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Prologue

Once there was a land where education was considered a most important priority, yet student performance was unsatisfactory. From 'education presidents' to continuous reform efforts to national goals, much time and rhetoric were expended to resolve the problem. The real educational process, though, took place in individual classrooms, between students and teachers everywhere.

In the schools, administrators were deeply concerned and exhorted teachers to produce better results. Experts devised ever more complex appraisal systems. Most required several visits to each classroom by an administrator. Otherwise, though, the administrators remained in their offices most of the time. Managing budgets and paperwork had become a full-time job in itself. When they did conduct performance appraisal observations, specific feedback to improve teacher performance was seldom included. Instead, teachers received ratings in several areas defined as important to good teaching performance.

Today's world of educational reform is little more than make-believe.

Though rare, it wasn't unheard of for teachers to be rated without a single visit by the administrator since the process was often considered a nuisance and a waste of time. As long as a teacher received a good rating, the process was considered complete. Appraisal systems were often best suited for the rare situation where seriously deficient performance required documentation.

Teachers tried to find ways to improve their students' achievement, too. They attended many conferences, seminars and courses. But the implementation of conference ideas in the classroom was largely an unsuccessful proposition. Teachers were on their own when it came to implementation and rarely received feedback or follow-up help.

Consequently, teachers never knew for sure how they were doing. Except for the infrequent appraisal visits, no one, including other

teachers, ever saw them teach. They never saw their colleagues teach either. It just wasn't done. A curious tradition had developed whereby teachers were isolated in their classrooms. It was called professional autonomy.

Teachers were also extremely busy. They were under pressure from educational leaders to find new ways to engage their students in collaborative group learning and problem-solving experiences, to name just two departures from centuries' old tradition. This was not the stuff of teacher training in college, not a reflection of how schools themselves were organised and administrated, but new strategies that teachers were expected to learn, perform and continuously refine, despite little or no training. Add that to increasing societal problems, growing student diversity and professional isolation, and little joy remained in the teaching profession.

The world was rapidly becoming a more complex place. Even small businesses were expanding beyond national boundaries. Global commerce required new ways of communicating and working

In our complex world, people need better ways of communicating and working together.

together. Group efforts requiring interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities, communication, feedback and trust seemed necessary to maximise business opportunities. Even more urgently, these skills were needed to address some of the issues threatening the planet, such as the deterioration of the environment, caused

largely by people, businesses and nations acting in isolation.

Eventually, some teachers began to wonder, how can we best address student performance when our own professional development is not optimal? What are other teachers doing? How can we improve?

Uncertainty was rampant. Teachers knew that they didn't have to be sick to get better. But typical performance appraisal systems and staff development models seemed to have serious flaws. Frequent feedback and follow-up was needed. Isolation was a tremendous handicap. This book introduces a unique tool capable of addressing these dilemmas: 2 + 2 for teachers.

Introduction

Collaborative Peer Coaching That Improves Instruction tells the story of one school's implementation of 2 + 2 for teachers, a collaborative approach to the improvement of teaching and learning. In the narrative, details of the 2 + 2 model gradually emerge as the teacher leaders and principal of John Dewey High School identify problems grounded in systemic processes that encourage teacher isolation and ineffectual staff development. The account, though fictionalised, is based on the experiences of the authors with 2 + 2 implementations in schools. Readers seeking a complete description of the 2 + 2 for teachers model prior to reading the book are referred to the section '2 + 2: Frequently asked questions' at the end of the book, following the epilogue. There, readers will find an overview of the 2 + 2 for teachers model as well as a detailed explanation of implementation processes. This section is also valuable for readers who may wish to plan a 2 + 2 implementation after reading the book.

Why is teacher isolation a major catalyst for the development and implementation of a model such as 2 + 2 for teachers? As is widely acknowledged among educators, isolation from other adults is one of the less-heralded hallmarks of the teaching profession. Some teachers view this circumstance positively, as an indicator of professional autonomy. Many, though, readily admit to feelings of uncertainty and discouragement at the lack of professional feedback. How can it be otherwise when it's human nature to learn from external as well as internal feedback? Dedicated professionals have a need to achieve, to grow and to make progress in their craft. Teachers already exert extra effort and expend long hours to improve student performance. But without the feedback and encouragement necessary for effective

Isolation from other adults, one of the less-heralded hallmarks of the teaching profession, significantly hinders teacher effectiveness.

guidance, the only option becomes doing the same things harder. More often than not, the result is burnout rather than success or satisfaction.

