Who's a Good Teacher?: Third, Fifth, and Seventh Graders Speak out

Mary Anne Coppola

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WHO'S A GOOD TEACHER?
THIRD, FIFTH, AND SEVENTH GRADERS SPEAK OUT

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development:
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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Abstract

Included in any discussion of quality education, there has usually existed a universal agreement as to the importance of good teaching. It has been impossible to ignore the teacher's powerful ability to create achievers or failures out of his/her students. However, as adults attempted to define the characteristics of the "good teacher", they rarely invited students to offer their input, even though those students possessed first-hand knowledge of intimate classroom dynamics.

This study, therefore, was an effort to tap this valuable resource by interviewing 117 third, fifth, and seventh graders and asking them the following questions: "Think of the best teacher(s) you ever had. What made him(her) special?" "Think of the worst teacher(s) you ever had. What made him(her) so bad?" Students responded in classroom discussions, in written form, and in drawings.

Two characteristics of the "good teacher" were emphasized repeatedly in the comments of students. They were "caring and/or loving" and "providing students with academic success". Students wanted a teacher who was compassionate, helpful, supportive, and encouraging. Personal characteristics of the teacher, such as patience, sensitivity, and sense of humor, were far more important to students than the professional skills the teacher possessed.
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"I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized."

(Ginott, 1972, pp. 15-16)
Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

When asked to name persons who have influenced their life in a positive way, people will almost always include the name of a teacher. Is there anyone whose destiny has not been touched and the course of it altered in some way because of the unforgettable presence of a teacher in his/her life?

In discussions on quality education, people often single out the "good teacher" as the primary factor contributing to the success of schools. Studies have suggested a strong relationship between teacher personality and student achievement. Some even suggested teacher personality may be the most significant variable in the classroom. Physical education teachers who were assertive, expedient, inquisitive, imaginative, genuine, confident, and experimental tended to be more effective in their instruction and produced students who learned more (Phillips, Carlisle, Hautala, and Larson, 1985).

When adults who had been hyperactive had been asked what helped them the most to overcome their childhood difficulties, no program or methods surfaced. Their most common reply was that someone (often a teacher) had "believed in them." (Weiss and Hechtman, 1986).
The effect of teacher expectations on student performance has been well documented through the years. Belle Kaufman, in her book *Up The Down Staircase* (1964), quoted a student as saying, "Once I had a teacher who didn't know I was dumb, so I wasn't." It is impossible to ignore the teacher's powerful ability to create achievers or failures out of children.

There seems to be universal agreement as to the importance of good teaching. Good teaching is fundamental to good education. Yet there also exists a diversity of opinion as to what criteria should be used to identify the "best" teachers and who is competent enough to define these criteria.

Rarely do adults study the perceptions of young children in answering the question, "Who is a good teacher?" Yet children are the consumers of education, participants in the complications of classroom activities, and a storehouse of information on life in school. Students have very strong feelings about teachers, and are usually enthusiastic about sharing them. They can provide researchers with valuable insight into teacher behaviors from a unique point of view. Their concerns, expectations, and comments may provide new dimensions in the search for the "ideal teacher" (Duke, 1977).

If it is agreed that academic success and satisfaction
depend to a high degree on effective student-teacher relationships, then researchers must pursue the discovery of the characteristics that distinguish the "good teacher" from the "bad teacher." What better place to start such an inquiry than the classroom and the students within it.

Questions To Be Answered

Over the years, there has been a great diversity of thought on how teaching performance can be evaluated in a meaningful way. Teacher-evaluation plans have been based on a variety of methods--pupil performance, classroom observations, supervisor evaluations, self and peer ratings. However, interviewing students directly has been traditionally avoided as though the resulting information would somehow be invalid.

This study, therefore, addressed the need for student-centered research by interviewing elementary and junior high students in an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are third, fifth, and seventh graders perceptions of their "best" teachers?

2. What are third, fifth, and seventh graders perceptions of their "worst" teachers?
3. Do third, fifth, and seventh graders use similar criteria in defining their "best" and "worst" teachers or do variations exist among grade levels?

4. Do the perceptions of third, fifth, and seventh graders of their "best" and "worst" teachers provide useful information to adults who are interested in improving the field of education?

Need For The Study

Everyone agrees that quality education cannot occur without quality teaching, but who are the good teachers? What are the characteristics they possess that make them extraordinary?

The people who run our schools go to great lengths in questioning parents, teachers, and administrators about improving education, yet they generally avoid including students in their discussions about schools and learning. Student input is rare, with the exception of the student evaluations conducted at the college and university level. Adults are constantly making inferences about how students feel, but without student confirmation or denial, how can adults assume their inferences are correct? Adults cannot always know what students are thinking, and a vast source of valuable information is overlooked when student perceptions are ignored.
In research of the young student's point of view, primary children generally state that they enjoy school, while secondary pupils give an opposite opinion (Meighan, 1977). What happens to students in those intervening years to erode their positive attitudes into negative ones? Perhaps the only way to obtain meaningful answers to this question is to ask the students themselves. *When I Was Young I Loved School* (Sheffield, 1989) is a collection of 23 interviews with teenage students and former students who illustrate the transformation of student enthusiasm into student apathy and anger. It is an attempt to find out how to improve learning and public education by looking at the problem from the student's point of view. One of the points emphasized by teens was the positive difference a teacher can make in keeping the would-be dropouts in school.

In his comprehensive national survey of 5,000 children in the fourth through twelfth grades, Coles (1990) attempted to discover what was happening to the moral life of our young people. A number of shocking attitudes were uncovered: A majority of children have no firm religious or moral code to guide them. They have no strong conception of right and wrong, good and bad. "...most children, if given the chance, would lie, cheat, or steal to get ahead." It is entirely possible that such valuable information might never have surfaced under more traditional research methods.

In politics, elected officials commonly poli
constituents before supporting or rejecting legislation. In marketing, researchers frequently question consumers if products are not successful. In industry, when factory production decreases, researchers seek out employee comments as a reliable source of information in discovering and correcting problems. However, educational researchers have overlooked the wealth of knowledge anxiously waiting to be shared by the students, or workers, in the schools. Here lies a missed opportunity for obtaining significant data from a unique viewpoint.

There is an obvious need for student-centered research, especially at the elementary and secondary level. The majority of studies has previously been conducted in university settings and has usually consisted of formal student evaluations of instructors. This project will research the opinions of elementary and junior high students by the use of informal discussion, rather than through a structured evaluation format. It will focus on the perceptions children have of good teachers, rather than the evaluation of any specific instructor.

Limitations of the Study

In their search for information, researchers in the social sciences have established two fundamentally different modes of inquiry: naturalistic (also called post-positivist, ethnographic, phenomenological, and qualitative) and
exper1mental (also called positivist, empirical, analytical, scientific, rationalist, and quantitative) (Lincoln, 1988; Yoong, 1986).

