“What does it say about a society that it devotes more care and patience to the selection of those who handle its money than those who handle its children?”

(Gladwell, 2008)

Teachers play a valuable role in molding and shaping America’s youth from the time a child enters preschool to the time they graduate from college as a young adult. From a very young age, a child is groomed and guided on a path towards a life of learning that society can rely upon to become a contributing citizen. The quality and effectiveness of the teaching is the single most important factor in a child’s development. Outside of parents or guardians, teachers will have the most impact on a youth’s future and it is important to the welfare of our nation that the United States of America improve on the quality of education our youth currently receive. Failure to improve on the quality of teaching coming from our school systems today will impact our nation’s financial security and standing as a world dominance.

There are many research papers and case studies of what constitutes an effective teacher from both the education profession and students. It is important for the education world to see the whole picture of what an effective teacher is perceived in order to guide training, recruitment and retention. The best performing teachers should be rewarded for their effectiveness in contributing to a student’s overall achievement and performance in the classroom. Another piece of the puzzle in determining the effectiveness of a teacher is the recruitment, analysis and evaluations on prospective educators from the time they apply for a job to the performance after years in the classroom. Investing in the quality of education our youth receive in the classroom would provide positive outcomes years down the road as they become contributing members of society. America cannot afford not to invest in the quality of its educators or we will be passed by other countries on the world stage both in the sectors of education and economics.

**Effective Teaching – What does it look like?**

According to Smith (1995) suggests that learning “is a consequence of experience” (p.588). Effective teaching is grown from the trials and tribulations in the classroom.
Through those experiences, one can determine what contributes positively to the students overall performance on standardized test and in the classroom. In addition, an educator can observe what is detrimental to a students learning in order to correct those deficiencies before the next set of students come in the classroom. Smith (1995) mentioned that schools should focus less on ‘talking about learning and teaching’ and ‘more about doing’ (p.985). What should educators be doing to become an effective teacher? After drawing from his own research and 29 years of teaching experience, Gurney (2007) developed five key factors that provide a foundation for good teaching:

- Teacher knowledge, enthusiasm and responsibility for learning
- Classroom activities that encourage learning
- Assessment activities that encourage learning through experience
- Effective feedback that establishes the learning processes in the classroom
- Effective interaction between teacher and the students, creating an environment that respects, encourages and stimulates learning through experience

(p. 91)

These five key factors by Gurney provide future educators a guideline on how to mold their teaching efforts around becoming an effective teacher. In addition, these factors provide school districts with possible teacher assessment criteria for conducting evaluations that can lead to positive results from students standardized test scores. If a teacher is failing to meet certain performance objectives, they can conduct a self assessment and see where they can improve in accordance with the five foundational factors for good teaching according to Gurney.

Rice (2003) states teacher quality matters and it is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement (p. 5). Through Rice’s study, she highlighted five broad measurable categories to organize the teacher characteristics assumed to reflect teacher quality.

- Teacher experience:
  
  Through her research, she found a positive correlation of teacher experience to their effectiveness in the classroom. Like any other profession, an educator will improve on their teaching quality by experience in the classroom.

- Teacher preparation programs and degrees:
  
  She found teachers who attended prestige institutions had a positive effect on a student’s achievement as compared to average performing institutions. The cognitive abilities of an individual attending a higher tier institution coupled with the institutions abundant resources may have more of an influence on the preparedness for the education profession. She also concluded that educators with advanced degrees in the sciences and mathematics had a positive impact on student’s achievement within those certain subject matters.
Teacher certification:
Rice’s study found teachers who attained specific certifications i.e. science or mathematics as compared to a standard certifications had a more positive influence on a student’s educational achievement. This is the same with any other profession per say. A doctor who specializes in orthopedics is better at evaluating and treating skeletal injuries as compared to a general family doctor.

Teacher coursework:
Rice (2003) discovered a teacher’s coursework in both the subject area taught and pedagogy contributed to positive education outcomes (p. VI).

Teacher’s own test scores:
Rice (2003) concluded test that assess the literacy levels or verbal abilities of teachers have been shown to be associated with higher levels of student achievement (p. VI). Basically, a teacher’s aptitude and intelligence had a positive correlation to a student’s overall success. An educator is not only required to be a subject matter expert but be able to verbally communicate the information in a way that promotes learning. One needs to have both qualities in order to be effective in the classroom.

