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Elements of Master Teaching

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If only we knew exactly what makes a master teacher. We would require a course for all future teachers that would instantly transform them into master teachers. We might develop *pep pills* to provide these aspiring teachers with enthusiasm for their subject matter and their students. Would it not be glorious? The days of unprepared instructors with their dreary lectures would be a thing of the past. Instead, the teachers of the new millenium would be dynamic classroom teachers who model scholarship, seek the company of their students, and teach life's most essential lessons. Students of this new breed of teacher would experience the unadulterated joys of learning, and our culture would flourish. The cycle would be self-perpetuating as these students become the master teachers of tomorrow.

With regret, we report that there is no such protocol or chemistry available that magically turns ordinary teachers into master teachers. Thus, our vision of a teaching and learning utopia must remain just that—an imaginary world where students everywhere would sit in inspiring classes led by the likes of Bill McKeachie and Charles Brewer.

Master teaching at the college and university level has been an enduring and passionate interest of many members of the academy, including psychologists. Educational researchers, philosophers, and teachers have long written about the qualities possessed by master teachers. What we currently know about master

teaching is derived from a blend of the musings of experienced and astute teachers with a dash of formal research. This chapter reviews what we know about master teachers based on these methods and describes a new approach to understanding what it is that makes master teachers so good at what they do. Our review is not exhaustive. Instead, it focuses on a representative sample of that literature.

MASTER TEACHERS ON MASTER TEACHING

The past two decades have witnessed the publication of several books authored by master teachers on the art, craft, and science of teaching. These books summarize the most important lessons learned by each author over a lifetime of college and university teaching. Each author testifies that the road to becoming a master teacher is often long and arduous with plenty of wrong turns and dead ends, although rich rewards invariably accrue to those persons who merge onto and travel along this road. The authors of these books share three common themes about what they believe to be the qualities of master teachers: knowledge, personality, and classroom management skills.

Knowledge

Master teachers are well versed in the content of their courses. They present the current state of what research can tell us about their subject matter. They also come to class prepared to offer anecdotal information that may facilitate student learning (Eble, 1983). Their presentations are well organized (Gill, 1998).

Master teachers teach students that their discipline is not an island unto itself. The content of their courses is often distilled from several disciplines reflecting the oft-heard adage of Charles Brewer (1982) that "everything is related to everything else." Master teachers share with their students new discoveries and how new knowledge complements and extends older knowledge. More important, master teachers model how to think critically about what we know.

Personality

There is likely no single personality type that enables teachers to be successful in the classroom. Master teachers use their own unique personal strengths to engage students in the learning process, and they are willing to alter their personal style and tailor their teaching tactics to different and unique teaching environments (Eble, 1983, 1984).

Master teachers are approachable, genuine, and humorous (Vargo, 1997). They respect their students and expect the same in return (Beidler, 1997). These characteristics contribute to the development of rapport between student and teacher

similar to that formed in psychotherapy between therapist and client (Lowman, 1995). Rapport facilitates trust, which in turn leads to the kind of approachability in which students feel that their questions are welcomed (Brookfield, 1990).

Perhaps the most often talked about personality characteristic of master teachers is passion, sometimes referred to as *enthusiasm* (see e.g., Brookfield, 1990). Passion in this case means an excitement for the subject matter, enthusiasm for sharing that subject matter with students, and enjoyment of teaching. Simply put, the teaching process *turns on* master teachers. Master teachers convey that excitement in their classroom demeanor and their interactions with students outside of class.

Classroom Management Skills

Master teachers know how to deal with problem students and difficult situations by invoking well-developed problem-solving and decision-making skills (Boice, 1996; Eble, 1983; McKeachie, 1999). These teachers promote student cooperation. They communicate high expectations and devote time—in and out of the classroom—to helping students succeed (Hatfield, 1995).

Master teachers often control their classrooms through active learning techniques that help motivate students to become more personally invested in their own learning. Master teachers downplay the authority inherent in their positions and create an atmosphere of participation, sharing, and playful learning (Eble, 1983; Gill, 1998).

