

# Effective Teaching: Perceptions of Secondary Business Education Teachers

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## Synopsis

A profile of the effective secondary business education teacher as determined by the perceptions of both teaching award recipients and non-recipients in business education was developed. This study, which was a modified replication of the Ruff (1989) study, used an ethnographic approach to interpret a particular topic or phenomenon from participants' frames of reference. There is much agreement between the award recipients and the non-recipients with regard to the fact that their career centers around the success of their students in the classroom and beyond. There is, however, considerable disagreement between these two groups with regard to support from faculty outside vocational education, commitment to professional organizations, and teacher preparation experience.

Teacher education programs have been the subject of much criticism. Both *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986), by the Holmes Group, and *A Nation Prepared* (1986), by the Carnegie Forum, seek to abolish undergraduate degree programs in education. These groups hypothesize that any person with a degree in arts and sciences could enter the teaching profession by first interning at schools designated as "clinical sites," thus eliminating the need for teacher education programs. The National Governors' Association in its report, *Time for Results* (1986), offered another suggestion for improving secondary teachers' education. They proposed creating a national board to define standards for teachers which would specify what teachers need to know and be able to do.

Though the intentions of these groups and others are admirable, they concentrate only on the knowledge base that teachers should possess. They do not attempt to define the intangible qualities which effective teachers exhibit, such as, instilling self-confidence in students (Roush, 1987); promoting autonomy and encouraging creativity (Simmons, 1987); and possessing fairness, empathy, and humor (Rose, 1989). Thus, the development of a profile of an effective teacher is of particular importance.

Historically, a variety of criteria have been used to determine teacher effectiveness. As indicated by the following literature review of business teacher education effectiveness research, these studies have been quantitative in nature. In fact, a review of the following sources yielded no qualitative studies in business teacher education to date: *Educational Resources Information Center* (ERIC), *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *Psychological*

*Abstracts (PsychLIT)*. In addition, a manual search was conducted using the following sources: *Encyclopedia of Education*, *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, *Business Education Index*, *Education Index* and *Teacher Effectiveness Bibliography*.

It should be noted that from the 1920's through the early 1970's, educational research was replete with teacher effectiveness studies. Interest in teacher effectiveness studies appears to have resurfaced in the mid-1980's and continues.

Messenger (1979) surveyed 577 high school business students in California regarding their perceptions of "good" and "poor" business teachers. The questionnaires were categorized into four areas: personal traits, teaching traits, teacher-student relationships, and grading assignments. These students determined that good teachers were those who had a sense of humor, made learning interesting, and were able to relate to students. They likewise determined that poor teachers were those who did not explain subject matter well and did not care about students.

Wilkinson (1979) surveyed 517 high school business law students, from various high schools in Philadelphia, on effective and ineffective behaviors of secondary business law teachers. Analyzing the questionnaires using the chi-square test for independence, effective teachers were found to be the ones who organized and presented materials at paces appropriate for student learning, allowed for student participation, controlled classroom behavior problems, and listened to the opinions of students. Ineffective teachers were ones who only used the lecture method of teaching, did not provide sufficient guidance in terms of expected results, did not control classroom disruptions, and criticized and/or embarrassed students in class.

Self-perceptions of faculty and teaching behaviors were the criteria used by Hyslop (1988) in his study of teacher effectiveness. Twenty-one business faculty, who had received teaching awards from 1982 to 1987 at Bowling Green State University, responded to questions regarding methodology and overall philosophy of teaching. Respondents' most common perceptions about effective teaching included: possessing high concern for students, possessing high expertise in the discipline, willingness to be flexible, projecting enthusiasm for teaching, and creating caring classroom environments.

Choi (1988) also used teacher perceptions in his study of teacher effectiveness. He surveyed 465 secondary business teachers in New York State, excluding New York City. He asked them to rank the teaching competencies, identified by the National Business Education Association as effective, in order of perceived importance. Competencies in the management and instruction categories, which included being able to control classrooms and being able to give feedback, was ranked highly. The evaluation and student organization categories were ranked lowly.

Brandenburg's (1985) approach differed. He studied the relationship between instructor communicator styles and teacher effectiveness. He defined teacher effectiveness as student attainment of instructional objectives as measured by subject matter mastery. Fifty-one College of Business faculty at two midwestern universities participated. One section of students for each faculty participant completed *Norton's Communicator Style Questionnaire*. The instructor communicator style "friendly/animated" was the only one found to have a relationship at the .05 level of significance with student attainment of instructional objectives.

