



Seven Qualities of Highly Effective Teachers

By Linc. Fisch

Reprinted with permission as originally published in The Journal of Staff and Program, & Organizational Development.

By themselves, these seven qualities may not be sufficient conditions for teaching excellence, but they may be pretty close to essential.

The number seven seems to have magical properties that attract people to it.

The universe was created in seven days, according to Genesis, and we now have seven days in a week. There are seven theological and cardinal virtues (faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance). Likewise, there are seven deadly sins (pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth). The liberal arts of the Middle Ages numbered seven, chunked into a quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) and a trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic). And today, fortunate faculty members may be granted sabbatical leaves.

On a more mundane plane, seven is the most probably sum when rolling two dice. Seven digits (such as a telephone number) are generally all that most people can store in short-term memory. And if you want your slide or overhead projector transparency to be readable, don't put more than seven lines on it, with each line no longer than seven words.

So it's not unexpected that an American Association for Higher Education commission focused on "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," and Steven Covey wrote a best seller *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. I even read a recent journal article by an off-beat writer: "Seven Principles of Teaching Seldom Taught in Grad School" (see *Chalkdust, J. Staff, Prog, & Org Dev.*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Winter 1992, pp. 217-218).

Seven is not quite in the same number league with the three of *Liberte-egalite-fraternite*, but it's a good cut or two above the ten of David Letterman's lists. Propelled by this mystical momentum of the number, here are my nominations for qualities of highly effective teachers - seven in number, of course.

1. **Highly effective teachers care.** They care about their students, their work, and themselves. They treat others with dignity; they respect others' integrity. They give high priority to benefiting others. They affirm others' strengths and beings; it's a kind of love.
2. **Highly effective teachers share.** They share their knowledge, insights, and viewpoints with

others. Their willingness to share is a way of life for them. They don't withhold information for personal gain.

3. **Highly effective teachers learn.** They continually seek truth and meaning. They seek to discover new ideas and insights. They reflect on their experiences and incorporate the learning into their lives. They are willing to upgrade their skills. They continue growing and developing throughout their lives.
4. **Highly effective teachers create.** They are willing to try the new and untested, to take risks for worthy educational outcomes. Anything worth doing is worth failing at. They are not discouraged by an occasional failure; they reframe the error as an opportunity to do better as a result of the experience.
5. **Highly effective teachers believe.** They have faith in students. They trust students and are willing to grant them freedom and responsibility. They hold high expectations for their students, as well as for themselves.
6. **Highly effective teachers dream.** They have a vision of success. They are driven by an image of excellence, the best that their innate abilities allow. They always seek to improve, never being content with just "getting by" in teaching or in any other endeavor.
7. **Highly effective teachers enjoy.** Teaching is not just employment to them; it is their Work. They throw themselves into it with vigor. They gain major satisfaction and joy from it. And that joy often infects their students.

While this particular set of qualities is my own compilation, I've found in workshops where we've examined what is meant by "good teaching" that these qualities are prominently mentioned. By themselves they may not be sufficient conditions for teaching excellence, but they may be pretty close to essential.

Surely, you say, there are other qualities that should make the list. What about critical thinking, positive attitude, or calm equanimity, for example? What about patience? Well, certainly a case could be made for all of these - and others, I'm sure.

But eleven (though the next prime number after seven) is not such a magical number. And keeping practicality in mind, it's harder for one to retain more than seven in memory.

So if you can keep in mind care, share, learn, create, believe, dream, and enjoy, you may keep them actively in practice. And that will move you toward becoming a highly effective teacher.

Linc. Fisch does off-beat writing at his home in Lexington, Kentucky. He has had 30-some years of experience in teaching and other assignments in higher education.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/7qualities.htm>