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## Supporting Quality Teachers With Recognition

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*Abstract: Value has been found in providing recognition and awards programs for excellent teachers. Research has also found a major lack of these programs in both the USA and in Australia. Teachers receiving recognition and awards for their teaching have praised recognition programs as providing motivation for them to continue high-level instruction. Motivational theories provide a solid foundation for these programs. Teacher educators should find 'recognition' as an important part of their curriculum in terms of teaching the research behind motivational theories. They can also encourage K-12 schools to provide recognition to the excellent teachers working with university teacher educators assisting student teachers. The concept of merit pay is being touted in both the USA and Australia but the research has found merit pay to be a non-motivator and it has not provided significant improvements in student learning outcomes in most programs that have provided it.*

### Introduction

Recognition is a very rewarding experience for an excellent classroom teacher and his or her students. Recognition for teachers builds off of some of the well known extrinsic and intrinsic motivational theories. It offers hope for meaningful recognition to the other teachers working to improve student-learning outcomes. It also brings pride and support from the teacher's students, administration, governing board and general public. Teachers are not satisfied with current evaluation processes as they have not lead to meaningful outcomes for most of the best teachers and/or those not performing in either the United States or Australia.

There are movements now in both of these countries to promote merit pay that has been found ineffective in numerous studies over the years and proven not to be a motivator for teachers. Teacher educators, school administrators and the governing boards can change the climate by expanding meaningful recognition programs for their exceptional teachers.

*This is a tremendous honor, an incredible opportunity for me to advocate for students, represent teachers, and draw positive attention to our collective efforts in public education.*

*Michelle Shearer, 2011 National Teacher of the Year, High School Chemistry Teacher, Frederick, Maryland, USA*

*It was a lovely ceremony that made me feel very special as a teacher. It makes us feel like we have a place in the lives of the children we teach.*

*Tracey Anthony, Western Australia's Winner of The Excellence by a Teacher-Best National Achievement Award; Western Australia, Aranmore Catholic College*

This article should help bring to the surface the lack of recognition presently existing for outstanding teachers in the US and Australia. It incorporates the important roles of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to teachers receiving awards. The focus is primarily on the K-12 systems and community colleges in the US and, secondarily, on K-12 systems in Australia. I have chosen to leave out evaluation and recognition in the university system due to the fact that their systems of evaluation of teachers depends in large part on research and publication whereas K-12 and community college evaluation depends almost entirely upon classroom teaching. However, the role of university teacher educators to encourage and promote recognition for outstanding teachers they work with in placing student teachers can play a significant role in expanding teacher recognition sensitivities and programs.

Harris Interactive supported a study in which the Gordon S. Black Corporation identified recognition of excellence in teaching as one of the top three drivers of satisfaction among teachers in the US. Their survey of 23,569 teachers, however, found only 50 percent of the teachers reported a recognition program existed in their schools (1999). It is hard to believe that this many school administrators, teacher unions, and governing boards have neglected to realize the importance of recognition as a motivator for their teachers.

A US national study by Andrews and Erwin (2001) of community college chief academic administrators had 633 of the 934 administrators surveyed return their questionnaire. A total of 55.7 percent of the colleges (353) reported an awards and recognition program for their faculty. The downside of the study was the fact that 44.3 percent of the reporting administrators had no teacher awards programmes. There was a strong suspicion that the majority of the 301 non-responding colleges did not respond due to their colleges not having a recognition program. An earlier community college study by Andrews of 19 states (1993) documented 80 percent of the respondents as not having a recognition system in place (pp. 30-31). It appeared, indeed, that more community colleges had added recognition program between the 1993 and 2001 studies.

### **Evaluation Needs to be Accountable**

*We are in the most important job there is, and the most difficult one. Always put the children first. Believe in them. Trust them. Allow them to become your partners in the learning process. Wonderful things will happen.*  
*Mark Kohl, 2005 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year, Lodi High School, Lodi, Wisconsin, USA*

*Recognising that boys often respond well to physical stimuli, Loretta incorporates this type of activity into many of her lessons. She also conducts many play- and game-based learning sessions such as times tables competitions and word games.*  
*Loretta Kennedy, NeiTA, 2011 ASG Inspirational Teaching Awards, Canberra Grammar School, Red Hill Australian Capital Territory*

Andrews (2011) identified a need for accountable teacher evaluation. Properly conducted, such evaluation can provide one of the major impacts for quality improvements in classroom teaching and student learning outcomes in our school systems. In order for this to happen teacher evaluation needs to produce a number of outcomes that are meaningful to the teachers, improves student outcomes and supports the educational values of the governing boards. Four of these outcomes are:

- (1) recognition awards and public awareness of the high quality of the best instructors;
- (2) assistance for those teachers needing support to improve;
- (3) providing the means and support to place some of the weakest teachers into a remediation program and if that fails,
- (4) support dismissal steps and action (pp. 1-2).

