

Summary

Mapping of seminal reports on good teaching

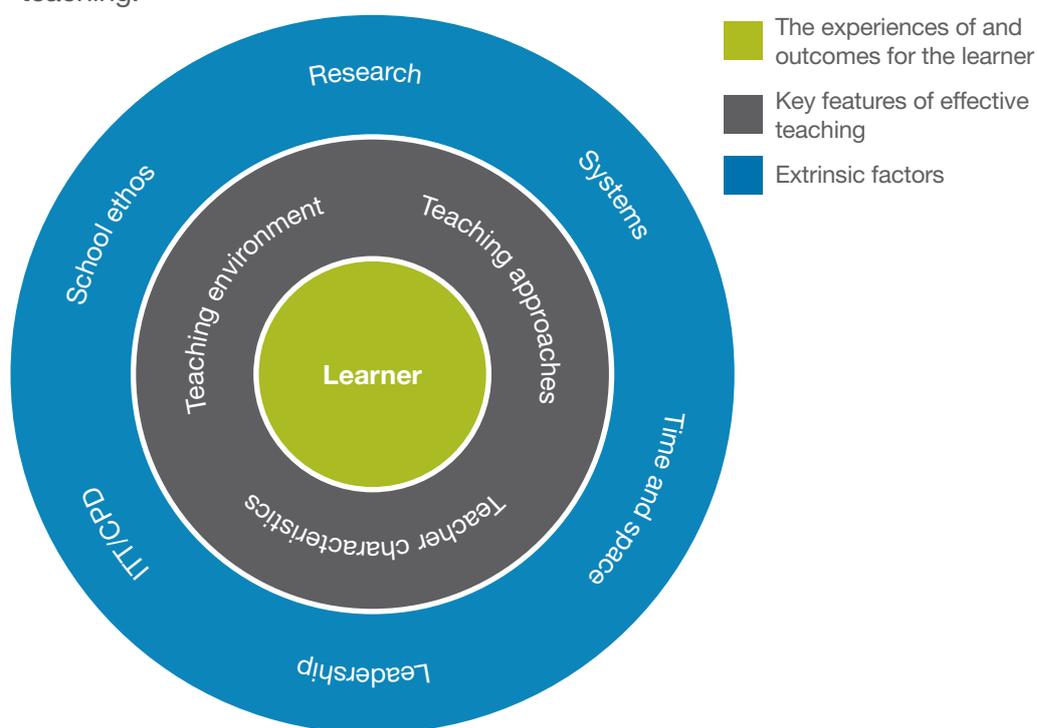


This report presents the findings of a literature review conducted as part of The NFER Research Programme. It forms part of a pair of reviews that collectively consider creating change in schools through workforce development. The focus of this review is to establish the key features of ‘good teaching’. The report explores evidence from 2006 to 2011, through the selection of 25 influential reports considered to be the best available research, to find out what ‘good teaching’ looks like, if there are any contradictions and if there are any gaps in the literature.

In order to assess ‘effective teaching’, it is important to consider what is meant by the term. It is not just about individual teachers’ practices and values but includes issues surrounding curriculum and assessment, as well as the social, cultural and policy aspects of learning.

Key findings

Below is the analytical model showing a map of the conditions for effective teaching.



Key features of effective teaching

The review discusses three main features shown to lead to effective teaching.

Teaching environment

Provision of a positive emotional climate, with clear boundaries and behavioural expectations within a culture of mutual respect, was seen to encourage pupils’ confidence and facilitate their learning. A calm, well-disciplined and orderly classroom environment was seen to be of particular benefit to low-attaining groups.

Improvements in the physical appearance of, and facilities in, classrooms were also noted to have an impact. Bright, attractive and informative displays, displays of pupils’ own work and a clean, tidy and well-organised physical environment were said to result in pupils having more respect for their classrooms and appeared to lead to positive changes in their attitudes and behaviour.

Teaching approaches

A large number of the reports summarised for this review offered teachers advice on particular strategies or approaches that can support them in their teaching:

- interactive approaches and the use of teacher-pupil dialogue
- continuous monitoring of pupil progress (including the use of feedback)
- actively engaging pupils as partners in their own learning
- effective planning and organisation
- building on pupils' prior experience and learning
- personalisation—responding to the needs of each child
- home-school learning and knowledge exchange
- innovative use of new technologies and ICT
- teachers working together and learning through collaborative practice
- making good use of well-trained and supervised teaching assistants
- making creative use of visits and visiting experts.

Teacher characteristics

Key teacher characteristics identified as influential in pupils' learning experiences and outcomes were: good subject knowledge; a good understanding of how to teach the subject; and a strong sense of professional values. Effective teachers were seen to be calm and caring during lessons and displayed sensitivity to pupils' personal and learning needs. They gave praise frequently and for a variety of purposes, and often used humour as a tool for making a topic or subject seem more relevant to pupils' own experiences.

Teachers' self-reflection and a belief in their own capabilities were also seen as important, along with high expectations and the ability to motivate pupils through a variety of teaching approaches such as pupil-led or interactive lessons. Another key factor was the ability to create and develop positive relationships with pupils. This built rapport, facilitated interaction and communication, and nurtured mutual wellbeing, thus leading to more positive behaviour and higher standards.

Extrinsic factors to the classroom

A number of extrinsic factors were identified which interact with the key features of effective teaching outlined above and can positively or negatively impact on the experiences of, and outcomes for, pupils.

School ethos

A positive whole-school ethos – the culture and values of the school and the way in which the people in the school treat each other – was reported to be of paramount importance in securing a successful learning experience for pupils. Implementing particular teaching approaches or making changes to the teaching environment was reportedly easier when supported by a whole-school ethos which enabled those changes to become embedded in the culture of the school.

Institutional leadership

High-quality leadership is seen as a fundamental element of a positive whole-school ethos that is focused on raising the standard of teaching and achieving positive outcomes for pupils, second only to the quality of teaching as the most important determinant of pupils' success.

Research

Although not widespread amongst the sample of teachers, conducting research to develop professional knowledge and skills was considered important for enabling teachers to go beyond simply delivering the curriculum.

Systems and policies

The need for systems and policies that can underpin and facilitate improvements in teaching practice was noted in a number of reports. This includes the development of school-wide policies, as well as policy documents and education laws.

Time and space

In order to enable teachers to innovate and improve their own practice, for example through professional development, self-reflection, better planning, collaborative practice and greater personalisation, they need to be afforded the time and the space to be able to participate.

Professional development

Appropriate and relevant professional development was reported to be one of the key ways of improving teachers' practice, and thus impacting positively on the learning outcomes for pupils. Targeted professional development courses and materials, a collaborative approach, and coaching and mentoring were particularly valued.

Concluding comments

Even such a brief review of recent reports has identified many areas in which there is consistent evidence of what constitutes good teaching, with no contradictions and no gaps in the literature. Several of the features of effective teaching could be transferable to other educational settings and for work with particular groups. For example, personalised approaches, having high expectations, flexibility and positive relationships built on mutual respect and trust, have all been shown to be effective with vulnerable groups, such as those in alternative provision, with learning difficulties, or from particular ethnic minority groups.

Although this review cannot be considered exhaustive, it does highlight a number of key features and extrinsic factors that are seen to impact on pupils' experiences and outcomes. However, while it is important to identify features, strategies and principles that enable 'good teaching', they are not enough, in themselves, to change practice.

As well as being provided with useful strategies, teachers need to understand the principles that underpin their practice so that they can adapt and refine successful strategies to suit the particular needs, context and experience of their school, and its teachers and pupils.

The NFER Research Programme

This Programme was set up in 2011. Funded by NFER, it is developing partnerships with organisations and individuals who share our commitment to solving unanswered challenges young people face in education. The Programme targets key areas of education, highlighting gaps in existing evidence and conducting new research to provide evidence to fill the gaps. Current areas of focus are: *From Education to Employment, Developing the Education Workforce and Innovation in Education.*

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