K-12 Teaching Standards and the Promotion of Highly-Effective Teaching

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Introduction

It is a widely held belief that teachers have a powerful effect on students' academic success.ⁱ As such, the topic of teacher quality has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years. The need to identify and distribute excellent teachers and to support their professional growth is critical if the United States is to compete in a global economy. Current reform efforts in North Carolina (NC) and throughout the nation aim, in part, to raise standards for teacher quality by identifying effective teachers during recruitment and training and by supporting and evaluating them throughout their careers.

Standards and Effective Teaching

Effective teaching must begin with clear standards that describe what teachers should know and be able to do, and be centered on shared expectations for student learning. A national movement is afoot to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) developed to articulate student learning goals for K-12 students in English language arts and mathematics. North Carolina is among 45 states that have adopted the CCSS. The North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards align with the CCSS and other essential standards for student learning as well as standards applied from the point of entry into teaching (preparation and initial licensure standards) to advancement in the profession (advanced certification with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). These standards were established by practitioners and guided by evidence-based best practices from research, much like other professions such as law and medicine establish their own standards.

Teacher Recruitment and Preparation

While standards based on student learning expectations provide a guide for teaching, there are considerable differences among teachers due to their professional preparation prior to entering the classroom. Today, teaching candidates can enter the profession from a myriad of pathways. Some candidates will enter traditional undergraduate teacher education programs or complete a Master's program, while others may choose to teach while earning their license via an alternative certification program—a program specifically designed for candidates who already have an earned degree.

Research on these portals—categories that capture a teacher's formal preparation *prior* to entering the classroom—indicates that there is a relationship between the preparation portal and teaching effectiveness in North Carolina. For instance, Henry et al. (2014) found that, compared to teachers from in-state public undergraduate education programs, out-of-state prepared undergraduate-teachers and alternative entry teachers were less effective in high school-tested subjects. Additionally, Teach For America Corps Members were more effective than other portals in STEM subjects.

These findings may reflect differences in the quality of candidates being selected into the preparation program and/or differences in the quality of preparation they receive in these portals. For instance, in order to enter an undergraduate preparation program in NC, candidates must successfully complete prerequisite coursework, have earned a minimum GPA of 2.5 or better on course work, meet established scores on the state teacher test (Praxis), and have successfully completed an admission interview. In

29th ANNUAL EMERGING ISSUES FORUM TEACHERS AND THE GREAT ECONOMIC DEBATE FEBRUARY 10-11, 2014

comparison, Teach For America requires Corps Members to meet minimum academic qualifications (they must hold a bachelor's degree and have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale to be eligible) as well as demonstrate through online assignments and an extensive interview process specific personality characteristics, such as perseverance, leadership, and a deep belief that all students can learn.

Some believe that improving instructional effectiveness hinges on recruiting certain types of individuals into the profession. Research has explored teacher academic credentials, demographics (age, gender, and race) and attributions beyond cognitive ability (non-cognitive traits) and their relationship to student achievement. Research on academic credentials (such as GPA), cognitive ability (such as SAT scores), and teacher test scores (such as Praxis) has yielded mixed results. There is some empirical support for a need to recruit underrepresented groups into the profession; Dee (2004) found that same-race teachers garner better achievement gains with their students. Non-cognitive traits may also relate to a candidate's ability to thrive in the profession. For instance, resiliency is an exemplar non-cognitive trait that has been linked to teacher persistence while some research suggests that a commitment to teaching, critical thinking skills, and knowledge of teaching pedagogy may predict teachers' performance.

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) advises teacher preparation programs to assess "selectivity factors" for candidates in each of the aforementioned areas: academic credentials, diversity, and non-cognitive dispositions.ⁱⁱ CAEP recommends that programs require candidates to have a grade point average of at least 3.0 and be in the top 50 percent of the distribution on national achievement assessments (ACT, SAT, or GRE).

While educators and policymakers agree that recruitment of top teaching candidates is important, there has also been considerable focus on the quality of preparation teachers receive. Recently, the National Council on Teaching Quality released their teacher preparation review report, a national evaluation tool that identifies the nation's best and worst teacher preparation programs (TPPs).ⁱⁱⁱ While this report has spurred considerable conversation regarding the quality of TPPs, it has been roundly criticized for a research design considered by some to be input-based rather than outcome-based, a lack of research-supported standards, and a lack of association between the ranking system used to determine TPP quality and actual program outcomes (such as licensure test passing rates and value-added scores).^{iv} Despite the controversy, high profile reports such as this one reflect a larger call for improving teacher preparation programs.

Research suggests that the quality of some experiences in teacher preparation, such as supervision by more competent teacher mentors (also known as cooperating teachers) as well as knowledge obtained in teacher preparation about subject matter, child development, and teaching methods may relate to teaching effectiveness. However, little is known about the extent to which some teacher preparation reforms impact teacher performance. In a recent study of a large TPP, Henry et al. (2013) examined whether indicators of progress and performance predict student learning and found that these indicators did not predict student learning. Henry and colleagues suggest that the need for improved measures of progress through the TPP is essential.

