Great Teachers

Many things are taken for granted in schools. If you have a bachelor’s degree in education, you must then be qualified to teach. And indeed, the majority of elementary school teachers hold B.A.’s in Education.

However, the majority of these same teachers might have chosen to study education because they were not good at math or science. I apologize to those teachers who chose education out of passion for the field and those who actually love math and science. But the fact remains that with most First, Second and Third Grade classrooms led by teachers who are afraid of math and science, that attitude is being passed on to the students. Is it any wonder that most students in public schools perform better at Reading and Writing than at Math and Science?

Singapore became a focus of the Math education world from the late 1990s onwards because of its standing in international studies and exams, particularly in Math. Its national curriculum for Mathematics actually became known as “Singapore Math”. One can study the curriculum design and figure out that those curriculum planners knew what they were doing. Moreover, one can step into a classroom in Singapore to find out that all Math teachers know their subjects in depth. The Singapore Math textbooks were difficult to sell to American public school systems because it did not come with a “Teachers Edition”. This, by the way, is a larger version of the student textbook, with pageby page instructions on how to teach every step of the way. The teacher needs not really know anything about the topic at all.

Is it a surprise then to find out that to become a Math teacher, one has to first get a Bachelor’s degree in Math, then only train as a teacher? The salary of a first year teacher exceeds that of a first year doctor, engineer or lawyer.

Can one imagine the social status of a teacher in Singapore? Any smart student can choose to become a teacher without having parents breathing down his/her neck about how little s/he will make.

Let’s try, for a minute, to imagine the landscape of education in Arizona in virtual reality. Teachers are paid anywhere between $65,000 to $150,000 or more a year. Graduates from all branches of learning compete for jobs in schools. Teachers are well respected by parents and students because they inspire them, motivate them and develop their inner talents. Teacher training courses are rigorous, and the drop-outs end up in medicine, engineering or law. Schools lay off teachers whose students do not make progress in academics, arts, physical fitness, and character education.

Am I dreaming? I don’t think so. There was a time in ancient China, when a high official found guilty of treason or corruption would be put to death, along with ***his teacher.*** This is how much accountability a teacher must have for his student. Today, accountability only lasts as long as the next report card, if at all. This picture could come true, and much faster than we think.