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TEACHERS FOR A NEW ERA

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Effective Teaching

Preface

TNE members drafted this working conceptualization of effective teaching in Year 1. It was, in fact, the first work of the TNE project. In order to start thinking critically about models of teacher education, they hypothesized what effective teaching in K-12 would look like, based on the research literature. Recently, this literature has been surveyed in AERA's Studying Teacher Education. And armed with hindsight, we see that we were, and still are, motivated by the theory that effective teaching *results*—even if that verb oversimplifies the cognitive and contextual chain—from what teachers learn. Training, policy, and background have roles, too. We, though, place a premium on learning. Also, in this revision of our paper, the focus has changed from *good* teaching to *effective* teaching. *Good*, we now understand, is a speculative quality. Instead, our definition has to be pragmatic: that is, eventually it has to be either confirmed or denied by the *effect* that credential graduates have on pupil learning in K-12.

At the start of the TNE effort, we also asked what credential graduates should be able to do, not immediately when they graduated but when they were well into careers. Because we had not yet tested the hypothesis of what made for effective teaching, we did not link its aspects closely to career stages. In this draft, based on early evidence, we do suggest basic links. Subtler associations will emerge as we progress in gathering evidence.

Now, as at the start of the TNE project, we ask for help from the larger CSUN community, especially in identifying direct evidence of successful learning in K-12 that can modify the elements of the definition that follows. Meanwhile, we are beginning to accumulate evidence of effective teaching—and more to the point, of effective elements in teacher preparation that, in turn, make for effective teachers. We are aware, of course, that no one document can sum up all the methods and strategies of the different disciplines. Nor, can a brief statement like this capture all effective teaching as practiced by professionals at different stages (teacher candidates, recent graduates, and experienced practitioners), at different levels of instruction, and in different subjects. Rather, we are aiming for—and risking—a general statement that embraces these differences while suggesting common traits, values, and issues for K-12 teaching. Common elements, should we confirm them, will enable us to consolidate efforts to gather evidence, aggregate it, and draw reliable and valid conclusions. We are involved in a dialogue between, on the one hand, an evolving hypothesis of effective teaching and, on the other, direct evidence of pupil learning as well as the informed opinions of practicing professionals.

Working Conceptualization of "Effective Teaching"

CSUN TNE's working conceptualization of effective teaching consists of the following categories:

- belief system and dispositions,
- knowledge base: subject matter knowledge, subject specific pedagogy, and professional/political knowledge, and
- practices and skills.

Not all of these categories are measurable in the same way (see the "Framework for Data Needs" for the initial links of evidence with these categories). And they all must be viewed in context. The backgrounds of teachers, pupils, colleagues, schools, and districts influence how the elements in these categories actually play out. So does the passage of time: for example, subject matter that is acquired bit by bit in college, in fact, is practiced years later in school sites. Obviously, the TNE task is complex. We must decode teacher and pupil learning in the larger context of teacher and pupil living.

Beliefs / Dispositions

Effective teaching is rooted in a well-considered and evolving belief system that includes the following tenets:

1. Pupils learn best in a positive and nurturing environment established by teachers who believe that every pupil is capable of learning.
2. All pupils have areas of strengths and interests that can be useful in advancing pupil learning. Effective teachers establish an instructional environment that will draw on these strengths.
3. Differentiated instruction addresses pupils' diverse abilities, cultures, languages, and cognitive skills.
4. Teachers take into account the *whole pupil*; in other words, they attend to the cognitive, affective, social, and physical dimensions when developing an instructional program.
5. Active engagement and interaction facilitate pupil learning.
6. New learning is built upon previously learned information. Learning is enhanced when prior knowledge and cultural and social experiences are valued, acknowledged, and leveraged throughout the curriculum.
7. Pupil learning is both individually and socially constructed; it is influenced by cultural, familial, and social context.
8. Meaningful assessment is both formative and summative; it relies on multiple measures, including informal observations.

Historically, the educational experiences of pupils have not been equal. Biases about class, race, ability, gender, and sexual orientation have affected teaching. A society that is truly democratic understands that pupil differences—diversity—should be valued; all pupils deserve equal consideration by their teachers. In short, a teacher should be both knowledgeable and passionate about sustaining equality. A teacher's knowledge itself, however, cannot transmit to students such commitment to them as learners; teachers must bring intensity and passion to this task. Intensity and passion transform act of teaching

into acts of personal and professional commitment. Commitment reveals that teaching humanizes communities through the social activity of learning.

Knowledge

Effective teaching requires several types of knowledge: subject matter knowledge, subject specific pedagogy, and political/professional knowledge. All three are critical, integrated components of a teacher's thinking processes, instructional practices, and instructional repertoire. They are dynamic processes that respond both to the changes within the discipline itself and to learners' needs.

Subject Matter Knowledge

Most beginning teachers enter the profession, in theory, more proficient in subject matter than in other areas. In universities they have developed subject matter proficiency. However, the pathways to teaching do not necessarily follow the traditional way in which programs are designed—with general education and content area work largely preceding professional preparation .Many prospective teachers enter preparation programs with considerable experience in K-12; some have not experienced coherent undergraduate programs. But no matter when or how they enter preparation programs, effective teachers understand that, because subject matter knowledge is discursive, it continues to grow from collaboration with peers and mentors. Subject matter is not a static "thing" that professors, scholars, and curriculum guides canonize and close for prospective and credentialed teachers. Thinking and teaching itself open new interpretations. Peer conversations unfold different nuances; student interactions provide changing contexts that frequently change the meaning of the most rigorously designed lesson. Teachers, pupils, and scholars continually debate such questions as:

- What comprises subject knowledge?
- Whose knowledge is it?
- Whose knowledge counts?
- How do I get my pupils to own the content?

