



THE OPPORTUNITY:
FROM “BRUTAL FACTS”
TO THE BEST SCHOOLS WE’VE EVER HAD

Dr. Mike Schmoker
October 21, 2009

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Dr. Mike Schmoker

October 21, 2009

7:30 - 8:30	Registration/Coffee Time
8:30 - 8:35	Introductions and Opening Remarks
8:35 - 9:45	THE OPPORTUNITY: From “Brutal Facts” to the Best Schools We’ve Ever Had
9:45 - 10:00	Break
10:00 - 11:30	RESULTS: the Essential Elements of Improvement
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch
12:30 - 1:45	Group Activities
1:45 - 2:00	Break
2:00 - 3:30	Group Activities continued Closing Remarks

Dr. Mike Schmoker

has worked on school and district improvement, assessment, curriculum and staff development as a central office administrator in two school districts in Arizona, as a senior consultant at McREL (Mid-Continent Regional Educational (Laboratory) in Denver, Colorado and now as an independent speaker and consultant. He is a former middle and high school English teacher and football coach.

He has written four books and numerous articles, which have appeared in *Educational Leadership*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Education Week* and *TIME magazine*.

He has just published another book: *RESULTS NOW: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*

As well as his other books: *The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies from Dramatically-Improved Schools* (ASCD August 2001). His previous book, *Results: the key to Continuous School Improvement* is an ASCD bestseller.

He is the subject of 2 video series by ASCD and the *Video Journal of Education*.

In the last five years, he has trained and consulted in hundreds of schools and districts throughout the United States and Canada.

He was a featured speaker at the Harvard Principal's Institute.

He now lives in Flagstaff, Arizona with his wife and two daughters.



THE OPPORTUNITY:
From “Brutal Facts” to the Best
Schools We’ve Ever Had

Dr. Mike Schmoker
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INTRODUCTION: DO WE *TRULY*
WANT BETTER SCHOOLS?

Because organizations only improve...

“where the **truth** is told and the
brutal facts confronted”

Jim Collins

BRUTAL FACTS:

Only 7% of low-income
students will ever earn a
college degree

BRUTAL FACTS:

Only 32% of our *college-bound* students are adequately prepared for college

“Understanding University Success”
Center for Educational Policy Research

COLLEGE SUCCESS:
ANALYTICAL READING & DISCUSSION
PERSUASIVE WRITING

- Drawing inferences/conclusions from texts
- Analyzing conflicting source documents
- Supporting arguments with evidence
- Solving complex problems with no obvious answer

David Conley
College Knowledge

**COLLEGE and LIFE SUCCESS
DEPEND ON...**

- “The TEACHER EFFECT makes all other differences pale in comparison”
William Sanders
- Five years of effective teaching can completely close the gap between low-income students and others.

Marzano; Kain & Hanushek

IMPACT of TEACHING

- Pittsburgh Schools: 69% range of difference
- Mortimore & Sammons: teaching has 6 to 10 times as much impact as other factors
- Dylan Wiliam: 400% “speed of learning” differences

REALITY CHECK

- “Effective practices never take root in more than a small proportion of classrooms and schools”
Tyack and Cuban
- “Effective teaching is quite different from the teaching that is typically found in most classrooms”
Odden and Kelley

THE REAL OPPORTUNITY...

- “Most of us in education are mediocre at what we do”
Tony Wagner
Harvard Graduate School of Education
- EVERY STUDY of classroom practice reveals that most teaching is mediocre--or worse
Goodlad; Sizer; Resnick; Powell, Farrar & Cohen; Learning 24/7 Classroom Study

BRUTAL FACTS

- After decades of reform, we still DO NOT INSPECT instruction, i.e.:

1. **WHAT** we teach (essential standards)
or
2. **HOW** we teach
(effective lessons/units)

Gordon; Elmore; Marzano; Tyack &
Hess; Berliner

Cuban;

The case of SEAN CONNORS

EFFECTIVE LESSON: WHAT & HOW

- Clarity @ essential standard being learned that day (“introductory paragraphs”; “infer character”)
- “Scaffolded” (step-by-step) instruction
 - Modeling → “guided practice”
 - **“Check for understanding”/formative assessment**
between each step or “chunk”
 - **Models/exemplars:** students studied these in pairs
- Engagement & attentiveness—students monitored/called on randomly
- Students write own intro. paragraph...
only when most/all students are ready

Hunter; Popham; Fisher and Fry; Marzano; Burns

WHY IS MOST TEACHING MEDIocre?

- “The administrative superstructure of schools ...exists to ‘buffer’ teaching from

OUTSIDE INSPECTION”

Richard Elmore

**YOU CAN’T EXPECT WHAT YOU DON’T
INSPECT**

Peter Senge

PRIMARY TASK: Improve
WHAT and HOW we teach

- I. REPLACE "IMPROVEMENT PLANNING" WITH TEAM-BASED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE
WHAT IS TAUGHT and HOW WELL
- II. "GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM"
("WHAT")
- III. SIMPLIFY "LEADERSHIP"
- IV. RADICALLY REDEFINE
LITERACY INSTRUCTION

**I. FIRST: TYPICAL "STRATEGIC" or
"IMPROVEMENT PLANNING" MODELS...**

- superficial; time-consuming
- counterproductive, distracting
actions that PREVENT

rapid, team-based cycles of instruction →
assessment → improvement of instruction

**I. LEARNING COMMUNITIES: AN
ASTONISHING CONCURRENCE**

"The most promising strategy for
sustained, substantive school
improvement is building the capacity of
school personnel to function as a
professional learning
community."

Milbrey McLaughlin (cited in *Professional Learning
Communities at Work* by Dufour and Eaker)

I. LEARNING COMMUNITIES: AN ASTONISHING CONCURRENCE

“Professionals do not work alone; they work in teams... to accomplish the goal—to heal the patient, win the lawsuit, plan the building.”

Arthur Wise: *Teaching Teams: a 21st – Century Paradigm For Organizing America’s Schools*

I. FIRST: ADOPT “SIMPLE PLANS” to create PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

- 1. DATA - driven (academic!) priorities
- 2. GOALS: that are measurable/tied to an assessment
- 3. TEAMWORK that produces *short-term* assessment results

...Anchored by a
GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

DATA: “S.M.A.R.T.” GOALS

- 1. SET measurable, annual goals for:
Math; Art; Writing; P.E.—tied to an ASSESSMENT

GOAL: Our team will improve in
(Physics; Math; Writing; French;)

from: 62% (2009)
to: 66% (2010)

- Peter Senge: “More than ? goals is the same as none at all.”

