

Building teacher effectiveness: Turning good intentions into strategies for a quality teaching.

NEZZAR Kenza -ENS Bouzaréah (Alger)

Following the assumption that teaching and learning are the beginning and the end of any educational policy, all what bears on the professional development and effectiveness of the teacher has to be of prime importance; educational psychologists have dwelt on the question for decades trying to help teachers and educators in understanding what goes on the teaching and learning process. Many researches proved that only motivated teachers can produce motivated learners; knowing that a teacher's performance in contributing to leaning effectiveness is strongly influenced by his/her motivation.

Its worth noting, that in our context as developing countries education is at a critical juncture; we fail to reach international agreed on targets to expand and improve education and despite the pivotal role of teachers, there is a tendency on the part of the policy makers to bypass teachers in decision making and program changes; and the teaching force is demoralized by many other factors, but teachers are still striving to provide the best training and education they can in our universities and colleges.

What is good teaching ? what are the characteristics of a good teacher? what are key factors of teaching effectiveness? How do students perceive teacher effectiveness, and how do they rank teacher's characteristics in their aspiration for a healthy classroom atmosphere conducive to quality learning and achievement? These questions haunted many educational psychologists and teachers for decades. We will try to provide some answers of some of the most prominent educational psychologists, and see some policies regarding teacher effectiveness in some developed countries.

Overview of research on teaching and teacher effectiveness:

In our discussion of current research on effective instruction, it is important, as a starting point, to distinguish between the two notions of *teacher quality* and *teaching quality*.

Teacher quality might be thought of as the bundle of personal traits, skills, and understandings an individual brings to teaching, including dispositions to behave in certain ways. **Teaching quality** refers to strong instruction that enables a wide range of students to learn. Teaching quality is in part a function of teacher quality—teachers'

knowledge, skills, and dispositions—but it is also strongly influenced by the context of instruction: the curriculum and assessment system; the “fit” between teachers’ qualifications and what they are asked to teach; and teaching conditions, such as time, class size, facilities, and materials.

This leads us to understand that if teaching is to be **effective**, policymakers must address the teaching and learning environment as well as the capacity of individual teachers. That is trying to deal with both teaching spheres. A significant body of research and numerous reports attempt to isolate factors that determine the effectiveness of teaching, and much research too was conducted to determine students’ perceptions of effective teaching, and establish criteria by which to judge instructor’s effectiveness. Research has also identified the compelling link between positive emotions and enhanced learning and creative thought (Norman, 2005).

It has proved also, that the important for teachers who aspire to a quality instruction, is a full awareness of the psychological implications of what actually happens in the classroom on the learners motivation and achievement, and how they relate to what they do, in the confines of the four walls that they define as their teaching

“All teachers do good things some of the time, and all good teachers do bad things some of the time. The differences among teachers lies not only in the proportions of the good and the bad, but also in their awareness of the effects of what they are doing and their readiness to share this awareness with their students.”
(p.590)

environment, Smith (1995) clarifies this in the following quotation:

What is good teaching ? Day (1999: 22) argues that teaching is more than a craft, it is an educational **science** and a pedagogical **art**; thus he suggests that good teaching has to be based on a reflective Professionalism; if we aspire to quality teaching we have to remember those two touchstones. Not far from this view, Eisner (2002) observes: “Good teaching depends on sensibility and imagination. It courts surprise. It profits from caring. In short, good teaching is an artistic affair.” (p.577). While, Smith (1995) argues that teaching, should be focussed on the creation of ‘appropriately nourishing experiences so that learning comes about naturally and inevitably’(p.589).

The possibility of improving teachers' practices lies also in the fact of using reflective teaching that is nurtured by teachers' experiences; Killen (2006) in his book *Effective Teaching Strategies* underlines this fact: « No matter how well you teach, there is always room for improvement. One way to continually improve is to learn from your day to day experience by becoming a reflective teacher» (p. 88). Hence; the effective teacher will use assessment as part of the learning environment rather than as a separate entity, and will be one who engages with the students in the class in a way that highlights mutual respect and an acknowledgement of the learning process that is in place.

Alton-Lee (2003) suggests, 'quality teaching provides sufficient and effective opportunity to learn' (p.53).

