

Behaviors and Attitudes of Effective Foreign Language Teachers: Results of a Questionnaire Study

Teresa R. Bell
University of Oklahoma

Abstract: *This article reports on a study of teacher perceptions concerning teaching behaviors and attitudes that contribute to effective foreign language teaching and learning. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire to which 457 postsecondary foreign language teachers of French, German, and Spanish who are members of ACTFL responded. Based on current research on second language acquisition (SLA), various teaching behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers were identified for inclusion on the questionnaire. The results indicate an emerging professional consensus regarding a number of teacher behaviors and attitudes related to foreign language teaching. The more that is known about teacher beliefs, the more likely the profession will be to create models for foreign language teacher preparation and evaluation that reflect relevant behaviors and attitudes of foreign language teaching.*

Key words: *applied linguistics, effective foreign language teaching, questionnaire research, SLA (second language acquisition), teacher behaviors*

Languages: *French, German, Spanish*

Introduction

In the last 50 years, many researchers and professionals responsible for teacher development and evaluation have sought to establish criteria for assessing effective teaching. While there is little agreement regarding which specific behaviors constitute effective teaching, researchers agree at least on some dimensions that describe effective teaching in general, regardless of subject matter. These include enthusiasm/expressiveness, clarity of explanation, and rapport/interaction (Murray, 1991). Researchers also agree that teaching is multidimensional, and that even though these dimensions may vary according to setting and discipline, they are still consistent to some degree across disciplines.

Very little research has been conducted regarding discipline-specific teaching behaviors and attitudes of teachers (Brosh, 1996; Schulz, 2000). Because every teaching and learning situation is context specific and because disciplines differ, some teaching behaviors and attitudes are considered more relevant in one discipline than in another (Murray & Renaud, 1995). For example, lecturing may be effective in a history course but not in a beginning foreign language course. Yet, in most cases, the history teacher and foreign language teacher might be evaluated using exactly the same criteria (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). Thus, while some teaching behaviors are considered to be effective regardless of discipline, there are also teaching behaviors and attitudes that are considered to be discipline specific.

As stated above, the research literature suggests that there is no one single accepted definition of effective foreign language teaching. Foreign language teaching is a complex, multi-

Teresa R. Bell (PhD, University of Arizona) is Assistant Professor of Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.