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Student Perceptions of Teaching Style in the Health Occupations Classroom

K. Kurt Eschenmann

Abstract: This study addressed the relationship between teaching style and student performance and motivation. Secondary health occupations education students identified their perceptions of the teachers’ (a) personal manners/personality, (b) clarity in relating material, (c) student recognition, (d) instructional methods, and (e) problem solving activities. Inasmuch as previous research suggests a positive relationship between teaching style and student performance, the results of this study can help teachers become more effective with students. Information was obtained that teachers can use to develop individual programs of improvement that will increase student performance and level of motivation.

Teaching style influences the attitude and behavior of students (Ames, 1983). Teachers who are unable to manage the classroom and fail to create a positive learning environment soon become ineffective (Miller, 1990). Students who perceive that their teachers are demonstrating negative behaviors frequently develop similar behaviors.

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These negative student behaviors include reduced class participation, disruptiveness, and underachievement. Teachers would not conscientiously demonstrate behaviors that would produce such negative student attitudes. Unfortunately, their unconscientious acts have the same results. If teachers want to have a positive influence on the performance and attitude of their students, they must demonstrate behaviors that their students perceive to be friendly and non-threatening (Bers, 1975; Boyer, 1983).

**Purpose**

This study was initiated to identify the students’ perception of their teachers’ (a) personal manners/personality, (b) clarity in relating material, (c) student recognition, (d) instructional methods, and (e) problem solving activities. Teachers can use this information to develop a plan that emphasizes positive teaching traits and increases their effectiveness and student motivation. It is important to identify negative traits so they can be eliminated.

**Methodology**

**Population**

All 55 secondary students enrolled in a health occupations education program in an urban school system participated in this study. Consequently, the data are derived from the total population of this group.

**Instrument Design and Administration**

A 32 item instrument was initially developed and reviewed by five health occupations teachers and three teacher educators. The purpose of this review was to (a) ensure clarity of items, (b) eliminate redundant items, and (c) ensure the items adequately addressed the initial
research questions. As a result of the peer review process, 25 items were selected for a pilot study with a group of secondary health accusations students. Three additional items were eliminated from the instrument after the pilot test because of duplication.

The 22 item instrument was designed to solicit information on the teacher’s (a) personal manners/personality, (b) clarity in relating material, (c) student recognition, (d) instructional methods, and (e) problem solving activities. Student responses were recorded on a five point Likert type scale. The scale was (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) disagree, (d) strongly disagree, and (e) not applicable.

Data Collection

The project investigator administered the coded instrument to the students participating in the study. The purpose of the code was to insure respondent confidentiality. After completion, the questionnaires were collected and the data were entered into the computer program.

Data Analysis

The student responses were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions. Since all health occupations students participated, no inferential statistics were calculated.

Findings and Discussion

Personal Manners/Personality

Teacher personality plays an important role in the learning process. Students who perceive their teachers to be warm, caring, and concerned about their success will perform at higher levels (Kelly, 1983; Wlodkowski, 1986). Seven items addressed the teacher’s personal manners/personality. One item asked the students if their teachers showed favoritism in the classroom. Fifty-five percent of the students
indicated that their teachers did not demonstrate this type of behavior. Although 11% strongly agreed and 34% agreed (34%) that their teachers did show favoritism in some manner. Another item asked if teachers treated the students fairly. Slightly less than one-half of the students (49%) indicated that all students in the class were treated fairly, regardless of academic ability. When asked if they perceived their teachers to be friendly, 95% of the students either agreed (71%) or strongly agreed (24%) that teachers were friendly with students.

Research strongly suggests that students who perceive their teachers to be interested in student growth and development perform at higher levels (Kelly, 1983). This interest serves as a strong foundation to the teacher’s motivational efforts. When asked if they felt their teachers liked them and cared about their class performance, 87% and 82% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed respectively.

Enthusiasm is another important element in student motivation (Kelly, 1983; McKeachie, 1974). Eighty-five percent of the students responded that their teachers demonstrated enthusiasm in the classroom.

Students who feel part of the educational process will have higher levels of performance than those students who feel alienated (Cornwell, 1979). Because of the negative impact that alienation can produce, students were asked to indicate if their teachers took time to listen to their opinions regarding subject content and classroom activities. Eighty percent of the students indicated that they were considerate of their opinions and took the time to listen.

In some instances teachers criticize student comments or behaviors in front of their peers. While constructive criticism is perceived to
have value, the use of overall criticism by teachers continues to be questioned (Comb, 1979). Students who are unable to accept criticism may withdraw and become antagonistic (Brophy, 1981). Seventy-three percent of the students responded that their teachers did not unfairly criticize individual student performance in front of other students. Unfortunately, 27% either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that teachers unfairly criticized students.

