

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHERS

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In presenting the concept of student feedback to teachers, it will be helpful to be able to cite some of the key research that has been conducted over a period of years. Some teachers hesitate participating in voluntary programs because they believe that students who are doing poorly will rate them lower. This is not supported by the research and it will be helpful to be able to cite specific studies when making presentations to faculty. While the majority of the studies have been conducted at the college level, similar results have been

obtained in programs administered at the high school level. (Thompson, 1971) The following information is presented as a resource for student-teacher committees as they develop their surveys.

“More than 80 years of research confirm that well designed, correctly administered, and properly interpreted student ratings are valid and reliable measures of effective teaching (Alaemoni, 1999), especially if they are obtained from multiple courses over multiple semesters.”(1) He offers the following arguments to support the use of student ratings of teacher performance (1981).

1. Students are the main source of information about the learning environment, including teachers’ ability to motivate students for continuous learning, rapport or degree of communication between instructors and students.
2. Students are the most logical evaluators of the quality, the effectiveness of, and satisfaction with course content, method of instruction, textbooks, homework and student interest.
3. Student ratings encourage communication between students and their instructor. This communication may lead to the kind of student and instructor involvement in the teaching-learning process that can raise the level of instruction”.

Seldin (1993) noted that “ hundreds of studies have determined that student ratings are generally both reliable (yielding similar results consistently) and valid (measuring what the instrument is supposed to measure”.

In his 2003 article “Of What Value are Student Evaluations”. Edward B. Nuhfer notes that” good teaching can be defined and evaluated with the aid of student evaluations, but not by such evaluations alone.’ The most effective tools are defined as formative and are conducted mid-term. They ask detailed questions that identify the frequency that specific teaching practices are employed by the teacher. Formative questions provide a " Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree to statements such as " uses examples and illustrations", "is well prepared", "states objectives of each class session" "encourages class discussion/participation". (Nuhfer, 2003)

The issue of the impact of a teacher's personal qualities on learning has been addressed in several studies. At the high school level instruction seems to be more effective if "the teacher possessed characteristics classified into seven categories of instructional skills."

(Buser, Stuck, and Casey, 1974). According to their research the teacher should be knowledgeable, tolerant, interested in students as individuals, good listeners, have a sense of humor and a warm and friendly attitude.

Over 2,000 studies on the effectiveness of student evaluations at the college level are cited in the ERIC System. According to John A. Centra in his article "Will Teachers Receive Higher Student Evaluations By Giving Higher Grades and Less Coursework". states that "the majority of these studies have been positive, concluding that the evaluations are 1) reliable and stable; 2) valid when compared to student learning and other indicators of effective teaching; 3) multidimensional, in terms of what they assess; 4) useful in improving teaching; 5) only minimally affected by various course, teacher or student characteristics that could bias results" (Cashin, 1988; Centra, 1993; d'Appolonia & Abrami, 1997; Marsh, 1987; McKeachie, 1979).

A number of studies concluded that perceptions of elementary students are also valid and helpful. (Benninga, Thornburg, and Gurkey, 1980; Kronowitz, 1984; Driscoll et. Al., 1985; Peterson, Driscoll, and Stevens, 1990; Weber and Manatt, 1992;)

Scriven (1995) identified a number of elements that contribute to the validity of student evaluations including:

- student ratings of their own learning and retention
- perceived changes in motivation toward a) the subject taught, b) a career associated with the subject 3) further learning in the subject area.
- observed teacher behavior relevant to competent teaching such as punctuality.
- identification of teaching style indicators such as enthusiasm
- test evaluation"

Researchers at North Carolina State University in 1994 concluded that anonymity and confidentiality are critical in the administration of student evaluations. An extensive student evaluation program conducted at San Mateo High School in 1971-72 was anonymous, confidential and voluntary on the part of teachers. Participation rose from 55% in the first semester to 68% in the second semester to 92% in the third semester. Another factor that contributed to the success of the San Mateo program was the comparative data provided to the teachers. On each question, they could compare feedback from each of their classes with their department and the total faculty results. An identical program was implemented at Awalt H.S. in Mountain View, California in 1972-73. After five years the process was mandated through collective bargaining.

In an effort to reduce teacher negativity toward student feedback, Davis (1995) suggested that faculty develop their own instruments that would be individualized to their own department and courses.

The Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET) launched in 2009 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation utilized the Tripod survey instrument, developed by Ron Ferguson, a Harvard researcher, to elicit student feedback regarding instruction.

Feedback is sought on "specific aspects of a teacher's practice, so that teachers can improve their use of class time, the quality of the comments they give on homework, their pedagogical practices, or their relationships with their students". preliminary findings reveal that " student perceptions of a given teacher's strengths and weaknesses are consistent across the different groups of students they teach. Moreover, students seem to know effective teaching when they experience it...Most important important are student perceptions of a teacher's ability to control a classroom and to challenge students with rigorous work...Our preliminary results suggest t that the student questionnaires would be a valuable complement to other performance measures." Gates Foundation 2010)