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From the Editor

Due to unforeseen circumstances the second year of the NIE Researcher has Number 1 and 2 combined. The last year has been a significant year in terms of programmes and research at NIE. This short editorial comment will mention just two.

First, there was the formal announcement early this year of the establishment of the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP). The formation of this Centre was mentioned in the initial issue of the NIE Researcher and it will be "up and running" at the start of 2003. It will provide a focus on some of the key areas of Mathematics, Science and Language (English and Mother Tongue) Literacies and, Information and Communication Technology. Basic information on the CRPP is available from the following website, <http://www.nie.edu.sg/html/crpp.htm>, and more information will be added as the Centre undertakes specific projects.

Second, the Master of Education programme was restructured to meet the needs of teachers in the current educational environment. It still consists of coursework plus a dissertation, but the coursework has been oriented to 11 specialisations, including areas such as Art Education, Chinese Language Education, Mathematics Education, and Special Education to name a few. Information on the programme and the specialisations is available at http://www.nie.edu.sg/html/gpr_masterseduc_med.htm.

These are just two of the initiatives undertaken by NIE in the last year.

Essential Characteristics of Effective Teaching

Myint Swe Khine and A. Lourdasamy

This article reports findings from a recent study on the perceptions of trainee teachers regarding the constituents of effective teaching. The aim of this study was to elicit views of the pre-service trainee teachers in Singapore related to personality characteristics and teaching behaviours, which they perceived to be important to effective teaching. The results of this study provide information on the types of personality traits and teaching behaviours that the trainee teachers considered to be important. It is hoped that the information will be helpful for teachers to reflect on their own approaches to teaching, interaction with students and lesson preparation.

Background

There is little argument among educators that teachers' personality factors play a

part in effective teaching. **Getzels** and Jackson (1963) proposed that the best teachers are those who develop ideal personality **traits**. Teachers are recommended to acquire "empathy", "enthusiasm", and "energy". Others have proposed that teacher should have "warmth" and "understanding". **Wubbels** and **Levy** (1993) suggest that teachers' interpersonal behaviour in the classroom is positively related to student achievement. A number of research studies show that there is a significant positive relationship between the teacher interpersonal behaviour and attitude and cognitive outcomes.

According to **Arends** (2001), effective teachers have personal qualities that allow them to develop authentic relationships with their students. He also believed that effective teachers command a repertoire of teaching practices known to stimulate student motivation, to enhance student achievement of basic skills, to develop **higher-level** thinking and to produce self-regulated learners. Also, **Borich** (1996) has noted that there are **some** key teaching behaviours that can contribute to effective teaching. Among those mentioned are clearly presenting information to the class, flexibility and use of variety of techniques in delivering a lesson, and engaging students in the learning process with instructional materials and activities.

Methodology

A **questionnaire** consisting of 15 items on Teaching Behaviour and 15 items on Teacher Personality scales was developed based on existing instruments. The items related to Teaching Behaviour addressed actions in effective teaching such as the teacher organizing instructional materials well and planning the lesson carefully. The items related to Teacher Personality focused on the characteristics in the teacher such as being conscientious, sincere and helpful.

The items were rated on a 5-point scale, 1 for an item that they considered "completely unimportant" and 5 for an item that they considered "extremely important" for effective teaching.

One hundred and **twenty-eight** trainee teachers enrolled in the Postgraduate **Diploma** in Education (PGDE) secondary program at the National Institute of Education, Singapore took part in this study. There were 44 male (34.4%) and 84 female trainees (65.6%). Among the sample, 60 trainee teachers (46.9%) reported that they had had a short-term teaching experience before they join the programme and 68 of them (53.1%) do not have any teaching experience prior to joining the training program. They were majoring in science and humanities subjects for teaching at secondary school level.

Results

Teaching behaviour

The five most important teaching behaviours as perceived by trainee teachers were: Gain respects of *students*,

Instructional materials are *well-organized*, *Sound knowledge of the subject matter*, Plan lesson *carefully and* Use clear *and* precise language. These are behaviours related to interpersonal relationship, planning, **organising** and **delivery** including knowledge of subject matter. The high ranking often given to these **factors** is in line with what has traditionally been acknowledged as the most important factor for teacher effectiveness.

It is interesting that trainee teachers in this study have given the highest priority to *Gaining respect of students* rather than subject matter and pedagogical skills. **Arends** (2001) also considered this a very important determinant for effective teaching, that is effective teachers should **have** personal qualities that allow them to develop authentic human relationship with their students.

Next in importance were **four** behaviours including *Use classroom* time effectively, Encourage *students to participate in class*, Regularly checks students' *learning* progress *and* Provide positive *reinforcement for good work done*. These behaviours relate to aspects of managing student learning like time management, feedback and reinforcement. Of **lesser** importance were **four** behaviours including *Involve all student actively in the lesson*, *Use a variety of teaching methods*, *Regularly review difficult concepts* and *Know the need of each* student. These are behaviours related to pedagogy. At the lowest end of importance were two behaviours *Insist students* to correct *all their learning errors* and *Classroom procedures are* orderly and *business-like*. These two behaviours are also related to pedagogy. All these behaviours are related to the broad principles and strategies of pedagogical knowledge and skills that have a bearing on classroom instruction, learning and monitoring student progress.

Teacher Personality

Of the 15 teacher personality characteristics included in the questionnaire for trainee teachers to rate, teacher sincerity, **fairness and enthusiasm** are considered the most important characteristics of an effective teacher by the trainee teachers. These were **closely** followed by *warm and caring* helpful, *open and friendly*, conscientious, *enjoy* teaching, *understanding and sensitive to students' personal feelings*. These characteristics **closely fit** with the view expressed by **Arends** (2001) that the **teacher's** biggest job is to develop a democratic learning community through authentic relationships with their students. Considered of **lesser importance** were being even-tempered, patient, intelligent, sympathetic and having a good senses of humour.

Teaching behaviour vs. Teacher Personality

Trainee teachers have given greatest importance to five teaching behaviours before any of the teacher personality characteristics namely: Gain respects of *students*; *Instructional materials are well-organized*, *Sound knowledge of the subject*

matter, Plan lesson carefully; and Use clear and precise language. The teacher traits considered most important were being Sincere, *Fair and Friendly**In general the views expressed by trainee teachers in Singapore are in line with the research findings related to effective teaching elsewhere.

Recommendations

The results of the present study suggest that the trainee teachers are well aware of the practices and personality characteristics that promote effective teaching. But knowing them is not enough. They have to be translated into practice in the actual classroom situation. Beginning teachers will have to be guided in this matter. Senior master teachers in the schools can help beginning teachers in this respect. Another approach that might be used would be to encourage beginning teachers to monitor their teaching and get regular feedback from their peers and students on their teaching.

The culture of getting feedback from peers and students needs to be cultivated in schools to improve one's practices and actions in the classroom. The ultimate goal should be to produce reflective teachers who reflect on their practices and take appropriate steps to improve their teaching quality.

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