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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in the City College of Chicago and replicated in three other urban community college districts to investigate the instructional methods of a sample of exceptional community college teachers and to look for alterable teaching behaviors and techniques that could be presented to other teachers who wanted to improve their teaching. The subject pool for the study included full-time and permanent part-time teachers of introductory English composition, biology, math, and social science courses who were identified by administrators as exemplary teachers and whose students had high achievement rates. Interviews conducted with 90 of these outstanding teachers revealed: (1) the effective teachers had a strong sense of educational and instructional goals and purposes which they transmitted to their students; (2) they showed respect for and interest in their students which was exemplified in their learning the students' names; (3) they encouraged student participation in the learning process by asking questions in class, arranging for students to work cooperatively with each other, and promoting active "hands on" learning; (4) they carefully observed their students' progress and achievement levels and used the information to adapt class instruction and plan individual remediation; and (5) the teachers had adapted well to the special conditions and circumstances of their colleges and developed a set of teaching techniques suited to the needs of their students. The interview schedule is appended. (HB)

# National Study of Effective Community College Teachers

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## Abstract

Three major urban community college districts replicated a study of very effective teachers originally conducted at the City Colleges of Chicago. Researchers at the cooperating institutions identified teachers who had outstanding reputations and whose students achieved at very high levels. Intensive interviews with the teachers revealed four common attributes of the ninety teachers involved in the original and replication studies. The teachers plan and organize goals, they show respect and interest in their students, they encourage student participation, and they monitor student progress and respond accordingly. The excellent teachers in this study are exceptionally dedicated and hard working. Many of the techniques that they use can be successfully used by other teachers who would like to improve their own teaching.

In the last year or so several major studies have appeared nationally focusing public attention on the quality of education in the United States. Indeed, the President himself has sponsored efforts to investigate the problems and explore potential solutions so that education would be enhanced and the goals of a fully literate and critically thinking society be realized. Most research efforts, both prior to and following the prestigious President's Commission on Education have focused on K-12 education in this country. Great concern for the difficulties of both teaching and learning has been expressed, and many studies have focused on that subject. Educational researchers have reached some level of consensus on ingredients of good teaching, especially at the elementary school level. Brophy (1982) has reviewed and summarized these findings that show a set of teaching behaviors that are consistently linked to greater achievement in students. Statistical meta-analysis techniques (Walberg, 1982) also identify common elements of good teaching at both the elementary and secondary levels. Lysakowski and Walberg (1981, 1982) have shown strong effects due to a set of instructional techniques that are equally effective across different levels of schooling, socio-economic levels, races, and community types.

Research on effective teaching at the community college level is less plentiful, although the needs and demands for such information is also great. In a discusion of instruction at American community colleges, Arthur Cohen and Florence Brawer (1982) mention many innovations based on televisions and on computers, and they discuss the growth of the learning resource center concept as important developments in community college instruction. While these ideas have held great promises, they have not proven to be a panacea to the difficulties of educating the diverse student population attending the nation's newest educational institutions. One reason for this lack of total

effectiveness is that the innovations suggested focus largely on "things" as enhancers of instruction and ignore the human element--the teacher--as a purveyor of instruction and facilitator of student learning. From other quarters came assertions that systems like mastery learning and competency based instruction have shown some success in college classrooms, as indeed they have. Again, however, one must look at the teacher behind the system to see if success in teaching is attributable to instructor behavior and attitude as well as to the mastery learning and competency based methodologies.

This paper describes the findings of a nationally replicated study of especially effective community college teachers. The study sought to investigate the instructional methods of a sample of exceptional community college teachers and to look for alterable teaching behaviors and techniques (Bloom, 1981) that could be presented to other teachers who wished to improve their teaching. Guskey and Easton (1983) conducted an initial study on this topic at the Center for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning of the City Colleges of Chicago during the 1981-82 academic year. During the 1982-83 year Cuyahoga Community College (Cleveland, Ohio), Wayne County Community Colleges (Detroit, Michigan), and Metropolitan Community College (Kansas City, Missouri) replicated the original study after adjusting and refining the original methodology. This paper describes the results of this expanded study. Both studies used personal interviews to investigate the teaching techniques of a sample of highly effective community college teachers.

## Study Methodology

### Planning the Replication

Researchers from the four participating community college systems met for two days in the early fall of 1982 for training and planning for this study.

