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Date August 11, 1971

STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHERS: A LITERATURE SURVEY

by

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A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial
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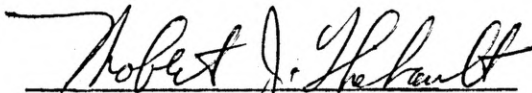
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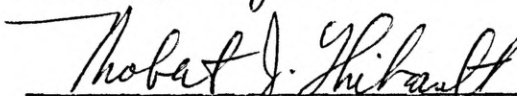
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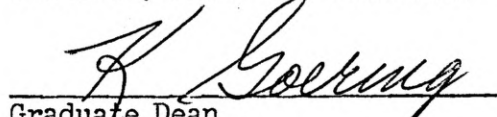
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ABSTRACT

The investigator has reviewed the literature on the use of student opinionnaires as a measure of teaching effectiveness. A summary of various views concerning such an evaluation is presented, and the factors affecting its validity are discussed. Some of the important conclusions of this study are: (1) More than half-century of research efforts has produced no standards which are commonly agreed upon as the criteria of teacher effectiveness; (2) Pupils are able to make more valid and reliable ratings of teachers than any other group; (3) Despite the widespread resistance, more and more administrators are beginning to visualize the importance of securing a picture of the weaknesses and strength in the teaching staff from the pupils' viewpoints.

This study presents indirect evidence to the fact that rejection of student evaluation of teachers out of fear or ignorance can be a setback to the process of keeping education in pace with the times.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past half a century several instructor evaluation studies have been done. The criterion of instructor effectiveness, as reported in most of the studies, has been some form of rating. Usually supervisor ratings have been used, but, peer ratings, student ratings, and self ratings have also been tried. The main problem faced by educators is: just who is the best judge of teacher effectiveness? Thompson (1962) cites student evaluation of a teacher's proficiency as one of the best approaches to evaluation. As Hood (1957) notes, it reveals information that "cannot be secured from any other source since pupils are the only persons who are in constant daily contact with teachers at their best and at their worst."

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to give educators a better understanding of student rating as a method of teacher evaluation. After reviewing the literature, the investigator has presented a summary of various views concerning student evaluation. The salient features of various rating forms used for this purpose are outlined, and the factors affecting the validity of this means of teacher evaluation are discussed.

Need of the Study

A student's interest and attitude towards the courses taught in school are largely conditioned by his personal reactions to the instructor (Snedeker and Remmers, 1960). Such attitude is a vital factor in the total learning situation, and a student opinionnaire or rating form can be very instrumental in its identification. Also, recognizing that the community and the school are not separate identities, pupils can act as a community pulse (Yack, 1959).

As Wright and Serman (1963) point out, there is a need for teacher self awareness.

"Self awareness is an important factor in teaching behavior, because in so far as a teacher is unaware of how she appears to her pupils, she is also unaware of what she is doing to them. The more a teacher is aware of how her pupils view her, the more she is able to use her impact on them in the service of her educational goals."

Thus, aside from being useful to the administrator and to the individual student, the rating scales may be made to work for the benefit of the teacher, and thus to the whole class.

The information gained by a school wide survey could be used as a basis for faculty in-service training. It may be used to measure the teachers' enthusiasm for their work since there is a positive correlation between the instructor's enthusiasm for teaching and the students' rating of his teaching ability (Webb, 1955).

Based upon a few selected readings and from the personal views and experience of the investigator, it can be safely asserted that the advantages and capabilities of such student evaluation forms have been largely misunderstood in the past, both by the teachers and the administrators. This is exemplified further by an excerpt from Remmers and Gage (1955, p. 496):

"Pupil ratings tend to disrupt the morale of the teaching staff by arousing hostility, self-consciousness, discouragement, disrespect between colleagues, and attempts to cater to adverse pupil opinion through activities irrelevant to good teaching."

Considering such misunderstandings, the investigator felt that there was a strong need for giving this aspect of teacher evaluation its due recognition and, thus, to present the reader a comprehensive report of the facts.

Questions to be Answered

Readings for this study were conducted so as to get answers to the following questions:

1. What are the basic qualities of a teacher which the student rating forms generally try to find out?
2. Are the students as individuals competent enough to evaluate instructors?
3. Are students generally honest in the evaluation of their teacher?
4. Is there any effect of age or student immaturity on the evaluation?
5. Does the student's frame of reference make any

difference in his rating?