DATA DRIVEN PRIORITIES

2. IDENTIFY lowest - scoring standards—from ASSESSMENTS

- MATH: “measurement; operations with negative and positive integers”
- WRITING: “voice”; “word choice”
- P.E. “volleyball unit; personal health plan”

3. USE formative assessment data (results from lessons, units, etc)

Stiggins; William & Black

AUTHENTIC TEAM-BASED PLCs:

plan lesson/unit → teach it →
assess its impact → adjust
instruction

- **Amphi High:** Thesis statement/introduction
- **Adlai Stevenson:** Physics: how a rainbow works
- **Lake Havasu High School:** Operations with negative & positive integers

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: FACTS

- The “PLC” concept (by whatever name) is indisputably the STATE OF THE ART for ensuring that WHAT and HOW are of a high quality, but alas...

authentic, team-based PLC’s are EXCEEDINGLY RARE.

II. "GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM"

How important is this?

The NUMBER ONE FACTOR

for increasing levels of learning

Marzano; Porter; Lezotte

II. GUARANTEED...?

- Do America's schools now ensure that a "guaranteed & viable curriculum" *actually gets taught?*

II. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM? BRUTAL FACTS:

- ROSENHOLTZ: teachers provide a "self-selected jumble" of standards
- BERLINER/WALBERG: wild variation from teacher to teacher; no alignment with agreed-upon, viable curriculum standards or assessments
- LITTLE; SIZER; ALLINGTON; CALKINS: "curricular chaos" in English & language arts

II. GUARANTEED CURRICULUM: MAP the STANDARDS*

1st quarter: NUMBER SENSE

DATA ANALYSIS & PROBABILITY

2ND quarter: PATTERNS, ALGEBRA & FUNCTIONS

GEOMETRY

3rd quarter: MEASUREMENT & DISCRETE MATH

MATHEMATICAL STRUCTURE/LOGIC

4th quarter: **REVIEW: for YEAR END ASSESSMENT**

**END OF EACH QUARTER: common assessment...with ample
intellectually rich, college-prep component**

III. LEADERSHIP in the Professional Learning Community

- “No institution can survive if it needs **geniuses**
or supermen to manage it. It must be
organized to get along under a leadership of
average human beings.”

Peter Drucker

THE LEADERSHIP ILLUSION

The actions of administrators, including all
forms of improvement planning & staff
development, have virtually no impact on
the quality of teaching in the school.

Richard Elmore 2000

*This is not a matter of work ethic;
it is a matter of misplaced priorities.*

MONITORING 1. INSTRUCTION and
2. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

- LEADERS (administrators, dept. heads) must
 1. Conduct at least one unannounced classroom walk-through each month, looking for schoolwide patterns of strength/weakness with regard to...
 - Clear focus on essential standards
 - College prep: critical reasoning/higher-order reading, writing, thinking
 - Essential elements of an effective lesson

September: "4 of 15 classes teaching essential standards"
October: "__ of 15 classes..." (SMART goal)

MONITORING 1. INSTRUCTION and
2. GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM

**"If you can not
measure it, you
cannot improve it."**

British scientist Lord Kelvin

**LEADERSHIP: Team Management for
"GUARANTEED & VIABLE CURRICULUM"**

(D. Reeves; R. Marzano; R. DuFour)

QUARTERLY CURRICULUM REVIEW:
Leaders & Teams discuss...

- quarterly assessments (success rate; areas of strength/weakness)
- grade books (lowest-scoring assessments)
- scored work samples (weak/strong areas)

IS THIS A FAIR, REASONABLE REQUIREMENT?

PURPOSE OF MEETINGS: to strategize for/celebrate "SMALL WINS"

- ___ schools with a "steering committee"
- ___ presentations to faculty/depts: case for WHAT & HOW
- ___ teams that have/are using meeting norms/protocols
- ___ # of courses for which there are 1.) quarterly "standards maps" full of intellectually-rich, college prep content and common end-of-quarter assessments (which assess intellectually-rich college-prep content 2.)
- ___ of our 25 course-alike teams have created a **SUCCESSFUL LESSON*** (e.g. 87% succeeded)
- MARCH: 6 of 15 classrooms—essential standard being taught
- APRIL: 13 of 15 classrooms—essential standard taught!

RECOGNIZE & CELEBRATE
measurable "SMALL WINS" to overcome resistance & **promote MOMENTUM**

The **#1 LEVER FOR IMPROVING MORALE AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE**
Nelson; Blasé and Kirby

- The single best, low cost, high-leverage **way to improve performance, morale, and the climate for change is to dramatically increase the levels of meaningful recognition for educators**

Robert Evans

RESULTS of Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum; Effective Teamwork; Frequent Recognition & Celebration

ADLAI STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL

- 10+ years of record-breaking gains on every national, state & **end-of-course** assessment
- 800% increase in AP success
- Average ACT score: 21 to 25*

IV. UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY: LITERACY INSTRUCTION

“Under-developed literacy skills are the number one reason why students are retained, assigned to special education, given long-term remedial services and why they fail to graduate from high school.”

Ferrandino and Tirozzi: presidents of
NAESP and NASSP

BRUTAL FACTS; GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY*

- “Reading and Writing vs. ‘stuff’ ratio”
- Lucy Calkins: 1/15 reading to “stuff” ratio
- “Literature based Arts and Crafts”:
 - dioramas; game boards; **worksheets; posters; presentations;** coats-of-arms; mobiles; movies; cutting, pasting; designing book jackets; skits; collages

The CRAYOLA CURRICULUM

“I can only summarize the findings by saying that we’ve been stunned...”

kids are given more coloring assignments than mathematics and writing assignments...

I want to repeat that, because I’m not joking, nor am I exaggerating.”

Katie Haycock

HIGH SCHOOL English

- 9th grade: *To Kill A Mockingbird* (100 points total)
 - Draw “head or full body shot” of any character—use “crayons, colored pencils” (20 points)
 - Create a model of Maycomb (wood, plastic or styrefoam) (20 points)

HIGH SCHOOL English

“Honors” Sophomore English:

- **Two schools—collage as 6-week assessment of literary unit**
- ***Frankenstein* assessment: make a mobile or collage**
- *Siddhartha* Assessment
 - 8-pages of worksheets (96 questions; 5 days)
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of space to answer each question
 - NO DISCUSSION OR WRITING

HIGH SCHOOL English

- AP Literature: “Memories” Scrapbook (200 points)
 - **Second-semester project**
 - **For each page of text [no criteria for quality of written work] draw illustration (using various media)**

A BETTER WAY: READ, WRITE
and TALK

- After close reading of innumerable books and articles, students
“wrote and talked,
wrote and talked”
their way toward understanding.

Mike Rose: *Lives on the Boundary*

K-12/COLLEGE SUCCESS:
ANALYTICAL READING & DISCUSSION
PERSUASIVE WRITING

- Draw inferences and conclusions
- Analyze conflicting source documents
- Solve complex problems with no obvious answer
- (Prepare students to) Write multiple 3-5-page papers supporting arguments with evidence
- Read far more books, articles & essays than they now read in high school [in class!]

College Knowledge by David Conley

WRITING: IMPORTANT?

