

CHAPTER ONE

What Is Wayside Teaching, and Why Does It Matter?

Wayside teaching is all about relationships. It's about showing genuine interest in kids. Wayside teachers positively influence each and every student through seemingly small actions, bolstered by awareness of needs, purposeful observations of students and situations, and a determination to go beyond what's written in our lesson plans. By doing so, we connect with students and support their learning.

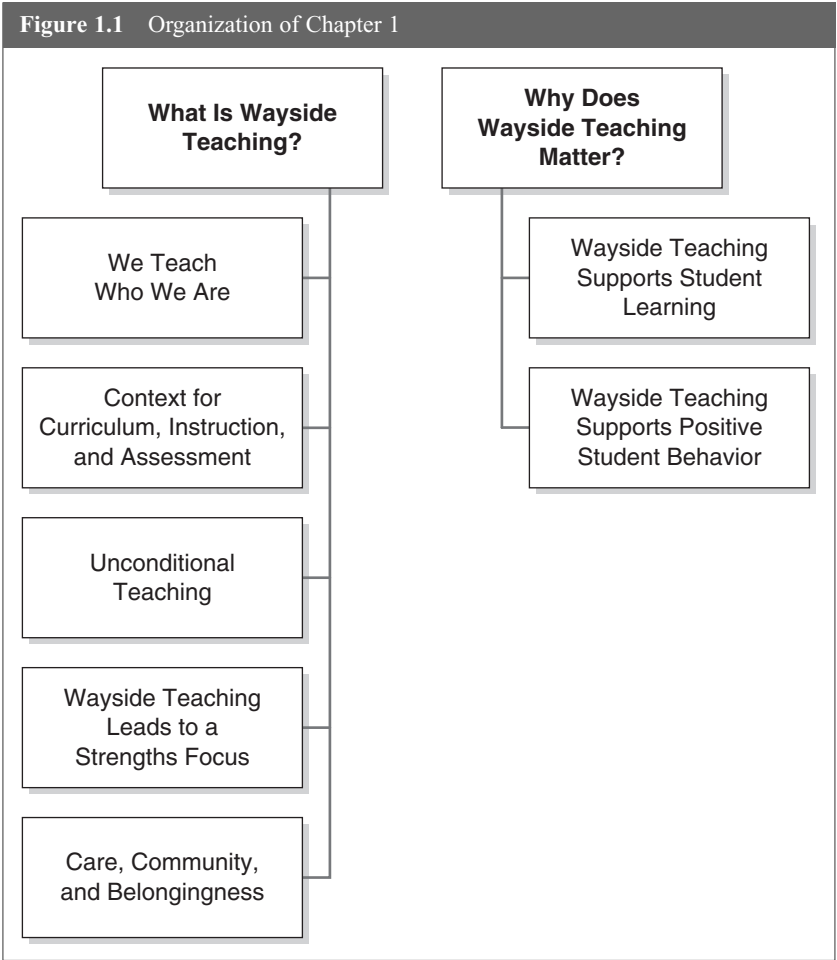
Multiple research studies provide evidence of the link between what this book calls *wayside teaching* and *student learning*. In this era defined by an obsession with testing, our students, teachers, and schools are judged based on snapshots of standardized results. Is testing important? Of course. Do students acquire knowledge and skills in a vacuum deprived of recognition that they are whole human beings with affective needs? Yes, some may, but none learn to the optimal extent possible unless structured lessons are embedded in an environment of genuine attention to development. As teachers we are hungry for acknowledgment that what we do beyond the structured lesson plan, and who we are as individual role models and mentors, matter to student development. We often feel as though

there's no time in the day, or room among the curricular standards, to foster the kinds of relationships we know matter. Intuitively, we are certain that the extra attention, encouraging notes, pats on the back when things aren't going well, interest shown in extracurricular activities, acknowledgment and development of special talents, emphasis on collaboration . . . that all of this makes a positive difference to student well-being and learning. And it does.

A single individual practicing wayside teaching as part of day-to-day life in a classroom and school will positively impact the lives of many students. As teachers, we are often directed to implement some new large-scale initiative that requires massive change and promises improved student learning. You know what I mean: new programs, more materials, and days of inservice training where imported experts tell us once more how their particular initiatives need to be managed. The antithesis of this—wayside teaching—is personal. You can do it yourself.

Purposefully using the power of wayside teaching makes a difference for students, both affectively and academically. Current research inextricably links wayside teaching practices to academic achievement. Knowing the rewards of positive and purposeful wayside teaching helps shape our *attitudes*, our *approaches*, and our *actions* as we connect with kids to support learning.

