

Teachers as talent scouts*By Jon Schwartz on March 11th, 2014*

Every student has a talent that we can uncover if we keep our eyes and mind open. If we teachers were able to harness a fraction of the talents our students possess, we'd find enough creative energy to power our classroom for the entire school year. I learned this the hard way. I spent my first 10 years thinking that my job was to fill my students with information, and I measured kids' talents by how well they were able to sit quietly, follow instructions, and regurgitate the information back to me in a manner and time of my choosing.

My students aced the tests and everything went smoothly, but inside, the repetition was stifling me. Things changed when a new principal arrived. She observed my class and challenged me to change my teaching style. She brought up some mumbo-jumbo about multiple teaching modalities, student engagement, collaborative learning centers and catering my instruction to the interests and needs of my students. Huh?

I was flabbergasted. I'd spent 10 years crafting a finely tuned information delivery system, and my students' scores were consistently among the school's highest. I felt like she was telling me to give the reigns of the class over to a bunch of info-starved kids who needed to be spoon fed. To boot, this was her first year as principal; I'd been teaching for a decade. How dare she suggest I change!

Partly in an effort to prove her wrong, I opened up the floodgates. I set up student-run learning centers. They failed at first, until I realized I needed to first teach the material to the whole class with direct and explicit instruction, and model for the students how to facilitate the centers. And I needed to differentiate the instruction. When I relinquished a measure of control and started listening to my students teach, question and explain their understanding of the material in smaller peer groups, I realized I'd been missing out on the greatest resource we had: the kids themselves!

All these years, I'd been dominating the conversation. It was if I was being introduced to these students for the first time. The authentic peer-to-peer conversations I witnessed in student groups allowed me to pick on up on a host of academic and personal skills I never knew the kids had. The children's level of engagement soared. Their discussions were often rich and meaningful, and they yielded data that no test had been able to find or measure.

I wanted every student to get a chance to run a center, but not every child was ready to deal with the math, spelling or reading involved. One student kept volunteering, but she didn't know enough to help other students with the material. I wanted everyone to have the experience of leading a group, and of course I felt badly they couldn't — or could they?

Looking in her notebook, I noticed this student was a prolific and capable artist beyond her years. The state science standards required students to understand the sequential life stages for butterflies, and the art standards required that "students apply artistic processes and skills, using a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art."

She may not have been the best reader, but her renditions of a chrysalis were stunning, and when I teamed her up with a shy but high academic-functioning student to run the "Read About the Chrysalis and Draw It!" center, the rest of the class buzzed with excitement, and two completely new students emerged that day. The class doodler transformed into a fantastic peer art coach, and the shy bookworm morphed into a reading tutor par excellence.

Since then, I've enjoyed locating and utilizing the unique gifts of my students. They all have something to offer, and given the right amount of support and guidance, they're eager to share and develop their talents. I still use direct and explicit instruction, but I also let go of the reigns and let my students digest and share the material in a way that makes use of the class's greatest resource: themselves.

Reflect and take time to record your individual thinking.

How does this relate to your experience with the implementation of REACH?

What similar "Aha!" moments have you experienced?

REACH 2014-2015 Pre-Test

1. How do I get my 2013-14 REACH Evaluation Summary Report?
2. How many Formal and Informal observations do I need to have in 2014-15?
3. How much time should elapse between my REACH observations?
4. Do I administer Performance Tasks this year? To whom?
5. What is Roster Verification and do I have to do it?

2014-2015 REACH Worksheet

My REACH evaluation will consist of ____% Professional Practice, ____% Performance Tasks and ____% value-added.

Educator Categories with 2014-15 REACH Evaluation Multiple Measure Percentage Weights

Educators	Professional Practice	Student Growth	
		Performance Tasks	Value-Added
Category A. Grades 3-8 English, Reading, and Math educators	70%	10%	20% individual
Category B. Grades K-2 educators	70%	30%	0% individual
Category C. Grades 3-8 Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, P.E., Technology educators	70%	20%	10% school wide
Category F. Counselors, Related Service Providers, Educational Support Specialists	100%		
PreK educators are yet to be determined			

Professional Practice

Check the box to the left of the Framework that will be used for your evaluation this year.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Framework for Teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	Framework for School Counselors	<input type="checkbox"/>	Framework for Educational Support Specialists
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Evaluation Plan:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Annual (PAT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Annual (Tenured)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Biennial (Tenured)
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Evaluation Cycle:

I will have ____ **Formal Observations** and ____ **Informal Observations** during 2014-2015. There will be ____ **month(s)** between.

Formal Observation Steps

Pre-Observation Conference	Formal Observation	Post-Observation Conference
48 hours (school days) notice to educator is Best Practice	Occurs within 5 school days of the pre-observation conference	Occurs within 10 School days of the observation
Collaborative conversation around planning and preparation	Evaluator observes for length of the lesson, 45 minutes, or a class period. Evaluator captures evidence from the Classroom	Collaborative conversation around, but not limited to, evidence, preliminary ratings, feedback and next steps for improving Professional Practice
Focus on Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation)	Focus on Domain 2 (Classroom Environment) and Domain 3 (Instruction)	Focus on Domains 2 and 3 as well as Component 4a; Conversation around 4b-4e is Best Practice
Guided by the Pre-Observation Protocol and discipline specific CPS Framework	Observed lesson must be from the unit discussed in the pre-observation conference	Guided by the Post-Observation Protocol, discipline specific CPS Framework, and evidence from the observation
Educators have the option of submitting responses for the Pre-Observation Protocol and supporting artifacts within Reflect and Learn (RLS)	Evaluator sharing evidence in RLS in sufficient time for educator to review prior to the Post-Observation Conference is Best Practice	Educators have option of submitting responses for the Post-Observation Protocol and supporting artifacts within RLS; Evaluator sharing final ratings in RLS within 5 days of Post-Observation Conference is Best Practice

Evaluation of Workshop		
What Worked	What Needs Work	Questions/Comments/Concerns