

We KNOW best practice: Thinking about Effective Instruction with Teachers

Categories: Professional Learning

In literacy instruction, we *know* what best practices are. We have learned from the best: Dick Allington, P. David Pearson, Michael Pressley, Isabel Beck—all authors of seminal studies on best practices in literacy instruction. We *know* that choice is imperative. We *know* that time to practice is critical. We *know* that collaboration is important. We *know* that . . . the list could go on and on.

The problem is putting what we know about best practices into action in our classrooms. For some reason, many of us continue to teach as we were taught ourselves—oftentimes directly defying what we *know* to be best practice. I am frequently asked by district leaders, “How do I coach teachers on best practices in writing or reading?”

One resource we find incredibly helpful here at Center for the Collaborative Classroom is the book *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life in America's Classrooms* by Steven Zemelman, Harvey “Smokey” Daniels, and Arthur Hyde. This text informed the revisions of our programs and I often use it as a guide with grade-level teams or professional learning communities. The authors have created a video supplement to go alongside the text, but, if your focus is literacy, the videos on our Inside the Collaborative Classroom site are incredibly helpful!

When working with a group of teachers, you will want to begin by showing the book and sharing a bit about its premise. As an introduction, share this quote from the *Best Practice* with the group you are working with:

Virtually all the authoritative voices and documents in every teaching field are calling for schools that are more student-centered, active, experiential, authentic, democratic, collaborative, rigorous, and challenging.

Best Practice, Fourth Edition

Depending upon the content area that you are focusing on with this particular group, share the “Recommendations on Teaching” chart for that content area (found at the back of each chapter) with each participant. Each chart offers a list of experiences we should increase and decrease in our classrooms. Allow them to read through quietly and highlight several strategies that they might want to either increase or decrease over the next month or so. Once they have had the chance to read and think, have them share with a partner and then facilitate a conversation with the whole group on these topics.

This simple activity can morph into future learning for your team. Your group might decide to read this book together and talk about the implications. You might decide to visit each content area's list of recommendations over the course of several months. You might watch some of our lessons on Inside the Collaborative Classroom to see these practices in action.

Have fun exploring *Best Practice*!