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Redefining a Highly Qualified Teacher

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Abstract

This research paper reviews the qualifications of a “Highly Qualified Teacher” as described by the No Child Left Behind Act that was published in 2001. Further research was done to determine if these qualifications were sufficient enough to qualify a teacher as “highly qualified”. A number of scholarly reviewed articles and journals were analyzed to dictate augmented qualities that should be premeditated when considering an applicant as highly qualified. Aside from additional experience and content knowledge, researchers suggest teachers should have qualities that improve their relationships with their students and their staff. Teachers' content knowledge does not necessarily mean they are efficient as educators. Students can be very complex and learning to adapt to different learning styles is also a learning process for teachers. The findings of this research paper expand on other factors such as being able to take advice and cultivate strategies to sustain when creating a classroom culture. The “extra” effort teachers make is what defines them as “highly qualified teachers”.

Definitions & Acronyms

- NCLB - No Child Left Behind (document later defined)
- NAEYC - The National Association for the Education of Young Children
- CAEP - Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
- NBPTS - The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- NAECTE - National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators

Background and Introduction

Teaching is often a profession that is uncredited. Teachers play a unique position in society as they are the ones interacting on a daily basis with future generations who will be active members of society. Teachers are influencers. They're educators. They implement their thoughts and ideas on a new set of 30+ individuals, developing minds every 10 months out of the year. They play a key role in raising citizens of society. Having such a significant role as an educator, it is important that teachers enter their role fully prepared and highly qualified.

When conducting my research, I aim to focus on the quality of teachers. My primary research question is, "Are the current teacher qualifications, a bachelor's degree, passing the CBEST, and attending a teacher prep-program sufficient enough to consider an educator as highly qualified?" Becoming a teacher can simply be done over a series of basic skills and knowledge tests, but is that all it should take? Is a willingness to form teacher-student relationships important? Is a willingness to build a safe classroom culture that's inclusive to

diverse students an essential factor of becoming an educator? There's more to being an educator. How do these qualities contribute to being an effective teacher? By conducting this research project, I hope to influence teachers, students, and principals alike. I hope to influence teachers to want and be more for their students. I want students to understand their worth as students. I want principals to be mindful of their staff and be aware of the type of school-wide environment they're implementing in their community. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was implemented and influenced standards in school nationwide.

This document was set into place for the purpose of improving the academic field. Public and private schools were addressed along with the quality of teachers. The document also addressed the education of minority groups, funding for schools, and improving academic achievement for the disadvantaged. This paper will narrow in on the quality of teachers and their preparation to become a teacher. According to Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act, the increase of student achievement would be positively affected by the improvement of, "teacher and principal quality and increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom" (U.S Department of Education). In response to this statement, this paper will address what it means to be a "highly qualified teacher" by questioning the credentials that certify teachers and the attributes that take them beyond their certification.

A "highly qualified teacher" characterized by the NCLB act must, "be certified by the state, have at least a bachelor's degree, and pass basic skills and subject area tests" (Selwyn, 2007). As explained by Selwyn in his journal, these "qualifications" are simply based on content knowledge. One cannot be accepted as an educator into the system without passing basic skills tests. However, there is no statistical proof of the effectiveness of teachers who take a basic skills test compared to a, "moral, ethical, and practical imperative" (Selwyn, 2007) research method to

determine the qualifications of a teacher. These research methods would analyze a teacher's ability to approach their students as human beings, allowing students to feel valued. These methods would work on teacher improvement and focus on how charismatic teachers are willing to be to influence their students. Although there are tests set in place to qualify teachers' basic knowledge and skills, there are no tests that can possibly test the effectiveness of a "good" teacher.

