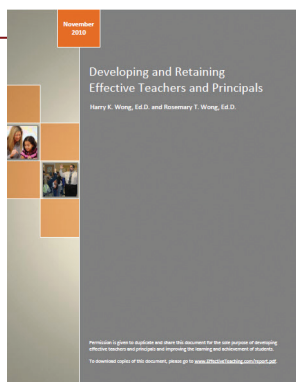


Harry and Rosemary Wong:

Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers and Principals

As schools struggle to raise student achievement while walking a budget tightrope, Dr. Harry Wong and his wife, Rosemary, remind us that the effectiveness of the teacher is the single most important variable in determining student achievement. As the Wongs discuss in this interview, "... effective teaching is identifiable, teachable, and implementable. The more effective the teacher, the greater the student gains. The more effective the principal, the greater the achievement levels at the school." The following is an abridged version of an interview with the Wongs presented by School Leadership Briefing, a professional development audio journal for administrators (www.schoolbriefing.com).



Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers and Principals

Download a copy of the report at:
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Q: How do you define effectiveness as it refers to teacher quality?

Harry Wong: Effectiveness in education is defined by how well students perform. This is no different from how well teams perform, how well companies profit, and how well people in the medical profession provide a service. Very simply, an effective teacher and principal can produce student learning, growth, and achievement. Now, the number one mandate of the Race to the Top legislation is to produce effective teachers and principals. Yet, the irony is that the U. S. government, the philanthropic foundations, and the many commissions and groups and even educators that have jumped on the Race to the Top campaign—few can define the term “effective.” Few can describe the characteristics of an effective teacher, and few even know how to train a teacher to be effective.

Rosemary Wong: Effectiveness can be defined. Teachers and principals who are effective can produce student learning, student growth, and achievement. Learning is the process of acquiring basic knowledge and skills. Growth indicates increased quantity or progress over time, such as acquiring more information and

skills and being able to synthesize and apply the information and skills. Achievement is when a student is able to demonstrate an act of accomplishment or attainment, such as producing a report, writing a poem, performing a weld, singing a song, or even solving a problem.

So, we know that effectiveness can be defined and if you can define it, you can teach it. And if you can teach it, you can implement it. And that's the role of an administrator: to teach, to coach, to be the instructional leader in teaching teachers how to teach and then implementing effective teaching techniques in the school so the next teacher who may come along can be an effective teacher. Now, you leave a legacy when you teach someone how to teach so it can be passed on. You do not leave a legacy by installing another program.

Q: Can you describe the characteristics of an effective teacher?

Harry Wong: Very easily! For over 30 years research has identified the three characteristics of effective teachers. Studies reported by Thomas Good, Jere Brophy, Robert Pianta, Carolyn Evertson, Robert Marzano and so many others, including

ourselves, have resulted in the same conclusion: there are three most important characteristics of effective teachers: (1) They are extremely good CLASSROOM MANAGERS; (2) they know how to teach a lesson for student LEARNING and MASTERY; and (3) they have POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS for student success. You do not need massive funds to develop and retain effective teachers and principals. The number one mandate of the Race to the Top Act is that money is to be spent on improving teacher and principal effectiveness. We contend that a district or school does not need Race to the Top funds to develop effective teachers and principals. For over 25 years, we have consistently underscored a single point: effective teaching is identifiable, teachable, and implementable. The more effective the teacher, the greater the student gains. The more effective the principal, the greater the achievement levels at the school.

Rosemary Wong: A district can use the three characteristics of effective teachers to form the framework for an effective professional development program to teach, to train teachers to be effective. Professional development is the only strategy school districts have to strengthen the effectiveness of their teachers and principals. And professional development is also the only way teachers and principals can learn so that they are able to improve their effectiveness. So, school districts that are serious about training, supporting, and retaining effective teachers have a two to three year comprehensive, coherent, and sustained new teacher induction program that then seamlessly flows into a lifelong professional development program. The schools and school districts that can implement a professional development program to recruit, develop, and retain teachers—they will be the most effective ones and they produce the results we want as educators.

So, simply put, there are two major ways to implement effectiveness. And what is effectiveness, again? It is improving student learning, student growth, and achievement. And so, what are those two major ways? (1) The principal must be an instructional leader and (2) the teachers must work collaboratively.

So, let's talk about the principal. Principals must know instruction. They have to know instruction so well that they can teach, and they can coach teachers how to teach. The second part of that word is "leader." You do not lead programs. You do not lead a change in the school structure. Leaders lead PEOPLE. And leadership is "organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal." So, a leader is a person capable of inspiring and collaborating with others to fulfill that goal.

So, to implement effectiveness, you need: (1) the principal as an instructional leader and then (2) schools where teachers work collaboratively. It has been shown that teachers learn more when they are in sustained teacher networks and study groups than with individual mentors. So, in high performing schools, teachers are more likely to work in a collegial approach to decision making and are willing to share with one another their knowledge and skills to help their students and the students of their colleagues reach higher academic performance.

Q: In your research, is there one major strategy for improving teacher effectiveness? One strategy that you can go to any administrator and say, "All right, you want to improve student achievement? Follow this strategy and you will!"

Harry Wong: Yes, there is only one—a carefully thought out professional

development program that is comprehensive, coherent, and sustained. The professional development program begins with new teacher induction, where new teachers are acculturated to the responsibilities, missions, academic standards, and vision of the district.

Now, you can see this in everyday life where people are trained. Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Southwest Airlines train their employees with a comprehensive, coherent, and sustained program. Why, even local small businesses—real estate offices, dentists, and grocery stores—train their new workers, from the day an employee joins a company or team until that person leaves. Compare this with many schools and school districts where training is nonexistent. In too many schools and school districts, we put teachers in a classroom and hope by dumb luck that they become effective teachers.

Teachers want training; they want to fit in; and they want their students to achieve. For the most part, education has failed to recognize what other industries have recognized almost from the start. Formalized, sustained training matters.

It is better to train a teacher and lose that teacher, than to not train a teacher and keep that teacher. Our children deserve effective teachers—and nothing less! ■

*Harry K. Wong has authored more than 30 publications, including the bestseller *The First Days of School*. He has been a general session speaker at major educational meetings and has given over 3,500 presentations to over a million people. Dr. Wong has been awarded the Horace Mann Outstanding Educator Award, and Instructor magazine named him one of the 20 most admired people in education. Rosemary Wong was chosen as one of California's first mentor teachers and has been awarded the Silicon Valley Distinguished Woman of the Year Award.*