

**General Evaluation of Teacher Challenges in 2015**

**Sole 2015**

Weisblat





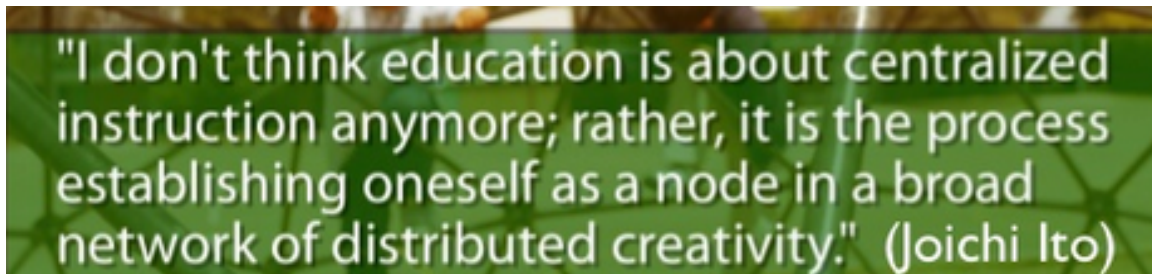
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## Introduction

Our exploration of multiple media, along with interviews with teachers, experts and administrators, has allowed us to identify four central domains impeding educational success. These areas represent the major hurdles in a diverse set of modern school environments. We recognize that not all schools face all of these problem areas, and that in some cases, these domains might be superseded by a range of other worries (a list that will also be reported in this document). We will describe and break down these four domains, and then offer some approaches using the SOLE pedagogy that can be used to tackle them.

Figure 1: Education Quote from the Research



## Buckets of Challenges

**Technology:** Pedagogy, education of how to use it effectively, training, digital native versus not, systems perspective (broad school community), evidence of effect, external community support, related resources, what should a classroom of today look like and operate as given the internet and technology of today

**Role:** Redefinition of the teacher as a automaton to deliver homogenous content to all students in an attempt to meet state set benchmarks, a lack of freedom to explore multiple arenas to present content exposure and learning, and a lack of balance for responsibilities (too much time doing administrative roles or addressing social determinant of academic success within the school community).

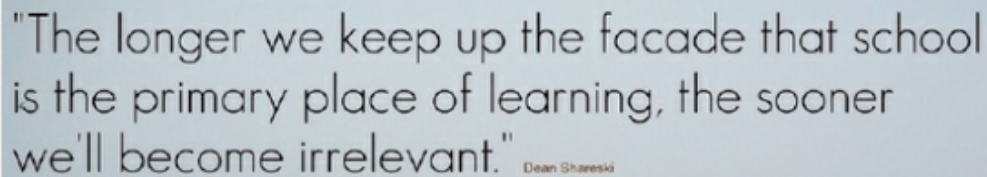
**High-Stakes Testing:** Teaching to the test, compensation for wages tied to tests, a lack of equity or resources to help children compensate for external matters that impact attainment on these tests, culture of fear, destroys health community interaction and support of teachers to one another, standardizing each child to get to a standard and no voice on these issues.

**Established Concerns:** Lack of training, lack of time, classroom management (particularly related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs), resources, time needed, parental involvement, external challenges that students face, concern of reaching students and achieving high learning outcomes, relevance of knowledge learned during training and how that transforms to the classroom, and general burn-out.

### Cutting across themes:

- Digital Integration
- Lack of adequate resources
- Lack of uniformity and clear expectations on how to achieve
- Concern for student outcomes
- General perception of value and appreciation in the system

Figure 2: Education Quote from the Research



"The longer we keep up the facade that school is the primary place of learning, the sooner we'll become irrelevant." Dean Shereski

### Methodology

We reviewed over 100 web sites on education and teaching. We also interviewed college professors in the field of education, superintendents, principals, foundation leaders, university faculty and leaders, teachers and parents. We completed 37 interviews of individuals whose jobs confronted the challenges of urban, rural, charter, private, parochial, on-line, suburban, and large and small district schools. Lastly, we reviewed over 50 articles in the literature, investigating what solutions researchers were examining to the challenges of today's classrooms.

