BFK•Connect™

Powerful Practices in the Classroom

*Applying lessons from highly effective teachers to adopt
an integrated approach to professional development*

Battelle for Kids

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Introduction: Pursuing Excellence in Education

Classrooms are complicated, challenging environments. Consider all the variables that affect teaching and learning on any given day: instructional content, lesson design, presentation style, student engagement, student motivation, and diverse student achievement levels. Add to this increased accountability and higher standards, and a teacher's job becomes even more daunting. In spite of these challenges, most teachers go to school every day, work hard, and do a competent job of educating their students. But some teachers go beyond—some consistently move their students further and deeper in a year's time than their peers. This raises several important questions:

What is different about these teachers? How do their practices differ from their peers?

Why are they successful regardless of the group of students in their classroom?

Are the differences that matter things that can be understood and taught?

These are all important questions, especially in the context of an increasingly competitive knowledge-based world. The new economy and the technologies that fuel it require an educated workforce. All students need and deserve access to teachers who can maximize their academic growth. For this reason, teacher effectiveness has become an important national issue. Around the country, educators, policymakers, and others are struggling with the question of how to improve the overall effectiveness of the teaching force.

One response has been to increase the rigor of teacher evaluation systems. While this "solution" focuses attention on the issue of teacher effectiveness, it has several inherent limitations.

- First, it increases the workload of already overcommitted principals. Someone has to perform an evaluation, and better evaluation systems require more time and more effort.

- Second, the formative value of an evaluation is often overshadowed by its summative intent. Teachers are less inclined to take improvement seriously when all of the rhetoric surrounding evaluation is about judgment.

- Third, even when an evaluation process successfully identifies an underperforming teacher, the removal of such a teacher is difficult and does little to improve the overall quality of the instructional program.

In the long run, while more rigorous teacher evaluation systems may eliminate some of the least effective teachers and provide some impetus for others to improve, evaluation by itself does not do enough to improve the overall effectiveness of the profession.

Educational excellence requires everyone, including the best, to continually get better.

To develop more effective teachers, we must first understand what it means to be effective. Since the 2007–2008 school year, researchers at Battelle for Kids (BFK) have identified, assembled, and studied more than 350 teachers who consistently produce greater-than-expected student academic gains. The original intent of these focus groups was to better understand the practices of effective teachers. Since then, this work has blossomed into a full-blown research and development project.

Currently, BFK is using what we have learned from highly effective teachers (HETs) to support other teachers in their movement toward more effective practice. This paper provides an overview of our HET research and outlines a new approach to professional development that emerged from this work.

So far, our results have yielded significant—and exciting—implications for improving professional development programs and building a self-sustaining system of educational excellence.

Research on Highly Effective Teachers

Research Approach

During the 2007–2008 school year, BFK researchers used value-added data to identify high-gain teachers. We brought these teachers together in subject-specific focus groups to explore what they did to produce larger-than-expected academic gains with their students. The research was framed around an "appreciative inquiry" approach (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003) and a simple research question— **What makes a great teacher great?**

As a part of the process, these teachers were asked to recall the times when their classrooms functioned at their highest level and to describe what it was about themselves, their students, and the organization and focus of their classrooms that contributed to their effectiveness. In each case, conversations were documented and grounded theory methods were used to uncover dominant themes.

As this project moved forward over the first two school years, BFK researchers spent two full days with nine different subject-specific groups of about 30 teachers. Each of these groups engaged in appreciative inquiry about their practice. The teachers came from rural, urban, and suburban classrooms, and they spanned the four core subject areas: math, reading, science, and social studies. During these meetings, teachers talked and wrote about their practice.

Core Themes

After each round of focus groups, data were organized into themes. The themes that emerged took into account what had been learned from the most recent group of teachers and what had been learned from prior groups. By the end of the second year of research, the study findings coalesced into **four overarching themes:**

1. High expectations for student growth;

2. A classroom environment that is structured to promote success;

3. A student-centered focus; and

4. Continuous improvement.

Aside from the convergence around these themes, the end of the second year also marked a turning point in the research. While the four themes worked well to capture the range of data that had been collected, they didn't capture the important interrelationships across the themes.

HETs rarely talked about any theme in isolation. As they told stories centered in one theme, they almost always ended up touching on the other themes. BFK's challenge, then, was not only to uncover common elements across HETs' classrooms, but also to find authentic ways to connect these ideas theoretically.