In addition to knowledge, personality, and classroom management skills, authors of many teaching books agree that master teaching involves many other characteristics and tendencies. Some of these qualities include: flexibility, common sense, sense of humor, thoughtfulness, recognition that learning how to teach is a life-long quest, desire to stay current in their subject matter, strong work ethic, well-developed listening and speaking skills, creativity, and rigorous academic standards for their students (Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998; Lowman, 1995; Roth, 1997).

QUALITIES OF AWARD-WINNING TEACHERS

Another approach to understanding master teaching involves the analysis of the characteristics of award-winning teachers. For example, Baiocco and DeWaters (1998) recently surveyed presidents of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in New York State, Delaware, and Massachusetts to determine their perceptions of the selection processes used to honor outstanding teachers.

One question in Baiocco and DeWaters' (1998) survey asked respondents to identify the characteristics of the award winners with respect to their teaching. In order, Baiocco and DeWaters found the following 10 characteristics to be ascribed

to award-winning teachers: (a) work ethic and commitment, as represented, for example, by campus leadership, reputation, and quality service; (b) positive affect, including enthusiasm and pleasantness; (c) excellent communication skills, as typified by sensitivity to students and a willingness to listen to them; (d) classroom creativity, for example, involving students in the learning process; (e) concern for students; (f) intelligence and knowledge, including the love of the subject matter; (g) demeanor toward students; (h) humanistic values; (i) high standards for student work; and (j) popularity among students.

In an earlier study, Lough (1997) surveyed recipients of the National Professor of the Year award, which is bestowed annually on a single professor by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Lough's survey queried CASE winners regarding biographical information; age; teaching experience; professorial rank; scholarly contributions to their disciplines; summer activities; and, of most relevance to this chapter, specific aspects of the winners' teaching as reflected on their syllabi.

In general, CASE winners constructed syllabi that laid out the day-to-day schedule of their courses and described highly specific policies for attendance, office hours, and grading. In most cases, CASE winners required attendance in their courses and were available to students for 20 or more hours a week for office visitations. They described grading standards in clear and detailed ways, such as listing the number of points earned through various class activities and providing a grading scale that specified the minimum number of points necessary to earn a particular grade.

Similarly, Pittenger (1992) examined the attributes of winners of the American Psychological Foundation's (APF) Award for Distinguished Teaching in Psychology, the American Psychological Association's (APA) highest teaching award. Pittenger's study was markedly broader than Lough's examination of CASE winners. He used nine categories to catalog the contributions of APF award winners: (a) development of new teaching methods and materials, (b) development of new courses and curricula, (c) contributions to a psychological subfield, (d) noteworthy departmental leadership as chair, (e) teaching of minority students and women, (f) extraordinary teaching and training of teachers, (g) teaching at smaller institutions, (h) provision of a forum for teaching enhancement, and (i) authorship of outstanding texts.

Pittenger (1992) noted that each APF honoree contributed to some degree in all nine categories. However, he stressed that these individuals shared four characteristics. First, each individual was an author, either of textbooks and text ancillaries or items that facilitated the training of teachers. Second, each individual was a rock-solid classroom teacher. Third, award winners were exemplars of creative thinking with respect to the role that psychology plays in everyday life. Fourth, award winners portrayed the teaching of psychology as a scholarly endeavor.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF MASTER TEACHERS

A third approach to investigating master teaching entails examination of student evaluations. Although the problems associated with assessing teacher performance using student evaluations has been well documented (see Davis, 1993, for a brief review), student evaluations nonetheless offer us another perspective on what is involved in master teaching.

In an early study, Feldman (1976) found that students prefer instructors who are stimulating, enthusiastic, prepared, organized, clear, comprehensive, and fair. More recently, Lowman (1995) used confirmatory factor analysis in an attempt to reveal the underlying structure of student perceptions of their teachers. His results point to two broad factors that separate the best teachers from ordinary ones. First, students believe that the best teachers present material both clearly and enthusiastically. They tend to use concrete examples that stimulate thinking. Second, students like instructors who are warm, understanding, and concerned for them as individuals.

