

Effective Teacher Behaviors Evident in Successful Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Vance L. Austin, Ph.D.

Ellis I. Barowsky

Micheline S. Malow

Diane W. Gómez

Manhattanville College
Purchase, New York

Abstract

Four highly qualified teachers and 21 students classified with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD) participated in an investigation of teacher effectiveness. Data collection included: video of teaching behaviors, interviews with teachers, and student surveys. The student survey identified characteristics of teacher effectiveness in general and of their teachers specifically. Results reinforced a framework of effective teaching behaviors: personal resources, teacher performance and teacher effectiveness. A significant correlation ($p < .01$, $N = 14$) was found between desired teacher behaviors and behaviors students perceived in their own teachers. Implications for inclusion of effective teaching behaviors in teacher preparation programs are discussed.

Effective Teacher Behaviors Evident in Successful Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

The special educational teaching model known as inclusion requires the collaboration of both special and general educators and the ability to accommodate and provide services for diverse classroom populations. As the inclusive classroom continues to develop into standard practice throughout the United States, classroom teachers can no longer claim students with special needs are not their responsibilities. Frequently, within the inclusion model, special and general educators are paired to serve students with a variety of needs – gifted, average, learning disabled and emotionally disturbed, in a single classroom. As a result, the role of the general education classroom teacher has changed. All teacher candidates must now acquire the skills and dispositions necessary to teach students with a wide variety of needs. Teacher preparation courses must find ways to insure that teacher candidates are prepared to teach such a diverse population in the inclusion model. As one-step in the reflective process of teacher preparation practices, the effective efforts of working successful teachers need to be considered.

One population of students that are a great concern to teacher candidates is those individuals classified with emotional disorders. School districts across the country have reported an increased number of students classified with emotional and behavioral disorders (Office of Special Education Programs, 2006). To remain current, teacher preparation programs must begin to evaluate the qualities that effective teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) demonstrate and which of the identified qualities can be taught to teacher candidates.

The concepts of effective teaching behaviors and teacher quality have proven elusive and difficult to define, so much so that the terms are frequently rendered useless (Kennedy, 2008). One framework that appears to be more useful is Kennedy's (2008) categorization of effective teaching behaviors: (a) personal resources; the qualities that the teacher brings to the job (b) teacher performance; teachers' everyday practices that occur in and out of the classroom and (c) teacher effectiveness; the relational teacher qualities that influence students. Utilizing these categories allows a framework from which to discuss the qualities of teacher effectiveness.

Personal Resources

Kennedy (2008) delineated traits such as beliefs, attitudes, values, knowledge, skill, and expertise to be personal resources. Four basic personal qualities were repeatedly found in the research to be considered effective: knowledgeable in the subject area, respectful to students, reflective about teaching and active in one's professional growth.

Effective teachers in general education are highly qualified teachers who possess a strong knowledge and certification in their content area (Helm, 2007, Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008; Polk, 2006). Stough and Palmer (2003) reported that knowledge of special education instruction and individual students' needs are a central tenet of effective teaching.

Teachers who are effective believe in the potential of all children to learn. This belief is translated through the demonstration of respect for students (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008), their families (Woolfolk, 2004) and student differences (Imber, 2006). Similarly, dispositions of caring, concern for children and empathy are characteristics that should be encouraged for teachers to be effective (Helm, 2007; Imber, 2006). Elementary students preferred teachers who showed that they truly cared for the well-being of each of their students (Pratt, 2008).

Teaching effectively is linked to a willingness to continuously develop as a professional (Harris, 1998). Helderbran (2008) noted that students defined good teachers as ones who are never satisfied with their teaching, but are always eager to stretch, grow, and refine their teaching skills and subject knowledge. To remain effective, teachers self develop or participate in lifelong learning (Polk, 2006). The avenue to continued professional development is self-reflection and inquiry (Harris, 1998). Topping and Ferguson (2005) recommended that all teachers should "... have access to opportunities to monitor and reflect upon teaching behaviors they use and do not use, in different contexts" to enhance teaching efficacy (p. 141). In a study on special education instruction, the act of

reflection and “concerned responsiveness of teacher to individual students” were central to effective teaching (Stough & Palmer, 2003, p. 220). The challenge is to develop an assessment system that transfers newly acquired skills to the classroom so that the quality of teaching and student behavior can be improved (Bracey, 2009).

Teacher Performance

Performance qualities are teacher practices that occur daily such as learning activities, actions that foster student learning, and motivating students (Kennedy, 2008). For learning to take place, students need a safe and stimulating learning climate maintained through efficient classroom management (van de Grift, 2007). One aspect of classroom management is clear communication. Effective teaching is highly dependent on the teacher’s ability to communicate well the instructional objectives (Harris, 1998; Polk, 2006; van de Grift, 2007). Other qualities found as characteristics of effective teachers are to recognize and use teachable moments (Woolfolk, 2006) and to model concepts in their content area (Polk, 2006).

Highlighted in the research is the necessity for flexibility in teaching methodology. Teachers need a repertoire of more than one style to be maximally effective in their teaching (Harris, 1998). Effective teachers exercise creativity to adapt their teaching and use of teaching-learning strategies to match the needs of different students (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2004; van de Grift, 2007; Woolfolk, 2006). Additionally, Rosenfeld and Rosenfeld (2004) reported sensitivity to individual learning differences as an integral component of effective teaching when working with students with special needs.

Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher qualities that influence students are labeled as effective (Kennedy, 2008). One way that effectiveness can be identified is by questioning students. Pratt (2008) and Biddulph and Adey (2004) studied the topic of teacher efficacy from the perspective of the student. Biddulph and Adey (2004) found that it was not the content of the curriculum that peaked students’ interest in a subject, but rather it was the quality of the teaching and meaningfulness of the learning activities that influenced students’ opinions about a teacher and the subject area. Pratt (2008) noted that elementary-level students preferred teachers who made them feel like they were an important part or member of a community, provided choices in learning activities, allowed for cooperative projects, made learning seem fun and used authentic and meaningful assessments.

Other researchers also reported qualities related to humor as effective traits of teachers. Mowrer-Reynolds (2008) found teachers who were humorous, funny, and entertaining to be ranked highly as exemplary teacher characteristics. In addition to being humorous, teachers who were easy to talk to, approachable and provided outside help often were considered exemplary (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008).

Purpose of Study

A review of the literature pertaining to teacher qualities and the efficacy of instruction revealed that the majority of the studies were conducted with general education teachers. Studies investigating the teacher qualities considered effective when teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders specifically were few.

Research and experience both support the contention that teaching students classified as emotionally disturbed (ED) present one of the greatest challenges for novice and inexperienced teachers and play a significant role in new teacher attrition (Billingsley, 2003; Nelson, Maculan, Roberts, Ohlund, 2001; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Despite the challenges posed by students with behavioral problems, many experienced teachers have anecdotally reported consistent success in working with this population of students. Any initiative aimed at improving teacher success with these students should begin with an investigation of the effective practices and behaviors employed by experienced, successful teachers.

The objectives of the present investigation were to examine the effective teaching behaviors of highly qualified teacher participants and to identify the behaviors that can be taught to teacher candidates.

Method

Participants

For the purposes of this study, highly qualified teachers were defined as those with at least 10 years of experience in working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, are confirmed by colleagues and the school's principal as effective practitioners and who have had a record of superior standardized test scores achieved by their students. Utilizing this definition, four teachers (two male, two female) certified in special education, each with a minimum of 10 years teaching experience with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) were identified and participated in the study. The four participants teach grades 10-12 in a private school located in the greater New York City area for students with EBD.

Additionally, students defined as EBD are students who have gone through New York State special education identification process and have been classified as such. Utilizing this definition, 21 students from the school, all with an EBD classification and taught by the participating teachers volunteered to complete a survey. Although students possessing an EBD classification vary in diagnosed disability, the student participants were identified as having demonstrated either externalizing behaviors such as those evidenced in conduct disorders or ADHD or internalizing behaviors such as mood and anxiety disorders.

Instruments

Three instruments adapted from previous studies were utilized in this investigation for data collection purposes. First, an assessment of each teacher-participant's video-taped lesson was evaluated by means of a five point likert-type scale using the *Checklist of Optimal Teaching Behaviors* (see Appendix A). This scale was based on the previous work of Harris (1998) and rated teaching behaviors on: (a) Analytic/Synthetic Approach, (b) Organization/Clarity, (c) Instructor-Group Interaction, (d) Instructor-Individual Student Interaction, and (e) Dynamism/Enthusiasm.

Next, a semi-structured interview, *Interview Script for Teacher Participants* (see Appendix B) adapted from prior work of Cox (1996), was used to collect teacher-participant perceptions of their pedagogy. This interview was tape-recorded and used a semi-structured format. One of the four researchers conducted each teacher interview.

The final instrument was a student participant survey, *What Makes a Teacher Good?* developed to assess students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness (see Appendix C). The student survey provided the students with a list of some qualities which previous research has suggested are possessed by good teachers. Students were asked to select those qualities they felt were important for teachers to have and those qualities they felt their teacher possessed as the criteria for evaluating the teacher participants. The survey employed a five point likert-type scale on the importance of specific teacher qualities and/or behaviors. Some background information about the student participant such as age, grade level, and school experience was also included.

Procedure

Imber (2006) suggested that the principal way to determine the presence of effective teaching traits in a teacher is through observation of the teacher's classroom performance. In order to capture the teacher participant's lesson for later coding, a fixed position video camera was located in each classroom during which separate lessons were presented by the four participating teachers. The cameras were positioned prior to the entrance of the students into the classroom and remained unattended during the course of the lesson. This unattended videotaping was done to avoid any added distraction from the lesson by an additional and novel adult in the classroom. The cameras remained on for 50 minutes, the full time period of each class session. Two non-consecutive instructional class periods were videotaped within a two-week period. Teacher participants were instructed to carry out their planned lesson and interact with students present as they would normally do in the course of a teaching session. Subsequent to the lessons' completion, the four researchers evaluated the pedagogy observed in each videotaped lesson. Each researcher individually evaluated all lessons and coded their responses to the videotape on the *Checklist of Optimal Teaching Behaviors'* likert-type scale according to the protocol outlined by Harris (1998).

Subsequent to the video-analysis, one of the four researchers interviewed each teacher participant. The purpose of these interviews was to assess participant perceptions of their own lesson and what they believed constituted effective pedagogy and positive teacher-

student interaction. Participants responded to a semi-structured script adapted from work previously conducted by Cox (1996). Each interview was tape-recorded and took place in the teacher participant's classroom during a 50-minute period.