We begin this chapter by considering what wayside teaching is in broad terms. We establish that *we teach who we are*, that students learn *us*, regardless of how much they learn about the subjects we teach. We discuss how wayside teaching *interacts with curriculum, instruction, and assessment*, followed by an exploration of what it means to *teach unconditionally* and to *capitalize on student strengths* by teaching with our own. We address building a *classroom community* where students are cared for and a sense of belongingness is fostered. Then we examine both the academic and behavioral benefits of capitalizing on the *power of one* as a wayside teacher to positively and purposefully implement a multitude of small acts each day. You may find it helpful to refer back to Figure 1.1 as an organizational tool as you read this chapter.



WHAT IS WAYSIDE TEACHING?

While wayside teaching may seem nebulous, it can be narrowly defined as a concept, and broadly practiced in ways limited only by a teacher’s creativity and willingness to connect with students in authentic ways. Mike Schmoker, author of *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (1999), tells us that “clarity precedes competence” (p. 85). This entire book you are reading serves to define

wayside teaching as a collection of attitudes, approaches, and actions. Recall from the Introduction that John Lounsbury originally defined wayside teaching as “the teaching that is done between classes, when walking in the halls, after school, and in dozens of one-on-one encounters, however brief.” The concept of wayside teaching is expanded to include broader possibilities and practices that may result from wayside teaching attitudes, approaches, and actions.

Now for what wayside teaching is *not*. It is *not* a warm, fuzzy concept. It is *not* an add-on. And it is *not* anti-accountability. On the contrary, wayside teaching practices enhance academic learning and complement academic rigor because they build student self-concept, motivate learners to engage in the curriculum, and provide a sense of belonging and safety that can help free learners to participate more fully in their own education. Before we can consistently and successfully implement wayside teaching practices, we need to adjust our *attitudes* (what we believe), understand *approaches* (what we know how to do), and determine to put the principles of wayside teaching into *action*.

A temptation many of us face when reading articles and books about teaching is to skim the theory and go straight to the lists and bullets to find out *how* to do something. The more I learn about our profession, the more I value the theory that supports effective practice. We want our students to see the big picture and understand concepts rather than just memorizing isolated knowledge and skills. In this same vein, as teachers we need to understand the “why” of what we do, not just the “how.” Becoming convinced of the value of wayside teaching and entrenched in its practice requires an understanding of the underlying theory. No peeking at Chapters 2–5 before reading the rest of this one, please!

We Teach Who We Are

Teachers understand that the real pay of teaching comes from relationships. Every once in a while, we have those special moments that let us know that we are making a difference.

Several years ago, as I prepared for a new fall semester section of Teaching Middle School, I noticed a name on my class roll that sounded familiar. Sure enough, at the end of the first class, Jessica, a former student in my sixth-grade math class many years before, came to me and said, “Remember me?” There she was, all grown up, married, with a child of her own.

Jessica had not planned to be a teacher when she went to college. She majored in accounting. But after working for a large firm for several years, she went through what she called a “metamorphosis of purpose.” She told me that each day on her lunch hour she would walk to a nearby deli, sit by the window, and watch children play at a local school. And each day she thought of me. While my memories of Jessica were hazy, apparently she remembered me with clarity (and also, I’m sure, a healthy dose of time-enhanced fantasy). She told me stories of my interactions with her friends as well as the kids she considered “losers.” Those relationships made a lasting impression on Jessica. She said she felt like she knew me so well.

As she watched the kids playing and thought back to her sixth-grade experiences, she became overwhelmed by the sensation that she should return to school and get her teaching license. Now she was in my class once again. This is the real pay of teaching.

We Teach Who We Are

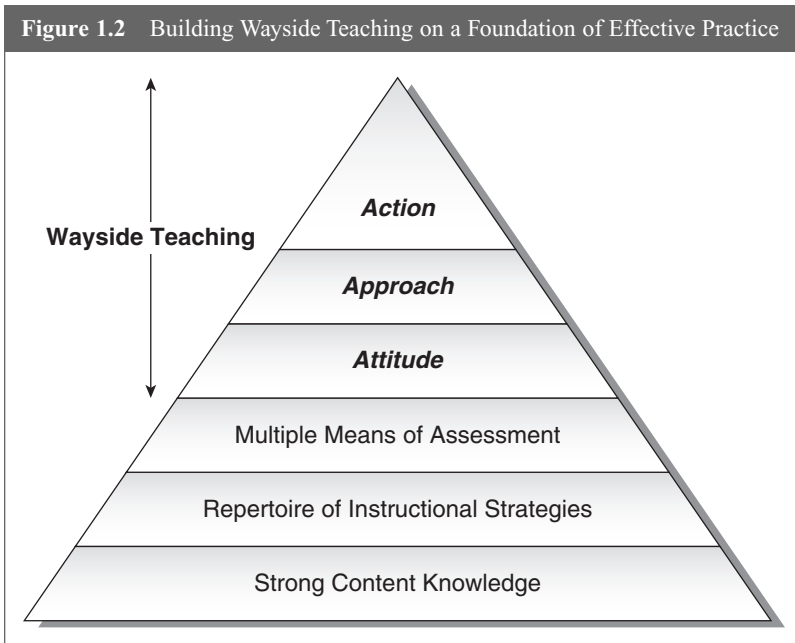
There’s no getting around it—we teach who we are. By our simply being present in a classroom as the authority figure, children and adolescents learn our personalities and priorities. It’s inevitable. So, since it happens whether we want it to or intend it to, harnessing the *power of our presence* has tremendous implications. Something as small and seemingly insignificant as a smile can encourage a student, while the absence of a smile can diminish motivation to learn or to behave appropriately. “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Our students learn our identity and are influenced by our integrity.

To lessen the likelihood of inadvertently doing or saying something that might either harm a student or simply encourage apathy, we must be aware that we are continually watched, and even emulated. The responsibility inherent in 15, 30, or even 130 students continually studying who we are is pretty staggering. Even if we feel ignored or not listened to, students are influenced by our every word and action. In the broadest sense, wayside teaching is *us*. Literally, living optimism, pride in learning, consideration of others, and good judgment will positively impact our students. These dispositions influence our *attitudes* toward, and *approaches* to, the *actions* we employ regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Context for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Wayside teaching *attitudes* and *approaches* permeate what we decide to teach, the strategies we choose to use, and the ways we determine when and how much students learn. While state and national standards define in large measure our curriculum, every teacher has some control over what is emphasized and how the curriculum is integrated within a subject area and among curricular disciplines. Because wayside teaching involves paying attention to individual students and their needs, choices of instructional strategies should be made with differentiation in mind. Assessment should also vary, giving students multiple ways to show what they know.

Carol Ann Tomlinson, the author of numerous books and articles on differentiation, tells us that we can differentiate content (curriculum), process (instruction), and product (assessment). Knowing how to accomplish this, and then developing the skills and dispositions for doing so, go hand in hand with the *attitudes*, *approaches*, and *actions* of wayside teaching. There's nothing warm and fuzzy about it. This is the work of teachers. In order to be optimally effective, wayside teaching must be built on a foundation of strong content knowledge, a repertoire of instructional strategies, and multiple means of assessment as illustrated in Figure 1.2.



Teachable moments come and go, sometimes recognized, often overlooked, and only occasionally fully utilized to promote student learning. The heightened awareness that accompanies purposeful wayside teaching dictates that we take advantage of teachable moments and adjust lesson plans accordingly. Any event, local or global, that impacts students may offer teachable moments. Student behavior often generates teachable moments. To continue with our lesson plans without alteration regardless of some reality that affects our students is not best for them.

Taking advantage of teachable moments doesn't have to be a big production. For instance, if Megan comes to school on crutches and can't wait to tell her story, not encouraging her to do so is to possibly lose an opportunity to create empathy and understanding. If a plane crashes and there are fatalities, to not mention this tragedy may result in the loss of learning opportunities from the standpoint of concern for humanity and lessons in the awesomeness of nature's fury if the crash is weather related.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are measurable aspects of schooling. It would be nice if wayside teaching could be easily measured, but it can't. Isolating the variable or quantifying the effects related to greeting students at the door with a warm smile and a kind word can't be done. What we *can* verify is that when taken as a whole, the practices of wayside teaching do make a difference in student well-being and learning. Eric Jensen's (2005) research on how the brain is activated to learn reveals that when students feel safe and valued, they are more willing to take risks for the sake of learning and they cooperate more fully in the classroom—two variables that lead to greater learning. In spite of the measurement dilemma, there is significant research that says that implementing wayside teaching practices, and doing so unconditionally, makes a difference in terms of academic growth and improved behavior (Cohen, 1999; Goleman, 1995; Lambert, 2003; Liesveld & Miller, 2005; Marzano, 2007; Osterman, 2002; Pianta, 1999; Scales & Taccogna, 2000; Stronge, 2002; Yero, 2002).

Unconditional Teaching

Teaching unconditionally “requires that we accept students for who they are rather than for what they do” (Kohn, 2005, p. 20). Alfie Kohn is talking about teaching the whole child, not just the intellect or behavior, but all aspects that contribute to who our students are.