During these meetings they considered how to select teachers to be interviewed, how to select and train interviewers, and how to analyze findings. (The authors would like to thank Kathryn D. Sloane for her assistance in this planning phase of the project.) In most cases they followed the procedures of the initial study reported by Guskey and Easton (1983) but made slight changes in some areas. Each system was free to add procedures to the overall research design, yet such procedures were supplemental and did not interfere with the standard procedures.

Identifying and Selecting Teachers

The subject pool for this study included full-time and permanent part-time teachers of introductory English composition, biology, math and social science courses. The researchers identified their samples by first asking college administrators to recommend exemplary teachers in the designated courses. Then, from this list of teachers the researchers chose those with relatively high student achievement rates (using grade point averages or the proportion of the teachers' students who received A through D grades). Although there are many other possible ways of identifying effective teachers, these two selection criteria are reasonably efficient and cost-effective, and they had also succeeded in the Chicago study. After selecting teachers, the researchers invited them to participate in the study, guaranteeing them confidentiality and anonymity.

Selecting and Training the Interviewers

Some colleges hired local graduate students on a part-time basis to conduct the interviews, and others used non-supervisory community college administrators. The training consisted of a thorough discussion of the purposes of the project, discussion of the specific questions to be asked (see Appendix), and two trial interviews. A detailed description of the training

process, along with all procedures in this study, is available from the first author of this paper. Following the training, interviewers arranged and conducted the interviews, which they tape recorded.

Data Analysis

Each participating community college transcribed all interview tapes, then summarized each transcript into a set of six categories that described the first two to three weeks of the semester; teaching practices; monitoring and evaluating student progress; relationships with students; student support systems; and attitudes toward teaching. The researchers also coded specific behaviors from these summaries. The researchers met in the spring of 1983 to compare their findings. This paper represents a compilation of all data from a total of ninety interviews. The conclusions are based on an analysis of the written summaries, and are supported here with quotations from the transcripts.

## Results

The findings of the replicated study are remarkably similar to the Chicago findings, lending strong support to the generalizability of these results. Like the Chicago study, this replication showed that the exceptional teachers had adapted extremely well to the special conditions and circumstances of their college and developed a set of teaching techniques uniquely suited to the needs of their students. The teachers in this sample appear to be representative of their colleagues in terms of race and sex, although on the average they have somewhat more teaching experience both at the community college level and at other levels of education than their peers.

This analysis confirmed the four categories of teaching behaviors discussed by Guskey and Easton (1983): the teachers are highly organized, they

are student oriented, they encourage student participation, and they provide students with regular feedback about their work. These characteristics of the teachers are behaviors and techniques rather than dispositions or personality traits. Because of slightly different emphasis in the current data the four categories are renamed here as follows: plan and organize goals, show respect and interest in students, encourage student participation, and monitor student progress and respond accordingly. The remainder of this paper discusses these categories in detail.

Plan and Organize Goals

The first common element in these teachers' methods and procedures is that they have a strong sense of their educational and instructional goals and purposes. They are clear and decisive about what the important goals of their courses are, why these goals are important, and how they and the students will reach these goals. In addition to understanding the course goals themselves, they tell the students what the goals are, and further tell the students how to reach these goals. Ninety-three percent of the sample stressed the importance of acting on this factor.

In planning the courses the teachers consider exactly what it is that they want the students to learn because of a "very strong feeling that if I don't know what it is that I want them to learn, then they're not going to learn it." The teachers relate the courses' goals to the total curriculum, to job skills, and to everyday life, and then focus on the parts of the course that are necessary for the students' subsequent success in school or on the job. Most of the teachers concentrate on a core of basic information and are somewhat flexible in terms of the details of the course. However, the major goals and objectives are predetermined and the teaching strategies and materials coordinated to match the basic goals.

The teachers tell the students what the course is about and explain unambiguously the requirements and procedures so "there's no surprise coming up anywhere along the line." They distribute a syllabus or course outline at the beginning of the semester covering course objectives, assignments, grading criteria, textbooks, attendance policy, and class and laboratory rules and regulations. The early classes contain thorough discussions of the goals and objectives of the course, because "if you want the students to learn something, you have to tell them what you want them to learn." Although most teachers do not have the entire semester planned from beginning to end, they are sure of the important aspects of the course and they tell the students clearly what these are. The teachers continue to remind students of important ideas and concepts throughout the course by repeating the major objectives and highlighting the most crucial mateial.

