

1 Understanding and Owning the Concept of Highly Qualified Teachers

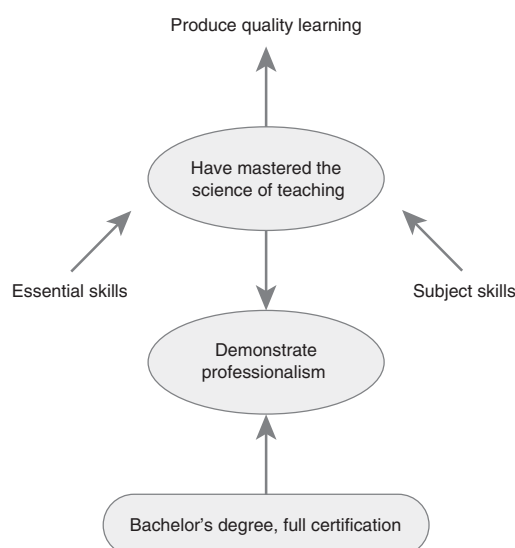
There is much talk these days about highly qualified teachers. In fact, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 makes it clear that having highly qualified teachers is a keystone element of this federal design for reform. As of this writing, all new teachers hired with Title I funds must meet requirements of a “highly qualified teacher,” and by the 2005–2006 school year, all teachers in the core academic subjects must be “highly qualified.” However, the federal government has thus far been reluctant to specify what is meant by “highly qualified.” This chapter therefore has two major objectives: to help you understand our concept of “highly qualified teaching” and to suggest a process by which you and the faculty can develop your own understanding of this key concept in operation.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

By reflecting on our own experience and reviewing the research, we have developed the conception of highly qualified teachers shown in Figure 1.1. As the figure indicates, highly qualified teachers have the necessary credentials: a bachelor’s degree and full certification. Then they demonstrate competence in three major areas. Observe that the figure identifies three major components: quality learning, the science of teaching (which includes the essential skills and the subject skills), and teacher professionalism.

4 • The Foundations

Figure 1.1 Quality Teaching



Quality Learning

As the diagram suggests, the ultimate goal is quality learning. All actions and measures focus on this element. This is the overriding goal: Highly qualified teachers get results, producing quality learning. Quality learning, as the term is used here, is characterized by the following features:

- It matters. It includes the core ideas of the disciplines. It leads to more learning.
- It is built upon a broad knowledge base. Both content and process are crucial.
- It involves problem solving. Students solve meaningful problems, using that broad knowledge base.
- It is learning that sticks. Students understand its importance and find ways to retain it.
- It requires active thinking. As students acquire quality learning, their minds are active, even though they may not be physically active. Teachers emphasize meta-cognition—thinking about thinking.
- It produces in the learner a sense of satisfaction and power. Learning is not always fun, but quality learning is often accompanied by a sense of excitement.
- It is best fostered by a teacher who knows how to give students the right degree of the structure they need to learn. The experts call that structure *scaffolding*.

Understanding and Owning the Concept of Highly Qualified Teachers • 5

- It happens best in learning-centered groups, as students share ideas, work together, and help each other learn.

While these general characteristics are usually in evidence, you will often note marked differences among students.

The Science of Teaching

What produces quality learning? The most important element is the science of teaching. The science of teaching includes the knowledge and skills that have been found by the research to produce student learning. In this book, the science of teaching is composed of two key elements: the essential skills and the subject skills.

The Essential Skills

The essential skills apply to all subjects and all grade levels. They have been strongly supported by good research and have stood the test of time. There have been several such lists. Those skills shown in Figure 1.2 have been synthesized from several major sources, including Cotton (1995),

Figure 1.2 Essential Skills of Teaching

Planning

1. Develops, uses, and shares problem-solving units based on curriculum standards
2. Provides and maintains a supportive learning environment
3. Uses group structures to maximize learning, keeping group assignments flexible
4. Communicates high expectations for self and students

Knowledge

5. Broadens and uses knowledge of community, subjects taught, students, and resources

Teaching and Learning Strategies

6. Communicates clearly the learning goals and objectives
7. Helps students discern, articulate, evaluate, and correct prior knowledge
8. Uses learning activities that extend knowledge, relate to goals, and actively involve students
9. Maximizes use of time for learning, using appropriate routines
10. Uses homework as additional learning opportunities

Assessment and Feedback

11. Assesses student learning, using classroom assessments as learning opportunities
12. Gives students timely and focused feedback on learning
13. Provides corrective learning activities for those not achieving initial objectives

6 • The Foundations

Danielson (1996), Marzano (2003), the National Research Council (1999), and Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, and Miller (2003).

The essential skills may be seen as the basics of effective teaching. Through numerous sound research studies, their use has been associated with improved school learning. As Figure 1.2 indicates, there are four planning skills. The effective teacher builds problem-solving units, drawing from the state's or district's curriculum standards and emphasizing long-term plans; the daily plans come from unit plans so that student learning is focused on the big ideas, not lesson fragments. And rather than focusing narrowly on student discipline, the effective teacher emphasizes a supportive learning environment that keeps students on task and engaged. At times, the teacher uses whole-class learning, at times small group activities, and at times individual activities. Throughout the lesson, the teacher communicates high expectations for self and students.

The teacher also has and draws from four areas of knowledge—the community, the subjects taught, the students, and resources for teaching and learning. Subject knowledge is perhaps the most essential. A teacher who has in-depth knowledge of the subject and knows how to make that knowledge of the subject accessible to the students is probably better able to help students master the subject.

Note that subject knowledge by itself is not sufficient. The teacher also needs “pedagogical content knowledge,” the ability to make the subject understandable to the students (see Shulman, 1986).

The teacher also uses several basic strategies in fostering learning. The learning episode begins with a clear statement of objectives. Then the teacher helps students activate their previous knowledge, in the process testing and changing their concepts. The learning activities enable students to achieve the objectives, engaging them actively. Throughout the lesson, the teacher maximizes time for learning, using routines to systematize classroom processes. Finally, the teacher gives supportive and corrective feedback in a timely manner, helping the students demonstrate their learning.

However, these lists of the basics have been criticized on several grounds. First, the critics have questioned the soundness of the research that provides a justification for the skills. Such research, they note, has been poorly designed, showing a weak relationship with better learning. Also, most of those studies have been conducted in urban elementary schools. Finally, the critics note, those general skills ignore important research focusing on the subject skills.

Subject Skills

In response to that last criticism, many researchers have focused on the subject skills. These are skills that have been associated with increased

Understanding and Owning the Concept of Highly Qualified Teachers • 7

Figure 1.3 Subject Skills: Writing

The effective teacher of writing . . .

1. Builds a writing community in which students work together to improve communication
2. Emphasizes writing for real purposes and real audiences
3. Helps students use the writing processes flexibly and effectively
4. Helps students make appropriate choices about matters of form and style
5. Uses the technology to foster effective writing
6. Works with colleagues to emphasize writing as a way of learning in all subjects
7. Gives students constructive feedback about early drafts, helping students to revise

learning in specific subjects. For example, Figure 1.3 shows the Subject Skills for teaching writing.

If you examine carefully the writing skills, you will note that they provide a very useful supplement to the essential skills; they go beyond the basics. Thus, they are important in extending the basics.

You can use several sources in identifying such skills. The book *Best Practice* (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998) is an excellent summary of the subject skills for several subjects. The Macmillan publishing company has published several compilations, most having titles that begin with the words *Handbook of Research*. Thus, one compilation is titled the *Handbook of Research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning* (Grouws, 1992). Another similar collection is called the *Handbook of Research in Teaching the English Language Arts* (Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003). You should also be able to locate sources on the Internet. Finally, most state departments of education will be able to assist you.

Teacher Professionalism

Finally, this conceptualization of quality teaching also includes teachers as professionals, who demonstrate week by week what it means to be professional, shown in Figure 1.1 as providing a foundation for the science of teaching. Some teachers view teaching as a job, doing the minimal responsibilities in a perfunctory manner and concerned primarily with working hours, salaries, and benefits. Some teachers see teaching as a vocation, a calling to serve in the classroom.

The professional sees teaching as neither a job nor a vocation. Instead, the professional knows that the impact of effective teaching goes beyond the classroom, affecting the families and the community. Figure 1.4 is one attempt to analyze the nature of teaching professionalism.