There is also precedent for looking to award recipients for characteristics of teacher effectiveness. Ahern (1969) surveyed 83 recipients of local and national Outstanding Teaching awards from New England institutions of higher education and determined that the majority of award winners chose teaching as a first career and continued to teach for the sheer joy of it.

Kelly and Kelly (1982) conducted in-depth interviews with each of nine university professors who had won prestigious teaching effectiveness awards since 1972. It was determined from the interviews that these award winners stressed enthusiasm for teaching, commitment to students, thorough knowledge of subject matter, and maintaining a sense of humor.

Tursman (1981) also chose to interview 11 teachers who had won Teacher of the Year awards regarding their perceptions on effective teaching. These teachers viewed effective teachers as those who were flexible, student centered, and democratic. In addition, they were always willing to grow personally and professionally and were willing to change teaching styles to meet the needs and skills of students while creating supportive and caring classroom climates. Effective teachers also encourage problem-solving and critical-thinking skills as students learn the subject matter.

As indicated earlier, there is precedent for using teaching award recipients as a standard. However, previous studies did not attempt to contrast opinions of teachers who have not won awards to look for similarities or differences. This study addresses that dimension.

Ruff (1989) found that the most common criteria used in evaluating teacher effectiveness were (a) teacher preparation, (b) personal motivation and abilities, (c) the teacher-student relationship, (d) professional roles and practices, and (e) teaching environment. These criteria are consistently reported in the business education literature (Messenger, 1979; Golen, 1980; Gruber, 1978; and Wilkinson, 1979).

With the exception of the Ruff (1989), researchers used quantitative methods to determine effectiveness and survey instruments predominated. Results of quantitative research, for the most part, generated lists of competencies that defined effectiveness; but they failed to provide any depth of understanding about teacher effectiveness.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 32), qualitative research can provide depth because it is essentially concerned with what people and events mean; i. e., the why as well as the what. Using a naturalistic inquiry paradigm, Ruff (1989) was able to create a profile of an effective secondary marketing teacher, giving a new dimension to effective teaching.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The first purpose of this study was to analyze perceptions of business education teaching award winners in order to create a profile of the effective business education teacher. The second purpose of this study was to compare and contrast those perceptions with the perceptions of non-recipients in order to discover whether or not specific similarities or differences exist between the two groups.

As this is a modified replication of the Ruff: ( 1989) study, the following research questions closely parallel those used by Ruff.

1. How do award recipients and non-recipients perceive their personal motivation and abilities?
2. How do award recipients and non-recipients perceive their students?
3. How do award recipients and non-recipients perceive their teaching environment?
4. How do award recipients and non-recipients perceive their professional roles and practices?
5. How do award recipients and non-recipients perceive their teacher preparation?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

“The basis of qualitative research is to discover patterns in the data and to interpret their meaning in a natural setting” (Erickson, 1986, p. 119). Tuckman (1988) reports that, based on Bogden and Biklen’s work, qualitative research exhibits these features: “(1) the natural setting is the data source and the researcher is the key data-collection instrument; (2) it attempts primarily to describe and only secondarily to analyze; (3) the concern is with process, that is, with what has transpired, as much as with product or outcome; (4) its data is analyzed inductively, as in putting together parts of a puzzle; and (5) it is essentially

concerned with what things mean, that is, the why as well as the what" (pp. 388-389).

This study used an ethnographic approach. In an ethnographic approach, a particular topic or phenomenon is interpreted from the participants' frames of reference. "This approach relies on interviews or observations of participants to discover patterns and their meanings which form the basis for generalizations" (Tuckman, 1988, p. 389). The topic of this research was effective teaching. By interviewing each teacher, similar patterns of data about effective teaching appeared. From these patterns, a profile of an effective secondary business education teacher emerged.

### ***Instrumentation***

"The use of an interview guide maximizes the neutrality of the researcher's approach and improves the consistency of the findings" (Tuckman, 1988, p. 393). The interview guide used in this study was a modified version of the one used by Ruff (1989). The contents of the guide were modified to reflect the emphasis of this research study on secondary business education teachers.