Teacher performance appraisal is, in most schools, the only avenue for teachers to receive feedback. However, the nature of the typical teacher performance appraisal, with its infrequent observations and emphasis on ratings, makes it an inadequate vehicle for professional development and improvement. Teachers today are challenged to be lifelong learners. But who provides teachers with the encouragement and support needed for continuous learning? Where does the joyful satisfaction of receiving positive feedback and supportive suggestions for improvement come from? Too often, a disconnect exists between joy and learning, between feedback and improvement of instruction, between schools and parents, between teachers and administrators, and among teachers themselves.

We believe there is a way to alleviate isolation, promote professional growth and re-establish vital connections among teachers. A simple but radical program of feedback known as 2 + 2 for teachers requires no additional funding. Implementing 2 + 2 is feasible even given the daunting time constraints faced by teachers. 2 + 2 for teachers is based on frequent, mutual feedback from peers, students and administrators. Teachers regularly visit one another's classrooms during instructional time for as long as it takes to write two compliments and two suggestions for improvement. It has already been successfully implemented in several school districts, and, where it has been introduced, feelings of support, trust, wonder and joy have been awakened.

2 + 2 can't solve every problem and is not a panacea for improved teaching. We believe, however, that it is an important – and doable –

2 + 2: A simple, important step toward teacher professionalism.

step toward the professionalisation of teaching. 2 + 2 creates a connection for the ongoing feedback necessary for continuous improvement. Just as important, 2 + 2 is a source of increased meaningful contact and discussion among teachers and a first step toward true collaboration. 2 + 2 allows for administrator participation in a less threatening context than the traditional performance appraisal. Even 2 + 2 feedback from students is valued. In light of our experience with 2 + 2 in schools, we encourage you to keep an open mind as you read about the potential of 2 + 2 to transform teachers. 2 + 2 is simple in concept yet rich in possibilities.

1

The performance appraisal paradox

Performance appraisal exists to help teachers improve instruction. The categories and domains of the performance appraisal instrument are based on extensive research and break the teaching act into useful, discrete components. School administrators observe staff frequently; give helpful, specific feedback; follow up on suggestions; provide additional assistance; and praise excellence. Teachers thrive on feedback, are motivated to improve, and experience satisfaction through professional growth. The appraisal system is taken seriously and is an integral part of staff development. This, at least, is the intent.

In practice, however, performance appraisal exists to document marginal teaching performance. Categories and domains are useful in identifying deficiencies. The school administrators observe staff infrequently, give perfunctory 'pats on the back' to 90% of teachers, and have no time or opportunity to follow up on any suggestions for improvement. Schoolteachers receive little feedback, are anxious about performance appraisal ratings, and are relieved when the process is complete. The appraisal system is often subverted by cutting corners and has no link to staff development or professional growth.

The current performance appraisal system does little to help teachers improve.

Andy Armstrong was nervously anticipating his principal's third and final classroom observation of the year. Tall, slender, and bespectacled, Andy was in his late twenties. While the past six years teaching English at Eltham Secondary College had greatly developed his confidence, performance appraisal time inspired a touch of uncertainty. He thought, *I wouldn't mind these visits if only they didn't happen so rarely. Three years of teaching with no one but students in here, and suddenly it's time for the administration to take a look again. Three visits – of just half a class period each!* He wasn't comfortable with the idea that his performance appraisal rating – a permanent part of his personnel file – was based on these three visits. Even his students acted differently when Dr Cecilia Fusz, the principal, was in the room. Thankfully, Andy had received some advance notice of this last visit.

Not that Dr. Fusz wasn't a good administrator, Andy reflected. She had impressive credentials. As far as he knew, she was truly concerned about the quality of education at Eltham. He was just not convinced that she understood the realities of front-line, day-to-day teaching – at least not in his department. With her maths background, she sometimes seemed out of touch with the significant language problems of these urban students. He, as an English teacher, felt that he had a more accurate understanding of how to address the basics in the language arena.

Still, he hoped Sissy, as Dr Fusz was known among the staff, would be pleased with what she saw. These performance appraisal observations were his only chance to get feedback on his teaching. Reassurances that he was on the right track were always welcome. Ideally, he'd hear mostly good things at the post-observation conference. It was too late in the year to hear any substantial criticism – too late for him to make changes, that is. Sissy hinted at his last two conferences that he might find it helpful to explore some new teaching strategies, use more variety in his approach. But he wasn't very clear on what that meant. Did she want him to de-emphasise grammar and spelling? Ask more questions? Get rid of worksheets? Would she be looking for something specific today?

Sissy always seemed to have some new idea about how things should be done. At faculty meetings, she often talked about things like creating more relevance for all students and teaching problem-solving skills. She liked the idea of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching. She wasn't completely off track, he conceded to himself. 'Relate everything to students' experiences and involve them actively in class,' she exhorted. Andy had nothing against any of that, at least not in theory. But the underlying message was that he needed to raise