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IT'S WHAT WE DO – RATHER THAN WHO WE ARE – THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE, SAYS EILEEN FIELD...

TEACHER?

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I'm a School Direct Trainee Teacher working in a large secondary school. I'm loving being in the classroom with students and am doing everything I can to be the best I can. With half term I've got some professional studies work to complete and have to reflect on this question: "Great teachers or great teaching?" What do you think?

A Now that's a question and a half. I'm delighted that your professional studies are getting you into the habit of deep reflection early on. It's a skill that we all need – although finding the time to do it is a tough call. Still, practice makes perfect!

Let me trade you this quote: "The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers." This gem is one I regularly stumble across – a recent look on Google returned over 180,000 uses, since it appeared in the 2007 McKinsey Report, *How the world's best performing education systems come out on top*. It's quoted so often that it has almost acquired the status of a fundamental law in the educational universe!

On reflection, it's a great quote. And yet it doesn't fit comfortably with me.

I was recently in conversation with a senior colleague who leads one of the largest UK Academy chains during which the question was posed "What is the most important factor in learning?" and interestingly, your question "Great teachers or great teaching?" seems to sum up the spectrum of answers.

For me, it's *teaching*, not *teachers*.

As you will now know, we can all have good days and oh so bad days in the classroom. But there is that innate mantra – "I know I can teach better". Teaching changes and develops. Skills improve. Ideas change. Practice alters. It's teaching, not teachers.

This reminds me of something

I've heard Dylan Williams – he of "Inside the Black Box" – talk about, concerning improving teaching quality. If it's *teachers*, you focus on people and in consequence need to remove the weakest and implement a system to replace them with better ones. Of course, performance managing very poor teachers out of the profession is important, and it is important that we recruit the brightest and the best. But this is a very, very slow approach to improving the quality. It took Finland more than 30 years for recruitment practices to re-shape the profession.

If it's *teaching* that matters, though, you get a different viewpoint. It's still important to recruit and train those who can develop as excellent teachers, but you need to work continuously to improve the quality of teaching across schools: every teacher, in every classroom, in every school, everyone concentrating on getting better at teaching.

This involves focusing on what drives really good teaching – committed teachers and high quality delivery, which itself depends on rigorous subject knowledge, knowledge of effective and adaptable pedagogy and a good dose of humour and imagination.

As regular readers will know, I believe that high quality delivery and effective pedagogy can be achieved by all teachers if they are willing to harness the power of technology in the classroom with blended learning techniques to actively assist in teaching and learning. There is now excellent research on what works and what has the most impact, and technology can be used to effectively model and implement these facets. If you haven't read the Visible Learning books by Prof. John Hattie – stop reading this and go read them!

Hattie's findings evidence that feedback is one of the most important factors in effective learning, which is where technology can have

its greatest impact, followed by a student's expectations and the trust built by teachers with their students. Not surprisingly, it demonstrates that positive teacher-student interaction is by far the most significant factor in effective teaching.

EdisonLearning's own teaching effectiveness research has confirmed that teaching makes the difference, and to share this learning more widely we've written the EdisonLearning Quality Framework for Learning and Teaching, which is a research-based descriptive and evaluative tool that covers everything that teachers do, both in and out of their classrooms, to enable great learning.

Linked to the Ofsted Inspection Schedule, as well as the Teachers' Standards, it is organised in logical and progressive detail so that teachers can explore all aspects of teaching and learning through a coaching model, identify their development needs and examine the behaviours they will see when these needs have been met. To this end, it is a tool for systematically developing the quality of teaching and learning.

We believe that effective solutions rest in the profession, and that with the right motivation and guidance, we can all become more intentional and responsive to the most important thing in student learning – good teaching.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Eileen Field is director of achievement, online and virtual learning, at EdisonLearning (edisonlearning.net). She has held a number of senior leadership roles in secondary schools and in 2004 was invited to design a nationwide internet school to serve out-of-school-learners, eventually becoming the head teacher of the only virtual secondary school in the UK. You can contact her directly with any queries at eileen.field@edisonlearning.com

