

Chapter 44

Criteria That Contribute to High Quality Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Top-quality teaching fosters high student achievement and high achievers can harness their talents and energies to become successful, contributing citizens. There is confusing and conflicting research on teacher quality and no consensus on objective ways to describe teacher quality. This article describes an approach to the issue as a subjective multivocal synthesis of writings, opinions and comments of many different individuals and groups. The chapter is based on the principal component analysis of a Likert-scale survey instrument which consists of 30 statements adapted from research literature and U.S. states' Teacher of the Year criteria. The results deliver responses to the question: What are the frequently-cited criteria describing high quality teachers and teaching that can be combined to form named, describable components for high quality teachers and teaching upon which there is a general consensus among students, teachers, parents, and school administrators?

INTRODUCTION

Facilitating learning requires skilled teachers, whether in the classroom or remotely in a distance learning situation. There is confusing and conflicting research on teacher quality and no consensus on objective ways to describe teacher

quality. This chapter describes an approach to the issue of teacher quality as a subjective multivocal synthesis of writings, opinions and comments of many different individuals and groups. A Likert-scale survey instrument consisting of 30 statements adapted from research literature and U.S. states' Teacher of the Year criteria was taken by the study participants. The quantization of the survey results were subjected to a principal component (factor)

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analysis which yielded five named components or factors contributing to outstanding teacher performance in the 21st century.

The 2004 report of The Teaching Commission states:

“All good schools have one thing in common: good teachers. Top-quality teaching fosters high student achievement—and high achievers can harness their talents and energies to become successful, contributing citizens. ... This should serve as a reminder that teaching, our nation’s most valuable profession, is vital to our continued economic well-being and civic stability” (The Teaching Commission, 2004, P.12).

Educational researchers (see Goldhaber & Anthony, 2005; Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Hanushek, 1986; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005) have failed to reach a consensus over which, if any, readily identifiable teacher characteristics are associated with students’ learning gains. It remains an open question as to whether it is even possible to judge teachers’ effectiveness using measures other than direct observations of their teaching.

While this still may be a correct statement, most academic studies have focused on the external qualifications of individuals or groups of teachers such as: college degrees, scores on teacher qualifying tests, state certificates, even past SAT scores of teachers. Many studies have used “productivity function analysis” or “input/output analysis” to compare the teacher qualifications to the results of those teachers’ students, and the above opening statement is where the researchers are left.

These authors took a very different approach, somewhat like a JD Power’s customer satisfaction methodology – ask the “customers.” The seven focus groups of high school students provided criteria that were far outside of most academic research items. Statements regarding respect and

ethnic equity and making learning fun and relevant are what the student “customers” thought really were important and contributed to outstanding teaching. Also the students’ comments did include important items that previous research had analyzed, such as knowing the subject and knowing how to teach the subject and curriculum.

Given that 14-18 year old “customers” may not always be right, the authors included the opinions of adults who are either actively participating in the education system (teachers, administrators and parents) or who have previously experienced K-12 education. Focus groups and survey responses from these other “voices” generally supported and agreed with the students in what criteria contribute to outstanding teaching.

If indeed high quality teachers have a great impact on students, what constitutes high quality teaching? How do we describe high quality teaching? How do universities and teacher colleges educate and prepare new teachers? It has been acknowledged by many researchers that there are different perspectives on describing “high quality teachers” and there is no consensus. This can be summarized by the statement: “I don’t know what constitutes high quality teaching, but I know it when I see it.” Additionally, as the “digital generation” moves through the public education system, what are the new technological knowledge and skills that teachers must acquire and use to be high quality teachers in the 21st Century? The basic research question was:

What are the frequently-cited criteria describing high quality teachers and teaching that can be combined to form named, describable factors or components for high quality teachers and teaching?

This chapter describes the context for the research, the methodology employed, the results produced by the principal component analysis, and the conclusions reached.

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