In addition to telling students what the major points of the course are, these teachers give students hints and methods on how to focus on the important ideas. Often they stress study, reading and note-taking skills at the beginning of the semester and then incorporate these techniques into the course content. Many instructors encourage the use of college resources for initial instruction as well as for remediation. The teachers tell the students how to discern the most significant material from their textbook; they emphasize by repetition and the use of the blackboard the important concepts; they foretell the key issues in the following lessons; and they suggest methods to prepare for tests and quizzes.

These teachers are highly organized in terms of course goals and objectives, in terms of communicating these to students, and in terms of assisting students in learning these by providing cues and learning guidelines. They teach "well thought out" courses where "organization is

critical." Equally important is the line of communication to students emphasizing the essential points that have implications to other courses and jobs. Not only do the teachers "sift the significant from the insignificant" for themselves, but they teach their students how to do this.

Show Respect and Interest in Students

A second commonality among these teachers deals with the interpersonal components of student-teacher relations. This aspect of teaching practices can be described by the different ways that the teachers display interest in their students in the classroom, the type of classroom atmosphere they strive to create, and in the expectations that they hold for their students. The underlying theme of these more personal exchanges is the attempt on the teachers' part to help students find their own niche in the class, in the curriculum, and in the overall educational process.

The primary example of showing interest in students is learning their names and additional information about their backgrounds and interests. Most of these excellent teachers (sixty-four percent) say that they make a concerted effort to learn students' preferred names in get-acquainted activities in the first or second class meeting, by using seating charts, or by returning homework and quizzes. As the teachers learn the students' names they also gather other information from informal discussion or from student questionnaires. Teachers use what personal information they have in order to make their classes more relevant to students. Teachers "try to see the course from the students' point of view" and gear instruction toward student interests, tell how the course can be applied in everyday life, and discuss the relationship between the course and other courses. Background information gives the teacher the context for relating the class to the students' lives. One common goal is to "bring students out in terms of their own background,

their own interests, their own environment, to share the kinds of things that are important with all of us in the class." These teachers can more easily relate their classes to the students by learning about their personal and academic backgrounds. In addition to fitting parts of the course to students' interests these teachers are flexible in the curricular material that they cover, usually accommodating the syllabus to student weaknesses. This technique is discussed in detail in a later section of this paper.

The teachers in this study stressed the importance of "treating students like human beings." This is basic to their approach to teaching and is manifested in class by their refusal to embarass or intimidate students. Several teachers mentioned how they help weaker students participate in class without making embarassing errors. They either ask these students questions that have no precise correct answer, or they help the students turn whatever response they make into a correct answer.

Using related strategies, the teachers create a classroom atmosphere that they describe as relaxed, comfortable, cheerful, friendly, non-threatening, and positive. The teachers make students "feel at ease" and "try to get them to relax" by making a deliberate attempt to create this special environment.

A final aspect of this interpersonal component of teacher-student relations is that the teachers want their students to succeed and they believe that with sustained effort that the students can do well. Eighty-nine percent of the interviewees expressed this strong belief. Many tell their students "I think you can do it and I'll help you as much as I can." Accompanying the high expectations for student success is the belief that the students and teacher together have a common mission in the class, that the teacher is "with them in trying to master the subject," and "it's not me against them." The high expectations and sense of responsibility for the students combine to help

create the special learning atmosphere that so many of these teachers desire.

These teachers learn about their students' backgrounds and interests and when possible tailor parts of their course to fit these. The classrooms are relaxed and non-threatening places where the teachers and students work together to accomplish course goals. These methods have worked exceptionally well for those teachers who are confident in their own abilities to help even the most poorly prepared student.

Encourage Student Participation

The third major characteristic of these teachers is that they have a variety of ways of encouraging students to become active participants in the learning process. About ninety percent of the interviewed teachers emphasize the importance of engaging student attention and involvement in classes by asking the students questions in class, by encouraging students to ask questions, by arranging for students to work cooperatively with other students, by relating course material to students' interests, and by promoting active learning with "hands on" applications and examples.

