

## **Effective Teachers**

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At the global level, several studies have been conducted which have convinced researchers that teaching is a multifaceted process designed to facilitate individual and group learning as well as the development of societies. Unfortunately, some researchers have concluded that it is difficult (if not impossible) to distinguish between “good” and “poor,” or “effective” and “ineffective” teachers. There are others, however, who believe that criteria for appropriate teaching behaviour can be established and learned by teachers, and that teachers can make a difference to students. In support of their view, they submit that poor teaching can have a greater impact on students than positive teaching, because negative teacher influences can turn students into non-learners and cause them to experience loss of self-esteem in a very short time. I fully endorse the view that teacher behaviour can significantly influence student progress.

Research shows that children have been able to establish criteria for effective teaching and teachers. According to the 2000 Hay McBer Report on Teacher Effectiveness, commissioned by the British Department for Education and Employment, the following revealing perceptions of a good teacher were held by a sample of twelve-year-old students:

A good teacher: is kind and generous; listens to you; encourages you; has faith in you; keeps confidences; likes teaching children; likes teaching his/her subject; takes time to explain things; helps you when you're stuck; tells you how you are doing; allows you to have your say; doesn't give up on you; cares for your opinion; makes you feel clever; treats people equally; stands up for you; makes allowances; tells the truth; is forgiving.

The research literature not only supports the perceptions of these twelve-year-old children, but also provides the following generalisations for all who are concerned with teacher effectiveness:

- Teachers who spend more time teaching are more effective than other teachers.
- Effective teachers maximise time spent in productive activities and minimize time lost in transitions, disciplinary procedures, and disruptions.
- Effective teachers usually move around the classroom, checking student work and, simultaneously, demonstrating awareness of student behaviour.
- Effective teachers involve all students in the lesson, and use a variety of activities and learning methods, as well as a range of questioning techniques to probe students' knowledge and understanding.
- Effective and outstanding teachers exist in all kinds of schools and school contexts.
- Student progress is affected more by teachers' skills and professional characteristics than by factors such as the teacher's sex, qualifications, or experience.

The Hay McBer Report supports most of these generalisations, and identifies three main factors that combine to influence effective teaching: teacher professional characteristics, teaching skills, and classroom climate.

Professional characteristics are defined in the literature as the ongoing patterns of behaviour that combine to drive the things that good teachers typically do. They include respect for students, challenging and supporting students to achieve higher levels of learning, encouraging trust and confidence in students, understanding colleagues, cherishing team work, teacher efficacy, and commitment, and possessing a passion for professional improvement.

Desirable teaching skills include: high expectations for student learning, strategic planning, smooth-flowing lessons, time on task, appropriate teaching methods and strategies to meet student needs, humanistic student management and discipline, time and resource management, meaningful homework, and fair assessment practices.

Studies have recognised that teachers' skills, knowledge, and professional characteristics all contribute to classroom climate. Classroom climate, it is often argued, is the collective perceptions of students on those dimension of the classroom environment that impact on their capacity to learn.

Experience has confirmed that in Trinidad and Tobago teacher effectiveness is severely constrained by the following factors: teachers' lack of an appropriate philosophy of education, failure on the part of many teachers to understand their role as teacher in school and the nation, and the reluctance of a great number of teachers to see themselves as part of a team that thrives on punctuality, regularity, and commitment to student learning and professional development. In addition, it has been found that teacher effectiveness is hampered by poor personnel policies, myopic principal leadership, and the failure of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA) to condemn undesirable practices by delinquents among its membership.

Another structural weakness to be found among many of our teachers is the effect of what educational administrators call the *Dame School Syndrome*. This phenomenon suggests that: 1) teaching can be done by almost anybody, 2) a reform-resistant and anti-intellectual culture exists among too many teachers in our education system, 3) a minimum acceptable performance level seems to prevail among a substantial number of our teachers, and 4) the Ministry of Education continues to be strong on rhetoric but weak on action for promoting professionalism among teachers.

Many attempts have been made to propose theories to replace this 1966 Dame School theory. One of these is the Empowerment model, whose proponents argue that effective teachers can be created if there is (a) meaningful teacher involvement in school governance, (b) new respect for teachers and an improvement in their work conditions, (c) higher salaries and new professional structures, and (d) increased teacher autonomy.

Sandy, one of our secondary school principals, in a 1988 doctoral dissertation, also suggested that teacher effectiveness could be enhanced through principal instructional leadership, enhanced teacher efficacy, satisfaction of teachers' expectations relevant to the work place, a healthy school climate, and collegial staff support.

Clearly, attempts to promote enhanced teacher effectiveness in our education system are feasible. If we are to attain highly developed status by 2020, we will need a multi-prong action plan. The Ministry of Education will have to re-examine its recruitment and salary policies. The teachers' colleges and the School of Education, UWI will have to revisit their visions, missions, and modus operandi. Also, schools will have to see themselves as learning organisations in which constant adjustments, by way of in-service staff development, are made to confront the increasing turbulence of the external environment. Finally, TTUTA will have to decide what contributions it wants to provide to this new vision for education.

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