Most educational theory is based on experimental research which typically manipulates a single or limited number of conditions and controls other relevant conditions. Useful information about the relative effectiveness of teaching strategies or materials results. However, teachers rarely use these research findings in their classrooms because "teachers often view traditional education research as irrelevant" (Enochs and Hortin, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1988) suggest that the naturalistic approach to research examines the "real world" of the classroom. This involves observing, interviewing, and documenting student and teacher behaviors. Naturalistic research is conducted in the setting in which it naturally occurs, unlike experimental research with its artificial environments, manipulated variables and preconceived hypotheses (Hatch and Bondy, 1985). Naturalistic research also provides more creative and flexible methods for collecting data. By giving educators an opportunity to participate in research in natural surroundings, the results are more readily accepted and used.

Naturalistic research, based on inquiry, has been widely used in the social sciences and is now growing in the field of education. Some researchers have examined
statistics in an attempt to understand the school dropout problem. Others, such as Fine (1986) went to the source and interviewed the actual population that left school. It is recognized that naturalistic research in the classroom can effectively supplement experimental study with observational evidence (Barr, 1986). Smith (1986) predicted that the deficient approaches in the field of learning disabilities could only be corrected through naturalistic research.

However, several limitations of naturalistic research do exist. While naturalistic inquiry attempts to avoid artificial devices and settings, this is not entirely possible. The very presence of the investigator is unnatural and may cause the students being interviewed to alter their testimony and/or change their behavior (Kennedy, 1984). It is possible that students may be anxious or threatened by the investigator's presence, suspicious of his/her motives, reluctant to share intimate feelings, or fearful that information given during the interview will be used in a negative way against the students giving the information. Students may make certain comments because they feel they "should say these things."

These problems have been partially avoided in this study by using only those students who had freely volunteered and were comfortable with their participation in this research. Before the interviews began, students were thoroughly briefed on the purposes and procedures of the
study. The investigator was a teacher in the chosen school setting and, therefore, not an unfamiliar adult to the students being interviewed.

Another problem of naturalistic inquiry is that interviews may be limited by the articulateness of the participants and the inherent ambiguity of the language used. Therefore, time restraints in this study were flexible enough to provide students with whatever time was needed in open forum for self-expression. The interview format was unstructured in order to encourage the emergence of multiple views. Both oral and written comments were collected. The option to draw a picture of a "good teacher" and/or "bad teacher" was also offered to students.

There is some evidence that information gathered in group interviews tends to be more valid than evidence taken from individual interviews (Kennedy, 1984). Masters (1979) and Smith (1984) suggested that teachers could clarify the meanings of student comments by interviewing more than one class. Therefore, in this study, group interviews in six classes were conducted.

In comparison to the one-shot evaluation of the teacher done by an adult observer, the collection of the perceptions of many students has the advantage of averaging a large number of individual biases. It is also the result of seeing the teacher on many occasions under normal
conditions. The resulting information is not complete in itself, but should be used to supplement other input on teacher effectiveness.

There are some critics who question the validity and reliability of naturalistic inquiry. However, when the researcher adheres to comprehensive data-gathering techniques and objective observation, valuable information will result. Perhaps comprehensive educational research is best served when both experimental and naturalistic methods are utilized. While each method has its limitations, each also provides a unique means of information gathering and perspective on the task at hand (Bredeson, 1986). It is probably a mistake to believe that one research tool will answer all questions and serve all purposes.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This chapter reviews the literature in the field of teacher evaluation. It explores the history and the problems involved in the measurement of teacher effectiveness—Who have been the evaluators? What criteria have been used? How has the process has changed over the course of time? What does the current research suggest to educators in order for teacher evaluation to be most effective?

Teacher Personality and Student Achievement

Some have spent huge amounts of time and money developing programs only to be confronted by research that suggests it is the teacher, not the methods or materials that makes the difference. It has also been shown that no one teaching method is effective over another (Davis, cited in Centra, 1977; Gudridge, 1980). Rather it is the teacher's personality that facilitates or obstructs learning in the classroom.

No one teaching method works all the time with all students. A strategy that is successful for one student may not be successful with another. Braskamp (1986) states that no one instructional strategy is "always superior over another." For example, a lecture is neither more nor less
effective than classroom discussion. Learning can take place in spite of seemingly inappropriate techniques or materials (O'Brien and Obrzut, 1986; Sills, 1985).

And what about student expectations? In research by Jamieson, Lydon, Stewart, and Zanna (1987) eleventh-grade students were told that their new English teacher was especially competent and highly motivated. Students who received this information performed better in class and received higher grades on tests and assignments than students who were not told about the teacher. The researchers suggest that the students' high expectations of the teacher influenced their own motivation and conduct. And by perceiving their own greater potential, they set higher personal standards and pursued them.

In a study of 240 university students, Widmeyer and Løy (1988) demonstrated that when subjects were told a professor was "warm," they perceived him/her as a more effective teacher, a more sociable, pleasant, humorous, informal, and humane individual. (Students regarded warmth as a characteristic of teaching ability.) Subjects who were told a teacher was "cold," perceived the opposite. Kuabrusly (1984) found a correlation between the student perceptions of the enjoyment, difficulty, and usefulness of different course components with perceptions of the different tutors teaching those components. Enjoyment of the subject was related to the relationship with the teacher.
The Evaluation of Teachers by Students

Between 1877 and 1900, the "inspection" of teachers was usually performed by an undemocratic supervisor who bore no respect for teachers or students. From 1900 to 1920, operation of a school was looked on as a business arrangement. Teacher morale dropped as low as the salaries (Peterson, 1982).

While student evaluation of teachers can be traced to the Middle Ages, it came into its own in the United States in the 1920's. A group of Harvard students emerged as the evaluators of courses and teachers in 1924. They published and offered a list of comments to fellow students as a guide for course selection. In 1925 The University of Washington followed with a similar publication, and the idea of student evaluations soon spread rapidly to other American campuses (Doyle, 1983).

In 1935 The Measurement of Teaching Efficiency by Lancelot and Barr, in collaboration with others, was published with its noteworthy use of the opinions of college students as an evaluation technique. A study in 1939 by Bryan concluded that teacher-ratings by junior and senior high pupils were highly reliable. In 1942, research by Baxter emphasized the pupil-teacher relationship as a determiner of effective teaching (cited in Peterson, 1982).

During the late 1960's and 1970's students became very vocal in their demands for increasing participation in the
affairs of the college or university that directly affected them. Student evaluation of college courses and teachers became common and was being used to improve courses, as well as influence the promotion, salary, and tenure of instructors (Doyle, 1983; Simpson, 1966).

Student participation in the formal evaluation of teachers in the elementary and high schools gained momentum in the 1970's. It was felt that each segment of the population in the school community should be allowed a voice in assessing the performance of those in authority. Evaluations by students were usually returned to the teacher and used to gain insight into the teacher's strengths and weaknesses (Kowalski, 1978).

Administrators and teachers also used informal methods, such as group discussions and teacher-constructed surveys, to obtain insight into their students' opinions of good and bad teachers (Sheldin, 1986).

Validity of Student Evaluations

There has always been some skepticism concerning the validity of student evaluations and at times a reluctance to use this information to its full potential. Researchers have avoided student input, and teachers have been intimidated by it. However, teachers have little to fear because reports from students have tended to be "constructive and sympathetic" (Meighan, 1977). In a review of current research, Fox, Peck, Blattstein, and Blattstein
(1983) state that student evaluation of instruction is a reliable and valid means of differentiating good teachers from ineffective teachers. Phoenix (1987), in a study of college classrooms, also concludes that students are able to distinguish the characteristics of good teaching from poor teaching.

