

THE MIRAGE: CONFRONTING THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT OUR QUEST FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT¹

“Most teachers in the districts we studied seem to be marching in place when it comes to their development,” (p. 13).

“The districts we studied spend an average of nearly \$18,000 per teacher, per year on development efforts,” (p. 2).

“No type, amount of combination of development activities appears more likely than any other to help teachers improve substantially, including the "job-embedded", "differentiated" variety that we and many others believed to be the most promising,” (p. 2).

“Less than half of teachers surveyed agreed they had weaknesses in their instruction,” (p. 2).

“The notion persists that we know how to help teachers improve and could achieve our goal of great teaching in far more classrooms if we just applied that knowledge more widely. It's a hopeful and alluring vision, but our findings force us to conclude that it is a mirage. Like a mirage, it is not a hallucination but a refraction of reality: Growth is possible, but our goal of widespread teaching excellence is further out of reach than it seems,” (p. 3).

“We must acknowledge that getting there will take much more than tinkering with the types or amount of professional development teachers receive, or further scaling other aspects of our current approach. It will require a new conversation about teacher development- one that asks fundamentally different questions about what better teaching means and how to achieve it,” (p. 3).

“We identified teachers whose performance appeared to improve substantially and worked backward to find any experiences, mindsets or environments they had in common, in contrast to those teachers whose performance did not improve substantially,” (p. 4).

“For every 14 to 37 teachers across the districts we studied, there is one full-time equivalent staff member directly supporting teachers,” (p. 9).

“The largest district we studied offered more than 1,000 professional learning courses during the 2013-14 school year,” (p. 9).

“An outsized investment in teacher support is not necessarily unwise or unmerited' after all, if teacher improvement were achieved at scale, it would have an enormous effect on students. The problem is our indifference to its impact - that all this help doesn't appear to be helping all that much,” (p. 9).

¹ TNTP. (2015). “The mirage: Confronting the hard truth about our quest for teacher development. Brooklyn, NY: TNTP.

“Across the districts we studied, only three out of every 10 teachers tended to improve their performance substantially over the years studied, as measured by their overall evaluation scores. Of the remaining teachers, five maintained relatively the same level of performance, while two actually saw their performance decline substantially, over a two- to three-year period,” (p. 13).

“Similar patterns of limited progress hold when we look closely at individual teachers' performance over time on specific instructional skills rated in classroom observations. In the 11-12 school year, for example, more than 1,200 teachers in one district earned a rating below "effective" on how well they develop students' critical thinking skills. Two years later, nearly two-thirds of those teachers had still not earned a rating of "effective" on that skill strand,” (p. 13).

“In another district, of all the teachers who earned a low rating in 2011-12 for their ability to engage students, 28 percent of those who remained in the district two years later hadn't improved in this area at all. Another 43% improved only enough to earn "developing" rating instead of the lowest score. Only 26 percent had improved enough to become at least effective at this skill,” (p. 13).

“We were disappointed not to find common threads that meaningfully distinguished improvers from other teachers. When we looked at activities in which improvers participated, as well as their attitudes and beliefs, they seemed more similar to non-improvers than different from them,” (p. 18).

“Every development strategy, no matter how intensive, seems to be the equivalent of a coin flip: Some teachers will get better and about the same number won't,” (p. 22).

“Among teachers whose most recent evaluation scores were a 1 or 2 62% rated their own instruction a 4 or 5,” (p. 25).

“Among teachers whose observation scores have declined substantially over the past several years 80% say their practice has improved ‘some’ or ‘tremendously,’” (p. 25).

“Those conversations painted a picture of well-intentioned system that, at least from a teacher's perspective, is as disjointed and impersonal as it is vast,” (p. 28).

“One district administrator we spoke to put it this way: Truly, everybody is trying very hard to have a positive impact on the schools, but there is some redundancy and disconnect. The phrase 'random act of school improvement' pops into my head,” (p. 28).

“Our research shows that our decades-old approach to teacher development, built mostly on good intentions and false assumptions, isn't helping nearly enough teachers reach their full potential - and probably never will,” (p. 34).