

Do I Have What It Takes?

Do I have what it takes to become an effective teacher? After changing my major to education last year, I asked myself that question. I knew that it was not an easy job and that it was not for everybody. I also realized that it was a complex job that certainly did not limit its work to the classroom alone.

After taking this class and doing the required tutoring hours, I am now much more confident that the answer to my question is a resounding “yes”. I was able to see how I performed in the areas of instruction, classroom management, and value-added assessment in a classroom setting. However, there are still a great deal of improvements to be made as I grow and develop as a teacher.

Before I began my tutoring hours, I learned about the three areas of effective teachers in class; the first being instruction. Effective instruction can be simply defined as teacher behaviors and practices that enhance the learning of all students. This may be the most important of all three areas because it deals with teaching and learning the most directly. In fact, many education policies that are enacted to enhance student achievement specifically look at altering classroom instruction (Desimone, Frisvold, and Smith, 2010).

This is also a very complex area of effective teaching because all students are different. They are different on the outside (social class, gender, race), as well as on the inside (academic ability, learning style). Therefore, one style of teaching will not work for every student. Teachers cannot be afraid to try new things and possibly step outside of their own comfort level to reach every student. Also, teachers have to recognize that teaching is a blend of art and science. There is nothing wrong with following tried and

true techniques, but they have to be creative and come up with different ways to get their points across, so that students don't get bored with the lesson.

Classroom management deals with what to do when students do get bored with the lesson and how to prevent problems from arising. This can be the scariest area for prospective teachers because this area is the biggest cause of teacher failure, dismissal, or resignation. Matthew A. Kraft states that, "Lack of training, anxiety, and inexperience cause many new teachers to feel overwhelmed when a group of rambunctious students doesn't cooperate. Even high-quality instruction by veteran teachers is rendered ineffective when students are disrupted, distracted, or feel threatened by their peers." But, a teacher's own behavior is something that they can always control. They have to anticipate and be prepared to stop problems before they happen. And when problems do arise, teachers must be careful not to react with emotion, but react with the best interests of the students and the class in mind.

As with any other aspect of teaching, this area is complicated by the fact that every student is different. Teachers must be prepared to walk the line between too harsh and too soft. Going too far in either direction can result in classroom disorder. I think that this is a great example of how teaching is a balance between art and science. Teachers have to utilize the experiences and expert opinions of peers, while figuring out what discipline style is best for a given scenario.

The third area of effective teaching is value-added assessment. It is understood as a combination of state proficiency tests, national standardized tests, and classroom tests. Assessment is another area of effective teaching that has many layers involved with it. Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, says schools should

“engage in an ongoing process of improvement by constantly evaluating performance, identifying problems, trying various remedies, measuring their success, discarding those that do not work, and incorporating those that do” (Austin 2010). Teachers and students face constant pressure to perform well in comparison to others within the school, state, and country. However, teachers shouldn’t merely “teach the test”. They should teach the students to comprehend the subject matter, so that they are prepared to answer any potential questions about it.

After learning about all of these areas and reflecting on how I performed while tutoring, I believe that my strongest area is that of instruction. One of the main reasons that I decided that teaching was right for me was because I feel like I can connect with students effectively so that they are able to understand what I am teaching them. Having coached football and lived through many little cousins, I realize that every student is different. I think I can be effective when required to switch up my approach toward a certain student or group of students. For instance, we had one 7th grader on our team last year who understood best when we explained to him exactly what he needed to do. On the other side of the coin, we had another who had to be shown everything in the exact manner that he had to do it. I felt comfortable with both learning styles, and feel confident that I will be able to deal with any additional learning styles that students might have.

I also feel like I have enough background knowledge in English to explain different concepts in a variety of different ways. I chose to teach English because that has always been my strongest subject and I think that the comfort level I have with it will translate to how comfortable I can make my students with it. Through different

approaches learned in this class, I feel like I can instruct most any student in most any subject.

However, at this preliminary stage of my teaching career, I still have a large amount of room for improvement. One area that I need work in is the area of classroom management. I think that sometimes I get locked into one style of discipline and ignore others that may be more suitable for the situation. I found that when tutoring, I was often too content to let the classroom teacher or head tutor take control of handling all of the discipline. When I did have to use discipline techniques, I felt like I achieved mixed results. Sometimes, I could resolve the issue myself and it would no longer be a problem. But other times, the classroom teacher or head tutor would step in and assist me with the discipline when my style wasn't working. That was something that embarrassed me in a way, but also made me realize that I need some work in this area and it's something that I will have to work on in the future.

Another area that I need to improve upon in order to become an effective teacher is the area of value-added assessment. The reason I say that I need improvement is that I am very inexperienced in this area. When tutoring, I wasn't asked to grade or assess students more than just noticing improvement or recognizing day-to-day patterns. I didn't do any formal assessment, like grading tests or distributing points. I understand the concept of formal assessment from class, but I have never really had to apply it. I am not proficient at the nuances of this area yet, so I realize that I need work at it.

The good news is that the weaknesses I have in the areas of classroom management and value-added assessments are fixable. In a general sense, I think the more classroom experience I get, the better I will become at those areas. Admittedly, I

am still raw as an educator and will learn from the experience I gain in the time leading up to me becoming a full-fledged teacher. With that experience will come the ability to react on the spot to classroom discipline problems or assess individual students and the class as a whole.

Specifically, in the area of classroom discipline, I think that talking to teachers and coaches is the best way to go about gaining more knowledge on the subjects. I think that there are things that can be taken from most every educator's style and applied to my own. The key is to be open-minded and willing to try new things. Also, in this upcoming football season, I will concentrate more on utilizing different styles of discipline and management with different players. I will focus on recognizing differences in how children respond to certain styles of discipline.

In the area of value-added assessment, I will begin to pay attention to the different ways of assessing students that different teachers use. I will focus on the subtle forms of assessment, as well as the formal ones. As far as things that I can do in the upcoming football season, perhaps I will use some form of formal evaluation to grade out my players on certain aspects of the game. As previously mentioned, the more I practice this concept, the better I will become at it.

I have learned many things about myself as a teacher throughout this class and my tutoring experience. I have discovered how the different areas of effective teaching can impact learning and how effective I am at each area. I realize that I have to do a lot of work to get where I need to be as a teacher, and that I still have a long road ahead of me. With that being said, I still have confidence that I do have what it takes to become an effective teacher.

Works Cited Page

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