The following demographic data were also gathered from each participant: undergraduate degree and major, other degrees held, total years teaching experience, present position, non-paid involvement in school activities, number of current memberships in professional organizations, number of past and present office(s) held in professional organizations, gender, and race. These data were not included in the formal qualitative data analysis.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

A semi-structured interview was used to ensure greater consistency in data collection. "In qualitative research, validity refers to the researcher's ability to capture precisely the participant's view of the world and accurately portray it to the reader" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 130). To ensure that the data was interpreted correctly, each participant was contacted by telephone a few days after the interview; and the transcribed responses were read to him or her. Any needed corrections, additions, or clarification to the responses were made at that time.

### ***Sample***

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting a sample that will yield the most comprehensive understanding of the subject (Babbie, 1986, p. 247). Purposeful sampling differs from random sampling in that the findings from the data cannot be generalized to a larger population. (Statistical generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research.) Because one goal of qualitative research is to better understand human behavior and experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 49), random sampling would have been inappropriate for this study. The study participants formed two groups of six teachers. Patton (1987, p. 54) found that if there is a targeted subject and the sample is relatively homogeneous, five to eight subjects per sample will normally provide enough data. One sample consisted of this criterion: each participant was a secondary business education teacher, who had won either the Southeastern Business Education Secondary Teacher of the Year award or the Georgia Business Education Secondary Teacher of the Year award. The other sample consisted of secondary business education teachers who had not received awards. Both groups contained rural, suburban, and urban teachers.

Letters were sent to the selected individuals requesting an interview. All agreed to participate. Telephone calls determined convenient times for face-to-face interviews.

All interviews, from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length, were conducted in quiet settings of the participant's choice, most often in a classroom.

### *Treatment of the Data*

To create the profile of an effective secondary business education teacher, the data from each transcribed interview were organized and synthesized so that patterns could be discovered and interpreted. This process was started immediately after each interview was transcribed. The five research questions guided the interviews: personal motivation and abilities, students, teaching environment, professional roles and practices, and teacher preparation. These five topics also served as the major core categories under which the data were logically coded and analyzed. Each major core category was assigned a number from one through five. These numbers correlate with the numbers of the research questions.

Data from teaching award recipients were marked according to the five core categories. Data from non-recipients were similarly marked according to the five core categories. As data became larger in each category, subcategories emerged until all the data were coded and patterns among the data were formed.

**Table 1**

### *Demographic Profile of the Participants*

	Award Recipients	Non-Recipients
Gender		
Female	6	5
Male	0	1
Race		
Caucasian	6	5
African American	0	1
Teaching Experience		
Least number years	11	8
Most number years	34	30
Highest Degree Held		
Bachelors	0	2
Masters	2	3
Specialist	3	1
Doctoral	1	0
Type of School		
Urban	3	2
Suburban	2	2
Rural	1	2
Present Position		
Teacher only	1	4
Teacher/Department head	3	1
Teacher/CPE coordinator	2	0
Teacher/other	0	1
Non-Paid School Involvement	6	6
Professional membership	6	6
Offices held	6	0

## Findings

A demographic profile of the two participants groups is presented in Table 1. This provides general background information.

Using an ethnographic approach to data analysis where a particular topic is interpreted from the participants' frame of reference or viewpoint, the responses of the teachers were coded under the five core categories. Patterns of responses emerged under each category to form conceptual categories. The category that emerged as the strongest, i.e., the one that had the most similar responses, is presented first under each core category. Others follow in order of strength. Excerpts from the transcribed interviews are included for illustration of the conceptual categories. To protect the identity of respondents, each teacher from each group was assigned a number, 1 or 2, representing the group, and a code letter, A-F, representing individuals within the group.

*Question 1: How do award recipients (Group 1) and non-recipients (Group 2) perceive their personal motivation and abilities?* Five conceptual categories surfaced for Group 1: career choice dilemma, rewards of teaching, personal strengths, external barriers, and barriers from within. Though teaching was not their first career choice, the award recipients all expressed much satisfaction from their careers. Satisfaction and the motivation to continue teaching came mostly from working with students and watching them grow, mature, and succeed in and out of the classroom. Teacher 1A stated this regarding student achievement:

The thing I find most satisfying about teaching is working with students, seeing students learn skills, and go out and use them. You get to see what they've learned from you that they are able to use out in the world.

