TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Robert A. Barry, Ph.D.
Department of Education
Marylhurst University
February 2010

MARYLHURST
UNIVERSITY

CHALK
BOARD
PROJECT

TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AND WHY IT MATTERS

> "*To improve student learning, you do not change the structure. You change the instructional practices of teachers. The schools that seem to do best are those that have a clear idea of what kind of instructional practice they wish to produce, and then design a structure to go with it.*"
>
> — Richard Elmore, Harvard University [1]

> "*It's not rocket science—the better the teacher teaches, the better the student learns.*"
>
> — Harry K. Wong, Author, The First Days of School; How to Be an Effective Teacher [2]

The challenge that Oregon and US schools have is not that we don't know what teaching effectiveness is or that we do not have models and research to guide us. The challenge is how to ensure that these practices are in every classroom and in every teacher's repertoire of professional practice. The answer is creating school and school district systems which align the practices of Teacher Hiring, Mentoring, Expanding Career Opportunities for Teachers, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation in a Continuum of Professional Practice that is based upon the principles and behaviors of Teaching Effectiveness.

It is safe to say that everyone, every parent, grandparent, young person and citizen in America would like to have the assurance that all our children are being taught and prepared for college, for future work and for life in the Twenty-First Century. In order to achieve this, we need to ensure that those who teach our children incorporate the qualities of effective teaching in their professional lives. In essence, we need every teacher in our schools to be an effective teacher.

The current movement in thinking and research that is taking us from the concept of a Highly Qualified Teacher in every classroom, to the need for a Highly Effective Teacher in every classroom, is a logical and needed evolution in our thinking about improvements in the way teaching and learning takes place in our schools.

Both the current federal funding program Race to the Top and the considerable economic support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have focused our attention on teacher effectiveness as the critical factor in student learning. Race to the Top has challenged and mandated that states both define and measure teacher effectiveness in individual classrooms and the Gates Foundation has awarded $335 million in grants to five urban school districts to promote effective teaching and raise student achievement. Both of these funding initiatives emerged from recent thinking about teaching and learning and have spawned new areas for research, models of practice and definitions of teacher effectiveness.

Though there has been much study and writing recently that has led to this focus on teaching effectiveness, it is not a new topic in educational research. The fact is that we know a great deal about what makes a teacher effective. Though particular studies and models for teacher effectiveness have subtle differences, all of them agree that the gauge for teacher effectiveness is student learning.

Just what is Teaching Effectiveness?

Just what teaching effectiveness is can be understood by studying the models of instruction that capture and define what it is that effective teachers know and do…a set of behaviors that effective teachers incorporate into their daily professional practice. These involve a deep understanding of subject matter,

learning theory and student differences, planning, classroom instructional strategies, knowing individual students, and assessment of student understanding and proficiency with learning outcomes. They also include a teacher's ability to reflect, collaborate with colleagues and continue ongoing professional development.

More than twenty years ago *A Study of Fifty Effective Teachers in Each of Four School Types in Project Star* was presented at the American Educational Research Association conference in San Francisco. The findings are applicable today.

A variety of instructional planning activities, teaching strategies, and materials were found to be common in the repertoires of effective teachers:

- They had high expectations for student learning.
- They provided clear and focused instruction.
- They closely monitored student learning progress.
- They retaught using alternative strategies when children didn't learn.
- They used incentives and rewards to promote learning.
- They were highly efficient in their classroom routines.
- They set and enforced high standards for classroom behavior.
- They maintained excellent personal interactions with their students.[3]

In fact, much of the effectiveness research of the past was analyzed and disseminated in Portland, Oregon beginning in the 1980's by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. The focus of much of this research was on how to assist schools in supporting effective teaching. *Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis* was updated in 1995 by the late Kathleen Cotton of NWREL and has much of value in defining effective teaching and the ways schools can support it.

In defining effective teaching for the Twenty-first Century, the teaching and learning models of Charlotte Danielson and Robert Marzano are prominent in

many United States schools. Both of these models of instruction incorporate research findings of effective teaching past and present.

Charlotte Danielson's book, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, outlines measures relating to effective teaching organized into four domains, each with several observable teacher behaviors: Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities.**(4)**

Robert Marzano's model of teaching effectiveness, *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction*, articulates his framework in the form of 10 questions that represent a logical planning sequence for successful instructional design including: establishing learning goals, students interaction with new knowledge, student practice to deepen understanding, engaging students, effective classroom management, effective student teacher relationships, communicating high expectation for students, and effective, standards-based, formative and summative assessment practices which use multiple measures of students' proficiency.**(5)**

In addition, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) also offers direction for what an effective teacher should know and be able to do and has merit in guiding school districts to formulate their own model of teacher effectiveness.

The challenge that Oregon and US schools have is not that we don't know what teaching effectiveness is or that we do not have models and research to guide us. The challenge is how to ensure that these practices are in every classroom and in every teacher's repertoire of professional practice. The answer is **creating school and school district systems which align the practices of Teacher Hiring, Mentoring, Expanding Career Opportunities for Teachers, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation into a Continuum of Professional Practice that uses the principles and behaviors of Teaching Effectiveness as its foundation.**

It is this alignment of practices in schools and school districts where we need to improve if we are to reach the goal of having effective teaching in every classroom.