Figure 3: Facts on Technology

**Some Facts:** In 2012 Pew reported that 89% of adults had mobile devices, as did 77% of those between the ages of 12-17 (2011). Only 29% of schools use mobile technology to help teach at one point or another during the academic experience (2012).

### SOLE Solution

In order for SOLE to be successful in tackling the above challenges, it is necessary to do three things upon entry to the system: 1) garner leadership support, 2) show the relevance, ease and simplicity of the SOLE method, and 3) secure some level of connection and credibility with the teachers. Each of the barriers described in the four domains can be overcome by using and reorganizing existing resources. This results in building the capacity of the school, and fostering the growth of school

personnel and the community in the quest for a sustainable healthy school eco-system.

### Domain One: Technology

The most cited reason for lack of implementation of new technology is lack of professional development (Drexler, Baralt, & Dawson, 2008).

SOLE provides simple start up technology activities that unite teacher and student in the classroom. This process, done on a weekly basis, will begin to fuse technology to learning and create independent opportunities to support regular classroom lessons. SOLE is the gateway experience that will gently guide teacher and student to collaborate and explore technology in a shared context. This moderated journey will provide the digital native and the teacher roles of importance, increase self-agency within the community (for teacher and student), and create a new set of conditions for the learning eco-system. Teachers can adapt at their own pace, using SOLE to progress in a relaxed manner into a new relationship. It also alleviates the burden on the teacher to feel that they must know and control everything, shifting their position to one of sagacious guide, while at the same time providing them training as a by-product of the process. This journey into SOLE heightens the teacher’s awareness and ability to use technology to flip the classroom experience, and to teach by shared learning, allowing the new technology to lead.

**Table 1: Study on Teacher beliefs and technology integration practices: A critical relationship**

Perceptions of the impact of different barriers on technology integration.	
Barrier to technology integration (from most to least impactful)	Average rating of impact (1 = not at all a barrier; 5 = very much a barrier)
Attitudes and beliefs (other teachers)	3.17
Technology support	3.00
State standards	2.83
Money	2.83
Technology access	2.67
Time	2.58
Assessments (standardized, state)	2.50
Technology problems	2.33
Institution (administration)	2.09
Subject culture	1.91
Knowledge and skills (students)	1.83
Institution (community)	1.42
Knowledge and skills (their own)	1.42
Institution (parents)	1.33
Attitudes and beliefs (their own)	1.00

### Some General Teacher Reflections...

*“Learning how to use technology, cultivating and using new styles of teaching and teaching to the standards is really hard.” ~6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher (SOLE interviews)*

*"I am not sure I know how to use technology in my room to include student cell phones and all the other technologies. I am open to it, I just don't know how to do it." ~10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher blog post*

*"I feel overwhelmed by the inundation of technology and my ability to implement it effectively." ~Teacher Comment from Study on Technology usage*

*This year I've used [technology] much, much less because my students were really weak so we've been doing a lot of practice. But when I had much strong students, I used [technology] a lot in class. ~ Technology Discussion page on Teacher Challenges, ~teacher*

*"Some rooms have great technology set ups and some don't," one teacher said. "It makes it difficult to teach the same lesson to all my students fairly." ~Teacher Comment from Study on Technology usage*

*"We do have technology challenges and we rely a lot on videos as the students struggle to read. However, the students are so highly engaged that they are able to listen to the videos and come up with their own interpretation and share that back to the class. Students also correct each other in this method. It is remarkable how they will make sure the other students are on track and doing it right!" ~kindergarten teachers (SOLE interviews)*

*I could see myself using [technology] over the course of the year with math. With physics, this is my first year teaching it, so I can't really speak out of a comprehensive knowledge of it. I would like to do more of where the kids are in on that, you know, sort of wandering off the beaten path in terms of the curriculum itself [Jerry]. ~ Teaching blog, ~teacher*

