Evaluating and Improving the Effectiveness of Middle School Educators

In education, the effectiveness of the educators is an important factor, if not the most important factor, surrounding student success. Evaluating the effectiveness of an educator is a difficult task, and an extensively studied topic of many previous researchers. In music education, the effectiveness of the educator seems to take on an even more important role in the student’s future success than just that of a general educator, making it of the utmost importance that proper care is taken to understand and implement the characteristics of effective teaching. In order to implement effective teaching characteristics, they must be identified, understood, and applied to the specific group being taught. There have been many studies conducted on the effectiveness of teachers, but student learning as a dependent variable has not been included.

Research findings suggest that education experts have been able to agree when making global assessments of effective teaching, but often, the research results show a disparity in the identification of the specific attributes that contribute to a teacher’s effectiveness (Madsen, Standley, Byo & Cassidy, 1992). Even with the research disparities, some patterns of agreement and effectiveness have been shown.

Previous research has suggested that effective teachers demonstrate accurate knowledge of the subject matter, effectively pace and manage their classrooms, and teach with enthusiasm (Madsen, K 2003). It has also been suggested that there is a significant relationship between teacher intensity and teacher effectiveness. Madsen defined teacher intensity as ‘sustained control of student/teacher interaction evidenced by efficient, accurate presentation and correction of the subject matter with enthusiastic affect and effective pacing’.
A study by Teachout (1997) found that experienced music teachers rated enthusiasm, maximized student on-task time, and maintenance of student behavior as the three most important skills to successful music teaching. Although it seems counterintuitive, accuracy of the information being taught and the accuracy in the way it was taught (rhythms, timing, etc.) were reported as the least significant factors contributing to a successful teaching experience (Madsen 2003; Mathews, W. K. & Kitsantas, A. 2007).

Interestingly, another study by Mergendoller et al (1981) showed that students perceive classroom management as an attribute necessary for effective teaching. In fact, middle high school students report to be most concerned with classroom management and discipline issues above all other teaching behaviors or characteristics. These reports have been corroborated, as on-task behavior is a measurable characteristic of effective teaching. It has been shown that student learning suffers when off-task behavior exceeds 20% (Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1968), and that teachers who maintain a higher rate of approval within the classroom in turn maintain a higher rate of student attentiveness (Forsythe, 1975; Kuhn, 1975; Madsen 2003).

A study by Young and Shaw (1999) found that when 912 college students were asked to use a 25-item evaluation form to assess one of their college professors. Subject matter knowledge was reported for all professors regardless of how the students viewed their overall effectiveness. This means that overall teaching effectiveness is separate from subject matter knowledge because all teachers in the study with high and low effectiveness ratings were reported to possess subject matter knowledge. This indicates that educators are generally assumed to be knowledgeable in the subject matter they are teaching. The general consensus of the current body of research on teacher effectiveness suggest that teaching episodes are perceived as being more interesting and likeable when a teacher demonstrates
good delivery during a lesson, regardless of whether the content of the lesson is accurate or not (Madsen, 2003).

The effectiveness of middle school music teachers has not been explored as extensively as the effectiveness of college professors, but some research can be found. For example, Madsen (2003) found that middle school students perceive ineffectiveness in the teacher when the students are off-task. Recent studies have verified that effective teacher-delivery skills enhanced student liking and interest levels in lessons, regardless of the quality of their content. In fact, Madsen (2003) found that the delivery of information may have a greater influence on music students’ perceptions of effective teaching than the accuracy of the teacher’s instruction and the social behaviors of the students. These results parallel another study by Weeks (1991), which suggested that both seventh and eleventh grade students value the effective delivery of the teacher more than accuracy of instruction. This strengthens the idea that teachers should strive for maintaining a controlled classroom environment.

Although accuracy of information being taught is not as easily recognized by younger students, the current body of research on teacher effectiveness shows that regardless of age and experience level, musicians can recognize good and poor teaching. Of course, accuracy of information is important, but without understanding how to effectively reach the students with that information, teaching becomes pointless.

This study aims to investigate two things: teacher delivery and its effects on perceived teacher effectiveness, and actual teaching effectiveness in the middle school setting as evaluated through student learning. For this study, teacher effectiveness will be evaluated through classroom observation and student survey data.
The following research questions will be explored and will guide future research:

1. What factors of teaching do middle school students perceive as effective?
2. Are these factors different for their college counterparts?
3. If the accuracy of information being taught is not perceived as important to effective teaching, does this decrease teacher’s incentive to teach accurate information?
4. Does this mean that the quality of middle school music education suffers because teachers are unable to reach their students in an effective manner with accurate information?
5. What aspects of teaching are effective for teaching middle school students?
6. Does this vary by age group?
7. Can these teaching techniques be standardized and taught in order to improve middle school music education, and can it be applied to other grade levels?
References:


