The December 2014 JSD is all about teacher evaluation, observations, growth models, and learning needs. Such hot buttons for teachers, administrators, students, parents, and society at large. We know there are so many factors determining our students' performance and want to provide them with the best environment possible for learning. Teacher and principal evaluation along with school profiles and student growth are the current trends. But we also need to be reminded of Albert Einstein's words: *"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted."*

We know that the single most influential factor in student learning is teacher quality with research showing that teacher quality affects students' learning greater than race, class, academic record, or the actual school a student attends. (Center for Public Education, 2007, updated August 27, 2014.) If that's the case, one might argue that students with achievement gaps should be taught by highly effective teachers who can show that their students have made academic gains over a predetermined period of time. Of course, this kind of data comes from standardized tests which some say are culturally biased because of the limited experiences of those students who come from backgrounds that are not literacy-rich or from schools that have inadequate resources. Tradition tells us that many "highly effective teachers" do not teach in these challenged environments. In fact, for many of my teaching years, I was not "senior" and was not offered the opportunity to teach the upper grades or the upper level courses. So, I didn't teach the "better" classes; I taught the students who were challenged the most, those overage students who came to my class with huge gaps in their achievement and even larger gaps in their motivation and feelings of self-worth. I never did get to see what the "others" were teaching their "upper level" classes. I only knew that my expectations were very high for my students' success.

Having said that, here's the beauty of instructional coaching… coaches collaborate with all of their teaching colleagues and foster consistency in practice and language. OECD indicates that there is a 2.6 times greater variation in student achievement across classrooms in the same school (2008 – PISA). Perhaps that's why it's not the environment as much as the opportunity to work with colleagues that makes a difference in student achievement.

"Deep learning happens when educators have an opportunity to talk openly and frequently about teaching" (JSD, December 2014, Vol. 35 No. 6). It is an interesting thing to talk about effective teaching practices where all colleagues can learn from each other rather than having an administrator talk to one teacher about his/her weaknesses and how to address them. Imagine talking about teaching and learning all the time and not just on the 4th Tuesday of every month during a time "set aside" for learning. Imagine a place where every teacher has a voice and meets with the team where together they reflect and make adjustments in teaching and debrief about what worked well in classrooms. Imagine working side-by-side, elbow-to-elbow with an instructional coach who is non-judgmental, talks about practice, offers descriptive feedback, and gives you personalized support.

To be effective, an evaluation system cannot be a “gotcha” or threat imposed by the administrative team. An evaluation system should be a system that involves a philosophy that demonstrates its belief that teachers want to get better at their craft. What better way for teachers to refine their practices than to talk with their colleagues about those practices.

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