

# Good Teachers, Plural

**What makes a teacher good? Looking at the ways we have answered that question in the past century may place the current evaluation craze in perspective.**



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**T**here are as many kinds of good teachers in our schools as there are varieties of good apples in supermarkets. Unfortunately, we tend to recognize and honor only one kind of teacher at a time. We currently glorify teachers whose students pass standardized tests (Bradley, 2000). In the 1990s, we admired those who had proven they could bring about greater student achievement. In the 1980s, good teachers were those who followed Madeline Hunter's prescriptions for teaching success (Garman & Hazi, 1998). And the list goes on.

Let us identify some of these visions of good teachers. Only then can we begin to explore how we can value them all and how school districts can support the development of many kinds of teachers and create ways to evaluate them.

## Visions of Good Teachers

*Ideal teachers.* For the first half of the 20th century, school principals, supervisors, and education professors determined the attributes of good teachers. Schools, school districts, and colleges cranked out checklists and

rating scales that scored such traits as professional attitude, understanding of students, creativity, control of class, planning, individualization, and pupil participation. During this period, scholar Dwight Beecher (1953) developed the popular Teaching Evaluation Record, and Arvil Barr and his associates (1961) drew up a comprehensive list of ideal attributes that included buoyancy, emotional stability, ethical behavior, expressiveness, forcefulness, and personal magnetism.

Thus, an ideal teacher met subjective standards of excellence determined by selected, significant others. Because the standards were subjective, many disagreements developed over what the standards meant and which teachers met them (Mitzel, 1960; Morsh & Wilder, 1954).

*Analytic teachers.* By the early 1960s, administrators encountered problems

associated with measuring the attributes of ideal teachers (Cruickshank, 1990). In a search for some other way to judge teacher quality, experts soon began describing good teachers as analytic.

Analytic teachers methodically inspected what they did in the classroom. They recorded and examined their classroom practice using a variety of observation techniques (Simon & Boyer, 1968). Many teachers and observers used the Flanders System of Interactional Analysis (Flanders, 1960) to make a detailed record of the teacher-student interactions occurring during a lesson: how much and about what the teacher talked, how much and about what students talked, and the extent and nature of student silence or confusion. Teachers modified their practice on the basis of these analyses. Becoming an analytic teacher required being investigative and self-correctional. Over time, the work involved in being analytical seemed to overwhelm even proponents of this vision of good teachers.

*Effective teachers.* In 1966, the influential Coleman Report asserted that students' socioeconomic back-

grounds influenced their learning more than their teachers did (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare). Immediately, dozens of educational researchers set out to show that teachers made a crucial difference in student achievement. First, researchers identified teachers whose students scored higher on tests than did comparable students taught by others. Next, they examined these over-achieving teachers, referred to as *outliers* or *effective teachers*, to determine exactly what they were like and what they did so that other teachers might benefit from such knowledge.

The findings of many studies (Rosenshine, 1971; Rosenshine & Furst, 1971) consistently found that effective teachers carefully monitor learning activities and are clear, accepting and supportive, equitable with students, and persistent in challenging and engaging them. Nonetheless, researchers disagreed about the methods used in the studies and about whether student gain is the most important outcome of teaching (Cruickshank, 1990).

Paralleling the development of the concept of the effective teacher has been a significant increase in the amount of student-achievement testing. As a result, we have become more focused on the product—better student scores on standardized tests—and on rewarding teachers who succeed in teaching to the test. In many states, teachers and principals are deemed effective and are rewarded monetarily when students



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typical attributes of effective teachers, such as enthusiasm, may yet bring about student learning. They asserted that studying the attributes of effective teachers can be useful, especially for guiding preservice and inservice development, but these attributes should not be used as standards for judging teacher quality. Rather, we should evaluate teachers according to how well they understand and perform their duties: knowledge of the subject matter, school, and community; demonstrated classroom skills, including testing and grading; personal characteristics that encourage learning; and service to the profession (Scriven, 1990).

