Don't Reteach if you don't know why!

By: Robert Crowe

Practical Solutions for Classroom Challenges

As Chief Learning Officer at Elevated Achievement Group, Robert Crowe supports educators in the complex work of teaching and learning. He assists at all levels, partnering with students, teachers, and administrators. This work includes being on site: in classrooms working with students and teachers delivering model lessons, co-planning and co-teaching, and offering feedback; in schools mentoring administrators; and at the district office planning and organizing support programs. Prior to forming EAG, Robert lead a national professional development company in the implementation of research-based strategies, helmed the development of the HMH reading intervention program Gateways, and supported over 25,000 educators in schools and districts nationwide. His passion is for practical solutions that increase student achievement. In this column Bob offers practical solutions for real classroom challenges.

Question: I am a 7th-grade teacher in a large urban middle school. Recently, my students took a quarterly benchmark exam to see where they are in their effort to master the district standards. I followed my district PLC protocol to analyze my students' results. I was told to identify the standards that the majority of my students missed and then reteach those. I've identified the standards but I have no idea why my students missed them, so I am unsure of what I need to do to reteach them. Am I missing something?

Answer: Actually, you aren't missing anything but your data protocol is. You are correct in feeling that something is missing and that there is more to your job than just identifying what kids didn't learn and then reteach them. You need to find out exactly why your students didn't master the standard and then correct that aspect of your teaching. Don't worry, I'll walk you through the steps.

First, let's state your **Challenge:** To implement a data protocol that accurately analyzes student results and ensures appropriate corrective action by the teacher.

Now, for the **Solution:** When looking at student results it is important to remember that your goal is to identify WHAT students have learned (or not) and WHY they have learned (or not). Without those two pieces clearly identified, you won't be able to determine HOW to reteach them what they need. Your data protocol only has you identifying what the students did not learn and then asks you for a reteaching plan. Your data protocol is

missing a step: Identify what supports your students received from you, so that you can identify if your students received the best, first instruction.

So, once you have identified which standard students have not mastered, you will need to reflect on your instruction of that standard. You will want to analyze what supports your students received from you regarding your curriculum choices, your instructional choices, your assessment choices, and the climate/culture of your classroom. You will reflect on each of these areas to help identify the strengths and gaps of your students' classroom experience. More than likely, the gaps will help you determine how you will reteach your students—fill in that gap!

First, take a look at your **curriculum** choices and ask yourself: Was all of the student learning driven by the standards with measurable and achievable objectives? Many folks implement (or are told to implement) "standards-based" textbooks or programs and feel they then no longer need to worry about the actual standards. Well, this might not work to the advantage of your students. Hoping studentsmaster standards through osmosis isn't a great game plan. Students need more transparency in their learning. So, think about your teaching and ask yourself: Did my students know what they were learning (skill or content from the standard) each lesson? Did my students know how they would show that they had learned the skill or content for each lesson? Was the skill integrated into the unit so that students had a variety of opportunities to master that skill or content? Did my students access materials that matched the rigor and content of what they were learning? Now, if you answered "no" to any of these questions, you might have discovered one of the reasons why your students didn't master the standard.

Second, take a look at your **instruction** choices and ask yourself: Was all of the student learning driven by research-based, highly effective and efficient instructional practices? Many teachers over-rely (or are told to over-rely) on just one strategy. It could be that this is the only strategy the teacher knows or is comfortable with, but it also could be that this is a district or school initiative that is expected in every lesson. Well, this might not work to the advantage of the student. Research shows that the best instruction practice is the one that is most effective (students learn to the highest degree) and efficient (students learn the quickest) for the stated objective and the needs of the students. Thus, all instructional strategies can be used if they are the most appropriate. Think about your teaching and ask yourself: Did my students have opportunities to make meaning with each other? Did my students have opportunities to engage in a variety of instructional strategies? Did my students receive sufficient time to master the learning? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you might have discovered more reasons as to why your students didn't master the standard.

Third, take a look at your in-classroom **assessment** choices and ask yourself: Was all of the student learning drive by regular assessment which determined instructional modifications? Many teachers wait until the end of a lesson or unit to assess if students have mastered the skill or content. Waiting until the end might not work to the advantage of your students. Knowledge of your students' current understanding lets you adjust and refocus at a moment's notice. This quick refocusing is easier to do if you have a clear objective and almost impossible to do if you don't. So, think about your teaching and ask yourself: Did my students have opportunities to tell me when they were learning and when they were struggling? Did my students receive supportive feedback from me regarding their struggles? Did I adjust my instruction based on what they students were learning or were struggling with? Did I differentiate my instruction based on other student needs such as having an IEP or being an English learner? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you might have discovered more reasons as to why your students continue to struggle with that standard.

Last, take a look at your classroom **climate** and ask yourself: Was all of the student learning driven by a positive climate? Many teachers feel that well managed room (many times meaning quiet and calm) is a positive climate. However, this might not work to the advantage of your students. A well-managed room does not necessarily translate to a positive learning environment. A positive learning environment is one where students feel respected and safe and are encouraged to ask questions and take risks. Learning is hard—and making mistakes in integral to academic growth. So, how well the teachers supports students in growing is crucial. Think about your teaching and ask yourself: Is my classroom a respectful environment that honors and promotes each and every student? Does my classroom environment encourage risk-taking? Does my classroom environment encourage cooperation and collaboration? Do my students recognize that by supporting each other they actually get smarter? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you might have discovered more reasons as to why your students didn't master the standard.

In other words, **reteaching** cannot be effective and efficient if the teacher does not clearly understand what worked (and didn't) during classroom instruction. Reflecting on your practice will help you reteach better, initially teach better, and share teaching strategies with your colleagues.