

The Effective Teacher

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There is no limit to human potential and how it amazingly develops as an exciting phenomenon, yet something that we as teachers cannot verify in advance. There is no accurate instrument to predict the future of the students within our classrooms, even the “troublesome” ones who may present unique challenges of learning or behaviour. Therefore, all students deserve and need the nurture of a teacher who is truly interested in their success. We, as teachers in a Christian context, have a unique opportunity and advantage in molding our students’ future.



Reflecting recently on some of our nephews and nieces, my husband and I realized that, when they were children, we had never thought of them becoming what they are today. One is a missionary doctor in Zambia. Another is an anesthesiologist in Memphis, Tennessee, and is consistently ranked the top doctor in his specialty by the physicians in that city. Another is a family practitioner with training also in dentistry. Two are teachers. One is a school social psychologist, and another an engineer who became a nurse. One trades in foreign currency, and another does research for the US Department of Defense. Years ago, they were simply children or teens growing up within the family. But now they are all respected and viewed by family and peers as professionals within their respective fields, and are regular supporters of the church, with both financial and personal involvement – products of nurturing both at home and at school.

Jesus saw individuals on the basis of what they could become, rather than as they were. “In every human being He discerned infinite possibilities. He saw men as they might be, transfigured by His grace--in ‘the beauty of the Lord our God.’ Psalm 90:17” (E. G. White, *Education*, pg. 80). How can we translate this concept into the classroom? One quick translation is grades on a report card, but these marks only reveal the student’s current performance based on established criteria, and do not necessarily indicate the future outcome of a student. This is one reason why each student deserves the dedication and attention of an effective teacher, one who is genuinely concerned about the student’s ultimate success, and has the knowledge and skills to help impact that success. I wonder whether the teachers of students like Ben Carson would have shown a different attitude toward his lack of early academic success had they been able to look into the future and know that one day this student would become a world-renowned neurosurgeon. Effective teachers go beyond the classroom to seek to understand their students against their background, family and culture, to get to know them in a personal way, and to mentor them to challenge and achieve their best individually. The effective teacher knows the *real student* behind all of the test results, the performance records, and the standardized test scores.

While report cards may not be the best indicator of student outcomes, several research studies have shown that quality instruction is the greatest prediction of student achievement. Quality instruction increases brain connections. “The quality of a child’s teaching most certainly affects his or her mind profile. In fact, recent studies using sophisticated brain scans have shown vividly that good instruction can actually result in positive changes in brain structure. It is possible to see increases in brain tissues when parts of the brain get properly stimulated after having been neglected.” (Mel Levine, *A Mind at a Time*, pg. 42).

From an academic perspective, the effective teacher is one who understands the process of learning, including the social construct of learning, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the individual learners in the classroom. In addition, the teacher knows how to assess learning in a manner that makes students’ thinking visible, and that provides useful feedback for further instruction. The effective teacher has studied how knowledge is organized, with the central concepts in the discipline being taught, and presents those ideas in a way that can be understood by learners at different ages and stages of development.

During a recent brain-based-teaching conference, a presenter shared impressive research data. Proper implementation of effective teaching strategies can result in a percentile gain of from 29-45 points in student achievement. Over a three-year teaching period, students who received effective instruction increased in performance from 63 to 87 percentile points while ineffective teaching increased from 40 to 58 percentile points.

When this academic context is combined with the value-added Christian perspective, effective teaching looks for ways to inspire students to rise above all expectations. The effective teacher never gives up on the students, because Jesus never gave up on his disciples.

“If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust; but – if we work upon immortal souls, if we imbue them with principle, with the just fear of God and the love of fellowman, we engrave on those tables something which will brighten all eternity” (Daniel Webster, *Permanent Principles*, pg. 78).