*Competent teachers.* The U.S. accountability movement in the 1970s spurred an effort in education to identify competencies that teachers should possess. Specifically, the public wanted to know what teachers needed to know and be able to do.

To identify teacher competencies, scholars studied the early research on teacher effectiveness, analyzed what teachers do, and obtained the opinions of expert teacher practitioners and other educators. The most thorough

compilation (Dodl et al., 1972) organized competencies in the areas of planning instruction, implementing instruction, assessing and evaluating students, communicating, and performing administrative duties.

The public also wanted to make certain that teachers used their knowledge and performed well in the class-

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demonstrate satisfactory gains on standardized tests. Opposition to this narrow definition of teacher effectiveness is mounting (Hoff, 1999; Kohn, 1999).

*Dutiful teachers.* Those less than satisfied with the attributes originally assigned to effective teachers argued that teachers who do not display the

room. Consequently, the teacher-testing movement was born, soon to be given a boost by the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education). Thereafter, teachers or teachers-to-be had to pass tests developed by state education departments or by such national organizations as the Educational Testing Service and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The Educational Testing Service developed the Praxis teacher competency series of tests for use in teacher preparation programs and entry into the teaching profession. Praxis assesses three areas: reading, writing, and math skills near the beginning of a preservice teaching program; professional academic and pedagogical knowledge near the end of a teaching program; and on-the-job classroom performance. Thirty-eight states currently require some Praxis testing.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides national certification for experienced teachers who meet competencies set forth by discerning teachers (King, 1994). Teachers seeking National Board certification submit portfolios that include lesson plans, videotapes of lessons taught, and samples of student work. They also come to regional sites for further inspection and testing. States now offer incentives for teachers to obtain Board certification. For example, in Massachusetts, the Veteran Teachers Board offers up to \$50,000 over 10 years to any public school teacher who receives National Board certification (Bradley, 1998).

Even the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education is moving toward assessing the competence—the knowledge and skills—of preservice teachers and away from merely reviewing their programs of study (Bradley, 1999).

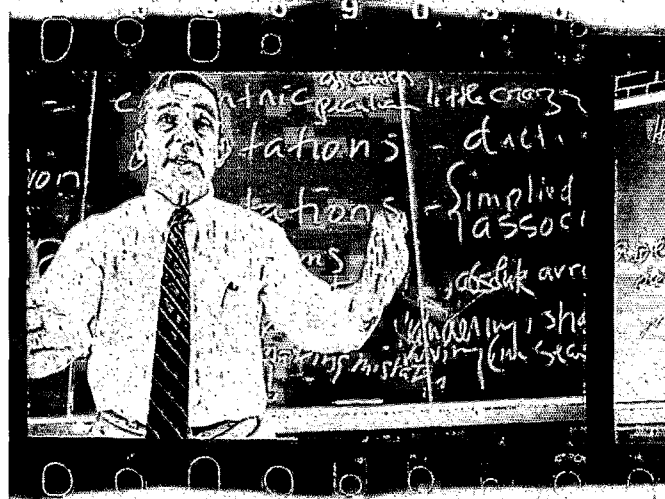
*Expert teachers.* In the 1980s and into the 1990s, many scholars decided that what makes a teacher good is expertise. Expert teachers are different from nonexperts in three ways: they have extensive and accessible knowl-

edge that is organized for use in teaching; they are efficient and can do more in less time; and they are able to arrive at novel and appropriate solutions to problems (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). Thus, expertise is more than experience. Teachers could be experienced and have less expertise than some novices.

*Reflective teachers.* The definition of the reflective teacher was developed at Ohio State University in the late 1970s. Reflective teachers are students of teaching, with a strong, sustained interest in learning about the art and science of teaching and about themselves as teachers (Cruikshank, 1987, 1991). Reflective teachers are introspective, examining their own practice of teaching and seeking a greater understanding of teaching by reading scholarly and professional journals and books, including teachers' autobiographies. Because they want to be thoughtful practitioners, they constantly monitor their teaching—for example, by using videotape or audiotape.