For the final component, students in the teacher participant's classrooms were asked to volunteer to complete a survey *What makes a good teacher?* developed from criteria identified in prior investigations of teacher quality (Biddulph & Adey, 2004; Pratt, 2008). Students who agreed to participate completed the surveys at the beginning of assigned class time within a 15- minute time limit under supervision of the assistant teacher. Codes were placed on student surveys according to the teacher observed but were anonymous with regard to student identification.

Analysis of Data

The videotapes of the classroom practices and teaching behaviors of each of the teacher participants were analyzed individually by each researcher. Subsequently, the team met to compare their perceptions of the teacher behaviors evident in the videotapes relative to each of the four teacher participants. A consensus decision was achieved corresponding to each of the behaviors identified in the checklist employed by all four investigators. Additional comments recorded individually by the researchers for each of the four teacher participants were carefully analyzed to establish understanding. In a similar manner, the interview transcripts of the responses of the teacher participants were studied first by each investigator and then communally to identify and code both thematic and unique teacher perceptions. Individual teacher responses were compared with their actual teaching behaviors as observed on the videotapes. Finally, all three data sets were cross-referenced in order to identify consistent findings that might have implications for the purpose of the present investigation.

Results

After reviewing the three data sources, video, interview and student survey, observations and responses were categorized into Kennedy's (2008) framework of effective teaching behaviors. The framework broke effective behaviors into three components: (a) personal resources, (b) teacher performance, and (c) teacher effectiveness. Qualitative categories, examples, and percentages of student response are provided. Additionally, a one-tailed Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient was conducted on the student survey responses ($\rho=.65$, $p<.01$, $N=14$). The mean scores of identified effective teaching behaviors and the mean scores of the observed behaviors of the teachers were highly correlated. Thus, students elected the ideal qualities of effective teachers to be the similar to the qualities that they observed in their own highly qualified experienced teachers.

Personal Resources

Personal resources as defined by Kennedy (2008) were those qualities and dispositions that the teacher brings to the job. Within this category, the researchers looked to see evidence from the four teachers on the videotape, or in the interview that the following

qualities were present: knowledgeable in their subject area, personally reflective about their teaching, an individual who was active in their own professional development and finally that, the teachers' actually liked and respected their students. Additionally, from the student survey responses, evidence that students appreciated these personal resource qualities was identified.

Video. Upon reviewing the videotape, the researchers identified two areas in which the four teachers displayed Personal Resources (see Appendix A). One was in their apparent respect of the students and the second was in their knowledge of the subject area. All four teachers' demonstrated respect for their students as evidenced by the researcher's observations that the teachers created "...a very pro-social environment" and that the teachers were "...very encouraging and supportive, they valued every student's contribution". Additionally, all four teachers were knowledgeable about their subject matter. Some of the identified comments noted by the researchers included "...very knowledgeable about her subject" and "well-prepared-effectively conveys knowledge to students".

Interview. Comments that fell within the category of Personal Resources were identified and examples are listed (see Appendix B). Teacher 2 noted in response to Question 2 (In what ways do you consider your teaching to be effective? Identify you major strengths.) that she had "interest in the subject". In answering Question 3 (Could you identify a few classroom management techniques that you currently employ and find effective?) Teacher 4 stressed the importance of setting high expectations for students, regardless of the type or severity of their disabilities, and establishing these from the outset. For example, she explained, "...when a new student comes [into my class] I review with them (sic) so they know what to expect; like in my class they know there's no cursing, they don't talk about drugs or sex, unless we are talking about the topic for a reason".

In answering Question 6 (Briefly describe one of your most successful lessons or experiences as a classroom teacher at this institution. What do you think most contributed to its success?) Teacher 3 responded that providing a nurturing environment and modeling relationship building, which facilitates the development of trust, were the tenets of success. In Question 7 which asked the opposite of 6 (Briefly describe one of your most unsuccessful lessons or experiences as a classroom teacher at this institution. What do you think was the greatest obstacle to its success?) Teacher 1 showed a reflective position and responded to this question by stating that he had difficulty establishing the importance of the American Revolution and its implications for our government and way of life today. He noted, "They had a difficult time understanding that there are people in the world that do not enjoy the same freedoms that they [the students] do. They simply cannot perceive it from the perspectives of those people in the world that are experiencing the repression of freedoms..."

Finally, when posed with questions of the essential qualities of a good teacher (see Appendix B), Teacher 1 proposed that empathy is the most essential quality because it enables the teacher to be more understanding and open in considering the background and context that contributes to the student's difficulties. The second quality that he cited

was patience and he felt that teachers can acquire patience. Teacher 1 further noted that the most important action for a teacher to take in working with these students is to be “relaxed and open with them and to build trust through demonstrating respect for the student and her feelings”.

Teacher 3 asserted that, “... the ability to listen and really try to understand where the student is coming from as well as mitigating circumstances such as family life are critical qualities in a successful teacher.” He purported that active listening is a skill set that can be acquired with training and patience and even empathy can be acquired through greater experience with the student. In contrast, he considered teachers to be “...born with the ability to relate to students...you can’t teach someone how to relate to children and enjoy them, and you either are born with it or not.”