Interestingly, given the historic divide between education and business, the solution to this challenge was a framework that has been used almost exclusively in the business world—**the Competing Values Framework**.
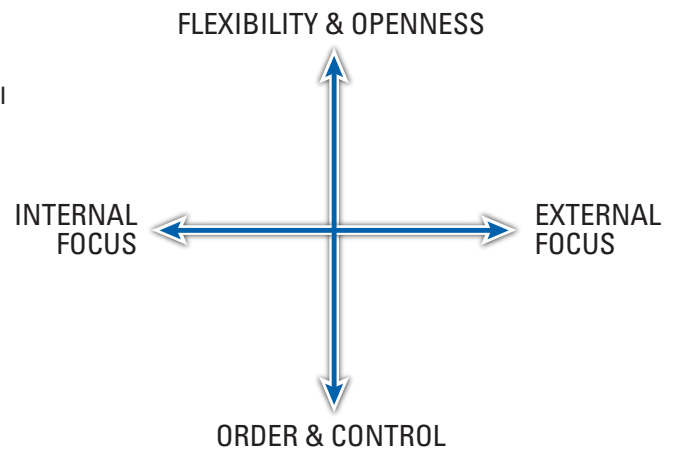
The Competing Values Framework

In 1983, Robert Quinn and John Rohrbaugh published a paper that introduced the Competing Values Framework (CVF). This framework has been recognized as one of the "40 most important frameworks in the history of business," (Ten Have et al., 2003). It is a fundamental component of higher education business programs, but has been used only sparingly in K–12 education. The CVF identifies and connects the diverse set of factors associated with organizational effectiveness (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The strength of this model is that it captures many of the inherent complexities associated with organizational effectiveness in a relatively simple, visual framework.

Organizational Tensions

The CVF is built around **two core organizational tensions** (see Figure 1). The **vertical dimension** describes a fundamental tension associated with structure. At one end are structures that promote order, control, and specificity, and at the other are structures that encourage flexibility, openness, and self-organization. Effective organizations employ structures that are a good fit for the kind of projects in which they are engaged.

The **horizontal dimension** describes the tension associated with focus or attention. At one end is a focus on internal operations and the well-being of people within the organization, and on the other end is a focus on the alignment of the organization with the environment and sustainability of the organization as a whole. Effective organizations focus their attention on the right things at the right time.

Figure 1. CVF Organizational Tensions.
Used with permission from Quinn & Rohrbaugh (1983).
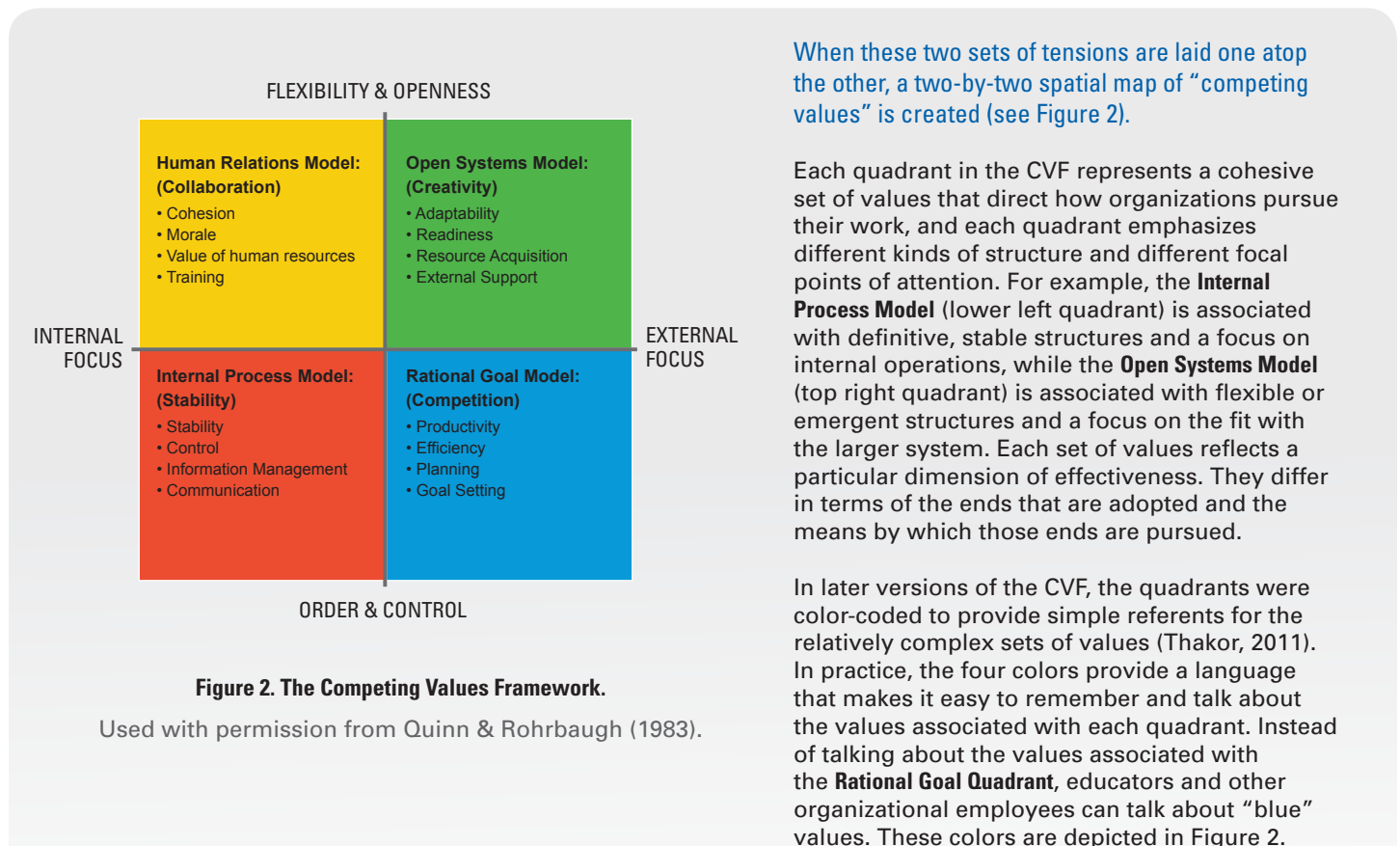
Figure 2. The Competing Values Framework.
Used with permission from Quinn & Rohrbaugh (1983).

