

Access & Excellence in Teacher Education Excellence and Quality Standards Required In Teacher Education: A Study about Effective Teaching Strategies

Ashish Kumar Dhawan

M.Sc (Physics), M.Ed, NET in Education

ABSTRACT

Perhaps the deepest wounds schools inflict on students are wounds of underestimation. We underestimate students when they fall short of expectations because they don't understand the school game and we determine that they lack motivation when we allow them to shrink silently into the background of the action in the classroom. We underestimate them, too when we assume they're doing well in school because they earn high grades and we praise them for reaching a performance level that required no risk or struggle. Classrooms that teach up function from the premise that student potential is like an iceberg most of it is obscured from view and that high trust, high expectations and a high support environment will reveal in time what's hidden. Martin L. King Jr. (1965) reminded us that human beings are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. That truth has never been more evident than it is today. Schools have the still-untapped possibility of helping all kinds of learners become what they ought to be by developing the skill and will to proliferate classrooms in which equal access to excellence is a reality for all learners. Although schools, teachers and administration are rigorously working for the improvement of the students progress in all aspects and perspectives. Yet there is a need for easy access and quality in the field of teacher education too.

Key words: students, educators, equity, access and quality

INTRODUCTION

Public schools hold the responsibility of ensuring quality teaching for all students. Public schools are accountable for educating all learners to high academic standards and outcomes regardless of differing characteristics of these learners. Students who are entitled to full access to excellence and equity in educational opportunities at all levels. To accomplish this, schools must be responsive to students' unique social, cognitive and linguistic needs and must plan to address them accordingly. They also must strengthen their capacity to implement creative approaches for serving students. IDRA's South Central Collaborative for Equity has outlined six goals of educational equity. These are comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes, equitable access and inclusion, equitable treatment, equitable opportunity to learn, equitable resources, and accountability. There are four dimensions of quality teaching and describes effective school approaches for educating students. These four dimensions are instructional leadership, instructional focus, safe and orderly school climate and high student expectations. Each dimension is being practiced effectively.

Instructional Leadership

The principal coordinates necessary resources to serve students. A high priority is assigned to efforts that will provide students with quality educational programs. Curriculum options are explored, implementing those with highest success for the students being served. The principal creates an environment that values and promotes integration of special and gifted students into the mainstream as soon as possible. Progress of students is periodically evaluated for success with adjustments made as needed. The rights of such students are respected and communicated to staff, parents and community.

Instructional Focus

The school mission statement acknowledges and values a diverse student population and the role that the school plays in maintaining educational equity and excellence. No group of students or parents is isolated from the mainstream other than for specific instructional purposes for a period of time not to exceed two hours per day. Teachers are encouraged to adapt instruction to the needs of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Educational materials reflect the diversity of the student body, and staff receives training on their appropriate use. Professional development opportunities are encouraged focusing on effective practices for educating immigrant students.

Safe and Orderly School Climate

Students and their families feel safe and secure in the educational environment. Peers, teachers, administrators and other personnel treat students and their families as well. Students and their families are provided orientation in their home language to clearly understand procedures, requirements and opportunities of the school. School administration and teachers promote relationships based on mutual respect among all students. Students and their families are afforded opportunities to assume leadership roles.

High Student Expectations

Students feel that teachers and administrators value them and hold high expectations for their educational success. Teachers communicate high expectations and provide support by challenging students intellectually. Students are fully integrated into the mainstream curriculum within specified times that vary with grade levels and the students' previous educational background. Progress is monitored on a regular basis and communicated effectively with parents as partners in the learning process.

Creating a Vision of Success

For quality teaching to occur, administrators and teachers need to create a vision of success for immigrant students that incorporate a mental image of them as strategic and independent learners of English and core content. This vision of success must be translated into statements and actions to support their full integration as contributing members of society.