Both Gurney and Rice studies identified those attributes that are required to become an effective teacher from the “educators” perspective. Students should also have a voice on what they believe makes an effective teacher or has a positive impact on their learning. In 2004, educators Thompson, Greer and Greer conducted their own study on what students characterize as good teaching and the traits of effective teachers. Over the course of their study, they discovered twelve personal characteristics effective teachers possessed in order to have a positive influence on a student’s overall learning. Thompson, Greer, Greer (2004) compiled a grocery list of 12 characteristics of caring teachers who understood the importance of caring for their students and the impact on student achievement (p. 1-5).

- Fairness
- Positive attitude
- Preparedness
- Personnel Touch
- Sense of humor
- Creativity
- Willingness to admit mistakes
- Forgiving
- Respect
- High expectations
- Compassion
- Sense of belonging

These twelve attributes are positive qualities an educator should strive to achieve in their classroom from the time their training begins to the time they become a seasoned veteran. These qualities should constantly be assessed from an inward perspective in order to increase student overall achievement in the classroom and beyond.
Recruiting Effective Teachers – Building the education foundation

How does the education profession train, recruit, assess, hire and retain teachers with all the qualities previously mentioned? That is an important question in the today’s society and one America needs to answer quickly before an entire generation is influenced by ineffective teachers.

Professional sports and certain industries i.e. financial and medical fields, commit massive amounts of time, resources and money towards assessing, hiring and retaining excellent professionals related to their field. Rice (2003) mentioned in 2002 alone, the United States invested $192 billion in teacher benefits and compensation (p. v). Due to inflation, that amount has probably increased way beyond that figure. Gladwell (2008) indicated there are certain jobs where almost nothing you can learn about candidates before they start predicts how they’ll do once they’re hired with none with such profound social consequences as the profession of teaching (p. 37). The analysis and hiring of quality teachers is a domain the education world needs improvement upon if wants to climb the ranks of world rankings in education.

Gladwell described how one successful financial institution in Minnesota interviews approximately a thousand people a year for their firm. From those thousand people, they picked forty-nine candidates for a four month “training camp” to test their skills as future financial advisors. They analyzed the qualities, work ethic and attributes required to succeed in the fast paced environment of being a financial advisor. After the “training camp” was complete, they hired 23 apprentice advisors. Out of those 23 apprentice advisors, approximately thirty to forty percent would remain with company and become successful financial advisors. Gladwell believes the teaching profession should adopt a similar model in order to identify the best teachers in the profession and keep them in the classroom. Gladwell (2008) mentions teaching should be open to anyone with a pulse and a college degree and teachers should be judged after they have started their jobs, not before (p. 42). Gladwell (2008) identified with this kind of model, the education profession would have to try out four candidates to find one good one (p. 42). Tenure could not be rewarded the way it is currently constructed and teacher salary would need restructuring if the education profession wanted to rate teachers on their actual performance with positive student achievement.

On the contrary to Gladwell’s belief in the “door wide open” approach to hiring prospective teachers, Hanushek and Rivkin interviewed several successful school principals or superintendents about their hiring practices and came to a different conclusion on the hiring of excellent teachers. Hanushek and Rivkin (2004) discovered from the interviews of administrators, they wanted to be assured that prospective teachers had a deep knowledge on the science of teaching as well as competence in subject matter. They wanted to know if the candidates had extensive student fieldwork
experience, frequent classroom observations, case studies and practice lessons that characterize the better teaching programs (p. 33).

Both models mentioned above are proven ways to reach the desired outcome of assessing, recruiting and hiring the right person to become an educator. For the education profession, this is a practice that needs detailed attention and reform from our government administration in order to improve on the quality of education our youth currently receive. Change comes at a cost and how much is America willing to invest in the future of our nation?