- Writing is the **litmus paper of thought** ...the very CENTER OF SCHOOLING

Ted Sizer

*Writing aids in cognitive development to such an extent that the **upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy could not be reached** without the use of some form of writing .*

Kurt and Farris 1990

BRUTAL FACTS

- Writing is rarely assigned, even more rarely *taught*.
William Zinsser; National Commission on Writing
- Even U.S. student's "best writing is mediocre."
NAEP report on "best" US high school writing
- Students "with 3.8 GPAs," in highly selective colleges, write poorly.
NAEP writing Study

BRUTAL FACTS

"If we could institute only one change to make students more college ready, it should be to increase the amount and quality of writing students are expected to produce."

David Conley
author of *College Knowledge*

K-12/COLLEGE SUCCESS:

ANALYTICAL READING & PERSUASIVE WRITING

SIMPLE STEPS → MAJOR REVOLUTION

- "Who would make a better friend—
Spider or Turtle?"
- "Old Dan or Little Anne: which admire most?"
- "What do you think are the most important lessons of WWI?"
- Evaluate for most/least effective, significant; interesting--presidents; explorers; scientists etc.

SIMPLE STEPS → MAJOR
REVOLUTION: EACH QUARTER

DEVELOP ARGUMENTS/PROPOSALS:

- **SCIENCE:**
 - PRO/CON: Drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
 - Environmental sustainability
- **HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES:**
 - Illegal Immigration; Middle East issue(s)
 - Evaluation of two presidents
 - Case for liberal/conservative policy/politics

THE OPPORTUNITY

- “We don’t know the half of what these kids can do”

Ted Sizer

- “We now have 100/100/100 schools – every kid poor and minority, and every one of them meeting standards – including 100% of special education kids (the typical average is about 15%)” Doug Reeves/e-mail

FOR SWIFT, DRAMATIC
IMPROVEMENT, FOCUS ON:

- **TEAM-BASED** PLCs (“WHAT” & “HOW”)
- **GUARANTEED** & VIABLE Curriculum
- **RADICAL** changes to literacy instruction

CELEBRATE every “SMALL WIN” in these areas
at **EVERY faculty & admin. meeting**

WHY?: 35-50 percentile gain in
THREE YEARS (Marzano; Sanders; Bracey)



RESULTS

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS of IMPROVEMENT



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The 333 Story

From Chicken Soup for The Soul

I was doing a weekend seminar at the Deerhurst Lodge, north of Toronto. On Friday night a tornado swept through a town north of us called Barrie, killing dozens of people and doing millions of dollars worth of damage. Sunday night, as I was coming home, I stopped the car when I got to Barrie. I got out on the side of the highway and looked around. It was a mess. Everywhere I looked there were smashed houses and cars turned upside down.

That same night Bob Templeton was driving down the same highway. He stopped to look at the disaster just as I had, only his thoughts were different than my own. Bob was the vice-president of Telemedia Communications, which owns a string of radio stations in Ontario and Quebec. He thought there must be something we could do for these people with the radio stations they had.

The following night I was doing another seminar in Toronto. Bob Templeton and Bob Johnson, another vice-president from Telemedia, came in and stood in the back of the room. They shared their conviction that there had to be something they could do for the people in Barrie. After the seminar we went back to Bob's office. He was now committed to the idea of helping the people who had been caught in the tornado.

The following Friday he called all the executives at Telemedia into his office. At the top of a flip chart he wrote three 3s. He said to his executives "How would you like to raise 3 million dollars 3 days from now in just 3 hours and give the money to the people in Barrie?" There was nothing but silence in the room.

Finally someone said, "Templeton, you're crazy. There is no way we could do that."

Bob said, "Wait a minute. I didn't ask you if we could or even if we should. I just asked you if you'd like to."

They all said, "Sure, we'd like to." He then drew a large T underneath the 333. On one side he wrote, "Why we can't." On the other side he wrote, "How we can."

"I'm going to put a big X on the 'Why we can't' side. We're not going to spend any time on the ideas of why we can't. That's of no value. On the other side we're going to write down every idea that we can come up with on how we can. We're not going to leave the room until we figure it out." There was silence again.

Finally, someone said, "We could do a radio show across Canada."

Bob said, "That's a great idea," and wrote it down. Before he had it written, someone said, "You can't do a radio show across Canada. We don't have radio stations across Canada." That was a pretty valid objection.

They only had stations in Ontario and Quebec. Templeton replied, "That's why we can. That stays." But this was a really strong objection because radio stations are very competitive. They usually don't work together and to get them to do so would be virtually impossible according to the standard way of thinking.

All of a sudden someone suggested, "You could get Harvey Kirk and Lloyd Robertson, the biggest names in Canadian broadcasting, to anchor the show." (That would be like getting Tom Brokaw and Sam Donaldson to anchor the show. They are anchors on national TV. They are not going to go on radio.) At that point it was absolutely amazing how fast and furious the creative ideas began to flow.

That was on a Friday. The following Tuesday they had a radiothon. They had 50 radio stations all across the country that agreed to broadcast it. It didn't matter who got the credit as long as the people in Barrie got the money. Harvey Kirk and Lloyd Robertson anchored the show and they succeeded in raising 3 million dollars in 3 hours within 3 business days!

Bob Proctor

Improvement Brainstorming Guidelines

The purpose of brainstorming is to produce as many good ideas or strategies as possible in a fast-paced, positive setting. It is often the first step in a focused, productive improvement meeting.

1. The purpose or desired result of the team meeting is clearly stated--preferably in writing.
2. A recorder writes down each idea on a flip chart, chalk board or whiteboard. If using a flipchart, post (rather than flip back) each page as it is completed.
3. Each person in the group, **in consecutive order**, has the opportunity to contribute **one** idea or strategy.
4. Each team member has the option to say "pass" when it is their turn to contribute.
5. Each person's remarks should be made as clearly and succinctly as possible--in 20 seconds or less.
6. There should be no criticism or discussion of ideas or strategies.
7. The recorder can seek clarification to ensure accurate recording of each idea or strategy.
8. *Expect to "piggyback" or build on each other's ideas:* some of the best strategies are generated in this way.