The No Child Left Behind Act in the U.S. had written in a guarantee to the Act that there would be quality teachers in every classroom. It also made removal of incompetent teachers imperative. A part of accountable evaluation is the need for evaluation to be legally defensible when it comes to making decision in items 3 and 4 above. Legally defensible here is defined as: an action, conclusion, or statement that can be upheld under current legislation, governmental mandates, and court decisions (Teacher Evaluation Kit Glossary, 2003, p. 18).

Lee (2010) looked at President Obama's key elements in the Race to the Top program being pushed in the US. These elements call for ambitious teacher and principal evaluation processes, recognition for excellent teachers and principals, and removal of those teachers who continue to fail:

*We urged schools and school districts to make sure we have excellent principals leading our schools and great teachers leading our classes by promoting rigorous plans to develop and evaluate teachers and principals and by rewarding their success (p. 2).*

McNeil (2011) reported that four of the Race to the Top states that had been given large incentive grants were lagging quite significantly in forming the aggressive evaluation being called for in the law one year after receiving their grants. Seventeen other states were praised for their progress in this area (p. 1).

## Motivational Theorists

Motivational theories over the years have focused on factors that lead to highly motivated workers. Recognition for teachers is reflected in, and finds support, from two motivational theorists and a recent study on worker motivation.

Herzberg's theory of worker motivation (1966) identified two levels of motivators for workers. The two levels are 'hygiene' and 'motivation' and each one provides for different purposes for a worker. The 'hygiene' factors include pay, working conditions, relationships with co-workers, competence of supervisors and company policies. Herzberg pointed out that these factors may not ensure that a worker will be motivated to any high degree. Here is where his 'motivational' factors come to play and must be satisfied. These factors include (1) achievement; (2) responsibility or autonomy; (3) recognition; and (4) opportunities for advancement (p. 266).

A second well-known motivational theorist, Maslow (1954), placed human needs in a hierarchy. He determined that the more basic needs of humans needed to be satisfied before the higher level needs can be realised. His higher level needs include: (1) working toward excellence and (2) self-actualization. In the basic needs he identified include adequate pay as necessary to secure essentials for life. Second

and third levels of Maslow's basic needs include having job security and safety, establishment of a congenial work group, and obtaining a feeling of being needed. He summarized that only after these basic needs become satisfied can the higher-level needs of esteem, recognition and self-actualization be pursued and met (pp. 105-107).

A recent study by Amabile and Kramer (2011) viewed diary entries of hundreds of employees of several different organisations in the US. The study was looking for ways to remove common barriers to progress of workers in order to boost long-term creative production. They found that clear goals and autonomy and 'nourishers' can uplift workers. This included encouragement and respect and collegiality by fellow workers and supervisors. The four broad categories they found to impact workers inner work life significantly were: (1) respect; (2) encouragement; (3) emotional support; and (4) affiliation.

Each of these motivational theorists and researchers found recognition, encouragement and respect as motivational factors in improving workers production and their self-images.

### **Motivational Theory Applied to Teacher Recognition**

Andrews (2004) compared recognition programs at one K-12 school, Catalina Foothills School District in Tucson, Arizona and one community college, Illinois Valley of Ogleby, Illinois. Both schools based their programmes on Herzberg's theory of motivational factors that drive teachers to produce excellence in their teaching. The factors utilized were: (1) achievement; (2) recognition for achievement; (3) intrinsic interest in the work; and (4) growth and advancement. Teachers in both institutions reported trusting their administrators as being competent and objective in evaluating their work. A summary of some of the responses of the award winners from both institutions follows.

1. Teachers receiving awards view the recompense as special recognition for teaching excellence:

Catalina Foothills (K-12)

Yes 24; No 3

Illinois Valley (Community College)

Yes 31; No 0

2. Faculty members who have received the rewards are motivated to continue to excel:

Catalina Foothills

Yes 21; No 6

Illinois Valley

Yes 30; No 0

3. Teachers receiving awards highly value the recognition they received:

Catalina Foothills

Yes 22; No 5

Illinois Valley

Yes 30; No 0

(pp.178-179)

Both award winning groups responded very positively to receiving the recognitions as a result of the teaching evaluations by the administrators at each of the institutions. Frase (1982) reviewed how Catalina Foothills choice of awards conformed to Herzberg's theory. Rewards were individualized and given for attendance at conferences out of state, computers, cash, and classroom instructional or other enrichment materials.

