

Timothy J. Lewis By Krista McManus



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Education

Ph.D. from the [University of Oregon](#), 1990, in Special Education-Behavioral Disorders

M.A from the [University of Missouri](#), 1984, in Special Education-Mental Retardation

B.A from the University of Missouri, 1983, in Psychology

Dr. Timothy J. Lewis has been a teacher and researcher in the field of special education for over 25 years (anonymous author, 2010). In addition to being a professor of Special Education at the University of Missouri, Dr. Lewis is also the Co-Director for the [Center for Adolescent Research in Schools](#) (CARS), the Co-Director for [Office of Special Education Programs](#) (OSEP), [Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and](#)

[Supports](#) (PBIS) and the Director for [MU Center for School-wide Positive Behavior](#)

[Support](#) (PBS) (anonymous author, 2010).

Early Life

Dr. Lewis was born in 1960 in the St. Louis area. It was here where he would spend the rest of childhood and youth until college. Like many people, Dr. Lewis had not planned on making a career in special education and the study of behavioral disorders in children. In fact, growing up, he had a few extended family members who worked in special education, but never felt it was a personal fit (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). He went to the [University of Missouri](#) where he would major in psychology. Dr. Lewis minored in special education, which he believed would assist in his undergraduate study of psychology (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Dr. Lewis's undergraduate research sparked his interest in the research process and its application to the world at large. This growing interest in applied research, coupled with the support of his own instructors, inspired Dr. Lewis to complete a Masters of Arts in Special Education-Mental Retardation in 1984. Dr. Lewis completed his formal education with a Ph.D. from the [University of Oregon](#) in Special Education-Behavioral Disorders in 1990 (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Career

Throughout his career, Dr. Lewis has held several positions in the field of special education. As a graduate student, Dr. Lewis worked in a center for adults with mental disabilities. Upon graduation, Dr. Lewis took a job working with children diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders in the St. Louis area. Although initially he was nearly overwhelmed by a mob of 12 angry high school students, over time he fell in love with teaching. Next, Dr. Lewis worked briefly in an elementary school before moving onto a self-contained psychiatric treatment center in St. Louis, a co-op program between state mental health and a local school (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Dr. Lewis soon returned to the University of Missouri as a professor. In addition to teaching, Dr. Lewis was also the Associate Dean for Research where he oversaw all grant activity in the [College of Education](#) (personal communication, October 11, 2010). Since, he has stepped down as dean to concentrate on several large research projects underway at MU. To date, Dr. Lewis has served as project director of several research grants, in the areas of behavioral disorders, developmental disabilities, and positive behavioral support.

Dr. Lewis has also busied himself throughout the years as an author and co-author of several articles, books, and monograph chapters (anonymous author, 2010). Presently, Dr. Lewis is also on the Editorial Board of several journals and textbooks,

including but not limited to, *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* and *Journal of Disability Policy Study* (anonymous author, 2010).

In addition to being a Professor at the University of Missouri, an author and researcher, Dr. Lewis is also the Co-Director for the [Center for Adolescent Research in Schools](#), the Co-Director for [OSEP Center for PBIS](#) and the Director for [MU Center for School-wide Positive Behavior Support](#) (SW-PBS) (anonymous author, 2010).

As a part of the leadership team for SW-PBS, Dr. Lewis helps educational teams around the world with the development of school-wide systems of behavioral support (anonymous author, 2010). In doing so, he assists in the development and implementation of action plans to endorse the execution of behavioral and academic support for all students, he helps to train school staff, and to reduce reactive disciplinary measures in schools (anonymous author, 2010).

In 1999, Dr. Lewis and his colleagues received a national grant through the [Office of Special Education Programs](#) (OSEP) to fund the OSEP Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (anonymous author, 2010). Through his work here at the OSEP Center on PBIS, Dr. Lewis and his colleagues conduct yearly training sessions for designated schools (anonymous author, 2010). Presentations by Dr. Lewis include [Charting the Course for a Complete Continuum](#) and [The Road Less Traveled: Making a Difference in Student's Lives](#) (Lewis, 2009). These presentations stress the idea that as

educators, one cannot make a student learn. Instead, an environment guided by core curriculum and implemented with consistency, may increase the likelihood a student will thrive in a school setting (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 2009).

Dr. Lewis's presentations and training sessions are set in place to provide educators with the knowledge of how to implement these ideas and concepts into their schools and classrooms (Lewis, 2009). In essence, they are all about the outcome. He wants educators to understand the information he has to offer and be capable of applying this information to the classroom. Following a presentation, it is not uncommon for Dr. Lewis to ask educators who approach him what they have learned (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). While educators may be taken aback by this question, he insists that he is not there to entertain, but rather to learn what the school systems really need in order to take what he has to offer and apply these techniques to their own districts. His presentations are not about good ideas or concepts, but rather they are about thinking strategically about what needs to be in place for these schools in order to succeed (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). Leaders like Dr. Lewis have spent the last twenty years trying to improve the quality of education in the United States for the betterment of all students.