To do otherwise is to show students that “their worth hinges on their performance” (p. 20). Citing current research, Kohn tells us that students who sense that they are cared for unconditionally are more interested in learning and enjoy academic tasks to a greater degree. And as most teachers recognize, kids engaged in their own learning are far more likely to succeed and less likely to exhibit problem behaviors.

Wayside teaching requires us to accept students for who they are. It’s an *attitude* that says, “I care about you even when you mess up. I don’t take less-than-your-best achievement or poor behavior personally, nor will I ever write you off as incorrigible.” We should never tie our genuine care for children and adolescents to their performance. Kids know. Remember, they learn us. Our attitudes speak loudly.

Kohn (2005) tells us teachers who practice unconditional teaching do the following:

- Show students they are glad to see them
- Show students they trust and respect them
- Are not afraid to be themselves around students
- Display an appealing informality
- Spend time with students even when they don’t have to
- Ask about students’ lives outside school and remember their answers
- Find something appealing about each student

That’s quite a to-do list. Wayside teaching is about putting each element and more into practice. Unconditional acceptance of students will lead to our recognition of their strengths.

Wayside Teaching Leads to a Strengths Focus

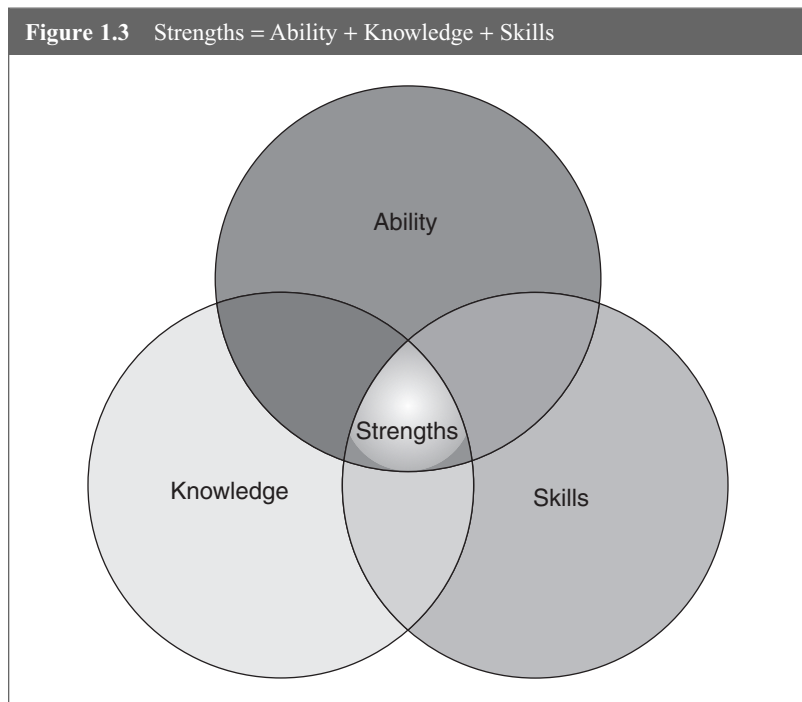
“Children build on their strengths, not their weaknesses. This is one of the most important things to keep in mind when teaching. . . . This is true whether teaching academic or social skills” (Denton, 2007, p. 91). To this I must add that teachers build on *their strengths* just as children do. Wayside teaching opens up a whole world of possibilities for teachers to explore their strengths and purposefully use them to focus on student strengths.

The Gallup Organization has spent years trying to analyze what makes a teacher great. As a result, they published a book titled *Teach With Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students* by

Rosanne Liesveld and Jo Ann Miller (2005), based on the research of Donald Clifton. The book asserts that the one thing all great teachers do is teach with their strengths. Great teachers discover what they innately do best in relating to both students and content, and then use these strengths to teach effectively. Numerous researchers and educators have written about the value of teaching to student strengths, including Carol Ann Tomlinson and Howard Gardner. When we adopt a strengths focus, we all win. Wayside teaching is the vehicle for putting this focus into action.

Defining Strength

Let's examine what we mean by a *strength*. There are three components that, when implemented together, result in a strength, as illustrated in Figure 1.3. The first component is innate ability, or talent. The second component is knowledge, what you know and have learned. Knowledge can be increased; there's always more to know. The third component is skill, defined as the ability to perform a task (Liesveld & Miller, 2005). Assets are closely akin to strengths. Scales



and Taccogna (2000) advise us to look at schools and students with an assets lens. Looking for, and then building, student developmental assets is less a program and more a way of understanding and relating to students. It's rethinking what we already do and viewing assets as opportunities. Sounds like wayside teaching, doesn't it? Not a program or a script or a set of materials but rather an awareness of opportunities to benefit students. Strong, nurturing, consistent relationships prompt us not only to recognize strengths and assets but also to promote them.