The basic technique of involving students is asking them questions in class. Many teachers have a routine pattern of asking questions, some go around the room in a consistent order, and some are selective in asking certain questions of certain students. One of the reasons that teachers ask so many questions is to "make sure that they're with me" or to "see if they're following me." This is a monitoring process that is discussed fully in the next section of this paper. A second reason for asking questions, relevant here, is to "draw students out to express new ideas and express themselves fully." Question asking and answering is a part of the learning process. Teachers ask questions and they encourage students to ask questions in order to enhance learning. Students feel free to ask questions of these teachers

because they know that the teachers are not going to "put them down." Students' and teachers' questions serve two purposes in these classes: they check on facts and basic information and they also spark discussion of new ideas that will help the students think, actively consider the concepts that they are studying, and solve problems.

Another technique of involving students in the learning is to use students to help each other study in small group discussions and peer tutoring sessions. Teachers frequently suggest that students "check with your neighbor." More formal group work occurs to "activate students and get them talking to each other about what we're saying in class." The teachers believe that discussion groups will facilitate interactions among students and may involve students who prefer not to talk before the entire class. Some teachers chose group members selectively, pairing "readers with talkers." The group work involves students first with each other, and then allows them to explore the class material together.

Students are most likely to participate in class when the teachers know how to make the material pertinent to the students' own lives. This concept has been discussed previously in the paper under the topic of learning about students' backgrounds and interests. The teachers believe that students are more likely to participate when the material is connected to their personal lives, and they make these connections by bringing in practical applications and concrete examples from everyday life and from newspaper stories, television programs and current movies. Teachers also take their students on field trips that will help connect the course material to real life. In the courses that have laboratory sections the exercises are designed to connect the abstract to the concrete and the theoretical to the practical. Many teachers ask their students to give everyday examples of the concepts and

ideas that they discuss in class.

The excellent teachers believe in the importance of having students become involved in their work and participate in class. They ask the students questions and they encourage students to ask them and each other questions. They have found that students participate readily in small groups and also that they relate to material that is personally meaningful. Participation occurs in non-threatening classrooms where it is encouraged.

Monitor Student Progress and Respond Accordingly

These very successful teachers carefully observe their students' progress and achievement level and use the information they glean both to adapt class instruction and to plan individual remediation to students' strengths and weaknesses. The teachers collect achievement data on their students both formally and informally and they make decisions about how best to respond based on this data. When the students are successful they frequently praise them for their accomplishments; when the students have difficulties some teachers lightly admonish them and all these teachers engineer plans that will help the students to improve. In some cases the teachers adjust their curricular and instructional plans for the entire class and in other cases the teachers devise individual plans for student improvement. The important common feature among ninety-three percent of our teachers is that they collect and use information about students' achievement and progress to plan alternative instruction so that students can achieve better in the areas where they are doing poorly.

The teachers rely on several sources of information on how well or how poorly their students are doing. Many teachers have writing samples or diagnostic test scores at the beginning of the term. All teachers use quiz and examination scores as indicators of how well the students are learning.

Other sources of information include class interactions, student responses to questions, projects, papers, presentations, reports, as well as "the looks in their eyes." These teachers believe that they "...have to know what's going on between the students' ears in order to teach better." They use all available data about student progress to decide how to make class and individual assignments for the course.

Over ninety percent of these stress the importance of feedback to students so that they "...should know exactly where they stand." The most common form of feedback is scores on quizzes and exams, with many teachers giving trial quizzes to prepare students for the graded quiz. English teachers make extensive comments on papers. Teachers also speak privately to students before and after class, they return homework assignments regularly with grades and comments, they schedule conferences to discuss progress, and they make verbal comments in class about how the class as a whole and individual students are progressing.

These teachers keep themselves and their students abreast of student achievement and they base subsequent instruction and remediation on students' achievement levels. Some change teaching methods "according to the needs of the class," while others make less radical changes and simply review and reteach material that students have difficulty with. All of the teachers in this sample encourage students to meet with them privately during office or conference hours to discuss problems. They also refer students to learning center resources, tutors, counselors, and computer-aided instruction. Several teachers take class time to discuss all of the extra resources available to students on their campus. Other remediation techniques include student study groups, peer tutoring, and special study rooms developed by teachers. English composition teachers in this sample required students to revise essays in line

with written comments and to turn in the revised papers. In addition to the many specific corrective activities that these teachers recommend to their students, many also discuss general study techniques that can help students improve their overall study habits.