Biggest Challenge for Special Education Today

At a recent conference in Washington D.C., Dr. Lewis participated in a discussion on the major issues presently facing special education programs in the United

States. Dr. Lewis cites two primary problems facing special education today (personal communication, October 11, 2010). First, is the solidification of the field's identity and second is how to prepare and retain qualified individuals within the field.

Special education and the study of behavioral disorders in children may have a relatively short history, but Dr. Lewis believes that leaders are now mature enough to start making tough decisions in regards to what direction this field should go. The field, as Dr. Lewis states, is at a crossroads with its identity and needs stronger leadership in order to move forward (personal communication, October 11, 2010). Previous generations of special education professionals sought to find their voice; now that they have that voice, it is imperative to set their agenda for the next twenty plus years. Dr. Lewis poses the question, "Are we just about yearly conferences or do we really want to make a difference?" (personal communication, October 11, 2010). The field can wait for lawmakers to make decisions for it, or older and rising leaders can shoulder the responsibility of progress.

Secondly, field leaders must determine a way to prepare and retain qualified individuals to remain in the field (Lewis & Sugai, 1999). It is vital to attract the best and the brightest and prepare them to understand where we have been and where we would like to go. Preparing the next generation, as Dr. Lewis does every day in his classroom, is our greatest hope for the improvement of special education.

During a discussion in Washington D.C., current leaders in the field of special education asked each other, "Why are we here?" (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). As they looked around the room, generations of leaders, such as Walker and Nelson, with their incredible wealth of knowledge, were planning for retirement. It became clear among all those involved, regardless of age or professional experience, that the cultivation of future leaders was one very important answer. Dr. Lewis strongly believes in the responsibility of the accomplished to foster leadership and direction among the newly minted in the field of special education. Dr. Lewis and his colleagues understand the importance of this eventual changing of the guard and the need to pass along their knowledge. Every day in the classroom, Dr. Lewis and others from his generation pass along their knowledge of psychology, while understanding that the field must rethink how to support children and their families (personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Awards/Honors

Throughout his career, Dr. Lewis has received several awards and honors. Early on, Dr. Lewis was the founding state sub-division president for the [Oregon Council for Children with Behavior Disorders](#) (CEC) (anonymous author, 2010). In 2001 Dr. Lewis was a participant in the President's Leadership Development Program and was a Fellow at the [National Institute of Mental Health](#). Through the years 1997 and 2004 Dr. Lewis

was the recipient of the College of Education Excellence in Teaching Award (anonymous author 2010).

Dr. Lewis is appreciative of all of the awards he has received; however, his teaching awards are perhaps the most meaningful. Pertaining to his numerous awards Dr. Lewis said, "Regardless, teaching is above and beyond the most important" (personal communication, October 11, 2010). In his own humble manner, Dr. Lewis cannot help but be particularly proud and appreciative of the Honored Alumni Faculty Award he received two years ago. As recipient of this award, Dr. Lewis joined a very select group of educators at the University of Missouri. This honor was especially meaningful because it was presented by his alma mater, the University of Missouri.

Influences on Dr. Timothy Lewis' Work

Dr. Lewis' experience as an undergraduate and graduate student, gave him the opportunity to meet fantastic educators who truly inspired, and at times pushed him, to continue with the field of special education. Dr. Lewis credits his undergraduate professors, namely Dr. Sharon Huntze, as the ones who encouraged him to find a career in special education. In Dr. Lewis' opinion, Sharon Huntze exemplifies what a great professor should be. It was Dr. Huntze who singled him out one day and observed that the young Dr. Lewis seemed 'kind of bored' in her class (T. J. Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). Dr. Lewis explained that he already knew this information and was more interested in how it applied to the real world. Dr. Huntze was

neither offended nor dismayed, but rather recognized in her student the makings of a fine researcher and educator and pushed him to reach his full potential. At this point Dr. Huntze set up an independent study for Dr. Lewis, allowing him to travel around the state. Like all great professors, she never gave up on Dr. Lewis.

At the University of Oregon, Dr. Lewis credits two professors in particular as having a significant impact on his career. First was [George Sugai](#), who Dr. Lewis continues to work with today at the OSEP Center on PBIS (anonymous author, 2010). Second was [Hill Walker](#) who provided a great deal of guidance to Dr. Lewis in both his teaching and research efforts. This 'giant among giants' served as one of Dr. Lewis's greatest role models in the field of special education (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Contributions to the Field of Special Education

When asked what his greatest contribution to the field had been, Dr. Lewis stated that he felt the answer lies in his students. Above all the articles that are published and "put away on dusty shelves," preparing future leaders is what he believes to be his greatest contribution (T.J Lewis, personal communication, October 11, 2010). While he misses working with young children, working with eight potential leaders who will go out and help thousands is a greater contribution. For Dr. Lewis, the success of his former and current students is of greater reward than his own impressive career.

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