

THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT TEACHING SUCCESS

BY

WALTER S. MONROE

Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois, Urbana

ABSTRACT

The most direct method of determining the factors that contribute to teaching success is to select a group of excellent teachers and a group of poor teachers and then to endeavor to identify the teacher traits and instructional procedures that distinguish the successful teacher from the unsuccessful ones. This method has been employed by Barr who found significant differences for three traits and thirteen instructional procedures. The score cards devised for rating teachers consist of phrases or other expressions that are intended to designate the significant characteristics of classroom instruction. Hence, an analysis of teacher rating scales might be expected to yield a consensus of opinion in regard to the more significant factors of teaching success; but variations in phraseology make this approach of doubtful value. A more direct consensus of opinion relative to teacher traits was secured by Charters and Waples in the Commonwealth Teacher Training Study, completed in 1929. Their final list includes twenty-five items ranked in order of importance with respect to five types of schools.

On the basis of these investigations it appears that professional training, or rather the application of certain principles taught in professional courses, and certain personal qualities are important causes of teaching success. The evidence with respect to academic training and general intelligence probably should be considered negative.

There are also a number of correlation studies which should be considered with respect to the identification of the factors that contribute to teaching success. The correlations between intelligence test scores and measures of teaching success are low, several of them being approximately zero. These findings have been interpreted as meaning that general intelligence makes a very minor or even a negligible contribution to the quality of teaching. This interpretation probably is not justified. It is not unlikely that the low correlations are due largely to poor measures of teaching success. Furthermore, the range of intelligence in these studies is limited to that of college or normal school graduates who become teachers. This selection of the population with reference to intelligence results in "partialling out" a large portion of its influence. Hence the calculated coefficient of correlation is for only the portion of intelligence in excess of the minimum of the group. Since the data are for graduates of teacher training institutions who secured positions as teachers, this minimum approximates the mean of adult intelligence. Consequently, the factor dealt with should be labeled "intelligence in excess of the mean adult level." It is not unreasonable that the contribution of this factor should be relatively small for teaching below the college level. The total contribution of intelligence, both direct and indirect, is undoubtedly much larger. When we consider correlation studies of professional training and academic achievement it is necessary to bear in mind that measures of these factors probably include general intelligence as a large element. When allowance is made for this the correlation studies indicate that professional training makes a relatively large contribution to teaching success. The evidence with reference to academic training indicates that its contribution is somewhat less than that of professional training. The investigations examined relate

to teachers below the college level and for such teachers a possible explanation is that the subjects which a student pursues during his course of training are not very closely related to those that he teaches. Hence, it is not unreasonable that knowledge of subject matter resulting from advanced study in a teaching field makes a minor contribution to teaching success in the elementary school or even in the high school.