*Satisfying teachers.* Satisfying teachers please students, parents or caregivers, teaching colleagues, administrators, and supervisors by responding to their needs. In Rochester, New York, for example, parents rate their children's teachers on the basis of 20 questions that inquire about such qualities as the teacher's accessibility, clarity, responsiveness, and optimism (Janey, 1997).

School or parent organizations recognize satisfying teachers by presenting them with awards for good teaching. More often, however, admiration shows up in daily responses to the teacher: students advise one another to take this teacher's courses, fellow teachers look to this teacher for guidance and inspiration, most parents want their children in this teacher's class, and administrators trust this teacher to respond posi-

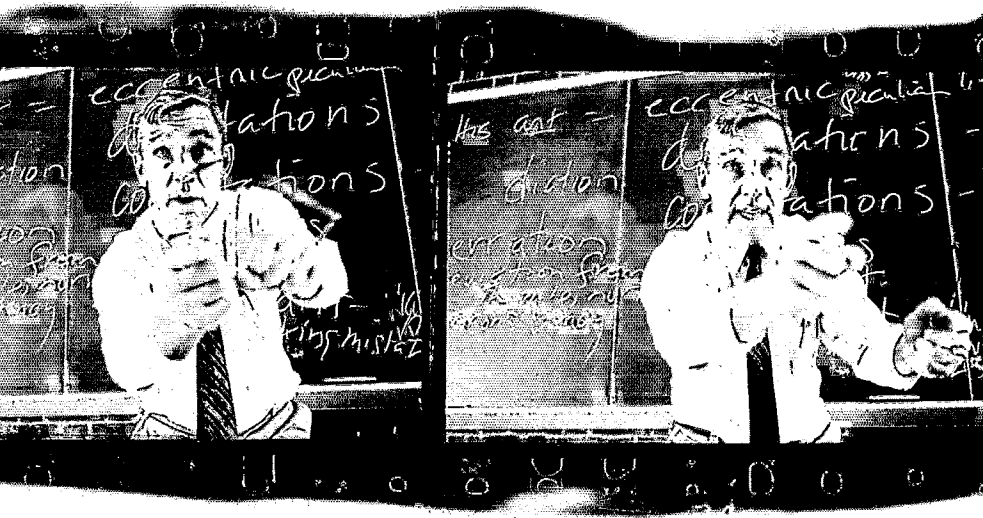


tively to difficult students.

Of course, knowing and meeting the expectations of others is a daunting task, and considerable disagreement can develop about what expectations are appropriate. We can all think of instructors who did or did not satisfy us or others but who were nonetheless effective teachers.

*Diversity-responsive teachers.* Diversity-responsive teachers take special interest in and are particularly sensitive to students who are different culturally, socially, economically, intellectually, physically, or emotionally. For example, Jacqueline Irvine and James Fraser (1998) believe that African American students are best served by "warm demanders" (p. 56). Warm demanders use a culturally specific pedagogical style that is substantively different from the approaches described in effective teaching research. Such teachers perceive themselves as parental surrogates and advocates, employ a teaching style filled with rhythmic language and rapid intonation, link students' everyday cultural experiences to new concepts, develop personal relationships with the learners, and teach with authority.

Diversity-responsive teachers are also dedicated to bettering the lives of students both inside and outside the classroom. Often working with children who have special needs, this kind of teacher demonstrates great tenderness,



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patience, and tact. A well-known exemplar is Annie Sullivan, Helen Keller's teacher (Peterson, 1946).

**Respected teachers.** Respected teachers, real and fictional, sometimes are idolized in books and films. Some of the real ones include LouAnne Johnson in *Dangerous Minds*, Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver*, and Marva Collins in *The Marva Collins Story*. Fictional, virtuous teachers have been crafted in *Mr. Holland's Opus*; *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; *Up the Down Staircase*; *To Sir, with Love*; and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*.