They also value their organizational skills, a personal strength, which frees them to be creative in their teaching. They did, however, believe that their ability to be effective teachers is hampered by three factors. The first, and one with which they expressed most concern, was students' poor attitudes toward learning. The second was the increasing amount of classroom and administrative paperwork. The third was the never-ending effort to stay current with rapidly changing technology. These teachers also perceived loss of patience with students as a personal barrier to success in the classroom.

Four conceptual categories emerged in Group 2 teachers: career influence, student accomplishment, student rapport, and external barriers. These teachers chose teaching as a career because of influences of important people in their lives, i. e., a parent, friend, or teacher. As a group, they were very satisfied with their career choices and attributed longevity in teaching to being able to help students succeed in the classroom. Teacher 2E stated:

Sometimes kids have potential, and don't realize it. I like finding something in their lives, whether it is in the classroom or through extracurricular activities, that will help them use their potential to the fullest. I enjoy seeing them succeed.

The effectiveness of Group 2 teachers was also hindered by several factors. The biggest source of frustration was poor attitudes toward learning on the part of some students. This group also expressed concern about staying abreast of changing technology.

*Question 2: How do award recipients (Group 1) and non-recipients (Group 2) perceive their students?* Three conceptual categories regarding student perceptions surfaced for Group 1: professional relationship, student needs, and fulfilling potential. Group 1 teachers believed that students wanted to feel important and that they, as teachers, could help with their self-esteem development by letting the students know that they cared. They also reiterated, however, that in order to maintain identity as teachers, they had to keep a certain emotional distance from students. Teacher 1A said:

We have a partnership—a teamwork atmosphere. We have the same sort of caring relationship you would find in the business world.

These teachers were also of the opinion that students needed to learn skills that would enhance chances for employment. In addition, they believed that students wanted to be active participants in learning; so Group 1 teachers involved students via practical, hands-on activities. Recognizing that learning is not a one-way endeavor, Group 1 teachers always expected students to work to potential, accepting nothing less than best effort from each student.

These same three conceptual categories, professional relationship, student needs, and fulfilling potential, surfaced in Group 2 participants. These teachers were critically aware of the need of many students to be recognized as individuals, so these teachers worked diligently to ensure that students knew they had someone with whom they could discuss problems. This group of teachers also always expected students to work to the best of their ability. They felt students would be successful if teachers could make coursework relevant to students' lives and involve students in the learning process; therefore, they spent almost as much classroom time explaining the "why" as they did the "what." As teacher 2E stated,

You have to make everything relevant. If they don't think it affects them, they've lost interest.

*Question 3: How do award recipients (Group 1) and non-recipients (Group 2) perceive their teaching environment?* Analysis of the perceptions of Group 1 regarding teaching environments revealed three conceptual categories: congenial atmosphere, administrative support, and parental support. Group 1 teachers said their schools had friendly, open atmospheres wherein teachers liked and respected one another. Teacher 1F stated:

We have a very good teaching environment. We are friendly and open. Teachers get along well with each other. The math and science people have really come together with the vocational teachers in combining applied projects.

These teachers held the perception that the support they received from administrators played a large part in creating relaxed teaching environments. This same kind of support was also found when working with students to correct problems.

Analysis of Group 2 perceptions also revealed three conceptual categories: departmental support only, open administration, and parental support but not involvement. While Group 2 teachers believed they had good working relationships with other vocational education teachers, they did not believe there was support for business education from faculty outside vocational education. A statement from teacher 2F reveals this perception:

The business department stays together. Other faculty groups have a problem with us because we are not "academic." They try to talk our kids out of our classes. Everything is academic, and we are not included—it's a struggle.

Group 2 teachers also did not believe they had the support of their administrators. In addition, they felt that while parents were not inclined to become involved with PTA or open house, they would work with teachers to correct student problems when called upon.

*Question 4: How do award recipients (Group 1) and non-recipients (Group 2) perceive their professional roles and practices?* Perception analysis for Group 1 revealed four conceptual categories: classroom mission, professional enhancement, shaky future, and retirement. Group 1 teachers believed their classroom goal was preparing students to enter the business world. They were also of the opinion that in order to best reach this goal they must continually upgrade their knowledge base in business education via professional conferences and staff development workshops. Teacher 1B said this:

I belong to many professional organizations. I try to attend as many conferences as I can. By making wise use of my time, I can discover a lot of new areas in business ed, especially in computers.