Teachers who were rated high by students displayed distinctive behavior patterns. They accepted student ideas and feelings, corrected and encouraged students without rejection, and allowed students more choices (Goodlad, 1984). Research by Rosenshine and Furst (cited in Travers and Dillon, 1975) identified four teacher behaviors that consistently influenced student academic success:

1. Organization and logical sequence of materials and presentation
2. Variety of materials and presentation
3. Enthusiasm
4. Task-oriented behavior.

In an attempt to define the personality characteristics of effective teachers, Henjum (1983) studied 123 student teachers at a Midwest university. It was found that "healthy social adjustment and positive mental health were related to teaching effectiveness." Effective teachers were "motivated, enthusiastic, self-assured, emotionally stable, participating, unfrustrated and have strong willpower."
In a survey of seventh and twelfth grade classes, Whittaker (1983) concluded that students expected and wanted both "love" and "authority" from their teachers.

Arubayi (1987) states that student ratings can lead to improved instruction. Additional research indicates that teachers often accept and utilize feedback received from students more readily than feedback received from supervisors (Evaluating Teachers for Professional Growth, 1974).

Common criticism of student evaluations has been that they are biased by variables unrelated to teaching effectiveness. However, research has not found a relationship between background variables (class size, workload, reason for taking the course, and grade point average) and teacher effectiveness. Marsh (1983) suggested that student evaluation research has often been based on surveys that did not have a "well-developed factor structure," and that underlying traits were not always accurately measured or interpreted. As a result many logical relationships in student evaluations of teaching effectiveness were overlooked or misunderstood. Therefore, most claims of student bias were not valid.

Research by Marsh, Overall, and Kesler (1979) compared faculty self-evaluations with student evaluations in two college courses. The result was considerable
student-faculty agreement in the ratings obtained, reaffirming the accuracy of student evaluation.

While evaluation by students has long been common at the college level, it has been used less frequently in elementary or high schools even though research has shown that judgments by those students agree significantly with the judgments of experienced classroom observers. Manning and Payne (1984) used second, third, and fourth-fifth grade students in measuring student perceptions of teacher effectiveness at the conclusion of a student-teaching experience. The student teachers were administered a survey of their own self-perceptions. The results were that elementary pupils had demonstrated the ability to perceive a difference in effective versus ineffective teachers.

In a study of 162 primary students (kindergarten through second grade) Driscoll, Peterson, Crow, and Larson (1985) found that very young children were able to reliably rate teacher effectiveness. Children were asked to respond to a checklist of twelve items about their teacher. (e.g. My teacher likes to talk to me. My teacher gives me time to finish my work. My teacher is glad to see me each day.) It was recommended that this source of good information be included in comprehensive teacher evaluations.

The use of student perceptions has been shown to be an important tool in conducting classroom research, especially
In the area of analyzing effective teaching, Waxman and Eash (1983), in a study of 762 fourth and sixth grade inner-city students, found that specific teaching behaviors, such as "pacing," had a distinct impact on improving student achievement. Achievement was also more likely to be affected when good teaching occurred earlier rather than later in a student's school career.

Masters (1979), in a review of research, states that student ratings of teachers continued to be stable over time and were in general agreement with ratings by supervisors. However, he suggests they are better used for the teacher's self improvement rather than to be included as part of the teacher-evaluation system.

It must be noted that when students are given an active role in the decision-making processes, positive attitudes toward education result. When students feel that they are a part of the process of running their schools, they are more likely to oppose vandalism, respect authority, and support school programs (Duke, 1977).

**Negative Effects of "Bad" Teaching**

In any discussion on the power of teachers, one must not overlook the damage caused by the ineffective educator. A student's self-confidence can be destroyed and his/her academic progress stunted. A child may be forever scarred by the careless remarks of an insensitive adult.

"The most frightening trait of teachers is the tendency
to dehumanize their contacts with the kids. After years of being cooped up with kids every day, they tend to become matter-of-fact in their treatment of the children, acting as if each child were nothing more than a piece of equipment on an assembly line" (Gruhike, 1968, p. 87).

Research by Brody (1977) suggests it unfortunately appears to be fairly easy to identify the "bad teacher" but far more difficult to pinpoint the qualities that make one teacher superior to another.

Lunenburg and Stouten (1983), in a study of fourth-through sixth-grade students, found a direct relationship between the dominant teacher who views students as subordinates and the students' negative, hostile attitudes toward teachers and school.

What Makes a "Good" Teacher?

Perhaps it is impossible to measure the intensity of a teacher's influence or the breadth to which it extends. It seems to touch everyone, and it goes on forever.

Maya Lin, architect and designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., remembers teachers who gave her an "incredible drive to get things done." Rob Angel, inventor of the game, Pictionary, recalls his high school business teacher encouraging him to "dream a little" and believe in himself. Deborah Norville, a network newscaster, remembers a fourth-grade teacher who encouraged her curiosity and her desire to learn (Shapiro, 1989).
In a study of 72 classrooms of seventh, eighth, and ninth graders, Randhawa (1983) supported previous research that stated a teacher's behavior greatly influences the behavior of the students. The intellectual climate of the classroom is determined by the "quality and type of teachers' intellectual input." Leder (1987) collected detailed data on teacher-student interaction by videotaping sixth grade classes in mathematics, language, and science. It was found that teacher behavior reinforced "different learning styles and students' self-perceptions" and eventually maximized differences in student achievement.

Junior high students interviewed by Mergendoller and Packer (1985) described good teachers as "being able to communicate clearly," were available to students, and helped them "fully understand the assigned material." Good teachers "maintained enjoyable and inviting classes, possessed appealing temperaments, and demonstrated interest in their students."

Dorhout (1983), in a study of 279 academically gifted students in grades five through twelve, concluded that the greatest learning occurs when students are taught by a teacher who displays behavior "preferred by the students." That preferred behavior included positive personal-social characteristics such as enthusiasm and a sense of humor.

Vargas-Gomez and Yager (1987) surveyed third, seventh,
and eleventh graders concerning their attitudes toward science teachers. Students who were enrolled in exemplary science programs had more positive views toward their teachers than did students in general. Students in exemplary programs described their teachers as ones who had 1. asked frequent questions; 2. encouraged student ideas; 3. liked science themselves; 4. made science exciting.

Appraisal of teaching has been used in public education in the United States since the early colonial period. The resulting evaluations have been used for administrative decision-making (staffing, hiring, firing, promotion and salary decisions), public relations and public accountability, as well as the improvement of teacher training and performance (Hawley, 1976; Peterson, 1982).

Identifying good as well as bad teachers has been a problem wrestled with by various educational researchers, colleges that prepare teachers, state education agencies that set standards, and local agencies that hire, promote, or fire teachers. As school boards attempt to institute career ladders, merit pay, and mentors in an attempt to identify, encourage, and reward good teachers, opposition is encountered from skeptical teachers who want to know "who will evaluate?" And by "what criteria?" While teacher evaluation has been accepted as a indispensable tool in educational progress, it has also been met with resistance from teachers themselves who view it as threatening and
demoralizing (Good Teaching, 1989). Teachers do want to be evaluated, however, when the appraisal is mutually developed, objectively administered, the process is ongoing, and the results used to help improve their performance (Evaluating Teachers for Professional Growth, 1974; Peterson, 1982).