When these two sets of tensions are laid one atop the other, a two-by-two spatial map of "competing values" is created (see Figure 2).

Each quadrant in the CVF represents a cohesive set of values that direct how organizations pursue their work, and each quadrant emphasizes different kinds of structure and different focal points of attention. For example, the **Internal Process Model** (lower left quadrant) is associated with definitive, stable structures and a focus on internal operations, while the **Open Systems Model** (top right quadrant) is associated with flexible or emergent structures and a focus on the fit with the larger system. Each set of values reflects a particular dimension of effectiveness. They differ in terms of the ends that are adopted and the means by which those ends are pursued.

In later versions of the CVF, the quadrants were color-coded to provide simple referents for the relatively complex sets of values (Thakor, 2011). In practice, the four colors provide a language that makes it easy to remember and talk about the values associated with each quadrant. Instead of talking about the values associated with the **Rational Goal Quadrant**, educators and other organizational employees can talk about "blue" values. These colors are depicted in Figure 2.

Managing Tensions

What is critical to understand about effective organizations is that these tensions do not necessarily imply either/or choices. Effective organizations do many things well. This means that they are typically not defined as either highly structured or highly flexible, but instead as "appropriately" structured to meet the demands they face. The structures an organization employs must fit the kinds of work it pursues. Similarly, effective organizations don't typically limit their attention to either internal or external issues. Instead, they focus attention on whatever is most critical to the ongoing work.

Another important aspect of this model is that it provides a powerful lens for understanding organizational success as well as organizational difficulties. Each quadrant is positive and productive as long as it remains connected to the values in the other quadrants. When any single set of values begins to dominate, performance deteriorates.

Assets Can Become Liabilities: Examples of the CVF in Action

- Goal setting, productivity, and competitiveness (blue quadrant) are all essential aspects of organizational effectiveness, but when these values are pursued to the exclusion of values in the other quadrants, the organization can regress into an "Oppressive Sweatshop." When this occurs, people experience high levels of stress, over-exertion, and unproductive conflict rather than the pursuit of a shared purpose.

- Discussion, participation, and morale (yellow quadrant) are also essential aspects of organizational effectiveness, but when these values become more important than the values in the other quadrants, the organization may regress into an "Irresponsible Country Club." When this occurs, decision-making may become overly participative, discussion may take precedence over action, and freedom may override responsibility.

These sets of values and their associated negative aspects are reflected in the diagram below (see Figure 3) (Quinn, 1991). The inner blue ring represents the positive dimension of these values; the outer light blue ring represents what can happen when one set of values is overemphasized.

