Chapter 3

A Framework of Total Teacher Effectiveness

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Teacher effectiveness is often a major issue in current movements of education reform and school improvement. No matter which wave of reform we are riding at, it is generally agreed that teacher is the key element for the success of school education (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Cheng & Townsend, 2000; Cooper & Conley, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Education Commission, 1992; Education & Manpower Bureau, 2000). Traditional studies on teacher effectiveness focus largely on the performance of individual teachers in the classroom. This narrow conception of teacher effectiveness has its limitations and can no longer meet the needs of changing school environments particularly when parents and the public are demanding high quality school education.

In the past two decades, in order to improve the performance of teachers, policy-makers, teacher training institutions, and schools had designed and implemented a great number of innovations in teaching techniques, methodologies and supervision. In Hong Kong, although huge amount of resources had been invested into educational reforms initiated by a number of educational policies in the past decade (Education Commission, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990), the performance of students as a whole was declining at a significant rate. The policy-makers and the public began to be aware of the importance of teacher performance to students' educational outcomes and try to make policy efforts for improving teacher quality and effectiveness (Education Commission, 1992; Education & Manpower Bureau, 2000). Inevitably, there is an urgent need to understand the complex nature of teacher effectiveness and develop new strategies to improve it if we want to achieve better student learning outcomes. Therefore, this chapter aims at establishing a framework for understanding the nature and development of teacher effectiveness. This chapter will first review and identify the strategies and their
limitations for improving teacher effectiveness that are based on traditional conception. Then, it will develop a framework of total teacher effectiveness including multi-levels and multi-domains to understand the complex nature of teacher effectiveness in school organization. It is hoped that this framework can bring a holistic approach to studying and improving of teacher effectiveness.

TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

In these decades, the topic on teacher effectiveness continues to attract the attention of researchers, educators, and professional organizations. However, Ornstein (1991) criticizes that the literature on teaching effectiveness or teacher effectiveness is a morass of ill-defined and changing concept. To different people, the definition of teacher effectiveness could be very different. Their approaches to presenting this concept are also very different. Some researchers focus on teacher personalities, traits, behaviors, attitudes, values, abilities, competencies, and many other personal characteristics. Some other researchers are more concerned with the teaching process (including such factors as teaching styles, teacher-student interactions, classroom climate, etc.) or the teaching outcomes (including such factors as students’ academic achievements, personal developments, learning experiences, etc.). Despite thousands of studies conducted in the last 50 years, it is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at generally accepted conclusions. Few powerful generalizations concerning teacher effectiveness have been established (Borich, 1986; Ornstein, 1986). In different periods of the past decades, the studies might emphasize different aspects of teacher effectiveness (Cheng, 1995a; Cruickshank, 1990; Ryan, 1986). Some scholars had given their criticisms on the underlying philosophy, methodologies, and findings in these studies of teacher effectiveness. They suggested that the existing perspectives of teacher effectiveness, such as the “teacher trait” perspective, the “teacher behavior” perspective, and the “process-product of teaching” perspective, could not successfully explain or analyze the complexity of teacher effectiveness (Cheng, 1995a; Needels & Gage, 1991; Ryan, 1986).

As suggested by Anderson (1991), effective teachers are those who achieve the goals they set for themselves or the goals have been set for them by others, such as school principles, education administrators, and parents. According to Ornstein (1991), effective teachers must have a body of knowledge essential
for teaching, and know how to apply it. By integrating these two conceptions, effective teachers may be assumed as those who possess the relevant competence (including necessary professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and use the competence appropriately to achieve their set goals. From this line of thinking, the understanding of teacher effectiveness must be based on the linkages between teacher competence, teacher performance, and the setting of goals or expected educational outcomes.

Medley's (1982) structure of teacher effectiveness is a comprehensive framework that can integrate the "teacher trait" perspective, the "teacher behavior" perspective, and the "process-product of teaching" perspective to explain the relationship among teacher competence, teacher performance, student learning experience, and educational outcomes. He explained:

The term "teacher effectiveness" will be used to refer to the results a teacher gets or to the amount of progress the pupils make toward some specified goals of education. One implication of this definition is that teacher effectiveness must be defined, and can only be assessed, in terms of behaviors of pupils, not behaviors of teachers. For this reason, and because the amount that pupils learn is strongly affected by factors not under the teacher's control, teacher effectiveness will be regarded not as a stable characteristic of the teacher as an individual but as a product of the interaction between certain teacher characteristics and other factors that vary according to the situation in which the teacher works. (pp. 1894-1895)

