
Pupil Selection of Teachers

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TEACHER effectiveness is a meal-time topic in many a home, and quick judgments are made by school beginners, their teen-age brothers and sisters, and their middle-aged fathers and mothers with sublime disregard for the fact that researchers in this country have been attempting for three quarters of a century to identify the factors which contribute most significantly to teaching effectiveness.

The elusiveness of criteria to judge good teaching needs little documentation. If we accept the assumption that each teaching act is unique, then by definition we accept as a fact that each performance is "different from all others."

Young consumers of education have little concern for problems of psychological measurement, but for the past 45 years they have increasingly been supplying answers to researchers who are attempting to differentiate among teachers while accepting teaching as a multifaceted process. Early skepticism has given way to widespread confidence in the ability of students, from the intermediate grades to graduate schools, to make reliable and valid judgments of teaching performance. Published results¹ of studies of teacher ratings by pupils indicate an

uncanny ability on the part of pupils to describe good and poor teachers in much the same way as do knowledgeable adults.

Pupil Selection of Teachers Is Inevitable

Mary beamed at her mother. "We all wrote reports to see who would represent the class. Beverly will give the report and Dale and Paul will demonstrate the models. Miss Jones let us select them!"

"Mrs. Dawson taught us about depreciation today. Why, it's easy. She showed us the difference between a lipstick that we would use up in a hurry and a record player that would last for years. You and Daddy thought I couldn't learn bookkeeping, but it's simple as anything the way she teaches," Janice declared triumphantly.

Yes, pupil selection of teachers is inevitable. Whether we defend or condemn such evaluation, it is and always has been part of the real world of teaching. A comprehensive summary of investigations dealing with the measurement and prediction of teacher effectiveness² reminds us that evaluation is "inescapable"; evaluations are made, the report states, "whether openly and carefully" or "subversively and haphazardly."

² A. S. Barr and others. *Wisconsin Studies of the Measurement and Prediction of Teacher Effectiveness: A Summary of Investigations*. Madison, Wisconsin: Dembar Publications, Inc., 1961.

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¹ Summaries of extensive research findings from 1896 through 1961 appear in Chapter II, "Related Materials on Teacher Effectiveness and Pupil Ratings as a Method of Measurement." In: Elizabeth L. Dalton. "Preparation Programs of Junior High School Teachers." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Nashville, Tennessee: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1962. pp. 17-91.

The choice is the profession's to make. Many educators choose to accept the inevitability of evaluation, ensure that it is handled openly and carefully, and capitalize on its findings for the improvement of instruction.³

Pupil Evaluation Differentiates Among Teachers

Pupil evaluation was used to secure the two samples for the writer's doctoral research relating to preparation programs of junior high school teachers. The instrument administered was the Student-Opinion Questionnaire prepared by Bryan⁴ to secure student reactions as the basis for helping teachers. Bryan recognized that "Immature students obviously are not authorities on pedagogy," but he emphasized the difference between "expert knowledge of teaching methods and the effects of those methods." He explained:

This is much like saying that untrained persons, even children, can tell experts much about the effects of a television set on them—whether the picture is clear and the sound is right—but they cannot analyze the reasons for or prescribe the solution to malfunction.⁵

Bryan contended that student-reaction reports help teachers to:

(1) Determine the degree to which desirable characteristics exist, (2) discover unsuspected weaknesses and strengths, (3) maintain good public relations, (4) discover gaps between theory and practice, (5) get the proper balance in emphasis on competing factors in the teaching situation, and (6) get recognition for excellent teaching.⁶

The Student-Opinion Questionnaires

³ This article does not deal with the use of ratings by pupils or school personnel for purposes of merit pay, since such an element can seriously affect teacher morale and the evaluative process itself. It is true that much research related to pupils' reactions to teachers and their performance has been directed toward this purpose.

⁴ Roy C. Bryan, *Twelve Teachers and Their Effects on Students*. Faculty Contributions, Series 4, No. 4. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, School of Graduate Studies, 1959. pp. 8-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

were administered in the 12 junior high schools of the Chattanooga system, to all teachers and librarians with the exception of full-time guidance teachers and special education teachers, with each of the 252 faculty members rated by two different classes.⁷ The 10 characteristics included in the questionnaire⁸ are listed below.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION CONCERNING:

1. *The knowledge this teacher has of the subject taught?* (Has thorough knowledge and understanding of his teaching field?)

2. *The ability of this teacher to explain clearly?* (Are assignments and explanations clear and definite?)

3. *This teacher's fairness in dealing with students?* (Is fair and impartial in treatment of students?)

4. *The ability of this teacher to maintain good discipline?* (Keeps good control of the class without being harsh? Is firm but fair?)

5. *The sympathetic understanding shown by this teacher?* (Is he patient, friendly, and considerate?)

6. *The amount you are learning in this class?* (Are you encouraged to do your best? Are you learning much?)

7. *The ability this teacher has to make classes lively and interesting?* (Shows enthusiasm and a sense of humor?)

8. *The ability of this teacher to get things done in an efficient and business-like manner?* (Has foresight and plans thoroughly and well? Little time wasted?)