One reason why this model has remained viable over the last 30 years is that it makes complex issues associated with organizational effectiveness visible and, therefore, open to oversight and thoughtful action.
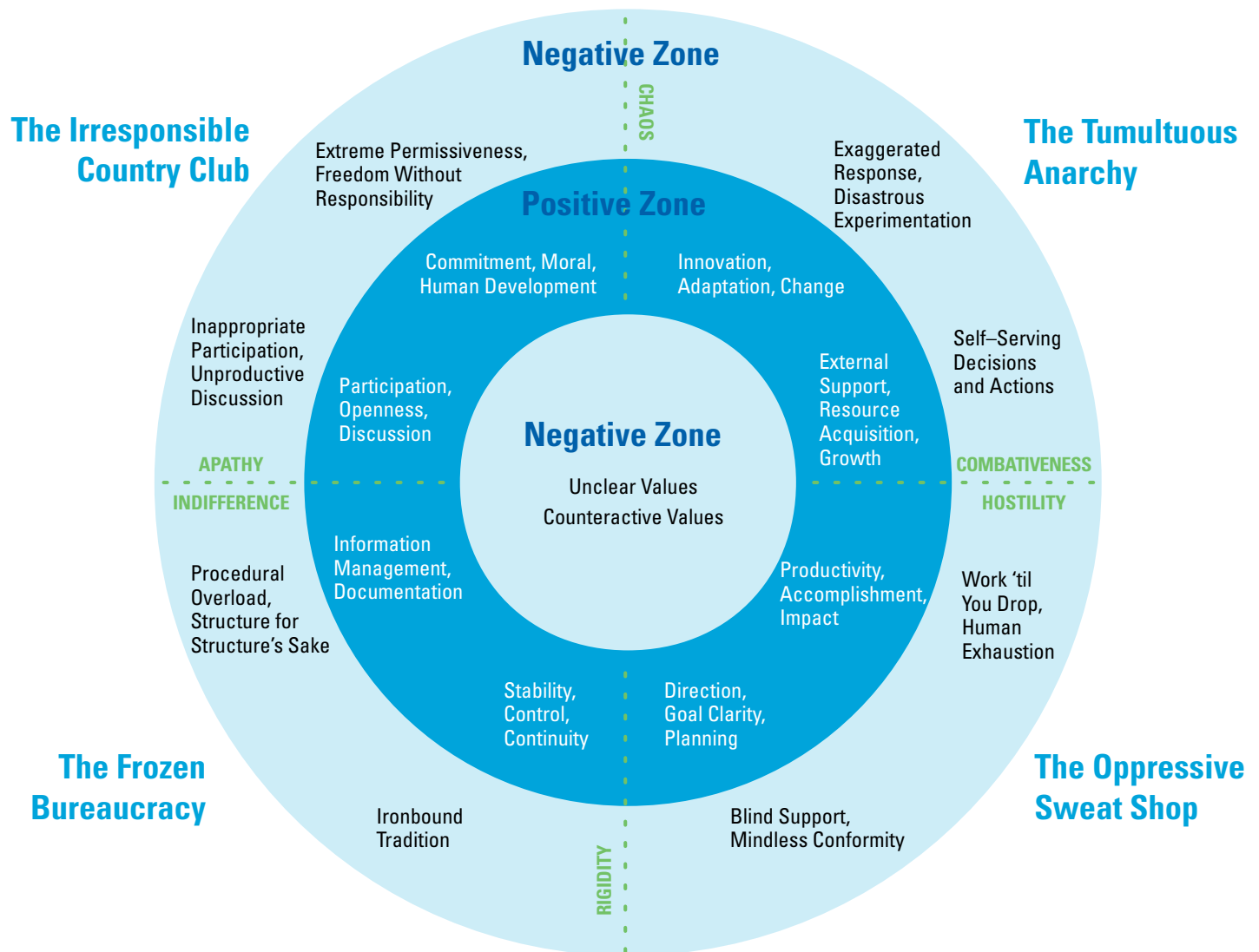

Figure 3. Positive and Negative Zones of the CVF.
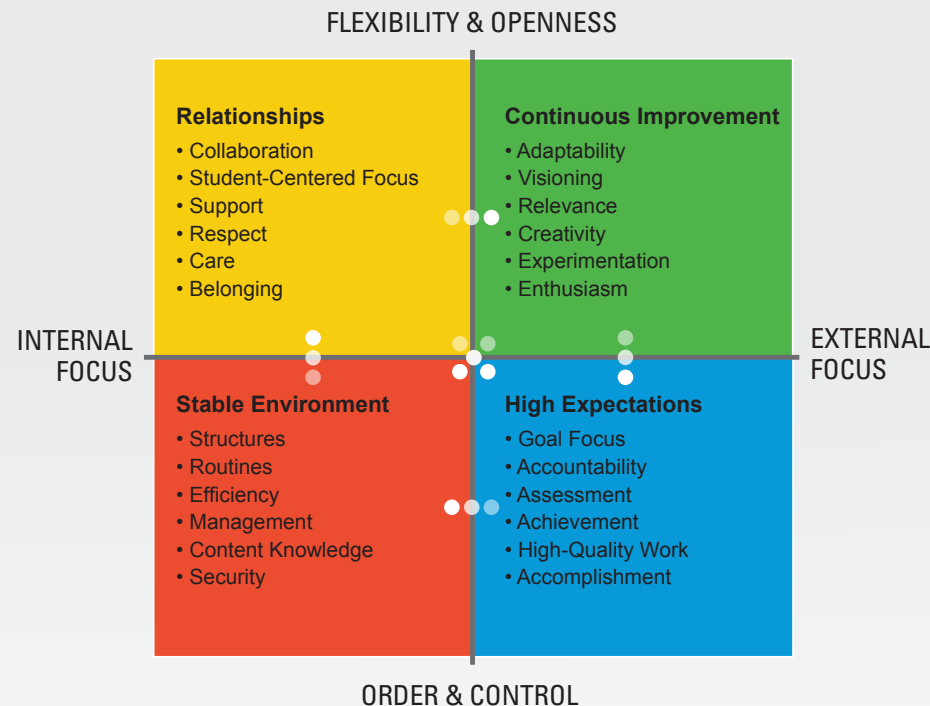
Quinn (1991)

