

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Required to answer the following question:

Essay Question: Discuss the effects of poor teaching practices on the students' academic performance and social life in schools.

By

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The Effects of Poor Teaching Practices on  
Students' Academic Performance and  
Social Life in Schools

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### Abstract

This paper explores five published articles that report on results from research conducted on the effects of poor teachers on student achievement. One of these articles had, as its main focus, effects on belief in cooperation and social capital. All authors of the articles agree that poor teachers hinder academic growth. However, not all of them would blatantly state that poor teachers impact upon test scores. Chetty et al (2011), as cited by Stevenson (2011), produced evidence that teachers can cause students to be in higher or lower percentiles, depending on how effective they are. Rivers and Sanders (n.d.) found that one should examine academic growth rates rather than standardised test scores. Algan et al identified two major effects of ineffective teaching on 'social capital'. This paper examines the researchers' findings and one text (Eggen and Kauchak, 2010) to suggest that the effects discussed are caused by teachers rather than specific practices. This paper also examines the effects provided by the researchers and proposes solutions that will mitigate these effects.

The Effects of Poor Teaching Practices on  
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“A very poor teacher has the same effect as a pupil missing [forty] 40 percent of the school year...” (Kristof, 2012). “The report states: ‘The difference between good teachers and poor teachers can amount to two years of student achievement.’” (Stevenson, 2011). As a result, there were proposals, in the United States of America, for merit-based pay as a means to either motivate teachers to improve their practices or motivate them to leave the profession. Kristof and Stevenson examined the impact that ‘poor teachers’ have on student achievement. Effects on social life in school include lack of cooperation and alienation of students; these have been attributed to certain teaching practices. Credit for those effects should be given to the teacher rather than the practices. Before effects are discussed, the use of the term ‘poor teaching practices’ will be discussed in the following section.

**Poor Teaching Practices or Ineffective Teachers?**

No educational researcher explicitly identified what poor or bad teaching practices are. Some were thus quick to state what a good teacher does. For instance, the study that Stevenson based his article on “‘identified five key areas of teacher practice that, if used in most or all lessons, can improve a child's literacy scores [but could also be applied to any discipline] by the equivalent of one school year. [A good teacher] gives students the chance to ask questions, asks students to explain the meaning of texts, tells them in advance how their work would be judged, gives them time to think about their

answers and asks questions that challenge them to better understand a text” (Stevenson, 2011).

There will be no identification of ‘poor teaching practices’ in this paper. Each established practice, or teaching strategy, has its purposes. In teacher-training institutions, nowadays, one will learn about constructivism; students are provided with learning experiences that allow them to construct their own knowledge and develop a deeper understanding. Yet, this does not signal the end of an era of direct instructional strategies. The University of Michigan (n.d.) acknowledged that direct instruction helps students with learning disabilities, and epileptic students, to better understand subject matter.

Another reason for not pinpointing specific ‘poor teaching practices’ is that if one were to identify poor practices such as embarrassing students or continually ranking students, then a teacher who does not carry out those specific practices could then consider him/herself to be good, when they could actually still be ineffective for a variety of other reasons that will be explored in the following two paragraphs.

In this paper, focus will be placed on ineffective teachers – those who do not apply teaching practices that will “maximise student learning” (Eggen and Kauchak, 2010), as the more experienced researchers and writers alluded to. Such good practices, according to Eggen and Kauchak (2010), include creating a community of caring and trust, developing learner responsibility, maximising the time and opportunity for learning, conveying enthusiasm and high expectations to students, being organised, being an effective communicator, providing focus (such as sensory focus to maintain attention) and giving constructive feedback. Good teaching practices also consist of using effective

questioning strategies and having a review and closure so that pupils can link prior knowledge to new knowledge and organise the new knowledge “into a meaningful schema” (Eggen and Kauchak, 2010).

An ineffective teacher not only does not take into account the good teaching strategies outlined in the previous paragraph; ineffective teachers neglect the students’ interests, learning styles and various intelligences. It is hardly likely that all learners in a classroom are the same. They will differ in terms of learning styles; some are auditory learners, so lecturing suits them; some are visual learners so pictures and organisational charts will appeal to them and some are bodily-kinaesthetic learners so involving movement in the lesson will capture their interest. Learners may like different things or ideas: space, fashion, construction and music are some possible interests. Howard Gardiner and his Multiple Intelligences Theory have enlightened us about the various intelligences that learners will be strongest in: musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal and naturalistic, to name a few.

