From Good to Great

We believe that teachers are the most important part of the education system and that “building teacher quality is the most efficient way to influence student outcomes” (Teaching Australia, Monash University December 2008). In fact outside of family background teacher effectiveness is the largest factor influencing student outcomes. (OECD 2009)

The Grattan Institute report 2011 noted that “conservative estimates report that a student with a teacher at the 75th percentile of effectiveness (measured with a value-added metric) will achieve in three quarters of a year what a student with a teacher at the 25th percentile will achieve in a full year. A student with an excellent teacher (at the 90th percentile) would achieve in half a year what a student with a less effective teacher (at the 10th percentile) will learn in a full year”.

What is it to be an excellent teacher?

Teacher excellence or quality has been defined as “expertise in relevant subject content studies coupled with skills in teaching and learning” (Quality Teaching Curriculum Leadership Journal 2007). To achieve the best outcomes for students, subject knowledge needs to be integrated with pedagogy. Pedagogical knowledge involves knowing how to organise and present subject matter, how students learn the subject and the worth of available curriculum materials. Quality teachers interpret student behaviours based on this knowledge in order to be responsive, creative successful in facilitating learning.

How do teachers improve their practice?

Research shows that knowledge about content, learners and pedagogy cannot be achieved through an initial teacher education course on its own and that quality teaching is reliant on ongoing professional development regarding subject content, teaching, students and education policies.

According to the Grattan Institute report, research also shows “that teacher appraisal and feedback significantly improves teachers’ understanding of their teaching methods, teaching practices and student learning” (Wade 1984, Hattie 2009). A disposition towards self-awareness, a willingness to engage in reflective practice and a capacity to be self-judging have been found to be beneficial in teacher’s professional learning, especially when based on professional interaction, feedback and cooperation.
Providing meaningful feedback to teachers is the best way to improve teaching and learning according to the Grattan Institute report which suggests eight feedback strategies:

1. Student performance and assessments
2. Peer observation and collaboration
3. Direct observation of classroom teaching and learning
4. Student feedback and surveys
5. 360 degree feedback
6. Self-assessment
7. Parent survey and feedback
8. External observation.

Importantly of the eight strategies five highlight observation. Through observation teachers can further their own professional development observing the strengths of their teaching partners and exploring innovation.

What can school leaders do to assist their teachers?

"Teaching quality also improves within a collegial, collaborative environment…. The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things". (Michael Fullan)

The reach of collaborative working and range of available resources is enhanced even further when the collective capacity is extended across a number of schools working together to share practice and raise standards. Schools can identify outstanding practitioners to model and coach within and beyond the school.

"Effective school leaders have expertise in building school and community capacity and collegiality… [They] promote the school as a learning organisation and improve student outcomes. Effective school leaders develop the intellectual or cultural capital of their schools [through] professional dialogue within and outside the school, staff professional development, peer networking and knowledge sharing". (Teaching Australia, University of Western Sydney)

How can technology assist with solutions for self-reflection, peer observations, effective feedback and communities of practice?

Web 2.0 video collaboration and experiential technologies promise to genuinely change what we do for the better. We have for the first time the opportunity to connect people together on the basis of need and expertise and to create opportunities for effective professional learning which go beyond institutional, financial and geographical boundaries.

IRIS Connect is an innovative and powerful system for building teacher capacity.

By fusing a mobile video system, data collection tools and a secure web community, IRIS Connect provides a practice based, effective professional development system for your school.

IRIS Connect breaks the mould of what lesson observations have been about and puts teachers in control. Teachers can view their own practice or share it with their colleagues. Peer coaches can observe practice aligned with professional teaching standards or code practice against models such as the NSW Quality teaching framework.

Schools within their own contexts can create libraries of best practice to demonstrate innovative and effective pedagogical strategies around, literacy, numeracy or ICT. Head teachers or year/stage co-ordinators can provide models of practice for the implementation of new syllabuses.

Through IRIS great teachers can demonstrate how they teach so others can learn.

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