The above two school district responses were collected several years apart but both achieved very similar results from their teachers. The evaluators from both institutions concluded that Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory was an appropriate foundation for rewarding excellence in teaching (pp. 266-267).

## The Awards and Recognition Limitations That Exist

Existing recognitions programs often do little to impact the greatest number of excellent teachers within anyone school district. Andrews and Erwin (2003) in their national study of American community college recognitions programs found that one award a year was number selected by the large majority of respondents when asked, “How many teacher awards are given by your college each year?” The second and third largest numbers of awards made each year were two and three awards (See Table I). This was true no matter what the size the faculty group was in these community colleges.

Number of Responses	Number of Awards
60	1
14	2
19	3
7	1-2
5	3-5
5	5-10

**Table 1. How many teacher awards are given by your college each year**

While this paper is not examining university recognitions programmes, Evans (2005) provides an interesting discussion on his university and its limited awards program. There are far too few rewards given for the number of teachers who should be recognized. Evans noted the limitation of awards available in his university. His own department at California State University in Sacramento had over 100 tenured and tenured-track teachers. The recognition plan only allowed him to award one teacher a year for the Outstanding Teacher Award. His analysis puts this into a realistic focus of the problem of a limited number of awards:

*For the sake of discussion, let's assume that 25 percent of the faculty members are excellent teachers (I think the percentage is considerably higher). That means it would take 25 years, the length of a typical academic career, to recognise all deserving faculty members, provided that no new outstanding teachers enter the college in the meantime (p.1).*

How many of our K-12 school systems and community colleges have a similar situation? Keep in mind that these minimal number of recognition awards are taking place in the 50 percent of the K-12 schools that have programmes as identified in the Black study. It is easy to project that 80-90 percent or more of the exceptional teachers in most of our school systems go wanting for school and public recognitions and/or endorsements of their teaching of students.

Hanushek (2002) discussed the lack of recognitions that exists for most teachers who are accomplishing excellence in teaching for their students: Teachers who elicit academic gains from their students are not rewarded for their achievements. Most teachers are hard working and doing the best they can, but in the absence of incentives to improve, additional resources are not directed to maximising student output (p.1).

Andrews (2006) reported that in the Andrews and Erwin in their national study of community college recognition programs asked the question, “Is your recognition program successful and accepted by your faculty?” Eighty-nine percent of the respondents with programs (284) replied “yes” and that most of them were developed with support of administrators, faculty and governing boards. In both the

Catalina Foothills School and Illinois Valley Community College faculty award winners teaches reported valuing the recognition and were motivated to continue to excel (p. 9). Once these programs are set up they do provide incentives and motivation for other faculty members to obtain this recognition status that is now available in their schools.

### **A Role for Teacher Educators**

It should greatly help if teacher education institutions encourage the local schools that they work with to engage in recognition programs for their excellent teachers. It should also provide an incentive to other teachers in the schools who may then begin striving for this special recognition as they strive to improve their teaching. In short, it could help lift the teaching profession in the eyes of the teachers, parents, general public and the profession.

Recognition for students from their teachers and professors through both grades in their school work and verbal support and reinforcement for their efforts is parallel to the needs of teachers to receive a similar form of reinforcement from their supervisors and governing boards. The previously mentioned motivational theories apply to students, teachers and to headmasters, principals and others within a school environment.

As young teachers learn the value of motivational techniques in working with students they should become stronger teachers for all of their students. This should be one of the strong building blocks in teacher education curriculum for developing competent teachers.

The teacher educators could provide program development assistance in the identification of the teachers in schools that have been assisting in the practicum experiences and have provided outstanding service in helping mold these student teachers in their development. By placing students in their practicums with highly competent teachers who have been so recognised by the school board and school administration should build confidence in the student teacher. It should also provide dignity to the teacher education programmes that utilize these outstanding teachers in the schools. The teacher educators, as is sometimes the practice already, can also provide recognition documents to those competent teachers who provide excellence in helping prepare these new teachers. This will also help spread the word that excellent teaching can and needs to be recognized.

### **Does Recognition Really Matter: Some Historical Studies**

Scherer (1983) presented research findings on teachers done by Teachers College at Columbia University on why experienced or veteran teachers had positive feelings about their work as teachers. The following were included as being among the most important reasons:

- Receiving respect;
- Receiving recognition;
- Receiving reinforcement;
- Being encouraged by principals, parents, colleagues and students

Million (2004) in his review of The National Association of Elementary School Principals study of the All-USA winning teachers which sought to find out

what affects winning the award had on them. The following is a summary of the replies received:

- It boosted self-esteem. Several noted that after decades of teaching in places where they received little recognition for their efforts, the awards gave them and their communities a new sense of pride.
- It renewed confidence in their teaching. Teachers felt that it reinforced what they had been doing and also encouraged other teachers.
- It gave them a voice in their profession. Suddenly they were being asked to speak, write and apply for grants. People wanted to know their thought on education issues.
- It spotlighted their areas of expertise.
- It inspired them to work harder.
- It validated their ideas (p. 1).