Historian Richard Traina (1999) explored the autobiographies of some 125 prominent Americans to determine what qualities in teachers they valued. He notes that three attributes stand out: subject-matter competence, caring about students and their success, and distinctive character. Respected teachers possess and demonstrate virtuous qualities, including honesty, decency, fairness, devotion, empathy, and selflessness. Most such teachers also have determination, overcoming great odds to ensure student success.

## Moving Forward

None of these categories is mutually exclusive. And no variation, by itself, has proven or is proving to be just right: None satisfies all education stakeholders. In a utopian world, teachers would demonstrate all aspects of teacher "goodness" and possess the attributes of all 10 visions. In the real world, we must learn how to recognize and appreciate the many models that teachers can follow to be

## Variations of a Good Teacher

**IDEAL** teachers meet standards set by school principals, supervisors, and education professors.

**ANALYTIC** teachers use observation techniques to record how well they are meeting their instructional intentions.

**EFFECTIVE** teachers bring about higher student achievement.

**DUTIFUL** teachers perform assigned teaching duties well.

**COMPETENT** teachers pass tests that indicate they possess requisite teacher attributes.

**EXPERT** teachers have extensive and accessible knowledge and can do more in less time.

**REFLECTIVE** teachers examine the art and science of teaching to become more thoughtful practitioners.

**SATISFYING** teachers please students, parents or caregivers, colleagues, supervisors, and administrators.

**DIVERSITY-RESPONSIVE** teachers are sensitive to all students.

**RESPECTED** teachers possess and demonstrate qualities regarded as virtues.

good teachers.

Further, we need to answer some questions. Have we identified all of the possible exemplars of good teaching? To what extent do the exemplars overlap? Are some models more valuable than others? Who decides which exemplar is more valuable? Should all teachers be good teachers according to at least one of the 10 or so models? What should be the standard for good teachers within each vision of a good teacher? How can we prepare teachers and help them become good by some criteria? How can teachers document what kind of good teachers they are? How can we reward good teachers?

In addition, we need to conduct research. To what extent do various education stakeholders agree on what makes teachers good? How do perceptions of good teachers differ by age, gender, socioeconomic background, educational level, geographic area, and political persuasion? Which exemplars of good teachers are related to which educational outcomes? To what extent can good teachers be readily distinguished from bad teachers?

## Evaluating Different Kinds of Teachers

School districts that appreciate multiple kinds of good teachers need to create teacher evaluation systems corresponding to the full range of teaching exemplars. To meet legal requirements, an evaluation system must be both formal (guided by public, written policies and procedures) and standardized (applied evenly and fairly). For example, all teachers must meet the criteria of one of the exemplars. Evaluations of *effective teachers* should require that teachers demonstrate such attributes as clarity and enthusiasm—qualities associated with student achievement. *Dutiful teachers* should be judged on such

criteria as knowledge of subject matter and classroom skills.

Clearly, to judge each vision of a good teacher, we must use valid criteria that are related to the particular exemplar that the teacher strives to emulate. A good teacher evaluation system should also have predictive validity and make the desired impact on students; an evaluation of a *satisfying teacher*, for example, should include surveys of students and parents. Of course, any teacher evaluation system should require that evaluators—administrators, supervisors, teaching peers, or others—receive training so that each evaluation is objective and would result in approximately the same outcome if done by another evaluator.

Tests for teachers were a direct result of the push to describe the competent teacher and to determine to what extent teachers measure up.

### Accepting Many Exemplars

Substantiating that there are all kinds of good teachers serves several useful ends. First, it dispels the traditional notion that there is only one kind of good teacher. Second, it permits teachers to describe which kind of good teacher they are and, when necessary, submit evidence to that effect. Third, it provides positive direction for teachers and persons responsible for teachers' continuing development. Finally, such knowledge enables the teaching profession to identify and remove teachers who are unable to meet any definition of what makes teachers good.

Meanwhile, Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, chairman of the Education Commission of the States, whose membership consists of governors and top state education officials, reports that he hopes to work with the states to define what it means to be a good teacher (Sandham, 1999). Is the time right for educators, educational researchers, and

elected officials to join hands in broadening the scope of this ambitious and important task? ■

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