*Money has always been the central issue for education. This has been true since the founding of education back in the day of Daniel Webster, for Heaven's sake teachers worked for just room and board back then. I teach in the State with the largest class sizes and lowest spending per pupil, Utah. I teach not for the money, the recognition, nor for anything else, except for the kids. I love to see the lightbulb go on in their heads. That is worth the poor pay, long hours, and sometimes difficult parents and administrations. Finding ways to reach (tech is a great way) our students despite the difficulties is what teachers do best! We have done more with less than almost any historic group I can think of. I love teaching, even though I have to supplement my teaching addition with a part-time job! I make a difference in the lives of my students. I prepare students for the challenges of tomorrow, by facing and overcoming the challenges of today. The biggest challenge I see is technology usage. I wish we had more service and knowledge on how to better use technology in our classrooms. Give them the tools they need for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and they will surprise you time and again with the things they create! ~Teacher comment on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills discussion page*

*"Whenever we use new technology or a new method there's always the challenge of classroom management making sure that the kids are able to meet the standards, behave*



*and use the new content. It is important to make sure that they meet the standards expected.” ~ 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (SOLE interviews)*

*There's a third option here that was discussed among those involved in the preparation for this report but somehow didn't make it into the report itself: technology arbitrarily imposed on teachers — that is, technology that makes no pedagogical sense but that teachers are nevertheless required to use. Reading into what I've heard, I get the sense that sometimes when teachers are saying something like "We have no time to learn this" or "We can't use this until we've had training," they are actually diplomatically telling their bosses, policymakers or the IT department to go get stuffed. ~Teacher Comment on Teacher Challenges blog*

*A lot of teachers wanted a lab, but we have 800 kids and they only get to the library once a week so how could they possibly share a lab? We never have room for this [a computer] so we haven't had to face that issue. . . I wonder if a lab would mean that they would really learn it? But then there is the issue of, it's just a lab, it isn't integrated. You hate to pull computers out of rooms where they aren't being used, but should those who are using them [have more computers]?--Elementary school project coordinator*

*I came from a school where most of the families could afford a computer and the kids that didn't . . . had the tendency to withdraw and put their heads down and not really want to be into anything technology-based. . .--Middle school mathematics teacher*

*Technology can overwhelm kids as well as teachers. Students nowadays are burdened with heavy workloads, lots of curriculum to cover and diploma exams. There just is no room for more activities ~Teacher Challenges blog, Teacher Comment*

## **Domain Two: Role**

The role of the teacher has gone through a number of changes as schools have evolved and test taking and benchmarking have become the standard that guides the profession. With the advent of a national common core, a faster paced society in general, and a societal trend toward pinning accountability to one person or thing, teachers will continue to struggle to define their role and their place within the system. Twenty-first century learning means more than Wagner's described objectives; it means redefining the student and the entire eco-system in terms of technology. Being a digital native and having constant access to information changes the traditional boundaries to student success that teachers have faced. Today, social networks are still important factors in achievement, but with the information and multiple communication modalities available, there is far greater equity in how students from varying backgrounds can succeed. Additionally, teachers today are officially more accountable to their students because of social media and the way it is used to rate all of our experiences.

**Table 2: Teacher District Choice**

**Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in?**

The school that paid a significantly higher salary	15	17	14
The school where student behavior and parental support were significantly better	83	81	86
Don't know	1	2	1

This new role for teachers, while being chained down to meeting certain standards in a more resource strapped environment, would benefit greatly from what SOLE has to offer. Teachers that are struggling to define their role, meet the standards, and connect in new ways can use the technology of the internet to guide a self-learning process by using questions to lead students to the standards they must meet. This methodology also provides some freedoms to the teacher, allowing natural knowledge consumption to bring a new energy to everyone involved in the system. The teacher will access the How People Learn (HPL) process by engaging in and exploring the technology within this newly defined role. The teacher will define how a teaching role will look in the future using pedagogy like SOLE, rather than allowing the system to define the teacher.