*Team Learning Log: From Problems to Solutions

(reproduce as needed; team should submit copy to principal or project leader)

MEMBERS PRESENT:

DATE: _____

TARGETED STANDARD/AREA OF WEAKNESS (from a state or local assessment) [e.g. “Add/subtract decimals and fractions”; “identify author’s bias”]

COMMON ASSESSMENT: TO EVALUATE INSTRUCTIONAL SOLUTION (BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHAT STUDENTS MUST KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO)

INSTRUCTIONAL SOLUTION: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LESSON UNIT/STRATEGY (that addresses the above area of weakness)

SHORT-TERM RESULTS (1-4 WEEK CYCLE): MEASURABLE IMPACT OF SOLUTION (This can *only* be filled out *AFTER* an assessment has been given, e.g. “62% of our students” or “17 of 28 students” mastered the targeted standard)

ADJUSTMENTS TO INSTRUCTION (IF RESULTS AREN’T SATISFACTORY) _____

*one Team Learning Log per team, per meeting is sufficient

Annual Improvement Goals for 200__ -- 200__

GOAL 1: The percentage of our team's students who will be at or above standard in _____ will increase from:

_____ % at the end of 200__ (previous year's percentage/mean score) to

_____ % at the end of 200__

as assessed by the _____ (State/District or School Assessment)

SPECIFIC, low-scoring skills/standard areas to improve (e.g. "Measurement"; "Compare & order fractions and decimals"; "Organization")

*

*

GOAL 2: The percentage of our team's students who will be at or above standard in _____ will increase from:

_____ % at the end of 200__ (previous year's percentage/mean score)

to

_____ % at the end of 200__ (the following year's percentage/mean score)

as assessed by the _____ (State/District or School Assessment)

SPECIFIC skill areas to address/improve

“Next Steps” to ensure success with collaborative, data-driven improvement efforts:

- I. Create end-of-course or end-of semester assessments for all courses
(some of this is based on recommendations by Rick DuFour and Rebecca DuFour)

Assessments must align with only the most *essential, enduring* standards on state assessments.

For courses *not* assessed in your state (e.g. electives, science etc.) teams should create end-of-course assessments based on a careful review of standards and the selection of—once again--*only the most essential standards* to be taught in each course. These assessments should:

--be **completed during the summer/during team meetings**

--include a clear and sufficient emphasis on **higher-order proficiencies: analysis, evaluation and synthesis**, which has to include writing and real-world problem-solving (English/Language arts should focus almost exclusively on *higher-order* proficiencies and assessments).

Finally, divide **essential standards into quarterly blocks & create quarterly assessments**; quarterly results should be reviewed by teams & leaders to gauge progress & identify need for support/improvement

II. At the beginning of the school year/after end-of course assessments are created, have ALL STAFF analyze state & end-of-course assessment data to complete a form like page 5: “Annual Improvement Goals” to

1. set a limited number of measurable, end-of-course/subject-area goals (not more than two, in my opinion)
2. list—for each course goal--specific, lowest-performing areas to improve on this year

Establish dates and times for team meetings; these are sacrosanct. Then be sure that every teacher brings the following **Teamwork Tool Kit** to every meeting

- Team norms/protocols/brainstorming guidelines—**essential** to time-efficient, productive meetings
- “Annual Improvement Goal” form (p. 8: with goals and areas of weakness based on data analysis)
- Interpretive guide(s)/sample assessments/scored writing samples provided by the state
- Rubrics, anchor papers, samples of student work wherever appropriate
- **Team Learning Logs** (e.g. p. 4)

Regularly collect and review **Team Learning Logs** at both building and district level

At every school and district meeting, regularly *share, celebrate and reward* measurable successes recorded on Team Learning Logs; be sure to disseminate successes to *all who teach the same skills or grade levels*

III. Administrators, Department Heads, Teacher Leaders :

Ask “key questions” regularly: What are your measurable goals? what specific standards are teams currently working on? What short-term wins has your team recently celebrated?

Meet with teams quarterly to: discuss results of quarterly assessments; ensure that essential standards were taught; plan for improving performance on standards where assessment data reveals weaknesses; explore ways to support improvement on next quarterly assessment

IV. Launch an all-out assault on reading deficiencies; improve literacy instruction at every grade level

Increase time spent on **purposeful (question or prompt-driven) reading and writing**, (shoot for 60 minutes of reading; 40 of writing in all classes combined--*daily*)

Have students regularly discuss open-ended, higher-order questions before and after they read—and before they write

Writing that is scored or graded should always be the result of “process writing”—of planning, drafting and revision—guided by teacher feedback at each stage

Conduct a “walk-around audit” of reading and English classes to identify patterns of strength or weakness (i.e. how much **actual purposeful reading and writing** are occurring? Report results and make plans for improvement—followed by another tour/audit—and another report

Provide direct instruction in **vocabulary** at every level. Use lists that are linked to state assessments, e.g. *EDL Core Vocabularies* (Steck-Vaughan: 800/531-5015) or SAT vocabulary

VI. Conduct a “Lesson Fair,” as soon as possible, where teachers attend staff development given by in-district teachers.

Any team should be eligible to conduct a session, if their team has had created a lesson or unit that achieved *successful, measurable results on a viable assessment* in any specific skill or area of proficiency

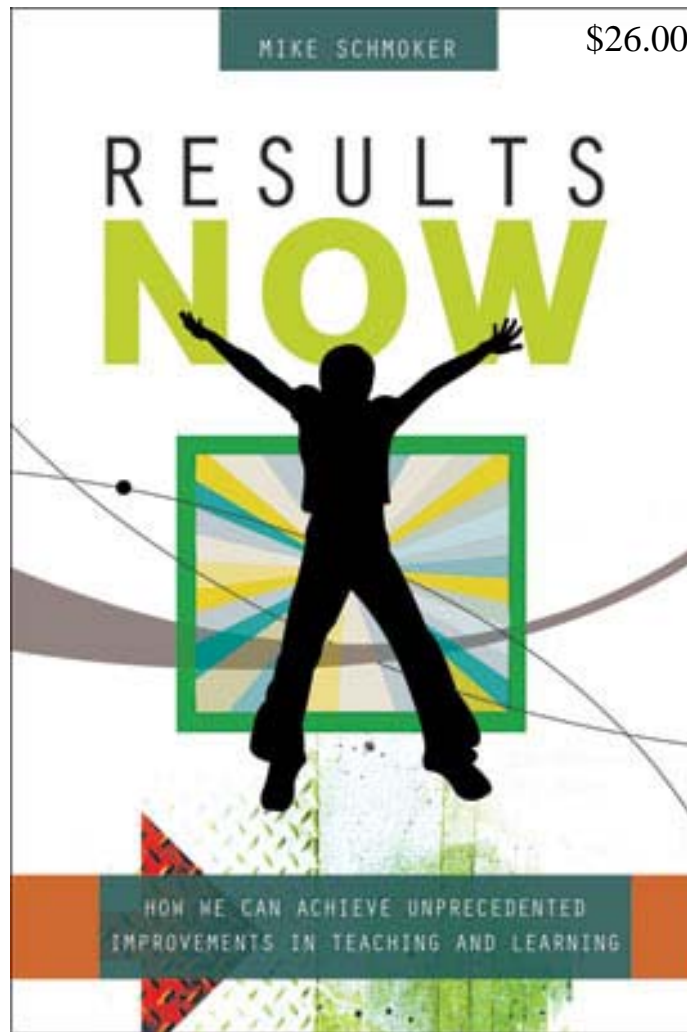
Annually examine data to **find schools/district teachers or teams whose high achievement on certain standards warrants an opportunity to present to others** in need of improvement on the same standard(s) (observe, interview & disseminate their methods)

For starters, **sponsor an event with even a few teachers; compensate these presenters and advertise their presentations** (“The 3rd grade team at Jefferson Elem. will present successful strategies and lessons for teaching ‘Measurement’ between 3:00 and 5:00 at _____ on ____).