The Value of Teacher Effectiveness

Effective teachers are the single most important aspect in an effective school that contributes to the lifelong learning of a child. There are massive economic returns to having and retaining an effective teacher. Eric Hanushek conducted detailed calculations on the relationship of having a good teacher and the impact that individual will have on a child’s future earnings potential of having higher achievement. Hanushek (2011) found that a teacher at the 85th percentile can, in comparison to an average teacher, raise the present value of each student’s lifetime earnings by over $20,000 – implying that such a teacher with a class of 20 students generates over $400,000 in economic benefits, compared to an average teacher (print). On the other end of the spectrum, a low performing teacher will have a negative production of $400,000 as compared to an average teacher. The Future of Children publication estimated a high school dropout in the United States will earn nearly a quarter of a million dollars less over his/her lifetime than a high school graduate. He will also pay $60,000 less in taxes. Another way to look at the economic impacts of effective teachers is the cost the nation pays for keeping poor performing teachers in the classroom. Hanushek (2011) identified the quality differences among teachers, if we could replace the bottom 5-8 percent of our teachers with just average teachers, we could improve students achievement and America’s education ranking to that of Canada’s who is near the top. Moving to the education level of Canada has a present value of over $75 trillion (print). The average American entering the work force will earn approximately $1.16 million over the span of their life in the work force. Hanushek (2011) discovered an increase in the level of achievement in high school of a standard deviation yields an average increase of between $110,000 and $230,000 in life time earnings (print). Hanushek’s (2011) graph below highlights the economic growth of an effective teacher as compared to ineffective teacher (print).
Hanushek (2011) estimated by closing the achievement gap with Finland would increase the annual growth rate of the United States by 1 percent of GDP. Accumulated over the lifetime of somebody born today, this improvement in achievement would amount to nothing less than an increase in total U.S. economic output of $112 trillion in present value (print). With those results, it is hard not to ignore the economic potential of our nation if we replaced the bottom performing teachers with just average teachers. Other professions who observe this kind of earning potential would not think twice about separating themselves from the ineffective performers if they had the opportunity to increase their overall wealth portrayed by Hanushek’s study.

The United States cannot afford to keep ineffective teachers in their schools and continue to remain a world power economically. There are a few hurdles the education profession would need improvement if it wants that kind of return on investment in hiring and keeping the effective teachers in the classroom. The main hurdle to overcome is
the attractiveness of the education profession for college graduates entering the work force. There are difficulties in recruiting high-quality teachers due to low salary compensation as compared to other professions. Hanushek (2011) identified the salaries of male teachers are in the 30th percentile of the distribution of all college graduates, and women who teach are at the 40th percentile of their college-educated peers (print). Today’s teacher salaries are based on credentials and years of experience instead of productivity as related to student achievement. Hanushek (2011) stated in a competitive marketplace, a firm must compensate employees according to their productivity or risk bankruptcy. Yet no school district goes out of business if it retains ineffective teachers and pays them as much as effective ones (print). There is minimal incentive to enter the education profession other than the love of teaching. More so, there is little incentive to perform at a high standard if it is not properly compensated with higher wages as compared to ineffective teachers.

In closing, there is a snow ball effect of having effective teachers in the classroom and the positive results one produces in student achievement.

Effective teachers = positive student achievement = increased earnings as adult = increase in economic growth for nation = United States remains world power at a time of intensifying international competition! America cannot afford not to invest in the quality of teachers in the today’s classrooms.

Annotated Readings


This blog post highlighted the events surrounding the Chicago teachers’ strike in 2012. Too much surprise the strike was not over the issue of pay and benefits but centered on the criteria used in evaluating teachers to identify good teachers from bad teachers. Teacher unions have argued for a long time that teaching experience and credentials should be the main criteria in evaluating teachers instead of subjective evaluations from school administrators based of a student’s performance standards. The tide is slowly evaluations be partly based on student performance. Furthermore, the blog stated a fundamental way to evaluate teachers performance is not just based on whether a student does well on a test but how likely a particular student finished high school, goes to college, how teachers affect the earnings of students once they enter the workforce and whether their students get involved in crime related activities.

Byrne, Brian, Olson, Richard K., Samulesson, Stefan, “Fire Bad Teachers” a critical look at public perceptions on the role of teachers and schools in students’ relative levels of achievement. 1-5.
The author’s of this article conducted a study of over 700 pair of twins in the US and Australia to determine what happens if they are have different teachers for literacy standards. If the twins had different literacy ratings then public opinion would point to the difference in teacher teaching methods as the determining factor in their literacy separation. Up to that point, the twins had the same economic class, parenting and genetics. They did find greater similarity among twins who had the same teacher than those in another class but the difference was not very large. Their summary of the study concluded the single strongest influence on a child’s literacy achievement was the child’s genetic makeup and not the teacher. They thought if some teachers get negative academic results from socially or genetically disadvantage children then denying them tenure, employment or pay increases is unfair to the teacher.


