

Introduction

Any teacher can fill a bookshelf with books about education. Any teacher can study lists of guidelines, standards, principles, and theories. The best teachers and the worst teachers can ace exams in their undergraduate and graduate classes. The difference between more effective teachers and their less effective colleagues is not what they know. It is what they do.

This book is about *what great teachers do* that sets them apart. Clarifying what the best educators do, and then practicing it ourselves, can move us into their ranks.

This book is not meant to prescribe a narrow set of instructions. Instead, it frames the landscape of school from the perspective of great teachers. What do they see when they view their classrooms and the students in them? Where do they focus their attention? How do they spend their time and energy? What guides their decisions? How can we gain the same advantages?

There is no one answer; if there were, surely we'd all have it by now. Education is extremely complex, and so is classroom teaching. But we can work toward understanding what the best teachers do. We can gain insight into how effective we are as educators. Most of all, we can continue to refine our skills. All of us have this in common with the best teachers: No matter how good we are, we still want to be better.

The book flows from three different perspectives. I have participated in five research studies on the effectiveness of school principals. Each study was grounded in visits to more effective schools and to less effective schools. In every school, no matter what the environment, I found a wide range of teachers—some more effective, some less so. Better schools may have a higher percentage of better teachers, but I found great teachers in every setting, and I grew curious about what made them great. Second, every year I work with more than 50 schools as a consultant. Through years of observing and visiting with teachers, principals, students, and staff, I have gained insight into the atti-

tudes and behaviors that lead to success. The third perspective is very personal: I write from my own experience as a teacher and principal. I have worked with many outstanding colleagues. What made them great? What kept others from reaching that level?

Over the years, I have presented some of my answers to these questions in sessions with school principals and other educators. And, I compiled my thoughts in a short book, *What Great Principals Do Differently*. Before long, it became evident that great principals and great teachers share many of the same qualities. It makes sense: Part of being a great principal is to be a great teacher; part of being a great teacher is to be a great leader. Educators began inviting me to their schools and districts to work with their teachers, and teachers began asking me to write a companion volume that accounts for the differences between a principal's role and a teacher's role. With my compliments to all the great teachers in our schools, here is that book.

Not all aspects of great teaching have a place in these pages. Those who seek guidance on curriculum development, instructional approaches, assessment rubrics, and other such tools of the trade will find that information elsewhere. These chapters focus on the beliefs and behaviors, attitudes and interactions that form the fabric of life in our classrooms and in our schools. Learning can happen in isolation; teaching happens between people. Effective teaching calls for "people skills," and the best teachers practice those skills every day.

The format of this book is straightforward. An introductory chapter provides context on the importance of learning from the most effective teachers. A concluding chapter asks us to center on our own core beliefs. And in between are fourteen chapters—one dedicated to each of the fourteen things that great teachers do differently. Each of us can do everything described in this book—everything the best teachers do.