Evolution of the BFK•Connect™ Framework

Connecting the CVF to Effective Teacher Practice

When great teachers talk and write about the factors that guide their practice, they reference the same themes that Quinn and Rohrbaugh cited with respect to effective organizations. The four domains of effectiveness represented by the framework are virtually identical to the themes that emerged from Battelle for Kids' HET research.

In partnership with Dr. Quinn, we have used the CVF to further our research with HETs. Drawing out the four overarching themes did not come quickly or easily. Most of the teachers who participated in the early focus groups had never been a part of conversations like these before. As a result, they had difficulty putting their practice into words. Once we began to use the CVF to explain our initial research findings, it became easier for educators to talk about their own practice. The CVF provides a set of categories and relationships that make intuitive sense to teachers. It allows them to better characterize what they do and why they do it. The CVF continues to be an integral part of our conversations with educators. However, the version that we use with teachers is slightly different than the original CVF.

Battelle for Kids introduced the BFK•Connect™ Framework as a version of the CVF that has been adapted to include descriptors more appropriate for an education setting. Beyond that, the CVF and its underlying meaning structure are unchanged.

FLEXIBILITY & OPENNESS

Relationships
• Collaboration
• Student-Centered Focus
• Support
• Respect
• Care
• Belonging

Continuous Improvement
• Adaptability
• Visioning
• Relevance
• Creativity
• Experimentation
• Enthusiasm

INTERNAL FOCUS — **EXTERNAL FOCUS**

Stable Environment
• Structures
• Routines
• Efficiency
• Management
• Content Knowledge
• Security

High Expectations
• Goal Focus
• Accountability
• Assessment
• Achievement
• High-Quality Work
• Accomplishment

ORDER & CONTROL

Figure 3. The BFK•Connect™ Framework

This arrangement of the themes from our HET research is reasonable and appropriate. The framework captures the dominant themes in the research and relates them in ways that are consistent with how HETs characterize their practice while preserving the essential tensions and meanings associated with the original Competing Values Framework. This last condition is critical because these tensions give the framework its dynamism and heuristic power.

Intuitively, the similarities between effective classroom practice and effective organizational practice make sense. Teachers can be thought of as leaders of complex organizations. Their organization is a classroom whose members are students. A teacher's job is not only to instruct, but also to support, challenge, inspire, and guide students. The core tensions confronting organizations are equally relevant to teachers. As stated earlier, the BFK•Connect™ Framework is built around two core organizational tensions: one having to do with structure and one having to do with focus. Each of these tensions can also be related to a classroom context.

Generative Tensions in the Classroom

1. Structure.

Structure is a central issue for teachers. This tension is clearly visible in questions like:

- How do I organize my classroom?
- What are the processes and structures that define my classroom?
- How much structure do students need for this activity?
- Which students need more structure than others?
- How do I move students from dependence to independence?
- How do I provide enough structure to move work forward, but not so much that I stifle the curiosity and creativity of my students?

2. Focus.

Teachers are also challenged by issues of focus:

- What is my curriculum?
- How are the state standards represented in my curriculum?
- When is it okay to depart from what is prescribed?
- How are board policy, administrative directives, and parental expectations reflected in my classroom?
- How do I keep my classroom relevant?
- How do I deal with differing expectations and demands?

At its most basic level, the core tensions in the original CVF are also central to the BFK•Connect™ Framework. As educators develop the capacity to integrate these tensions, their practice becomes more powerful and more engaging.

Addressing Cross-Quadrant Tensions through BFK•Connect™

Inherent in the BFK•Connect™ Framework is another set of cross-quadrant tensions between the blue and yellow quadrants and the red and green quadrants. These relationships are significant because these quadrants differ in terms of both structure and focus. HETs manage these tensions by integrating them rather than by favoring one over the other.

Yellow and Blue Quadrant Integration

For example, HETs not only talk about the importance of classroom relationships and trust (yellow quadrant) and of pushing student achievement to the limits (blue quadrant), but they also clearly connect these two sets of values. For these teachers, time spent developing powerful relationships with students is a necessary precondition for high productivity and achievement.

The often-repeated saying, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," reflects the essential connection between relationships, trust, and respect (yellow quadrant), and achievement and performance (blue quadrant).

