

QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

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The positive and negative behaviors exhibited by teachers determine, to a great extent, their effectiveness in the classroom and, ultimately, the impact they have on student achievement. Several specific characteristics of teacher responsibilities and behaviors that contribute directly to effective teaching are listed for each of the following categories:

- The teacher as a person
- Classroom management and organization
- Organizing and orienting for instruction
- Implementing instruction
- Monitoring student progress and potential
- Professionalism

Red flags signaling ineffective teaching are presented at the end of each section. Both positive and negative characteristics are based on a plethora of research-based studies that address the concept of improving the educational system for both students and teachers. These qualities are general for any content area or grade level. Subject-specific qualities presented for the four content areas typically found in all schools include:

- English
- History and Social Studies
- Mathematics
- Science

The lists are provided as a vehicle to promote teacher effectiveness.

I. THE TEACHER AS A PERSON

The teacher is the representative of the content and the school. How a teacher presents himself makes an impression on administrators, colleagues, parents, and students. Often a student links the preference to a particular subject to a teacher and the way the subject was taught. A teacher who exudes enthusiasm and competence for a content area may transfer those feelings to the students. In addition, how the teacher relates to the pupils has an impact on the students' experience in the class. The teacher's personality is one of the first sets of characteristics to look for in an effective teacher. Many aspects of effective teaching can be cultivated, but it is difficult to effect change in an individual's personality.

A. Positive Qualities

- Assumes ownership for the classroom and the students' success
- Uses personal experiences as examples in teaching

- Understands feelings of students
- Communicates clearly
- Admits to mistakes and corrects them immediately
- Thinks about and reflects on practice
- Displays a sense of humor
- Dresses appropriately for the position
- Maintains confidential trust and respect
- Is structured, yet flexible and spontaneous
- Is responsive to situations and students' needs
- Enjoys teaching and expects students to enjoy learning
- Looks for the win-win solution in conflict situations
- Listens attentively to student questions and comments.
- Responds to students with respect, even in difficult situations
- Communicates high expectations consistently
- Conducts one-on-one conversations with students
- Treats students equally and fairly
- Has positive dialogue and interactions with students outside the classroom
- Invests time with single students or small groups of students outside the classroom
- Maintains a professional manner at all times
- Addresses students by name
- Speaks in an appropriate tone and volume
- Works actively with students

B. Red Flags of Ineffective Teaching

- Believes that teaching is just a job
- Arrives late to school and class on a regular basis
- Has classroom discipline problems
- Is not sensitive to a student's culture or heritage
- Expresses bias (positive or negative) with regard to students
- Works on paperwork during class rather than working with students
- Has parents complaining about what is going on in the classroom
- Uses inappropriate language
- Demeans or ridicules students
- Exhibits defensive behavior for no apparent reason
- Is confrontational with students
- Lacks conflict resolution skills
- Does not accept responsibility for what occurs in the classroom

II. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION

A classroom reveals telltale signs of its user's style. Typically, a well-organized classroom has various instructional organizers, such as rules, posted on walls. Books and supplies are organized so that often needed ones are easily accessible. The furniture arrangement and classroom displays often reveal how the teacher uses the space. Once the students enter, the details of a classroom at work are evident. The teacher's plan for the environment, both the organization of the classroom and of students, allows the classroom to run itself amid the buzz of student and teacher interaction.

A. Positive Qualities

- Positions chairs in groups or around tables to promote interaction
- Manages classroom procedures to facilitate smooth transitions, instructional groups, procurement of materials and supplies, and supervision of volunteers and paraprofessionals in the classroom
- Manages student behavior through clear expectations and firm and consistent responses to student actions
- Maintains a physical environment where instructional materials and equipment are in good repair
- Covers walls with student work, student made signs, memos, and calendars of student events
- Has students welcome visitors and observers and explain activities
- Emphasizes students addressing one another in a positive and respectful manner
- Encourages interactions and allows low hum of conversations about activities or tasks
- Maximizes the physical aspect of the environment
- Manages emergency situations as they occur
- Maintains acceptable personal work space
- Establishes routines for the running of the classroom and the handling of routine student needs (e.g., bathroom visits, pencil sharpening, and throwing away trash)
- Provides positive reinforcement and feedback
- Disciplines students with dignity and respect
- Shows evidence of established student routines for responsibilities and student leadership
- Exhibits consistency in management style
- Posts classroom and school rules
- Posts appropriate safety procedures

A. Red Flags of Ineffective Teaching

- Arranges desks and chairs in rows facing forward (without regrouping)
- Displays inconsistencies in enforcing class, school, and district rules
- Is not prepared with responses to common issues (bathroom visits, pencil sharpening, and disruptions)
- Uses strictly commercial posters to decorate walls
- Lists rules and consequences for negative behaviors (teacher formulated)
- Ranks student progress on charts for all to view
- Emphasizes facts and correct answers
- Assigns one task to be completed by all students
- Does not post or is not clear about expectations of students
- Does not display school or classroom rules
- Allows student disengagement from learning
- Is unavailable outside of class for students
- Complains inappropriately about all the administrative details that must be done before class begins
- Maintains an unsafe environment or equipment
- Students have no specific routines or responsibilities
- Keeps an unclean or disorderly classroom
- Uses many discipline referrals
- Makes up rules and consequences or punishment according to mood; unpredictable
- Does not start class immediately, takes roll and dallies

III. ORGANIZING AND ORIENTING FOR INSTRUCTION

Some teachers plan at home, and others work after school, crafting unit plans that incorporate various objectives. Regardless where or how teachers plan and organize for instruction, the evidence of effective work is seen in the classroom. An observer in the classroom of an effective teacher can quickly understand the work by viewing the daily lesson objectives and activities posted. Further, the teacher is able to share what the class will be doing to follow-up the lesson of the day. In many schools, teachers are required to submit weekly lesson plans, these plans typically note accommodations for different learning styles or needs, and the variety of instructional approaches that will be used. It is important to note, however, that a lesson plan is not an end-all; it is merely a description of what should be occurring in the classroom. Thus, a good plan doesn't guarantee high-quality instruction, but a poor plan most certainly contributes to ineffective instruction.

A. Positive Qualities

- Lesson plans are written for every school day

- Students know the daily plan because an agenda of objectives and activities is given
- Student assessment and diagnostic data are available
- Assessment data and pretest results are included in the preparation of lesson plans
- Student work samples are available and considered when writing lesson plans
- Lesson plans are aligned with division curriculum guides
- Teacher-developed assessments are aligned with curriculum guides
- State learning objectives are incorporated into lesson plans
- Lesson plans have clearly stated objectives
- Lesson plans include use of available materials
- Lesson plans include activities and strategies to engage students of various ability levels
- Lesson plans address different learning modalities and styles
- Lesson plans include required accommodations for students with special needs
- State standards are posted in classroom
- Lesson plans include pacing information
- Lesson plans for a substitute or an emergency are located in an easily accessible area of the classroom containing all necessary information

B. Red flags of Ineffective Teaching

- No (or very few) lesson plans are available
- Student assessment and diagnostic data are not available
- No connection between assessment data and lesson plans is evident
- No differentiated instruction is provided
- Lesson plans are not aligned with local or district curriculum guides
- State learning objectives are not incorporated into lesson plans
- Activities that are unrelated to the learning objective are selected
- No plans for or anticipation of potential problems
- Lesson plans mainly consist of text or worksheets
- Students are not engaged in learning
- Lesson plans do not address different learning styles of students
- Lesson plans do not reflect accommodations for students with special needs
- State standards are not posted in the classroom
- Information on pacing is not discernible in lesson plans
- Lesson plans are disjointed
- Lesson plans are short and do not allow for smooth transitions between activities
- Poor or inconsistent student achievement is the prevalent pattern

- Emergency lesson plans are not available
- Materials for substitutes are not available (attendance rolls, class procedures, lesson plans, fire and tornado drill evacuation route maps)

IV. IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTION

Effective teaching combines the essence of good classroom management, organization, effective planning, and the teacher's personal characteristics. The classroom presentation of the material to the students and provision of experiences for the students to make authentic connections to the material are vital. The effective teacher facilitates the classroom like a symphony conductor who brings out the best performance from each musician to make a beautiful sound. In the case of the classroom, each student is achieving instructional goals in a positive classroom environment that is supportive, challenging, and nurturing of those goals. The best lesson plan is of little use if the classroom management component is lacking or the teacher lacks rapport with the students. Implementing instruction is like opening night at the theater where all the behind-the-scenes work is hidden and only the magic is seen by the audience. Effective teachers seem to achieve classroom magic effortlessly. The trained observer, on the other hand, is likely to feel great empathy and appreciation for the carefully orchestrated art of teaching.

A. Positive Qualities

- Uses student questions to guide the lesson
- Uses pre-assessments to guide instruction
- Develops elements of an effective lesson
- Uses established routines to capture more class time (e.g., students have roles to play, such as passing out materials so the teacher need not stop the momentum of the lesson)
- Incorporates higher-order thinking strategies
- Uses a variety of activities and strategies to engage students
- Monitors student engagement in all activities and strategies
- Has high numbers of students actively engaged in the class continuously
- Adjusts the delivery and pacing of the lesson in response to student cues
- Effectively uses the entire classroom (e.g., teacher movement throughout the room)
- Student-centered classroom rather than teacher-centered classroom
- Provides feedback (verbal, nonverbal, and written)
- Designs and bases assignments on objectives
- Assists students in planning for homework assignments

B. Red Flags of Ineffective Teaching

- Experiences student behavior problems
- Has unengaged students (e.g., bored, off-task, asleep)
- Has poor student performance in class and on assessments
- Gives vague instructions for seatwork, projects, and activities
- Unresponsive to student cues that the delivery of instruction is ineffective
- Lacks variety in instructional methods used
- Has difficulty individualizing instruction
- Uses outdated material or terminology
- Fails to implement needed changes pointed out by peers or supervisors
- Tells students to “know the material”
- Does not apply current strategies or best practices
- Uses poor examples of or improper English
- Transitions slowly between activities or lessons.

V. MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS AND POTENTIAL

Effective teachers have a sense of how each student is doing in the classes that they teach. They use a variety of formal and informal measures to monitor and assess their pupils’ mastery of a concept or skill. When a student is having difficulty, the teacher targets the knowledge or skill that is troubling the student, and provides remediation as necessary to fill in that gap. Communication with all parties vested in the success of the student is important since parents and instructional teams are also interested in monitoring the student’s progress. Monitoring of student progress and potential need not be solely the responsibility of the teacher; indeed, an effective teacher facilitates students’ understanding of how to assess their own performance, that is, assists them in metacognition. However, ultimate accountability does lie with each teacher, so documenting a student’s progress and performance needs to be accomplished. An effective teacher who has observed and worked with a student has a sense of the potential that student possesses, encourages the student to excel, and provides the push to motivate the student to make a sustained effort when needed.

A. Positive Qualities

- Enables students to track their own performances
- Grades homework
- Gives oral and written feedback
- Documents student progress and achievement
- Makes instructional decisions based on student achievement data analysis
- Circulates in the room to assist students and provide praise
- Gives pretests and graphs results
- Considers multiple assessments to determine whether a student has mastered a skill

- Keeps a log of parent communication
- Uses student intervention plans and maintains records of the plan's implementation
- Records team conference or teacher conference with students
- Gives assessments on a regular basis
- Makes use of a variety of assessments
- Uses rubrics for student assignments, products, and projects
- Practices differentiated instruction based on assessment analysis
- Exercises testing accommodations for special-needs students
- Maintains copies of all correspondence (written, e-mail,) concerning student progress
- Holds teacher-parent-student conferences and meetings
- Produces class newsletters
- Invites parents and guests to special class events
- Maintains class Web page featuring student work, homework assignments
- Communicates with informal progress reports
- Uses appropriate and clear language in communications
- Participates in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for special-needs students

B. Red Flags of Ineffective Teaching

- Does not monitor student progress or allow for questions
- Infrequently analyzes or lacks appropriate data
- Infrequently or fails to monitor student progress
- Does not keep a communication log
- Does not record conferences with students or parents and guardians
- Uses extremes in grading – high failure rates or unrealistically high percentage of excellent grades
- Fails to re-teach after assessments to correct gaps in student learning
- Offers little or not variety of assessments
- Ignores testing accommodations for special-needs students
- Does not document or holds few parent communications (communication may include conferences, phone calls, e-mail, newsletters, Websites)
- Uses vague, technical, or inappropriate language in communication
- Does not participate in or attend IEP meetings for students with special needs

VI. PROFESSIONALISM

Teachers have been portrayed in a variety of ways in the media, ranging from detrimental images to beloved masters of their craft who inspire students to excel.

Effective teachers can be seen, heard, and sensed. The effective teacher engages in dialogue with students, colleagues, parents, and administrators and consistently demonstrates respect, accessibility, and expertise. Effective teachers are easily identified through their adept use of questioning and instruction given in the classroom. Finally, an observer who knows from all sources that this person truly makes a difference in the classroom can sense the presence of an effective teacher. The true teacher is a master of teaching.

A. Positive Qualities

- Practices honest two-way communication between teacher and administrators
- Communicates with families of students
- Maintains accurate records
- Reflects on teaching, personally and with peers
- Attends grade-level meetings; is a team player
- Attends and participates in faculty and other school committee meetings
- Focuses on students
- Performs assigned duties
- Implements school and school district goals and policies
- Acts “globally” around the school for the benefit of the whole school
- Volunteers to assist others
- Seeks community involvement
- Seeks leadership roles on school committees and teams
- Contacts central office personnel for technical support when needed
- Treats colleagues with respect and collegiality
- Works collaboratively with faculty and staff
- Attends professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences, graduate classes, workshops)
- Maintains current teaching certification
- Submits required reports on time and accurately
- Writes constructive, grammatically correct communications
- Writes appropriately for the intended audience
- No testing irregularities found that are within the control of the teacher
- Submits lesson plans and assessment documents on time
- Submits grades on time
- Maintains a calendar of report deadlines
- Keeps an accurate and complete grade book

B. Red Flags of Ineffective Teaching

- Gives negative feedback routinely at meetings

- Displays unwillingness to contribute to the mission and vision of the school
- Refuses to meet with parents and guardians or colleagues outside of contract hours
- Resents or is threatened by other adults visiting the classroom
- Does the minimum required to maintain certification or emergency certification status
- Submits reports late
- Submits grades late
- Writes inaccurate or unclear reports
- Does not update grade book or it is inaccurate