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Section One

Chapter 1: Why Look at Great Chapter 2: It's People, Not Programs

Understanding Key Concepts

- ◆ Great teachers do not use sarcasm, yell at students, or argue with students in front of other students.
- ◆ We can always learn from observing what great teachers do. Eliminating inappropriate choices does not help as much as identifying good ideas used by successful educators.
- ◆ All that is truly needed to improve education is for *all* teachers to be like our very *best* teachers.
- ◆ *Who we are* as teachers and *what we do* as teachers is more important than what we know. Teachers must self-reflect on who they are and what they must do in order to improve their practice.
- ◆ There are really only two ways to improve any school: get better teachers and improve the teachers already there.
- ◆ No program inherently leads to school improvement. It is the people who implement sound programs and determine the success of the school. Programs are never the solution, and they are never the problem.
- ◆ What matters most is not *what* teachers do (including “programs” such as whole language, assertive discipline, open classrooms), but *how* appropriately and effectively they do it.

Selecting Questions for Discussion

- ◆ What is the most important idea communicated in these two chapters? How would you implement this idea in your classroom?

- ◆ Why should we look at what great teachers do?

- ◆ Why must we also study less-effective teachers and schools when determining what constitutes great teachers and schools?

- ◆ What is it that determines—in the eyes of parents and students—whether or not a school is great?

- ◆ Are *Open Classrooms*, *Back to Basics*, *Whole Language*, and *Assertive Discipline* programs inherently good or bad? Explain.

- ◆ When considering whether or not to adopt a school program change, what should stand as the primary criterion?

Interacting With Others

Teaching 5th grade for 38 years

In groups of three to five, consider the following two points: (a) Some teachers have 20 years of teaching experience; others who have taught for 20 years have 1 year of experience which they have repeated 20 times. (b) "Students want to know how much you care before they care how much you know." On p. 7 of the book, there is a description of a teacher who taught the same grade effectively for 38 years. Use the scenarios above and discuss how they apply to this particular teacher. Create a list with three categories: *what she knew* as a teacher, *who she was* as a teacher, and *what she did* as a teacher. Based on the description of this effective veteran teacher, brainstorm descriptions within each category that would likely have applied to her and her knowledge, passion, and practices as an educator. Be prepared to share these lists with the group.

It's not what you do, it's how you do it

Beginning on p. 10 of the book, three "programs" are described that are deemed neither a problem nor a solution: Open Classrooms, Assertive Discipline, and Lecturing. Divide participants into three groups and assign each group one section ("How Open Classrooms Got Started," "Assertive Discipline—The Problem or the Solution," and "The Poor Lecturer's Classroom") to review. Have each group create and present a skit to the entire group showing how the "program" in question can be both an effective and ineffective strategy in teaching.

Notes