Teachers often think that by sticking to the materials, and trying to discipline their students, they will create a healthy atmosphere conducive to learning, but many seem to loose sight of the fact, that unless they accept their student's personalities and work on those details that constitute their social and psychological make up, they will fail to motivate them. The **passion** that a teacher has for his subject will be creating a world that moves beyond the ritual of classroom activities Fried (1995) sums this idea up: "The example we set as passionate adults allows us to connect to young people's minds and spirits that can have a lasting positive impact on their lives."(p.19)

In developed countries, to encourage teachers effectiveness some measures like rewarding, or licensing were taken by the Educational Boards. In America; for instance, a recent task of the American National Association of State Boards of Education emphasized the importance of creating a more aligned system to teacher effectiveness, beginning with recruitment and preparation and continuing through evaluation and career development, a number of American States even issue certificates to recognize accomplished practice along with salary bonuses and other forms of quality teacher recognition.

Schulman's notion of PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge):

Lee S. Schulman an educational psychologist who has made notable contributions to the study of teacher education, and assessment of teaching. president (since 1997) of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905, was

the one who first introduced the notion of "**Pedagogical Content Knowledge**" (PCK) into research discourse.

He claimed that the emphases on teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogy were being treated as mutually exclusive domains in research, he believed that teacher education programs should combine the two knowledge bases to more effectively prepare teachers. To address this dichotomy, he proposed to consider the necessary relationship between the two by introducing the notion of PCK. Among the longest standing constructs of teacher knowledge is Schulman's (1987) model that includes pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

Hence; if the **Pedagogical knowledge** includes the "how" of teaching, generally acquired through education coursework and experiences in the schools (Ball, 2000). **Content knowledge**, on the other hand, is the "what" of teaching or the "subject-matter knowledge" (Lafayette, 1993). And the combination of both competences leads to a combination of the how and what leading to a better quality teaching. Given the actual Educational context and the astonishing speed and spread of the technologies of information and communication, our emphasis has to be more on the How, thus teaching the student how to fish rather than giving him a fish, since the information is available and he can get it by himself / herself.

Emphasising the how will lead to a learner's autonomy and students will own their learning as it is clarified by Stipek (1996) in the following quotation: "An effective classroom acknowledges the vital role of intrinsic motivation in creating an environment where students can feel that they are the masters of their own learning." (p. 102). In the same vein; speaking of the foreign language teacher Jacobovits (1971) observes : « The foreign language teacher ought to be aware of the psychological importance to the student of the latter's self evaluation of his progress, and take steps to help him to define his progress in realistic and relevant terms » (249)

Murrey, Gilles, Lennon, Mercer, and Robinson (1996), in cooperation with the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, published: Ethical Principles in University Teaching, with the intention of encouraging dialogue of ethical practice in university teaching, delineate the two type of knowledge (content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge) in two separate competences:

content competence: a university teacher maintains a high level of subject matter knowledge and ensure that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the position of the course within the student's program of studies.

pedagogical competence: A pedagogically competent teacher is supposed to communicate the objectives of the course to students, is aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction, that according to research evidence, are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives. (Murrey et al: 1996 : p1)

Students perceptions of effective teaching:

One of the most prolific manifestations of the attempt to improve college and university instruction is the course evaluation survey used in many developed countries; notably America, Canada, and Australia. Student's evaluations of courses and instructors are used by more than 80% of universities in those countries. Notions of asking students to provide feedback on the quality teaching they receive have started almost one century ago; Students rating of instruction was introduced to North American universities in 1920's. Actually; course evaluation questionnaire are used extensively in Canada, to allow students identify and rank qualities of effective teaching.

Those questionnaires ask students to rate various aspects of the course and instructors behaviours. Much current research investigates the validity of this process and the reliability of course evaluations to indicate effective teaching practices (Shao, Anderson & Newsome 2007). Ryan and Harrison (1995) investigated how students weight various teaching components in their evaluation of teaching effectiveness; they carried out an experiment in three different institutional contexts, were students evaluated hypothetical instructors, based on the manipulation of nine teaching factor: learning, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth of coverage, examination fairness, assignments and course difficulty. They observed that the students' evaluations of the importance of the factors were similar across the three contexts.

In Australia surveys of that sort were also used to help improve quality teaching; Develin (2002) examined the strengths and weaknesses of a survey used at the university of Melbourne to identify students perception of their learning environment. He observed that

the questionnaire design forces students to comment on the teacher's behaviour; thus, "it doesn't allow them to communicate their views on how they themselves can contribute to their learning" (p.290).