Mike Schmoker: schmoker@futureone.com 928-522-0006

AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

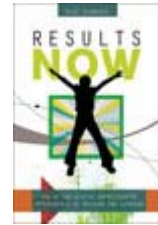
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST



Results Now

by Mike Schmoker

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An ASCD Study Guide for Results Now: How We Can

Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning

This Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding of *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented*, an ASCD book written by Mike Schmoker and published in July 2006. It will help you make connections between the text and the school or school district in which you work. The study guide can be used after you have read the entire book or as you finish each chapter. Most of the questions contained in this study guide are ones you can think about on your own. But you might also consider pairing with another colleague or forming a group of people who have read (or are reading) *Results Now*.

Introduction

1. In what way does the introduction motivate you to a different level of action to improve current practice at your grade level, in your school, district and state?
2. React to Schmoker's findings that educators in overwhelming majorities have agreed that there is indeed a yawning gap between the most well-known, incontestably essential practices and the reality of most classrooms. Do you agree?
3. Would you describe your district and/or school as having a culture of incompetence?
4. If improvements are needed, why is time NOT a solution even though it seems to be at the top of the list of most teachers: "we need more time to. . . ."?
5. Are educators in the life-saving business? What is the most basic of lessons here and who do you need to share this with? Why do you believe that educators tend to resist changing their practices when presented with the "brutal facts"?
6. Are you in need of a school to put on your list of "schools that are doing the right things"? In addition to those listed by Schmoker, find successful schools and districts in your area and state that have made significant achievement gains. Resolve to replicate their best practices.
7. What is the current status of instruction in your district and/or school? Is there room for improvement? Are you ready to accept suggestions about improving instruction?

Chapter 1 - The Buffer

1. Reread the first sentence of the chapter. Do you agree or disagree with this premise?
2. Prepare a simple explanation using layman's terms of what the "buffer" really is.
3. Consider the statement by J. Little about the culture of non-interference. Is your district or school plagued by this crippling attitude?
4. How many pages is your school improvement plan? Who reads and monitors this document? Is your school improvement plan possibly a "work of fiction" (meaning that what it states does not accurately reflect what actually takes place in the school)?

5. Teachers: How many times per week do administrators visit your classroom for the purpose of observing you and students in action? Evaluators: How many times per week do you visit classrooms on an informal basis in order to observe teaching and learning?

Chapter 2 - Isolation: The Enemy of Improvement

1. How should teacher evaluations be overhauled to be more effective and meaningful?
2. Picture teachers at your building. Is there an overwhelming feeling that teachers are working in isolation or rather is there a culture of collaboration? What are the causes of the current situation?
3. How many teachers do you know who have gone through some sort of formal remediation process based on low evaluations? How many teachers do you know who have been dismissed because of inferior practices? Can you think of teachers in your school or district who are still teaching despite being ineffective at the job? What mechanism protects these teachers? Is it the union? Principals who are not up to the long-haul fight? Teachers who protect other teachers? Is it time to change what is taking place in your district? How can you and your colleagues help bring about the positive change that is needed?
4. Should teacher evaluations take place on a more frequent basis in your school or district? Would this frequency, along with a new evaluation system, result in improved instruction and thus increased achievement?

Chapter 3 - Leadership Interrupted: How the Buffer Compromises Supervision

1. Reflect on Kim Marshall's suggestion about "the emptiness in the professional relationship between teachers and school leaders." Generate a solution to address this problem.
2. What measures are taking place in your district or at your school to involve principals in day-to-day instructional decision making? Are these measures working?
3. Ponder the "logic of confidence" and determine the degree of protection it provides to ineffective practices. What is a solution to this problem?
4. What will it take for your school or district to embrace a "logic of quality"? What is a first step in that direction?
5. Take an honest look at the process of creating your district or school improvement plans. How many goals are listed? How many strategies are indicated? Is your improvement plan focused on 'doing' by educators or on aspects or measurements of learning? Is cause data gathered about the behaviors and actions of the adults in the system? Do educators in your district or school view these documents as important or more as a formality in order to check off a task and satisfy the school board?
6. Devise a plan to improve the process of planning school and district improvement and then resolve to take action. Simplify. Streamline the process. What does that new plan need to look like? What will be eliminated? What considerations will be added to make the improvement plan more meaningful as it relates to instructional practices?

Chapter 4 - Curricular Chaos

1. To what degree is the defined chaos in this chapter alive and well in your district or school?
2. How do teachers view the curriculum that has been created for them? Do they accept it or do they disagree with it, leading them to engage in "private practice" (doing their own thing)?

3. Reflect on the district whose new superintendent was brave and bold enough to tell the truth. Does your superintendent follow this path or do you yearn for a superintendent who will lead your district out of the current chaos?
4. Confer with colleagues and describe how your district or school focuses on quality control (in terms of instruction and curriculum).
5. Do you know anyone like Kim Marshall? How does your school or district support strong and courageous leaders who might question status quo?
6. Independently, and then collaboratively with your colleagues, generate a list of three practices alive and well at your school that if turned around or reversed would have an overwhelming positive impact on student achievement. Call these your potential "tipping point" actions. Focus on any one of the three actions and establish and then implement the plan to change the practice.

Chapter 5 - The Power of *Authentic Literacy*

1. Examine the power of teaching Jack MacFarland demonstrated. Is this same methodology alive and well on a large scale in your school or district or is this level of instruction rare or nonexistent? Share your evidence.
2. What is the "way up and out"? Do you agree with this assertion?
3. On average, how frequently are your students required to synthesize and evaluate information? Is there a link between avoiding complex questions and tasks and students' in ability to think? Explain.
4. Discuss the positive outcomes of ensuring intellectual empowerment.
5. What amount of time do your students spend engaged in healthy discussions, writing, and reading?
6. What is the "dominant discourse"?
7. Note that Schmoker explains that "it is the ability to read well that is the single best indicator of future economic success." If this is what we believe, how can we explain the numbers of students who are not reading on grade level?

Chapter 6 - Authentic Literacy and Intellectual Development

1. "No subject of study is more important than reading. . .all other intellectual powers depend on it." Do you agree?
2. Are you satisfied with reading instruction in your district or school? What improvements would you recommend take place so that reading improvement occurs?
3. How many minutes a day do students in your school or district actually read or reread?
4. Define and describe strategic reading.
5. How many teachers in your school deliberately teach their students how to read with "pen in hand"? Why is this such a powerful practice?
6. Why is writing so important in terms of literacy? How has your school or district placed greater importance on writing? What have the district and school leaders done to communicate the need to improve writing instruction?
7. In what ways are students at your school encouraged to write?

8. What are three actions that could take place right now in your school that would immediately change the face of writing instructional practices? What would teachers need to learn how to do? What would teachers need to believe about their students and writing in order to improve writing instruction?
9. Would you describe your school as a thoughtful place? What leads you to this statement? Are your students intellectually awake? If not, what is an action that would wake them up?