6. Does the sex of the student influence his rating?
7. What is the effect of classroom atmosphere, if any, on student ratings?
8. Do the student's grades or academic performance bias his rating?
9. Do pupils' reactions agree with those of the authorities?
10. What are the advantages of student evaluation over other measures of teacher effectiveness?
11. What do teachers think of such evaluations?
12. What are the various types of professional or individually constructed rating forms available for the purpose?
13. Are the existing opinionnaires or forms valid measures for the purpose, or do they reflect a "halo" effect?

General Procedure

The study would, in essence, be a review of literature, with efforts concentrated in the directions dictated by the questions to be answered.

Limitations and Delimitations

As far as the present study was concerned, the shortage of time did not permit getting literature which was not available at Montana State University, thus restricting it to whatever was available at the said institution.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past thirty-five years, much has been done by way of experimentation in the area of student evaluation of teachers. No one has doubted that students have opinions about the quality of instruction they receive, but only within these past few years have these ideas been systematically arranged (McKeachie, 1969). In order to make a definite move in the direction of making this means of teacher evaluation widely usable, more research is needed to clear up many unresolved problems relative to the measure and prediction of teacher effectiveness (Barr, et.al., 1961).

Characteristics of "Effective" Instructors

What students look for in the faculty has been a topic of wide research. No single study has provided adequate criteria of teacher effectiveness, although results of various studies seem to be very consistent (Eble, 1970). The "result" criterion, in which effectiveness is evaluated by result or product, has been strongly supported by various authors (Howsam, 1963; Barr et al., 1961). But, the difficulty of determining precisely how much change can be attributed to a particular teacher, make this criterion rather inconsistent (Fattu, 1963).

Competence, caring, energy, imagination, and a sense of proportion are the five qualities of superior instructors des-

cribed by Eble (1970). Coffman (1954) came up with four factors of teacher effectiveness: empathy, organization, personality, and verbal fluency. 'Empathy' in his studies include the ability to arouse interest, humor, interpersonal relation, and tolerance. Gadzella (1968) found that the five most important criteria in describing an "ideal professor," in rank order of preference, were: knowledge of subject, interest in subject, flexibility, daily and course preparation, and vocabulary. In the same order, the five least important characteristics were: writer, participant in a community, researcher, appearance, and punctuality.

The notion of the "good teacher," so basic to the study of teacher effectiveness, turns out to be almost as vague and diffuse as the range of human experiences relative to teaching (Ellena, Stevensen and Webb, 1961). Many attempts have been made to define teacher traits that may be identifiable in terms of one of these three criteria: 'product' criteria involving student gains, results, or student changes in behavior; 'process' criteria which involve teacher behavior, situation, conditions, climate, and student-teacher interaction; and 'presage' criteria predicting effectiveness in term of intelligence, adjustment, and character traits (Mitzell, 1960). An example of the 'process' criteria is presented by Flanders' work on verbal interactions between the teacher and the students (Flanders, 1964). However, much work

remains to be done in this direction (Biddle, 1964).

Different studies on teacher effectiveness describe different sets of qualities attributed to the successful teacher (Yourgliche, 1955; Matlack, 1959). The most typical of those qualities, as listed by Punke (1961) are:

1. Good explanations; easily understood; interesting
2. Willing to help; extra effort with students who do not understand readily
3. Friendly; kind
4. Is understanding about both academic and social problems of students
5. Knows the subject
6. No favorites
7. Maintains discipline
8. Is interested in students, school program, and general level of education
9. Inspires students to work
10. Is considerate
11. Is patient
12. Grades fairly

General Observations about Student Evaluations

Student evaluation of teachers brings many controversial issues to light. Many objections and doubts have been raised about this technique. One such objection is "Students cannot really evaluate a teacher until they have left college and gotten

some perspective on what was really valuable to them" (McKeachie, 1969). Drucker and Remmers (1951) carried on an investigation to test the hypotheses that students' ideas of what constitute a good instructor change as the students grow older. They compared student and alumni judgements of the same traits and instruction and presented evidence that "the judgements made by undergraduates of their instructor are valid ones in terms of permanence and maturity." Teachers whom students think to be good ones are still remembered as being effective years later. Of course, as pointed out by Starrach (1934), if the instructors are evaluated over a period of time, they tend to raise themselves in the opinion of the students.

