HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUALITIES OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS: ARE THERE DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS?

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the essential qualities that are characteristic of highly effective teachers by researching what distinguishes highly effective teachers from their colleagues at elementary and secondary levels. Literature was reviewed from multiple sources to determine extraordinary teacher traits that contribute to improved student academic performance. Data was also collected from a sampling of 31 principals in an urban school district with a human capital management strategic goal to recruit and retain highly qualified candidates. Of the 31 elementary and secondary principals, 11 responded to the survey with responses that provide valuable input on those qualities they believe characterize a highly effective teacher.

With respect to the qualitative research findings, slight differences that exist between male and female principal perspectives are a matter of professional opinion about which qualities are deemed the most important to describe a highly effective teacher. While all survey respondents believe characteristics such as positive relationships with students and a strong knowledge base are critical to teacher effectiveness; male principals also describe a highly effective teacher as compassionate/caring and a life-long learner, while female principals value effective classroom management and consistent use of best instructional practices. This research suggests that a more in-depth study in the form of personal interviews or focus groups with these and other principals be conducted to further validate the literature reviewed and qualitative analysis presented in this study.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Many urban school districts struggle to experience high levels of student achievement due to the inability to recruit and retain highly effective teachers. One such school district located in the Midwest has been plagued by a revolving door of superintendents in the last 40 years which has disenfranchised teachers who are ill-equipped to deal with the demanding social-emotional challenges faced by a majority of its students. As a result, student achievement has been marked by persistently low-performing schools which prompted the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to strip this urban district of its accreditation effective January 2012. This once-flourishing urban school district currently serves 17,000 students and employs 2,000 employees, and like so many of its fellow inner-city public school systems is now served by a majority of minority populations: 61.1% African-American, 26.3% Hispanic, 9% White, & 3% Asian students, with a 87.7 % free/reduced lunch rate compared with 49.5 % at the state level. The district has 25 elementary schools grades K-6, 8 high schools grades 7-12. Of these 31 schools there is one technical center, and two alternative educational programs offered at both elementary and secondary levels.

In an effort to attract highly effective candidates to the district, the governing board issued a directive in the form of policy that the Human Capital Management department would strategically recruit and retain highly effective teachers and administrators as a means to ensure the success of quality educational programs.
The urban district states in its policy: “The school district recognizes that recruiting is an essential part of reaching the overall goal to provide an exemplary education to all students. The school district is committed to expanding its recruitment process in order to identify and attract the most qualified individuals to become employees of the school district. Specifically, the school district will focus its search for highly effective teachers and other professional employees in a large geographical area concentrating on educational institutions in Missouri and the surrounding areas.” (Policy# GBD-C.KCY 11/10)

Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

In order to provide a working definition of ‘highly effective’ several sources will be considered such as Grieve (2010) whose research describes excellence in teaching as, “in terms of personal qualities and interpersonal skills” suggesting that teachers as practitioners themselves consider excellence to be a reflection of qualities that teachers bring with them that foster positive classroom relationships including strong communication skills. Kennedy (2008) refers to effectiveness as a teacher’s ability to cultivate learning, motivate students, and develop personal and social responsibility in students. While Williams, et. al asserts, “The definition’s ability to reflect the nuances of the successful teachers makes it perfectly congruous with the idea it seeks to represent. Therefore, effective should be the sole, universalized identifier of the successful or ‘good’ teacher.” (Williams, 2012) According to Williams’ research teacher effectiveness hinges upon research-based strategies and procedures used in the classroom and wisdom that comes with being an experienced teacher.
The urban school district discussed in this research paper has implemented several initiatives to attract candidates who fit the general description of highly effective through a Pay-For-Performance program funded by a Pioneer Grant which offers bonus incentives for the staff of those participating schools based on components such as school-wide attendance, staff attendance, professional development, academic achievement, and positive behavior support to name a few. The district in its efforts to recruit talented young educators participates in the Teach For America (TFA) program where it contracts with the organization to select from a pool of bright, aspiring educators who graduated with honors from Ivy League Schools with the desire to teach in America’s distressed urban school districts for a minimum of 2 years. These TFA candidates undergo an intensive summer boot camp before they are assigned to elementary and secondary schools within the district. Teach For America serves the purpose to fill the gap where high levels of teacher turnover exist particularly in the urban core which has the greatest need for student academic achievement. Based upon his research, former TFA teacher Steven Farr and now author believes that Teach For America teachers in some cases are more effective at teaching than their formally trained educator counterparts because they 1) set seemingly impossible goals 2) generate student buy-in to the vision 3) plan with the end in mind 4) use a variety of methods to assess student knowledge 5) engage in reflective practice and 6) assume personal responsibility for student academic success.
Statement of the Problem

