



Teaching Quality Impacts Student Achievement

By Bob Hoglund and Cindy McClung

There has long been debate over the impact a single teacher can have on a child's learning. A review of the research reveals that students may learn an additional full year's worth more information during a school term with a highly effective teacher than with an ineffective one.¹

This effect is increased over time. A study by researchers William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers found that students who were assigned to highly effective teachers for three consecutive years were likely to score up to 50 percentile points higher in math than students who had ineffective teachers for three consecutive years.²

Daniel Aaronson, Lisa Barrow and William Sander found similar results in 2007. Their study also indicated that not only do students not learn as much from an ineffective teacher, but also that their academic performance actually declines.³ In addition, Sanders and Rivers' study indicated that students assigned to a highly effective teacher after having consecutive ineffective teachers were able to improve their results, but were not able to make up for the lost learning. These studies support the idea that each teacher has an immediate and lasting impact on student achievement.

Unfortunately, it is much easier to look at post-test data to determine which teachers are more effective than it is to predict which teachers will be more successful in raising student achievement. In an effort to change this, researchers have tried to pinpoint indicators that correlate with effective teaching.

Nationally, much attention has been focused on the work of Charlotte Danielson and the Danielson Group. Many states, including Florida, have turned to Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*⁴ as a basis for teacher evaluations. The aim of the evaluation process is to encourage teachers to reflect upon their practices and plan for improvement in an effort to increase student learning.



Knowing that a high quality teacher may be the single most significant factor in student success and taking into account W. Edwards Deming's assertion that, "It is not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, and then do your best," the School District of Lee County in Florida has a history of stressing the importance of professional development. The new teacher evaluation system that is being piloted this year is a prime example of the emphasis on continuous improvement that has been prevalent in our district for the past several years. For the past five years, we have delivered a training component focused on continuous improvement that incorporates the Glasser Quality Schools model with the Baldrige model. The objectives of this training are highly correlated with the indicators of quality teaching found in the new evaluation.

The emphasis of this professional development is twofold. First, teachers learn to view their school and classroom through a systems perspective that helps them to evaluate their teaching using a framework comprised of the three E's: environment, expectations and evaluation.⁵ Second, teachers are taught how to help students learn to set goals, design action plans, monitor their progress, evaluate and make changes as needed.

An effective teacher must be able to critically examine his or her own teaching. Teachers are asked to consider how they establish a positive and supportive learning environment based on trust. Specific indicators included on the teacher evaluation contain the descriptor, "The teacher has created a culture for learning ... students hold themselves to high standards of performance; for example, by initiating improvement to their work."⁶ Questions for teachers to consider include:

- How do you welcome students to the classroom?
- How do you involve students in creating a classroom that meets their needs?
- Are students comfortable asking for help?
- Are processes in place to welcome new students and to help students who have been absent?

Setting clear expectations is the second area of examination. Teachers need to be sure that academic and behavioral expectations are well-defined and understood by all. Evaluation

descriptors include, “Standards of conduct are clear, with evidence of student participation in setting them,” and “The teacher collaboratively develops and monitors ambitious and measurable achievement goals with individual students...”⁷ Questions to consider in the area of expectations include:

- How are students included in the development of classroom expectations?
- Do all students understand the classroom expectations? How do you know?
- How do you explain academic expectations to students?
- How do you gain student buy-in to your expectations?
- Are goals, action plans, etc. clear to students? How do you know? How are they involved in the development of these tools?
- What do you do when a student does not meet the classroom expectations?

When teachers consider self-evaluation, they must do so in terms of student achievement. This is best done by first ensuring that good evaluation procedures are in place, then reviewing student data on an ongoing basis. Evaluation descriptors include:

- “Formative assessment is frequently used in a sophisticated manner in instruction, through student involvement in establishing criteria, self-assessment by students, and monitoring of progress by both the teacher and students.”
- “The teacher holds students accountable for personal learning through the use of data folders, goal statements and/or reflection of individual learning. The teacher adjusts long term plans when needed.”
- “The teacher tracks, monitors and analyzes student progress data to drive instructional planning and uses results to differentiate instructional and curriculum design.”⁸

Questions to consider include:

- How do you provide students with multiple opportunities to exhibit mastery of skills?
- Are rubrics, grading scales, etc. clear to students? How do you know? How are they involved in the development of these tools?

- How do you vary your method of evaluation (test, project, presentation, etc.) to broaden your view of your students' learning needs?
- How do you monitor student learning?
- Are your instructional strategies working?
 - What data indicate that students are learning?
 - What data indicate a need for improvement?
- What different instructional strategies will you use to reteach information that was not learned?

After teachers are comfortable with working toward continuous improvement, they are encouraged to teach these concepts to students. Students learn to set personal goals, develop plans to meet those goals, monitor and evaluate their own progress, and make changes to improve, helping them to realize they are responsible for their own learning. Specific tools and strategies that can be used to teach these skills to students are shared during the professional development.

The types of questions teachers use in the classroom can encourage students to think at a higher level, as demonstrated in the following evaluation descriptor: "The teacher regularly asks questions that reflect high expectations and are culturally and developmentally appropriate, allows sufficient time for students to answer, promotes critical and creative thinking, ensures that all voices are heard and frequently responds to students' correct answers by probing for higher level understanding in an effective manner."⁹

Just as self-reflection is good for teachers, it is also a useful strategy to teach students. Using a questioning process based on the work of William Glasser, teachers can stimulate critical thinking and help their students identify what is important to them, define what they are doing to obtain that, evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and plan for improvement. This questioning process has also proven to be effective in managing classroom procedures and misconduct.

In this process, there are four basic questions. The skill, which is practiced during the professional development sessions, is in asking the questions in a conversational,



nonjudgmental manner that is appropriate for the student. The basic questions, with some alternate ways of asking them, are:

- What do you want?
 - What is your goal?
 - What would you like to accomplish?
- What are you doing to get what you want?
 - What did you do to reach your goal?
 - What strategies have you used to learn _____?
- Is what you are doing working?
 - Are you satisfied with your results?
 - How have the strategies that you have used helped you?
- What else can you do?
 - What is your plan (For example, plan-do-check-act or SMART goals)?
 - What are your action steps?

The value of a quality teacher cannot be overstated. Educators who are able to model continuous improvement principles, bring them to the classroom and facilitate their use by students will enable those students to think critically, plan for improvement and take control of their own learning. That is success by any measure.

References

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