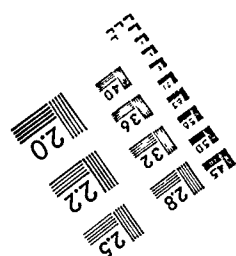100 mm

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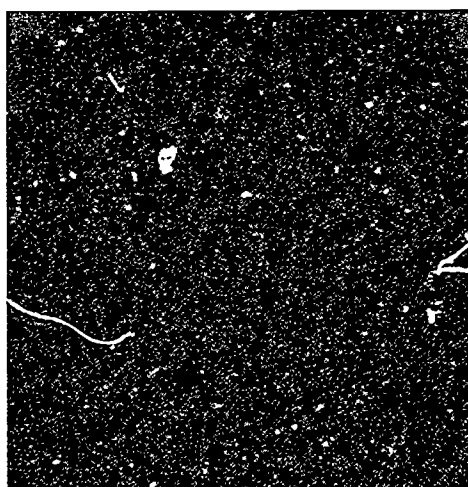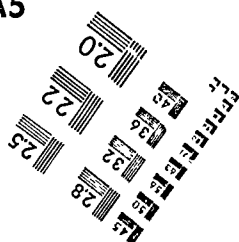
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ABSTRACT
        As one aspect of the project on expected student
achievement of the Kentucky Career Ladder Plan, teacher participants
(N=26) were interviewed about their perceptions of the issues
surrounding the use of student achievement data in teacher
evaluation. Perceptions of students (N=59), parents (N=23), and
principals (N=22) were also obtained through interviews for
comparison, with parallel questions asked of each group. Overall,
teachers were more concerned with non-academic outcomes that might be
attributable to themselves, but might not be fairly incorporated into
an evaluation system. Parents considered student test scores part of
the evaluation process, but other factors were of equal importance to
them. Students felt that it would be unfair to use their test scores
for a variety of reasons. Principals were the most concerned about
the subjective nature of non-standardized test data. (SLD)

A Comparison of the Perspectives of Teachers, Students, Parents, and

Principals Concerning the Influences of Teaching on Students and the

Use of Student Outcomes to Evaluate Teaching

Doris L. Redfield [a]

Running Head: Comparison of Perspectives

A Comparison of the Perspectives of Teachers, Students, Parents, and

Principals Concerning the Influences of Teaching on Students and the

Use of Student Outcomes to Evaluate Teaching

During the 1986-87 school year, Kentucky piloted several teacher

evaluation instruments for possible use in its proposed Career Ladder

Plan (Pankratz, 1987). Concomitantly, a special project on "expected

student achievement" was conducted to: (a) satisfy the mandate to include

student achievement in the Kentucky Career Ladder Plan and (b) to avoid

the indefensible/inappropriate use of standardized achievement test scores

in the evaluation of teachers.

Participants in the special project on expected student achievement,

hereafter referred to as the Project, included 26 teachers representing a

wide variety of grade levels (K - 12), subject matter areas (e.g., basic

skills, arts, business, P.E.), and students (e.g., gifted, handicapped).

Procedures used to select Project participants and the tasks they worked

on throughout the 1986-87 school year are described elsewhere (Redfield &

Craig, 1987a; Redfield & Craig, 1987b). The focus of this paper is one

component of the Project. In January, 1987, Project participants were

interviewed concerning their perceptions of the issues surrounding the

use of student achievement data in teacher evaluation. Information from

these interviews served as the impetus for interviewing students, parents,

and principals. That is, it became important to validate the perceptions

and concerns of teachers against those of other interest groups.

Methods

Teacher Interviews

Interview data were collected under a variety of circumstances.

First, a modified Focus Group Interview (FGI) technique, as described below,

was used to interview groups of Project participants. Groups ranged in size from seven to nine individuals. Interviewers were Western Kentucky University (WKU) College of Education faculty who had been trained to use the FGI technique. Graduate students in Psychology, also trained in the technique, served as backup interviewers.