### Teacher Job Satisfaction

*As I reflect back to the award announcement in May, it has been just an amazing journey thus far and it really has just started! Paul Galbenski, Michigan Teacher of the Year 2011-2012, Oakland Schools Technical Campus Southeast, Oakland, Michigan, USA*

A Texas promotion for the Teacher of the Year program, Reasons to participate in the Texas Teacher of the Year Program (2005) listed the following as reasons why persons need to participate in nominating teachers for their Teacher of the Year program:

- Each nomination is memorable for the teacher; it boosts the teacher's morale and validates the perceptions of students, parents and colleagues.
- It is valuable for students who will feel great pride and joy when their teacher, or one they know is chosen.
- It is significant for the school and faculty. It is good for the community. A healthy society values education and appreciates the educators who work to ensure future generations are well educated (pp.1-2).

There are many other good things that can happen to the teachers that receive special recognition. The public recognition makes it known to colleagues, families, friends and students. Some recognition programs provide for professional travel funds, equipment for the award winners' classrooms, speaking opportunities with local educational and civic organizations and a chance to promote the teaching profession. For most of them it will be the first time in their teaching career such an award or recognition has been received.

### How to Start

Setting up a new or improving existing recognitions programmes needs support throughout a school district. The governing board, administration and faculty all need to be involved. Guidelines as to how the selection of teachers for special recognitions will be made will take time. The number of awards will depend in large upon the size of the faculty number. It should differ considerably if a school



has 25, 60, 150 or 200 teachers. The type of awards will need to be sorted out as well and will, in large, be dependent upon funds that can be tapped for this program. Some recognition can cost almost nothing if produced in house while others can be provided with some funding support.

Funds may need to be appropriated from general funds, fund-raising, support from the school foundation, parent associations, banks and other businesses or other sources. Each community will approach this part differently. School foundations often raise student scholarship monies but seldom have been asked to assist in a program to reinforce the quality teaching that takes place in their school districts. Some foundations already help in that they make grant monies available for in-class projects of teachers. Teacher recognition programmes should be considered somewhat different.

Awards may vary from a plaque, plaques along with cash awards, funding to support state and national association meetings within a teacher's field of study, and/or provide additional equipment for the teachers' classroom. A recognition announcement in front of the board of education, a public information release to the community and/or a supper for the winners are inexpensive but impressive means of letting the teachers know they are appreciated. Each of these types of awards can be modest in cost to a school district.

### **Does Merit Pay Fit in as a Recognition Option for Teachers?**

Dunwell (1986), in speaking at the convention of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, determined that merit pay was *not* the answer for rewarding or recognizing teachers. Some of the myths he focused on were widely believed in the 1980's regarding merit pay were as follows. He listed the myth and then presented reasons why there were not supported in research or practice:

- Myth 1: Teachers favour merit pay.  
This statement contrasts with a number of findings in other studies and surveys. Teachers have been found to favour other rewards than merit pay.
- Myth 2: Money is a motivator – more money produces more work.  
Research studies did not support this. Money was only found to motivate some people in some circumstances, whose salaries were below market value.
- Myth 3: Merit pay will persuade highly qualified people to enter teaching.

There is no research to support this. Teachers do not enter into teaching primarily to make money.

Andrews (1988) in his research for the North Central Association's community colleges summarized the key core outcome elements he found in recognition programs 19 states:

- They were outgrowths of faculty evaluation systems conducted primarily by instructional administrators.
- They avoided the "merit pay" issues by offering the alternative of "recognition" to outstanding faculty.
- The faculty, administrators, and trustees or boards of education found them to be acceptable.

- They were usually based upon motivational theories of well known theorists such as Maslow (1954) and Herzberg (1966).
- They were considered successful in accomplishing the goal of improved instruction and faculty recognition for outstanding work.

### **Recent Movements and Results on Merit or Performance Based Pay**

There is another ‘push’ by political leaders to provide merit pay for the best teachers as a means of recognising the best teachers. The Obama administration in the United States is pushing hard in its Race to the Top program to reward teachers with new pay incentives such as merit pay.