Chapter 7 - The Startling State of Literacy Education

1. To what degree have students in your school or district been formally taught how to read text while reflecting on their reading (metacognition)? There seems to be a disproportionate number of students in many districts who lack reading comprehension. What are some solutions to this problem?
2. What professional development can be offered teachers to learn how to become more effective teachers of reading comprehension?
3. What professional development can be provided for teachers who lack understanding of effective practices in the teaching of writing?
4. How many times during this school year will you collect student writing and score it based on a pre-established rubric?
5. How often do teachers in your school or district collaboratively score student writing and base future lesson plans and student needs on this information?
6. Briefly describe the typical high school English classes in your district or school. Would you want to be a student in most of the classes? How will you remedy classrooms where effective writing instruction and production is woefully lacking? In schools where you know deep learning and processing is taking place, are those identified teachers facilitating or offering learning opportunities (professional development) to colleagues who need to improve their practices?
7. What would you see if you took a tour of classrooms in your school or district? What would be your response to the two questions Schmoker suggests about the activities and level of student engagement?
8. Administrators: Conduct your own action research by visiting classes during reading and writing instruction time and determine if the “crayola curriculum” is in place in your building. Teachers: Take an honest look at what takes place under your watch. How frequently do students color?
9. To what degree is writing taking place in other content areas outside of the English or language arts classrooms in your school or district?
10. What will you do with the research findings related to the state of English or language arts instruction in your schools? How can this information open the door to improving practices and the monitoring of those practices in your district and/or school?
11. Do you believe too many teachers assign writing but neglect to teach students how to write?
12. Consider the recommendations of researchers about devoting time to closing reading gaps. Would it be possible or even viable to create a program in your school where students experience effective reading intervention for three to four weeks? What would it take to get this started? If your school has already taken these actions, have students closed reading gaps?

13. How will you react to a teacher's claim that there isn't time to teach reading and writing?
14. Schmoker compels us to ponder the "brutal facts" about literacy instruction and the price of ineffective practices. How will you use this information to compel yourself, your team, your school, and your district to changing current reality and status quo as it relates to literacy instruction?

Chapter 8 - Professional Learning Communities: The Surest, Fastest Path to Instructional Improvement

1. Do professional learning communities exist in your school? Are they effective in terms of improving instruction and learning based on the steps and requirements identified by Schmoker, DuFour, and Eaker?
2. To what degree do teachers teach what they want to teach rather than following a viable and consistent curriculum?
3. Who creates the professional development plan in your district and school? Does the professional development offered seem disconnected to the truly important aspects of teaching and learning? Think of the last few professional development experiences you participated in. Did you change practices as a result of what you learned?
4. How frequently do you meet in a team format to discuss effective teaching practices? Do your team meetings take a reflective and collaborative, non-threatening approach? Do you actually learn effective strategies and replicable practices from colleagues during your team meetings?
5. Ponder the viability of weekly team meetings where teachers go the next step and collaboratively write lesson plans based on data from short but focused assessments. How much time could this save? How better organized would teachers be and how would this type of organization decrease stress levels of teachers?
6. What are the basic reasons teachers tell us that professional learning communities are the way to go?
7. How would you define the knowing-doing gap? Does this gap exist at your grade level or in your building or in your district?
8. Think of an example of positive deviants in your district. Analyze what happened in New York City District 2 under the leadership of A. Alvarado and assess whether this strategy is possible in your district.

Chapter 9 - Leadership in the Professional Learning Community

1. Explain the power of shifting from the "instructional leader" mindset to the "learning leader" mindset. How are they different and what are the implications and outcomes of this monumental shift?
2. Why is it imperative that leaders monitor effective instruction?
3. Analyze powerful suggestions for conducting a curriculum review. Determine the best path for a curriculum review. If you are already in the routine of curriculum review, are there any changes you believe must be made in order to be more efficient and effective?
4. Discuss with colleagues the manner in which most district or school change occurs, and then compare those processes with recommendations made by Schmoker and the four concrete steps identified in this chapter. In what ways could the current process be made more effective?
5. In what ways is your current district's teacher evaluation process working? Not working? Compare your district's plan to the suggestions Schmoker shares from effective practices

around the country and identify key actions that will directly lead to improving current practices.

6. Should administrators participate in professional development programs their staff members are required to attend? What are possible outcomes of administrative involvement?
7. How do you feel about the suggestion that we must be willing to “raise appropriate guilt and anxiety” when the occasion demands?
8. What is the relationship between praise and momentum?

Chapter 10 - Scaling Up: Central Office and State-Level Leadership in the Learning Community

1. Interpret the statement that “organizations are either supported or constrained by those who exercise authority at the next highest level.” What does this really mean?
2. How critically important is it to have the right leaders in the right places at the right time? How do you feel about your district or school leadership? Could it improve? Are you willing to follow your leaders? Are they effective?
3. Are the majority of your district meetings effectively and directly linked to teaching and learning or do you feel they are a waste of time and need to be overhauled?
4. In simple terms, define what is meant by a “predisposition toward clarity.”
5. What suggestions would you make to simplify management processes in your district?
6. What does your director of curriculum and instruction do? What is he or she responsible for? What are they held accountable for? Why does Schmoker suggest that in many districts this position needs to be overhauled?
7. How does a focus on simplification bring about redirected energy and improvement?
8. What are identified obstacles currently in the way of positive leadership change in your district?

** This study guide was prepared by Nan Woodson, Center for Performance Assessment

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Phi Delta Kappan **Radically redefining literacy instruction: an immense opportunity.**

Phi Delta Kappan | March 1, 2007 | Schmoker, Mike

Students in today's English and language arts classes typically are not asked to read, discuss, or write analytically. But by emphasizing such authentic **literacy** activities, Mr. Schmoker maintains, we could bring about the results that all our reforms seek: higher test scores, intellectual development, and a narrowing of the achievement gap.

AUTHENTIC LITERACY--the ability to read, write, and think effectively--belongs at the very top of the reform agenda. There is every reason to believe that these capacities, if acquired across the disciplines, will change lives by the millions and will redefine the possibilities of public education. Best of all, the most effective ways to impart these vital skills are disarmingly simple.

For Vincent Ferrandino and Gerald Tirozzi (the respective presidents of the national associations for elementary and secondary principals), "under-developed **literacy** skills are the number one reason why students are retained, assigned to special education, given long-term remedial services and why they fail to graduate from high school." (1) They conclude that **literacy** "speaks to the larger societal issues of access and equity. In our society, being literate opens doors--and opens them wide."