Bearing in mind the research that as already been presented, the urban district’s goal of recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers is plausible since quality teaching is at the core of student success. The problem facing most urban school districts is the recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers who can confidently and competently rise to the challenges that come with teaching in schools with concentrated levels of poverty, limited resources, behavior issues, family dysfunction- the list goes on and on. If an urban school district is to regain its academic status as fully accredited within two years, it must attract talented educators who have the stamina and creativity to address distinctive urban issues within the context of the classroom setting so that students can achieve success not only academically but intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially which should be the educational goal for each student to become a life-long learner. But how can a urban school district that has failed students for decades regain re-establish itself and attract teachers who are dedicated to the vision and mission which requires tenacity, dedication, and perseverance and other endearing qualities to overcome barriers to student learning? How can high turnover rates at the executive leadership level be diminished to cultivate a sense of stability in a district that has been on a downward spiral for so long that failure has become an unspoken expectation? Is it a realistic expectation that highly effective teachers would want to invest time, energy and effort into an educational system that has been dysfunctional for years? Having stated the problem with many urban school districts to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, it is proposed that
there are viable solutions that will reverse the trend of excellent teachers leaving the education profession within the first five years of teaching by identifying those professional and personal traits during the recruitment process that are the necessary ingredients for teacher effectiveness in the classroom that will lead to personal and professional fulfillment, especially in an urban setting.

Purpose of the Study

This study serves the purpose to determine if excellent teacher qualities as identified by a select body of research are a mirror reflection of the perspectives of school principals in an urban school district on the qualities of highly effective teachers. In the event there is a correlation between what research indicates and what a sampling of school principals believe to be exemplary traits of effective teachers, then the urban school district should seek more input from building administrators on the kind of applicants to actively select as highly qualified candidates for teaching positions across the district. The scope of this study is limited to a sampling of principal responses to a survey disseminated district-wide for feedback on what makes a highly effective teacher in comparison with current research on teacher effectiveness.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are there distinguishing qualities that characterize a teacher as highly effective?

RQ2: Are there significant differences between male and female principal perspectives on the qualities of a highly effective teacher?
Anticipated Benefits of the Study

It is anticipated that the Human Capital Management division could benefit greatly from the outcomes of this study by having an authentic perspective from its building-level administrative staff on the recruitment measures that may need to be implemented in order to attract the right candidates for instructional positions in this urban school district, to meet its goal of recruiting and retaining highly effective teacher in an rigorous effort to regain its accreditation status with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education within the next two years.

Summary

The term “highly effective teacher” is universally associated with being successful or excellent and correlates with a teacher’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness through personal qualities and interpersonal skills that cultivate a classroom environment conducive to high levels of student learning. The urban school district featured in this study has formulated board policy to direct the efforts of the Human Capital Management division to recruit and retain high effective teachers as part of a two-year laser-focus strategic plan to regain its accreditation.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of Quality of Teaching in America’s Schools

The body of research utilized for the purposes of this study on distinguishing characteristics of highly effective teachers suggests that not only must a teacher demonstrate content knowledge but certain interpersonal skills that lead to high levels of student achievement. Perhaps the foremost expert on the subject of quality teaching, especially within the context of the urban public school setting, Dr. Martin Haberman (2005), identifies distinguishing characteristics that effective teachers possess. In his book that addresses teachers of diverse children in poverty, he outlines 15 attributes that are leading indicators of teacher effectiveness in urban classrooms: “…they are over age thirty, they majored in a field other than education as an undergraduate, they are part of family/church/ethnic community in which teaching is still regarded as a fairly high status career, they have had out of school experiences with children of diverse backgrounds, and they have engaged in paid or volunteer activities with diverse children in poverty…” (p. 82). Mary M. Kennedy (2008) writes that teacher quality must first be discussed in terms of distinctive teacher qualities that can be categorized into three groups in order to improve the overall quality of the teaching workforce: personal resources, performance and effectiveness. Personal resources are those values, personality traits, and expertise that highly effective teachers bring to the classroom with them; while performance describes the teacher’s ability to engage in quality instructional practice that impact teaching and learning, and effectiveness being the end
result of those practices that motivate students to increase academic performance (2008). In an article on teachers in low-performing schools, Poplin et. al (2008) assert that highly effective teachers possess a core belief system about themselves and their students, citing specific beliefs: “1) Every one of my students has much more potential than they use 2) They have not been pushed to use it 3) It is my responsibility to turn this situation around 4) I am able and 5) I want to do this for them” (p. 43). Wilson (2011) poses the question about how to improve teacher quality in her article which suggests that certain measures can be put in place to ensure that the best teachers remain in America’s classrooms. Her proposed solutions include: 1) recruit the best and brightest to become teachers 2) keep the most qualified teachers in the profession well past the five year mark 3) invest in high-quality teacher preparation research 4) cultivate quality teaching through continuous school improvement of time, resources, and materials and 5) provide ample opportunities for professional development (p65-66).

Tucker (2011/2012) questions educational reform strategy with regard to teacher quality in America by citing the strategies used by other countries to recruit and retain highly qualified candidates. The distinction between what other countries such as Finland and China require of teachers is much more rigorous than currently practiced in the United States by making schools of education research universities, requiring teachers to be experts in the subjects they teach, refusing to waive licensure standards, and compensating teachers, all of which has caused these and other countries to become top performers of academic excellence (p.42-46).
Qualities of Effective Teachers

In a recent article about what makes a great teacher, Ripley (2012) reports findings from hours of classroom observations and interviews with effective and ineffective teachers in conjunction with her study of the interview process for Teach For America candidates identified two distinctive characteristics, perseverance and overall life satisfaction as key indicators of teacher effectiveness. In his book, Steve Farr, a former Teach For America teacher who now recruits and studies the behaviors of excellent teachers, has gleaned specific lessons from his experiences and observations about successful Teach For America teachers. According to Farr, excellent TFA teachers set big goals, invest in students, plan with a purpose, check for student understanding, reevaluate their instructional practice, and assume responsibility for student learning (2010).

McEwan (2002) presents 10 traits of highly effective teachers which can be divided into the intellectual, personal and teaching domains. Personal traits are described as “teacher leader”, “positive and real”, “mission-driven and passionate.” The intellectual domain includes: “street smarts”, “book learning” and “mental life.” While the teaching domain encompasses: “instructional virtuoso”, “style”, “motivational expertise”, and “with-it-ness.” Bright (2011) describes five habits of highly effective teachers that have positive impact on student academic achievement: 1) Taking a wider view of student success 2) Recognizing instruction as a performance 3) Internalizing personal accountability 4) Understanding student motivation and 5) Continuing on instructional improvement, further concluding, “While there can be
honest debate about the essential habits of elite teachers, we can be certain the most important factor affecting student achievement, the quality of instruction, is completely within our control. It is possible to educate all children well. The only question is whether teachers and administrators have the determination to do it” (p. 35).

One commonly used expression to describe a highly effective teacher is that of a “warm demander.” Bondy and Ross (2008) provide a definition of this term the following way: “These teachers communicated personal warmth and used an instructional style Kleinfield called, ‘active demandingness.’ They insisted that students perform to a high level” (p.2). The teacher as warm demander manifests itself in three ways: 1) building relationships with students deliberately 2) learning about students’ cultures and 3) communicating high expectations for student success (p. 2-3).

Diverse Perspectives of Quality Teacher Characteristics

Research from the perspective of educators who voiced their own opinion about what makes a great teacher was presented by Gabriel, Day, and Allington (2011) who provide insight into the development of exemplar educational professionals who have made their mark in the classroom setting. According to the exemplary teachers surveyed, three themes emerge as to what it takes to be an effective teacher: relevant professional development, mutual collegial support, and engaged autonomy with support from school leadership (p.38-39). The perception of teacher’s themselves was also investigated by Grieve (2010) in an international study, who researched characteristics associated with teacher excellence. The teacher participants interviewed responded with favorable opinions of other educators who placed emphasis on
interpersonal skills that foster high expectations for student learning and build positive relationships with students and consistently rated these qualities as characteristic of excellent classroom teachers (p.65). Specifically, Grieve (2011) reported that the Scottish government in which the study was conducted identified five essential elements that an excellent teacher should possess: “a positive attitude, an ability to communicate value to pupils, a good content knowledge and understanding, a teaching repertoire of many ways to impart content, and knowledge and understanding of connections across curricular areas” (p.66).

One current study conducted by Williams, Sullivan, and Kohn (2012) surveyed the opinions of students about the qualities of an outstanding teacher. Of the 223 secondary students in grades 7-12, the findings were very consistent with three themes that emerged from the clientele who are directly impacted by quality teaching or lack thereof. According to their research category one consisted of friendly/relates/bonds/cares; category two consisted of enjoys subject/knowledgeable/can teach and category three consisted of classroom management/respect (p. 111). In the succinct words of the authors, “In analyzing the overall responses, we discovered that students wanted a teacher who related to them, enjoyed teaching, and can handle classroom management” (p.113).

Last but not least is the perspective of administrators themselves who provided feedback to Okpala, James, and Hopson on the effectiveness of national board certified teachers in comparison with those teachers who are not certified by the national board. The study concentrated in North Carolina which has the highest number of national
board certified teachers, provided insight on the qualities that distinguish these teachers from their counterparts. The themes that emerged from this study suggest according to the authors, “The public school principals in this study overwhelmingly perceive NB certified teachers as being highly effective in terms of instructional skills, classroom skills, and personal skills than teachers. The participants in this study with roles in elementary schools perceive National Board certified teachers as being more effective in personal skills than participants in middle and high schools” (p.32).

In another study, a large, urban school district managed to reach a collective bargaining agreement with its teacher’s union to give principals more flexibility in dismissing ineffective teachers who have not attained tenure. Jacob (2012) writes in his article, “By comparing the characteristics of dismissed versus non-dismissed probationary teachers within the same school and year, I was able to determine just how much weight school administrators place on a variety of teacher characteristics, including their performance in the classroom” (p.2). Jacob found that principals were more likely to non-renew those teachers who were frequently absent from work, previously received low performance ratings with respect to student academic achievement, or who did not have a strong educational background, accounting for an 11% dismissal rate during the first year of implementation of the new policy. This study suggests that principals should be given more autonomy to decide which teachers to dismiss due to ineffectiveness in impacting student achievement, without all the red tape directly associated with the non-renewal process.
Summary

Collectively, the body of research used to study the issue of teacher excellence presents clear evidence to suggest that there are distinguishing characteristics that paint a portrait of a highly effective teacher. These distinctive teacher traits are consistent throughout the review of literature from which the following themes emerge: solid content knowledge, quality instructional practice, a core belief system about student achievement, positive relationships with students, strong interpersonal and communication skills, high expectations for student learning, and effective classroom management. These themes will be used to compare and contrast the perspectives of a sampling of elementary and secondary principals in an urban school district on the qualities of highly effective teacher
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purposes Overview

The problem under investigation is the dilemma that many school districts, especially those in the urban core, face in the recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers to positively impact student academic achievement. The purpose of this study is not to establish if a teacher is effective in an urban versus suburban setting but to determine those distinctive qualities that make a teacher highly effective in their instructional practice regardless of the academic setting.

Research Design

This study is a one-shot static survey in the form of qualitative analysis that will generate opinions from principals who have recruited and retained highly effective teachers in their schools. The research question is stated as an open-ended writing prompt: *Please list or write a summary of those qualities that you believe describe a highly effective teacher.* The survey will capture other critical pieces of information about the research participants such as gender, current assignment, and years of experience as a principal.

Study Group

This study involves 31 principals from an urban school district in the greater Kansas City area within the Midwest region that serves diverse student populations, where there are 22 elementary schools (K-6) and 6 high schools (7-12).
Data Collection and Instrumentation

Once authorization is received to conduct the study by district officials, the data will be collected through dissemination of a survey to 31 principals at the elementary and secondary levels through interoffice mail with sealable return envelopes to ensure anonymity. Principals will be given the option not to participate in the study. Only those surveys returned will be counted as part of the study. Principals will be given three weeks to return the survey from August 6th- August 24th.

Data Analysis Methods

The qualitative data collected from the study will be captured by key words that re-occur in the form of lists or summary descriptions of highly effective teacher that will be converted into meaningful concepts that represent the qualities of highly effective teachers according to the perspectives of school principals. The responses will be analyzed collectively for common themes from the whole group of survey respondents; then sorted by male/female responses; then sorted by secondary/elementary principal responses to determine if there are any similarities or differences between the sub-groups.

Summary

A summary of findings will be developed after the qualitative data is collected and reviewed by the collective group responses and sub-group responses as sorted by gender, elementary/secondary level principals, and years of experience.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RESULTS FROM DATA ANALYSIS

Review of Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine if excellent teacher qualities as identified by a select body of research is closely aligned with the perspectives of school principals in an urban school district on the qualities of highly effective teachers. A survey was disseminated to 31 principals in an urban school district serving approximately 17,000 students representing 25 elementary schools, 8 high schools, and one technical education center. Of the 31 principals surveyed, only 11 responded by completing the surveys which is an approximate 30% return rate. However, the responses received were thoroughly examined to extract valuable information with regard to the perspectives of principals on the qualities of highly effective teachers.

Presentation of Data Analysis

Of the 11 elementary and secondary principals who responded within the identified research group, in-depth responses were given with regard to those characteristics that describe a highly effective teacher. The 11 responses were disaggregated through qualitative analysis to identify common themes that emerged, and divided into three categories with respect to the principal’s background: gender, elementary or secondary, and years of experience. The male principals constituted 5 of the 11 respondents, 3 at the elementary level and 2 at the secondary level. Of this group, 2 had 1-4 years of experience as a principal and 2 had 5-9 years of experience, and the remaining male respondent had 10 plus years of experience. The female principals (all at the elementary level) comprised the remaining 6 respondents with 3 having 1-4 years
of experience, 2 with 5-9 years of experience, and the remaining respondent with 10 plus years of experience as a principal. Collectively, 6 of the survey participants have 5 or more years of experience as a school principal, while the remaining principals have 1-4 years of experience. Although few in number, the 11 respondents represent a cross section with regard to years of experience and gender, but primarily reflect the elementary principal’s perspective since only 2 secondary level male principals responded.

The principal responses generated common themes with regard to those exceptional qualities that are deemed to be characteristic of highly effective teachers such as: life-long learner, knowledgeable, organized, persistent, optimistic, data-driven, willingness to accept criticism, positive classroom management, inspiring, passionate, effective communicator, patient, empathetic, creative, flexible, open-minded, curious, high expectations, risk-taker, and sense of humor.

Upon examination of how male and female principals responded, a more in-depth analysis was conducted to determine if there is any difference between those distinctive qualities considered to be most important. According to the 39 collective responses from the 5 male principals at both the elementary and secondary levels placed more emphasis on the qualities of: committed to professional growth and development, caring, motivated, relationship-builder, achievement-oriented, positive rapport with students, knowledgeable of content, positive professional attitude, patience, organizational skills, flexibility, ability to accept criticism, creativity, compassion, instructional leader, classroom manager, researcher, organizer, tolerance
for differences, open-mindedness, curiosity, self-motivated, perceptive, ability to learn from failure, sense of humor, and communicator. The five major themes that arose from the male principal perspective include 1) ability to accept constructive criticism 2) compassionate and caring 3) relationship building with students 4) knowledge of content and 5) effective communication skills.

Female principals as primarily representative of the elementary perspective, since no secondary female principals participated in the survey, consider the following qualities to be descriptive of a highly effective teacher: consistent use of best instructional practice, relationship-building with students, organized lesson design, high expectations, data-driven instruction, collaborative, positive classroom management, nurturing, persistent, accepts feedback, committed to professional growth and development, sense of humor, solid content knowledge, effective communication skills, believes children can succeed, energetic, strong knowledge base, open-minded, creative, risk-taker, empathy, passionate, resourceful, inspirational, determined, and continuous learner. Of these qualities, five major themes arose from the 36 collective responses from the 6 female principals which include: 1) positive relationships with students 2) strong knowledge base 3) excellent communication skills 4) effective classroom management and 5) consistent used of best instructional practice. Both male and female perspectives as represented by the five major recurring themes are represented the table below:
Recurring Themes of Principal Perspectives of Highly Effective Teachers

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Principals</th>
<th>Female Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 survey respondents</td>
<td>6 survey respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to accept constructive criticism</td>
<td>1. Positive relationships with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Compassionate and caring</td>
<td>2. Strong knowledge base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relationship-building with students</td>
<td>3. Excellent communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge of content</td>
<td>4. Effective classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Effective communication skills</td>
<td>5. Consistent use of best instructional practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When analyzing the data collectively between the 39 responses from the 5 male principals and the 36 responses from the 6 female principals, the recurring themes from the principals’ perspectives were collapsed into five major descriptors. An Affinity Diagram shows the qualities deemed to be strong indicators of highly effective teachers:

Diagram 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathetic</th>
<th>Life-long Learner</th>
<th>Knowledgeable of Content</th>
<th>Relationship-Builder</th>
<th>Passionate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Self-motivated</td>
<td>Data-driven</td>
<td>Positive rapport with students</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Strong sense of self</td>
<td>Knowledgeable of content</td>
<td>Effective classroom manager</td>
<td>Motivational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptive</td>
<td>Ability to accept criticism</td>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Respectful of differences</td>
<td>Committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>Risk-taker</td>
<td>Achievement-oriented</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Energetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Continuous learner</td>
<td>Instructional leader</td>
<td>Excellent communicator</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>Tolerance for ambiguity</td>
<td>Believes children can succeed</td>
<td>Persistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Researcher of best practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>Goal-setter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based upon the *Affinity Diagram* which represents the unique perspectives of practicing urban school administrators, those qualities which rise to the top as accurate descriptors of highly effective teachers are clearly identified as: 1) *Empathy* which fosters a genuine care and holistic concern for students and their academic, social, and emotional progress 2) *Life-long learning* which suggests a commitment to ongoing professional development to improve teaching and learning 3) *Knowledge of content* which leads to mastery of subject matter taught and research-based instructional strategies which is a significant indicator of teacher effectiveness as evidenced by student academic performance 4) *Relationship building* which encompasses positive rapport with students, effective classroom management, and strong communication skills and 5) *Passion for teaching* which speaks to an educator’s keen sense of purpose and calling to the profession.

**Summary**

These survey responses although few in number representing only 11 of 31 principals in an urban school district serving 17,000 students, paint a vivid picture of those distinctive qualities identified as strong indicators of highly effective teachers. The five major themes that arise from the sample body of research including empathy, life-long learning, knowledge of content, relationship-building, and passionate about teaching, indicate that the urban principals surveyed place tremendous value on educators who fit the following description: “*Wanted: Highly Effective Teachers*” - must be empathetic to the unique, individualized needs of students; life-long learners who are committed to professional growth and reflective practice; well-able to build positive rapport with students
Highly Effective Teachers

through excellent communication skills and effective classroom management; knowledgeable of content taught and research-based instructional strategies that impact student achievement, and passionate about teaching and learning as demonstrated by an unwavering belief that empowers each student to reach their fullest potential.

In comparison with the some of the research presented in the Literature Review, the principal perspectives correlate with the findings presented. Based upon McEwan (2002) whose book 10 Traits of Highly Effective Teachers, describes the characteristics of teacher effectiveness as divided into three domains: Personal Traits- 1) Mission-driven and passionate 2) Positive and real 3) Teacher-leader; Teaching Traits- 4) With-it-ness 5) Style 6) Motivational expertise 7) Instructional effectiveness; and Intellectual Traits- 8) Book learning 9) Street smarts and 10) A mental life. These 10 main concepts as divided into 3 categories are well-represented by the principal survey responses, albeit in different terminology as listed in the Affinity Diagram on page 21. Bright (2011) whose article, Five habits of highly effective teachers, outlined a similar belief system as articulated by the principals surveyed by suggesting that outstanding teachers: 1) consider not just academic progress but future success for students 2) employ multiple strategies to improve instructional practice 3) take personal responsibility for student learning 4) motivate students with relevant learning opportunities and 5) focus on instructional improvement, all of which align with the feedback given by the survey respondents. One last research reference which is perhaps the most important perspective of all, from students themselves as outlined in the article authored by Williams, Sullivan, and Kohn (2012) which suggests that genuine care and concern for
students, knowledge of subject matter, and effective classroom management/respect for students are the necessary ingredients for an outstanding teacher. In comparison with the research presented in the Literature Review and the perspectives of principals in an urban district there are distinctive qualities that make a teacher highly effective. Although there is a slight variation on which qualities are most important, there is no significant difference between the perspectives of male and female principals on the characteristics of a highly effective teacher.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore if the perspectives of school principals from an identified research group of 31 principals in an urban school district on the qualities of highly effective teachers correlate with the overall body of research found on the subject matter of teacher excellence. With respect to perspectives generated from teachers, students and administrators as presented in the Literature Review, the message is loud and clear about what is deemed to be characteristic of a highly effective teacher who truly makes a difference in the lives of students. For the purposes of research the terminology ‘highly effective’ is used interchangeably with words such as outstanding, excellent, and superior. Based on research, the qualities of a highly effective teacher are consistently described as but not limited to the following: knowledgeable of subject matter, excellent communication skills, positive rapport with students, compassionate and understanding, passionate about teaching, resourceful and creative, a life-long learner, inspiring and motivational, results-oriented, teacher-leader, open-minded and flexible, effective classroom management, and high expectations for learning.

Discussion of Findings

As discussed in Chapter Four, it was found that there are distinctive characteristics that accurately describe a highly effective teacher as identified by teachers, students and administrators throughout a collective body of research on the subject matter. While only 11 of 31 principals, 5 male and 6 female, in an urban school
district in the Midwest participated in a one-shot design survey on the qualities of highly effective teachers, the feedback generated from the principal survey responses provided some valuable information that the school district can use to enhance its efforts to attract and retain highly qualified candidates. Of the 11 principals, all of whom were at the elementary level with exception of two male principals, six were experienced principals with 5 or more years of experience while the remaining five principals had 1-4 years of experience. With regard to the gender or years of experience of the principal- this did not have a bearing on qualities of a highly effective teacher; the responses were consistent across sub-groups. In comparison with the body of research reviewed on teacher excellence, the principal perspectives are relatively the same with respect to common themes that emerged when examining the terminology used in research and the survey responses generated descriptors of highly effective teachers such as compassionate, relationship-builder, effective classroom manager, reflective practitioner, knowledgeable of content, motivational, instructionally savvy, life-long learner- these classic descriptors can be found in multiple sources as thorough research on highly effective teachers.

Conclusions and Implications for School Policy

Based upon the research generated from principal perspectives on the qualities of highly effective teachers, it is recommended that the school district’s Human Capital Management division establish a focus group comprised of the principals who participated in this study to review its selection process of highly qualified candidates. Currently, the urban school district utilizes the panel interview approach which
Highly Effective Teachers

requires the candidate to demonstrate teaching ability and classroom management pedagogy before a panel of teachers and administrators which entails a mini-lesson in the content area and grade level for which the candidate has applied. The panel interview team screens prospective teachers and scores candidates utilizing a rubric and scoring guide based upon the lesson plan, model lesson, post conference review and writing prompt based on a given scenario, as developed by the Human Capital Management department. All of this documentation accompanies a formal panel interview of the candidate to determine if the candidate meets the following competencies: 1) school fit 2) effective teaching and management and 3) professional qualities to determine if he/she is a highly qualified candidate with an overall acceptable or strong rating.

With the additional input from the principal perspectives on the qualities of highly effective teachers, the school district could significantly improve its effort to recruit and retain highly qualified teacher. By using the descriptors created by the principals as a frame of reference throughout the selection process to determine if the candidates fits the description of a ‘highly effective teacher’, and make informed hiring decisions that will have a positive impact on student achievement.

*Application of Learning*

As an elementary principal in the urban school district featured in this research paper, our school has utilized the panel interview process as an effective means to identify highly qualified candidates to teach in the urban classroom setting. Specifically, this process involved administration, teacher leaders, and students to
conduct the interviews to ascertain who would be selected to fill a teaching vacancy. The candidate interviewed well by designing an organized lesson plan with key components, preparing for a model lesson, participating in a post-conference with candor about the lesson strengths and weaknesses, and responding to two scenario-based writing prompts. The candidate demonstrated knowledge of effective instructional design and classroom management principles which generated consensus from the interview panel that the individual was the best candidate for the position having met the category of strong indicators in three areas of competency: 1) school fit 2) effective teaching and management and 3) professional qualities. It is important to note that based on the research presented, the candidate also demonstrated evidence of the qualities of a highly effective according to the principal perspectives.

Summary

While conducting a survey of 31 principals in an urban school district it was determined from the careful examination of survey responses from 11 participating principals that there are distinguishing characteristics of highly effective teachers. Five major themes emerged from the study that correlates with the research cited on the subject matter of teacher excellence. It is recommended that the human capital management division engage in further dialogue with the principals in the form of a focus group to determine how to aggressively pursue the strategic goal of recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers as part of the urban school district’s two-plan to regain its accreditation.
APPENDIX A

Please list or write a summary of those qualities that you believe describe a highly effective teacher in the space provided below.

Please indicate your gender: _______male    _______female

Please indicate your current assignment: _______secondary    _______elementary

Please indicate your years of experience as a principal: _______years

Your professional input is greatly appreciated!

Return survey to Andrea Dixon via email at: adixon@kcmsd.net
Dear Elementary or Secondary Principal,

As an Education Specialist candidate at Northwest Missouri State University, I am asking for your input on my research of the essential qualities of a highly effective teacher. My thesis is entitled: School principal perspectives on the qualities of highly effective teachers: Are there distinguishing characteristics? This study is being conducted in alignment with the recruitment goals of urban school districts to hire and retain highly effective teachers.

Your feedback is being solicited by completing the enclosed survey that will provide a qualitative analysis of collective responses received from elementary and secondary principals in urban school districts in Kansas City. The responses that you provide will remain anonymous for the purposes of this study. DO NOT PROVIDE YOUR NAME OR SCHOOL LOCATION. If you choose to “opt out” please do not return the survey. If you decide to participate in the study, please complete the survey by Friday, August 24th and return via email to adixon@kcmsd.net.

Thanking you in advance for your support to fulfill the research requirements of my Education Specialist Degree program at Northwest Missouri State University. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact my professor, Dr. Phil Messner at pemday@nwmissouri.edu.

Sincerely,

Andrea Dixon

Education Specialist Candidate, Northwest Missouri State University
REFERENCES