The following quote from a HET illustrates how and why she integrates yellow and blue values:

One of the most important factors to instill personal excellence is to continually remind students I believe in them and to believe in themselves. I begin each school year by getting to know my students and their interests. All students have something they excel at outside the classroom, whether it is gymnastics or showing rabbits at the fair. I use this as a starting point to talk about excellence. We look at their area of excellence and discuss the traits or factors that make them excellent. This helps the students feel successful before we get into academic excellence. We can then make the connections between individual excellence and wanting to excel at school. It also can give you insights into your students outside the classroom. This can help you develop the classroom culture. Most students enter my class thinking that high grades = excellence. My goal is to show them that the desire to excel is more of a process than a product."

Red and Green Quadrant Integration

There were similar conversations about the relationship between order and stability (red quadrant) and creativity and adaptability (green quadrant). Many HETs talked about structure and routine as antecedents, rather than impediments, to creativity and adaptability. Creativity without order is chaos; order without creativity is boredom. It is when order and creativity are integrated that classrooms begin to take off and students begin to excel.

The following quote from another HET integrates red and green values. She talks about playing a math game with her students. The game has rules, structures, and procedures (red quadrant), but creative ideas emerge (green quadrant) in playing the game.

We play a game called "Clear the Board," where I'll put 3 random numbers up on the board. They can use whatever they know about math to combine these numbers to try to get the numbers 1 through 12. We hadn't done integers, but they came up with something that yielded a -3. They're like, "Oh, its -3. If I could only take away that negative sign." And somebody said, "Isn't there a way you can take away that negative sign?" So I thought, all right, the door has opened: "Yes there is," and we talked about absolute value, just briefly. Whenever we played the game, absolute value came up, repeatedly, and I thought, "Wow" —and the same thing [happened] with roots. When we did square roots, somebody asked the question, "Are there any other roots, or are there just square roots?" "Well since you asked…," and the door opened and we walked through it. Now my kids are finding fourth roots and cube roots. They're playing this game and they are expanding their number sense, not because of any kind of formal lesson that I've taught, but [because] they were interested. It was in their best interest to learn it because then they could play the game..."

Integrative Capacity

These examples are important to this research because they illustrate the capacity of HETs to connect and integrate values that, in other circumstances, might be viewed as contradictory or antagonistic. We believe that this integrative capacity is one of the critical factors that set HETs apart from their peers.

HETs are quick to say that they couldn't always do this. They couldn't always connect the relational and performance aspects of their classroom. They couldn't always use structure and rules to produce novel outcomes. HETs are not just teachers who display the values and skills represented in the four quadrants; they are also teachers who have learned how to integrate their practice across these four distinct dimensions of effectiveness. We have begun to call this kind of integrative practice, *Powerful Practice*.

Powerful Practice

Powerful practice is practice that mindfully integrates teaching and learning across the four domains of the BFK•Connect™ Framework.

It is evidenced by action that simultaneously takes into account multiple dimensions of effectiveness. For example, some teachers focus a great deal of attention on rules and structures. For them, a good lesson may be one in which students are organized, orderly, and busy in a prescribed sense. Another teacher may also focus on structures, but for reasons that go beyond producing an orderly classroom. For this teacher, structures are leveraged to enhance relationships and trust, to promote creativity, and to increase performance.

This kind of integrative capacity is advantageous because it simultaneously brings into play more than one aspect of effectiveness. It's like building a diversified investment portfolio: By spreading risk across multiple types of investment, there is an opportunity to limit losses and take advantage of different kinds of gains. When teachers begin to display this kind of integration, they bring more depth and breadth to a classroom experience.

Leveraging Strengths

Throughout our interviews and focus groups with HETs, integration emerged as a recurring theme as these teachers described their practice. However, it is crucial to note that **integrative practice unfolds in different ways for different people**. HETs sometimes described the values within a single quadrant as their "personality" or "identity" as a teacher.

As one HET explained, the values in her comfort zone are "the frame for everything else to come together. If I try to teach like somebody else, it's not going to work." HETs use their natural affinity for the values in one quadrant, their "comfort zone," as the starting point for developing more integrative practices. In essence, these teachers have learned how to leverage their strengths to develop more powerful practices.

This kind of integration is clearly evident in a writing excerpt from one HET. His writing is color-coded to draw attention to the kinds of integration he is managing.