Discovering our strengths, and then using them to help students discover their own, is very productive. Let's first examine teaching with our strengths, and then how to recognize and help cultivate student strengths as a result of wayside teaching.

Teaching With Our Strengths

An understanding of our own particular strengths, combined with the ability to relate to students and content, sufficient content knowledge, and the use of effective pedagogical skills, equals teaching with strengths. There are so many ways to think about your own strengths. For instance, are you the one the principal comes to when she has a new idea or project because she knows you'll follow through and be enthusiastic? Or are you the one the principal waits to involve, knowing you will be a huge supporter if you see results first? Do you value your colleagues' time and always show up on time for meetings? Or do you get so wrapped up in a new idea that you forget to check the time and run in late? The characteristics implied in these questions are all potential strengths.

Wayside teaching is most effective when based on our strengths. Each strategy explored in Chapter 2 will work well for some teachers but may fall flat for others. That's OK. The recent emphasis on differentiation in education doesn't apply just to students. As teachers, we each have different strengths and unique ways of relating to students and the content we teach.

Teaching to Student Strengths

Before we can teach to student strengths, we must learn to recognize them. Knowing our students well, a major component of wayside teaching addressed in Chapter 2, is the key to recognizing student strengths.

The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) was originally developed to help explain how the mind works. The various intelligences are stronger in some individuals than in others, with everyone having their own combinations of strengths. While MI theory has become a program in some schools, including lesson plans requiring indications of how the intelligences are addressed, this was not necessarily Howard Gardner's intent. He sought to indicate that intelligence cannot be measured by one set of parameters because there are multiple strengths, or multiple ways of being smart (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006). Creating rich experiences that encourage learners to use their strengths is a goal of naming the various intelligences. Wayside teaching practices enhance these experiences.

The power of teaching to strengths is reflected in five principles in "Teaching Beyond the Book," an article by Tomlinson and Jarvis (2006). They consider teaching to student strengths as "tapping into students' areas of greatest comfort, confidence, and passion" (p. 17). Following are the principles that express the benefits of teaching to strengths:

1. Teachers who see the strengths in students teach positively.
2. Teaching to student strengths helps students see themselves positively.
3. Teaching to student strengths helps students see strengths in one another.
4. Teaching to student strengths helps students see learning positively.
5. Teaching to student strengths helps students overcome weaknesses.

Wayside teaching not only helps students discover and appreciate their strengths, but it also encourages students to experience and develop the scope of those strengths.

Once we use wayside teaching to both recognize and promote student strengths, the picture isn't complete until we celebrate this recognition and development. Celebrating strengths can be as simple as allowing students choices based on their strengths and then acknowledging their efforts and accomplishments within a caring community.

Care, Community, and Belongingness

It may seem unnecessary on the surface to have a section on care, community, and belongingness in a book written for teachers. If you are reading this, chances are you already care about students, develop community, and help students feel as though they belong . . . or at least you recognize the value of these actions. If you have been in a school system for even a short period of time, you can probably name a number of teachers who don't appear to show care when dealing with students, who don't consciously practice ways of bringing a group of children or adolescents together to form a sense of community, or who don't do what's necessary to help each student sense belongingness in the classroom and school. Bolstering our beliefs that these things matter, and giving us new tools to do a better job, are primary goals of this section and of this book in general.

Nel Noddings has conducted qualitative research on the value of infusing care into classrooms for decades. She tells us, "Caring is the bedrock of all successful education" (1992, p. 27). According to Noddings, care can be demonstrated in multiple ways. The following wayside teaching practices embody care:

1. Listening and responding to students in ways that take their individuality into account
2. Showing empathy that encourages students to trust us with their aspirations and concerns
3. Affirming and encouraging student efforts

Classrooms are about learning. Developing a community of learners within the classroom has both affective and academic implications. Sergiovanni (1996) defines communities as "collections of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bonding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of 'I's' to a collective 'we'" (p. 48). A challenge of wayside teaching is to create this sense of "we" among a collection of diverse students. Rick Wormeli (2001) advises us to welcome students into our classroom community and attend to their affective needs with the following actions:

1. Being pleasant and smiling often
2. Greeting students at the door and calling them by name

3. Catching students doing something right and applauding them
4. Asking questions that show our interest
5. Cracking a few jokes

Attending to academic needs in a community of learners can be fostered in the following ways:

1. Sharing exceptional homework or projects with the class
2. Asking students to tutor each other based on their strengths
3. Giving students responsible jobs in the classroom
4. Applauding academic risk-taking

Developing and maintaining community requires awareness, vigilance, and commitment.