In Pursuit of Equity and Excellence in Education: Requirements

- Equity vs. excellence
- Understanding your students
- Designing systems of support for students
- Addressing disparities in discipline
- Impacting the quality of instruction

I. Equity vs. Excellence: Competing or Compatible Goals?

Unless we can challenge the normalization of failure, nothing will change

- Translation: Race and class should not determine or predict achievement
- Equity - Equality of opportunity with attention to equality in results, judicious allocation of resources
- Leaders must identify and eliminate practices that contribute to student failure
- Internal accountability is more important than external forms in promoting achievement for all

Failure is not an option: Moving beyond winners and losers

In order to create equitable schools educational leaders must be the guardians of equity

- Education tends to be based upon competition and perception of zero-sum scenario
- Focus on measuring and sorting results in advanced students being treated better than disadvantaged students
- Gifted vs. remedial education

- Political pressure influences priorities and allocation of resources and assignment of teachers - unions and parental pressure

NCLB Requires a Shift in the Paradigms: Focusing on all students

Students who are behind must work harder, longer and under conditions that offer possibility of success

- Schools have based their effectiveness on the performance of their most successful students
- Discipline practices have been used to weed out “bad” students rather than focusing on changing behavior
- Educating all students requires attention to quality instruction and effective intervention programs

Re-think Remediation

Students who are behind must be given the opportunity to learn if they are going to have a chance to succeed.

- Move from remediation to acceleration through
- Diagnostic assessment of learning needs
- Personalization of interventions
- Regular evaluation of interventions
- Homework is an equity issue - students with inadequate home support are at a disadvantage

Effective Teaching Strategies for Reducing Academic Disparities

- Active learning, interactive classroom
- Moving away from the cemetery model
- Teaching within the zone of proximal development
- Constructivist, inquiry-based pedagogical strategies
- Simulations
- Socratic seminars
- Project based learning
- Experiential learning
- Student leadership in the classroom
- Public presentations of student work

II. What we know about student achievement

- All students do learn, educators need to understand how they learn
- We must teach the way students learn rather than expecting them to learn the way we teach
- Much of what students know is not recognized in school
- Over emphasis on deficits
- Not enough awareness of the knowledge, skills and interests that students bring with them

Exceptions to Patterns for Students

- Tend to be over-represented among successful and at-risk student
- Whether or not they are literate in their native language often has tremendous bearing on their ability to learn English
- Class and educational backgrounds of parents is significant
- Socialization process may produce conflict for students
- Schools serving special and gifted children need bilingual staff and relationships with social service agencies that serve such students.
- The academic success of students is contingent upon how they and their families are treated

At-Risk Students

- Tend to lack support at home - come with lower literacy skills
- Tend to live in high-stress environments

- Often provided ineffective support at school
- Likely to be labeled in ways that reinforce problematic behavior
- More likely to internalize labels, vulnerable to adult expectations
- Behavior problems often overshadow academic problems
- Punishment alone does not help
- Need to find ways to promote resilience
- Need structure and support

What we know about High Achievers

- More likely to receive intellectual and material support at home
- May require less structure at school
- May be less teacher dependent and even “teacher proof”
- More likely to have clear goals and to be self motivated
- Generally get the most and best resources in school
- More likely to get bored unless stimulated and challenged
- Need to develop intrinsic motivation
- Master the “game of school” easily

III. Enacting an Equity Agenda: Demystify school success

- Teach study skills
- Start from the end: show and explain what excellent work looks like
- Provide intensive academic counseling for students and parents
- Teach kids “code switching”
- Kids who are headed somewhere will behave differently than kids who are headed nowhere
- Discuss future plans early and expose students to options

Teaching and Learning at Your School

- Unless teachers see teaching and learning as connected activities and take responsibility for learning it will not be possible to raise achievement.
- Teachers must take responsibility for learning and focus on mastery
- Teachers must constantly look for evidence of learning and reflect on their practice in order to increase their effectiveness
- Teachers must view the work produced by students as a reflection of their teaching
- Teachers must limit the amount of time students are engaged in passive learning and increase opportunities for active learning

We can’t do it without them: Building partnerships with parents

- Recognition of shared interests
- Respect and empathy
- Clear guidance on what parents can do to support their children
- Diverse staff with cultural competence in working with parents
- Students benefit when parents and teachers work together

Seven Principles of Teaching Up

To create classrooms that give students equal access to excellence, educators at all levels need to focus on seven interrelated principles.

1. Accept that human differences are not only normal but also desirable.

Each person has something of value to contribute to the group, and the group is diminished without that contribution. Teachers who teach up create a community of learners in which everyone works together to benefit

both individuals and the group. These teachers know that the power of learning is magnified when the classroom functions effectively as a microcosm of a world in which we want to live.