In terms of student maturity, Burkard (1962) found that students from the fourth to the twelfth grade level became more critical with increased age. According to Hood (1957), the evaluation seems to be "most satisfactory with senior high school and college students, although there is some evidence that they may be used with limited benefits in the upper elementary grades." Remmers (1930) found that whether a student is a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior, does not make much difference, but, graduate students do tend to rate teachers higher than the undergraduates.

The ability of the students does not seem to influence appreciably his rating of the instructor (Starrach, 1934). As

concluded by Remmers (1930), and Voeks and French (1960), there is practically no relationship between the student's grades and his judgement of the instructor. On the other hand, some earlier studies showed that what a student has achieved in a course is to some degree reflected in his rating of the instructor. Weaver (1960) found that the student's grades were an "indicator of his ability to discriminate." Spencer and Dick (1965) and Spencer (1969) found a definite relationship between student opinion of a course and course grades. General severity of grading does not affect overall rating of instructors, although instructors who grade low are more likely to be rated low on the item 'fairness in grading'.

The size of the class seems to influence only slightly the rating received by its instructor. In a study conducted at Grinnell College classes over 30 rated lower than smaller classes (Lovell and Haner, 1955). But, there was no such relationship found by Goodhartz in his study at Brooklyn College.

The atmosphere of the classroom does seem to make a difference in the rating. Vanderpol (1957) suggests that an authoritarian atmosphere will bias the result, by over-emphasizing the achievement, because, in a "democratic social climate" one can expect franker criticism of teacher and the course. Maney (1959) concluded that "the most authoritarian teachers receive the most

unfavorable ratings.....(students) tend to reject teachers whose personality make-up is such that they are disposed to express or act on the basis of autocratic ideas."

Piana and Gage (1957) concluded from their studies that pupil rating is affected by his frame of reference. Chansky(1958) exemplified it by stating that the democratic student will see the democratic characteristics of his teachers, while the student with an authoritarian nature will look for and see these characteristics in his teacher.

Sex of the student, or of the instructor, have no relation to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a teacher, as shown by the studies of McKeachie (1969), Remmers (1930), Starrach (1934), and Kent (1967). However, Bendig (1955) found it the other way around. According to him, "the highly competent instructors tended to be overrated by their male students and underrated by females, while instructors rated low in competence were rated even lower by men and somewhat higher by women students."

Regarding student honesty in evaluation, Hood (1957), and Chapman (1958) found their students to be honest: if the students are assured that the results will be used for proper purpose. As pointed out by Weaver (1960), the personality of the instructor is not confused as 'popularity' by the students. Eble (1970) asserts that the fallacy that professors can win high rating by

easy grading and light assignments is not true. Coffman (1954) suggests that "students are not considering surface manifestations when they make their judgement of teaching effectiveness." Even though students describe instructors through their ratings, and factors related to surface manifestations do appear in the analysis, but, it is not reflected in their judgement of teaching competence.

Borg and Hamilton (1956) found that a close relationship exists between supervisor ratings, self ratings, and peer ratings. Based upon such observations, Burkard (1962) went on to suggest giving the pupil ratings equal validity with part time observers and other such means of teacher observation. Byran (1962) concluded from his studies that most administrators believe that teacher-pupil understanding is germane to effective instruction, and that parents' judgement of the teacher's worth is based upon pupil opinion, thus, making for good school-community relations. His studies showed that "administrators said that students were in a good position to make reliable judgements on fairness, ability to explain clearly, systematic understanding, ability to stimulate interest, and sense of humor." Morsh, Burgess, and Smith (1956) concluded that students' ratings of instructors correlated significantly with instructors' proficiency test scores. In the comparison of student ratings and supervisory

ratings done by Cotsonas and Kaiser (1962), the supervisory ratings showed a 'halo' effect, whereas, student ratings did not.

Some other factors affecting student ratings are: age of the instructor, his qualifications, experience, and rank. Older teachers tend to be rated lower than younger teachers. In a university-wide study conducted at Utah State University, King (1971) reports:

- "1. University instructors rated high by students may be described as being generally female in sex, an average of 39 years of age, having a Master's degree with an average of seven years of university education and a professional rank lower than a professor.
2. University instructors rated low by students may be described as being male in sex, an average of 46 years of age, having a doctorate degree with more than eight years of university education, and a professional rank of a professor.
3. College affiliations and years of teaching experience have relatively little influence on whether a teacher at university level is rated effective or ineffective."

Students' Competency as Evaluators of Instruction

"With remarkable consistency, the findings have shown that pupils are able to make more valid and reliable ratings of teachers than any other group, including administrators, supervisors, and experts" (Howsam, 1963). Although the opinion of the individual student is not reliable in predicting the reaction of the whole class (Reed, 1961), Remmers and Gage (1955) have shown that the

reaction of the students as a group is very reliable. As pointed out by McKeachie (1969), student ratings do have some validity, and that teachers rated as "effective" tend to be those whose students learn most. Eble (1970) notes that student opinion can give much information about a teacher's actual performance. As stated by Kent (1967), students are perfectly capable of saying whether the subject presented to them was in an organized manner, whether the instructor established a good communication with them, and whether the instructor seemed to be interested in it. According to him, it would be "foolhardy to regard student evaluation as a cure-all for the ills of higher education, but,.....they may help to solve some of the current problems connected with evaluating teacher effectiveness and improving the quality of undergraduate instruction."

Byran and Dubois (1961) mentioned that one of the most reliable source of information about a teacher's effectiveness is his students: "They know whether they are interested or bored, are working or loafing, are confused or working with clear purpose, and are enjoying or hating the course."

Not all the educators agree on the usefulness of student evaluations. Vanderpol (1957) suggests that student opinions are not valid criterion for judging of teacher competence. Remmers and Gage (1955) summarized this viewpoint as follows:

"Attaching importance to pupil ratings commits the democratic fallacy of implying that teaching is best which pleases the majority of pupils, and that teaching should be adjusted to achieve this end."

Various Types of Teacher Rating Instruments

Many different types of individually constructed or professional rating instruments have been tried for the purpose of student evaluation of teachers. This section summarizes the salient features of the most typical of such instruments.

Richard E. Spencer developed the Illinois Course Evaluation Questionnaire, which is used to collect student attitudes toward a course and provide faculty members evaluative information about their teaching (Spencer, 1968). The Questionnaire is composed of 50 items which have been grouped into six areas: (1) General Course Attitude; (2) Method of Instruction; (3) Course Content; (4) Interest and Attention; (5) Instructor; and (6) Specific Items (miscellaneous). Students are asked to mark 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree', or 'Strongly Disagree' for each item. Following is a portion of the list of items in this questionnaire:

7. The course held my attention.
8. I would have preferred another method of teaching in this course.
9. It was easy to remain attentive.
10. The instructor did not synthesize, integrate or summarize effectively.

11. Not much was gained by taking this course.

At Western Michigan University (1964), the rating instrument is based upon a five-point scale. The characteristics considered are: superior attitude, ability to explain, fairness, class discipline, ability to create interest, empathy, efficiency, ability to motivate student thought, and overall teaching ability.

The revised Purdue Rating Scale for Instructors, constructed by Remmers and Elliott (1950), is a ten-point scale measuring the following ten teacher traits, in addition to evaluating other classroom and course activities:

1. Interest in subject
2. Sympathetic attitude toward students
3. Fairness in grading
4. Liberal and progressive attitude
5. Presentation of subject matter
6. Sense of proportion and humor
7. Self-reliance and confidence
8. Personal peculiarities
9. Personal appearance
10. Stimulating Intellectual curiosities.

Snedeker and Remmers (1960) designed the Purdue Instructor Performance Indicator to measure student opinion of college teachers.

The questions are based upon behavioral characteristics of instructors in such a way that the rater is unable to determine the net effect of choosing one item rather than another on the total evaluation of the ratee, thus precluding faking by the rater.

Morsh (1955) designed a Q-sort technique in which the student stacks the test items in piles according to his opinion of the teacher. The student is "forced" to limit his pile size to fit the normal distribution curve. Snedeker and Remmers (1960) suggest that such "forced type" tests should be restricted to professionally prepared instruments only, because of the technical nature of such instruments.