8 • The Foundations

Figure 1.4 Hallmarks of Professionalism

1. Implements school board policies involving the classroom
2. Keeps accurate records of student achievement and uses data to increase student learning
3. Communicates effectively with students and parents
4. Has high ethical standards and acts ethically
5. Provides leadership in school improvement activities
6. Continues to grow professionally and uses constructive feedback for growth
7. Uses after-school activities as learning opportunities for students
8. Resolves faculty conflict constructively and cooperates with faculty in developing faculty cohesiveness

OWNING THE CONCEPT OF THE HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHER

While the previous section explained our concept of the highly qualified teacher, this section is concerned with developing in your faculty a sense of ownership of the concept. In this way, they feel that the results achieved represent them and their values. They will more strongly support a conceptualization in which they have had some input, rather than simply accepting a textbook definition. What matters most is for you and your colleagues to answer the question, “What is a highly qualified teacher?”

There are several ways to accomplish this task. Described below is a systematic process that has worked well in several faculty workshops.

Quality Learning

Begin with quality learning. Bring the entire faculty together for the initial workshop. At this workshop, have an expert update this book’s delineation of quality learning. Provide time for faculty discussion in small groups. Invite representatives of the parent organization. On the basis of the update, the faculty discussion, this book’s formulation, and parent suggestions, prepare a revised version of the nature of quality learning. Submit copies of this draft to the entire faculty, requesting revisions and suggestions. Use faculty input in preparing a final draft.

Focus Next on the Essential Skills

Use the same structure as above: expert update, small group discussion, faculty input, and preparation of final draft. Parents should be informed about the final draft; parent input is desirable but not necessary.

Understanding and Owning the Concept of Highly Qualified Teachers • 9

Move Next to the Subject Skills

Next, provide sufficient time and resources to enable team leaders or department chairs to develop brief summaries of the research in teaching a specific subject. Distribute the summaries prior to the faculty meeting. In the faculty meeting, give each group sufficient time to review the subject skills. Inform parents of the general results.

Now Focus on Teacher Professionalism

Invite a team of teachers to present a panel discussion of their concept of teacher professionalism. Invite a parent representative to offer a parent view. Develop a synthesis of these perspectives. Circulate the synthesis to the entire faculty, soliciting their input. Review faculty suggestions, making any revisions that seem strongly supported by teachers. Give each teacher a final copy of the synthesis.

USING GUIDELINES FOR LEADERSHIP

You can use any process you prefer in developing your own concept of the highly qualified teacher. In doing so, you may find the following guidelines helpful. They have been derived by analyzing our own experience.

1. Use an appropriate group structure. Rather than organizing one more committee, you would find it more efficient to use the groups already functioning. Thus, if you are the leader of a middle school where grade-level groups work together well, use a grade-level structure. On the other hand, if you are the leader of a high school where the department structure seems to work well, then you would be well advised to involve the departmental teams. The nature of the task forces will also influence group structure. For example, the essential skills should be determined by the entire faculty; the subject skills, by departments or teams.
2. Get multiple types of input. This is one area where diverse sources of input are desirable. Teacher input throughout the process is essential. Parent input is desirable when the issue concerns parents. How parents construe “highly qualified teachers” is critical since they are a key part of the educational process. Some schools have also invited older students to participate.
3. Take time. This process of developing faculty ownership of the concept of highly qualified teachers should not be rushed or treated lightly. You could do the whole job in one full day of high-pressure

10 • The Foundations

work, but the result would probably not be high quality. While each faculty is different in terms of the pace of work and the demands of other tasks, most faculties who take the matter seriously spread the tasks over a term or an entire school year.

4. Deepen the knowledge base. You will get better results if those developing components of the vision draw from a deep knowledge base, rather than simply recapitulating their experience. That means that those leading the project should be sure that the work groups have available or can order books from this chapter's reference list and other bibliographies. How much reading they do will depend, of course, on the nature of their task and the total time available. Obviously, one essential piece of knowledge is further development by the U.S. Department of Education as well as state departments of education. Further analyses of what *highly qualified* means, then, should be integrated with your own.
5. See the process as ongoing. Both the process and the products should be revisited periodically to ensure that they are current and viable. Highly qualified faculty learn as they work together, and the products should reflect that learning.

A FINAL NOTE

Working through this process will take time and effort. However, principals who have used their own version of the process report that the discussions were an excellent learning experience for all.