

Nuggets of Knowledge

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Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Accountability

Robert Marzano on the "Art and Science of Good Teaching"

In an article written for the January, 2008 issue of *Principal Leadership* (<http://cinco.delgado.googlepages.com/ProducingLearning.pdf>), Robert Marzano discusses the balance between *art* and *science* in classroom teaching. "I believed that teaching could become a science in the sense that you could prescribe: if you do X, Y, and Z, then D is going to happen." However, Marzano states that all of his research indicates that good teaching goes beyond the broad definitions of good teaching – it must include the *art* of teaching. "The art of effective teaching is where individual teachers figure out the best way to use specific strategies in the context of their content area, their students, and their personalities. They adapt the research to their specific situation." (Marzano, 2008)

Marzano states that in using the concept of art and science, principals and supervisors should concentrate on the question: *Are students learning?* Instead of going in with a checklist and looking for specific instructional strategies, the principal should first go in and see if the students are learning. "By looking at teachers' pre- and post-tests and common interim assessments given by teacher teams," Marzano states, "We should be able to determine if students are learning." Marzano offers the following steps to help a principal systematically improve teaching and learning in their school:

- Read and discuss professional literature, making it part of the school's culture.
- Develop a written set of guidelines and principles about common language and model of instruction when discussing what good teaching looks like in the classrooms.
- Devote staff time to systematically apply common beliefs about good instruction. For example, teachers might try specific instructional strategies, informally assess student learning, and see if the strategies worked.
- Use peer observation in a very targeted, low-key manner with teachers. He suggests that on a volunteer basis, a teacher who is not getting the results they want can pair up with a master teacher to observe a specific strategy. Discussions are held between the teachers to help the observing teacher improve his/her classroom instruction.
- Measure student learning progress in all classrooms using common interim assessments and pre- and post-tests that use a common scale.

In conclusion, Marzano reminds the reader that the steps he has outlined can take four or five years to implement fully. However, in the end, "...you will have a system with which you can identify people who consistently produce knowledge gain and use those people to help increase instructional expertise throughout the school site."

Implementing the Reading/Language Arts Adoption Toolkit

At the November State Board of Education (SBE) meeting, new materials for English/language arts instruction were approved. Thirty-three programs were approved in the five program types. The five program types are outlined in Chapter 9 of the *Reading/Language Arts Framework for Public Schools*.

When districts are ready to begin the local adoption process, they first need to create a reading/language arts adoption committee with representatives from all grade levels and schools. The *Reading/Language Arts Adoption Toolkit*, created by the Curriculum and Instruction Steering Committee of the CA County Superintendents Educational Services Association, provides a process for selecting the best program to meet the needs of all students. The process has four parts: Developing the District Lens, Tracing Standards, Reviewing Program Components, and Making a Decision.

Section One: Developing the District Lens

- Using the toolkit, the committee discusses and reviews the district's current practices using the key components of language arts Instruction from Chapter 2 of the *CA Reading/Language Arts Framework for Public Schools*.
- The committee examines all state and local data noting patterns and trends significant to the adoption.
- The committee reviews district support structures for language arts.
- Using the data collected, the committee determines the most appropriate program type(s) to review for adoption.

Section Two: Tracing Standards

- Committee members review the teacher's editions of selected programs to trace key standards identified by the adoption committee. This process is used to narrow the field of choices of publisher programs.

Section Three: Reviewing the Program Components

- Committee members review all components of the selected publisher programs by analyzing a unit of study.

Section Four: Making a Decision

- The district follows a process for coming to a consensus in the selection of the most appropriate program(s) to meet the needs of the students.

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There is no doubt about the need and the benefit of having parents involved in their child's schooling. The issue on how to provide meaningful and powerful involvement opportunities for both parents and community members is often the mystery. The National Network of Partnerships School (NNPS, www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/program.htm) out of Johns Hopkins University has long been committed to research on effective models to engage parent and community members to improve student achievement. More than twenty years of research led Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D. to develop her Framework of Six Types on Involvement:

1. **PARENTING:** Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students **and** assist schools to better understand and serve families. *School level examples:*
 - Hold workshops concerning child development issues at each age and grade level.
 - Provide parent education classes and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, family literacy, college and/or training programs).
 - Conduct an annual survey for families to share information about their children's goals, strengths, and special talents.
2. **COMMUNICATION:** Schools should strive to implement effective communication strategies for both school-to-home **and** home-to-school concerning available school programs and student progress. *School level examples:*
 - Create folders of student work to be sent home weekly or monthly for parent review and comments.
 - Hold conferences with every parent at least once a year with follow-up conferences as needed.
3. **VOLUNTEERING:** Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities for parents at various locations and at various times. *School level examples:*
 - Create a parent room or a family center where parents can do volunteer work, have meetings, and come for information on local resources for families.
 - Establish a structured means to provide all families with important school information (e.g., a parent telephone tree).
4. **LEARNING AT HOME:** Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions. *School level examples:*
 - Create and distribute calendars with daily or weekly activities for parents and students to do together.
 - Encourage family participation in helping students set academic goals in each year, including college plans and/or technical training.
5. **DECISION MAKING:** Include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives. *School level examples:*
 - Support and encourage parent participation in school-site and district-level parent organizations such as PTA/PTO, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) that help to build parent leadership.
 - Insure that all parents receive information on school or local elections for school representatives.
6. **COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY:** Coordinate resources and services that are available in the community for families, students, and the school. *School level examples:*
 - Provide parents with information about local health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs and services; and with information on community activities that support learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.

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Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) publishes practice guides in education to bring the best available evidence and expertise toward producing systematic change (*Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide, 2007*; <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee>). In this issue we will focus on Recommendation 4:

Develop Academic English

1. Most researchers believe that instruction in academic English that is done early, consistently, and simultaneously across content areas can make a difference in English learner's ability to understand the core curriculum.
 - When addressing students, teachers need to use a variety of vocabulary (e.g., antonyms, synonyms, homonyms).
 - Students need to be taught the difference between slang and academic language.
2. Academic English instruction should focus on teaching English learners to use specific features of academic language related to the curriculum and content they are studying.
 - Prepare students to speak in front of others by modeling and explicitly teaching academic words and grammatical features that students would be expected to use in their presentations related to the topic of study.
 - Provide practice with partners *before* calling on students (e.g., *choral answers*, *"share with your partner"*). Practice opportunities increase student confidence and give the student an authentic context in which to use their academic language.
3. Provide teachers with appropriate professional development to help them learn how to teach academic English. Professional development should include:
 - Extensive practical activities such as analyzing texts used by students for academic English instruction.
 - Designing "student-friendly" explanations of academic terms.
4. Provide all English learners with a specific block (or blocks) of time each day when the primary instructional focus is on English language development and the development of academic English.
 - Teachers should purposefully plan interactive activities during content classes. Teachers should use a variety of grouping arrangements—partners, whole class interactions, and cooperative leveled groups.
 - Practice Cloze reading in all content areas.

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