

Strategies for enhancing achievement for all students



Discussions on education reform have been taking place for many years. It is a subject that is discussed on both national and local platforms, and many concerned educational stakeholders wonder what the correct approach is for increasing student achievement. After reviewing research conducted by numerous educational professionals and understanding the role that school administration, teachers, and instructional strategy play in educational achievement. It is my belief that the correct approach is for schools to focus on being effective, and helping all students to learn.

A topic often discussed by advocates of educational reform, is the performance of young American scholars on the global stage. The use of testing and push for performance in subjects such as math, is a constant discussion. With many other countries scoring higher in STEM and reading areas, many are concerned with the structure of today's curriculum. With a closer look it is clear that American students, while not performing as well as other nations, are not performing extremely poorly either. A study in 2015 found that American fourth and eighth grade students consistently ranked within the top fifteen, out of almost fifty countries, for math and science scores (U. S. Department of Education, n. d.). Interestingly, top performing countries such as Finland, achieve their rankings while also: assigning little homework, giving few tests, having shorter school days, and minimal involvement from local governments, much of which is the opposite of what is done in the U. S (Schools matter, 2012).

Places such as Hong Kong and Shanghai, consistently score high as well. However, in more rural areas of China, academic achievement is almost just as high. It is clear that academic achievement in China is not correlated to <https://assignbuster.com/strategies-for-enhancing-achievement-for-all-students/>

economic status as it often is in the United States (Armario, 2010).

Seventeen percent of the variation in student performance is related to income in the U. S, a much higher variation than in other countries.

Countries that produce the highest achieving students, are also countries with the most equitable education systems (Armario, 2010). Student test scores in America are impacted by various factors, over fifty percent of which are non-school related, such as: parental involvement, health, and food security (Schools matter, 2012). According to research, these non-school factors are three times more likely to negatively impact scores than the school environment (Schools matter, 2012).

The majority of the students within my community are low income, and the prevalence of out-of school factors such as: low parent involvement, food scarcity, health problems, etc. are numerous. Thanks to the efforts of educational leaders in my area, the creation of effective and equitable educational spaces has led to significantly higher academic achievement and opportunities that many students did not have before (LeBlanc, 2019).

Pursuing equity in education is a major part of improving academic achievement. It is clear that the key to reforming our educational system is to create an environment that allows all students to succeed, regardless of economic, racial, or cultural background.

Effective Schools

Creating an effective school environment has been a rallying point for many educators and has been the driving force of the effective school's movement first led by Ronald Edmonds (Lake Forest College, 2010). These educators

believe that schools can be effective for all students and that any student is able to learn and be held to high academic standards, regardless of their background (Lake Forest College, 2010). To achieve this level of effective instruction, schools must exhibit a number of specific characteristics. The school should have a clear and focused school mission that all staff understand and are committed to. It should provide a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning and holds each student to high expectations for success, with all educators believing and demonstrating that any student can master essential skills (Lake Forest College, 2010). An effective school should be led by a principal that is able to effectively communicate with staff, students, and families, and apply effective strategies in the management of instructional programs (Lake Forest College, 2010). Lastly, an effective school provides students adequate time to complete tasks and assignments, regularly measures student progress and achievement, and gives parents or guardians a chance to be involved in the school's efforts (Lake Forest College, 2010).

Educational reform is a constant journey and today the characteristics of effective schools must keep up with new advances in research (Lezotte, 1999). A new generation of effective correlates is able to be used to further develop and challenge school improvement efforts (Lezotte, 1999). These second generation correlates can only be introduced after the initial characteristics have been successfully implemented, and seek to take effectiveness development to the next level (Lezotte, 1999). For instance, instead of just seeking to make the educational environment safe by removing unwanted behaviors, second generation characteristics may focus

on promoting positive social behaviors in the school instead (Lezotte, 1999). Effective school strategies also help to promote an equitable learning environment by providing teachers with the necessary tools to meet the various learning needs of their students (Lezotte, 1999). The goal is to ensure that all are able to learn. It is my belief that these powerful strategies are able to address many of the current deficits in our education system.

