The Characteristics of Effective and Ineffective Teachers

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Pajares (1992) concluded that beliefs about teaching are well formed by the time a student begins college. These behavior-impacting beliefs were proposed to be self-perpetuating and persevering, even in the face of contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience. Because students have experienced thousands of hours of their teachers' classroom behavior before entering preservice teacher training programs (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984), preservice teachers enter teacher preparation programs with well established filters for what constitutes effective teaching based on an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 65).

Weinstein (1989) asked prospective elementary teachers to describe their perceptions of "a really good teacher" before and after an introductory education course. Preservice teachers did not change their perceptions of what constitutes a good teacher

across the span of the semester. This was interpreted as evidence that preservice teachers already possess strong beliefs about the constituents of effective teaching and that these beliefs are little affected by a single course. Although some movement has been demonstrated in a five-year teacher-preparation program, from a more affective-social orientation to increased emphasis on curriculum and classroom management (Morine-Dershimer, Saunders, Artiles, Mostert, Tankersley, Trent, & Nuttycombe, 1992), it appears (a) that perceptions of effective teachers do not change a great deal across the teaching-experience continuum and (b) that emotional climate constitutes a strong, if not predominant, construct associated with effective teaching, as seen by the entire range of prospective to experienced teachers.

Conceptions of teachers and teaching held by preservice teachers appear to focus more on affective (e.g., caring) than on cognitive issues (Reeves & Kazelskis, 1985). Book, Byers, and Freeman (1983) reported that entering prospective teachers believed that improving student self concept was a more worthy goal than promoting students' academic achievement or creating a good learning environment. At the other end of the teaching-experience continuum, experienced elementary-level teachers also tend to assign preeminent value to affective goals (Prawat, 1985). Even at the college level, perceived physical and psychological closeness of the teacher to the student (immediacy) has been shown to be related to perceptions of teaching effectiveness (e.g., Gorham, 1988; McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer, & Barraclough, 1995). Marsh's (1991) reliable factors derived from the student evaluations of thousands of university courses included instructor-student rapport and instructor enthusiasm. Closeness, warmth, and enthusiasm (immediacy) are likely to be included in descriptions of effective college-level teachers as well as K-12 teachers.

Thus, investigators have described the thinking of college students about their professors, the thinking of preservice teachers about the characteristics of *effective* teachers, and, to a limited extent, the thinking of experienced teachers about *effective* teachers. More research, however, is called for in two areas. First, there is need to determine perceptions about both *effective* and *ineffective* teachers. These are not necessarily mirror images (e.g., effective teachers do this and ineffective teachers do not, or vice-versa). People have a history of years of schooling and experiences with a variety of teachers. These experiences include contact with a range of teachers from ineffective to effective. It is probable that some of the most vivid and influential memories that we have come from devastating incidents with ineffective teachers in hostile learning environments. Second, descriptors of effective and ineffective teachers can clarify memories and perceptions across the preparation-teaching continuum (e.g., prospective teachers beginning their teacher preparation, novice teachers who have just completed the student-teaching semester, and experienced teachers in the field). This investigation was designed to assess conceptions of effective as well as ineffective teachers across this preparation-teaching continuum. Do similar proportions of descriptive statements about their

most effective (best) teachers emerge for prospective, novice, and experienced teachers, and do those descriptions strongly focus on emotional-affective descriptors? Do teachers across the teaching-experience continuum (prospective to experienced) also respond similarly when describing their least effective (worst) teachers, and do their descriptors emphasize emotion and affect more than learning and curricular issues?

Method

Participants

There were 90 participants—30 prospective teachers (beginning teacher-education students), 30 novice teachers (post student teaching), and 30 experienced teachers. A total of 30 experienced teachers responded, and 30 responses were randomly selected from the approximately 40 completed responses in each of the other groups to equalize numbers in the groups. In these three groups of 30 each, 22 prospective teachers were female, 25 novice teachers were female, and 24 experienced teachers were female. The 30 prospective teachers (beginning teacher-education students in the various K-12 grade-level and subject-matter specializations) wrote their descriptions during the first week of their first full course (following an orientation) in a five-year teacher-preparation curriculum at a major university. The 30 novice teachers (from the same university, in various grade-level and subject-matter specializations) wrote their descriptions during the final part of their student-teaching semester. All of these novice teachers had received supervised teaching experience in public schools during that semester. Their placements for student teaching ranged from elementary grades through high school. The 30 experienced teachers (mean=15.8 years of teaching) were employed in the public schools and taught a variety of subject matter from kindergarten through high school. All participated voluntarily, and ethical guidelines for protection of participants were observed.