Student Survey. Responses to the student survey displayed in Table 1 showed strong support for the personal resource qualities of teachers reflected in this instrument as knowledge of the subject, enthusiasm, warmth, kindness and sympathetic, and creating a warm classroom environment. Students felt most strongly about a teacher knowing his/her subject matter. Ninety percent of the students responded that this personal resource was important or very important for effective teachers and 90 percent of students elected that they felt their teacher frequently or always displayed their knowledge of the subject matter. Furthermore, 76 percent of the students felt it was important for teachers to be enthusiastic about their subject matter and 76 percent said that their teacher displayed the attribute of enthusiasm frequently or always. Most students, 71percent, endorsed characteristics of warmth, kindness indicating it is important or very important for effective teaching, and 76 percent stated that their own teacher was warm and kind.

Table 1.
Student Survey Responses – Personal Resources

	Knowledgeable	Enthusiastic	Warm, Kind, Sensitive	Warm environment
Percent who think it is an important/very important teacher behavior	90%	76%	71%	62%
Percent who think their teacher exhibits quality	90%	76%	76%	71%

Note. N= 21.

Based on aggregate of scores – 4 (Important/Frequently) and 5 (Very Important/Always)

Implications. Personal resources of the four highly qualified teachers were present in all three data sources. The specific teacher traits identified as present and important were knowledgeable of and enthusiastic about the subject matter, reflective about teaching practices and respectful of students which can be viewed as warmth, kindness and sympathy/empathy. Although there was no evidence observed or reported for the

characteristic of professional development as Kennedy (2008) noted this potential unacknowledged source of information may be the underpinnings of the observable qualities mentioned.

Teacher Performance

Teacher performance qualities are defined as the teachers' everyday practices that occur both in and out of the classroom. This includes all aspects of teacher behavior that is done to foster learning, motivate students, communicate effectively, and manage a classroom. Attributes of this category include the active, ongoing practices of teachers.

Video. Effective behaviors observed on the videotapes and noted by the researchers included the ways in which the teachers' conveyed the depth of their knowledge to the students. It is interesting to note that effective behaviors encompassed a variety of individual styles. Teacher 1 "...employed a more traditional teaching approach, primarily lecture-style supported by notes written on the chalkboard, with the additional use of maps and audio-visual material as enhancements". Whereas Teacher 2 "...uses Smartboard™ technology exclusively" and was "...very engaging-has students participate in lesson on Smartboard™". Thus it was not the teacher's style which made him or her effective, it was that the teachers' were "...well-prepared and effectively conveys knowledge to students". Researchers recognized that Teacher 3 utilized "...a more traditional, 'no-nonsense' approach" while she also "...provides notes for students and reviews lessons" in addition to having "...students very engaged in the lesson". Finally Teacher 4 was acknowledged as having "...provided in-class practice exercises and addressed individual problems effectively. [She was] very attentive to individual student needs" and, further "...the teacher participant was on top of student focus and provided effective redirection, when necessary".

Interview. During the interview, the teachers discussed what they perceived to be their effective teaching practices. Specifically in Question 3 (Could you identify a few classroom management techniques that you currently employ and find effective?) Teacher 1 focused on the importance of students staying put in the classroom during an instructional period and employing the assistant teacher to help ensure that struggling students are able to achieve this goal. Teacher 2 cited "...constant contact, walking around, ensuring they [students] know what's happening" as her most useful and effective management techniques. Likewise, Teacher 3 noted the importance of "...eye contact with kids if they are talking..." and "walking [standing] next to them" as two preferred strategies. This teacher suggested that such proximity control and nonverbal cueing were facilitated greatly by the quality of the relationship established between the teacher and student. Teacher 4 provided the most elaborate response, sharing her use of positive supports that include primary and secondary reinforcement, such as the use of points as rewards.

Question 4 (Describe a few teaching strategies or approaches that you employ regularly and which you feel are successful in improving learning for your students?) prompted Teacher 1 to identify his use of the teachable moment. For example, he described an

incident, “I stepped back from the review lesson and explained how you could make the stock market work for you, rather than continuing to talk about the more generic aspects of the stock market and the national and global implications”. Teacher 2 noted that “...a mixture of teaching approaches and strategies are most effective” and that she purposely changes her approach every “20 minutes or so...” to keep students focused and interested. Teacher 3 considered his use of technology, such as the Smartboard™ and the resources available via the Internet, to be his strongest teaching tools. His sense was that the students he teaches are very “...internet and computer savvy” and they are best served by a multi-modal approach in teaching, with a strong emphasis on both the auditory and visual modalities. Finally, Teacher 4 identified the ability to accommodate different learning styles as strength.

Student Survey. Responses to the student survey represented in Table 2 also showed strong support for the five teacher performance qualities represented in this instrument as well prepared lessons, the encouragement of student questions, utilizing a variety of instructional strategies, use of classroom management, and interacting with students. These attributes were highly endorsed by students as being qualities that effective teachers exhibit in their classroom and the students noticed these characteristics as present in their own teacher. Although not all students felt it essential that lessons be well prepared (71%) they noted that their own teacher’s lessons were (85%). For both identified qualities and those demonstrated by their own teacher, students found that encouraging questions were important (86% for both). In general, instructional strategies and classroom management strategies were also important to students; 71 percent supported using a variety of instructional strategies and 86 percent thought that good classroom management skills were important. Understandably, 81 percent of students felt their own teachers had good instructional strategies and classroom management skills. The final category was remarkable as only 76 percent of students felt that teacher-student interaction was important, where as 90 percent of the students indicated that their own teachers interacted with them before, during, and after class.