Normal Level of Teaching

*A normal level of teaching for me is based on the principal that **I have specific goals or standards I want them to learn**. **My gift is that I can break learning down into discrete skills**, and that is my normal teaching. **Sentence structure is one example of this. I have taught subjects, verbs, complements, and all of those things for years. I am effective at that.** I now, however, have put all of that together into **a formalized approach that allows students to follow a set sequence of questions and inquiries so that they can predictably attack what words in sentences do**.*

Best Level of Teaching

*When **I am able to teach the lesson in a way that the students can really get it and feel successful**, that helps me to be my very best. **It is a symbiosis**. When they learn it, **I am reacting to them honestly** and **with a clear purpose** as we learn each new thing and **fit it into the schema that we are building about words in sentences**. **When I get those positive formative indicators that they are learning, and when I get those negative indicators that they are not**, and when **I respond to those in a way that helps them to learn**, **it helps one student to teach another**, and [it] **helps the class as a whole to feel like a successful unit**; then I am at my best.*

There are two elements of note in this piece of writing.
- First, it is apparent that this teacher's practice takes advantage of all four dimensions of effectiveness in the BFK•Connect™ Framework. In describing his teaching, he draws on values from each quadrant.
- Second, this teacher also recognizes a difference between what he calls his "normal level of teaching" and a higher level of teaching that is referenced in his second paragraph. For him, "normal teaching" is characterized primarily by red and blue values—structures and routines that support clear goals driven by the standards. In the second paragraph, by including values from the yellow and green quadrants, he elevates his "normal" teaching to masterful teaching.

The fact that this teacher can differentiate between these two approaches is critical. If he can recognize the difference and act on it, others can as well. Once teachers can understand this distinction, they can begin to leverage this knowledge to shape teaching and learning in their classrooms.

As this research continues to move forward, our goal is to introduce other teachers to these ideas and then support them as they work to create more powerful practices in their classrooms.

Powerful Teaching Strategies

There are many examples of powerful practice in use in education today. A hallmark of all of these strategies is that they are both planned and emergent. Each dimension of the BFK•Connect™ Framework is integrated with the others as the strategy is implemented. One example is cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991). Cooperative learning is conspicuous among learning strategies because it focuses activity clearly on specific learning targets (blue), uses particular structures to enable and organize action (red), is inherently focused on collaborative action (yellow), and, because of collaboration, it produces more creative responses to academic challenges (green).

Cooperative learning meets our definition of a powerful practice because it systematically integrates all four dimensions of effectiveness reflected in the BFK•Connect™ Framework. Cooperative learning is also a complicated educational practice because each of the elements is dependent on the others. As teachers who use this strategy know, it never works exactly the same way twice.

Another strategy that clearly displays the elements of powerful practice is formative assessment (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2012), or formative instructional practices (FIP). The four core elements of FIP include:
1. Constructing clear learning targets (blue),
2. Collecting, documenting, and analyzing evidence of learning relative to the targets (red),
3. Providing feedback relative to the evidence and the target that moves the learning forward (green), and
4. Continually creating the circumstances for teachers and students to co-own the teaching and learning process (yellow).

When these four elements come together as an integrated whole, powerful learning happens, but integrating these elements is neither easy nor straightforward. Each element requires teachers to develop new skills and patterns of thought, and each element affects all of the other elements. Consequently, FIP takes time and attention to develop and effectively incorporate into the classroom.

New Directions for Research and Professional Development

Our development of the BFK•Connect™ Framework as a tool through which we describe and analyze powerful practice holds promise for enhancing professional development in ways that elevate the teaching profession as a whole. Standard professional development programs—costing millions of dollars annually—have proven largely ineffective. These top-down, one-size-fits-all programs do not adequately take into account the particular strengths and developmental needs of individual teachers.

If professional development is to become more relevant, useful, and impactful, it should be differentiated to recognize and address teachers' individual strengths and developmental needs.

In his recent book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, Daniel Pink (2011) argues that most organizations' human capital systems fail with respect to increasing motivation and effectiveness. Monetary incentives and performance sanctions—characteristic of most standard teacher evaluation and professional development systems—do little to move people toward exceptional performance.

What makes a difference in improving performance?

Most of the research identifies three factors that are conspicuously missing from most teacher development programs: **autonomy**, **mastery**, and **purpose**. Pink suggests that when employees have some degree of autonomy, a more focused sense of purpose, and metrics that allow them to assess their progress along the way, improvement is not just possible, but probable.

We are currently working with groups of teachers to apply what we have learned from HETs in such a way that teachers experience:

1. Increased autonomy in their choice of what to work on in their practice;
2. An increasing sense of mastery with respect to particular teaching practices; and
3. A growing sense of purpose with respect to personal learning.

This kind of professional development motivates and supports teachers, rather than criticizing and punishing them.

Because a distinguishing characteristic of HETs is their capacity to meaningfully integrate practice across four different dimensions of effectiveness, then it is possible to:

1. Describe the constituent elements of powerful practice to other teachers; and
2. Support them as they learn how to plan for and engage in this kind of integrative practice.

We have developed this knowledge into a concrete developmental approach that provides purpose, autonomy, and support for teachers who have a desire to move beyond their current practice.

All teachers—even those who are already making exceptional gains with their students—have the capacity to continuously improve their practice.