Effective Leadership

Creating an effective school must first start with effective leadership. The school board is the governing body of a community's educational system. To be impactful in their role, the school board must: focus on student achievement, appropriately disperse resources such as money and personnel, engage the community and ensure the community's investment yields results, and carefully review and analyze data to ensure that all students are academically achieving (Griffin & Ward, 2006). These characteristics help to set the tone for the community, staff, and students. The superintendent must also exhibit many of these same characteristics, as they work as the liaison between the school board and the staff, students, and families in the schools. Their attention must be focused on having a clear vision for the school district, and helping to implement that vision through instructional leadership to maximize student achievement (Great Schools, 2015). Effective superintendents are not only engaged with the community and school board, but with the staff and faculty of the schools within the district, including the principals. The principal is the instructional leader of their school, and must exhibit several characteristics to be effective in their role. These characteristics include: having a clear and focused goal

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to direct the school and instruction toward, promote collaborative problem solving and communication, collect and analyze data to identify needs within the school, use data to plan for needed changes to instruction, and monitor school improvement efforts (Maryland Department of Education, n. d.). The effective implementation of each role allows all three positions to work together as a cohesive unit. Many aspects of their roles are similar, and when they are all on one accord, they are able to effectively lead the community and teachers through a clear, focused, and research based instructional plan that benefits all students.

Teachers are able to have a large impact on student achievement, as they are the primary facilitator of the student's education. Any behavior, whether or positive or negative, is able to impact their effectiveness in the classroom (Stronge, 2007). Some of the variables that may impact how successful the teacher is, are: the teacher's personality and ability to relate to their students, classroom management and organization, preparation for instruction, their instructional implementation, how they monitor student progress, and their professionalism (Strong, 2007). These characteristics have been shown to correlate to student success. According to data, students with higher achievement in math tend to have teachers who have strong classroom management practices, while students that achieve higher in reading have teachers who often engage them in discussions and ask questions (Kane, Taylor, Tyler & Wooten, 2011).

Effective Instruction

Many of the characteristics that make teachers and educational leaders effective, also correlate to the establishment of effective instructional practices and planning. Teachers and administrators want to create an environment where students are able to learn, develop a deeper understanding, and extend and apply the information that they have learned. Consistent evaluation and assessment of instructional practices, classroom management, and student achievement, are necessary to address any deficits in instructional implementation (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012).

When teachers are developing instructional plans, the goal is to create the optimum environment for the students to learn in. The foundational strategies to achieve this are: identifying learning objectives, providing feedback and reinforcing effort, and promoting cooperative learning (Dean et al., 2012). Having clear and concise objectives explain to students and their families the purpose of each lesson, what key concepts they need to pay attention to, and overall sets the tone for the lesson (Dean et al., 2012). Providing feedback that is timely and criterion detailed, helps to inform students of what areas of their learning they need to improve. Providing recognition of effort is important to keep students motivated and teaches them the connection between their hard work and their ability to achieve (Dean et al., 2012). Cooperative learning helps students further develop their understanding of a concept by allowing them to share and discuss ideas with their peers. This helps the students take ownership of their learning and that of their peers, while promoting deeper thinking and comprehension as students share ideas with each other (Dean et al., 2012). For instance when

teaching high school students how to complete a dihybrid genetic cross, allowing them to collaborate with classmates and review each other's work, helps students exchange ideas and discuss the concept further (Patel, n. d).

Another area of consideration when planning instruction is how to help students build upon their previous knowledge and develop their understanding of the new curriculum. This can be done through a series of strategies such as: providing cues, asking questions, summarizing and note taking, and assigning practice (Dean et al., 2012). In terms of teaching the dihybrid genetic cross, having the students starting with summarizing what they already know about genetics, heredity and the monohybrid cross; and then providing ample practice problems, helps student establish a procedural knowledge for the task (Patel, n. d). The last phase of instructional planning is to help students move from just understanding newly introduced knowledge, to assisting students in extending and applying the knowledge in variety of new situations (Dean et al., 2012). Some strategies to help promote this is to have students identify differences and similarities between various concepts, and create and test various hypotheses (Dean et al., 2012). By reviewing prior knowledge about genetics and heredity, the students are able to extend and apply what they've been previously taught to the newer concept of dihybrid genetic crosses.

When put together: assessments, research based instructional planning, and effective leadership become a comprehensive strategy to improve equity and effectiveness within any learning environment. Schools work with students from a diverse set of backgrounds and by establishing these processes as norms, educational leaders can prepare all students for <https://assignbuster.com/strategies-for-enhancing-achievement-for-all-students/>

academic achievement (Dean et al., 2012). These processes establish a positive learning environment that promotes student growth, effort, responsibility, and self-efficacy, no matter their background (Dean et al., 2012).

Conclusion

While previously, my thoughts on equity had more to do with initiatives to combat out-of school factors. I have now learned that achieving equity through instructional practices and leadership has a powerful impact on a student's academic achievement. As discussions on education reform continue, research has clearly established a series of strategies that, if used, can be greatly impactful. Creating an environment where all students can learn and achieve the same level of basic skill mastery is as simple as deciding to do it. In truth, the best way to increase the competitiveness of the American educational system on the global stage, is to increase the equity and efficacy of our schools.

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