



## OPENING THE CLASSROOM DOOR TO ENHANCE LEARNING

Opening the classroom door is essential for enhancing the learning of teachers and other staff and increasing the productivity of classroom instruction.

The crux of the matter is to ensure use of effective mentoring and collegial practices to enhance learning through modeling and guiding change in a teacher's own classroom or in colleagues' rooms. This includes demonstrating and discussing new approaches, guiding initial practice and eventual implementation, and following-up to improve and refine.

Schools also can use specialist personnel (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, resource teachers) to mentor and demonstrate rather than pursuing traditional consultant roles. That is, instead of *telling* teachers about how to address student learning, behavior, and emotional problems, specialists can be trained to go into classrooms to model and guide teachers in implementing new practices to engage and re-engage students in learning.

Opening the classroom door also allows for adding a variety of assistance and useful partnerships. Student learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spent in classrooms. It occurs whenever and wherever the learner interacts with the surrounding environment. All facets of the community provide opportunities; anyone in the community who wants to facilitate learning might be a contributing teacher.

When a classroom successfully joins with its surrounding community, everyone has the opportunity to learn and to teach. Indeed, most schools do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. The array of people who might be of assistance are:

- C Aides and a variety of volunteers
- C Other regular classroom teachers
- C Family members
- C Students
- C Specialist teachers and support service personnel
- C School administrators
- C Classified staff
- C Professionals-in-training

It is evident that teachers need to work closely with other teachers and school personnel, as well as with parents, professionals-in-training, volunteers, and so forth. Collaboration and teaming are key facets of mobilizing and enabling learning. These practices allow teachers to broaden the resources and strategies available in and out of the classroom to enhance learning and performance.

### Examples of Opening the Door

**Using Aides/Volunteers in Targeted Ways** – Chronically, teachers find classroom instruction disrupted by some student who is less interested in the lesson than in interacting with a classmate. The first tendency usually is to use some simple form of social control to stop the disruptive behavior (e.g., using proximity and/or a mild verbal intervention). Because so many students today are not easily intimidated, teachers find such strategies do not solve the problem. So, the next steps escalate the event into a form of Greek tragedy. The teacher reprimands, warns, and finally sends the student to “time-out” or to the front office for discipline. And, the lesson usually is disrupted.

In contrast to this scenario, teachers can train an aide (if they have one) or a volunteer who has the ability to interact with students to focus on these youngsters. Specifically, the aide or volunteer should be taught to go and sit next to any youngster when a problem starts to emerge. The focus is on re-engaging the student in the lesson. If this proves undoable, the next step involves taking the student for a walk.

It is true that this means the student won't get the benefit of instruction during that period, but s/he wouldn't anyway. And, not having to shift into a discipline mode has multiple benefits. For one, the teacher is able to carry out the day's lesson. For another, the other students do not have the experience of seeing the teacher having a control contest with a student. (Even if a teacher wins such contests, it may have a negative effect on how students perceive the teacher; and if the teacher somehow “loses it,” that definitely conveys a wrong message. Either outcome can be counterproductive with respect to a caring climate and a sense of community.) Finally, there has not been a negative encounter with the student. Such encounters build up negative attitudes on both sides which can be counterproductive to future teaching, learning, and behavior. Because there has been no negative encounter, the teacher can reach out to the student after the lesson is over and start to think about how to use an aide or volunteers to work with the student to prevent future problems.

**Team Teaching** – The obvious point here is that partnering with a compatible colleague enables team members to complement each others' areas of competence, provide each other with nurturance and personal support, and allow for relief in addressing problems.

**Collaborating with Special Educators and other Specialists** – Almost every school has personnel who have special training relevant to redesigning the classroom to work for a wider range of students. These specialists range from those who teach music or art to those who work with students designated as in need of special education. They can bring to the classroom not only their special expertise, but ideas for how the classroom design can incorporate practices that will engage students who have not been doing well and can accommodate those with special needs.

The center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 Phone: (310) 825-3634. Support comes in part from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Adolescent Health, with co-funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Mental Health Services.