Design

The independent variables were teaching-experience group and effectiveness dimension. Teaching-experience group was a between-subjects independent variable (prospective teachers, novice teachers, experienced teachers) with 30 participants in each group. Effectiveness dimension was a within-subjects independent variable (effective-teacher description, ineffective-teacher description) in which each participant wrote both descriptions. The five dependent variables were percentages of the total number of verb-referent phrases (described subsequently) written by each participant in five behavior categories. These behavior categories were (a) emotional environment, (b) teacher skill, (c) teacher motivation, (d) student participation, and (e) rules and grades. Thus, the primary design was a 3x2 mixed format with one between-subjects independent variable (teaching-experience

group) and one within-subjects independent variable (effectiveness dimension). The dependent variables were percentages of total statements given by each participant in the behavior categories.

Procedure

A general explanation of purpose was given orally for the university students and by letter for the experienced teachers. Additionally, the instructions were typed at the top of each of two standard-size, unlined, sheets of paper that each participant received. One sheet of paper asked the participant to "describe your most effective (best) teacher(s)." The other sheet instructed the participant to "describe your most ineffective (worst) teacher(s)." Both sheets went on to say, "Draw on all school experiences (elementary, secondary, college) that you have had. Create a portrait so that one reading your journal could picture exactly what this classroom and teacher and the teaching-learning process were like."

Descriptions were handed in or sent in within a few days thereafter. Some typed their descriptions, but most hand-wrote the responses. They were restricted to the front and back of a single sheet of paper (1.5 pages after instructions) for the effective-teacher description and similarly for the ineffective-teacher description.

In the following Results section, classification of the verb-referent statements is described. Additionally, the origin of the categories used and the reliability (percentage of agreement) of classifying the statements is included.

Results

What were the characterizations of effective and ineffective teachers by (a) prospective teachers (beginning teacher-education students), (b) novice teachers (post student teaching), and (c) experienced teachers? The descriptions written by these 90 participants were scored by placing each statement into one of the five categories described previously. A statement was a verb along with that verb's referent. That is, these statements (phrases) were coded into the five overall categories (with each category subdivided into "effective" and "ineffective"). Examples of these verb-referent statements are (a) was aware of what was going on, (b) was enthusiastic, (c) was abrasive, (d) was insensitive, (e) was unprepared, (f) had a feeling of responsibility for student learning, (g) had a class where students relaxed, (h) had totally unreasonable tests, (i) had a class that students found really boring, (j) related new concepts to previous ones, (k) encouraged questions, (l) never gave practical examples, and (m) discouraged group activities. Additionally, it was important to note whether the verb-referent phrase referred to the teacher or the student (e.g., "We never understood what the lectures were about" indicates that from this respondent's perspective, the teaching was not clear). When a verb was associated with two or more referents, each was scored as a separate statement. For instance, if the participant wrote, "This teacher was abrasive and insensitive," both

"was abrasive" and "was insensitive" were scored. In this example, both statements were classified in the emotional environment (ineffective) category.

The categories were derived after sorting several hundred verb-referent statements, and they proved to allow reliable scoring. Primarily, the five overall categories were derived from responses collected in this study. Additionally, however, the extensive work of Marsh (1991) in establishing orthogonal factors (categories) was taken into account. The statements were sorted into categories by two of the authors. To assess reliability of classification, after the five overall categories had been established, classification of 100 verb-referent statements by two independent scorers yielded 97 percent agreement. Sample statements for each of the five overall behavior categories are reported in Table 1.

Each participant's verb-referent statements were sorted into 10 areas (five behavior categories by two effective-ineffective conditions). Thus, 100 percent of each participant's verb-referent statements were classified into these 10 areas (Emotional Environment-effective, Emotional Environment-ineffective, Teacher Skill-effective, Teacher Skill-ineffective, Teacher Motivation-effective, Teacher Motivation-ineffective, Student Participation-effective, Student Participation-ineffective, Rules and Grades-effective, Rules and Grades-ineffective).

A 3x2 mixed-model analysis of variance was computed for each of the five categories. In these analyses, the between-subjects independent variable was teaching-experience group (prospective vs. novice vs. experienced), and the within-subjects independent variable was effectiveness dimension (effective-teacher description vs. ineffective-teacher description). The dependent variable for a given analysis of variance was the percentage of verb-referent statements in a given

Table 1
The Five Behavior Categories and Examples of Statements
(E=Effective, I=Ineffective)

1. Emotional Environment
    (E)   Cared about me as a person.
    (I)   Was nasty to all but her pets.
2. Teacher Skill
    (E)   Always did creative things to make us learn.
    (I)   Was disorganized.
3. Teacher Motivation
    (E)   Kept up on the latest stuff.
    (I)   Always sat at his desk during the whole period.
4. Student Participation
    (E)   Had lots of hands-on activities.
    (I)   Discouraged students from asking questions.
5. Rules and Grades
    (E)   Wrote assignments on the board.
   (I)   Was totally a my-way authoritarian.

category. Because the percentages were derived from total responses in the 10 areas and the percentages in each category never equaled 100 percent, these analyses of variance for each pair of areas separately (e.g., effective vs. ineffective for Emotional Environment) were appropriate, and degrees of freedom were never artificially restricted.