WHAT IS A MASTER TEACHER?

This question is a difficult one to answer, and so far we have escaped defining the term. We all know master teachers. Some of us may even be master teachers. Nonetheless, most of us are hard pressed to put into words exactly what distinguishes master teachers from ordinary, run-of-the-mill teachers. One way, albeit tenuous, is to summarize what the three approaches reviewed before—writings of master teachers, analyses of the qualities of award-winning teachers, and examinations of student evaluations of faculty—tell us about master teaching. Table 3.1 provides a summary of 40 different qualities found across the three approaches. The "General Writings" category contains 22 qualities. The "Analyses of the Credentials of Award Winning Teachers" sources contain 14 qualities, with only 5 qualities overlapping with the former category. Finally, "Analyses of Student Evaluations" sources produced only 10 qualities. Interestingly, passion/enthusiasm is the only quality to appear on each of the three lists given in Table 3.1. No doubt this commonality underscores the critical importance of a teacher's excitement about the topic, the students, and teaching.

It is unlikely that possessing just 1 or even a few of the 40 qualities makes an individual a master teacher. It is equally unlikely that an individual must possess all of these qualities to be a master teacher. Rather, master teachers are likely to come in all shapes and sizes, so to speak, and represent different combinations or blends of these qualities. What makes Bill McKeachie a master teacher is not exactly the same as what makes Charles Brewer a master teacher, although there may be some overlap in the personal qualities and penchants relevant to teaching

TABLE 3.1

A Summary of the Qualities of Master Teachers Based
on a Brief Review of the Literature

<i>General Writings</i>	<i>Analyses of Credentials of Award Winning Teachers</i>	<i>Analyses of Student Evaluations</i>
Approachable	Commitment to field	Caring
Creative	Concern for students	Clear
Current in field	Creative	Comprehensive
Establishes rapport	Enthusiastic	Enthusiastic
Flexible	Good classroom teacher	Fair
Genuine	High standards for student work	Stimulating
Good listener	Humanistic	Understanding
Trusting	Intelligent	Warm
Passionate	Knowledgeable	Well organized
High expectations for students	Popular among students	Well prepared
Humorous	Scholarly	
Knowledgeable	Strong communication skills	
Models critical thinking	Strong work ethic	
Promotes cooperation	Write about their fields	
Respectful		
Stresses life-long learning		
Strong speaking skills		
Strong work ethic		
Thoughtful		
Uses active learning methods		
Uses common sense		
Uses interdisciplinary approach		

that each possesses. Thus, for those of us who train others to become teachers, we must be careful not to fashion our protégés from the same mold. Master teachers are as unique as teachers as they are as human beings.

Nonetheless, master teachers seem to be able to do four things to a greater extent than ordinary teachers: (a) instill in their students a desire to learn, (b) help their students actually learn something about the subject matter, (c) help their students discover that what they are learning is interesting, and (d) demonstrate to their students that learning in and of itself is enjoyable. It is quite possible that possessing some critical combination of the qualities listed in Table 3.1 enables master teachers to provide the context for accomplishing each of these processes.

WHAT ABOUT TEACHER BEHAVIOR?

As can be seen, these approaches to the study of master teaching reveal the personality characteristics and traits of persons believed to be master teachers. A problem with these approaches is that they beg the questions of (a) how a person acquires

such qualities, and (b) what specific behaviors reflect such characteristics. If a person wishes to teach another individual how to become a more effective teacher, as is the case in many graduate teaching assistantship training programs (see Davis & Huss, chap. 11, this volume), a person is more likely to be successful by training a range of specific behaviors as opposed to more ambiguous personality characteristics such as *creativity*, *concern*, or *demeanor*. Obvious questions arise: What do I do to become more creative? How can I demonstrate that I am concerned? How do I develop an appropriate demeanor?

The remainder of this chapter describes an alternative approach for examining the basic elements of master teaching. Our aim in developing this approach was to identify a broad range of personality qualities and their attendant behaviors that appear to exist in master teachers. In addition, we sought to compare undergraduates and faculty with respect to which of these qualities/behaviors they believe are the most important to effective college and university teaching.