Literature Review

Conducting my literature review, common themes that rose were the amount of experience a teacher has going into the field, the faults and limitations expressed in the original definition of the NCLB, and factors suggested that should truly qualify a teacher as highly qualified. The inadequacy of the qualifications listed by the NCLB is greatly showcased by Nicholas M. Michelli who wrote a journal titled, "Preparing highly qualified teachers: A contested concept". Nicholas M. Michelli challenged the concept of a Highly Qualified Teacher and its significance. He mentions how "good teaching vs. successful teaching vs. quality teaching is far more complex than the definitions included in No Child Left Behind" (Michelli, p. 67, 2004) which disregards factors of "good", "quality", "successful" teaching. Michelli, unlike other articles proposed in this research paper, states the ideal purpose of public education. That being, to allow knowledge to be accessible, cultivate critical thinking, and prepare students to be "critical participants in our social and political democracy" (Michelli, p. 67, 2004). He further criticizes the basic qualifications as being insufficient as they don't necessarily mean the teacher, knows "how to teach the discipline so as to allow students to make good judgments in

the context of the discipline, or to solve problems through critical thinking” (Michelli, p. 67, 2004). He then refers to pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as being factors that teachers should possess, similar to Darling-Hammond’s research. He concluded that successful teaching was a result of those who had the purposes of public education in their best interests. To find the impact of these results would have to initiate further research in a longitude study of teachers with a background of varied experience.

As written by the Association for Childhood Education International (2005), the No Child Left Behind Act highlights what teachers know, not necessarily what they can do in a classroom. Resources are also limited for schools to hire applicants who even meet the bare minimum requirements of the NCLB of passing state tests, along with the lack of financial support, standards are very easily dropped when considering a “highly qualified teacher”. Other issues stated in the article were methods of recruitment and the ability to retain their applicants. Determining qualifications should also revolve around what makes a teacher effective. Qualities teachers should sustain beyond following state standards and curriculum are their attentiveness towards their students’ needs (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). It’s important to clarify the best methods of teaching and how to deliver lessons to assure all students are understanding and overcoming any and all obstacles regarding their struggles in their education. Improving student achievement may be targeted by first improving teacher quality (Emerick, Hirsch, & Berry, 2004). By implementing more inclusive strategies for students’ advancement, a supportive environment is created for the diversity in student development.

In, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Contemporary Early Childhood Education* (2016), “highly qualified teachers” are interpreted from multiple perspectives including professional

standards, state standards, and academic degrees. Professional organizations provided standards for programs to prepare teachers. Though depending on the program, the majority of qualifications overlap or are similar to other programs.

“The NAEYC standards are used by the CAEP to accredit initial and advanced early childhood teacher education programs. These standards focus on the competencies students develop in the areas of promoting child development and learning; building family and community relationships; observing, documenting, and assessment children; using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families; using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum; and becoming a professional” (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016).

The NBPTS grants certification to teachers with three years experience and a teaching license from the state in which they teach as being “highly qualified”. These standards also go hand-in-hand with those of the NAEYC. The NAECTE identifies a highly qualified teacher as having “specialized training” with infants to children eight years of age (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016). Teachers with this experience have the capability to meet the social and emotional needs of children during this developmental period and can understand that their behavioral and cognitive development is different from children who are of older age. Implementing these standards into the NCLB would higher standards for all public schools as they describe moral, ethical, and practical qualities a highly qualified teacher should maintain.

Similar responses came from a series of interviews with teachers and administrators by SECTQ. Their responses emphasized the difference of their definition of a highly qualified teacher and the federal definition, that being “additional emphasis on skills such as

understanding the developmental stages of student learning, using multiple types of student assessment data, and revising instruction on a daily basis” (Emerick, Hirsch, & Berry, 2004). These skills could be implemented, taught, and learned into teacher preparation programs for the Liberal Studies department, allowing students-teacher learners to gain additional background knowledge on child development and student assessment. The article further questions if “highly qualified” signifies “high-quality”. Qualifications differ per state, however, many “settle” for the basic federal qualifications finding ways to loophole their standards.

As far as state standards go for considering teachers as “highly qualified”, teachers must have the essential degree, a teaching license for the state in which they work in, state certification, a bachelor's degree to meet the requirements of the NCLB act, and an understanding in the subject area they teach (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016).

“Highly qualified teachers are able to skillfully combine explicit instruction with warm interactions that lead to nurturing, trusting relationships with individuals. These teachers provide responsive feedback, verbal engagement, and cognitively stimulating experiences intentionally designed to promote children's learning within an environment that is neither too regimented nor too unstructured.”