Subject Matter Knowledge involves a deep understanding of these elements:

1. knowledge, not only of the *rules* and content of a given discipline, but also the theories that underlie it,
2. an understanding of the value and purposes for a specific subject,
3. the foundational knowledge and recent changes within a given discipline and the ability to research, analyze and use evidence to support claims, and dispute or build on the claims of others, and
4. an appreciation of where disciplines—subjects—entwine and where they separate; teachers know both the up-close and the big picture of what they teach.

Subject Specific Pedagogy (Pedagogical Content Knowledge)

Subject specific pedagogy, also known as pedagogical content knowledge, is a form of teacher knowledge and a part of a teacher's thinking process. It is a dynamic, changing in response to the discipline and the learners with whom it is being shared. Because this knowledge mediates between growing mastery of subject matter and the changing environment for teaching, it develops exponentially over a career. Subject specific pedagogy involves these elements:

1. the consideration of content, pedagogy, and theory; this is accomplished within communities of practice—in the school, among peer teachers and coaches, and at the university—where teachers and professors collaboratively develop local strategies for putting subjects in contexts that students can recognize and build on;
2. a developing variety of strategies to present content, using multiple ways to meet the needs of different learners;
3. knowledge of how to judge the needs of pupils – including their perceptions and misperceptions before and during lessons – and the ability to relate those needs to the pupils' process of organizing or scaffolding knowledge;
4. knowledge of how to reflect on one's own performance and learning process to increase pupil learning;
5. knowledge of how to find and work with peers and coaches who can expand one's repertoire of skills;

6. knowledge of how to focus on pupil understanding as well as the "delivery" of content; and
7. knowledge of how to scaffold learning so that the cultural knowledge of the pupil, family, and community contribute to the changing boundaries of a discipline.

Political and Professional Knowledge

Content knowledge is critical to effective teaching. But political, social, and cultural vectors also influence what teachers do. However, this influence should not flow in one direction. All professionals have an ethical responsibility to improve the contexts in which they practice; otherwise, work places and professions languish. Thus as professionals, teachers must reflect on and respond to the political, social, and cultural systems that affect education by

1. staying abreast of and having an active voice in governmental policies and political processes,
2. engaging in research and scholarship, as individuals and in collaboration with scholars within P-16 settings,
3. actively participating in relevant professional organizations in the pursuit of activities which will advance the profession and support ongoing growth and development of the teacher,
4. effectively communicating praise and concern regarding each pupil's welfare and educational progress to parents/guardians and school administrators, and
5. knowing the community in which one teaches.

Beginning teachers learn about professional ethics in courses and experience the complexities of school sites in internships and field placements. But professional knowledge—wisdom really—requires time, experience, and sustained engagement to develop.

Practices and Skills

Effective teaching, therefore, requires the practice of a complex set of skills that are attuned to the contexts in which one lives and works:

1. supporting an emotional, social, cultural context that promotes learning,
2. facilitating learning through collaboration among families, pupils, and other teachers,
3. developing competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum,
4. contextualizing teaching and curriculum in the experiences of pupils' homes and communities,
5. challenging students to develop and practice cognitive complexity,
6. engaging pupils through reflection and dialogue,
7. identifying problems related to curriculum and instruction and formulating a range of solutions,
8. adapting and improvising instruction during a lesson to meet pupils' needs as they arise,
9. anticipating and preventing situations that might cause disruptions or disengagement by the pupil in order to promote a positive learning environment,
10. recognizing the unique characteristics of all pupils or classroom situations and using these factors to guide instructional choices,
11. generating hypotheses and continually reassessing instructional options.
12. maintaining a genuine enthusiasm for teaching that reflects his/her commitment to pupil learning,
13. articulating high expectations through engaging lessons and demanding activities which promote academic and personal achievement, and
14. demonstrating mastery and continued maintenance of content knowledge and pedagogical skills commensurate with state standards and professional standards of excellence.

Questions to Consider

Many significant questions remain unanswered in this sketch of effective teaching:

- To what extent does a teacher ever achieve exemplary effectiveness?
- Must effective teachers possess all the attributes of effectiveness?
- Which aspects of effectiveness are achieved at which stages of development?

- Is effective teaching always observable and measurable?
- Who determines what performances should be evaluated and how?
- How do we account for the influences of context on teaching effectiveness?
- Which elements are learned characteristics? Which are innate?
- What are the most effective ways for teacher preparation programs to prepare K-12 teacher to sustain pupil learning?

Nonetheless, this document should be an important tool in the continued improvement of programs that support the development and growth of teachers.

Evidence of Effective Teaching

Decisions about effective teaching—and teacher preparation programs—should be based on evidence, according to the Carnegie design principles of TNE. Thus, we must determine how to use this tentative, extended definition of effective teaching in K-12 as the basis for collecting and interpreting evidence. The central questions are:

- what attributes of effective teaching are observable and measurable?
- how can teacher preparation programs develop those attributes?
- what evidence should we collect, and
- how should we collect it?

Once we have collected a significant amount of evidence, we will return to the draft for further revision.

Join us in this challenging but exciting work!