Various methods have been used to evaluate the teacher: pupil performance on achievement tests, classroom observations, supervisor evaluations, self and peer ratings (Evaluating Teacher Performance, 1978). However, many of these plans have produced unsatisfactory results.

Administrators who evaluate are often poorly trained and rely on standardized checklists of teacher behaviors and skills. They often do not have backgrounds in the grade level or subject area being evaluated (Ryan and Hickox, 1989; Kowalski, 1978).

Literature suggests that co-workers possess the professional skills necessary to participate in the evaluative process (Kowalski, 1978). Teachers also feel that peers are sympathetic and honest. However, some drawbacks do exist. These include a lack of money to release evaluating teachers from their own classroom duties, a need to train teachers in appraisal skills, and the reluctance of some teachers to judge their peers.

While some contend that teacher effectiveness must be measured in terms of pupil gain or "product" (Braskamp,
others believe that student learning is not as easily defined and measured as one might think. (Howsam, 1960). If we effective teaching is judged by the amount of student learning, two major problems exist. First, are the tests capable of measuring what a student actually learns? Second, how does student ability, motivation, and prior knowledge influence what a student learns? There is considerable difficulty in separating the personal part of teacher effectiveness ("loves children") from the scientific part ("gets results") (Gudridge, 1980).

Some school districts are experimenting with an entirely new type of assessment program. Teachers compile a portfolio of methods used to teach children during the entire school year. Included are samples of students' work and videotapes of lessons taught. Evaluations of the portfolios takes place in June (Gursky, 1989).

Each of the above evaluations programs have strengths and weaknesses when used in isolation. Some have suggested an integrated program using several forms of assessment might best provide a fair and accurate evaluation of the complexity of teaching. However, a valuable source of information still lies untapped unless the evaluator recognizes the importance of gathering student perceptions.

The above chapter has reviewed the literature on the search for and assessment of quality teachers. Research has suggested that teacher personality can have both positive
and negative effects on student achievement, and can be the most significant factor in the classroom environment. However, much controversy exists on how to accurately measure teacher effectiveness. While it has been common at the college level for teachers to distribute checklists to their classes in order to understand student perspectives and improve instruction, the polling of elementary and secondary school students rarely takes place, leaving a vast storehouse of knowledge virtually untapped.
Haiku

Child, give me your hand
That I may walk in the light
Of your faith in me.

(Hannah Kahn, cited in Ginott, 1972)
Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

If good teaching is at the heart of good education, then the improvement of schools must involve the identification of the attributes that define effective teaching. Yet, despite numerous efforts by researchers throughout the years, no credible method of recognizing outstanding teaching has emerged to be universally accepted by the educational community or general public. In the examination of classroom methods and materials, a prime source of information about teaching has been overlooked -- the student. This study has, therefore, attempted to discover what criteria elementary and junior high students use to distinguish the superior from the ineffective teachers.

Hypotheses

This study has addressed the following questions:

1. What are third, fifth, and seventh graders perceptions of their "best" and "worst" teachers?

2. "Do third, fifth, and seventh graders use similar criteria in defining "best" and "worst" teachers or do variations exist among grade levels?"
3. "Do these perceptions offer useful information to adults who are attempting to improve education?"

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study comprised two third-grade classrooms, two fifth-grade classrooms, and two seventh-grade classrooms with approximately twenty students in each class (n=120).

- Classroom 7N = 18 students
- Classroom 7W = 16 students
- Classroom 5F = 20 students
- Classroom 5V = 19 students
- Classroom 3L = 22 students
- Classroom 3E = 22 students

Total number of students interviewed = 117

Students were grouped heterogeneously in each classroom. The classrooms were in a private suburban school located in western New York State.

Procedure

Each classroom surveyed took part in an informal brainstorming session approximately 15 to 20 minutes long. Discussion was led by the researcher and was centered on the following two questions: "Think of the best teacher(s) you
ever had. What was it that made him/her special?" and
"Think of the worst teacher(s) you ever had. What made
him/her so bad?"

The researcher used probing questions when necessary to
facilitate discussion and encourage clarification of
students' opinions. For example, students who commented
"She (the teacher) was nice." were encouraged to amplify
their remarks to include specific examples of how the
teacher was "nice." Students who used ambiguous language
("She had a spaz.") were asked to rephrase or elaborate
on their comments.

Each brainstorming session was audio-taped. After the
class discussion, approximately 15-20 minutes was allowed to
students to record their written comments on paper and/or
draw a picture of a "good" and "bad" teacher. A few
students who needed additional time were allowed to keep
their papers and hand them in the following day.

In both their verbal and written comments, students
were asked to be detailed and complete when describing
teacher qualities. However, students were not required to
write in complete sentences or be hindered in their
expression by the expectation that the mechanics of writing
(correct spelling, punctuation, etc.) be error free.
Students were asked not to identify any individual teacher
by name and were reassured that their comments would be
anonymously recorded.
Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

This chapter presents the observations of the researcher and the comments of students who were interviewed. Comments are grouped into main categories of teacher qualities, such as "caring" and "providing students with academic success." Statements made by students in third, fifth, and seventh grades are included in each category.

Distribution of Subjects

Each classroom was listed as to grade level and number of students. The letter after the grade level (e.g. "7N") indicates the first initial of the classroom teacher's last name.

Classroom 7N = 18 students - 18 written papers submitted
no drawings submitted

Classroom 7W = 16 students - 16 written papers submitted
no drawings submitted

Classroom 5F = 20 students - 20 written papers submitted
12 drawings submitted

Classroom 5V = 19 students - 19 written papers submitted
9 drawings submitted

Classroom 3L = 22 students - 22 written papers submitted
12 drawings submitted
Classroom 3E - 22 students - 22 written papers submitted
11 drawings submitted

No comparisons were drawn among oral comments, written
comments, and the drawings. These were simply choices given
to students in an attempt to provide three alternate means
of expression.

**Pre-interview Observations**

In all classes, students initially expressed their
concern with understanding the purpose and parameters of
this activity. "Is this a test?" "Do we get a grade?"
"Does it go on our record?" "Does spelling and handwriting
count?" "Do we have to fill up the whole page?"

When students initially thought that they were
participating in a lesson that would be graded, they asked
that their comments not be revealed to their teachers.
However, after they understood that their comments would not
be judged, they were much more relaxed and participated more
freely in the discussion and writing activities.

Students became especially animated and enthusiastic
when they were told that their comments and drawings would
be placed in the college library as a resource for many
teachers as well as students who were becoming teachers.
Their attitude toward the interview became very serious,
possibly because they now viewed their input as essential
and valuable. They were most anxious to assist teachers in
understanding the student's perspective of school. Each
class asked if a copy of their comments could also be placed in their own school library for their teacher(s) to read. Many students who previously wanted their views to remain anonymous now requested that their names be included in the project. It appeared that the classes now recognized that they were involved in a meaningful activity with a real-life purpose.

Third graders requested that they be allowed to choose their own writing utensils (pen, pencil, marker, etc.). Third and fifth graders asked to be given their choice of either cursive or printed handwriting.