Table 2.
Student Survey Responses – Teacher Performance

	Lessons well prepared	Student questions encouraged	Variety of instructional strategies	Classroom management	Interacts with students
Percent who think it is an important/very important teacher behavior	71%	86%	71%	86%	76%
Percent who think their teacher exhibits quality	85%	86%	81%	81%	90%

Note. N= 21.

Based on aggregate of scores – 4 (Important/Frequently) and 5 (Very Important/Always)

Implications. The teacher performance qualities are those observable characteristics of teachers; this is what they do in a classroom. All three data sources found strong evidence that the behaviors represented in this category are exhibited by the highly qualified teachers, they speak to the importance of these characteristics. Furthermore, students find these behaviors desirable in general and acknowledge them in their own teacher. Within this category, it is important to note that the four-videtaped teachers did not exhibit the same teaching style, nor was it necessary that they do. Teacher 2 best represented this perspective in her interview response, noting that "...a mixture of teaching approaches and strategies are most effective" and that she purposely changes her approach every "...20 minutes or so..." to keep students focused and interested. Additionally she notes that having the ability to "...read a student and know how to change one's strategy if it's ineffective" is an essential skill that can be taught to novice teachers.

Teacher Effectiveness

Qualities of teachers that influence students are defined by Kennedy (2008) as teacher effectiveness. Traits of this category deal with the relational aspects of the student teacher interaction. These qualities range from humor and approachability to the teacher's concern for student progress to the student's interpretation of the meaningfulness of the learning activities. Through the examination of the videotape and interviews, qualitative examples of teacher effectiveness were identified. Student survey responses supported students' appreciation of these teacher effectiveness qualities.

Video. Researcher comments provided about teacher effectiveness behaviors included those about Teacher 2 who demonstrated that he was concerned about student progress. Researchers stated that Teacher 2 "...knows whether student's understood and can apply math concepts and strategies through individual participation in lessons". In addition, the researchers noted about Teacher 4 that "... [she was] very attentive to individual student needs and was consistently congenial..."

Interview. During the interview process, examples of teacher effectiveness were acknowledged. In response to Question 1 (Would you describe your teaching experience as generally positive?) Teachers 1, 2, and 4 cited the importance of the opportunity to help their students succeed both socially and academically in preparation for postsecondary training and for life in general. This sentiment was confirmed in Question 2 (In what ways do you consider your teaching effective?). Teachers 3 and 4 valued the ability to form relationships with students. In doing so, teachers' believed students' behavior, academic performance and outlook on life improved. When asked about the qualities that make a teacher successful, Teacher 4 stated "...having a sense of humor..." At the conclusion of the interviews the teachers were asked to provide suggestions for pre-service teachers. Several of the suggestions focused on relational topics. Teacher 2 stated that it is important to know each student as an individual and identify a common interest. Similarly, Teacher 4 indicated that "...her best kept secret is simply to forge some kind of positive relationship with each student you teach..."

Student Survey. Responses to the student survey depicted in Table 3 showed support for the four Teacher Effectiveness qualities represented in this instrument. These included concern for student progress, teachers who are approachable and make themselves available to students, having a sense of humor, and teaching subjects that students can relate to their own lives. Student survey responses indicated that their own teachers demonstrated these characteristics. The characteristic of concern for student progress was rated as important by students for all teachers and was identified as a quality their own teacher exhibited. As important attributes the students' found their teachers to possess humor (86%), approachability (85%) and the ability to relate coursework to life (85%). While the students reported these characteristics to be present in their own teachers, in general they also regarded them to be of less importance as a necessary quality for all effective teachers (respectively 70%, 76%, and 62%).

Table 3.
Student Survey Responses – Teacher Effectiveness

	Course content related to life	Teacher approachable and available	Concern for student progress	Sense of humor
Percent who think it is an important/very important teacher behavior	62%	76%	85%	70%
Percent who think their teacher exhibits quality	85%	85%	86%	86%

Note. N= 21.

Based on aggregate of scores – 4 (Important/Frequently) and 5 (Very Important/Always)

Implications. Qualities of interpersonal behavior have been identified as important in teacher effectiveness (Kyriakides, 2005). Others such as Goldhaber and Hansen (2010) suggested that the relevance of interpersonal factors cannot be discounted. Identifying teacher effectiveness must be included in teacher preparation. The highly qualified teachers' of students with EBD utilized for this investigation exhibited the interpersonal behaviors from this category in all three data sources. Specifically it was interesting to hear from all four teachers the strong endorsement for forming a relationship with the students in order to promote their well-being both academically as well as personally. Effective teachers understand that the teacher-student relationship can be difficult. Teacher 2 was quick to caution "...the teacher must understand the importance of establishing boundaries for such relationships".