9. *The value this subject has for you?* (Are the problems and topics studied useful and valuable?)

10. *The general (all-round) teaching ability of this teacher?* (All factors considered, how close does this teacher come to your ideal?)

The upper 27 percent and the lower 27 percent of the total number of teachers rated were identified by their composite scores and studied on the basis of variables reflected in

⁷ The anonymity of all teachers was protected, and only the researcher had access to the completed answer cards and composite scores; computer cards were processed in another city.

⁸ Bryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

the stated purposes of the research. Of importance here is the fact that there were no "surprise teachers" in either the effective or ineffective group as rated by pupils.

At the time of the study, the writer was serving as coordinator of secondary education for the school system and knew the majority of the teachers on a person-to-person basis and the others through administrative and instructional personnel. She missed a few teachers from the high group; an examination of their composite scores showed, in every case, that the ones seemingly overlooked had very favorable ratings while falling slightly below the 27 percent cutoff.

Interpretations of two major differences found significant at the .01 level seem valid for groups of teachers, if not for individual teachers. These were:

The ability and the will to achieve scholastically have a close relationship to a teacher's effectiveness with young adolescents in the classroom. A high academic record is not a guarantee of effectiveness, but in the absence of other information, the undergraduate average would serve at least as a fair predictor of success.

Knowing how to teach is one of the major requisites for effective teaching at the junior high school level. This ability probably is as essential with young adolescents as with elementary school children. Teachers rated effective had taken twice as many hours as had teachers rated ineffective in courses designed to equip them with methods and tools of instruction. Mastery of academic subject matter alone does not suffice for the teacher of the middle grades.⁹

Findings from this study added to the evidence that pupil evaluation of teacher effectiveness, when handled openly and carefully, can serve a useful purpose.

Pupil Selection of Teachers Can Improve Instruction

Teachers in increasingly large numbers are using self-initiated pupil evaluation to identify classroom practices that should be

⁹ Elizabeth L. Dalton. *What Makes Effective Teachers for Young Adolescents?* Nashville, Tennessee: Department of Education, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1962. pp. 29-30.

continued, strengthened, or eliminated. They are likely to resist personal ratings imposed by accrediting associations, administrative staffs, or pupils; they are certain to reject ratings published in the vindictive atmosphere of "Now, it's *our* turn to grade the professors!"

This writer became interested in utilizing pupil evaluation to improve her own teaching through work in a graduate course in the early 1950's. Her research project included a self-rating, a rating by her principal, and ratings by pupils in all her classes. She used for the pupils' scale the 12 traits of the teacher "who has helped me most" listed by Witty¹⁰ on the basis of thousands of responses by children in grades 2 through 12 from all over the nation. These traits were the following:

1. Cooperative, democratic attitude
2. Kindliness and consideration for others
3. Patience
4. Wide variety of interests
5. General appearance and pleasing manner
6. Fairness and impartiality
7. Sense of humor
8. Good disposition and consistent behavior
9. Interest in pupils' problems
10. Flexibility
11. Use of recognition and praise
12. Unusual proficiency in teaching a particular subject.

Free comments were also elicited through the request: "Indicate those things you *like best* and those things you *dislike most* about this class." The ratings were sufficiently favorable that they could be reported without embarrassment to the graduate professor and to the writer's classes. However, an analysis of the voluntary comments clearly indicated that the instructor was moving too slowly for some of the students and too fast for others, that she obviously was failing to individualize instruction.

¹⁰ Paul A. Witty. "The Teacher Who Has Helped Me Most." *NEA Journal* 36: 386; May 1947.

Use of pupil evaluation as the basis for improvement has continued for 18 years, with the writer using various types of scales and opinionnaires to secure reaction to her own teaching effectiveness. Taken into consideration is the importance of securing averages of at least 25 or more student ratings and of administering the evaluative instrument near the end of the semester or school year.¹¹

Pupil Selection of Teachers May Open Things Up

Recent use of pupil evaluations has been made at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in a methods course for English majors just prior to their student teaching experience. This study was based upon "things to be continued," "things to be discontinued," and "things to be added." An examination of the pupil reactions revealed that no

¹¹ Based on research and interpretations from: P. C. Baker and H. H. Remmers. "Progress in Research on Personnel Evaluation." *Journal of Teacher Education* 2: 143-46; June 1951; and Roy C. Bryan. "Pupil Ratings of Secondary-School Teachers." *School Review* 46: 357-67; May 1938.

procedures were considered inappropriate, that all procedures were found helpful, but that principles and techniques for handling discipline, homework, and tests should be given more emphasis in the course.

The question of teacher evaluation, particularly with the mechanism or procedure that will be the most helpful to the teacher, is currently being studied by the English department of UTC. A committee composed of faculty members and students is making an exhaustive survey of various evaluative techniques used throughout the country. The committee expects to make recommendations for specific procedures by the end of the year.

Researchers may lack the sophistication to identify criteria by which to rate the essentially unique performance of teaching, but pupils may provide the alternative to clean research design.

If we agree with learning theory that pupils' interests and self-initiated activities are related to teacher behavior and social interaction in the classroom, then we can utilize student reaction and perception to open things up for the improvement of instruction. □

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