The Art of Teaching:  
Teacher Behaviors for New Millennium Learners

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In this age of high tech and standards-driven curriculum it is so important that teachers demonstrate “high touch”. By that is meant demonstrating teacher behaviors that have a positive effect on student gains. It is accepted that the teacher is the most important variable to learning in the classroom but we seldom study the personal teacher characteristics and which ones affect learning. In this article three of these teacher behaviors are discussed: clarity, business-like behavior and teacher enthusiasm.

Introduction

Just teach with enthusiasm! This was my advice as the supervisor of a student teacher in trouble, Julie. We had just reviewed a video of Julie teaching a lesson to her fourth grade students. At the end Julie said: “I look bored, I sound bored and the students are bored”. I thought this is great she spotted the problem and she hit the nail on the head – a supervisor’s dream. I said Julie just teach with enthusiasm. She looked at me and said “How”.

How! (I thought) and being a savvy supervisor I responded that is enough for this session and I will get back to you. This incident led me into the study and research of teacher characteristics especially teacher enthusiasm.

Teachers today are teaching students in both grounded/blended sites and in virtual schools. Many states are encouraging and mandating school districts to provide the option or choice to parents of enrolling their children in virtual classes. Florida, as an example, has legislated that all school districts in the state offer virtual classes from grades 1-12.

What teacher characteristics will the teachers of the 21st century need to be effective? Teachers are presently being recruited by administrators to become teachers in a virtual school. These teachers are responsible for planning curriculum, teaching and assessing students in a virtual setting. They are to be available for these students and their parents through emails, phone calls, live chats, text and in person or groups when possible. The question then is what teacher behaviors are needed for students to succeed in this medium? The focus of this researcher’s work has been based on teacher characteristics that influence student achievement especially teacher enthusiasm.
Based on observations, and discussions with principals and teachers in virtual settings, this researcher concluded that the same key three teacher behaviors in the order of impotence seem to apply also to teachers in virtual classes as well as those teachers in traditional schools. These three behaviors in the order of importance (Rosenshine & Furst, 1971) are clarity, business-like behavior, and teacher enthusiasm.

**Background**

Research over the years has stressed the important role of the teacher in student achievement gains. This was a major finding of the research by Linda Darling-Hammond (2000, 2001). However there still is a dearth of studies on the specifics of this role especially a focus on specific teacher behaviors that influence student achievement. Rosenshine and First (1971) analyzed about fifty studies that they could find that studied the relationship between teacher behaviors and pupil gain.

Even though there were criticisms of their work because they failed to operationally define the identified eleven teacher behaviors, it is still considered a seminal study for future research. For the purpose of this article the top three teacher behaviors (listed in order of their “promise” and “best results”) are included: clarity, business-like behavior and teacher enthusiasm. In the late 70’s three researchers attempted to operationally define these three: clarity (Smith, 1977); business-like behavior (Gabrys, 1978) and teacher enthusiasm (Collins. 1976). Collins and Gabrys also developed training protocols for business-like behavior and teacher enthusiasm.

**Clarity**

It is easy to understand why clarity is the number one teacher behavior as it is vitally important that teachers be clear in instructing students to learn concepts and the interrelationships among concepts. When Gusky (2003) analyzed an extensive study on effective teacher characteristics clarity was not among the list. Morrison & Marshall (2003) found that many teacher preparation programs ignore the need for instructing future teacher candidates on being clear communicators to benefit learning in the classroom.

In their research, Morrison and Marshall (2003) also found that in rating their professors the college students indicated that the majority of their professors lacked clarity in their presentations. Is the teacher behavior, clarity, assumed to be naturally demonstrated in classrooms so there need not be any required training? The studies cited for clarity identified some of the indicators to define clarity but Stan Smith (1978) provided insight into what is needed to demonstrate clarity when instructing students. He observed instructors in over thirty community college classrooms and developed an operational definition of clarity.

After analyzing the data from his findings he identified the following eleven variables that indicate that the teacher is demonstrating clarity: uses examples, uses at least one example to illustrate each new concept which is presented; answers questions asked by students; asks questions of students which relate to the material being presented; encourages
students to ask questions; shares the overall structure of the lesson; teaches step-by-step; prepares students for what they will be doing next, uses verbal markers of importance and summarizes material at appropriate points in the presentation. Using these eleven descriptors, clarity could be included in the teacher preparation curriculum and be easily adapted as an observational instrument to rate a teacher on clarity of instruction. These eleven indicators of clarity also provide evidence that formative assessment is being implemented.

**Business-Like Behavior**

Following clarity, effective teachers are noted for their business-like behavior (Brophy, 1983, Airasian, 1997). Dammon, (1986) in his study on effective teachers included in his results that these teachers were good managers, used systematic and planned instruction and reflected on how organization can benefit student achievement. Evertson (1983, 1994) researched how business-like behavior of effective teachers resulted in well managed classrooms with few behavior concerns.

It was Gabrys’ (1977) research study, based on observations, research and expert opinions who operationally defined four main categories of teacher business-like behavior. Partial definitions are included here: (1) seriousness which included such qualities as earnestness, genuineness, being precise, purposeful and confident; (2) deliberateness which included willfulness, thoughtfulness, efficient use of time; (3) goal oriented which included single-mindedness of purpose, clear, precise, unambiguous, goals identified; and (4) organization which included preorder of materials, well developed lessons, consistency, advanced preparation evident. Gabrys (1977) study on teacher business-like behavior also studied teacher warmth to be sure business like behavior did not interfere. His findings indicated that demonstrating business like behavior had no negative effect on classroom climate.

**Teacher Enthusiasm**

The last teacher behavior to be discussed for this article that influenced student learning is teacher enthusiasm. This is based on research studies of enthusiasm being effective with (1) outcomes that included achievement (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1992); (2) test performances (Marlin, 1991); (3) recall (Stewart, 1989); (4) intrinsic motivation and vitality (Patrick, Hisley & Kempter, 2000); (5) student attitudes toward learning (Brophy, 1988); (6) on-task behavior (Bettercourt, Gillett, Gaul and Hull, 1983); (7) working with diverse students (Hernandez & Descamp, 1986, Henze & Lucas, 1993); and (8) ratings of teacher effectiveness (Murray, 1983).

Gage (1979) pointed out that there are two specific teaching behaviors that are generic to all content areas, all grade levels and all types of students. One is teacher enthusiasm and the second is high levels of students on task. This researcher considers the second to be a subset of teacher enthusiasm.

Collins (1978) operationally defined teacher enthusiasm based on observations, research and expert opinions. A training protocol was developed with teacher candidates
that indicated the training significant at the .001 level. Collins’ study was validated in three different research studies with first year teachers and veteran teachers by Gillet & Gall, (1980); Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall & Hull, (1983), and Streeter, (1986). These studies supported training in the following eight descriptors or indicators (Collins, 1978) used to identify, measure and communicate high teacher enthusiasm: vocal delivery, eyes, gestures, movements, facial expression, and word selection, acceptance of ideas and feelings and overall energy throughout the lesson.

Conclusion

In this age of accountability and high tech, there is a need for teachers to demonstrate high touch. The characteristics of teachers do influence students’ ability to achieve in all types of educational settings. Business-like behavior (Gabrys, 1977) and teacher enthusiasm (Collins, 1976) provide significant training interventions that could easily be replicated. Supported by research on teacher effectiveness, these three teacher behaviors – clarity, business-like behavior and teacher enthusiasm - provide a strong rationale for inclusion in teacher preparation programs and as ways to assist teachers to become more effective in the classroom.

References


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