ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS: INSIGHTS FOR
INDONESIAN TEACHERS

Muhammad Syahruddin Nawir
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar
syahruddin.nawir@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Teachers need to look closely at their students’ learning styles and explore related factors that influence this: factors such as family background and social status need to be taken into account because these affect the way students learn. Understanding how students learn is for successful and effective teaching; such understanding allows teachers to teach more effectively. Effective teachers also need to be conscientious about their students’ sociological and psychological maturity; successful teachers act as teachers and as educators. As educators, Indonesian teachers may need to transform their perception about the nature of school education. Therefore, the concern is to provide insights on the attributes of successful teachers. These attributes allow Indonesian teachers to understand those important teachers’ qualities that lead to succeed in teaching.

Keywords: Teacher, successful teaching, educator

INTRODUCTION

In a meta-analysis that focuses on empirical studies of teacher quality and qualifications, Rice (2003) found five broad categories of teacher that appear to contribute to teacher quality: “(1) experience, (2) preparation programs and degrees, (3) type of certification, (4) coursework taken in preparation for the profession, and (5) teachers’ own test scores. Wayne and Youngs also assumed that “students learn more from teachers with certain characteristics. Teachers differ greatly in their effectiveness, but teachers with and without different qualifications differ only a little”. Berry (2002) posits that while these teacher qualities are indeed important, they appear to have a “singular focus on content knowledge”. Highly qualified teachers must also know “how to organize and teach their lessons in ways that assure diverse students can learn those subjects…Highly qualified teachers don’t just teach well-designed, standards-based lessons: They know how and why their students learn…”.

The concern is to provide insights on the attributes of successful teachers. These attributes allow Indonesian teachers to understand those important teachers’ qualities that lead to succeed in teaching.
METHOD

This research method is basically an observation of a case study. Analyzing a teaching and learning process is something that must be done in research. This is important as a basis after analyzing the needs of teacher, educator, and students for the the better learning and teaching transfer process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Defining the Successful Teacher

Research offered definitions of a successful teacher. Clark (1993) wrote that, “Obviously, the definition involves someone who can increase student knowledge, but it goes beyond this in defining an effective teacher.” Collins (1990) established five criteria for a successful teacher: (a) is committed to students and learning, (b) knows the subject matter, (c) is responsible for managing students, (d) can think systematically about their own practice, and (e) is a member of the learning community.

Swank, Taylor, Brady, and Frieberg (1989) created a model of successfulness that was based upon teacher actions. For them, success meant increasing academic questions and decreasing lecture and ineffective practices, such as negative feedback and low-level questions.

The authors believed that these factors become easily identifiable in the assessment of performance. Million (1987) based successfulness on the lesson design and method of delivery. If teachers met a preset list of criteria during their evaluation, they were deemed success. Papanastasiou (1999) stated “that no single teacher attribute or characteristic is adequate to define a successful teacher”.

The definition of teacher successfulness most likely lies in the middle. Teachers must have adequate knowledge of the techniques and methods that are related to their profession and must understand that student learning must increase over the course of the year.

Promoting a Learning Community

The first attribute of successful teachers is their understanding of their students’ attitude to learning because having knowledge of students’ learning and the factors that affect their learning attitudes are necessary for effective teaching. Teachers need to look closely at their students’ learning styles and explore related factors that influence this: factors such as family background and social status need to be taken into account because these affect the way
students learn. Giddens (2001) suggests that students’ social cultures influence their ways of interaction, and also affect their subsequent experience at school. Social cultures have significant roles in shaping students’ attitudes to learning. This indicates that understanding students’ ways of learning is an important attribute of successful teachers.

Understanding students’ learning styles and the factors that influence this enables teachers to develop the most appropriate ways of interacting with their students in and out of the classroom. They would also be more conscious of their students’ social circumstances. For example, when students fail to achieve satisfactory academic results, teachers will first explore factors affecting students’ learning attitude without making unwarranted assumptions. In addition to understanding the nature of learning and what influences it, the teacher should also possess sociological and psychological knowledge. Having such knowledge, teachers would be better able assess and treat their students.

Understanding how students learn is for successful and effective teaching; such understanding allows teachers to teach more effectively. Effective teachers also need to be conscientious about their students’ sociological and psychological maturity; successful teachers act as teachers and as educators. As educators, Indonesian teachers may need to transform their perception about the nature of school education. Schools do not function merely as places to instil knowledge; they are moral agents where students’ morality and emotional capacity is shaped and moulded (Buchori, 2001). Moulding students’ morality and emotional maturity can only be achieved through the passion and the commitment of educators. Therefore, as a place to mould students’ emotional maturity, Indonesian schools should be transformed into learning communities, or ‘community centre’ to use Bransford, Brown and Cocking’s (1999) term; a place where learning, instruction and cooperation take place.

Bransford et al. (1999) assert that effective teachers should transform their schools to be community centred. This kind of environment allows teachers to practise their skills differently. In community-centred schools, teachers and students interact cooperatively as do people living in the community.

One other attribute of successful teachers is that they are oriented to democratic teaching. Democratic teaching regards students’ mistake as normal in the instructional process. For example, punishing students for an inability to solve a speaking problem or for their inability to do homework will discourage students, and block their academic improvement. The basic
tenet of a democratic classroom according to Wolk (1998) is respecting students because only then can meaningful learning occur. A democratic environment in the classroom will allow teachers to better understand their students’ capabilities from any mistakes they might make. In democratic classrooms, collaborative learning is encouraged and student competition is discouraged; competition between students will in fact block their learning. In collaborative learning, students adjust their behavior to achieve shared goals. For example, students work in groups to solve a particular problem in their lesson.

**Pedagogical Knowledge**

Successful teachers are qualified in pedagogical knowledge and in effective teaching methods. To teach effectively and successfully, teachers need sufficient pedagogical knowledge. This means that teachers should be able to build an effective learning environment which nurtures students’ intelligence (Bransford et al, 1999; Donovan and Bransford, 2005). According to Bransford et al. (1999), one way to improve teaching is to shift from teacher-centred instruction to learner-centred.

The latter recognises and appreciates students’ presence in the classroom. In learner-centred teaching environments, students come to recognise their own potential talent. Teachers adopting a learner-centred teaching style not only understand their subject matter but also position themselves as learners so they can be more understanding of students’ social background. Fraser (2005) also suggests that effective teachers teach subjects in depth, covering fewer topics in one session or class rather than teaching wider topics superficially. The most important of all is that, learner-centred classes allow democratic dialogue. Such dialogue is significant in the attempt to create a healthy learning environment because it gives students the space to voice their understanding or point of view on issues.

**CONCLUSION**

The article suggests some emergent attributes of effective teachers: first, effective teachers need to promote a learning community; and second, successful teachers must acquire pedagogical and content knowledge. In the attempt to promote a learning community, the article suggests that effective teachers understand the nature of learning, how students learn and the factors influencing their learning.
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