A Continuum of Professional Practice

> *"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a great deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.*
>
> – Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

In her work *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*, Charlotte Danielson creates a model of effective teaching that, *"identifies those aspects of a teacher's responsibilities that have been documented by empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting improved student learning."*

Danielson emphasizes the interconnectedness of a teacher's decisions, experiences and behaviors on her effectiveness with her students and her growth and development in teaching skills. Danielson's framework identifies flexible domains that can be applied in different classroom settings, subject matters or with different ages of students.

In her new work, *Talk About Teaching: Leading Professional Conversations*, Charlotte Danielson further refines the imperative to define effective teaching and the importance of giving teachers opportunities to engage in professional conversations about it.

> *Of all the approaches available to educators to promote teacher learning, the most powerful (and embedded in virtually all the others) is that of professional conversation. Reflective conversations about practice require teachers to understand and analyze events in the classroom. In these conversations, teachers must consider the instructional decisions they have made and examine student learning in light of these decisions.*[6]

Danielson creates a model for promoting professional learning through focused conversations which center on big ideas tied directly to student learning. These include: What constitutes important learning? What causes learning? How are students motivated? What is intelligence and how do students' views influence their actions?

By illuminating these ideas and creating a model of professional development through which teachers engage in professional conversations and by linking it to her Framework for Teaching, Danielson aligns effective teaching principles with ways for educators to discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of their own practices with a common understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and professional behavior.

It is through a similar alignment of the practices of Teacher Hiring, Mentoring, Expanding the Career Opportunities of Teachers, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation in a Continuum of Professional Practice that will offer schools and school districts their own framework that creates consistency and the common promotion of effective teaching.

The alignment of these systems and tasks focused on student learning and effective teaching should guide the ways teachers are selected, the ways they are mentored, the ways through which their skills are developed during the course of their careers and the manner in which their performance is evaluated.

Multiple Measures and Student Learning

Much of the current debate in attempting to define teacher effectiveness centers on teacher evaluation, and more specifically, what are the indicators of student learning that might be used to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness? Often this dialogue centers on students' performance on standardized tests, and leads to confusion regarding systems of teacher evaluation that focus on this data as the measure of an individual teacher's effectiveness.

Certainly, performance on standardized tests is one measurement, but not the sole measure of what students know and can do. This is why student learning must be assessed using multiple measures.

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality 2008 report, *Approaches for Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness*, makes a compelling argument for a much broader definition of teacher effectiveness.[7] It is based on more that 30 years of effectiveness research. In the section of their report, *Considering a More Comprehensive Definition of Teacher Effectiveness*, the researchers cite more than 50 research studies, policy documents, standards

and reports since 1979 including those written by Darling-Hammond and Youngs, Brophy and Good and The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, to create a comprehensive definition of teacher effectiveness.

What they argue for is that there are other behaviors besides standardized test preparation in which effective teachers take part. They suggest that rather than ignore these, that we should find ways to measure them and include them in teacher evaluation practices.

As is the case with the assessment of student learning, performance evaluation systems should use multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. These measures should be closely aligned with the practices that support teacher performance evaluation: Hiring, Mentoring and Professional Development that center on a common, articulated model of Teaching Effectiveness.

One distinguishing quality that effective teachers seem to have is, that in all their approaches to planning, designing and implementing instruction and assessment, their focus is on "student learning" to inform their own teaching.[8] This is a subtle distinction for many, because learning and teaching are connected in many ways. But this is a key distinction. Effective teachers know who their students are. They know their students' learning styles, their strengths and their deficits as learners. They are masters of their subject matter…but more importantly, effective teachers are always focused on their students' learning.

The current interest, research and dialogue about teaching effectiveness is a valid one because it compels us to examine, study and articulate what we do everyday as teachers. Adopting a model of effective teaching such as Charlotte Danielson's "Framework for Teaching" or Robert Marzano's "Art and Science of Teaching," or a hybrid of a school district's own design, is a strong place to begin. It is, however, through the alignment of school and district practices in Hiring, Mentoring, Professional Development and Performance Evaluation in a Continuum of Professional Practice, closely tied to an articulated understanding of effective teaching, which will provide the critical pathway to an effective teacher in every classroom.

Sources

(1) Elmore, R. in Wong, H. "Teachers are the Greatest Assets." *Teachers Net Gazette.* May 2009.

(2) Wong, H. "Teachers are the Greatest Assets." *Teachers Net Gazette.* May 2009.

(3) Bain, H., Lintz, N., and Word, E. *A Study of Fifty Effective Teachers Whose Class Average Gain Scores Ranked in the Top 15% of Each of Four School Types in Project Star.* Paper presented at AERA annual meeting, San Francisco, 1989. p 1.

(4) Danielson, C. *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching.* Alexandria: ASCD, 1996.

(5) Marzano, R. *The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction.* Alexandria: ASCD, 2007.

(6) Danielson, C. *Talk About Teaching: Leading Professional Conversations.* Corwin: Thousand Oaks, 2009. p 5.

(7) Goe, L. Ph.D., Bell, C. Ph.D., Little, O., and ETS. "Approaches for Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness: A Research Synthesis." National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2008. p 9.

(8) Abbott, M. Conversations about teaching. Marylhurst University, 2009.