“Members of a community . . . feel that they belong, that they matter to one another and to the group, and believe that their needs will be met through their commitment to one another” (Osterman, 2002, p. 167). Osterman’s research tells us students who experience a sense of relatedness, what she calls *belongingness*, have more inner resources to call upon for dealing with the social and academic aspects of school. She tells us that these inner resources predict engagement and performance. Building a sense of belongingness requires positive, purposeful wayside teaching. The good news is that as individual teachers, with or without systemic programs or assistance, we can demonstrate caring, develop classroom community, and help students increase their sense of belongingness.

Now that we have examined various components of wayside teaching, let’s explore more explicitly why wayside teaching matters.

WHY DOES WAYSIDE TEACHING MATTER?

Wayside teaching eludes mandate and measurement. Legislators and state officials can’t “make” us do it. Nor can they simply measure the effects of wayside teaching with standardized test scores. However, as elusive as it may appear, there is research to confirm the value of the wayside teaching general principles we have examined. In this section, we take a brief look at some of this research and also listen to

what a few of our most respected and well-known educators tell us about why wayside teaching matters. We do this by looking first at the learning benefits resulting from wayside teaching and then at the behavioral benefits.

Wayside Teaching Supports Student Learning

Teaching is about facilitating student learning. This simple statement is the focus of virtually all teacher preparation textbooks, trade books about practicing the profession, presentations at education conferences, and staff development in its many forms. And rightly so. Information abounds concerning content standards, instructional strategies, assessment practices, classroom management, technology integration, teacher leadership, and so on. But most teachers readily admit that teaching is much, much more than the tangible aspects of classrooms and schools. Educators know that the intangibles involved in creating and maintaining meaningful relationships with students are vital to student learning. Care and learning complement each other.

There is convincing evidence that wayside teaching makes a difference in student learning. Some of the evidence is the result of research studies and some comes to us anecdotally through our most respected and prolific educators, including John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Roland Barth, Elliot Eisner, Nel Noddings, Richard Dufour, and the person who first coined the phrase *wayside teaching*, John Lounsbury.

In this section, we explore how wayside teaching contributes to student learning in this era of academic standards and high-stakes testing. We examine what it means to teach implicitly and how teacher-student relationships build students' sense of self, all with academic growth as the goal.

Implicit Teaching

Both Michael Fullan and Elliot Eisner talk about the explicit curriculum and the implicit curriculum. The explicit curriculum consists of the standards, what teachers are expected to teach. The implicit curriculum is what may be taught unintentionally, or as an unplanned complement to the explicit curriculum. Applying these two words to instruction, we have explicit instruction, the instruction written in a lesson plan, and implicit instruction, the instruction that happens when we take advantage of teachable moments and when we use our personalities to prompt learning in ways that haven't

necessarily been labeled as instructional strategies. Implicit instruction describes wayside teaching. In the classroom, implicit teaching is the variable that depends on a teacher's awareness and resolve to fulfill the responsibility of meeting the needs of the whole child. The relationship established between teacher and student as this occurs is a valuable teaching and learning resource.

Teacher-Student Relationships

If you ask teachers why they teach, you will invariably hear answers that involve students and relationships. Some may say outright, "It's all about the kids!" Others will tell you they want to make a difference in the lives of students. The results of a 2001 large-scale study conducted by the National Education Association reveal eight reasons for choosing the teaching profession, including desire to work with young people, value or significance of education in society, interest in a subject-matter field, influence of a former teacher in elementary or secondary school, influence of family, long summer vacation, job security, and opportunity for a lifetime of self-growth. Of these specific reasons, the one chosen at least twice as often as any other was "desire to work with young people." For teachers, it's a no-brainer. Relationships with students make the profession fascinating, frustrating, and rewarding. Relationships keep us going and drive us to be at our best. We understand their importance.

After years of studying teacher-student relationships, Robert Pianta, author of *Enhancing Relationships Between Children and Teachers*, writes, "Although instruction-oriented interactions with adults have the goal of increasing the child's skill in a particular area, these interactions nonetheless occur in the context of the relationships in which they are embedded—and they are influenced by the qualities of those relationships" (1999, p. 81). Knowing what a difference positive teacher-student relationships make for student well-being—cognitively, emotionally, and socially—makes it very gratifying to realize that research validates what we know intuitively.