**Interview Results**

Some characteristics of the "good" teacher were so important to children that they were mentioned by nearly every child interviewed. One of these was caring, the other was providing students with academic success.

**Caring:** Third graders said -- "She's a person who cares about children (kids)." "She loves (likes) children." "She makes you feel good." "She makes you feel special." "She'll help you out if you have a problem." "She's patient and helps me whenever I need it." "She gives good hugs."

Fifth grade -- "She likes children." "She's loving, gentle, and caring." "Someone who cares if you get hurt." "She understands that kids have problems." "She offers you help." "She cares what we do." "She's your friend."
"She's a kind, patient, loving person." "She makes us feel good and doesn't put us under a lot of stress." "When you do something you're not supposed to do, she doesn't get on your case about it, cause she can understand why you did it." "She gives us hugs every day."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher cares about us."

"He's (she's) your friend." "If you ever have a problem, you could always talk to her about it. "You can talk to him about everything, even though he is a man." "He's there when you need him." "He listens." "He lets you talk about your problems and gives you good advice." "He helps you solve your problems." "If you get into trouble, he takes time to talk to you about it." "He makes you feel good." "She really loved us. If she knew we had a problem, she would talk to us." "She's very patient with us."

Success: In spite of their many complaints, students really want to learn. They are willing to work hard for a teacher who guides them along and provides them with a sense of accomplishment.

Third grade -- "A good teacher really wants you to learn." "She knows you have a brain." "She encourages you a lot to do your best work and tries to help you." "She always gives us a second chance and a third chance." "She wants to teach us something." "She teaches it so that you can understand it." "She takes time to put it word by word
into your brain." "She explains things and answers all your questions." "She teaches you things that you will understand." "She tells you when you do a good job."

Fifth grade -- "She helps kids if they are having trouble with a subject." "She helps people if they don’t understand the work." "She explains things again if you still don’t understand." "She answers all your questions." "She is a helping person." "She gives people two chances." "She goes through a lesson slowly so you will understand it." "If a student doesn’t pay attention in class, the teacher shouldn’t yell. He might not understand the lesson, so the teacher should explain it to him."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher knows that she is teaching kids and not teaching herself." "He cares about teaching. He really wants to teach us something." "She encourages us to do our best." "He explains directions thoroughly." "If you don’t understand the work, he helps you." "He explains it to you singly (one-to-one)." "He gives you extra help." "She discuss what you did wrong and helps you." "She was understanding. I was bad in math, and she always tried to help me. She wanted it better for us." "She goes through things over and over until you get it." "He prepares you for high school, college, etc." "She gave us a retest if we failed a test." "She gave us second chance, like if you got a bad mark on a test you can take the test over if you want to raise your grade." "She gives
partial credit if your work is partly done or if you get the answer partly right." "He’d only take five points off if you didn’t get done. You wouldn’t get a zero." "Tests were fair, not too hard." "There were no trick questions on her tests." "She gives you partial credit if you try." "He knows how to grade fairly." "She always gives you credit for trying."

When describing the "bad" teacher, children most often painted a mirrored image of the two most important qualities of the "good" teacher. They identified an uncaring individual who did not place the success of his/her students as a priority.

Third grade -- "A bad teacher isn’t kind or understanding." "She doesn’t love you and doesn’t care about you." "She hates kids." "She doesn’t like me." "She’s rich and only works for the money."

Fifth grade -- "She doesn’t care about you." "She’s not understanding." "She’s not your friend." "She doesn’t care what happens to you." "She hates boys." "She hates me."

Seventh grade -- "She hates kids." "She’s self-centered." "She doesn’t care about you in class or care about you out of class." "She doesn’t understand children."

Children were particularly critical of the "bad" teacher who prevented learning from taking place because
s/he withheld his/her help.

Third grade -- "She doesn’t help you if you don’t understand the work." "She gives you the answers instead of helping you work out the problems by yourself." "She never helps you if you get behind with your work."

Fifth grade -- "She won’t help you if you don’t understand." "She doesn’t even care if you understand the work." "She never gives you extra time or extra help to finish a hard assignment."

Seventh grade -- "She doesn’t take the time to help some kids." "She scolds you for helping others, but she won’t help them." "She never gives extra help when we need it." "She doesn’t stay after school to help us." "She doesn’t care about your grade or or if you learn anything." "If you don’t understand it, she still grades you." "She discourages you from doing your best."

It was important that individual learning styles to be recognized by the teacher.

Third grade -- "A good teacher teaches things slowly if you’re not as fast as the smart kids." "Sometimes she has to go over it again and again until I get it."

Fifth grade -- She gives us projects to do, and we can choose what we think will be fun and not too hard." "I like the long-term projects she gives us because you can do them as fast or as slow as you want, and you have a long time to get them done."
Seventh grade -- "A bad teacher thinks everyone learns the same." "They don't know that we can be different." "Some teachers teach the way they want to learn, not the way we want to learn." "They teach the way they learned when they were little and think it's going to work for us too." "She picks on the slower children. It's not their fault if they're slow." "She doesn't take into consideration that some kids learn faster or slower than others." "Sometimes she moves too fast for some of us to learn things." "She gives everyone the same task to do, when only a few should do it." "Bad teachers think if they know it, you should know it."

Children want to be accepted for who they are -- imperfections and all. They complained that some teachers let trivia drown out what was really important.

Third grade -- "A good teacher doesn't yell if we make a mistake." "She doesn't yell if we forget our homework." "If we didn't get our work done in class, she didn't yell." "She lets you explain why you don't have the work done." "Good teachers don't think that they are the perfectest persons in the world, and they don't try to make you the perfectest persons either."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher is forgiving." "She understands if you forget your homework." "She doesn't make a fuss over little things, like if you forget to underline." "If you forget your lunch money, it's o.k. She gives you
some money." "If you make a mistake at the board, she
doesn’t embarrass you. She just says, ‘Could someone help
David?’"

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher can forgive you if you
do something wrong." "She thinks about your knowledge, not
your grades. She enhances all your abilities, and doesn’t
pick on one particular little thing like neatness." "She
doesn’t mark off points if you forget to dot the ‘i’s’." "She
doesn’t care about grades, as long as you do your
best."

"Bad teachers" dwell on the unimportant and overreact
in their criticism of students.

Third grade -- "She tipped over a boy’s desk just
because it was messy." "She gets mad over stupid things,
like when you forget a pencil." "She yells, ‘Oh, that’s
great!’ if you forget your workbook."

Fifth grade -- "She yells if you forget something."
"She blows her stack if you do something wrong." "She makes
fun of you if you miss an answer." "She has a spaz if you
are bad, like if you get in trouble on the playground."

Seventh grade -- "She yells at you every time you do
some little bitty thing wrong." "She has a cow over one
homework." "She throws your binder in the garbage can if
it’s messy." "She takes points off for the dumbest things,
like crossing off a word with two lines instead of one and
putting on the wrong heading. Sometimes it means the
difference between a B+ and an A." "She marks off on things
that have nothing to do with the test, like not lining up
your numbers on a spelling test or taking off points if you
get the bonus question wrong." "She takes off points for
scribbling or printing."

There are many ways to hurt children. Students
strongly objected to the humiliation of public ridicule.