Palmer writes about the emotional connection an educator must have in order to truly connect and communicate the subject matter to their students. She describes the pure joy in projecting the condition of her soul onto the students, her subject matter and how they are emotionally related. She states that “knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.” She understands the importance of having a deep, true passion for teaching and the tremendous impacts she can have on a young adolescent as they navigate through school. According to the students she interviews, all good teachers share one similar trait: a strong sense of personal identity in their work. The teacher is passionately located in the classroom and that moment there is no other place they would rather be than guiding them through the learning process on a particular subject. On the other hand, bad teachers create distance between themselves and the subject they are teaching and in process distance themselves from the students.


This article focused how educators are constantly under the watchful eye of the students they instruct and their observations can have a tremendous impact on their students good or bad. The authors interviewed at total of 240 students and summarized what their responses with the following themes; what makes a good school, the perceived impact of teaching, teacher expertise, personal qualities of good teachers, attributes that contribute to poor teaching, teaching practices, pedagogical approaches and teacher responses to bullying and racism. Students vocalized the same qualities they viewed in good teachers as friendly, trustworthy, respectful, sense of humor, passionate, youthful, fair and interactive. On the other hand, bad teachers portrayed the opposite attributes of good teachers to include unfriendly, political, less capable, not competent in their job, poor verbal communicators, untrustworthy, inconsistent and
demonstrated favoritism. Good or bad teachers had a direct impact whether the student applied a solid effort in their class or “shut the door” on the teaching for being a poor teacher.

Thomas, Evan, Wingert, Pat (2010) Why We Must Fire Bad Teachers. Newsweek. 1-4

Education was once a strong point for America’s youth where they routinely scored higher than other students in the world. Recently, the decline of education in American society has been an embarrassment and overall scores continue to decline. School administrators have tried several programs over the years to only see the student achievement gaps grow wider with time. Thomas and Wingert indicate that the quality of the teacher over any teaching element has the greatest impact on a student’s academic achievement. One will be able to tell within five years if a teacher will be a good teacher or not. Students who have good teachers two, three or four years in a row will excel no matter their background or upbringing. However, kids with two bad teachers in a row will never recover. Accountability of bad teachers in the classroom is paramount if we want our nation’s youth to succeed and become contributing member of society.

Wilson, Maja (2010) “There Are a Lot of Really Bad Teachers Out There” One progressive teacher responds to an invitation to impose her practices on others.1-6.

Wilson is a high school English teacher who was invited to sit on a common curriculum committee after she made comments regarding her teaching habits as a consultant briefed how standardization and strict curriculum can tackle their literacy crisis. Wilson described how her best teaching practices developed as she got to know her students and experimented in the classroom. She worried that mandatory units, lessons and assessments would cause her to lose her flexibility in the classroom. The mandated standardization structure would level the playing the field and solve the problem of bad teachers in the education profession. The consultant highlighted that unions protect bad teachers and since the profession cannot physically remove a bad teacher then they can replace them with a mandated, scripted curriculum. Wilson would later mention she was removed from the committee due to her objective opinions. Because of her dismissal from the committee, her English department constructed their own professorial development program to ensure quality teaching attributes were shared among each other to utilize in the classroom.

“The Difference between Good and Bad Teachers” Editorial. The Denver Post 2009

This editorial article in the Denver Post focused on the point that many administrators who develop education policies view teachers as interchangeable parts. There is currently a decline in test scores, gaping achievement gaps and decreased graduation rates but yet administrators and teacher unions across the nation allow excellent teaching to go unnoticed while overlooking poor teaching. The author this editorial highlighted that teacher effectiveness rarely plays a role in decision making when hiring and promoting teachers. The author talks about the “widget effect” based off a study by
the nonprofit New Teacher Project and how some of the public school districts studies are beginning to track teachers by their performance. Less than one percent in the 12 districts studied received unsatisfactory ratings event with schools filled with students unable to meet basic standards

References