Research confirms that there are strong ties between positive teacher-student relationships and student learning. Deborah Stipek, dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, wrote an article published in *Educational Leadership* in 2006 titled "Relationships Matter." She cites research substantiating that close relationships between teachers and students lead to higher levels of student engagement and achievement. Her extensive study over a

30-year period confirms a broad body of research showing that when students sense that they are respected and valued, they function more effectively in school. According to Stipek, helping students feel respected and valued is not about coddling them but rather about holding them to appropriately high expectations and supporting them as they strive to meet those expectations.

Osterman (2002) makes the links explicit among positive teacher-student relationships, students' own expectations of success, and student learning. She also cites research that says teacher support through positive relationships actually has a stronger and more direct influence on student engagement in school than parental support. The concept of belongingness discussed earlier actively contributes to student academic success.

Teacher-student relationships are complex, fundamental, and difficult (Freire, 2005). Relationships are difficult, in part, because they involve emotions and feelings. Parker Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, writes, "Intellect works in concert with feelings, so if I hope to open my students' minds, I must open their emotions as well" (1998, p. 63). Echoing Palmer's stance, Combs, Miser, and Whitaker tell us, "Effective learning is a deeply personal matter. . . . The presence of feeling is an indicator of the degree to which learning is occurring" (1999, pp. 56–57). Wayside teaching invigorates the feelings and personal qualities that enhance learning.

This is just a sampling of the studies and theoretical stances linking wayside teaching practices to increased student learning. A significant benefit for students of personalized wayside teaching grounded in teacher-student relationships is the enhanced sense of self that is built and nurtured.

Sense of Self

Jonathan Cohen, editor of *Educating Minds and Hearts: Social Emotional Learning and the Passage Into Adolescence*, says our favorite teachers "exert a strong influence throughout our lives, because that relationship fundamentally altered our sense of ourselves" (1999, p. vii). This sense of self, or self-esteem, has received a very bad rap over the last few decades. Some teachers appeared to go through a phase marked by a "let's make them feel good about themselves and maybe they'll learn better" approach, often fueled by empty, generalized praise. Children are usually wise

enough to know that when they hear “good job” in response to haphazardly completing something, or in a mediocre way at best, that the adult saying “good job” is either lying or hasn’t bothered to look closely enough at the product. Praise undeserved has little long-lasting value. Also, praise that is too general has limited effect. Rather than “good job” when what has occurred is praiseworthy, saying “I noticed today, Jeremy, that you added some important information about the influence of economics on the Civil War. You obviously understand what you’ve been reading. I’m looking forward to hearing more of your views tomorrow” will impact Jeremy and build his confidence, encouraging further class contributions.

Worthwhile self-esteem is grounded in students’ thoughts about their own competence, their perception of control over their own lives, their self-discipline, the perseverance to meet challenges, and the ability to learn from both success and failure. Brooks (1999) writes that self-esteem motivates actions, and actions, in turn, influence self-esteem. He views self-esteem and actions as forming a dynamic, reciprocal process. This kind of self-esteem can’t be built on empty praise. It is built and sustained by genuine success and enhanced by our recognition of it. Success begets success. And with success comes prolonged engagement, often accompanied by positive student behavior. Wayside teachers look for student progress and success and take the time to give specific praise.

Supporting Positive Student Behavior

Caltha Crowe, a teacher and workshop leader, tells us that the most important quality of problem-solving teacher-student conferences is the teacher’s relationship to the child. Their sense of acceptance generally makes students eager to work with the teacher. Wayside teaching is all about relationship building. Here’s one of the experiences Caltha wrote about in *Educational Leadership* (2008, p. 44):

Whenever he was asked to write, Andrew, a verbally articulate third grader with learning difficulties, fell apart. During our daily writing workshop, he would lie on the floor, kick his feet, and refuse to write. I would sit beside him and offer support in getting started, but the tantrums would only continue.

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At a time when he was calm, I asked Andrew to talk privately with me to see if we could figure out a way to make writing go better for him. Andrew accepted my invitation, and in the course of the conversation, we together realized that he was too tired to think at writing time. Andrew then chose a solution: We'd create a special time for him to write first thing in the morning, when his energy was high. This didn't solve all of Andrew's problems, but he finally began to do some productive writing.

Wayside Teaching Supports Positive Student Behavior

Wayside teaching that promotes academic learning also promotes positive behavior, as illustrated by Crowe's experience with third grader Andrew. Because wayside teachers view the proverbial glass as half full, they recognize that every negative behavior has a positive correlate (Mendler, 2001). Wayside teachers reframe negative behavior as a first step in turning it around. For instance, the class clown can be thought of as a humorist who keeps things light. Perhaps he can be "used" by you when you give him the signal to infuse humor in a tense or boring moment. A stubborn student can be considered *persistent*, told that he is thought of as such, and then encouraged to brainstorm ways to use this characteristic.