Third grade -- "I'm afraid when a teacher yells at
someone else. Then I think she's going to yell at me next."
"When she yells at me, I get paralyzed. I get sweaty. And
everybody looks at you." "If she punishes me, and I have to
stay in at lunch, then everybody asks, 'Where were you?' and
I'm embarrassed." "She picks on people and embarrasses them
just because they don't raise their hand in class."

Fifth grade -- "She embarrasses you in front of the
class and in front of your friends." "If you're bad, she
makes you sit in the office where people can see you."
"She puts your name on the chalkboard, and you get teased by
the other kids." "When you make mistakes, she puts these
red marks all over your paper, and everyone can see them."
"She tells your grades out loud to the class and how many
you got wrong on a test. It's embarrassing." "She makes me
stand in front of the class and read and that makes me
stutter."

Seventh grade -- "She laughs if you ask a stupid
question." "She laughs if you give the wrong answer." "She
makes it worse when you get a bad mark by saying 'Ouch!' or 'Double Ouch!' " "She puts you on the spot in front of the whole class. She should know better; that's not adult behavior.

What a teacher says has great impact. Put-downs can be devastating to children who often accept the words as the literal truth.

Third grade -- "A bad teacher tells you that you're dumb, and that makes you feel dumb." "She calls you a slob just because your desk isn't clean. Sometimes I can't always help it." "She's a jerk when she calls you names."

Fifth grade -- "A bad teacher makes fun out of you and says mean things to you in front of the class when you miss an answer." "She calls you names and makes you feel really bad." "She embarrasses kids when they make mistakes and makes them feel dumb."

Seventh grade -- "She calls you names like 'dumb' and 'stupid'." "She puts you on the spot in front of the class and embarrasses you." "She puts you down when you give an opinion." "She laughs at you and says mean things." "She puts down students when they get the wrong answer." "She thinks we don't have a brain, and sometimes I don't feel like I have a brain either."

Students recognized the physical outbursts of "bad" teachers as inappropriate and cruel.

Third grade -- "Bad teachers hit you with a ruler."
"Bad teachers break pencils and throw them around when they are mad." "They yank you by the arm and almost break a bone." "They pull your ears and hurt them." "They pull your shirt and push you against the wall." "They hit and punch you." "They slam doors and rip up your paper." "They lift desks up and tip them over." "I think smoke comes out of their noses."

Fifth grade -- "She throws books at you when you don't do something right." "She hits people and slaps them." "She digs long nails into your skin." "She pinches your ears." "She slams the desk on your fingers." "She hits your head with a dictionary." "She throws paper." "She tips your desk over if you forget your homework." "She eats pets for dinner."

Seventh grade -- "A bad teacher throws things at you, like chalk." "Once a teacher shot a Bible at us to keep us quiet." "A bad teacher slams her hand on your desk." "She throws books across the room and out in the hall when she's mad." "She's too violent."

"Bad" teachers also frighten some children, even when they don't use physical force.

Third grade -- "She yells and screams at you." "Yelling scares me." "She yells in people's faces." "She throws mean looks and makes you cry." "I get upset if she takes my things." "She's mean and cruel and just bosses
you around." "She's a pain, a bully, a meany, and a no good person." "She screams and has a very short temper. Good teachers have soft voices and long tempers."

Fifth grade -- "She's not under control." "She shows her anger badly." "She's grumpy, strange, odd." "She's always mean and grouchy, grouchy, grouchy!" "She yells like crazy." "She scratchches and it hurts my ears." "She pounds the chalkboard." "I think she's a psycho-fanatic!"

Seventh grade -- "A bad teacher uses bad language and swears." "She takes out her anger on you." "She has a bad temper." "She's rude." "I hate it when she always yells and screams."

While kids objected to conformity, they also demanded equality.

Third grade -- "I think we should have Jean Day more often." "We should have more dress-up days and Shorts Days." (Students in this school are required to wear a uniform.) "I think the teacher should wear a uniform like we do."

Fifth grade -- "A bad teacher eats and drinks in front of the kids when we can't. That's not fair." "If we can't eat in class, then the teacher shouldn't either."

Seventh grade -- "A teacher should follow the same rules that students follow." "A bad teacher chews gum when you can't." "She eats and drinks in front of the class when we aren't allowed to." "She eats in front of us and gives
herself special privileges. But we would understand if she would just explain why she has to." "A teacher should explain her actions and special problems like having to eat because she's having a baby. We would understand."

Equality must extend to the fair treatment of all children.

Third grade -- "A good teacher doesn’t have favorites. All the class gets to be the teacher’s pet." "A bad teacher doesn’t give you credit for your work. She gave me an F4. That means ‘no effort’, but I put in some effort. It isn’t fair. She doesn’t think I have a brain, but I do."

Fifth grade -- "She doesn’t favor anyone." "She brings in treats for the whole class." "She doesn’t compare you with your brothers and sisters."

Seventh grade -- "She treats each child equally." "She includes everyone and doesn’t favor certain kids and ignore the others." "A bad teacher has favorites and doesn’t call on anybody else." "Good teachers treat everyone the same." "She is friendly to all students and treats them all as friends." "She treats everyone fairly." "He treat us as his equals. He tries to act like us, and he tries to think like us." "A good teacher doesn’t compare you to other family members." "She doesn’t expect you to be as smart as an older brother or sister." "She doesn’t compare your class with another class."

Students only complained about punishment when it was
unfair (excessive or assigned indiscriminately). Reasonable consequences for one's behavior was acceptable.

Third grade -- "A good teacher doesn't blame you for something you didn't do. She only yells at the bad people." "She doesn't punish the whole class when only one person is bad." "A good teacher doesn't give you a lot of punishment." "A good teacher doesn't yell if you don't get your work done." "I think kids should always get a second chance." "If a kid didn't do his homework, I'd ask him why he didn't get it done. Maybe it was too hard, so I'd give him something easier or I'd help him understand it." "If a student didn't get his homework done, I'd tell him to make it up or bring it in tomorrow. Then if he didn't do it, and he gave me a stupid reason, I'd have to send him to the office to do it."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher doesn't let the bad kids get away with being bad." "She doesn't let the people who cheat on tests get away with it." "She doesn't punish you for something you didn't do." "She doesn't accuse you or yell at you if you're innocent." "A bad teacher does stuff like pull your hair just because you are talking." "She throws around detentions like frisbees." "It's not fair to take away your snack time, or freetime." "A teacher shouldn't yell at you just because you forgot something."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher punishes fairly and individually." "He only takes off five points if you left
your work at home." "She knows how to discipline a child."
"She doesn't separate you from your friends." "Even if
we're bad, she tried to make us understand what we should be
doing." "A good teacher doesn't punish the whole class when
only a few people are talking." "If you're the talkative
type, a bad teacher blames you every time it's noisy even
if you're not even talking. She picks on only you." "She
give worse punishment to some children and favors others."

Students complained that some teachers made
unreasonable demands on their physical endurance. They were
willing to work hard as long as frequent breaks were given.