If **literacy** is so important, how difficult would it be to provide excellent **literacy** instruction across the disciplines? Mike Rose's classic, *Lives on the Boundary*, gives us a clue. Rose grew up poor in East L.A., in a tiny house where he shared a bedroom with his parents. For years, school was a place of boredom and frustration. He assumed he would never attend college or escape the conditions that accounted for the "ravaged hope" felt by the adults he grew up around. (2)

Then, in the 10th grade, a maverick teacher came to Rose's rescue. Jack MacFarland taught in a fashion **radically** different from his colleagues. To the near exclusion of all other activities, he had his students read, discuss, and write about record numbers of books and articles in response to questions he prepared for the reading and writing assignments. And the students did this work in class. As Rose puts it, they merely "read and wrote and talked" their way toward an education that few students receive in the K-12 school system. Simple stuff. Any teacher can begin to do these things. Only later did Rose realize that he and his fellow members of the "voc ed crowd" had in fact received a "prep-school" curriculum. Rose's personal success--he is now a professor at UCLA--suggests what could happen for students on a grand scale, across the social spectrum.

But his success shouldn't surprise us. The literature is strewn with evidence that such straightforward **literacy** instruction would have a monumental impact on students' lives. It all begins with close, careful reading.

THE POWER OF DEEP, PURPOSEFUL READING

"No subject of study," writes Jacques Barzun, "is more important than reading ... all other intellectual powers depend on it." (3) Intellectual power and development flow only and directly from what Richard Vacca calls "strategic reading," what James Popham calls "purposeful reading," and what legendary inner-city principal Deborah Meier calls "deep reading." (4) But this is not the kind of reading most students now do in English and language arts.

There's no mystery here: such reading starts with good questions and prompts. From the earliest grades, students need numerous, daily opportunities to read closely (or reread) an article or a chapter in a textbook for meaning: to weigh or evaluate the logic or evidence in a text--or in two or more related texts--in order to find the answer to an arresting or provocative question. (5) We do such reading to test a proposition, such as "Columbus was a great man." We do it to marshal support for an argument or propose a solution to an intriguing social or political problem. From college on, most of us have done such reading with a pen or highlighter in hand so that we can mark key passages or

patterns in a text. College students and adult professionals read in this way routinely.

But not so much K-12 students. Imagine what would happen to levels of intellectual attainment if we began to make daily opportunities for this kind of reading? From the earliest grades, students could be given literally hundreds of opportunities to read and discuss the answers to higher-order questions like this one suggested by Richard Allington for first-graders: "Who would make a better friend: spider or turtle?" (The children are reading or listening to the Ashanti story "Hungry Spider and the Turtle." (6)) Older students could be asked to read about two successive Presidents, say, Herbert Hoover and FDR, and then asked to evaluate them for their effectiveness. Or students could compare and evaluate the character traits of Old Dan and Little Anne, the hunting dogs in *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

Many of us have seen how animated and intellectually engaged second-graders become when asked to read stories like "Jack and the Beanstalk" and then asked to consider whether Jack is an admirable hero or an ethically challenged rascal. We've seen how perceptively students read when asked to read a story twice--and with a pen in hand--as they underline, jot marginal notes, or complete a graphic organizer to assemble their thoughts for discussion and writing assignments. Accompanied by a good program of vocabulary instruction, such activities will cause test scores to soar. (7)

This analytical, argumentative approach is exactly what students need to succeed in college. But it is markedly different from what students now receive. Moreover, there is good evidence that this approach would make school eminently more interesting to students who now find it boring and alienating. (8)

At Tempe Preparatory Academy, an open-enrollment charter school in Tempe, Arizona, students' favorite class, year after year, is the daily, two-hour "Humane Letters" seminar. Every day, students from seventh through 12th grades read and write and argue the issues they encounter in history and literature. Boring? Repetitious? Hardly. As Tempe Prep student Eric Dischinger put it, "I love it! The concept of forming ideas and opinions about these texts has been instrumental for me in learning how to think and explore in other areas of academia. I take the thought processes I learned in Humane Letters and apply them in Spanish, chemistry, and math." He tells me, "I have learned how to construct an argument and then defend it."

ARGUMENT: THE CORE OF COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

There is magic in this simple combination of a good text and a provocative question (given before--not after--students have read a text), combined with the chance to argue and support an interpretation from one or more texts. (9) And any teacher can learn to conduct such activities, which exercise students' natural intellectual powers and are the model for the best academic and professional discourse.

It all starts on the playground. As Gerald Graff points out, "kids love to argue," to compare and evaluate the relative merits of their favorite athletes and pop stars. For Graff, there is no substantive difference between academic work and such playground polemics, especially if we furnish texts that give students a basis for analysis, discussion, and writing.

We can do this--while also building reading, writing, and discussion skills on the foundation of the best content standards in every discipline, including such well-known and highly valued **literacy** standards as discerning fact from opinion; comparing and contrasting themes, characters, and interpretations; understanding an author's purpose; or recognizing bias. An important recent study affirms that this argumentative approach to learning content, in all subject areas, truly constitutes the "college knowledge" that so few students now acquire in K-12. (10) The recurring theme of this study by David Conley is that college success hinges on students' abilities to analyze texts thoroughly, to critique an author's position, and then to "advance an argument using evidence." (11)

More interesting yet, arguing from close, focused reading has been found to be the best basis for effective student writing, which powerfully extends students' abilities to think and reason across the disciplines. (12) It is time we made the case for requiring preservice teachers to learn to teach writing in this way.

THE UNSUNG POWER OF WRITING

Close, strategic reading is the first step toward deep understanding. But analytic, persuasive writing about good texts

amplifies and refines students' critical reasoning capacities even further. Consider just a sample of what researchers have found about the importance of writing--which is curiously underemphasized in the K-12 curriculum.

For TheodoreSizer, writing is "the litmus paper of thought," so vital to intellectual development that it deserves to occupy "the very center of schooling." (13) As things stand, however, writing barely shows up on the periphery of schooling. (14) We have to stop offering such excuses as "With so many students, there isn't time to grade papers." Many of us have found highly efficient ways to teach writing well without engaging in conventional--and time-consuming and counterproductive--grading practices. (15)

To get a better grasp on the link between writing and reasoning, listen to what Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council, has to say on the subject. "Writing," he tells us, "enables us to note inconsistencies, logical flaws, and areas that would benefit from additional clarity." (16) Like close reading, writing is thinking--perhaps in its most powerful and intense form. William Zinsser, a highly respected authority on writing, avers that writing is "primarily an exercise in logic," which enables us to "write our way" into an understanding of texts or concepts that previously mystified us. Why make such an effort? Because "meaning is remarkably elusive.... Writing enables us to find out what we know--and what we don't know--about whatever we're trying to learn." (17)

In "The Learning Power of Writing," R. D. Walshe writes that we "shouldn't hesitate to describe writing as incredible or miraculous ... a technology which enables thought to operate much more deeply than it normally does during conversation or inward reflection." (18) Indeed, it is only through writing that students can engage the "upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy." (19) Writing, observes John Franklin, is the "key to student learning; it directly cultivates the most valuable job attribute of all: a mind equipped to think." (20) Or, as Gene Budig recently wrote in these pages, writing is not only critical to the "crafting of a good education," it is also a "fundamental building block for designing and achieving professional success and advancement." According to an extensive survey of human resource directors, employees must now write more than ever. In the fastest-growing industries, those who can't write well are less likely to be hired and far less likely to be promoted. (21)