The Focus Group Interview (FGI) Technique. Briefly, the FGI technique (Krueger, 1986) is a group interview procedure originally designed for collecting marketing information from consumers. Groups of 8 - 12 individuals are interviewed for approximately 90 minutes concerning their feelings about, and perceptions of, various products and/or services. The interviews are structured and repeated with a number of groups until a consistent pattern of responses across groups is apparent. Each interviewer is assisted by a backup interviewer. Following the interview, the interviewer and backup collaborate to summarize the general ideas expressed by the group.

To facilitate efficient interviewing of Project participants, the FGI technique was modified. Participants were assigned to one of four groups. Each group was interviewed by a different interviewer-backup team. After each team collaboratively reviewed responses, team members were interviewed by the Project director and a backup. The purpose of this interview was to synthesize the information yielded by the four groups.

Parent Interviews

A modified FGI technique was also used to interview three groups of parents, ranging in size from six to nine individuals (total n = 23). The Project director functioned as the interviewer; graduate students or WKU faculty served as backups. The parents represented children ranging

from preschool to college age. When appropriate, scripted interview
questions paralled the questions asked of Project participants. The
purpose of the parent group interviews was to: (a) gain insights into
the kinds of outcomes parents perceive as attributable to schooling,
rather than to some other source such as home; (b) determine what outcomes
parents observe in their children that they perceive as attributable
to a particular teacher; and (c) elicit opinions concerning the use of
student outcome data in the evaluation of teachers.

Student Interviews

Six groups of students, with groups ranging in size from 6 to 14
individuals (total n = 59) were interviewed by the Project director and
backup interviewers. Because high school seniors would be able to speak
from the most educational experience, by design, most of the students
interviewed were seniors (n = 37). The groups were selected to be
representative of their particular schools. Since the group meetings were
arranged by various teachers, principals, and instructional supervisors,
some groups may have been more representative of a particular school than
others. Students were asked questions parallel to those asked of parent groups.

Principal Interviews

Structured (scripted) telephone interviews were conducted with the
principals of most Project participants (n = 22). Written permission to
conduct these interviews was obtained from Project participants. The inter-
views were conducted by two WKU faculty trained by the Project diretor. The
questions paralled those asked of Project participants, parents, and students.

Results

Responses to Interview Questions Common to All Interview Groups

An issue addressed by all groups concerned student outcomes that could be uniquely attributed to a particular teacher (rather than another teacher or source, e.g., parent, ability, prior experience). When asked what student outcomes (behaviors, knowledge, attitudes) might be uniquely attributable to particular teachers, Project participants (teachers) were slow to respond. Most said they had never really considered the issue before. Upon consideration, only one participant volunteered a response concerning an academic outcome; all participants described nonacademic outcomes (e.g., behaviors, attitudes).

When asked to recall from their own past experience, what they had uniquely learned in school (compared to other sources, e.g., home, church, friends), with few exceptions parents recalled positive school learning experiences centering on nonacademics (e.g., feelings of self-confidence, sense of curiosity, healthy skeptism of presented material, importance of trying/working hard, organization, neatness, self-discipline). Only two of the 23 parents mentioned specific, academic outcomes (i.e., facts and how to solve a certain kind of math problem) and only one parent recalled a negative outcome (i.e., learning that he/she did not like "screaming" teachers). Without being asked, parents volunteered that the teacher behaviors contributing to the outcomes they recalled included personal interest and encouragement.

When asked what educational outcomes they had observed in their children that could be attributed to any particular teacher, these parents again focused on nonacademics (e.g., curiosity,

self-confidence, to try hard, to have high expectations, punctuality,
self-discipline). Even with probing, only one academic outcome
was mentioned (i.e., learning to use the associative property of addition).
Only three negative outcomes were elicited and they did not all come from
the same interview group. One example was "learning to be different
in different teachers' classes."