Teachers with more experience who maintain these traits tend to have more “significant learning and developmental outcomes for children” (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016). Their experiences and interactions with their students carry a positive influence on their progress. Through field experiences, teachers can learn to strategize their own teaching style and techniques by observing and interacting with students and professionals.

In a journal entry written by Francisca E. Gonzalez, she goes in-depth of her meaning of “trenzas” as digging beyond the surface and excavating “lived experiences of multiple identities and realities, histories, contestations, and ambiguities in the shaping of values, practices, and institutions; experienced through family-community membership and class and collective interactions in a changing political economy” (p.645, 2015). Through her interpretation, she highlights the values of ensuring students are given the opportunity to discover their identity by digging up their roots. Making this connection and building this relationship with students is what adds value to the quality of a teacher. By creating an inclusive environment, the classroom culture becomes inclusive and fulfilling towards diverse groups of different backgrounds. Implementing this student-teacher relationship builds a class culture and expands into the community. These factors should also be incorporated into the NCLB definition to raise the standards of a Highly Qualified Teacher.

Selwyn mentions work done by Banks & Cohran-Smith that applied to a teachers’ knowledge and skills that should be retained in order to work with a diverse group of students. This list includes, “a teacher’s ability to appreciate and understand the cultures, communities, and experiences of their students; to work with them through various modalities, building on strengths and prior learning; and to support them in dealing with the ‘boundary crossings’ that many students have to negotiate between home and school” (Selwyn, 2007). These skills are not prioritized when it comes to considering an educator as “highly qualified” and implementing that educator in a classroom full of developing students. Even if some teachers have these attributes, they have no chance of leading a classroom of their own without passing the tests, causing limitations on diversity amongst teachers.

Due to NCLB standards, test scores are highly prioritized. The aim of the game is to assure all students are passing these standardized tests to pass to the next grade level. The pressure of assuring these students pass is imposed on teachers. This then, also imposes on the school's decision to allow student-teachers into their classrooms as they fear an inexperienced teacher may affect their students' test scores (Selwyn, 2007). With school's prioritizing test scores, they're forgetting the true importance of an education inside the walls of their schools and the actual "learning" being done rather than the "remembering" for a short period of time. The implication of stress on these teachers then forces them to lose their passion and forget the reasons why they entered the field.

Some teachers enter the field on emergency permits, having very limited to nearly no experience with "children, curriculum, and schools". Others retain their qualifications for the knowledge aspect of "what" to teach but maybe lack in "how" to teach to students who range in their academic development or who may have learning difficulties (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). The authors provide suggestions for teacher improvement such as having a veteran mentor available on a daily basis. Allowing teacher-learners to implement what they've learned and fine-tuned their strategies allows teachers to gradually become experts. Teachers can improve their role in a classroom by learning to focus on their students as learners and adapting to their learning dynamics (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Teachers who analyze their students and their learning is important to be able to distinguish what and where students struggle.

Results

In response to the primary question, “Are the current teacher qualifications, a bachelor's degree, passing the CBEST, and attending a teacher prep-program sufficient enough to consider an educator as highly qualified?” findings from this research paper resulted in numerous responses of the insufficiencies of the given definition of a “Highly Qualified Teacher” provided by the No Child Left Behind Act. All resources cited in this research paper stated that individuals going into the field of teaching should have more hands-on experience from a veteran mentor. That being, more than 2-3 service-learning classes that only required 20-30 hours per semester. These classes did not provide a sufficient amount of time for students to gain hands-on experience as an educator for their classrooms. They served as an “aid” and did not receive the opportunity to conduct a lesson plan or evaluate students. Aside from more hands-on experience, factors such as pedagogy, child development, classroom culture, social justice, and the ability to shape the curriculum around students’ needs are essential qualifications that produce successful student achievement. While these standards may have been taught during my four-year experience at CSUMB, I feel I lack the ability to reflect or implement what I learned from these courses. While I may have gained some insight about child development or social justice during the four months [a semester] of taking the course, I was unable to retain and implement the information I was taught as I never received the opportunity to. As well as the short amount of time that the concepts are covered, I feel I would have benefitted with more time or more classes diving into the depth of the content.