**Some General Teacher Reflections...**

*“I don't think they have a problem with technology at all. The problem that they have is a philosophical thing, a pedagogical thing. They are looking at this and going, “Is this the first step of replacing teachers in the classroom, where students can sit at a computer?” Sometime in the future, everything can be learned from a computer. So, there are a lot of teachers shaking their heads, and saying, “Nope.”” ~Blog post from a principal*

*I was nervous afraid the students were going to be what ever and really give me a hard time I couldn't believe that they enjoyed it so much I couldn't believe that they took so much care in their work and were actively trying to figure out the answer to the question and were eager to present in front of their peers. I need to understand my role in all of this now! ~SOLE Happy Hour Teacher*

*“There are many people that [are] still afraid of [being replaced by computers], but they would use different excuses such as limited computers available.” ~Blog post from a principal*

*Technology allows students to become more independent in the classroom. But is the change from teacher to facilitator a positive move for the profession? ~8<sup>th</sup> grade Science Teacher Blog*

*In our community it is very traditional. Parents do want to know what's going on and they do need to understand the learning that occurs. With problem based learning parents seem to get it.*

**Figure 4: Toxic Testing**

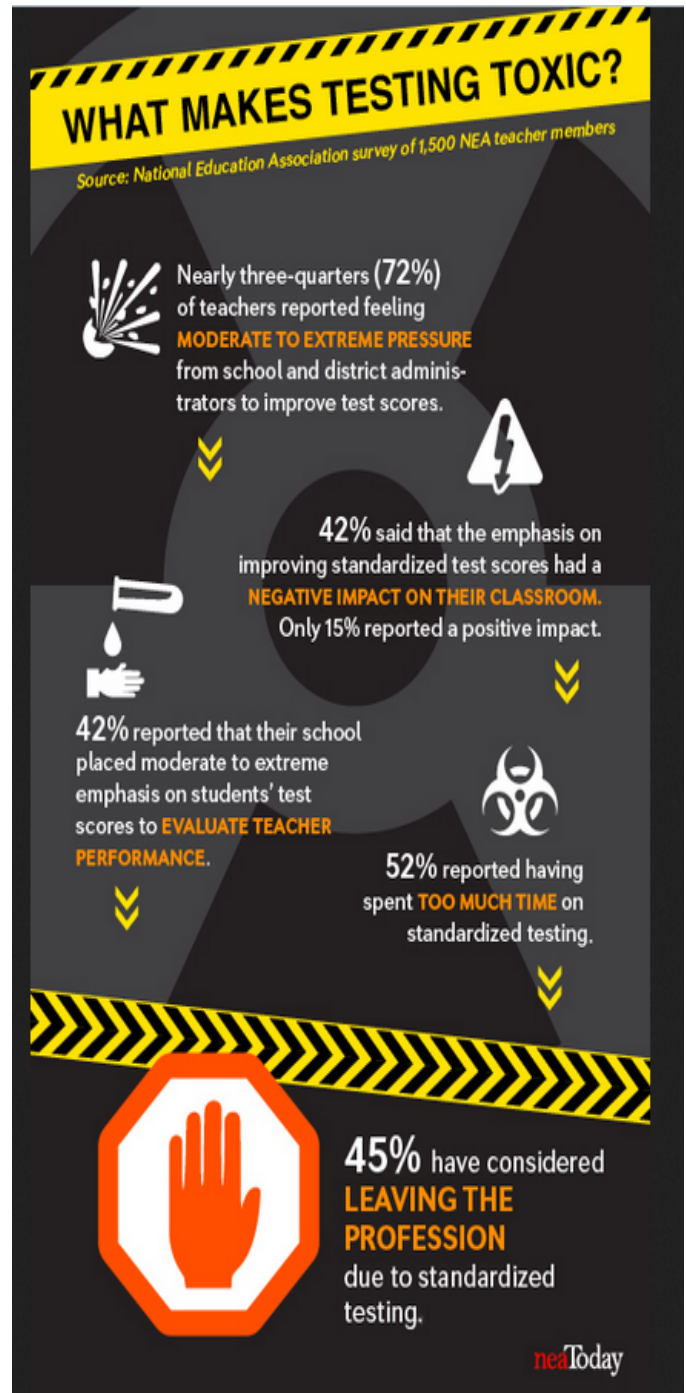
*Making sure parents understand what we're doing and making sure that we give them what they want is critical to being successful having progressive thinkers in a non-progressive community can really make a difference. The role of the teacher changes a lot. She has to be ready to work with the parents get them on board, follow the administrative directives, meet the standards and keep the kids engaged. This is a big challenge today. ~Teacher interview on SOLE*

