

# From Good Teacher to Great Teacher

by Martha C. Hougen

Several years ago I read a book that led me to dramatically alter how I conceptualized teaching. The book, *Good to Great*<sup>1</sup> by Jim Collins, discusses how some businesses remain mediocre or good, while other similar companies become great. The “good to great” concept and recent research about teaching and learning converged as I addressed the question, “What makes a great teacher?” Why is it that some teachers enable their students to make significant growth in achievement while students of other teachers may make progress, but not the leaps in achievement that students of the great teachers make? Why are there such wide differences in student achievement in the same schools, same grade, even in classes in the same hall?

I propose that the truly great teachers have mastered high-leverage strategies—ways to teach that produce the most results.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Most of these practices can be accomplished by applying five features of effective instruction.<sup>5</sup> These five features can make a good teacher great and turn mediocre student progress into significant student achievement.

## 1. Explicit Instruction with Modeling

Explicit instruction means being clear in what students are to learn and showing them what they are expected to do. Modeling, including thinking aloud your thought process, is essential for students who may have trouble understanding the concept or skill being taught. Modeling that is clear, concise, and consistent is an essential teacher skill and will reduce student confusion and increase learning.

## 2. Systematic Instruction with Scaffolding

The sequence in which teachers present new information is crucial. Teachers must be thoughtful about planning, building upon concepts students know. For students who need intervention, this typically requires teachers to ensure students know the prerequisite skills, to break the new skill into smaller skills, and to begin with the concrete and move to the abstract. Scaffolding refers to the practice of providing temporary support until the student has mastered the skill. Scaffolds include such practices as providing starter sentences or partial answers, additional modeling, or using multisensory strategies to reinforce learning.

## 3. Frequent Opportunities for Responding and Practicing

Great teachers maximize student participation, especially of students who find learning new concepts difficult and who need ample practice in order to master the material. Students need to respond and practice the new skills often. This does not mean more worksheets, but rather more opportunities to manipulate the material in a meaningful way. These opportunities for increased practice and responding are best provided during small-group instruction until the student can practice the skill independently with accuracy.

## 4. Immediate Corrective and Affirmative Feedback

Feedback that is specific and timely increases student accuracy and learning. The most effective feedback refers to what the student did. For example, a teacher may say to a student who is confusing the letter sounds for *m* and *n*, “You read *nat*. Look at the first letter again. It is the letter *m* and sounds like /m/. Look in the mirror while you say /m/. See how your lips are together? Yes, /m/ is the sound for the letter *m*. Read the word again, slowly. Yes! /m/ /a/ /n/. Now say the word fast. Yes! The word is *man*.” This type of feedback is most appropriate in a small-group or one-to-one instruction. Positive and effective ways to provide specific, corrective, and affirmative feedback during whole-class or small-group instruction are provided in this Teacher’s Guide.

## 5. Ongoing Progress Monitoring

Teachers need to be more efficient in their instruction than ever before. In a typical class students vary widely in their skills and instructional needs. Knowing exactly what a student needs to learn helps teachers target their instruction for that student, accelerating student learning in a focused manner. Quick, brief, frequent assessments help teachers plan their instruction to meet the needs of the students. Assessing students' reading fluency, for example, can provide a knowledgeable teacher with a great deal of information about student achievement in reading.

The intervention strategies in the *Foundational Skills and Word Study Studio* provide a basis for applying the features of effective instruction. The steps of Teach/Model, Guided Practice, and Apply are explicit and systematic. For example, the reading skills build from phonemic awareness to learning to decode words. The teacher models and is prompted to think aloud for students. Opportunities to practice are provided through Practice Pages as well as games and activities. Each session includes a tip on providing feedback and conducting formative assessment, and the *Intervention Assessments* provide tools for monitoring students' progress over time.

The resources are available. Now it is up to you, the teacher, to implement the features of effective instruction and become a great teacher for all your students.



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### Notes

1. Collins, J. (2001). *Good to Great*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
2. Ball, D. L. & Forzani, F. M. (2011, Summer). Building a Common Core for Learning to Teach, and Connecting Professional Learning to Practice. *American Educator*, 35(2), 17–21, 38–39. See also Teaching Works website: <http://www.teachingworks.org/>.
3. Archer, A. & Hughes, C. (2011). *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*. New York: Guilford Press.
4. Rosenshine, B. (2010). *Principles of Instruction*. Brussels, Belgium: The International Academy of Education. Available for download at the International Bureau of Education website: [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/Educational\\_Practices/EdPractices\\_21.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Educational_Practices/EdPractices_21.pdf)
5. Meadows Center for Preventing Education Risk. (2007). *Features of Effective Instruction*. Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency/University of Texas System.