Many authors have suggested the use of self or group constructed devices to fit the needs of a particular class. In any kind of rating instrument, Hood (1957) and Mauk (1955) recommend that space be provided for written comments by the student. The latter suggests the inclusion of the following items in addition to the standard items:

1. What is the most unfavorable remark you have ever heard about your teacher?
2. Do you agree with the above remark?
3. What is the most favorable remark you have heard about your teacher?
4. Do you agree with the above remark?
5. From what did you profit most during the first semester?

6. From what did you profit least?
7. What nervous habits or personal traits does the teacher have that might annoy students?
8. Were your report card grades always fair?
9. If your answer to No. 8 is no, please explain thoroughly. Do not reveal your identity.
10. Any additional suggestions not covered above will be welcome.

Byran and Dubois (1961) recommend the use of a five-point scale instead of three or four, since, being large, it allows the frequency distribution to more nearly approach the normal curve. Regarding the construction of the questionnaires, Hood (1957) suggests that "it might often be wiser to point the items on a rating instrument toward the work of the class rather than directly at the teacher."

Veldman et al. (1963), Punke (1961), Remmers and Gage (1955), and many others have presented the types of questions they asked their students. For location of broad areas that need upgrading, Byran and Dubois (1961) suggest the use of questions such as the following:

1. The knowledge this teacher has of the subject?
2. The ability of this teacher to explain clearly?
3. This teacher's fairness in dealing with students?
4. The ability of this teacher to maintain good discipline?
5. The sympathetic understanding shown by this teacher?

6. The amount you are learning in this class?
7. The ability of this teacher to get things done in an efficient and business-like manner?
8. The ability this teacher has to make classes lively and interesting?
9. The value this subject has for you?
10. The general (all-around) teaching ability of this teacher?

Student Evaluation and Administrative Policies

To exemplify some specific details of the administrative policies regarding student evaluation programs, the investigator has chosen to present an outline of the Faculty Evaluation Program at Utah State University. As King (1971) reports, permanent instructors on campus were evaluated through the university administration, under this program, including administrators who teach, honors instructors, and graduate assistants. The evaluation was conducted near the end of the quarter, and any student absent on the day of evaluation was excluded unless he specifically made a request to evaluate his instructor. The results, after scoring, were sent to each instructor privately. The instrument used for this purpose was the Illinois Course Evaluation Questionnaire.

Later, it was decided to keep a file on each instructor in the Student Union Building, for student use. The file is composed of the scores on eight out of the total fifty items

on the Questionnaire, in addition to some other pertinent information. The eight items which were "exposed" to students were:

3. Overall, the course was good.
4. The textbook was very good.
5. The instructor seemed to be interested in students as persons.
7. The course held my attention.
18. The instructor had a thorough knowledge of his subject matter.
19. The content of the course was good.
36. I think that the course was taught quite well.
42. Generally, the course was well organized.

According to King, "the students having access to a sample of the results made the evaluation more important to the students and more real to the faculty." The fact that only a portion of the whole questionnaire was shown to students fits well with Hood's recommendation (1957):

"Ratings of an individual teacher should not be revealed to any person other than the teacher concerned unless the teacher desires to discuss some points voluntarily..."

Advantages of Student Opinionnaires

Hood (1957) points out that, since the student is the focal point around which teaching must be centered, it is logical that

his reaction should be important in teacher evaluation. Such student reactions can be useful in various ways:

1. The results of student evaluation may be used by teachers for self-improvement since they may often be unaware of personal traits and habits which interfere with effective learning on the part of their students. McEachie and Solomon (1958), and Vanderpol (1957) contend that an instructor will develop more in-service competence through the use of student opinionnaires. If used over a period of time, these can also provide a measure of instructor improvement (Morsh, 1955).
2. Favorable findings of student ratings may encourage teachers and build up their self-confidence; they may stimulate good teachers to become even better. One teacher put it this way: "Basically, it hit on sore spots I am trying to overcome and the 'praise' sections boosted my ego enough to make me want to improve all the more!"
3. From general ratings--in which neither individual nor teachers are identified--administrators may secure a picture of the weaknesses and strengths in the teaching staff from the pupils' viewpoint. Information gained by a schoolwide survey could be used as a basis for faculty in-service training. (Theophane, 1956).
4. Kearney and Rocchio (1955) see the student opinionnaire as a valuable source of teacher-pupil relations. As pointed out by Trimmer (1960), and Scott (1955), these can reveal the cause of student classroom behavior, the student insecurities, and the "mental-emotional" postures that students have toward the course.
5. Student opinionnaires can be used to reveal the status of classroom practices and conditions (Scott, 1955). Also, it may be a means of correcting false impressions, gossip, and rumors about teachers.