Compared with other countries, TPPs in the United States are shorter in duration and less rigorous. Darling-Hammond and Ball (1998) report that, in many European and Asian countries, candidates must pass rigorous subject matter and teaching knowledge examinations before acceptance into their TPPs. In addition, TPPs in these countries typically require a year-long, full-time internship in a school prior to graduation. Some states and/or cities in the U.S. have piloted similar internships or residencies, such as the Seattle Teacher Residency, the Boston Teacher Residency, and the Chicago Teacher Residency, NC STATE UNIVERSITY | institute for EMERGING ISSUES

29th ANNUAL EMERGING ISSUES FORUM TEACHERS AND THE GREAT ECONOMIC DEBATE FEBRUARY 10-11, 2014

which apply a medical residency model to teacher preparation. In this model, candidates experience a blend of coursework with an intensive full year of "on-the-job" training under the tutelage of an accomplished master teacher. However, most TPPs only require their candidates to complete a semester of supervised student teaching; North Carolina requires only 10 weeks of student teaching to be completed prior to full teaching responsibilities. It should be noted that while TPPs may be longer and more rigorous in other countries, these countries offer significant incentives to enter the teaching profession, such as higher teaching salaries and additional incentives such as subsidies for candidates' tuition.

Measures of Teacher Effectiveness

In addition to recruiting and training excellent teachers, a strong teaching force depends on continuous professional development informed by a multi-faceted teacher evaluation system. Much national attention has been placed recently on identifying effective in-service teachers. The federal Race to the Top Program (RttT) incentivized states to overhaul their teacher evaluation systems and include a student growth measure as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. Student growth measures calculate changes in student performance from one period of time to another. By controlling for a student's prior performance, researchers can measure a teacher's value-added to student learning.

North Carolina is one such RttT state to adopt a student growth measure into their existing educator evaluation system. In 2012, the state contracted with the vendor SAS to measure an educator's impact on student growth using a value-added approach. As a result, North Carolina adopted a 6th professional teaching standard: Teachers Contribute to the Academic Success of Students. School leaders employ observation measures and document review to evaluate teachers according to the previous five North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards: (1) Teachers Demonstrate Leadership; (2) Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for Their Students; (3) Teachers Know the Content They Teach; (4) Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students; and (5) Teachers Reflect on Their Practice. The rubric for evaluating NC teachers uses a 5-point scale: not demonstrated, developing, proficient, accomplished, and distinguished. Teachers with lower than proficient on one or more standard are provided an intervention plan designed to target specific areas of improvement. Teacher value-added ratings related to the 6th standard are combined with their ratings on standards 1-5 to make up a teacher's overall effectiveness status.

Value-added is one approach to measuring a teacher's impact on student growth. However, it may not be a suitable option for teachers who teach untested subjects. Additionally, critics of value-added suggest that the measure does not adequately control for other factors that could impact student growth, such as peer effects in the classroom. Furthermore, value-added scores can change dramatically for teachers from year to year and, because different methods are used to calculate the value-added score, results can vary substantially. Marzano and Toth (2013) suggest that teaching evaluations: (1) employ multiple measures of student growth (such as observation, document review, student portfolio reviews, and student surveys); (2) measure classroom strategies via different data points throughout the academic school year; and (3) utilize measures that indicate what teachers do outside of classroom teaching (e.g. planning, reflecting, and professional collaboration). Related to this, North Carolina is currently piloting the Analysis of Student Work, a pre- and post- portfolio assessment of student work, as a way to measure student growth in untested subjects such as music, world languages, and art.



Conclusion

There is still much to be learned about what matters most in effective teaching. Many believe effective teaching is the result of a myriad of factors that interact throughout a teacher's professional career continuum. Some of these factors are internal and related to the teacher's cognitive and dispositional traits while others relate to the quality of teacher preparation and support. A strong teaching force can be developed by setting K-12 teaching standards that consider teacher development at various stages of their careers and the contexts in which teachers teach. Teaching evaluations should inform that process by using multiple measures of teaching effectiveness and providing a clear connection to recommendations for ongoing learning and development.

29th ANNUAL EMERGING ISSUES FORUM TEACHERS AND THE GREAT ECONOMIC DEBATE FEBRUARY 10-11, 2014

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29th ANNUAL EMERGING ISSUES FORUM TEACHERS 4ND THE GREAT ECONOMIC DEBATE FEBRUARY 10-11, 2014

^{iv} Fuller, E. (2014). Shaky methods, shaky motives: A critique of the National Council of Teacher Quality's Review of Teacher Preparation Programs. Journal of Teacher Education. 65(1), 63-77.

ⁱ Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2011

 ⁱⁱ http://caepnet.org/accreditation/standards/standard-3-candidate-quality-recruitment-and-selectivity/
ⁱⁱⁱ www.nctq.org/