Students' responses to the question, "What have you learned because
of any one particular teacher?" focused on affects and attitudes (e.g.,
motivation to learn, responsibility, self-confidence, independence). The
heaviest emphasis was on the importance of working hard, motivation, and
thinking. With the exception of one group, the interviewer had to probe
to get any responses related to academic outcomes. Every group had to be
probed for responses concerning negative outcomes. Such probing led to
the overall impression that when teachers appear not to "care" and/or they
do not have the respect of the students and/or they do not maintain
discipline, learning does not occur. The importance of a teacher: (a) who
cares about his/her content area and students and (b) who maintains a
well-disciplined class was stressed.

Students were also asked how others (e.g., other students, teachers,
parents) could tell from their performance that they were, or had been, in
the classes of particular teachers. Here, students focused on observable
behaviors and skills (e.g., what I say/talk about, what I know that only
that teacher teaches such as computer skills, the way I organize my
notebook, the books/materials I carry, behaviors or speech patterns that
I use). Secondary focus was on affects and attitudes (e.g., enthusiasm
for a subject taught by a particular teacher). The importance of a

"relaxed" classroom atmosphere was emphasized. The interviewer had to probe for responses concerning specific academic skills.

Principals were asked what student outcomes they attributed to the individual teachers (Project participants) about whom they were being interviewed. The overwhelming majority of responses concerned nonacademic outcomes (e.g., appropriate social skills, disciplined, wekk-behaved). These responses cut across teachers of all grade levels and content areas. The second most prevalent responses concerned affects and attitudes (positive attitudes, enjoy school, spirit of cooperation, enthusiasm, respect). However, only one such response came from a secondary principal; the remainder represented elementary school principals. Other outcomes mentioned were various types of "higher order" thinking, including creativity. Specific academic skills (e.g., reading skills) were the least mentioned outcomes; they were mentioned equally as often by secondary as by elementary principals.

Responses to Questions Common to Parent and Student Interview Groups

These questions focused on the appropriateness of using student achievement data in teacher evaluation systems. When parents were asked the extent to which teachers should be evaluated based on student outcomes, the overall concensus was that teachers should be evaluated but not solely on the basis of achievement test scores for a number of reasons: some teachers are in unfortunate circumstances, students move during the year, some students don't test well, tests are the same year after year so they don't validly measure what was taught in a particular class or grade. There was general agreement that test scores should probably be looked at in light of a teacher's track record but that other data should also be

considered and that variables outside the teacher's control (e.g., ability student anxiety) should be taken into account. Some specific advantages and disadvantages of Kentucky's mandated achievement test, the Kentucky Essential Skills Test (KEST), were mentioned. These parents thought that using the test was good in that it forced poor teachers to do more than they had done prior to mandated use of the test; they also thought that it had the negative effect of encouraging some teachers to limit themselves to teaching the skills tested by the KEST.

Parents were additionally asked to consider alternatives to standardized achievement testing in the evaluation of teachers. Their suggestions reinforced the notion that multiple sources of data, collected over a considerable period of time, should be used. They also were concerned that teachers receive feedback that would allow them to improve instruction before the end of the school year. The ideas and suggestions offered by parents primarily concerned: (a) evaluations (by students, parents, office staff, and/or other teachers) and (b) classroom observations to see how teachers interact with students (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement, empathy). Parents did voice a recognition that the procedures used would have to be logistically manageable.

When students were asked to what extent teachers should be evaluated on the basis of their achievement test scores, all but one student, across all groups, said they should not be used for a variety of reasons: seniors, especially, don't care about the tests -- the scores don't affect grades, college, or graduation; many students perceive the tests as a joke, having memorized many of the questions and answers; the tests are limited in scope and limit what some teachers teach; factors over which teachers have little control can affect scores (e.g., students having an

"off day," bad attitudes, ability); the testing atmosphere is not "real"
compared to the regular class environment. Students seemed particularly
concerned that some poor teachers may have bright students who look good
on test scores while some good teachers may not have time to cover all
of the material on the test. Despite their reservations about using
student test scores to evaluate teachers, the students agreed that teachers
should be evaluated.