Discussion

The research objectives of the present investigation were to examine the effective teaching behaviors of highly qualified teacher participants of students with EBD and to identify those behaviors deemed teachable for future inclusion in teacher preparation

programs. In the course of the research, the behaviors of four highly qualified teachers were observed. After analyzing the data from the videotapes, interviews, and student surveys, the researchers identified effective teaching behaviors. The importance of Kennedy's (2008) framework for breaking effective teaching behaviors into teachable components for general educators was supported and was demonstrated to be applicable to teachers of students with EBD. Specifically, the effective behaviors of highly qualified experienced teachers of students with EBD fell within the three categories framed by Kennedy (2008) for general education teachers. In particular, the performance category presents teachable instructional and interpersonal behaviors. These included strategies, such as awareness of body language, flexibility in accommodating different learning styles, active listening techniques, the use of eye contact, teacher availability, and incorporating a variety of teaching methodologies.

Limitations

The results of this investigation should be interpreted conservatively. The sample of four teachers and 21 students from a school that serves students classified with EBD limits generalization. While the researchers gleaned recommended teacher qualities from current, best-practice studies in the development of the measures utilized, the present investigation should be considered germinal in nature. The list of effective teacher behaviors used in the *Checklist of Optimal Teacher Behaviors, Interview Script for Teacher Participants* and the survey *What Makes a Teacher Good?* would benefit from alignment.

Conclusion

Goldhaber and Hansen (2007) indicated that while teacher certification procedures seek to identify effective teachers, in fact they might eliminate other teachers who may be proficient educators in the classroom. Effective teaching behaviors are not universal. Teachers need to know themselves and know their students in order to perform successfully in a given situation. Although the identified qualities provide a guide for effective behaviors, teachers must seek to fit these behaviors into their own style. Teacher preparation programs can utilize the qualities and behaviors identified to enhance instructional skills for teachers working with students with EBD. It is encouraging to discover that highly qualified teachers believe that many of the skills they possess can be successfully conveyed to those with less experience.

With the increase of the population of students with EBD (Office of Special Education Programs, 2006), particularly in the inclusive classroom, the awareness of these skills is relevant for both general education and special education teachers. The presentation of such teachable behaviors is essential to all teacher education programs.

Summative Implications

As stated at the outset, our research objectives were to examine the effective teaching behaviors of highly qualified teacher participants and to identify the behaviors that can be

taught to teacher candidates. In the course of our research, we carefully analyzed the behaviors of four highly qualified teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. We were able to reach a consensus regarding those observed behaviors that we acknowledged as effective and that were corroborated by the teachers themselves in one-to-one interviews. As an ancillary step, we compared the outcomes from our review of observed behaviors and the teacher interviews with the survey responses of some of their students.

The implications of the findings of this preliminary investigation are both constricted and limited; however, we have been able to modestly advance the purpose that impelled it. First, to that end, we were able to confirm the importance of the following teacher behaviors for educators who wish to be effective in teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders; specifically, (a) explain clearly, (b) be well prepared, (c) provide lessons that are multimodal, (d) invite students to share their knowledge and experience, (e) demonstrate effective classroom management, (f) have a genuine interest in students, (g) be friendly toward students, (h) be enthusiastic about the subject, (i) possess self-confidence, and (k) have a sense of humor. Consequently, teacher preparation faculty and professional development administrators might consider ways to introduce these skills or to ensure they are clearly and comprehensively addressed in their programs designed to prepare candidates to work with students with and without disabilities, such as EBD. Similarly, school administrators might use the qualities and behaviors recommended in this study as a “check list” during the interview process to enhance their selection of the most qualified candidates for teaching positions that entail working with students with disabilities that include EBD.

Nevertheless, an appreciation of the value of these behaviors is of little use to the novice or preservice teacher if these dispositions cannot be easily taught and acquired, either in a teacher preparation program or through sustained in-service training. The teacher interview responses provided some insights that address this concern. For example, some of the skills or approaches that can be “learned,” according to the teachers interviewed, include: having a sense of humor, awareness of body language, flexibility with respect to accommodating different learning styles, employing active listening, empathy, and patience. While some of the skills suggested might seem quite challenging to teach and learn; nevertheless, it was encouraging to the researchers to discover that highly qualified teachers believe that many of the skills they possess can be successfully conveyed to those with less experience, who are willing to work hard to acquire them. Again, this study has provided the reader with a glimpse of some of the more viable teacher qualities or behaviors that can be practically acquired in a teacher preparation program. The authors wish to encourage further research in this direction since the implications for improved teacher practice are clear.

To conclude, the principal achievement of this small, mixed methods investigation was, then, to confirm some of the findings of the few related studies, to contribute a little more to the address the dearth of knowledge regarding the behavioral components of effective teaching, and to encourage researchers to pursue this critical topic and further advance our understanding of what makes a teacher of students with (and without) EBD “good.”