THE BEHAVIOR OF MASTER TEACHERS

Our research involved two phases. In Phase 1, we asked 114 undergraduates to list at least three characteristics that they believed were central to a person being a master teacher at the college and university level. This process produced a list of 47 characteristics. We presented this list to 184 other undergraduates whom we instructed to "list or otherwise indicate up to three *specific* behaviors that reflect these qualities and characteristics." These students were then given the following example as a guide:

An Example of a Teacher Quality: *Sense of Humor*.

An Example of Teacher Behavior That Reflects This Quality: *Tells funny stories or makes witty remarks in class and kids around or jokes with students.*

Three researchers met subsequently to compare behaviors that these participants listed for each quality. In many cases, the behaviors students assigned to particular qualities overlapped with behaviors they assigned to other qualities. Thus, some categories of qualities were collapsed, resulting in a list of 28 qualities and the behaviors that students said reflected them (see Table 3.2). (It is likely that some of the qualities listed in Table 3.1 also overlap considerably, and if we asked students or faculty to assign behaviors to these qualities, this list, too, would be much condensed.)

In Phase 2, we gave the list of 28 qualities/behaviors to 916 undergraduate students enrolled in a large introductory psychology course and 118 Auburn University faculty members. The undergraduates included 413 men and 503 women; 717 of these students were freshmen or sophomores and 199 were juniors or seniors. The faculty members included 89 men and 29 women whose names were selected

TABLE 3.2

The 28 Qualities and Behaviors as Derived from Undergraduates

<i>Quality</i>	<i>Behaviors</i>
Accessible	Posts office hours, gives phone number and e-mail address
Approachable/personable	Smiles, greets students, initiates conversations, invites questions, responds respectfully to student comments
Authoritative/confident	Establishes clear course rules, maintains classroom order
Creative/interesting	Speaks loudly, makes eye contact, and answers questions correctly
Effective communicator	Experiments with teaching methods; uses technological devices to enhance lectures; uses interesting, relevant, and personal examples
Encourages/cares for students	Speaks clearly, uses precise English, gives clear, compelling examples
Enthusiastic about teaching	Provides praise for good student work, helps students who need it, offers bonus points/extra credit, knows student names
Establishes goals	Smiles during class, prepares interesting class activities, uses gestures and expressions of emotion to emphasize important points
Flexible/open minded	Prepares and follows a syllabus, outlines goals for each class meeting at beginning of period
Good listener	Changes calendar of course events when necessary, will meet at times outside of office hours, pays attention to students' opinions, accepts criticism, allows students to do make up work when appropriate
Happy/positive/humorous/humble	Does not interrupt students while they talk, maintains eye contact, replies respectfully to student comments, asks questions about points students make
Knowledgeable about topic	Smiles, tells jokes and funny stories, laughs with students, admits mistakes, never brags, does not take credit for others' successes
Prepared	Easily answers students' questions, does not read straight from book or notes, uses clear and understandable examples
Presents current information	Brings necessary materials to class, provides outlines of class discussion
Professional	Relates topic to current, real life situations; uses recent videos, magazines, newspapers to highlight points; talks about current topics, uses new or recent texts
Promotes class discussion	Dresses nicely (neat and clean shoes, slacks, blouses, dresses, shirts, ties), no profanity
Promotes critical thinking	Asks controversial or challenging questions during class, gives points for class participation, involves students in group activities during class
Provides constructive feedback	Asks thoughtful questions during class, uses essay questions on tests and quizzes, assigns homework, holds group discussions/activities
Manages class time	Writes comments on returned work, answers students' questions, gives advice on test-taking
	Arrives to class on time/early, dismisses class on time, presents relevant materials in class, leaves time for questions, keeps appointments, returns work in a timely way

TABLE 3.2

(Continued)