When students were asked for suggestions as to how teachers might be
evaluated, the most prevalent responses centered on classroom observation
and opinion surveys. The idea that classroom observations should be
unannounced and cover extended periods of time prevailed. Students were
concerned that observers watch for teacher enthusiasm, teacher organization,
and the ability of the teacher to make students feel comfortable/relaxed.
They felt that students should be observed for level of interest, attention,
preparation, asking/answering questions, etc. These students wanted more
from teachers than facts, including a pleasant social climate.

Overall, the students wanted to be surveyed or interviewed concerning
their teachers. They perceived the primary value of these surveys or
interviews would be to provide teachers and principals with feedback for
improvement. Suggestions other than classroom observation of teachers
and students and student evaluations of teachers included: interviewing
other teachers, follow-up on graduated students to see if they are
successful in "real life," pre and posttest students, use standardized
tests that students take seriously (e.g., ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement),
test teachers to be sure they are knowledgeable and up-to-date in their
subject matter areas, and interview teachers to assess the degree to

which they care about their students and what they teach.

Responses to Questions Common to Teacher and Principal Interviews

One of the Project tasks was for participants to negotiate, with their principals, a set of Student Achievement Outcome goals and procedures for documenting goal progress. This task grew out of the concern that achievement be broadly defined to include outcomes other than standardized test scores.

When questioned regarding the strengths and weaknesses of negotiations between teachers and principals, or other evaluating supervisors, regarding appropriate expectations for student outcomes, Project participants were quick to see the strengths; however, they were also careful not to generalize their positive, Project-related experiences to teachers in general. A perceived strength of a two-person agreement system was that principals might have important insights into a particular situation and could actually make a more valid decision than a naive or impartial evaluator. Concerns about teacher-principal agreement systems were: the time required to build trusting, collegial relationships; the knowledge level of the evaluating supervisor; and the legality of a two-person agreement.

When principals were questioned about the fairness of a two-person agreement concerning expected student outcomes, most felt that it was fair, but that there should be an appeals process. They also wanted to be able to call upon the expertise of an instructional supervisor or peer teacher as necessary. Overall, however, they seemed committed to the fairness of a two-person agreement process. These principals seemed to genuinely feel that being the teacher's partner in this sort of evaluation process should be their responsibility -- they did not suggest turning

the responsibility over to someone else.

Teachers' responses to a question about the kind of support needed to make a plan for incorporating student outcome data in a teacher evaluation system work may be categorized thus: time, readily available expertise, qualified evaluators, training, and a minimum of paperwork. The need for time assumed various contexts . . . time to accomplish teaching tasks, time to share/interact with other teachers, and time for one on one communication with their principals. Teachers thought that their principals also needed more time if they were expected to function as instructional leaders. In fact, these teachers concluded that more administrators would be needed if the professionalism of education were to be positively affected. However, these administrators would need to be of a particular kind, having educational expertise and an attitude of professional cooperation. A suggested option to increasing the number of administrators is to extend the responsibilities and roles of teachers. Curiously, teachers did not want help with teaching; rather, they wanted to be free from other responsibilities so that they could spend more time teaching.

Teachers also wanted ready access to expertise (e.g., someone to call on regarding individual student factors that influence educational outcomes). Further, teachers were concerned that observers and other evaluators receive training and be qualified. Teachers saw supervisors as needing training to make a teacher evaluation system work. They did not see themselves as needing any more "useless in-service;" rather, they wanted quality training for themselves, as well.

When principals were asked what kind of support teachers would need if a plan for using student outcome data to assess teacher performance were

implemented, their responses fell into four basic categories: support
(from administrators and fellow teachers who could share ideas and be
involved), time, training, and technical assistance (in getting data to
show outcomes). Principals expressed a concern that the teachers participating
in the Project probably would not need as much support or assistance
as other teachers. Most Project participants seem to have been
considered "good" teachers by their principals.

When asked what sorts of support principals would need to implement
a teacher evaluation system calling for the use of student outcome data,
principals said they would need time, assistance (with paperwork,
counseling, discipline, teacher evaluation), training, and technical
assistance (on how to use data).