In sum, these effective teachers carefully observe student progress, they inform students of their achievement, and they adjust their teaching and provide specific remediation opportunities to cover areas of student difficulty. The most common means of observing and reporting student progress are quizzes and examination; papers, clasroom interaction and question and answer sessions also provide information to teachers and students. Most teachers try to solve problems in class first, then they suggest individual conferences, and finally they refer students to learning resource centers, tutors, counselors, and peers.

## Discussion

The results if this replication study are highly consistent with the results of the Guskey and Easton study. The excellent teachers plan and organize course goals, they show respect and interest in their students, and they monitor student progress and respond accordingly. While there is little doubt that the ninety teachers in this study are exceptionally dedicated and hard working, it is equally true that many of the techniques they use can be successfully used by other teachers who would like to improve their teaching. These are techniques that most teachers can use; they are not deeply entrenched personality characteristics, nor are they traits that teachers are either born with or without. The teachers in this study appear to have learned these techniques and continued to use them because they worked so well.

Although these findings are interesting as research results, their usefulness can only be judged in terms of how well they can be practically applied. At the City Colleges of Chicago Ginsberg and Easton (1983) worked on a pilot basis with seven teachers to implement these principles at the beginning of a new semester. Although the study did not collect achievement data from these teachers' students, the evaluation showed that teachers found the program very rewarding and successful, and expected that their teaching would improve because of it. The City Colleges of Chicago also conducted a large scale implementation project based on the results of this study. About thirty teachers met for several informational seminars to discuss the four principles listed here, and then met in small groups to plan their actual teaching strategies with peers. The evaluation of this project is not complete. It is believed, though, that the peer group structure of the project has provided the teachers with emotional and social support to make useful changes in their instructional routines.

At Wayne County Community College in Detroit, a college-wide professional development program now includes seminars and workshops on student retention methods and instructional methodologies based largely on interest generated among faculty following dissemination of the results of the effective teacher studies. An ongoing group of about fifteen faculty from such diverse disciplines as chemistry, biology, English and speech meet regularly to discuss and assist each other in redesigning course outlines and classroom strategies that include practical applications of these findings. In addition, each discipline in the college has redeveloped individual course goals and objectives and criteria for success that are made available to students. More workshops are planned focused on those aspects of the effective teacher study that instructors want to emulate. Also following

these findings, the college's tutorial multi-learning laboratories have become an integral part of the feedback and reteaching/relearning process seen in successful instruction.

Other implementaion procedures may be equally successful. Some highly motivated teachers may be able to make changes on their own without assistance of seminars or peer groups. The information from the study could also be presented in self-assessment checklists for teachers to use at regular intervals. Teaching plans or teaching programs could also incorporate some of these findings into their manuals and instructions. Given the confidence that we have in these results, and the unquestioned need for improvement in education at all levels, the potential for this research is great. Teachers, instructional supervisors, administrators, and education specialists are urged to develop training plans based on this research.

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## APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. What is your previous teaching experience? (at CCC, elsewhere, levels taught)
2. How do you prepare for teaching the introductory classes in your department or division?
3. What do you do in the first class session? (OR: Take me through the first class session.)
4. Can you tell me what happens in a typical class period?
5. How do you evaluate students?
6. How do you (are you able to) assess student progress in class?
7. What do you do when you see your students falling behind?
8. How do students in your class know when they are doing poorly or doing well?
9. How do you reward or reinforce student learning?
10. Do you recommend any particular out-of-class or in-class learning resources or stuyd techniques to your students?
11. Can you describe to me what the interactions between you and your students are like in a typical class? (How often do you ask students questions? How often do they ask you questions?)
12. How do you get students to participate in class?
13. Do you try to motivate students in class? How?
14. How do you think students determine what is important for them to learn in your class?
15. How often do you see students outside of class? (Who initiates this?)
16. What percent of the students do you think are really able to master the subject? (Do you feel that certain students in your class are unteachable? About what percent?)
17. In your own teaching experience, what distinguishes a good class from a poor class?
18. What rewards or satisfaction do you grain from teaching? What do you like least about teaching?

19. How do you judge your overall effectiveness as a teacher?

20. What are your suggestions for in-service training for more effective instruction in the college?

21. Are there are other important aspects of teaching not mentioned that you feel should be covered?

(Ask permission to call back if more information is needed.)