With all this going for it, shouldn't every aspiring teacher be learning the case for this "miraculous" technology? And shouldn't students be given daily opportunities to respond in writing to good questions about the content they encounter in textbooks, articles, and literature? Shouldn't teacher teams be sharing and developing stimulating questions for everything they teach, in every discipline? These simple, intellectually rich activities (not our ubiquitous worksheets) are what truly engage the "upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy." And, as Douglas Reeves has found, "nonfiction" writing, in every subject, correlates strongly with achievement gains. (22)

For this reason, the report of the National Commission on Writing calls our attention to the alarming gap between our knowledge of the lifelong importance of writing and the sadly diminished role it plays in most schools. (23)

LITERACY'S 'KNOWING-DOING' GAP

When John Goodlad and his teams visited thousands of language arts classrooms as part of his large-scale study of instruction, he found most students enduring English classes in which they "rarely read or wrote ... they scarcely even speculated on meanings or discussed alternative interpretations" of what they read. (24) Years later, the authors of The Shopping Mall High School found English classrooms marked by a "wholesale absence of intensity about thinking." (25) My classroom observations and interactions with audiences of educators overwhelmingly confirm this. (26)

Richard Allington uses an ingenious expression that reveals a lot about the current state of **literacy** instruction: he refers to the "reading and writing vs. 'stuff' ratio." (27) In most classrooms, the majority of instruction consists of "stuff," with little or no connection to **literacy** skills. In grades 1 through 3, it is not unusual (even in schools with good test scores) to find two-thirds of the reading period being spent on "color, cut, and paste activities." (28) In the later grades, students are seldom found discussing or writing in response to good questions about interesting texts. Instead, as Lucy McCormick Calkins and her colleagues have observed, students are "making dioramas, game boards, posters, or mobiles to accompany a book ... making new books with illustrations ... [or making] murals or other artwork." (29) She has observed classrooms with a 1 to 15 ratio of reading and writing to such "stuff." Calkins laments this situation as the triumph of "literary arts and crafts" over substantive **literacy** instruction. Sadly, many of us were trained, even encouraged, in these approaches. Such activities--and the culture that tolerates them--may do

more to explain the overall achievement gap than any other factor.

AUTHENTIC LITERACY AND HIGHER TEST SCORES

There are other insidious, if well-meant, forms of "stuff," all of which reveal the real roots of the achievement gap. In too many classrooms, instead of analyzing and debating the issues in fiction or editorials, students are perennially drilled on such terms as "climax," "setting," or "rising action." Will we ever wake up to how inane and time-wasting this is? Or students are asked to identify decontextualized statements as either fact or opinion. Such exercises miss the point. But they can produce a short-term boost in test scores.

Then the scores plateau. We have yet to learn that thoughtful reading, writing, and discussion, in redundant abundance, promote faster, more enduring achievement gains on state assessments than quick-fix approaches. (30) As Michael Pressley recently found, what raises test scores in urban schools is exactly "what works everywhere: intensive instruction more driven by the higher-order than the lower-order skills." (31)

It is time to embrace and act on the evidence that authentic reading, writing, and discussion will promote higher scores, intellectual development, and a substantial narrowing of the achievement gap.

AUTHENTIC LITERACY--NOW

We could begin immediately by providing students with far more in-class opportunities to read interesting and provocative texts purposefully, always guided by good questions that stimulate discussion, debate, and effective writing. Such work will assuredly proceed more successfully if practitioners work collaboratively to continuously share, develop, and refine effective and stimulating questions, writing assignments, lessons, units, and assessments.

In science, social studies, English, and beyond, students should be reading, writing, and discussing their way toward deep understanding as they respond to questions such as these:

* Should we drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge? Consider the issue from scientific, economic, and environmental perspectives.

* As we read and study the American Civil War, prepare to make the case for the South. (I learned this question from Theodore Sizer.)

* As you read each chapter in *The Catcher in the Rye*, look for the answer to this question: What is wrong with Holden Caulfield? (I adapted this question from Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe.)

And we should remember to make adequate room for considering popular topics, among the best ways to promote both real-world and academic intellectual capacities. (32) As I write this, my own daughters have just completed extended argumentative research papers. After carefully reading several books, articles, and statistical tables, one argued that the Beatles edge out the Stones as the greatest rock 'n' roll band of all time; my other daughter argued that, historically, Coke's advertising campaigns beat Pepsi's. These are the most polished, passionate, and academically worthy pieces either has produced.

Such simple reading and writing activities cultivate precisely those intellectual capacities most necessary to success in college and careers. (33) For what it's worth, my audiences across North America strongly agree with me that the worksheet curriculum directly prevents us from making this critical transition toward authentic **literacy** instruction--with its predictably marvelous consequences.

Changing to the pursuit of authentic **literacy** may be the simplest, most productive, and most enjoyable change we could make in our efforts to reduce the achievement gap and prepare students for life and learning. In doing so, we will discover, with Theodore Sizer, that "we don't know the half of what these kids can do." With so much at stake, with the academic success and life chances of tens of millions of students on the line, there is no good reason to delay adopting such practices across the disciplines--starting tomorrow.

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31. Quoted in Kathleen Kennedy Manzo, "NAEP Results Offer Scant Insight into Best Reading Strategies," *Education Week*, 11 January 2006, p. 14.

32. Graff, op. cit.

33. Budig, op. cit; and Conley, op. cit.

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SAVE THE DATE

November 3, 2009

January 28 & 29, 2010

Location & Time TBD

Placer County Office of Education Presents: RtI, Professional Learning Communities, and
How to Respond when Students Don't Learn

Presenter: Mike Mattos



About the Presenter: Mike Mattos is currently the principal of Pioneer Middle School, in Tustin, California. A thriving Professional Learning Community (PLC), Pioneer has consistently ranked among the state's top schools for student performance and has received national recognition.

To achieve success, Mike implements PLC concepts, sustaining a collaborative environment among his staff.

Overview: In 2004, the federal government revised special education law, promoting a radically different model for helping students with special needs: Response to Intervention (RtI). The underlining premise of RtI is that schools should not delay providing help for struggling students until they fall far enough behind to qualify for special education, but instead should provide timely, targeted, systematic interventions to all students that demonstrate the need. Yet, for Professional Learning Community schools, this approach should hardly be considered "new", as the PLC practice of creating a "Pyramid of Interventions" is essentially the same work. This conference is designed to help educators understand how to implement PLC practices to create a powerful, highly-effective site intervention program.

Participants will:

- Develop a practical understanding of Response to Intervention (RtI)
- Identify the essential characteristics of an effective intervention program
- Understand how Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices are perfectly aligned to implement RtI and ensure high levels of learning for all students
- Study real-life, highly effective elementary and secondary intervention programs
- Leave with a practical, step-by-step implementation plan for creating a Pyramid Response to Interventions

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