*During 10 years in the profession, I've seen technology alter the role the teacher almost beyond all recognition. Teachers have undergone a Kafkaesque metamorphosis from Mr Chips to Mr Jobs; wooden, flip-lid desks have been replaced by iPads. The question we have to ask is, has this change from teacher to that of facilitator of learning been positive? Undeniably so, in my opinion. ~ Teacher Post on Teaching Today*

*Getting people away from the way they have always done things in the school is going to be hard. Getting them to immerse themselves in this new way will be especially hard particularly for those people who don't feel comfortable with technology. ~ Sole Happy Hour Teacher Quote*

### Domain Three: High-Stakes Testing

Norming learned content seems almost silly in today's society, where information is constantly at hand. It seems that the norms should be less about content and more about critical thinking skills needed to find, sort, understand and utilize existing content. Society will likely continue to rely on high-stakes testing as a measuring stick while we look at today's course. Recognizing this, SOLE provides a set of skills that helps students retain their knowledge to a greater extent. Research has shown that straight lecture or similar activity helps students retain on average only 20-25% of the content taught. However, with SOLE students find information and knowledge independently, teach each other, and understand within a context where they are capable and comfortable. This process can only improve student performance on these tests. SOLE can be designed to ask questions that help students achieve the outcomes



related to the test in a meaningful and intrinsically motivated manner. This process will naturally enhance the success of students in their test taking.

**Table 3: Teacher Drawbacks**

Here are some things that are often considered to be drawbacks to teaching. Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each is a major drawback, a minor drawback or not a drawback for you:

**There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative**

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
Major drawback	42	45	43
Minor drawback	44	40	44
Not a drawback	13	13	13
Don't know	*	1	-

**Some General Teacher Reflections...**

*In fact, to me, teaching is a calling. It takes a special person to dedicate themselves to helping guide our youth in their academic, social, and emotional development. After all, we know there is much more to the job than imparting knowledge. In the six hours a day children spend with us, we care for and nurture the whole child – not just their brains! As a boss of mine used to say: “We don’t teach science, math, and history – We teach kids.” My biggest challenge is boxing that up so I can meet the standards on the state testing. They measure me on that ...not on the other stuff. ~ blog on teacher challenges, teacher comment*

*“Educators know that real accountability in public schools requires all stakeholders to place student needs at the center of all efforts,” says NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Real accountability in public schools requires that everyone—lawmakers, teachers, principals, parents and students—partner in accepting responsibility for improving student learning.” ~Article on high stakes testing administrators comment from the NEA*

**U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently conceded that too much standardized testing was “sucking the oxygen out of the room” and causing “undue stress.” Although some of the nation’s educators may have been encouraged by Duncan’s words, most policymakers have spent the past decade ignoring calls from teachers to curb high-stakes testing. ~NEA Website 2015**