Clarity in Relating Material

The amount of clarity that teachers use in giving information and directions to students is another factor that determines student success (Glasser, 1969; 1972). Students who are unsure of either their individual assignments or classroom activities will have a difficult time in successfully completing them. Seventy-five percent of the students indicated that their teachers gave directions that were clear and easy to understand. Two items were included on the instrument to assess teacher clarity in relating material. Almost one-fourth (23.6%) of the respondents perceived the directions of their teachers to be unclear or confusing. Students who understand why classroom projects are assigned generally have a higher interest in completing the assignments. Eighty-eight percent either strongly agreed (13%) or agreed (75%) that their teachers explained why class projects were required when making assignments.

Student Recognition

Teachers who recognize the level of student performance by providing appropriate rewards can influence future student behavior and performance (Michaels, 1977; Slavin, 1977). Brophy (1981) acknowledges the importance of recognition and praise but suggests that teachers do
One item on the survey asked how effective teachers were in providing student recognition and rewards in the classroom. Seventy-six percent of the students either strongly agreed (16%) or agreed (60%) that teachers effectively provided recognition and rewards.

Teacher organization is another factor that can be used in determining student behavior. Organized classrooms enhance the learning process and increase the probability that students will continue to perform at high levels (Miller, 1990). Organized classrooms also teach students the value of organization and preparation. Students who possess organization skills are less likely to become distracted from the learning process and thus increase their performance potential. Eighty-five percent of the students perceived that their teachers were organized.

**Instructional Methods**

Different instructional methods have been associated with increased student performance and enhanced levels of motivation (Mager, 1968). Since varying instructional methods give teachers a greater chance of meeting individual student needs, a series of items were included on the instrument to address instructional strategies. Ninety-five percent of the students either strongly agreed (40%) or agreed (55%) that their teachers used a variety of instructional methods. Another item asked the students to identify the types of methods that were used? Ninety percent of the students indicated that guest speakers were used by their teachers. Fifty-five percent of the students indicated that field trips were commonplace.
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The discussion method was also popular among the health occupations teachers. Eighty-nine percent of the students indicated that class discussions were used in their classes and 86% of the students either strongly agreed (38%) or agreed (48%) with the statement that their teachers used demonstrations in their classes.

The lecture method has definite advantages not available with other instructional techniques. Fifty-five percent of the students responded that their teachers did not use many lectures in class. A related item was included to see if the students felt their teachers required them to take too many notes. Sixty-two percent of the students felt their teachers did not require or give too many notes. The remaining 38% perceives their teachers as requiring note taking too frequently.

Problem Solving Activities

The final series of items identifies the amount of assistance teachers provide to students in solving problems and to determine the teacher’s knowledge of the subject. Students who are unable to solve problems experience lower levels of performance which may limit future success and reduce motivation (Biehler & Snowman, 1986). Seventy-two percent of the students indicated their teachers permitted group work in solving problems.

The majority of the students considered their teachers to be knowledgeable in the subject. Ninety-five percent of the students strongly agreed (55%) or agreed (40%) with the statement that “the teacher knows a lot about the subject.”

summary

An analysis of the data indicated that the teachers in this study demonstrated attributes that enhanced student performance and
motivation. Overall, students' perceptions were positive.

1. Teachers were using a variety of teaching styles.
2. Teachers showed concern for students and a willingness to listen to individual needs.
3. Teachers recognized and rewarded student performance.
4. Teachers were well organized.
5. Teachers were knowledgeable in their subject matter.
6. Teachers provided assistance to those students having difficulty in solving problems.

Health occupations education teachers can use this information to plan activities that will enhance their overall classroom effectiveness. In addition, this information can be used to plan and develop specific inservice activities that will increase the positive perceptions that students have of teachers. Maintaining and enhancing these positive traits may not only increase student performance but may also produce positive dividends by increasing student motivation.

Recommendations

The data identified areas that suggest future attention. The following recommendations are provided to enhance the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom.

1. Inservice programs should encourage teachers to use a variety of teaching methods to enhance student performance and motivation.
2. A slight majority of students perceived teachers as treating students unfairly. Teachers should examine their behaviors and eliminate these perceptions.
3. The practice of showing favoritism to particular students, or student groups, should be eliminated.
The use of criticism by teachers must be eliminated.

Almost one-fourth of the students perceived the directions of their teachers to be unclear and confusing. Teachers need to become more specific when providing student directions.

References