Many HETs speak candidly about what they had to learn to become great teachers and about the time and effort they continually invest in improving their practice. BFK's Powerful Practice professional development approach positions HETs as models and guides for other educators as they move toward more powerful practice. Teachers learning from teachers—sharing best practices, engaging in productive dialogue, and implementing change in a supportive environment—helps make educational excellence a reasonable target.

Impact and Next Steps

Powerful Practice Professional Development

Our current research involves empowering teachers by introducing them to a structured set of developmental experiences to help each of them realize their full potential. We are continuing our development of a comprehensive set of tools, training, and resources that enables educators to direct their own professional development and builds teachers' capacity to support and coach their peers. This approach was initially piloted with ten professional learning teams (PLTs) in Ohio during the spring of 2012 and again in an extended pilot during the 2012–2013 school year. Ultimately, our goal is to embed continuous improvement into educators' daily lives.

Teachers participating in the pilot began by completing a series of online courses that provide the foundation for thinking and talking about effective practice. These courses introduce educators to the research on HETs and to the BFK•Connect™ Framework. The courses include a survey and reflection questions that enable teachers to assess their practice with respect to this framework and then to reimagine their practice around a new set of integrative principles. Teacher responses are captured in a summary report that teachers then used to engage in systematic conversations about their practice.

Throughout the school year, teachers regularly meet with a peer group to engage in conversations about their practice. Each PLT member creates a personal improvement plan to stretch a core teaching practice into a more powerful integrative practice. The PLT structure provides a safe environment for educators to question their practice, refine what is working well, and brainstorm solutions to challenges. We have developed materials to guide educators through this process and to help keep the work organized, focused, and productive. Resources include PLT meeting agendas, templates, and exemplars of powerful practice.

Powerful Practice at All Levels of the Education System

We have also used the BFK•Connect™ Framework in our research with highly effective principals (HEPs) to better understand what they do that contributes to student success. We have created a complementary set of tools, training, and resources that build leadership capacity. By integrating their practice across the four domains of the framework, district and school leaders can increase their effectiveness in leading change, bring coherence to improvement efforts, and implement new initiatives in more powerful ways to increase student success.

Impact

Results from the preliminary pilot with teachers are encouraging. **Many teachers described being transformed by the process**. After only working together for three months, many of the teachers could identify concrete changes in themselves, their students, and/or their classrooms. They valued the opportunity to engage in deeper conversations about their practice with their peers. Teachers also found it easy to understand the BFK•Connect™ Framework and use it to stretch and grow their practice.

One teacher explained, "It's changed the way I think about everything I do."

In addition, the focus on strengths was validating for teachers and gave them a new way to think about their personal development. Another teacher described this mindset shift: "I used to think that the strong attributes and the weak attributes of my teaching craft were disconnected in relationship to one another. In other words, I believed that I needed to use my strengths to 'overcome' my weaknesses, as though each was not pliable, as though each was separate. What this project has helped me to actualize is that I can use my strengths to develop my weaknesses."

Challenges

The initial pilot also revealed challenges that can impede this approach to professional development. The most significant roadblock was time for teachers to meet during the school day. Most groups had to carve out time before or after the school day to get together. In response, we are investigating cost-effective ways to build collaboration time into the school schedule and developing tools and resources for school leaders to support their staff's development.

Teachers also found it challenging to hone in on a focus area for their improvement plan and to dedicate time to formally reflect on their progress. We are currently piloting new tools and resources that address these issues.

Conclusion

In 2011, US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan set the following goal: "Every teacher should receive the high-quality preparation and support they need, so that every student can have the effective teachers they deserve." In order for the United States to compete in the global economy, we must have a workforce that is educated by the best teachers in the world. Teacher owned professional development programs based on the powerful practice of HETs allow teachers to be full partners in education reform—a key to maximizing students' academic growth. Excellence in education requires every educator to continuously improve upon his or her craft.

BFK shares and is committed to achieving a frequently stated goal: an effective teacher in every classroom. Current professional development approaches tend to rely on outside experts or administrators to push through new initiatives. With constrained budgets and over-extended administrators, this approach isn't sustainable. Our research with highly effective educators points to a new pathway for professional development. We propose an alternate route to excellence that makes motivation and support of teachers by teachers central to the implementation of powerful practice in the classroom.

BFK developed the BFK•Connect™ Framework to help educators at all levels of the education system think and talk about effective practice. The BFK•Connect™ Framework provides a common language for educators to assess strengths and opportunities for growth. In addition, our comprehensive set of tools and resources brings structure and purpose to PLTs within and across schools. BFK is currently studying the implementation of this professional development approach and continues to create additional resources that empower teachers to improve their practice.

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About Battelle for Kids

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides counsel and solutions to advance the development of human capital, the use of strategic measures, practices for improving educator effectiveness, and communication with all stakeholders. At the heart of this work is an unwavering focus on accelerating student growth.

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