All of the Group 1 teachers agreed that the future of business education appeared to be unsure. In spite of this opinion, only one from this group planned to leave the classroom for administration prior to retirement.

Four conceptual categories surfaced for the Group 2 teachers: classroom mission, professional enhancement, academic emphasis, and staying current. Group 2 also held the belief that their classroom mission was preparing students for employment. Tied closely with this is the need for continuing education. This group chose staff development workshops and independent learning as the primary vehicles for updating their knowledge base in business education. These teachers expressed much concern with focus on academic courses in secondary curriculum. Teacher 2B stated:

Next year students have to have an extra math and an extra science. That is bad for business ed because it is hard for these kids to get electives. We are going to have to push our programs.

*Question 5: How do award recipients (Group 1) and non-recipients (Group 2) perceive their teacher preparation?* The analysis of the perceptions of Group 1 regarding teacher preparation revealed two conceptual categories: positive experience and student organization involvement. All award recipients gave high marks to their teacher preparation programs, agreeing that methods courses provided strong foundations for both student teaching and full-time teaching. Teacher 1A stated,

I feel I was really prepared when I started teaching. I got a good foundation in teaching methods. I saw a lot of good teachers. My student teaching was a very positive experience.

This group was also of the opinion that participation in student organizations, particularly Phi Beta Lambda, while in college, positively contributed to success in classrooms. For many this experience inspired involvement in Future Business Leaders of America in their respective schools.

Perception analysis for Group 2 teachers revealed three conceptual categories: inadequate methods courses, positive student teaching, and business experience. Five of these six teachers believed they were inadequately prepared by the professors who were supposed to teach them how to teach. Teacher 2F said:

The professors did a very poor job in my methods courses. Writing papers did not prepare me to be a teacher. They never talked about the paperwork involved or how to deal with discipline problems.

Group 2 teachers did, however, express satisfaction with student teaching experiences. This statement from teacher 2E is representative:

My student teaching was the most valuable thing I've ever done. I learned more in those 10 weeks than I did during the whole time I was in college.

The majority of Group 2 teachers stated that they worked while going to school, and believed that experience was of great benefit to them in the classroom. Teacher 2Cs statement reflects this sentiment:

I worked several jobs while in school. My students can ask me questions that I can answer based on my experiences.

## Conclusions

From an historical perspective on teaching effectiveness, Barr (1948) determined that an effective teacher is one who is enthusiastic, can manage a classroom, give attention to individual needs, motivate students, stimulate thought, and cooperate with other teachers. Barr's findings are supported by this study. An effective business education teacher is one whose career centers around his/her students. His/her mission is to facilitate students' successes in the classroom and beyond, and the teacher's greatest career satisfaction comes from witnessing the same.

While neither group of teachers came to teaching in a direct way, a key motivator for staying in the profession was successes of students both in and out of the classroom. These



groups of business teachers treat their students as individuals working toward professional growth and development. They also willingly embrace the challenge of extracting best effort from every student.

While all study participants had good working relationships with administrators, all did not feel that their administrators would always be supportive of their efforts.

With regard to professional roles and practices, all teachers believed that classroom performance hinged on staying up to date with the latest information and technology. Staff development workshops played key roles in helping teachers stay current. None, however, were optimistic about the future of business education, primarily because of increased emphasis on academic courses.

Both groups of teachers had positive student teaching experiences which they strongly felt prepared them well for careers in teaching. Not all, however, felt as strongly about undergraduate methods courses.

### Summary

Participants provided insight to their perceptions of motivations and abilities, students, teaching environments, professional roles and practices, and teacher preparation. While there is much agreement between award recipients and non-recipients, there is considerable disagreement with regard to: support from faculty outside vocational education, commitment to professional organizations, and teacher preparation experience.

This is, perhaps, not surprising. One might anticipate that an individual who earned an award for teaching excellence would not only be motivated primarily by students' successes, but would also be committed to working with all faculty to ensure the best educational experiences for students and to continuing professional growth and development.

These results are in agreement with the findings of Roush (1987), Simmons (1987), and Rose (1989) which focused on intangible qualities of effective teachers; such as, instilling self-confidence, encouraging creativity, and possessing fairness, empathy, and humor. This information is especially important to teacher educators. Daily they should reinforce that teaching effectiveness requires both affective and cognitive skills.

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