



Extraordinary Teachers: Values and Attributes

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Chair: [Judith Harford](#)

Contribution

Extraordinary Teachers: Values and Attributes

This presentation will focus on primary school student teachers', teacher educators', primary pupils' (5-12 years old) and primary teachers' views of what makes an extraordinary teacher. This forms the first phase of a more extensive inquiry that is designed to explore the values and attributes of those identified as being extraordinary teachers.

This initial study is being carried out in Scotland with a view to creating a methodological design that can be extended to a wider range of international settings. This is particularly important given the current strong global policy emphasis on increasing teacher quality (OECD, 2005; OECD, 2009), resulting in the reform of teaching workforces across the developed world. Resulting policy, however, tends to have a managerial focus, with an emphasis on standards, efficiency and externally driven accountability (Sachs, 2001; Doherty & McMahon, 2007). What is arguably missing from the current policy trajectory across Europe is any fundamental consideration of the more abstract aspects of what it is that makes an extraordinary teacher. It is posited that such teachers are easily identifiable by those who work alongside them and so we sought to take this approach in developing the methodological design for this study. In analysing the data we draw on Goe's (2007) framework derived from synthesis of empirical studies which links teacher quality to pupil outcomes. Goe identifies four categories of teacher quality: teacher qualifications, teacher characteristics, teacher practices and teacher effectiveness, and in analysing the data we sought to identify whether particular categories of quality were deemed to be more prominent in extraordinary teachers.

This presentation addresses the following questions:

1. What do student teachers and University tutors think are the features of an extraordinary teacher?
2. What do teachers and pupils in two local authorities think are the features of an extraordinary teacher?

Method

Groups of student teachers and tutors in one Scottish university were invited to participate in focus group interviews exploring the question: What makes an extraordinary teacher? The focus groups employed one of two approaches: Nominal Group Technique (NGT) or a mapping tool called Decision Explorer. Using these two different approaches allowed us to evaluate the respective strengths of the two methods. The NGT provided a structured approach to the collection of both range of views and depth of views, while Decision Explorer allowed explicit consideration of the relationships between the issues raised. In total, the focus group data reported here is drawn from five groups of six to ten participants.

Ten schools from two demographically different local authorities participated in the second phase of the study which involved pupils, teachers and pupils' parents in nominating teachers they considered to be extraordinary and responding to the question: Why do you think this person is an extraordinary teacher?

These nominations were used to identify participants for the next phase of the study but analysis of the statements themselves is presented here. A thematic analysis was employed across all the data, adopting a grounded approach in order that emerging themes might arise freely.

Expected Outcomes

Early analysis indicates that while participants all acknowledged that they had seen extraordinary teachers, they had difficulty in distinguishing between features of 'good' and 'extraordinary' teachers. Thus, the range of data collected through the NGT process provides a comparison with statements of baseline competence for teachers, e.g. the 'Standard for Full Registration' in Scotland. However, in being required to prioritise the data, NGT participants variously identified the most important characteristics to be those that were deemed to be 'non-observable behaviours', e.g., 'going the extra mile' or 'having an aura'. Data from the Decision Explorer groups indicated a strong reliance on commitment to equity and the fostering of good relationships in contributing to 'extraordinariness'. The extent to which each group focused on issues such as the wider professional context, commitment to professional learning and the political nature of teaching varied, indicating that extraordinariness is perhaps associated most keenly with direct interaction between pupil and teacher (Goe's 'teacher practices' category). Interestingly, despite the growth of value added teacher evaluation approaches elsewhere, (particularly in the US, e.g. Staiger, Douglas & Rockoff, 2010), participants made relatively little mention of extraordinary teachers' impact summative measures of pupil attainment: what Goe refers to as 'teacher effectiveness'.

References

- Doherty, R. & McMahon, M. (2007). Politics, change and compromise: restructuring the work of the Scottish teacher. *Educational Review*, 59(3), 251-265.
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