Third grade -- "A good teacher gives you a break when
you do your work." "When we've been in our seats a long
time, she lets us get up and stretch." "She gives you at
least two freetimes." "She takes you outside if you work
hard." "A good teacher lets you go out a little more in the
summer when it gets hot." "A bad teacher makes you work
during snack time with no talking." "A bad teacher gives
you lots and lots and lots of worksheets and no freetime."
"She doesn't give us a break for snacks. She lets us
starve."

Fifth grade -- "When you work real hard, you should be
allowed to take a break." "A good teacher lets us have
snacks and recess." "Once in a while you should get a break
from homework." "We take breaks when what we have to learn
is hard." "We need to take a break and get up and stretch."
"A bad teacher always makes you work and never gives you free time." "She never lets you go outside." "She never lets you talk to your friends." "We get no breaks, no snacks, no games."

Seventh grade -- "She thinks we are robots and can work forever." "She doesn’t give us free time, even if we’re good." "She never gives you time to talk to your friends." "A bad teacher makes you work all the time and never gives you a break." "We should have a few minutes of free time every day." "Kids need to take a break."

Homework was frequently cited as excessive, boring, and useless.

Third grade -- "A good teacher doesn’t give you too much homework or too much work in school." "Homework shouldn’t be too hard. We should do fun stuff like interviewing a person or writing stories." "We shouldn’t have too much homework in the summer because we like to go out and play outside, but we could have more in the winter."

Fifth grade -- "She loads us up with homework, tons and tons and tons of homework." "She gives us five and six hours of homework each night, and people have to stay up until 9:00 and 10:00." "We shouldn’t have homework over vacation." "She gives you worksheets for homework, but I don’t want to do them. They’re boring."

Seventh grade -- "We shouldn’t have too much homework when we have other activities after school like sports and
music." "Teachers should check with the kids to see if they got a lot of homework from other teachers." "We shouldn’t have five or six tests to study for on the same day."

"We shouldn’t have hours and hours of homework." "I don’t think teachers should give homework over vacation. Who feels like doing worksheets in a motel room."

Students complained that some teachers had unrealistic expectations.

Fifth grade -- "Her tests are too hard. She should give more tests that kids will get the right answers on." "She gives you tests on stuff you don’t know anything about." "We should have more time to finish tests so we can get a better grade." "Sometimes the work is very, very hard. It’s too hard." "We don’t have enough study halls so that we can finish all our work and do a good job."

Seventh grade -- "She gives you work and doesn’t explain it." "How are you supposed to understand the work if she uses words that are difficult to understand?" "She is too strict with grammar." "She’s too tough, too stern, and makes you work too hard." "She doesn’t give us enough time to finish a test." "She gives you this long, long test, and what you don’t have time to finish, you get wrong. That’s not fair."

There was also an objection to working below one’s ability. Students wanted to be challenged.
Third grade -- "She never lets you stop working, even if you know the stuff already." "She gives you baby work." "She doesn't think you have a brain."

Fifth grade -- "I already know the work, but she never moves you up to the next reading group." "She gives you baby homework. It's boring."

Seventh grade -- "If we already know the work, why do we have to do so many worksheets?" "She teaches too slow."

There was an objection to "busy work" (meaningless activities) and academic overload.

Fifth grade -- "She gives you long, long notes to copy until my arm falls off." "She makes you color every single spot on every picture on every worksheet." "She makes you study all the time." "She gives too many tests. It's not necessary. She could grade you on your classwork too."

Seventh grade -- "She's obsessed with abbreviations, practice quizzes, and homework." "It's worksheets, worksheets, worksheets!!!!" "She gives us too many notes to copy." "She expects too much from us." "She overworks us." "We get too much work." "She gives us tons of work every day and too much homework."

Many students described the bad teacher as "boring."

Third grade -- "She makes you work, work, work! We never do any fun stuff." "She hates field trips. A good teacher takes you on lots of field trips." "She never lets
you stop working or make learning fun." "We have to take
too many tests and don’t have time to play games."

Fifth grade -- "A bad teacher never takes you on field
trips." "We have to copy too many notes." "We have to take
too many tests all at one time." "A good teacher does more
than just read out of a book. She makes learning fun."

Seventh grade -- "A bad teacher acts like a robot. She
does the same thing every single day and has no pep." "She
doesn’t use games to teach or review for a test." "She
wastes study hall for stupid things." "She gives us
homework or classwork and just writes it down in this teeny
weeny corner of the chalkboard where we can’t see it."

"She’s so boring that we end up not listening. Then when
it’s time to leave and we are halfway through the door, she
gives us homework." "She overwrites a test. She gives you
25 multiple-choice questions when you really need only 10."

"She stares off into space and doesn’t teach you anything."
"All she does is lecture. She talks too much, and then we
stop listening." "Learning becomes boring when it is
rigid."

Suggestions for making classes more interesting were
varied. They often included a plea for self-determination.

Third grade -- "The teacher should give you more
freedom." "She should ask us what we want to do." "We
should have lots of different activities." "We should go on
field trips, lots of field trips. "We should play more learning games." "I think we should get rid of worksheets." "A teacher should read you lots of stories." "We should do more fun things in class." "We should do more art projects." "We should read less books." "We should go to the gym more often." "We should listen to music while we work." "She should teach us more math."

Fifth grade -- "We should play more games to help us learn." "A good teacher takes us on field trips, gives parties, and gives us freetime." "She reads you books." "She gives you a wide selection of topics for reports." "She lets you choose your own books to read." "She lets you read library books instead of your reading book." "She lets you bring in pets to share with the class." "She brings in visitors." "She lets you do more projects." "She gives interesting assignments and brings in movies." "She turns lessons into games." "She shows us pictures and diagrams."

Seventh grade -- "We always have fun things to do in class so we never get bored." "He makes us enjoy learning so we don't have to go home and tell our parents how boring school was." "He's always flying around the room. We never get bored in his class. He does stuff like balance things on his nose." "He walks around and sits on our desks."

"He's talkative, but not boring." "He doesn't teach out of a book all of the time. He uses his own words." "He tries different things." "He doesn't spend a lot of time on one.}
thing." "He tries new things in class." "He's interesting, creative, different." "He has us learn something by doing it." "We have class discussions about our work." "Sometimes we work in little groups." "He lets your best friends help you with your school work." "He makes us comfortable about the subject we're talking about." "We play educational games and go on field trips." "We play review games." "We have classes out of doors." "She has really good ideas for projects." "We only have a moderate amount of notes." "We should have smaller and easier words for our notes." "He gives us freedom to make choices."

Students suggested ways to eliminate testing and still be able to evaluate progress.

Third grade -- "She can have you read out loud and see how well you read." "She can ask you questions to see if you were paying attention in class." "She can check your homework and your workbook."

Fifth grade -- "She could give open-book exams." "You can give reports." "She can grade you on how well you respond in class." "She can grade you on how hard you try, if you are cheerful, your comprehension, neatness, and projects." "She can tell if you listen and pay attention in class." "She can look at your homework, your dittos, your workbook, and if you do good in class."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher gives you open book tests and exams." "She can give you a grade by checking
your homework and your classwork." "She grades us on how well we participate in class, if we do our homework, and the projects and reports we do." "A good teacher allows us to be responsible for our own learning." "A good teacher gives you some freedom to make choices." "She trusts us." "She gives us a chance to express our views and make suggestions."