References

- Biddulph, M. & Adey, A. (2004). Pupil perceptions of effective teaching and subject relevance in history and geography at Key Stage 3. *Research in Education, 71*, 1-8.
- Billingsley, B. S. (April 2003). Special education teacher retention and attrition: A critical analysis of the literature. Executive Summary. Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (CPSSE) Document No. RS-2E (IDEAS).
- Bracey, G. W. (2009). Identify and observe effective teacher behaviors. *Phi Delta Kappan, June*, 772-773.
- Cox, J. (1996). *Your opinion, please!: How to build the best questionnaires in the field of education*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Goldhaber, D. & Hansen, M. (2010). Race, gender, and teacher testing: How informative a tool is teacher licensure testing? *American Educational Research Journal, 47*(1), 218-251.
- Harris, A. (1998). Effective teaching: A review of the literature. *School Leadership & Management, 18*(2), 169-183.
- Helm, C. (2007). What's new in...teacher dispositions affecting self-esteem and student performance. *The Clearing House, January/February*, 109-110.
- Helterbran, V. R. (2008). The ideal professor: Student perceptions of effective instructor practices, attitudes, and skills. *Education, 129*(1), 125-138.
- Imber, M. (2006). Should teachers be good people? *American School Board Journal, November*, 29-31.
- Johnson, W. A. (2001). Personality correlates of preferences for preprofessional training by special education and regular class trainees. *Education, 103*(4), 360-368.
- Kennedy, M. M. (2008). Sorting out teacher quality. *Phi Delta Kappan, September*, 59-63.
- Kyriakides, L. (2005). Drawing from teacher effectiveness research and research into teacher interpersonal behavior to establish a teacher evaluation system: A study on the use of student ratings to evaluate teacher behavior. *Journal of Classroom Interaction, 40*(2), 44-66.
- Mowrer-Reynolds, E. (2008). Pre-service educator perceptions of exemplary teachers. *College Student Journal, 42*(1), 214-224.
- Nelson, J. R., Maculan, A., Roberts, M. L., & Ohlund, B. J. (2001). Sources of occupational stress for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 9*(2), 123-130.
- Office of Special Education Programs. (2006). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Educational Sciences (IES). *Crime, violence, discipline, and safety in U.S. public schools. Finding from the school survey on crime and safety: 2005-2006*. Retrieved March 4, 2008, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pusinfo.asp?puid=2007361>
- Polk, J. A. (2006). Traits of effective teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review, 107*(4), 23-29.

- Pratt, D. (2008). Lina's letters: A 9-year-old's perspective on what matters most in the classroom. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *March*, 515-518.
- Rosenfeld, M., & Rosenfeld, S. (2004). Developing teacher sensitivity to individual learning differences. *Educational Psychology*, *24*(4), 465-486.
- Singh, K. & Billingsley, B. (1998). Professional support and its effects on teachers' commitment. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *91*(4), 229-239.
- Stough, L. M., & Palmer, D. J. (2003). Special thinking in special settings: A qualitative study of expert special educators. *The Journal of Special Education*, *36*(4), 206-222.
- Topping, K., & Ferguson, N. (2005). Effective literacy teaching behaviors. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *28*(2), 125-143.
- Van de Grift, W. (2007). Quality of teaching in four European countries: A review of the literature and application of an assessment instrument. *Educational Research*, *49*(2), 127-152.
- Woolfolk, A. (2004). *Educational Psychology*, 9th Edition. Boston: Pearson Education.

Appendix A

A Checklist of Optimal Teaching Behaviors Components of Effective Teaching

Please review the four participant's teaching behaviors, as captured on the DVDs provided, using the following checklist to guide your evaluations regarding their effectiveness. Feel free to add additional comments that you feel are germane to your observation and may address effective teaching behaviors that are not identified in the checklist.

Directions: As you review the videotaped teaching behaviors please evaluate them according to the criteria provided in the checklist below. Please circle your choice for each criterion.

Clearly evident	Some evidence	Little evidence	No evidence	Not relevant to this obs.	
1	2	3	4	5	5
1. Analytic/Synthetic Approach					
a. Discusses points of view other than his/her own.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Contrasts implications of various theories.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Discusses recent developments in the field.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Presents origins of ideas and concepts.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Gives references for more interesting and involved points.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Presents facts and concepts from related fields.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Emphasizes conceptual understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Organization/Clarity					
a. Explains clearly.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Is well prepared.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Gives lectures that are easy to outline, and/or presentations that are easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
Clearly evident	Some evidence	Little evidence	No evidence	Not relevant to this obs.	
1	2	3	4	5	5

d. Is careful and precise in answering questions.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Summarizes major points.	1	2	3	4	5
f. States objectives for each class session.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Identifies what he/she considers important.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Uses varied instructional techniques and assessments (e.g., small group, cooperative learning, portfolio, projects, multi-modal presentations, research projects, team projects, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
i. Provides lessons that are multimodal, that is, ones that facilitate access and learning through more than one modality (e.g., visual, auditory, tactual-kinesthetic).	1	2	3	4	5

3. *Instructor-Group Interaction*

a. Encourages class discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Invites students to share their knowledge and experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Clarifies thinking by identifying reasons for questions.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Invites criticism of his/her own ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Knows if the class is understanding him/her or not.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Has interest and concern in the quality of his/her teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Has students apply concepts to demonstrate understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Demonstrates effective classroom management.	1	2	3	4	5

Clearly evident Some evidence Little evidence No evidence Not relevant to this obs.
1 2 3 4 5