<i>Quality</i>	<i>Behaviors</i>
Rapport	Makes class laugh through jokes and funny stories, initiates and maintains class discussions, knows student names, interacts with students before and after class
Realistic expectations/fair	Covers material to be tested during class, writes relevant test questions, does not overload students with reading, teaches at an appropriate level for the majority of students in the course, curves grades when appropriate, provides extra credit work
Respectful	Does not humiliate or embarrass students in class, is polite to students (says thank you and please, etc.), does not interrupt students while they are talking, does not talk down to students
Sensitive/persistent	Makes sure students understand material before moving to new material, holds extra study sessions, repeats information when necessary, asks questions to check student understanding
Strives to be a better teacher	Requests feedback on his/her teaching ability from students, continues learning (attends workshops, etc. on teaching)
Technologically competent	Knows how to use a computer, knows how to use e-mail, knows how to use overheads during class, has a Web page for classes
Understanding	Accepts legitimate excuses for missing class or coursework, is available to answer questions, does not lose temper at students, takes extra time to discuss difficult concepts

at random from the university phone directory. These faculty represented numerous disciplines across campus. We instructed both students and faculty to select "the 10 qualities/behaviors that are most important to master teaching at the college and university level." Thus, every student and faculty member casts 10 votes apiece—one vote for each of the categories they believed represented the top 10 qualities/behaviors of master teaching. Following data collection, all participants' responses were analyzed for similarities and differences. Analyses of differences among participants in both groups did not reveal any appreciable differences in rankings: Male and female students rated items similarly regardless of year in school as did male and female faculty members.

Table 3.3 compares faculty and students with respect to their ordering of the importance of each of the 28 qualities/behaviors. The qualities/behaviors are listed in descending order according to student tallies of all 28 items. The shaded numbers in the far right column indicate each of the top 10 categories for faculty. Interestingly, students and faculty agreed on 6 of the top 10 qualities/behaviors, although the specific order of these items differed between the two groups. These

TABLE 3.3

Comparison of Student and Faculty Ratings of the 28 Qualities/Behaviors

Quality/Behavior Category	Students			Faculty		
	<i>n</i>	%	rank	<i>n</i>	%	rank
Realistic Expectations/Fair	587	64	1	55	47	9
Knowledgeable About Topic	558	61	2	107	91	1
Understanding	554	60	3	27	23	21
Approachable/Personable	543	59	4	62	53	5
Respectful	488	53	5	59	50	7
Creative/Interesting	469	51	6	58	49	8
Happy/Positive/Humorous	453	49	7	7	6	27
Encourages/Cares for Students	452	49	8	44	37	12
Flexible/Open Minded	450	49	9	43	36	13
Enthusiastic About Teaching	448	49	10	86	73	2
Rapport	387	42	11	8	7	26
Accessible	358	42	12	48	41	11
Provides Constructive Feedback	349	38	13	40	34	14
Sensitive/Persistent	347	38	14	25	21	22
Master Communicator	323	35	15	61	52	6
Confident	310	34	16	34	29	17
Strives to be a Better Teacher	268	29	17	39	33	15
Good Listener	244	27	18	31	26	20
Promotes Class Discussion	225	25	19	35	30	16
Prepared	208	23	20	72	61	4
Humble	179	20	21	7	6	27
Presents Current Information	166	18	23.5	55	47	9
Manages Class Time	165	18	23.5	33	28	18
Establishes Goals	165	18	23.5	32	27	19
Promotes Critical Thinking	164	18	23.5	75	64	3
Authoritative	145	16	26	22	19	23
Technologically Competent	79	9	27	13	11	24
Professional	76	8	28	12	10	25

six qualities/behaviors were (a) realistic expectations/fairness, (b) knowledgeableness, (c) approachable/personable, (d) respectful, (e) creative/interesting, and (f) enthusiasm. With respect to the 4 remaining top 10 items, students and faculty differed markedly, with faculty emphasizing specific elements of classroom instruction (effective communication, prepared, current, and critical thinking) and students favoring aspects of the student-teacher relationship (understanding, happy/positive/humorous, encouraging, flexible). In a similar study, Wann (2001) obtained highly congruent results using a sample of students and faculty at a medium-sized midwestern college.