Teachers' Reactions to Student Evaluation

Despite the favorable evidences, there is widespread resistance to the use of pupil ratings (Howsam, 1963). Teachers have generally been opposed to the employment of means other than training and experience as a measure for the salary received (Hood, 1957). King (1971) reports some of the problems he encountered during the administration of student evaluation program. Various doubts have been expressed about the adequacy and appropriateness of this method of teacher evaluation.

Fortunately, however, the situation is not all that hopeless. The happy side of the story is summarized in the following comments by teachers, who responded to a study by the Student Reaction Center of Western Michigan University (1964):

- a. I feel there is a great deal of merit in the program. After the results were sent to me, I did make some changes in my teaching.
- b. If the teacher can "face" it, I don't see how it can be anything but helpful. Just keep it up.
- c. I certainly intend to profit by the revelations.
- d. Reinforced my estimate of how well I was reaching or not reaching my class.
- e. It will be more helpful when I compare it with next year's report.
- f. The responses revealed several points that needed improvement of which I was not aware.
- g. Some of the comments gave me a big "lift". I became aware of some things about myself that were more important to students than I had realized.

- h. It gives the student's viewpoint which I feel is very important.
- i. It is extremely interesting to find out how we appear and the impressions we make on those who are watching us in action every day.
- j. Evaluation from the students is perhaps more meaningful than from a supervisor. I used it for self improvement.
- k. Without such reports we can only guess at student acceptance or rejection and that is difficult to do objectively.
- l. Helpful and hurtful. My first reaction was, "But you don't know my side of the story." This feeling soon disappeared.
- m. When you realize that certain weaknesses are evident to students, this becomes something to work on. It is encouraging to read complimentary remarks.
- n. Certainly it was helpful. The teacher must question himself concerning opinions given and try to change the undesirable ones for the better.
- o. The report confirmed some of my opinions as to my weaknesses which I should try to improve.
- p. The report pointed out some of my faults of which I was aware, but really not too concerned about. The fact that the students noticed these faults has led me to correct them.

Chapter III

CONCLUSION

We are living in an age of great advancement in all fields. Educators need to avail themselves of any resource that will help them to keep pace with the times. While considerable progress has been made in the area of teacher evaluation, and much more needs to be explored, many of the long-held beliefs about "effective" teachers need to be revised. More needs to be known about the relationship between the teacher traits, his performance, and the pupil change resulting from his teaching.

The studies mentioned herein present evidence to the facts that pupils are in a position to judge the teacher's performance more effectively, and that their grades, age, sex, level of maturity, and other such surface manifestations make little difference in their rating of the teacher. If they are assured that the results will be used for proper purpose, their ratings definitely reflect a strong sense of responsibility and honesty, and the teachers cannot "win" good ratings by trying to "please" the students just before such evaluations take place. Once an administrator feels convinced in favor of these findings, there is no reason why he should not tap this source of tremendous value in providing the truth about his institution. The investigator strongly urges all the administrators to place their cards on the table and start rechecking their own beliefs, before the students themselves

stand up and start demanding the legal right to evaluate the persons who influence their lives more than anyone else, namely, their teachers.

Moreover, teachers need a continuous growth as a person: growth in knowledge, in self-concept, and in caring about what and whom they teach. Feedback is almost a prerequisite for such growth. The feedback in teaching has generally been in the form of supervisor ratings, which very frequently have a "threat" attached to them. But, logically, since the whole business of teaching revolves around the pupil, and since he is in a position to constantly observe the performance of the teacher, it is he who is most competent to give the in-depth feedback for teacher growth. Rejection of student evaluation of teachers out of fear or ignorance is to cut off this valuable resource. Certainly other important considerations should receive equal weight, but this kind of information, from the pupils' viewpoint, could be very valuable in developing more effective teacher-pupil, faculty-administration, and school-community relationships. And, above all, it could be the very stimulation needed for improvement of the teaching-learning process.

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