According to this conception, Medley (1982) proposed that the structure of teacher effectiveness should include nine important components: pre-existing teacher characteristics (i.e., the knowledge, abilities, and beliefs that a teacher possesses on entering into teacher training program); teacher competence (i.e., the set of knowledge, abilities, and beliefs that a teacher possesses and brings to the actual teaching environment on completion of teacher training program); teacher performance (i.e., the behavior of a teacher at teaching that may change differently when the teaching environment is changed); student learning experience (i.e., the experience from interactions between teacher and the students in the process of teaching and learning); student behavior or learning outcomes (i.e., the progress of students make toward a defined educational goal); teacher training (for building up teacher competence); external teaching context (including school organizational structure, management, culture, teaching facilities, resources, curriculum, school goal and mission, etc.); internal teaching context (including class size and
composition, pupil abilities, classroom climate, teacher-pupil relationship, etc.; and individual student characteristics (i.e., individual student’s previous learning experience, physical and intellectual ability, learning styles, and other personal characteristics).

Cheng (1986, 1995a) further developed Medley’s (1982) structure by inclusion of two more components, namely, teacher evaluation and professional development. The structure proposed by Medley and Cheng indicates the procedural inter-relationships among the components of teacher effectiveness: (1) student learning outcomes are the product of the interaction between students learning experience and individual characteristics; (2) student learning experience is affected by both teacher performance and internal teaching context; (3) teacher performance is determined by the interaction between teacher competence and external teaching context; (4) teaching training and pre-existing teacher characteristics can contribute to teacher competence; (5) teacher evaluation activities that are based on the information from teacher performance, student learning experience, and learning outcomes can facilitate the development of teacher competence; and (6) professional development activities that are supported by the characteristics of external and internal teaching contexts, teacher performance, and students’ individual characteristics, learning experience, and outcomes can contribute to the development of teacher competence and teacher education. All the components of the structure can directly or indirectly relate to teacher effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS

Traditionally, teaching process is often assumed to happen only at the individual level. That is, individual teachers perform teaching and individual students receive teacher’s instruction and learn. This simplistic approach is reflected in most studies on teacher effectiveness, which examine teacher effectiveness mainly at the individual level. However, the narrow conception of teacher effectiveness is changing due to the induction of broader concepts of the educational process (Cheng, 1993, 1996b). First, school education is usually planned and implemented at the program level or the whole school level. Currently, school management reforms and effective school movements emphasize whole school approach to improvement of school performance and student learning outcomes (Caldwell, 1994; Cheng, 1995b, 1996a). It assumes that students are taught not only by individual teachers but also by groups of
teachers or by the whole school’s teachers (Tsui, 1998). In order to maximize school effectiveness, more attention should be given to the overall teacher effectiveness at the group level and school level. Second, based on our previous discussion, successful teacher effectiveness program relies on staff development program which brings about not only individual teacher development but also group development and school development (Cheng & Tam, 1994). Therefore, teacher effectiveness should not be studied solely at the individual level but also at the group, program and school levels. Obviously, the strategies based on the traditional conception at the individual level have limitations and is not sufficient to enhance teacher effectiveness at the group level and the school level.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF TOTAL TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

Taking the limitations of the traditional concepts into consideration, a new conceptual framework of total teacher effectiveness can be proposed, as follows.

Levels of Teacher Effectiveness

Traditional teacher effectiveness improvement programs focus on individual teacher performance in the classroom. Principals and administrators try to manipulate individual teacher’s competence and performance in an attempt to improve students’ learning outcomes. It is assumed that when individual teacher performance is improved, individual students and then the whole class and finally all students in the school will have corresponding improvement in learning outcomes. In reality, the situation is much more complicated. First, the Coleman study may be used for illustration. The study findings had been interpreted as proof that schools had little effect upon student learning, though it was misinterpreted according to Barr and Dreeben (as cited in Ryan, 1986, p. 9). However, it demonstrates that when teacher, school, and student characteristics were all aggregated to the school level (or class level), the individual teacher effectiveness or contribution would be diminished and deteriorated. Good, Biddle, and Brophy argued: “If teachers make a difference, and if pupils are to be exposed to both good and poor teaching, then it should not be surprising that many schools [classes] are found to be quite similar in their effects on students” (as cited in Ryan, 1986, p. 9). Obviously, the improvement of individual teachers does not necessarily promise the overall
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