decades. But we have never made the consistent implementation of these practices a priority. As we'll see, the impact of these practices is so profound that Marzano has concluded they should be "routine components of every lesson" (2007, p. 180). Surely this should be among our very highest priorities.

If good teaching can have this much impact, then we had better be perfectly clear about what it is. *Moreover, we cannot afford to over-complicate the elements of effective teaching.* That will only confuse practitioners and impede the consistent use of these elements. To that end, I will attempt to simplify them. Then, in the second part of this chapter, I will describe two enormously effective (and utterly unoriginal) teaching templates. In combination, these overlapping templates could be used by any teacher, new or veteran, to deliver 80 percent or more of the curriculum in any course or grade level. These elements simplify teaching while ensuring that students learn content knowledge and thinking and literacy skills with unprecedented pleasure and efficiency.

Effective Lessons: A Refresher Course

Sometimes the first duty of intelligent men is the restatement of the obvious.

* * *

George Orwell

[We must resist] the default mechanism that directs us to study and learn more rather than to take action using what we already know.

* * *

Peter Block

* * *

Despite their limitless differences, effective lessons share the same, well-known core structure. Though terms may differ, the essential parts of a good lesson include: a clear learning objective

with some effort to provide background knowledge or create interest in the topic; teaching and modeling; guided practice; checks for understanding/formative assessment; and independent practice/assessment (which can be one in the same).

There's nothing new here. These terms were formalized almost half a century ago, but their essence is as old as teaching itself. Let's now look at them in more detail.

Clear Learning Objectives. The learning objective should be a topic, skill, or concept selected from the agreed-upon curriculum. Some examples:

- Solve first-degree polynomial problems.
- Write an effective introductory paragraph for an argument.
- Make inferences/draw conclusions about a character (literary or historical).
- Compare and contrast meiosis and mitosis.

These are very different from the pseudo-objectives taught in many lessons: Complete these problems, fill out this worksheet, read and answer the questions, watch a movie, or make a poster/mobile/PowerPoint presentation about [fill in the blank]. Good objectives are clear, are legitimate, and derive from a decent, agreed-upon curriculum. But how do we teach them?

Teaching/Modeling/Demonstrating. As we'll see, these are often variations on lecture or direct teaching—explaining, demonstrating, instructing. But mere teacher talk doesn't assure learning. Two more elements are critical, and often simultaneous: guided practice and checks for understanding (a near-synonym for the most common forms of "formative assessment").

Guided Practice. Throughout the lesson, at brief intervals, the teacher must allow students to practice or apply what has been taught or modeled while he or she observes and guides their work. This step should include frequent opportunities for students to work

in pairs and occasionally in groups, as they are often the best teachers *and translators* of what we just (so brilliantly and eloquently) taught. This step overlaps with the next, as our ongoing attempts to find out if or how well students have learned.

Checks for Understanding/Formative Assessment. Though

I use both terms almost synonymously, I prefer "checks for understanding" because it is the older term, referring to the simplest forms of formative assessment. I believe our formative assessment efforts need to begin with the simplest forms of checking for understanding. This step is especially critical to the success of the lesson, yet is still seldom implemented with consistency. As students practice, and between each step in the lesson, the teacher should conduct "formative assessment" by checking—assessing—to see how many students have mastered that particular step. This ongoing "check for understanding" allows the teacher to see what needs to be clarified or explained in a different way, when to slow down, or when it's all right to speed up the pace of the lesson.

As we'll be seeing, even the oldest forms of checking for understanding significantly increase the proportion of students who learn (as it did for me at a critical stage in my teaching). Here are some simple, common forms of checking for understanding:

- Circulating, observing, and listening as students work in pairs
- Calling on a sampling of students or pairs *randomly* between each step (*not* on students who raise their hands)
- Having students signal their understanding: thumbs up or down; red, green, or yellow Popsicle sticks
- Having students hold up dry-erase boards with answers/solutions

There is nothing new here. What *is* new is the realization that these seemingly "boring and pedestrian" (Collins, 2001a, p. 142)

practices are not only effective, but astonishingly so. If they were consistently implemented, we would take a quantum leap toward the goal of "learning for all."

What happens when they are *not* implemented?

The Consequences of Typical, Poorly Built Lessons

Here are two true stories that represent what I see in most schools.

The first focuses on a highly respected teacher in a high-scoring school. He is always innovating. He has initiated interdisciplinary teaching, heavy use of technology, hands-on activities, and lots of "project-based learning." His students do very little reading and even less writing. But they spend lots of time going to and from the library, often preparing, making, and then listening (listlessly) to each other's flashy but unfocused PowerPoint presentations. And like the majority of the teachers at his school, he doesn't even realize that his lessons and projects are devoid of modeling, guided practice, or checks for understanding. Nonetheless, the teacher is highly regarded for his emphasis on "active" learning, on "integrating technology" into his "project-based" assignments. Why? *Because instead of coherent curriculum and effective lessons, these are the school's operative priorities; they are the focus of praise and professional development in his school and district.*

Many miles away, in one of the largest urban districts in the United States, several elementary schools are proud of their gains on standardized reading tests (which garnered good publicity). This is the result of massive expenditure and exceedingly tight supervision to ensure faithful implementation of a scripted reading program. All this work requires an army of additional personnel working from multicolored "data walls" to incessantly test, track, assign, and shuffle students to tutorials and small-group remediation in state reading skills and standards, tested with multiple-choice items just like those on the state test.