

Original Paper

Improving Instructional Pedagogy: What are the Issues?

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Abstract

This brief review paper examines some of the issues and concerns relative to the improvement of teacher instruction and discusses some of the inter-personal as well as the intrapersonal concerns and reviews some of the most salient constructs.

Keywords

Teacher improvement, teacher efficacy, supervision

1. Introduction

There has been continual concern about the quality of instruction and an examination and exploration of the main issues in teacher supervision and feedback. This paper will explore the most salient, relevant issues and provide a context for future examination of this realm.

2. Method

This paper cursorily reviews some of the main concerns involving the improvement of teacher instruction and pedagogy

3. Result

The issue of taking a good teacher- and making those good teachers into great teachers is a real challenge to principals and superintendents across the United States. However, we certainly need to discuss and talk about a number of key issues and concerns. Many of these things are problematic and present inter-personal challenges and concerns. Let me list about 20 areas that may need to be looked at:

1) Observation—in order to make a good teacher great—One has to consent to being observed—not all teachers like this. By observation, a certain amount of time has to be set aside for a principal or master

teacher to observe the teacher conducting a lesson not showing a movie but actually providing some direct instruction.

2) Supervision—In order to make a good teacher great—One has to accept being supervised-and this is a realm that many teachers feel uncomfortable about. In supervision, one has to consent to receiving feedback-for the good the bad and the deficiencies that one has. For some, this is a bitter pill to swallow and the teacher may have had an extensive background wherein they were continually praised and given a lot of reinforcement or even praised inordinately and excessively.

3) Feedback—in order to make a good teacher great—One has to accept feedback from the supervisor. Feedback can take many forms, it can be a written summation, it can be a discussion over coffee, it can be a very formal checklist or it can be a quite informal discussion. Sadly, the art of conversation and discussion has somewhat fallen by the wayside and we have to learn the knack of conversing about a common topic. There are evaluative checklists to help individuals improve their teaching and the various sub-aspects of teaching (such as beginning a lesson, dealing with disruptions, preparing students for follow up, and ending, concluding and summarizing the lesson).

4) Reorientation—in order to make a good teacher great, they may have to slightly reorient themselves to a new approach—(I taught face to face for years, then had to adjust to Instructional T.V. and now online—and while I was TRULY Great face to face, now perhaps I am just mediocre online.)

5) Acceptance, in order to make a good teacher great, they have to accept criticism and feedback as well as positive comments and statements. Many individuals have difficulty with accepting constructive criticism.

6) Readjustment, in order to make a good teacher great, they may have to readjust to the changing population and newer approaches (such as formative and summative evaluation). They may have to adjust to a more heterogeneous population and greater diversity.

7) Technology—in order to make a good teacher great, they may need to incorporate newer technologies to enhance their communication skills and abilities. They may have to utilize newer technology, different learning platforms, and often the latest technology. There are also different realms of education such as reading education, gifted education, bilingual education, career and technical education, early childhood education and many other realms investigated by Shaughnessy (2004).

8) Observation—in order to make a good teacher great, they may also need to observe other great teachers, this is a time-consuming process, but you learn by watching good teachers at the top of their game practicing their craft. There is minimal literature about this, but often individuals learn by observing. They learn by observing other individuals deliver a lecture or a lesson, they learn how they engage students, how they use eye contact, how they utilize body language.

9) Preparation- Good teachers take the time to prepare. They take the time to prepare their lessons, they take the time to review their text, and they take the time to review the various students that they may encounter (those that have an IEP for example or a Section 504). Teachers nowadays must also be

prepared for students that may have specific health needs or emotional outbursts and they need to be aware of accommodations and modifications that must be delivered within the context of their lesson plan. Part of this preparation contributes to what is termed “teacher efficacy” (Shaughnessy, 2004)

10) Passion—Good teachers are passionate about their craft and see it as a lifelong endeavor of improving many facets of their profession. This may include improving their charisma and stage presence, their relationships, their testing as well as their teaching skills and their abilities to reach all students. This is not easy. Not all teachers can reach all students with the wide variety of student needs, and heterogeneity out there in the world today. This passion should be about their subject matter, about the process of learning, and about the importance of ongoing assessment and grading and the teaching of skills to enable students to be successful.