My secondary questions, “Is a willingness to form teacher-student relationships important?” and “Is a willingness to build a safe classroom culture that’s inclusive to diverse

students an essential factor of becoming an educator?” should go without saying, however, sources such as, “*The SAGE Encyclopedia of Contemporary Early Childhood Education* (2016)”, (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2016), and the journal written by Francisca E. Gonzalez all state the importance of building student and community relationships. Building these relationships shows compassion and sensitivity to the future of these students and encourages them to further their education, knowing someone cares about their education. Francisca E. Gonzalez also references the importance of classroom culture and how it can be the space where students discover and build upon their identity. These are skills that were absent in my education as a graduate of CSUMB. We may have been involved with the community by performing our service-learning at public or charter schools in our community, but having limited authority, we were unable to leave an impact with these students and their community.

Methods and Procedures

In order to answer the questions posed in the background section of this paper, a survey was presumed to be given to around 10 k-12 teachers in the Salinas School District. Three to five principals were also of interest in conducting responses to determine their interview process for teachers they choose to hire for their classrooms. The participants remain anonymous as they provide feedback on their own experience from the start of their teaching career to the present day along with how many years of experience they've endured. The survey was meant to serve as a reflection of how teachers felt they may have or may have not been properly trained or experienced upon teaching a classroom of their own. The participants would be questioned on

their personal definition of what a “highly qualified teacher” means, if they would consider themselves to fit those standards, what they wish they knew or had more experience in before gaining full control of their own classroom, how their classrooms are different from others, and advice for future educators. The research portion of the methodology was conducted through CSUMB’s search engines. The CSUMB library provided primary and secondary sources through the “Articles & Databases” link which led me to EBSCO and ERIC search engines. Google Scholar also provided scholarly articles and journals.

Problems & Limitations

Limitations included the lack of ability to physically conduct this survey. Due to the pandemic that occurred in late March, my interaction with teachers in the Salinas School District was affected. I was unable to make contact or connect with teachers willing to participate as they had to reroute lessons of their own. This then affected any feedback I could have potentially received to reflect on or reconstruct a definition of my own of what it means to be considered a “Highly Qualified Teacher”.

Recommendation

After reviewing the research conducted, it is in students’ and teachers' best interest for NCLB to have revisions of their definition of a highly qualified teacher. State standards reach as far as federal standards which are at a base level for educators. More factors should be considered when considering an individual as an educator. This individual would be responsible

for educating the youth for generations to come, and therefore should not be “highly qualified” to do so.

A revision of qualifications to be considered a highly qualified teacher would be:

- Clarify the best methods of teaching and how to deliver lessons to assure all students are understanding and overcoming any and all obstacles regarding their struggles in their education.
- Implementing more inclusive strategies for students’ advancement,
- Create a supportive environment for the diversity in student development
- Certification to teachers with three years of experience
- Teacher Preparation Programs that “promote child development and learning; building a family and community relationships; observing, documenting, and assessing children; using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families; using content knowledge to build a meaningful curriculum; becoming a professional”.
- Ability to “skillfully combine explicit instruction with warm interactions that lead to nurturing, trusting relationships with individuals.
- Provide responsive feedback, verbal engagement, and cognitively stimulating experiences intentionally designed to promote children's learning within an environment that is neither too regimented nor too unstructured.”
- Create a student-teacher relationship in efforts of building a class culture

Annotated Bibliography

Association for Childhood Education International. (2005). Unfulfilled Promise Ensuring High-Quality Teachers for Our Nations Students. No Child Left Behind: A Status Report from Southeastern Schools. Place of publication not identified.

This study focuses on highly qualified teachers and how highly qualified doesn't necessarily mean high quality. It narrows in on the challenges of having experienced workers in the field and what it may cost to keep them employed. "Highly qualified" teachers are hard to find and hard to keep compared to competing schools such as private or charter schools. School districts also need more support aside from the NCLB, such as support from their community.