When teachers were asked what would "make" or "break" a
teacher evaluation system, the following issues surfaced. First, professional
teacher and administrator organizations were viewed as assuming opposing
stances. The need for good public relations programs and professional
credibility at all levels was expressed. The importance of soliciting
community and parental support was emphasized. Participants particularly
valued the collegial support of their peers and saw a need for more time
to interact with them regarding meaningful educational concerns.
Unionization was discussed as being negative in that a "few bad teachers"
would see that any evaluation plan was "killed." The need for state money was
seen as critical for the development and implementation of an equitable
teacher evaluation plan; but, it was also realized that the way to get
money is to show that you have a system that works. Participants definitely
saw a need for measures other than the KEST to better reflect the needs of

different teachers' teaching-iearning situations. They expressed the
concern that having the same expectations for every class, rather than
expectations based on "kids" and their needs, as unfair -- such expectations
may "make the school look good but are nt good for kids."

Overall, Project participants gave the impression that they believe
that there is a workable solution to the student achievement/teacher
evaluation problem but that the solution hinges on professionalism at all
levels. What they appreciated about their own Project participation was
that it allowed them to have input, receive feedback, experience a spirit
of cooperation and common effo.t, and increased their levels of awareness.
The fact that the project took a very controversial issue and required a
close examinatin and definition of those parameters of achievement not
reflected by achievement test scores, in light of goals that teachers
have for individual students, was valued by Project participants. To
them, it was important to be able to say that they wanted to moe each/every
child, given that students are different. Above all, participants
agreed that student outcomes should be at the forefront of educational
endeavors and, for the most part, wanted to have "meaningful" professional
experiences that would help them improve themselves as teachers.

When principals were asked what would have to happen for student
outcome data to be fairly used in the evaluation of teachers, most
responses concerned the needs to: (a) consider the validity of any data
collected, (b) consider the track record of the teacher with regard to
those data, (c) educate everyone concerned (e.g., teachers, administrators,
parents, policy makers) about the issues related to using student achievement

data to evaluate teachers, and (d) take into account the factors over which teachers have no control.

Summary/Conclusions

Currently, there is great public and political pressure to include measures of student achievement in the evaluation of teaching. Typically, "achievement" is operationalized as standardized achievement test scores. The purpose of this study was to determine if a variety of interest groups (viz., teachers, parents, students, and principals) held similar views regarding: (a) the definition of achievement, (b) those student achievements which may be fairly attributed to any particular teacher, and (c) the legitimate role of student achievement in the evaluation process.

Teachers, parents, students, and principals were interviewed. Overall, teachers were more concerned with nonacademic, compared to academic, outcomes that might be uniquely attributable to themselves (e.g., behaviors, affects, skills, attitudes). They were uncertain as to how those outcomes might be fairly incorporated into a teacher evaluation system; but, overall, they felt that such outcomes could be fairly considered given a colleagial relationship with a knowledgeable, evaluating supervisor.

With few exceptions, parents recalled positive school learning experiences centering on nonacademics (e.g., feelings of self-confidence). The parents wanted their children to be in classrooms of "caring" teachers. Learning specific academic skills was not volunteered as a valued outcome of schooling. Parents felt that students' test scores might be one piece of information considered in the evaluation of teachers but that other outcomes were of equal, if not greater, importance.

Students, like teachers and parents, did not focus on school as a
place for learning facts and basic skills. They generally emphasized the
importance of classroom learning that they could not obtain in books
(e.g., enthusiasm for a subject). For a variety of reasons, students
thought it would be unfair to use their test scores to evaluate teachers.

Similar to the other interview groups, principals emphasized
the importance of nonacademic outcomes (e.g., self-discipline).
Compared to other interview groups, principals were more concerned
with the subjective nature of nonstandardized test data.

Results imply an appreciation for the need to hold teachers
accountable for student achievement, broadly defined. They also warrant
the question: "Who is influencing policy makers to define achievement as
standardized test scores?"

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