



Teachers and Teaching: A Research Synthesis

David Lustick and Han Xue
Michigan State University

Introduction

Since the report *Nation at Risk* was issued in 1983, the quality of teachers has been viewed as a significant factor that greatly influences student academic achievement. Throughout the literature regarding the definition of effective teachers and teaching, several common principles are evident, though a research based consensus is absent. The seven principles presented here derive from a mix of research and “expert” opinion. Recent reviews of research would show some support for many of these principles, but not all. For none of the principles does a large, solid research base exist. In this paper, good teachers are examined from three perspectives: the prerequisites of quality teachers, the beliefs and competencies of quality teachers, and the practices of quality teachers.

Principle 1: Quality teachers are well prepared and certified.

Teacher certification is the most contested principle in the set, but the teacher quality provision in NCLB reflects a federal government commitment to the use of certified teachers, as a matter of national policy.

Principle 2: Quality teachers learn from experience.

The research supports the conclusion that teachers become more effective at their work with students for approximately the first five years of practice and then the effects of experience level off.

Principle 3: Good teachers have high verbal ability.

Teachers with high vocabulary and communication skills can convey ideas to students in a more clear and convincing way than those with lower skills.

Principle 4: Quality teachers are committed to student learning.

Teachers have high expectations for student success and clearly communicate expectations to them.

Principle 5: Good teachers know the subject they teach.

Solid subject matter knowledge is another attribute of effective teachers that seems to have a positive impact on student achievement.

Principle 6: Quality teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Effective teachers have general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and pedagogical learner knowledge that enable them to convey and reveal subject matter knowledge to students.

Principle 7: Quality teachers are members of the learning community.

Teachers continually learn from their practice and their interactions with colleagues.

Summary

The 7 seven principals of effective ‘high quality’ teachers presented here is neither definitive nor inclusive. Rather, the principles discussed are considered highly relevant to the work of teachers working in a variety of educational contexts. Teaching is an extremely complex endeavor that focuses on improving and developing a community of learners.