Thus, students and teachers do not view the teaching enterprise all that differently. Where they differ perhaps reflects what is most central to the educational process from their unique perspectives. Teachers wish to transmit well-prepared

and up-to-date knowledge effectively and stimulate students to think critically about it. Students desire to learn such knowledge within the context of a personal, empathetic, and supportive relationship. Perhaps the ideal approach to teaching includes both perspectives. Teachers who are able to convey the essence of a content domain clearly to students within the context of a supportive emotional environment are likely to be judged by students as the most effective and interesting teachers—that is, master teachers.

Our data overlap considerably with those derived data from the three approaches described earlier (“General Writings,” “Analyses of the Credentials of Award Winning Teachers,” and “Analyses of Student Evaluations”). Like these approaches, our approach showed the quality/behavior of enthusiasm to be associated with master teaching. In fact, each of 14 qualities/behaviors found in the combined “Top 10” lists for faculty and students in our study also appears in the results generated by the three previous approaches (see Tables 3.1 and 3.3). More specifically, 12 of the qualities/behaviors identified in our study overlap with the qualities identified through “General Writings” (approachable, creative, current in field, establishes rapport, flexible, good listener, passionate, humorous, knowledgeable, models critical thinking, respectful, and strong speaking skills), 4 overlap with “Analyses of Credentials of Award Winning Teachers” (creative, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and strong communication skills), and 5 overlap with “Analyses of Student Evaluations” (caring, enthusiastic, fair, understanding, and well prepared). Finally, our approach uncovered 12 qualities/behaviors not previously identified in these three approaches (accessible, provides constructive feedback, sensitive/persistent, confident, strives to be a better teacher, promotes class discussion, humble, manages class time, establishes goals, authoritative, technologically competent, and professional).

BECOMING A MASTER TEACHER

At some point in their careers, persons who are serious about teaching ask themselves, in one way or another, “How can I become a more effective teacher?” The question is simple, but its answer is complex. As Brookfield (1990) so clearly noted, teaching is messy business.

Perhaps the best way to answer the question is by attempting to incorporate some of the behaviors given in Table 3.2 into one’s existing repertoire. For example, if you feel that your teaching would be enhanced by being more creative and interesting, then you might attempt to experiment with novel teaching methods; incorporate more technology in the classroom; and use more interesting, relevant, and personal examples during class presentations. Likewise, if student or peer reviews of your teaching suggest that you lack rapport with the class, you might try learning your students’ names and talking to them students before and after class. In addition, you might consider telling a funny story every now and then or involving the class in more discussion of the subject matter.

Knowing which specific behaviors to adopt to augment one's approach to teaching is certainly advantageous in that much of the guess work is removed from wondering how to go about becoming a better teacher. To the extent that we implement the behaviors listed in Table 3.2 into our teaching, the more likely we are to provide contexts that favor student learning. Most of these behaviors are relatively easy to acquire and pay huge dividends in terms of how students view us. Being on time to class, smiling during our lectures, knowing our students' names, stopping every now and then in the hallways to chat with our students, and so on show students we respect and care for them. In other words, such actions on our part establish the foundation for the kind of student-teacher relationships that seem likely to motivate students to come to our classes, pay attention and participate in class discussions, study in earnest outside of class, and, most important, discover that learning psychology is interesting, worthwhile, and just plain fun.

Keep in mind, too, that the student-teacher relationship is a two-way street. By incorporating any or all of the behaviors given in Tables 3.2 and 3.3 into our teaching, we are likely to have a positive influence on our students' motivation to come to class and study; their academic performance; and their attitude toward our subject matter, us, and, for that matter, higher education in general. In turn, students are apt to behave positively toward us—enhancing our motivation to come to class prepared and well organized and our attitude toward them and our teaching. The student-teacher relationship, like all human relationships, is at its core an exchange relationship characterized by intertwining positive and negative feedback loops. Clearly, however, as teachers we set the tone for what happens in this relationship through our actions. Our behavior matters.

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