The means for these analyses are represented in Figure 1. The main effects for *effectiveness dimension* yielded findings of significantly greater percentages of verb-referent statements for their most effective than their most ineffective teachers for the categories of (a) emotional environment, $\underline{F}(1, 87)=15.61$, $\underline{p}<.01$, (b) teacher skill, $\underline{F}(1,87)=3.95$, $\underline{p}<.05$, (c) teacher motivation, $\underline{F}(1,87)=5.58$, $\underline{p}<.05$, and (d) student participation, $\underline{F}(1,87)=12.83$, $\underline{p}<.01$. In the category of rules and grades, however, this pattern was reversed with a significantly greater proportion of verb-referent statements describing their least effective than their most effective teachers, $\underline{F}(1,87)=6.82$, $\underline{p}<.01$.

The main effects for *teaching-experience group* yielded nonsignificant find-

Figure 1
Percentage of Verb-Referent Phrases Written
by Prospective, Novice, and Experienced Teachers
To Describe Their Most Effective (E) and Most Ineffective (I) Teachers
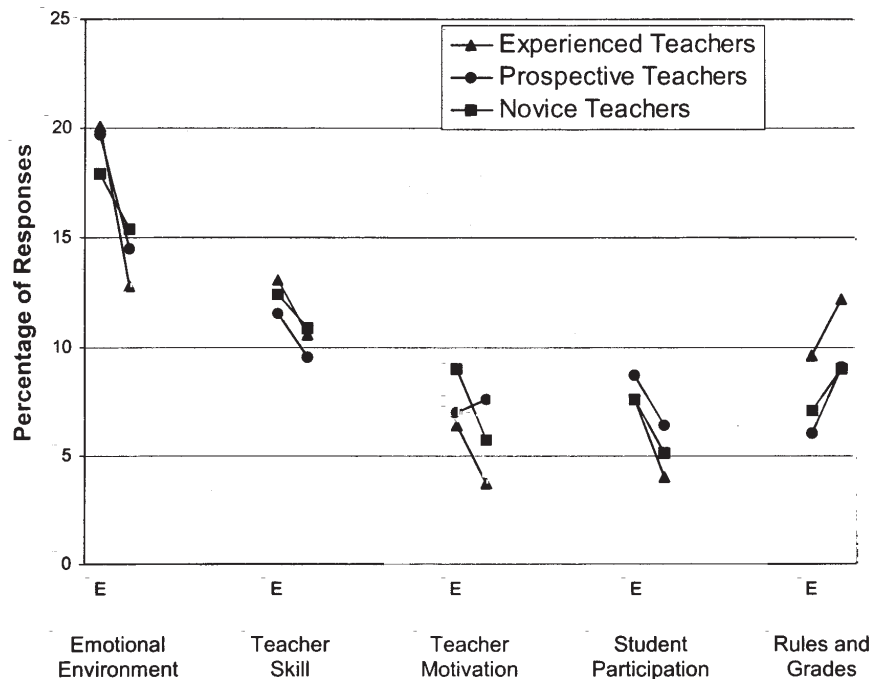
ings (p>.05) for the categories of (a) emotional environment, (b) teacher skill, and (c) student participation. Experienced teachers were less apt to mention teacher motivation than the other two groups, F(2, 87)=3.68, p<.05, and experienced teachers were more apt to mention rules and grades than the other two groups, F(2, 87)=3.86, p<.05. The teaching-experience group by effectiveness dimension interactions were nonsignificant (p>.05).

As may be noted in Figure 1, the three groups (prospective, novice, experienced) tended to use similar proportions of responses in portraying their best teachers. Also, the three groups tended to devote similar proportions of responses in portraying their worst teachers. The proportions of verb-referent statements, however, were markedly different when describing their best versus their worst teachers in each of the categories.

Discussion

The present work compares descriptions of effective and ineffective teachers written by prospective teachers (beginning a teacher-education program), novice teachers (finishing the student-teaching experience), and experienced teachers (teaching in public schools). The participants' descriptions focused on what their best and worst teachers did. The themes that emerged from their verb-referent statements were (a) emotional environment, (b) teacher skill, (c) teacher motivation, (d) student participation, and (e) rules and grades.