There is no set formula for being an effective teacher but failure to take into account the various factors discussed above can have severe repercussions on the students in a teacher’s care. Ineffective teaching negatively affects students’ academic performance and social life. In the following two sections, these effects will be examined.

### **Impact on Academic Performance**

#### *The Results*

“We do not find a statistically significant relationship between test scores and teaching practices...” (Algan et al, 2011). These researchers thus identified effects on

academic growth, but they shied away from definitively stating that a teacher's ineffectiveness can be evidenced by test scores. "The average years of education are negatively related to vertical teaching. This seems to suggest that even though teaching practices do not affect cognitive skills at a given grade, they might influence the selection of students into upper grades..."(Algan et al, 2011). Ineffective teachers have a long-range impact upon students; affected students' chances of selection into higher grades are hindered, with some writers even claiming that their chances of pursuing tertiary education are significantly reduced. This is corroborated in this statement:

"A teacher's effect on student achievement is measurable at least four years after students have left the tutelage of that teacher. When a student has experienced an ineffective teacher or a series of ineffective teachers, there is little evidence of a compensatory effect provided by experiencing more effective ones in later years" (Rivers and Sanders, n.d.).

Other authors claimed that teachers do impact upon test scores.

Stevenson, for example, cites a "[United States] U.S. study which shows the average eight-year-old, in a class with a high performing teacher for three years, can rise from the 50th percentile to the 90th; a student with a low performing teacher for three years will drop back to the 37th percentile" (Stevenson, 2011). Kristof (2012) also asserted that an effective teacher could substantially raise test scores; an ineffective one could result in lower scores.

### *Examining the Results*

The study to which Kristof referred was conducted by Chetty et al. Chetty et al took precautions so that no one could find much fault with their findings. They insisted in their report that they took into account potential bias that could affect the value-added (VA) approach they used. Taken into consideration were the possibilities

that teachers could be assigned ‘streamed’ classes, teachers could ‘teach to the test’, or even cheat, and parent characteristics. They found “no evidence of bias in VA estimates using previously unobserved parent characteristics and a quasi-experimental research design based on changes in teaching staff” (Chetty et al, 2011). The latter (research design) determined that when a high-VA teacher joined a school, the test scores for that grade increased; when a high-VA teacher left, test scores fell. The fact that teachers were not provided incentives regarding their students’ grades reassured the researchers that there would be no reason for teachers to cheat or to ‘teach to the test’. Chetty et al admitted that the effect that the ‘high-VA’ teachers had on test scores would fade within two to three years’ time. This implies that the students would have had ineffective teachers in subsequent grades. Yet, Chetty et al still asserted that students who had a ‘high-VA’ teacher in a particular grade would pursue tertiary studies. They did admit, however, that “it is quite plausible that aspects of teacher quality not captured by standardised tests have significant long-term impacts” (Chetty et al, 2011).

Rivers and Sanders, like Chetty et al, examined other factors that could affect the results of their study. “The effect of teachers can be separated from ethnic, socioeconomic and parental influences” (Rivers & Sanders, n.d.). They can boast of this since their study involved compiling standardised test scores for ‘approximately six million Tennessee children in a variety of academic fields. “Along with test score information, data [was] collected on a wide range of student variables, including ethnicity” (Rivers & Sanders, n.d.). The longitudinal approach that Rivers and Sanders adopted ensured that each student for the study served as his/her own control, so that his/her academic progress can be assessed without the need to control external influences.

Rivers, Sanders, Algan et al effectively suggested that one would not be able to measure the impact of ineffective teachers by taking test scores ‘at face value’. In Chetty’s case, “a teacher’s value-added is defined as the average test-score gain for his or her students” (Chetty et al, 2011). Such a measurement does not guarantee that all students would have benefitted from this teacher’s practice and would have attained their true potential. Rivers and Sanders apparently considered this. “True equity is defined as each student making appropriate academic growth, then expectations for educators and students can be set in terms of academic growth rates” (Rivers & Sanders, n.d.). Rivers and Sanders suggest that one can determine a teacher’s effectiveness by the ability of the students to maintain or even surpass their determined academic growth rate.

