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

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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
“I never cried because I was homesick in college. The only reason I cried was because I felt dumb. One night I called my cousin and I was like, ‘I feel stupid. I shouldn’t be here.’”

*Educational Leadership*, April 2007, p. 45
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
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 & Cuban; Hess; Berliner

The case of **SEAN CONNORS**
EFFECTIVE LESSON: WHAT & HOW

- **Clarity @essential standard** being learned that day (“introductory paragraphs”)

- **“Scaffolded” (step-by-step) instruction**
  - “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*
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% (2008)
   to: 66% (2009)

Peter Senge: “More than ____ goals is the same as none at all.”
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”
  “maim your opponent in dodge ball”

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

   Stiggins; Wiliam & Black
AUTHENTIC TEAM-BASED PLC’s:

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
The “PLC” concept (by whatever name) is indisputably the **STATE OF THE ART** for improving instruction 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
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*

1\textsuperscript{st} quarter: NUMBER SENSE

DATA ANALYSIS & PROBABILITY

2\textsuperscript{ND} quarter: PATTERNs, ALGEBRA & FUNCTIONS

GEOMETRY

3\textsuperscript{rd} quarter: MEASUREMENT & DISCRETE MATH

MATHEMATICAL STRUCTURE/LOGIC

4\textsuperscript{th} quarter: REVIEW: for YEAR END ASSESSMENT

END OF EACH QUARTER: common assessment…with ample “higher-order” component (analysis, evaluation etc.)
“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 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.*
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)
“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?
MEETINGS: STRATEGIZE TO ACHIEVE—and to RECOGNIZE/CELEBRATE every “SMALL WIN”

- ____ schools have a “steering committee”
- ____ of our 6 elementary teams: developed meeting protocols
- ____ of 28 teams completed 1.) quarterly “standards maps”; 2.) common end-of-quarter assessments
- ____ 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!

NO SMALL WINS = NO PROGRESS
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*

*The ACT scores are approximate and subject to change.
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)
"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)
  \(\frac{3}{4}\) 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)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERARY TERMS: essential?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>indirect characterization</td>
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<tr>
<td>direct characterization</td>
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<tr>
<td>static character</td>
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<tr>
<td>internal conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>external conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>rising action</td>
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<tr>
<td>omniscient point of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>third-person limited point of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>complication</td>
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<td>foreshadowing</td>
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<td>suspense</td>
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<td>anadiplosis</td>
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<td>chiasmus</td>
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<td>synecdoche</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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
“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*
“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.
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** PLC’s (“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)