



1-1-1978

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Recommended Citation

Parish, Thomas S.; Palazzo, Richard F.; and Parish, Jocelyn G. (1978) "Effect of students' expectations," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 5: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1984>

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This research suggests that public disclosure of evaluations best be curtailed.

Effect of students' expectations

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Student evaluations of teacher effectiveness can be an important tool for aiding instructors in improving their teaching skills. However, the practice of publicly disclosing these evaluations is a topic of concern to many educators.

According to Rosenthal (1973), the Pygmalion effect lives and flourishes in our classrooms today. The Pygmalion effect, as Rosenthal (1973) has described it, occurs when students live up, or down, to the expectations of their teachers. That teacher expectation does indeed influence student performance has been demonstrated in various ways in many different experiments (e.g., Beez, 1968; Chaikin, Sigler, & Derlega, 1974).

The Pygmalion effect is not necessarily restricted, however, to how teachers' expectations influence their subsequent judgment of student performance. Indeed, other studies have reported how students' expectations of teachers have influenced their subsequent evaluation of their teachers' performances (e.g., Herrell, 1971; Kelley, 1950). Herrell's (1971) study, for example, has indicated that public disclosure of students' evaluations of teachers has a particularly negative effect on subsequent students' attitudes toward the teachers who had been unfavorably evaluated by students in the past.

As demonstrated in the Herrell (1971) experiment, public disclosure of students' evaluations of teachers may actually create a negative set in students toward unfavorably rated teachers.

Given this negative effect of publicly disclosed student evaluations of teachers, it is indeed hard to justify continuation of such a practice, unless perhaps students who fill out teacher evaluation forms for later public disclosure are more frank and candid about the teacher's abilities than students who fill out teacher evaluation forms intended for the teacher's use only. In other words, it is hard to justify public disclosure unless evaluations by students vary due to expectations as to how the teacher evaluations will be used. If no significant difference exists then it would appear that little, if anything, can be gained by using publicly disclosed evaluations.

Subjects

All of the junior and senior level students enrolled in 12 sections of an educational psychology course at Oklahoma State University participated as subjects in this experiment. In all, nine instructors were evaluated by their students. Of the 264 students participating in this study, 129 students were randomly assigned to Group I, and 135 students were randomly assigned to Group II.

Table 1

Items on the Instructor Evaluation Questionnaire and Statistical Data Relating to These Items Across Form A (Public Use Scale) and Form B (Professor's Use Scale)

Items which appeared on Instructor Evaluation Form	† Test Scores and Probability Levels For Each Item
Rate each of the course or instructor characteristics using the following scale:	
A. excellent	
B. very good	
C. good	
D. fair	
E. poor	
1. The clarity with which the instructor communicated the aim of the course to me.	t = 0.05, p = .960
2. The preparedness of the instructor for class.	t = 1.38, p = .170
3. The clarity of the instructor's presentations.	t = -0.07, p = .942
4. The value of the instructor's presentations.	t = -0.52, p = .606
5. The degree to which the instructor stimulated my desire to know more about the subject.	t = -0.35, p = .727
6. The extent to which the instructor encouraged students to ask questions. (most encouragement A . . . E least encouragement)	t = 1.10, p = .274
7. The instructor's ability to answer students' questions.	t = 0.00, p = .998
8. The extent to which the instructor encouraged class discussion. (most encouragement A . . . E least encouragement)	t = -0.29, p = .775
9. The extent to which the instructor spent time on unimportant and irrelevant material. (least time A . . . E most time)	t = -0.36, p = .716
10. The extent to which I felt free to express my opinions in class, even when I disagreed with the instructor. (most free A . . . E least free)	t = 0.78, p = .439
11. The overall value of the class sessions.	t = 0.97, p = .335
12. The instructor's enthusiasm for the subject matter.	t = .06, p = .955
13. The instructor's knowledge of the subject matter.	t = -0.05, p = .960
14. The extent to which the instructor encouraged students to think for themselves. (most encouragement A . . . E least encouragement)	t = 0.77, p = .440
15. The extent to which I saw the course material as being related to my life outside of class. (most related A . . . E least related)	t = 0.36, p = .720
16. The willingness of the instructor to talk to students individually, outside of class.	t = 0.24, p = .814
17. The extent to which the instructor seemed to be interested in and care about students. (most interested A . . . E least interested)	t = -0.29, p = .770
18. The value of the assigned readings.	t = 0.83, p = .405
19. The value of the assignments (other than assigned readings). Leave blank if there were none.	t = 0.10, p = .924
20. The extent to which the instructor made it clear what material the exams would cover. (most clear A . . . E least clear)	t = 0.80, p = .422
21. The adequacy of the exams in testing my knowledge of the subject matter of the course.	t = 0.53, p = .597
22. The value of the exams as a learning experience.	t = 1.46, p = .144
23. The clarity with which the instructor described the grading procedures.	t = -1.91, p = .057
24. The fairness of the grading procedures.	t = 0.12, p = .905
25. The reasonableness of the amount of work required. (most reasonable A . . . E least reasonable)	t = 1.29, p = 0.199
26. My enjoyment of this course.	t = -0.18, p = 0.860
27. Over-all value of this course for me.	t = 0.53, p = 0.596
28. The instructor's over-all teaching ability.	t = -0.32, p = 0.748
Total across all comparisons	t = .25, p = .803

Procedure

At the end of the semester, during the week preceding final exams, Forms A and B of the instructor evaluation questionnaire were administered to the students in Groups I and II, respectively.

The 28 items that appeared on Form A and Form B of the instructor evaluation questionnaire are presented in Table 1. Forms A and B differ only in the instructions that were presented to the students before they filled out the instructor evaluation questionnaires. The instructions for Form A were as follows:

This questionnaire gives you an opportunity to express anonymously your views of this course and the way it was taught.

Its purpose is to assist in the improvement of instruction. It will serve this purpose best if you answer the items carefully and honestly. To insure your anonymity do not write your name on this evaluation form. These evaluation forms will not be reviewed by the instructor until final grades are received by the Registrar's Office. **These evaluation forms and their results will be made available for public inspection.**

The instructions for Form B were as follows:

This questionnaire gives you an opportunity to express anonymously your views of this course and the way it was taught. Its purpose is to assist in the improvement of instruction. It will serve this purpose best if you answer the questions carefully and honestly. To insure your anonymity do not write your name on this evaluation form. These evaluation forms will not be reviewed by the instructor until final grades are received by the Registrar's Office. **These evaluation forms are for the professor's own use and their contents will not be publicly disclosed.**

Notably, only the underlined segments of the instructions of Form A and Form B actually differ.

Results

Of the 28 items on Forms A and B of the instructor evaluation questionnaire, no significant differences were found as a result of the different instructions. As is numerically illustrated in the right hand column of Table 1, none of the t values reached or exceeded the .05 probability level.

Discussion

The findings of this experiment demonstrated that extremely similar instructor evaluations were obtained from

the two groups of students, even though one group expected that their instructor evaluations were for the instructor's use only. The 28 items on the instructor evaluation questionnaire used in this experiment are very much like items used to rate instructors at many of our institutions of higher education. Since there was little new or different information secured from those students who expected that their instructor evaluations would be subsequently available for public inspection, it seems rather questionable to encourage the practice of allowing students' evaluations of instructors to be made available to other students who will subsequently be studying with the same instructors. As pointed out by Rosenthal (1968) past evaluations give rise to future expectations, and such expectations seem to quite unwittingly create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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Footnote

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