Kurt Lewin (1936), a renowned social scientist, wrote that behavior is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment. This has powerful implications. The way students behave is a function of the interaction between who they are and their environments. Combs et al. (1999) echo Lewin when they write, "people behave according to how they see themselves, how they see the situations they confront" (p. 10). We have little influence over a student's home environment, but we must recognize that the quality of the environment of the classroom and of the school is in our hands. Let's explore how wayside teaching positively affects both the person and the environment and, consequently, behavior.

How Students See Themselves

We have significant influence over how students see themselves. As previously discussed, student self-concept is affected by our

attitudes and *actions*. Rick Wormeli (2003) tells us about a principal who believes students see themselves according to how they think we see them. The principal paraphrases the student's perspective as "I am not what I think I am. I'm not what you think I am. I'm what I think you think I am" (p. 175). How powerful we are. Wayside teaching matters.

Students need to see themselves as *autonomous*, not *anonymous*. Knowing our students well is part of wayside teaching. "People behave better when they feel known and welcome rather than anonymous and alienated" (Johnson, Poliner, & Bonaiuto, 2005, p. 59). Knowing students well gives us the information we need to help them become independent, autonomous learners. When students see themselves as taking charge of their own learning, their behavior improves. Students' autonomy leads them to perceive themselves and their teachers as more competent. As a result, students are more socially adjusted, engaged, and motivated (Osterman, 2002).

When students see themselves as related to the people and situations around them, they take more personal responsibility for their behavior. Wayside teaching is all about creating this sense of relatedness while gently prodding students to become more autonomous learners.

How Students See Situations

Students' perceptions of what's happening around them affect their behavior. Wayside teaching practices help students develop perspective on situations by encouraging *empathy* and the development of *resiliency*. Both empathy and resiliency lead to more acceptable behavior (Combs et al., 1999).

Empathy is the capacity to see situations from another person's point of view. When students exhibit empathy, they see situations differently and their behavior is affected. Through wayside teaching, we encourage students to consider the viewpoints of others and to do what Combs et al. (1999, p. 15) term "read behavior backwards." This process entails carefully observing a situation and asking what a person may be feeling, thinking, and believing to cause a particular behavior. Students are unlikely to do this on their own. Wayside teaching prompts reading behavior backwards and exhibiting empathy.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back, to overcome adverse situations, and to keep moving forward. When students face

problematic circumstances in their home lives and/or school lives, bonding with an adult in the school setting may provide the support necessary to be resilient. Resiliency is another trait that is closely linked to self-confidence and self-esteem (Brooks, 1999). When we maintain positive, close relationships with students, their self-confidence grows and they become better able to exhibit resiliency. A resilient student develops coping skills, as well as characteristics like a pleasant personality, a strong motivation to succeed, a belief that hard work pays off, and a high regard for education (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). By providing support through wayside teaching, we help students develop resiliency that leads them to see adverse situations as opportunities, rather than life delivering yet another blow to them. Their behavior reflects a “bounce back” approach that allows them to concentrate on the direction they want to go, rather than on the barriers that may be in their way. This forward motion leads to more productive behavior.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Wayside teaching is more about personal *attitudes, approaches, and actions* than programs and policies. We don’t have to justify it. But for those who think that unless a specific initiative is in place teaching and learning won’t improve, we can confidently say that the relationships and individual manifestations of wayside teaching contribute to student growth and here’s how we know it: intuitively as astute observers of student progress, and literally as espoused in the research and writing of those who study learning and growth. Most educators do not need to be convinced that wayside teaching as described in this chapter makes a difference in academic learning and classroom behavior. However, in this research-based-evidence era of No Child Left Behind, we are wise to find and articulate the research and anecdotal reasons for what experience and common sense tell us.

The groundwork for looking closely at wayside teaching has been laid in this chapter. We have established the following:

- Students learn us, regardless of what they learn or don’t learn about the curriculum.
- Wayside teaching affects how we view and implement curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

- Teaching unconditionally leads us to value all students for who they are, not for what they do.
- Finding and utilizing our own strengths and those of our students leads to higher levels of teaching and learning.
- Care, community, and belongingness encourage engagement and foster meaningful learning.
- We can individually affect students through wayside teaching.
- Wayside teaching contributes to academic growth.
- Wayside teaching contributes to improved behavior.

My hope is that understanding what wayside teaching is and how it benefits students will impact your *attitude* about putting into practice the simple, yet influential *approaches* to wayside teaching that lead to powerful *actions*, all with the purpose of connecting with kids to support learning.