Couchenour, D., & Chrisman, J. K. (2016). Highly Qualified Early Childhood Teachers. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Contemporary Early Childhood Education. doi: 10.4135/9781483340333.n186

A highly qualified teacher is redefined as having different qualities aside from the usual qualifications described by the NCLB act. These qualities include a teacher's contribution to promoting a child's development, their curiosity, and providing warmth and care for their students.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Youngs, P. (2002). Defining "Highly Qualified Teachers": What Does "Scientifically-Based Research" Actually Tell Us? *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X031009013>

This article highlights variables written in a report that is believed to be useless in teacher preparation such as teacher education and certification along with teacher education programs. Instead, a more viable method of teacher preparation, the author of the report argues, would be ACPs, Alternative Certification Programs. These programs are said to “academically stronger recruits who are highly effective and have higher rates of teacher retention.” Darling Hammond & Youngs perform further research to argue these propositions made by the Secretary of Education.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Baratz-Snowden, J. (2007). A Good Teacher in Every Classroom:

Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve. *Educational Horizons*, 85(2), 111-132. Retrieved March 11, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/42926597

This article elaborates on the lack of knowledge beginning teachers tend to have upon their first years of teaching. Having gone down a traditional route of education, earning a bachelor’s degree, tends to be less cogent in connecting theory and practices. The authors mention programs that “teach teachers to do more than simply implement particular techniques; they help teachers learn to think pedagogically, reason through dilemmas, investigate problems, and analyze student learning to develop appropriate curriculum for a diverse group of learners”.

Emerick, S., Hirsch, E., & Berry, B. (2004, November). Does Highly Qualified Mean

High-Quality? Retrieved from

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/nov04/num39/toc.aspx>

This article reviews and compares the federal and state qualifications of a highly qualified teacher. They conduct research through a series of interviews with teachers and

administrators. The pros and cons of the NCLB act are also discussed while analyzing the roles of the federal government, state government, and local school districts in educating children.

Francisca E. Gonzalez (2001) *Haciendo que hacer - cultivating a Mestiza worldview and academic achievement: Braiding cultural knowledge into educational research, policy, practice*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14:5, 641-656, DOI: 10.1080/09518390110059847

Gonzalez conducts research on the methodology of “braiding” interdisciplinary practices and incorporating a sense of class culture. She highlights social justice issues, human rights, identity formation, and education equity. She also encourages her students to be “pensadoras”. This means allowing them to question their education to give value to their learning and knowledge.

Harris, D. N., & Sass, T. R. (2011). *Teacher training, teacher quality, and student achievement. Journal of Public Economics*, 95(7-8), 798–812. doi: 10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.009

Douglas and Sass approach their study by analyzing three methodological challenges. The first, being the difficulty in isolating productivity when a student’s ability, peers, and the school’s characteristics affect measured outcomes. Second, is the evaluation of education and training of teacher productivity. “Unobserved teacher characteristics, such as motivation or intelligence, may affect the amount and types of education and training they choose to obtain as well as subsequent performance of teachers in the classroom” (Harris & Sass, 2011). Third, is the difficulty of obtaining data relevant to the quality of training teachers received and how it has affected student achievement. Using these factors, the authors pursue their study by analyzing the effects of pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Michelli, N. M. (2004). Preparing highly qualified teachers: A contested concept. *Highly qualified teachers*. Amherst, MA: National Evaluation Systems.

This journal challenged the concept and significance of a highly qualified teacher by defining what a public education signifies. He highlights the purpose of public education and how it is supposed to serve children of society. He then reflects how the definition of a highly qualified teacher given by the NCLB fails to comply with the purpose of public education as it simply brushes over factors of eligibility. He states how insufficient the definition is.

Selwyn, D. (2007). Highly Quantified Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(2), 124–137.

doi: 10.1177/0022487106297842

The impact of the No Child Left Behind Act is discussed in this article regarding how it has affected teachers and their classrooms. It also discusses teacher qualifications and applicants who can be admitted into teacher preparation programs, the experience they have going into these programs, and the experience they have as teachers in classrooms. After discussing these qualifications and teacher qualities, the impact of testing forced upon teachers by the NCLB act is highlighted.