11) Enthusiasm and emotions—Good teachers are enthusiastic when they teach, when they are asked to teach out of their field and when confronted with less than enthusiastic students.

12) Motivation—Motivating students, particularly students who may not be keen about the subject matter (for example math) is particularly challenging. Making a mediocre teacher into a master teacher may involve the idea of enhancing one’s abilities to motivate others to instill a love of learning and for the subject matter.

13) Interventions—A good teacher must learn what to say, how to say it and when to say it. This may involve a teacher responding to questions- but also commenting on a student’s questions, responses and ascertaining if their response is a simple response or reflects higher order thinking skills or critical thinking skills or both. A good teacher's interventions may praise, enhance, elaborate on a remark or simply instill a concern for rational, reasonable, logic.

14) The Environment—A teacher’s classroom is in effect a type of treatment variable. A teacher’s classroom should be warm, welcoming and assist in the process of learning. A good classroom has graphs, charts, pictures, maps, perhaps a globe, computer internet capacity, and comfortable chairs to help with the learning process. The room must not be too hot or too cold and a superior teacher is keen to think of these items of interest as of importance.

15) Paperwork and People—Often a good deal of paperwork is involved in making a good teacher even better! This may involve requests for ancillaries or requests for models or additional materials.

16) Executive Functioning and Time Management- Teachers have a limited amount of time to teach and review an enormous amount of material. Teachers have to do mini management in terms of their allotted time in a period and they have to plan to cover a much larger amount of material during the school year- while at the same time plan for unforeseen emergencies and disruptions to instruction- much like Covid-19. All this while attending IEP and 504 meetings and dealing with discipline problems and abrasive parents after school. Further teachers are often having to do Response to Intervention for some students who should have been retained the previous year.

17) Diversity—While not directly involved with pedagogical delivery, a sensitivity to student diversity

may contribute to a more welcoming relaxed student environment and student receptivity. This is difficult to make generalizations about but many teachers, while good instructors, do not always take the time to be sensitive to the various subtle nuances of different cultures. Surely there are differences between urban and rural cultures and African American, Chinese, Hispanic and other cultures and one needs to be careful about over-generalizations in these realms.

18) Exceptionalities—In terms of Section 504—instructors here also need to be sensitive to those students who may need additional time for exams, tests, and quizzes and those who have medical or health issues or needs. This adds another layer of duties, obligations and responsibilities to teachers and their preoccupations on a daily basis.

19) Discrepancies, Priorities and Conflict—During the supervisory process or the mentoring process—there may be extreme disconnect between what the supervisor feels is important, and what the teacher feels is imperative. Some teachers spend a good deal of time with their lesson plans, bulletin boards and arranging the classroom, while the supervisor or principal may feel that body language, voice projection and other aspects of instruction are important.

20) Sensitivity—Some teachers are more receptive to constructive criticism—whereas other teachers see every comment as criticism. I doubt if anyone has done research on this— but these are issues to be explored— male to male supervision and criticism, may be quite different than female to female supervision, and male to female and female to male supervision may all be conducted and see quite differently. Further, years of experience teaching may be a factor— a teacher who has been in the classroom for ten years may not take kindly to supervision from a supervisor or principal who may have taught kindergarten for one year—then gotten a master's and administrative license, and is now running a school.

21) History—some individuals have a long history of responding to comments and criticism or correction from authority figures. Athletes often hear about their performance from their coaches. Some athletes fume, other respond quietly and take comments to heart— and other quit the team. In the realm of music— musicians have to quietly accept feedback from their teachers—regarding their performance. Some musicians thank their instructors copiously for their feedback—while others smash their Stradivarius violins in frustration and exasperation. The same hold true for teachers—they may have had a long history of being complemented or on the other hand criticized. In some instances, the feedback was verbal, in others a scathing vitriolic, acerbic denunciation of their ability to communicate and impact young minds.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has attempted to summarize some of the main issues in terms of enhancing instructional skills. There are invariably others—but it is often important to be aware of most, if not all of these issues in order to assist good teachers in becoming better teachers.

4. Discussion

This paper has provided a cursory overview of some of the main areas of concern relative to teacher improvement and supervision.

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