In a News.com release (2009) in Australia, Julia Gillard, Prime Minister (former Education Minister), is working to provide merit-based pay for up to ten percent of their teachers each year. She sees this as a means of helping to retain the top teachers in the classroom through pay increased based upon their teaching success:

*We want to reward teachers – especially great quality teachers and (those) prepared to go to disadvantaged schools where their excellent teaching skills can make the most difference. We want to see school systems better rewarding those highly accomplished teachers (p. 1).*

Preliminary results of performance-pay for Chicago Public School teachers has found no difference for improved in math or reading tests between schools paying performance-pay and those not paying it (Sawchuk, 2010). This was deemed notable since Arne Duncan, US. Secretary of Education, was superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools at the time this experiment went into the school system as the Teacher Advancement Program model.

In Tennessee middle school mathematics teachers volunteered to be part of a three-year randomized experiment program through Vanderbilt University (Moran, 2010). The study was designed to show that large monetary incentives would produce significant boosts in student scores and encourage teachers to become more effective. Teachers were recommended to receive between \$5,000 and a maximum of \$15,000 for their very top teachers. In reality, the average paid was \$10,000. The program involved nearly 300 teachers in Nashville public school in the 2007-2009 school years.

The most basic question to be answered by this program of bonus pay was – Does bonus pay alone improve student outcomes? The Vanderbilt summary of this three-year program was that it does not. Other outcomes of this Project on Incentives in Teaching yielded only what was referred to as ‘two’ small positive findings. Fifth graders in the second and third year of the experiment showed small improvements. There were no effects for the students in the grades 6-8 in any of the three years of the study (pp. 1-2).

Texas also endorsed a program for merit pay (Stutz, 2009). After reviewing the results on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills of 140,000 or more students the center concluded, “There is no systematic evidence that TEEG had an impact on student achievement gains.” The governor of Texas continued to endorse the concept of merit pay. The Texas State Teachers Association, Richard Kouri, said, “we predicted the program would be a flop, and that’s what it turned out to be” (p. 1).

## Recognition Is The Acceptable Alternative

Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, Canada, made his appeal for the need to start a teacher recognition program to the Ontario Legislative Assembly as he announced the Premier's Awards for Teaching Excellence (2004):

*Mr. Speaker, I rise to announce a celebration—a celebration that is new and different and long overdue. It's time, Mr. Speaker to celebrate excellence in teaching. I am announcing today the Premier's Awards for Teaching Excellence. Great teaching can unlock that potential. Think about the moments a great teacher can author:*

- *The moment a boy realizes he can read a book.*
- *The moment a girl realizes she can master math.*
- *The feeling of winning a race for the first time – or just the feeling of being in the race for the first time.*
- *The realisation that a bully can be stopped, if everyone stands up to the bully. These moments, Mr. Speaker, are teaching moments – great teaching moments. So it is entirely fitting that we celebrate great teaching – and great teachers.*

*Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, May 5, 2004 (McGuinty, pp. 1-2)*

The needs of teachers in our K-12 school systems and community colleges are similar as has been found in the United States and Australia. The basic need of recognition for excellent teachers is one that is not fulfilled in nearly half of the school districts at the present time and in those districts with programs the number of the teachers recognised is far too few. Many well deserving competent teachers go wanting and will continue to until governing boards, administrators and teachers work to make these needs known and satisfied.

## Summary

Teacher education institutions can be instrumental in helping promote recognition programs in those schools they set up practicum experiences for their teachers in training. There is presently much neglect and lack of leadership in the development of programs of awards and recognition for our outstanding teachers in the field. The profession of teaching can be uplifted with teacher educators, school administrators and governing boards working together to provide recognition for the outstanding teachers in the field. Student teachers will be well served when placed in their practicum experience with these recognised competent teachers. This is a role that has been too often overlooked but can become one of the leading building blocks in improving the practice of teaching in the years ahead.

While there is much emphasis on promoting merit pay for teachers it has been shown that merit pay has not been a successful solution in meeting the needs of the teachers for recognition or as a means of improving student learning outcomes. Years of studies have come to the same conclusion: Merit pay does not produce the learning results expected. Secondly, merit pay is rejected as a reward that most teachers respect.

Educational statistics by Rainey (2006) showed that we will need to be replacing nearly two million teachers in the US in the years ahead. It behooves us to put forth known resources and programs that enhance teacher satisfaction in their jobs. It will not only help in recruiting quality persons into the field of teaching but should help to cut back the large number of teachers who leave the field each year.

Recognition is one program that is positive and can produce improved teacher motivation, provide respect for the field of teaching and highlight for students and parents that they have exceptional teachers in many of our schools today. It should also provide one additional way to keep quality teachers within our schools.

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