Contents

© 2004 Hawker Brownlow Education RF9106

© 2004 Hawker Brownlow Education RF9106

Introduction

Teacher–student teams have existed from the beginning of learning. Socrates and Plato, Mary Sullivan and Helen Keller, and Dr. Higgins and Eliza are just a few well-known combinations that produced notable learning on the part of the students. The goal for each of these teams was for the learner – Plato, Helen Keller, Eliza – to learn. Notice that the goal does not mention teachers teaching. So, if the goal is for the student to learn, and it is the student who actually does the learning, what contribution did the teacher make to these duos' goals?

The teacher enables, facilitates, encourages, goads, spurs, prompts, cheers, persuades, challenges, leads, steers.

The teacher enables, facilitates, encourages, goads, spurs, prompts, cheers, persuades, challenges, leads, steers, … well, the idea is clear. Teachers afford (make possible or allow) the act of learning by another. They set the learning climate, scaffold processes, assess achievements, encourage reflection, and model behaviour—all in pursuit of helping students to learn.

'The teacher is also the student' is a very apt characterisation of how teachers meet the many responsibilities of their role in the teacher–student duo. They become lifelong learners – always asking questions, seeking answers, and trying new things so that they may keep abreast of changes that influence student achievement, whether from inside or outside the school walls.

© 2004 Hawker Brownlow Education RF9106

What's It All About?

It is well known that quality teachers can make the difference in terms of increasing student achievement (Haycock, 1999). Schools under pressure from local, state, and national administrators to produce measurable results have turned to teachers, asking them to work with accurate current data to raise the level of achievement for all students.

What has brought about the change in attitude? Viadero (2000) has pointed out that there is an achievement gap. The achievement gap is about poverty, race, expectations, teacher quality, parenting and test bias. But, in the end, it is about literacy instruction…when kids can't, don't, or won't read, it affects everything else they do.

Figure Intro.1shows some facts that clearly delineate a student achievement gap; Figure Intro.2 displays a few remarks about the effects of the gap; and Figure Intro.3 shows some efforts that have reduced the gap.

Defining the Achievement Gap

- Only 1 in 50 Latinos and 1 in 100 African American 17-year-olds can read and gain information from specialised text, such as the science section in the newspaper. **Source: Haycock, 2001, p. 7.**
- There is a 30% illiteracy rate across American schools. **Source: Joyce, 1999, p. 129.**
- The fourth-grade reading slump is a myth. It's a slow decline, getting further behind. **Source: Barbara Taylor, personal communication, 12 July 2003.**

© 2004 Hawker Brownlow Education RF9106

- Parents with professional jobs speak about 2,153 words an hour to their toddlers; those in poverty only about 616. A five-year-old child from a low-income home knows 5,000 word, while a middle-class child already knows 20,000 words. Source: Hart and Risley, 2003.
- Students entering high school in the 35 largest cities in the United States read at the sixth-grade level. Students not reading at grade level are included in the achievement gap. **Source: Vacca, 2002, p. 9.**
- Achievement on literacy hasn't risen for 70 years. **Source: Joyce, 1999, p. 129.**
- U.S. students: the longer they are in school, the further they fall behind the averages of other countries. **Source: Joyce, 1999, p. 129.**
- 90 million Americans lack basic literacy skills, with consequences for poverty, welfare, employment status, and crime. **Source: U.S. Department of Education, 1993.**

Figure Intro.1

Checking the Effect of the Gap

- 40% of all ***mathematics*** errors on state tests are reading errors. **Source: Joyce, 1999, p. 129.**
- There is no sixth grade math test … it's cumulative; it's is a 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 test. **Source: Barbara Taylor, personal communication, 12 July 2003.**
- 80% of the boys in middle school prefer non-fiction. **Source: Barbara Taylor, personal communication, 12 July 2003.**
- Reading: Elementary School: 90% narrative text; High School, 90% informational text. The change in the type of reading affects the students' scores. **Source: Barbara Taylor, personal communication, 12 July 2003.**
- Informational text for Grade 1: 3% of reading (2.6 min./day); in Grades 2 to 5, 19% of reading. The amount of time spent reading informational text impacts student achievement. **Source: Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez, (in press).**

© 2004 Hawker Brownlow Education RF9106