4. *Instructor--Individual Student Interaction*

a. Has a genuine interest in students.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

b. Is friendly toward students.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Relates to students as individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Is able to help an off-task student refocus and return to the task at hand.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Is able to employ an effective behavioral technique to help defuse a volatile situation and refocus the affected student.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Is consistent in meting out appropriate consequences and rewards.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Recognizes and greets students out of class.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Is accessible to students out of class.	1	2	3	4	5
i. Is valued for advice not directly related to the course.	1	2	3	4	5
j. Respects students as persons.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Dynamism/Enthusiasm					
a. Is a dynamic and energetic person.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Has an interesting style of presentation.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Seems to enjoy teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Is enthusiastic about the subject.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Seems to have self-confidence.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Varies the speed and tone of his/her voice.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Has a sense of humor.	1	2	3	4	5

Additional Comments:

Appendix B
Interview Script for Teacher Participants

Semi-Structured Interview: An Investigation of Effective Teacher Behaviors for Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Directions to the Interviewees:

The following questions are designed to provide additional information about your teaching experience and what you regard as effective behaviors, strategies, and approaches you employ in your practice. You are encouraged to answer these questions as candidly and as completely as possible; the anonymity of your responses is assured. The responses of all those teachers interviewed in the course of this study will be reported as group data according to trends that are identified. The interview normally takes from 10-15 minutes – although you may take as much time as you need to answer the questions. The results of this study will be available to you upon request. **Thank you for your candor and valued contribution to this study!**

1. Would you describe your teaching experience generally as positive?
If yes...would you describe the positive aspects for me?
If no...would you describe the negative aspects for me?
2. In what ways do you consider your teaching to be effective? Please identify your major teaching strengths.
3. Could you identify a few classroom management techniques that you currently employ and find effective?
 - a. Briefly explain why you think each of these is effective.
4. Could you describe a few teaching strategies or approaches that you employ regularly and which you feel are successful in improving learning for your students?
 - a. What do you think makes each of these so effective?
5. What behaviors do you find most challenging in students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
 - a. Which of these would you characterize as the single most challenging and why?
6. Briefly describe one of your most successful lessons or experiences as a classroom teacher at this institution.
 - a. What do you think most contributed to its success?
7. Briefly describe your most unsuccessful lessons or experiences as a classroom teacher at this institution.
 - a. What do you think was the greatest obstacle to its success?
8. What do you consider to be the essential qualities of a successful teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
 - a. Which ones can be taught, in your estimation? How and where could they be taught?
 - b. Which ones are intuitive and perhaps difficult to teach?
9. If you could provide a few invaluable suggestions to novice or pre-service teachers working or planning to work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders or who exhibit disruptive behaviors, what would they be?
10. If you could share one “best kept secret” about working effectively with students who pose behavioral challenges, what would it be?

Appendix C

Student Survey: What Makes a Teacher “Good?”

Directions to the Student:

The following are some teacher qualities or behaviors that education “experts” consider characteristic or typical of good teachers. This list may not mention all of the teacher qualities that you consider to be important in teachers you think are effective or “good.”

Please take a moment to think of a teacher you currently have who you consider to be an effective or “good” teacher and which of the qualities or behaviors listed below he or she displays. You may also include other qualities that are not listed in the place for comments that follows the survey, if you think they describe the teacher more accurately. Please do not write your name anywhere on this survey. *Participants and their responses are anonymous!*

Note: Your participation in this assignment is completely voluntary. Also, your responses will be anonymous (no name used), so no one will know that you participated and they will also be kept confidential because only the principal investigator and his research collaborators will ever read them. We do value your honesty and the time you take to respond, should you decide to do so, and we sincerely **thank you!**

Some qualities of “good” teachers:

1. Knowledge of the subject and the ability to communicate this knowledge.
2. Lessons well prepared, organized.
3. Subject related to life, practical.
4. Students' questions and opinions encouraged.
5. Enthusiastic about his/her subject.
6. Approachable, friendly, available.
7. Concerned for students' progress and well-being
8. Has a sense of humor.
9. Warm, kind, sympathetic.
10. Uses a variety of instructional strategies.
11. Provides a "warm classroom climate."
12. Manages classroom and student behavior well.
13. Interacts with students during, as well as before and after class.
14. Has confidence in him/herself and what he/she is doing.

The following is a brief survey designed to gather your perceptions of the qualities and effective teaching behaviors that are frequently found in “good” (effective) teachers.

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Concerned for students' progress and well-being. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Has a sense of humor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Warm, kind, sympathetic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Uses a variety of instructional strategies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Provides a "warm classroom climate." | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Manages classroom and student behavior well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Interacts with students during, as well as before and after class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Has confidence in him/her and what he/she is doing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART THREE

Please **circle** the answer that best describes which of the following qualities and/or behaviors **your** "good" teacher displays, and to what degree.

Scale Key:

- | | never
1 | rarely
2 | sometimes
3 | frequently
4 | always
5 |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 22. Knowledge of the subject and the ability to communicate this knowledge. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Lessons well prepared, organized. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Subject related to life, practical. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Students' questions and opinions encouraged. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Enthusiastic about his/her subject. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Approachable, friendly, available. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Concerned for students' progress and well-being. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Has a sense of humor. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Warm, kind, sympathetic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. Uses a variety of instructional strategies. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. Provides a "warm classroom climate." | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. Manages classroom and student behavior well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. Interacts with students during, as well as before and after class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. Has confidence in him/her and what he/she is doing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please feel free to provide further comments about the qualities of “good” teachers that you have observed, in the space below:
