

[Recording starts 0:00:00]

Today's show is sponsored by Smart Learning Suite (<http://cctea.ch/10MT-smartlab>), an excellent tool to create more engaging lessons. I'll tell you more about Smart Learning Suite and a free webinar they're sponsoring with me on Thursday February 9th at 4:00pm about Differentiating Instruction with Technology (<http://www.coolcatteacher.com/free-webinar-differentiate-instruction-technology/>).

"It's not just a forced march through the curriculum, but we are recognizing that our students are people and that we need to honor that first. Honor them as learners and then the curriculum helps to support that."

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every weekday you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

VICKI Welcome Thought Leader Thursday and today we have David Guerin. He is 2017 NASSP Digital Principal of the year. And David let's talk about our blind spots. Do we educators, we teachers have blind spots that we just don't see?

DAVID: Every one, I believe, Vicki, has blind spots whether you're a teacher or not. There's things that we may not recognize about ourselves or our behaviors, our beliefs that maybe other people see or that we just haven't considered – really haven't thought about in a certain way. And I think we can be more effective as teachers, educators if we really kind of reflect the blind spots that we might have.

VICKI What's a blind spot that a lot of us teachers have?

DAVID: Well, one blind spot might be that we focus more on **our teaching than on the learning that happens in our classes**. So we are polishing our lessons but maybe not really reflecting on how students are seeing what's happening in our classes through their eyes.

VICKI So give me an example.

DAVID: An example of that might be – you know that I work up this great lesson, it's on a particular – maybe I've got some things that I think are going to be really engaging or hooks that are there and I deliver it.

[0:02:00]

And then I think students seem to enjoy it okay. But maybe it wasn't as great as I thought-- maybe I didn't really collect feedback from them that would help me to inform how effective it actually was. What we're encouraging our staff to do is to look at a lot of different ways that **they can examine the things they're doing through different lenses** to make sure that they're on any blind spots in their teaching.

VICKI Yes. And, you know, I recall one time when my students came in and I could tell they were upset and one of their classmates had been in an accident coming to school. And

if I hadn't been sensitive around their concern for her – we actually did a graphic design project where they were able to create something for their friend and take it to her in a hospital. As horrible as that sounds, I mean, you do have to sometimes be sensitive to what's going on in your kids' lives, don't you?

DAVID: Absolutely. I think that is a great point that, you know, the idea that teaching students first and then curriculum so that when there are things that are really relevant in their lives or things happen in the classroom those are opportunities for teachable moments. I believe that that's something that really makes the classroom come alive. It makes it more meaningful it's not just a forced march through a curriculum but we are recognizing that our students are people and that we need to honor that first. Honor them as learners. And then the curriculum helps to support that.

VICKI Yes, it's so much about relationship. That's such a great first point. So what's another blind spot that we teachers need to realize we might have?

DAVID: Well, one of the questions that I've asked is would I want to be a student in my own classroom? Is this an experience that would work for me as a learner? Because some of the things that may frustrate us sometimes about professional learning or about how we – professional development carried out those same things, sometimes maybe we're doing in our classroom.

[0:04:00]

So we can reflect on that and just ask ourselves that question. And I think it's a powerful question to look at.

VICKI I have seen teachers that I know lecture complain about PD, professional developers coming in and lecturing. I mean, it's kind of hypocritical. We do want to have an exciting engaging professional development experience and our student kind of want the same thing, don't they?

DAVID: Yeah, absolutely. No doubt about it. **Just creating the best experience possible for students is one of the strongest characteristics of a powerful teacher**, in my opinion. Being able to see things through their eyes. And so that's what a lot of this thinking about blind spots – is that are there things I'm really not recognizing that my students are experiencing in my classroom. So another question that I ask is:

"Do my students see me as a learner too? Do they see me as the teacher, as a learner? Do I model learning for them day by day?"

VICKI Oh, I know. And sometimes I have to say,

"Oh kids, I was learning this and I made a mistake and it didn't work right."

I mean, sometimes have to see you not have a lot of success, don't they?

DAVID: I totally agree. And that's something that that kind of language where they see learning beside them and that curiosity like,

"Oh, well I'm not sure about that let's go figure that out."

Let them work together to try to answer that question or find out what the answer is to what you are interested in finding out about.

VICKI So David if you could pick the biggest mistake that teachers make, that teachers just – so many of us have this as a blind spot what would it be? Out of all your observations and all your experience, seeing how we teach and helping us teachers become better. What is that biggest mistake you think that many of us make?

DAVID: I think one of the hardest things for teachers is **being willing to take risks and feeling pressure to play it safe.**

[0:06:00]

I think sometimes that is what holds us back. It's fear. You know, **a lot of times we're motivated unfortunately by fear of what could happen, what could go wrong.** And in the classrooms where I think the learning environment is the most dynamic, **we're able to kind of put those fears aside and be okay with something not working well.** And I think leaders, whether we're teacher leaders or more official administrators – those folks in buildings **need to really model that and be okay with flopping and just treating that as an opportunity to grow and learn and move forward.**

VICKI I totally agree with that, David. I know of some principals who are not forgiving and the teachers feel very uncomfortable taking a risk because, you know, the risk is okay as long as it turns out okay. Well if you know it's going to turn out okay it's not a risk, is it?

DAVID: No, it's not. And, really, to find the good stuff you have to take lots of risks because you're going to have some that flop. Like I may have 10 or 20 ideas and maybe 15 of them don't go so well but the ones that do, when you have that then you've really found something special there. And so I think that idea of just, you know, we're always trying to learn, and grow, and push our kids, help them to be that kind of thinker too. It's not just the curriculum that's being delivered or implemented on them, but they're actually getting to discover learning in the classroom each day.

VICKI So David let's finish up with what is something that teachers can do in their classroom today to help figure out their blind spot and get better in that area?

DAVID: There's a couple of things. One thing I think we really need is when teachers become students themselves.

[0:08:00]

So ask your administrator if they would **allow you to spend part or even a whole day in another, just basically going through student's schedule or being in a classroom and seeing what that experience is like.** That's been done quite a bit and I think it's a great experience.

Another thing would be to **actually use surveys**. And you have to use them that are appropriate for the age of your students. But I really think we should be consistently surveying students about, “Give me feedback on how things are working for you in this class.” And then we just need to have conversations. Let's talk to students about kind of reflecting on how learning is going and really listen to them to try to find out what it is that helps them to be stronger as a learner. And that can happen just in class discussions. So those are actually three things that I would say are powerful for helping us to overcome those blind spots.

VICKI That is definitely risky, to take a survey. But I will tell you that I have grown more by getting private feedback from my students because they have told me things that I had no clue I was doing. Really think about “Do I have blind spots and what am I intentionally doing to uncover those blind spots and get better as a teacher?”

Today's sponsor, Smart Learning Suite, has some fantastic ways to differentiate instruction. Next Thursday, February 9th at 4:00pm Eastern, I'll be sharing my tips for differentiating instruction in the classroom with technology on a free webinar sponsored by Smart Learning Suite. Check the show notes to register for this free webinar. My favorite tool in the Smart Learning Suite is Smart Lab. This is a cool fun game-based learning tool. Download your 45-day free trial today at cctea.ch/10mt-smartlab or by clicking the link in the show notes.

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every weekday you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

[End of Audio 0:09:53]

Transcription created by tranzify.com

Some additional editing has been done to add grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Every attempt has been made to correct spelling. For permissions, please email lisa@coolcatteacher.com

VICKI DAVIS @COOLCATTEACHER