Always in the Australian context, Killen (2006: book's Appendixes: Appendix1) provides us with one example of those lesson evaluation questionnaire that he used himself to know the student's perception's of their teacher's practices and behaviour.

LESSON EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

It is important for me to know how students feel about my teaching, any feedback that you give will help me to make it easier for you to understand future lessons. **please think about what happened in this lesson and place ticks in the boxes to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.** Do NOT write your name on this paper. The information you give will not influences your marks for this course.

Strongly agree 1

Agree 2

Neither agree nor disagree 3

Disagree 4

Strongly disagree 5

In this lesson the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Was well organized					
Was enthusiastic about the subject					
Appeared to know a lot about the subject					
Told the students what they should learn in this lesson					
Did not go too fast					
Did not go too slowly					
Explained the meaning of words I did not understand					
Made the information easy for me to understand					
Spoke clearly					
Made it easy for me to see what was important					
Made the lesson interesting					

Used examples that I could understand			
Encouraged students to ask questions			
Gave satisfactory answers to students' questions			
Presented the lesson in a logical series of steps			
Gave me time to think about new information			
Asked questions to check students understanding			
Gave a useful summary of the main points			

Axelrod(2008) has found that students' perceptions of what constitutes effective instruction transcend time, place, and discipline. He enumerates seven qualities as common elements of quality teaching:

1-accessibility and approachability

2-fairness

3-open mindedness

4-mastery and delivery

5-Enthusiasm

6-Humour

7-knowledge and inspiration

A study conducted in Canada, at Memorial University of Newfoundland in the winter of 2008 by Jerome Delaney, Albert and Trudy Johnson, and Denis Treslan; an open ended survey was made available to students, who were asked to isolate the characteristics they believe are essential to effective teaching, led to a set of students' definitions that describe nine characteristics and identify instructors behaviours that demonstrate effectiveness in teaching. The characteristics they underlined stated that the teacher has to be:

1-Respectful.

2-Knowledgeable

3-Approachable

4-engaging

5-communicative

6-organized

7-responsive

8-professional

9-humorous

So if we compare these qualities with the ones stated earlier by Axelrod, we see that they are almost the same qualities; that justifies his claim that students' perception of quality teacher transcend time, space, discipline and even mode of delivery.

Some strategies for effective teaching:

In their desire to improve higher education, many universities and colleges_ even in developing countries_ have expended substantial resources to integrate **technological infrastructure** into existing classroom facilities, research; however, highlighted that technology on its own didn't guarantee effective

“ there is nothing inherent in technologies that elicit improvement in learning, although the process of redesigning a course to adapt the content to technology can improve the course and the outcomes. In other words learning is not caused by the technology, but by the instructional method embedded in the media” (p.14)

teaching. Meyer (2002) quotes Russel who clarifies that:

Killen(2006) stated many techniques that can be used as effective teaching strategies, while he argues that no single teaching strategy is effective all the time for all learners, the main reason is that ‘teaching and learning are very complex processes that are influenced by many different factors, only some of which are under teacher’s control and none of which are fully understood »(1) The teacher has to vary the techniques at each time to get a satisfying outcome, he enumerated eight strategies :

1-using direct instruction.

2-using discussion.

3-using small group work.

4-using cooperative learning.

5-using students research.

6-using role play.

7-using case study.

8-using writing.

He also states that to apply those classroom strategies, the instructor has to acquire some **key competences**, these are:

1-collecting, analysing and organizing information.

2-communicating ideas and information.

3-planing and organizing activities

4-working with others in teams

5-using mathematical ideas and techniques

6-solving problems

7-using technology

8-using understanding of cultures.

Conclusion

We can see from all what has been done in the developed countries to help improve the teaching profession and the teaching outcome, that the task is not an easy one, it requires not only all the good intentions of teachers and educational policy makers, but also a know how, and a great aptitude at taking the required measures, and changing policies whenever needed, especially given the current international context of globalisation, economic and commercial competitiveness. Teaching as one of the most ancient jobs on earth is not only a noble mission; but one to be undertaken with the utmost devotion; classes in our Algerian context have to benefit from the insightful views, experiences, and achievements of other nations and our research has to build on their existing body of research on such issues as teacher effectiveness, class management and leadership; to be itself a classroom of opportunity for all learners.

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