



## **Teachers That Make a Difference**

by Amanda Hankel, editor

Looking back at my childhood and my years in school, I can tell you there weren't too many teachers that I truly disliked or thought were doing a poor job at educating me. That said, I remember some of my favorite teachers—those who made an especially strong, positive impact on me and my learning.

For example, I remember all the way back to my first- grade teacher, Mrs. Nelson, whose fun group activities made learning exciting and new every day. My fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Farnsworth, was known more for his “tough-love” approach to teaching—his assignments were difficult and he assigned more homework than most other teachers. But, he made class time enjoyable, helping to make those difficult assignments a little easier and showing how they tied into the broader lesson.

In high school, I appreciated Mrs. Molter for her lab experiments and associated lessons that made science bearable, even for someone like me who was mostly interested in reading and writing. For example, when our class dissected cats for a lab assignment (not something I wanted to do), it was associated with a lesson on the ethical treatment of animals and the importance of respecting animals (which made it bearable for me).

And as I got older, into my junior and senior years of high school, I remember Mr. Sauer and the way he treated his students as adults rather than children, allowing us to engage in classroom activities and discussions in a way that, I think, better prepared me for college.

As I recall these individual teachers who made a positive impact in my primary and secondary education, I would argue they would all fit the definition of a quality teacher. But is there a true definition of a quality teacher?

With the debate in education today about teacher evaluations and how they should be tied to student achievement scores, the definition of a quality teacher is not clear-cut. However,



research has shown that the quality of the teacher is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, factor affecting a student's long-term achievement.

In this issue of ASQ's *Primary and Secondary Education Brief*, we look at teachers and schools working to define quality teaching and achieve it by using tools and techniques that foster continuous improvement.

In the article, ["The Essential Facts,"](#) read about first-grade teacher Lynnette Bumgarner's use of the Essential Facts System™—a tool she uses to help her students retain and build knowledge while getting them excited about learning. The system is just one of many quality tools being used by Bumgarner, and throughout her school and district in Greenville, SC.

In another article, ["Teaching Quality Impacts Student Achievement,"](#) Bob Hoglund, an educational consultant and author, and Cindy McClung, coordinator of quality for the School District of Lee County, FL, discuss the district's emphasis on professional development and continuous improvement to support effective teachers.

Some additional resources in the issue include a [Harvard Business Review blog](#) that offers a recipe for good teaching, outlining critical elements to a teacher's success in the classroom.

Also, an [Education Week Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook article](#) reports on research that shows having a high-quality teacher for even one year can have a measurable long-term impact on students' career outcomes.

Finally, the article, ["What Makes a Great Teacher,"](#) from the *Atlantic* magazine looks in-depth at the data from Teach for America, a nonprofit that recruits college graduates to spend two years teaching in low-income schools. For more than a decade, the organization has been tracking hundreds of thousands of students, and looking at why some teachers can move them three grade levels ahead in a year and others can't. Its findings offer an interesting and surprising glimpse into what makes a teacher great.



Defining quality is difficult, but I think the definition starts with making a positive impact on students and their willingness and ability to learn. It means making learning fun, keeping students encouraged and motivated to continue to learn, and finding ways—such as using quality tools—to help them retain the knowledge they gain. Teachers play one of the biggest roles in student achievement. Working toward defining and achieving quality teaching is a critical step in ensuring success.

*What's your definition of a quality teacher? Let me know at [ahankel@asq.org](mailto:ahankel@asq.org).*