*I have read all the comments posted here and I am finding that a lot of teachers feel the same way I do. I love teaching students, but next year will be my last year in the teaching profession. The Common Core will be the "death of us all." I am not seeing any accountability from students or parents. I spend untold hours preparing interesting, engaging lessons for students who could care less. "This is too hard, why do you make us do all this work? School is boring. I stayed up late last night and I'm too tired to do this assignment. " I get these comments all the time. Parents are complaining in daily e-mails that their child should be getting "A's" and why aren't they? Am I frustrated? You bet I am! Do I agree with my evaluation being based partially on student progress? Absolutely not. We have 3 types of students in my school:*

*the ones who want to learn, the ones who can't learn beyond a certain level, and the ones who simply don't care. We are testing students too frequently and we will not see any progress simply because the students are tired of all the testing and don't even try to do their best. ~Teacher Comment on Article*

*Do not judge teachers on test scores. What about the degree of daily preparation for the tests? I do not just mean from the teacher's end either. If a doctor prescribes a treatment that the patient refuses, should the doctor be judged negatively when that patient succumbs? ~Teacher comment on a Blog of Teacher Challenges*

*I have worked as a special educator for over 14 years in our public school system. My current assignment is the special education teacher in two inclusion classrooms. I recently resigned, even though I am years from retirement. The federal reforms--Common Core, tied to high stakes testing and a punitive educator evaluations system--have made it increasingly difficult to implement my students' Individualized Education Programs. My students are suffering under Common Core, which may not be adapted to their developmental levels. If I persist in adapting the Common Core grade-level curriculum, I will be penalized. My hands are tied.*

*I had enough. So I resigned from my state's DOE. Although I love working with children, I am leaving the teaching profession ~ Teacher Blog Comment*

*My mother was a remedial reading teacher for over 25 years, and worked in other teaching areas earlier, so she had a total career of 46 years. Teaching was her life--she said she planned to work until she was 70. Well, Common Core and SLO's got the best of her. She left her dream job the year after Common Core rolled out in her district. A remarkable teacher was lost--and I know she is just one of many, many others out there who are just as fed up with the mandates as she was. I hope you are able to find another area where you can impact children's lives. ~Comment on High Stakes Testing Article*

*My school is considered as "failing" and this affects all of the teachers' evaluations (and eligibility for pay raises). Teachers may be fired or will quit, and who will replace us? Would you take a job knowing that many of the students have poor skills, low reading levels, family problems, and can't or won't stay focused for a four hour test? Teachers leave for "better" schools. I could do a much better job of teaching if I had focused, motivated students. ~ Teacher Comment on Top Challenges*

*Arne Duncan is FULLY aware of the effects of standardized over-testing. The question is, "What's he going to do with that knowledge?" The answer is "nothing". He is too beholden to big money and Wall Street. Mr. Duncan is a for-profit privatizer at heart. ~ Teacher comment on a blog*

#### **Domain Four: Established Concerns**

There are multiple concerns that have plagued teachers from the time they have begun their tenure. Classroom management techniques are important in all schools and all environments. Teachers' main goal is to help students achieve the outcomes and to do it in a manner that is safe and generally interesting to all engaged.

Classroom management often hinges on the mass of students in a room accepting a set of behavioral norms and mimicking each other in a positive manner, creating a collective classroom culture of behavior and attitude. The ability or inability to create and sustain that culture impacts teacher self-agency and morale and student success. SOLE provides a new set of behaviors that allow for a fresh norming of expected behavior from the collective. In SOLE, students lead the groups and the expectations that naturally arise from this grouping allows for a new order to be achieved within the classroom. It allows each student to be seen as a huge asset to the team and to thrive with his or her best skills. It builds a new social connectedness that is dependent on a culture of getting along and finding a joint pattern of learning for success. It is driven by the students and reinforced by the teacher stepping back and allowing for the students to grow successfully together. There are times the teacher will need to negotiate the groups or demonstrate how to work through some knots along the way, but when students are given the responsibility to lead, they often feel it incumbent on themselves to maintain a new order and culture.

The result of the above is a changing in the way students interact with one another, garnering a greater appreciation for the diversity of talents and skills that all students bring to the table, and allowing for a new order of social connectivity to better adapt to classroom challenges and increase classroom growth.