2. Develop a growth mind-set.

The greatest barrier to learning is often not what the student knows, but what the teacher expects of the student. A teacher with a growth mind-set creates learning experiences that reinforce the principle that effort rather than background is the greatest determinant of success, a notion that can dramatically help students who experience institutional and instructional racism. Teachers who teach up provide students with clear learning targets, guidelines, and feedback as well as a safe learning environment that supports them as they take their next steps in growth, no matter what their current level of performance is. Through words, actions, and caring, the teacher conveys to students "I know you have the capacity to do what's required for success; therefore, I expect much of you. Because I expect much, I'll support your success in every way I can. I'm here to be your partner in achievement."

3. Work to understand students' cultures, interests, needs, and perspectives.

Teaching any student well means striving to understand how that student approaches learning and creating an environment that is respectful of and responsive to what each student brings to the classroom. For teachers who teach up, understanding students' learning profiles is the driving force behind instructional planning and delivery. A learning profile refers to how individuals learn most efficiently and effectively. How we learn is shaped by a variety of factors, including culture, gender, environmental preferences, and personal strengths or weaknesses. Teachers can talk with their students about preferred approaches to learning, offer varied routes to accomplishing required goals, and observe which options students select and how those options support learning (or don't). Teachers who teach up select instructional strategies and approaches in response to what they know of their students' interests and learning preferences, rather than beginning with a strategy and hoping it works. Teaching up is not about hope. It's about purposeful instructional planning that aims at ensuring high-level success for each student.

4. Create a base of rigorous learning opportunities.

These teachers develop classrooms that are literacy-rich and that incorporate a wide range of resources that attend to student interests and support student learning. Teachers who teach up also ensure that students develop the skills of independence, self-direction, collaboration, and production that are necessary for success. They commend excellence as a way of life and demonstrate to learners the satisfaction that comes from accepting a challenge and investing one's best effort in achieving it. They know that when tasks help students make sense of important ideas, are highly relevant to students' life experiences, and are designed at a moderate level of challenge, students are willing to do the hard work that is the hallmark of excellence. These teachers scaffold each student as he or she takes the next step toward excellence.

5. Understand that students come to the classroom with varied points of entry into a curriculum and move through it at different rates.

Teachers who teach up understand that some students may feel racially and culturally isolated in their classes. Therefore, they find multiple ways for students to display their insights for the group. These teachers understand that every student needs "peacock" moments of success so classmates accept them as intellectual contributors.

For instance, a teacher might observe a student in a small-group setting who is questioning his peers about the solution to a math problem they are pursuing because it does not seem correct to him. A teacher who overhears the exchange might simply say to the group, "It seems important to me that Anthony raised the question he posed to you. His thinking brought to your attention the need to think further about your solution. The ability to ask a challenging question at the right time is a good talent to have." Elizabeth Cohen (1994) calls that attribution of status. In other words, teaching up requires both high expectations and high personalization.

6. Create flexible classroom routines and procedures that attend to learner needs.

Teachers who teach up realize that only classrooms that operate flexibly enough to make room for a range of student needs can effectively address the differences that are inevitable in any group of learners. They teach their students

when and how to help one another as well as how to guide their own work effectively. This kind of flexibility is commonly found in kindergarten classrooms a strong indication that it's within reach of all grade levels.

7. Being an analytical practitioner.

Teachers who teach up consistently reflect on classroom procedures, practices, and pedagogies for evidence that they are working for each student—and modify them when they're not. They are the students of their students. They are vigilant about noticing when students "do right," and they provide positive descriptive feedback so students can successfully recall or replicate the skill, knowledge, or behaviors in question. They empower students to teach them, as teachers, what makes students most successful. They share with students their aspirations for student success. They talk with students about what is and isn't working in the classroom, and they enlist students' partnership in crafting a classroom that maximizes the growth of each individual and of the group as a whole.

CONCLUSION

It is here by concluded that Schools have the still-untapped possibility of helping all kinds of learners become what they ought to be by developing the skill and will to proliferate classrooms in which equal access to excellence is a reality for all learners. Although schools, teachers and administration are rigorously working for the improvement of the students progress in all aspects and perspectives. Yet there is a need for easy access and quality in the field of teacher education too.

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