Teacher Quality and Effectiveness Literary Review

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Teaching has long been viewed as an important profession that is entrusted with the education of youth. However, teachers of high quality and effectiveness are not always available to every student. There has been a recent push to ensure that all teachers are highly effective. In order to accomplish this monumental task, effective teachers already in the classroom must be located and studied to determine what makes them highly effective. Leaders should use this information from studies to determine how you increase the effectiveness of current teachers and retain current effective teachers. Finally, teacher preparation programs and hiring practices should implement training to produce more highly effective teachers and hire them in the schools.

Effective teachers are located in schools everywhere. However, some types of schools tend to have a higher amount of effective teachers. Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, and Feng found that high-income schools tend to have more effective teachers than low-income schools (2012). Both low and high poverty schools have highly effective teachers, but high poverty schools tend to have more teachers on the lower end of effectiveness (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). One problem with keeping effective teachers in the classroom teaching students is that highly effective teachers are more likely to be promoted to administrative positions (Chingos & West, Promotion and reassignment in public school districts: How do schools respond to differences in teacher effectiveness?, 2011). On a positive note, Chingos and West found that highly effective teachers are less likely to teach low-stakes courses (2011). This would suggest that less effective teachers are moved, or move themselves, away from high-stakes courses (Chingos & West, Promotion and reassignment in public school districts: How do schools respond to differences in teacher effectiveness?, 2011). The effective teacher is relatively easy to find while they are teaching in schools. There are many of them doing a great job throughout this country. However, Winters, Dixon, and Greene found that more effective teachers are more likely to leave teaching (2012). It is important that effective teachers are retained in the profession and efforts are done to increase effectiveness of current teachers to replace teachers that leave.

Retaining current effective teachers and increasing the effectiveness of teachers is a top priority for all school districts. The literature discusses both practices that work and techniques that have been shown to not increase teacher effectiveness. Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, and Feng found in their study that more needs to be done to entice effective teachers to low-income schools (2012). However, they also found that new teachers do not increase their effectiveness at low-income schools as well as teachers at high-income schools (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012; Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010). Chingos and Peterson concluded that on the job training, advanced degrees, and the quality of university attended by the teacher are unable to predict quality (2011). They argue that it is easier to pick an effective teacher than to train one (Chingos & Peterson, 2011). Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger also found it difficult to judge a teacher’s effectiveness based on how they received their certification, but a better predictor of effectiveness is how they perform after the first few years (2008). Along the same lines, Hanushek found no link between salary and teacher effectiveness (2011). Paola did find a positive correlation between a student’s grade in later courses and the quality of the teacher they had in the first course (2009). This can be used to help retain effective teachers and train more teachers by purposefully setting up the sequence of teachers. There is good news for districts that want to use specific strategies to increase teacher effectiveness. Replacing the 5-8% of teachers at the bottom of the effectiveness scale with average teachers can have an economic impact of $100 trillion (Hanushek, 2011). Less effective teachers can be trained in new techniques to increase student engagement, but only when the teacher is willing to implement new techniques (Maftei, 2011). There is evidence that students’ math achievement increases based on the teacher’s math knowledge (Metzler & Woessmann, 2012). It could be argued that continuous subject education for teachers would increase their effectiveness. Saville, Zinn, Brown, and Marchuk conducted a study that asked students to rate teacher effectiveness based on a teacher’s syllabus (2010). All of these strategies are starting places for increasing effectiveness. However, it will take a good hiring practice and teacher preparation programs to make it far-reaching.

There is already a push for teacher preparation programs to track the effectiveness of the graduates and hold these programs accountable (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013). Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger (2008) argue that hiring teachers from different certification routes does not seem to affect teacher effectiveness, but “selectively retaining only the most effective teachers (p. 616)” does affect teacher effectiveness. Sandoval-Lucero, Shanklin, Sobel, Townsend, David, and Kalisher did find that teachers who were trained in traditional programs felt better prepared to teach and a feeling of being more prepared tended to correlate with higher effectiveness (2011). This could be used to improve not only traditional programs but also alternate routes to increase the amount of effective teachers from all programs. In the study by Scherff and Singer, they found that candidates had a better teacher preparation experience when they engaged in dialog about observations throughout the process and not just at the end (2012). Students also reported seeing practices that would have been overlooked without the communication element (Scherff & Singer, 2012). This could be used to strengthen teacher preparation and produce more effective teachers faster. Many principals are beginning to focus on different characteristics in the candidates they are hiring as first year teachers, like attitude and beliefs, which align with effective teaching (Ziebarth-Bovill, Kritzer, & Bovill, 2012). They are moving away from hiring based on just a teacher’s preparation. They simply cannot afford to wait long periods of time to determine a candidate’s effectiveness.

Teacher effectiveness is possibly the most important element in education today. Districts must be able to identify effective teachers and keep them in the classroom. They must also work on ways to increase teacher effectiveness as well as student achievement. Working with teacher preparation programs and changing hiring practices will move everyone towards more effective teachers and better educated students.

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