### Some General Teacher Reflections...

*“The number of hours outside the classroom that are required to prep lessons, grade papers, create exams, evaluate student progress, diagnose and address student problems, communicate with administrators and parents, participate in department and school committees and take on guiding extra-curricular activities.”*

– School Teacher

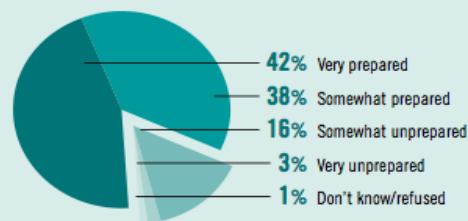
*“One problem that I don’t think most people are aware of is the number of interruptions in a typical class. These interruptions come from a variety of sources. Parents picking up their children early, announcements from the office, pep rallies, club meetings, bathroom breaks, phone calls, pictures, fire drills, intruder drills, tornado drills, and most distressingly student misbehavior. These things add up to a real problem.”*– High School Teacher

*“The situation is so bad that any small incident can trigger a fight in the class. At the end of the class, my aim is not to ensure that they understood the lesson. At the end of the*

**Figure 5: New Teacher Experience**

**Most new teachers feel prepared for the classroom**

Overall looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching?



*class, my aim is to ensure that nobody is bleeding” ~ Teacher Comment on Top Challenges*

*“In my reading class, many of my students do not even understand the basics of grammar and sentence. How am I supposed to teach the class without bringing all of them up to the same level?” – Elementary school teacher*

*“Half of the time I am just responding to emails by over-concerned parents”  
When interviewed, many beginning teachers say their pre-service programs did little to prepare them for the realities of classrooms, including dealing with unruly students. “A bigger bag of classroom management tricks would have been helpful,” one first-year teacher confessed ~9<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

*Case studies have observed novice teachers struggling “just trying to come up with enough curriculum” and spending 10 to 12 hours a day juggling lesson planning; grading; and the myriad demands of paperwork, committees, and extracurricular assignments (Fry, 2007, p. 225)*

*“Parents get mad when we put restrictions on children. How am I supposed to discipline the classroom? . ~ Teacher Comment on Top Challenges  
High school English teacher: “During my first two years of teaching, I worked 70 to 80-hour weeks, including time worked during the school day, in the evenings and over the weekend.” ~ Teacher Blog Comment*

*We asked nearly 500 teachers what they find most challenging about lesson planning and material preparation for the classroom, and here's what we found out. Not surprising, **55% of respondents said they struggle with time** to prepare lessons and materials for their classrooms. Overwhelmingly, teachers said they do not have enough time during the day to prepare for lessons and often work in the evening and on weekends to get ready. Stumbling blocks to lesson planning during the day included: Meetings, Paperwork, Grading, Parent Communication, Data Assessment, Student Behavioral Issues and interruptions ~ Article from NEA*

Figure 6: Educational Quote from the Research



## Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion teachers face challenges that are real and hard-hitting. Transformation is never easy and it takes time. SOLE is a natural game-changer that impacts the system swiftly and allows for immediate change to take root. It has the effect of a stem cell being planted into a new environment, slowly changing the cells around it to adopt and build a healthier culture for learning. SOLE is a catalyst to begin change; it will drive new innovations by creating an environment that accepts, nurtures and thrives on this kind of growth.

Figure 5: Overall List of General Concerns as noted by this study

- Technology
- Training
- Common Core/Curricula
- High stakes testing
- Compensation
- Stick Thinking
- Parental Involvement
- Under resourced
- Community
- Classroom management
- Roles within the school community e.g. (cafeteria duty)
- Morale
- Burn out
- Time
- Curricula Freedom
- Improving student learning outcomes
- Motivating students
- Allowing for personalization of teaching
- Student Skills
- Student Behavior
- Classroom Environment
- Digital citizenship