The affective domain figured prominently in the descriptions of all three groups. The overall *emotional environment* was a dominant theme. Caring about students was particularly prevalent in the descriptions of effective teachers. They were described as warm, friendly, and caring. Conversely, ineffective teachers often were said to create a tense classroom and were described as cold, abusive, and uncaring. A greater proportion of these emotional-environment responses, however, described their best teachers.

In the category of *teacher skill*, effective teachers were said to know how to create an effective learning environment. They were organized, prepared, and clear. Ineffective teachers consistently were indicted for their inept pedagogy, boring lectures, and unproductive learning environment. A higher percentage of statements was devoted to describing their best teachers.

In the category of *teacher motivation*, effective teachers were described as caring about learning and teaching. "Enthusiasm" or "enthusiastic" often appeared in these descriptions. In contrast, a common statement was that their worst teachers hated teaching. Some were faulted for being burned-out or just going through the motions. Overall, more verb-referent statements about teacher motivation were written for best teachers than for worst teachers.

In the category of *student participation*, the descriptions of their best teachers emphasized activities that involved the students in authentic learning, interactive

questioning, and discussion. Their worst teachers were characterized as requiring isolate behavior with little interaction, activity, or discussion. Some participants complained that their most ineffective teachers were intolerant of questions asked by students. Again, however, a greater proportion of student-participation descriptors were written about their most effective teachers than their least effective teachers.

In the category of *rules and grades*, participants wrote that their most effective teachers motivated their students and had little difficulty with classroom management. Their care about student accomplishment and advocacy for student success set the tone for fair rules and grading. Such teachers frequently were depicted as requiring and maintaining high standards of conduct and academic work. Ineffective teachers were faulted for unreasonable or unfair assignments, tests, and grades. Opposite poles in classroom management were expressed, in which the ineffective teacher either was a dominating ogre or had no control. This category of rules and grades was the only one of the five categories in which greater proportions of verb-referent descriptors were expressed for ineffective teachers than for effective teachers.

The literature on expert versus novice performance suggests that experts rely more on procedural knowledge, and those less apt in the particular professional field or task depend more on declarative knowledge. Expert teachers would appear (a) to have better developed schemata for classroom teaching with strong links between subject matter and ways to teach it, (b) to be more effective lesson planners and implementers, and yet (c) to be more flexible and reflective in meeting student needs and facilitating student social and academic growth (Gallagher, 1994; Leinhardt & Greeno, 1991; Peterson & Comeaux, 1987).

The present results were remarkably similar for the written descriptions by prospective teachers, novice teachers, and experienced teachers. The exceptions were that the experienced teachers dwelled less on teacher motivation and more on rules and grades. Even in light of more complete descriptions of effective and ineffective teachers, however, a problem for educators who are committed to the preparation of teachers is that knowing how effective and ineffective teachers behave does not provide a prescription for shortening or easing the route to proficiency and excellence in teaching. Simply copying the external characteristics of effective teachers without building complementary rich, underlying knowledge structures is likely to result in a conservative mimic lacking in adaptive innovation (Leinhardt, 1993). The challenge is to find an initial balance between formal knowledge of educational practice and the application of concepts of effective teaching and then to progressively shift that balance to move teachers-in-training toward expert thinking and action as rapidly as feasible.

By giving preservice teachers multiple opportunities to teach in progressively more complex, multidimensional, and realistic environments, progressive shifts and refinement from declarative "what to do" to procedural "how to do" knowledge structures occur (e.g., Morine-Dershimer, et al., 1992). The present results demonstrated that prospective teachers, novice teachers, and experienced teachers have

almost identical perceptions. They know what effective teachers do and what ineffective teachers do. All of the participants had strong views about what constitutes good teachers versus bad teachers, and the two are by no means mirror images of one another. More verb-referent statements about emotional climate, care about students, interaction with students, learning activities, discussion, and teacher or student questions were reported for effective teachers than for ineffective teachers. Further, there was evidence of more focus on tests, feedback, grades, assignments, and homework when participants described their worst teachers.

The present research builds on previous findings to provide a more complete picture of the positive and negative teacher procedures and behaviors as perceived across the teacher-preparation-experience continuum. Both (a) understanding how others along the developmental continuum define effective and ineffective teaching (comparative, declarative knowledge) and (b) having progressively realistic environments in which to attempt emulation of preferred actions (actualized, procedural knowledge) appear to be necessary components of teacher education.

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