Algan et al believe that cognitive skills – paying attention, storing and recalling information, logic and reasoning, processing stimuli - are not affected by teaching practices at a given grade. This conveys the idea that an ineffective teacher cannot cause an immediate, drastic decline in academic performance. If it is true, then counteracting ineffective teaching should be easy – a claim supported by Chetty et al, who are certain that an effective teacher could yield test score gains within an academic year. However, according to Rivers and Sanders, if students are exposed to ineffective teaching for two years, or more, in a row then having an effective teacher in the later years will have no significant impact.

### **Effects on Social Life in Schools**

#### *The Results*

An ineffective teacher could destroy the social fabric of a class, especially when no cooperation is developed among students. Mistrust and indifference could be

developed among students as a result. This is evident when students are not provided with experiences such as group work or cooperative learning tasks and merely work towards individual goals all the time. Working towards individual goals could result in a refusal to share information among classmates and also a perception of classmates as threats to one's academic well-being. Sometimes, though, one may find groups of students who will share information among themselves, within their cliques. Cliques have limited membership and can add to a sense of alienation felt by other students in the class. On the other hand, only working towards individual goals could result in students having no regard for – or being indifferent about - their classmates' successes or failures. Either way, there is “a negative association between ‘student cooperation’ and the country share of students who never work in groups...Horizontal teaching practices, such as working in groups, seem to promote the formation of social capital, while vertical teaching practices, such as teachers lecturing, seem to discourage it” (Algan et al, 2011).

Besides the inability to cooperate, mistrust and indifference, there is the possibility of students feeling alienated in a class taught by an ineffective teacher. “...feelings of alienation are positively related to ‘Always Takes Notes from the Board’” (Algan et al, 2011). Students who ‘always take notes from the board’ are denied opportunities to interact with their teacher and with their peers. Furthermore, an ineffective teacher might not make any attempt to “create a community of caring and trust” (Eggen and Kauchak, 2010) so that students will thus feel no sense of belonging within that learning environment.

*Examining the Results*

Algan et al focused only on lack of cooperation as stemming from not working in groups. Students could work in groups and still have no idea about functioning effectively or working cooperatively in a team. They need to be explicitly taught how to do this; an ineffective teacher might not be aware of this. This supports the view that it is not merely the practice that can be faulted for unwanted outcomes.

**Conclusion**

It is not so much the practices as it is the teacher who could cause negative effects on student performance and social life in schools, unless one can prove that there are certain teaching practices that all effective teachers do not use at all. No good teacher could say that they can teach different cohorts the same way, using the same practices, even if they are teaching the same grade level for years. Students are different. The goal of teaching is not to apply what may be perceived as ‘best practices’ but to maximise student learning. Eggen and Kauchak’s (2010) criteria for creating productive learning environments have already been considered (page 5). To mitigate, or even eradicate, the negative effects of ineffective teaching, a teacher must also learn to be a responsive teacher. According to Cooper (2006) there are steps that one can take to become a responsive teacher. One should know one’s students very well and be able to identify the most important concepts to teach one’s students. Routines should be implemented in the class. Providing immediate constructive feedback is another important step. Students are there to learn so a teacher must ensure that students provide feedback on what they actually learnt – assuming that they assimilate everything you taught is not advisable. Teachers should be

flexible; using a variety of instructional models and allowing students reasonable choices would develop flexibility. Teachers should use ‘resource people’ or even peers when applicable. Finally, teachers should ensure that their practice is aligned with their beliefs about teaching; in other words, they should reflect.

The steps outlined above are learnt in teacher-training institutions, but workshops could also be conducted if the need to refresh teachers’ memories arises. The Ministry of Education and principals should keep this quotation in mind: “...all children deserve to have highly effective teachers every year, but until something can be done to shrink the variability, no child deserves to experience two very ineffective teachers in a row” (Rivers & Sanders, n.d.).

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