navigating their instructional framework, many students find themselves working at a level that they cannot independently and need support in order to be successful. At this moment, very few of these variables can actually be controlled by the teacher.

In fact, in a classroom, the teacher has absolutely no control of so many things. They can't even control their students' attentiveness, level of understanding or overt behavior. They can however, control what they do in response to all of these variables. It is true that the only variable a teacher can truly control is their own actions. They can control their tone of voice, the examples they use, the questions they ask or where they physically place themselves during instruction. Some teachers control these actions as deftly as a master surgeon controls her scalpel, surgically making only the minimum number of incisions needed to respond to unforeseen clots or excessive bleeding. Other teachers, though well intentioned, are less skilled in their teaching, like a lumberjack, hacking away at a tree with a hatchet, not realizing how much more effective they could be with the chainsaw sitting within arms reach.

Equity is the current hot topic in education. Building administrators, coaches and teachers have lengthy discussion about interventions that can be put in place to help mitigate the effects of the above listed student variables in an attempt to help

every student find success. These conversations are not only righteous but necessary. On the other hand, there is a different aspect of equity that is only spoken about behind closed doors. It is a conversation between parents on the internet and in the neighborhoods around every school. It is a conversation between administrators and coaches when looking at classroom data trends. It is the conversation about the variance of skill between classroom teachers.

To be blunt, classroom placement is an immutable factor that is outside of the control of the child. Classroom placement also consistently predicts the average level of success or failure of any given group of students. In fact, all of the conversations, planning and implementation of other equity initiatives, whether it is culturally responsive lesson planning, minority representation in text selection or selected elicitation of student responses are solely dependent of the skill level of each teacher to ensure the implemented effectiveness and overall outcome.

Regardless of the initiative - academic or socio-emotional - certain teachers will have had an historical precedent of success and will likely continue to succeed while simultaneously, other teachers only a door away will have shown a precedent of lesser success and will likely continue with such a pattern. That is unless schools make the improvement of teacher skills and the providing of real-time support for change a top priority. The job of a teacher is incredibly difficult. Those who have chosen this profession far and wide possess a level of passion and desire to succeed that is beyond respectable. Change is hard. It isn't fair to expect teachers to improve their skills on their own and it is even less fair to expect them to want to change. After all, no one wants to change. Many would easily agree that the system of education in our country is broken. But, schools cannot be changed. They are inanimate. It

is only the people within a school that can change and thereby achieve greater results.

Improving teacher skills is the ultimate equity project. It ensures that every child regardless of classroom placement has an equal opportunity for success to every other student across the county. It is time to implement effective coaching practices that improve teacher skills as quickly as possible because every single day is a day that each child cannot get back.



If we believe that teachers attempt to do their best every day, then it is illogical to ask them to just

try harder to improve without the specific help of a coach. Though we value the expertise and professionalism of all teachers, we value far more the consistent improvement in teaching that leads to greater student achievement. Would you as a site administrator or coach tell your teachers that they need to work in real-time today with a coach that will help them try new, more sophisticated teacher skills if it meant that we could achieve greater and more consistent student success?

The time is now!

This is the first of a four-part series on specific teacher skills that coaches can target, demonstrate, co-teach and coach to improve student outcomes and enhance the equity of opportunity for all students. Check back next Tuesday as we specifically talk about how coaches can immediately improve the strategic elicitation of student language production in every classroom.