Good teachers are good communicators.

Third grade -- "A good teacher knows how to talk to kids. She knows kid language." "She explained hard stuff so you could understand it." "A bad teacher uses big words, and I don't understand them, and she doesn't explain what they mean." "She uses words that are too scientific." "She doesn't explain things, and when you don't understand, she puts your name on the board."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher is able to talk to people in a polite manner." "A good teacher is able to explain questions so you understand."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher uses words you can understand, not big words. But she doesn't use baby words either." "She uses up-to-date words. A bad teacher talks in a 40's language." "She uses old sayings like 'pipe down'." "She doesn't say things understandably." "She uses too many big words." "She doesn't explain things well, and I get confused." "Her explanations are too long. She
shouldn’t have to explain everything.” “She talks and talks and talks, and we get bored.” “A good teacher listen to you when you talk.”

Students want their opinions heard and validated.

Third grade -- "She stops and listens to me." "She cares what you think." "A bad teacher doesn’t let you explain or argue with her."

Fifth grade -- "She lets us talk to her." "She listens to us." "She doesn’t talk back if we need to explain something to her."

Seventh grade -- "She asks for your opinion." "She respects your ideas." "She’s concerned about what you think." "She accepts your explanations." "She understands your explanations." "He’s easy to talk to.” "She lets us explain to her, not just her explaining to us.” "I can talk to her. She cares what you think.” "I can talk to him, and he doesn’t treat you like a three-year-old.” "A bad teacher doesn’t listen to you.” "She always has the last word."

Kids want to be recognized in and out of the classroom.

Third grade -- "She always says hello to you in the hall.” "She always waved to me in the hall, even though I wasn’t in her class any more. I think she missed me.”

"She says ‘Hi’ to me every morning, and I say ‘Hi’ back.”

Fifth grade -- "She always says ‘Hi’ when she sees me.” "She says ‘Hi’ to me every morning.” "She always has a smile for me.” "She doesn’t ignore you.”
Seventh grade -- "She's friendly to you both in and out of class." "She doesn't forget your name." "Every time he spoke to me, he smiled." "He looks at the class when he talks, not at the ceiling."

Kids were especially impressed with teachers who spent time with them out of school.

Seventh grade -- "She gives up her free time to help you." "She stays after school if you're having trouble." "She always puts extra effort into her teaching and takes extra time with us. She does more than she has to." "She makes time to help you." "He tries hard and takes time out to do things with us." "She takes time to support our extracurricular activities." "She does extra things like stay after school to coach our softball team." "She supports us and is nice to us out of school too." "She participates in activities out of school with the kids."

Students recognize and respect intelligent teachers.

Third grade -- "A good teacher is real smart." "When you asked her a question, she knew most of the answers. If she didn't know the answer, she looked it up in the dictionary."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher isn't dumb."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher is talented." "He is a smart person." "She knows a lot of stuff and isn't dumb."
"She's always organized. A bad teacher is either under-organized or over-organized."

Students recognized self-confidence in their teachers.

Seventh grade -- "He isn't afraid to stand up to kids."
"Even though he listens to your opinions, he doesn't back down on his point of view."

Students were interested in knowing the teacher as a real person -- his/her personal feelings, interests, talents, and attitudes.

Third grade -- "I liked in when Mrs. E. brought in her special things to share with us -- like when she let us see her doll collection."
"She talks about her family."

Fifth grade -- "She's athletic. She's a good sportsman, and she teaches you how to be a good sport."

Seventh grade -- "He tells you about himself."
"He tells you his true feelings."
"He talks about past times, his past experiences, home life, etc."
"He can apologize, and he doesn't treat himself like a king or queen."
"He apologizes if he takes things out on us."
"He acts like a human, not the suit-and-tie ruler-on-the-knuckle robot."
"He's honest when he talks to us about himself."

Physical needs are recognized and addressed in the classroom of the good teacher.

Third grade -- "She lets you go to the bathroom."
"She lets you get a drink if you're thirsty."
"When it's hot
outside, she lets us get more drinks." "She asks you if you’re hot or cold and lets you open the windows." "If it’s hot, we can work outside sometimes." "She gives us more time to eat if we’re not finished." "She lets you wrestle or something physical so you can get all the wiggles out and concentrate better." "She lets you get up and walk around and take a break." "I hate it when I’m always stuck in my seat and never get to stretch."

Fifth grade — "She lets us go to the bathroom or get a drink if we need it." "She lets us have a break or a snack if we have a lot of work to do."

Seventh grade — "She lets us go to the bathroom and get a drink." "She lets people have recess or a break even if all the work has to get done." "We can have our classes on the grass when it’s too hot inside."

Sense of humor: Third grade — "She likes to smile." "She’s funny." "She laughs a lot and tells us jokes." "She doesn’t take things too seriously." "She lets me sneak up on her and make her laugh." "She’s happy, and she makes me feel happy."

Fifth grade — "She is humorous, funny." "She smiles and makes you happy." "She tells jokes and makes you laugh." "She has a great sense of humor." "A bad teacher gets mad, then tells a joke. That doesn’t work cause we know she’s faking." "She’s not any fun."

Seventh grade — She likes to have fun when she
teaches. "She laughs around you and with you. "He knows how to act like a kid." He likes to fool around."

"Sometimes she acts childish, silly, but she can be serious too." "He laughs if you do something funny." "He's funny, but he's naturally funny. Some teachers try too hard to make kids laugh, and it isn't really funny. Mr. G. is natural. He acts like a normal person." "He doesn't try too hard to be funny. He's real."

Students expect teachers to be in a good mood -- at least part of the time.

Third grade -- "A bad teacher wakes up on the wrong side of the bed every morning." "She is always a bossy bullfrog and never smiles at us." "A good teacher is cheerful and understands if you are having a bad day, and she tells you if she is having a bad day, and we understand cause she'll be normal tomorrow."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher isn't grouchy all day long." "She doesn't get angry quick." "A bad teacher looks grumpy all the time." "She always has a straight face." "She never smiles." "She gets uptight if you say something funny." "She's always mad, always yells." "She does nothing but complain."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher is cheerful and joyful." "She's courteous and polite." "He is always friendly to people and tries not to take out his problems on the kids in the class." "A bad teacher always complains."
"She is too serious and tweeks out for no reason."

Sometimes little extras meant a lot.

Third grade -- "She gives you parties." "She takes you to McDonald's." "She lets you talk in class." "She plays games with you at recess."

Fifth grade -- "Sometimes she brings in treats for rewards." "Sometimes she brings in doughnuts for no reason at all." "She takes you outside." "She lets you write on the chalkboard." "Sometimes we can talk in class if we don't disturb other people."

Seventh grade -- "She lets us chew gum." "She lets you discuss questions with your friends." "She lets you sit with your friends."

Some teachers had personal habits that annoyed students.

Third grade -- "When she yells at me, she stares me right in the eye. It makes me laugh, and then I get into more trouble. I wish she would look somewhere else."

Seventh grade -- "Some teachers talk too loud or too soft." "She makes these weird noises." "She talks while you are trying to do your work and trying to concentrate." "She looks at the ceiling while she is talking." "She forgets what she was saying." "She loses your papers and makes you do them all over again." "She never throws anything away." "She won't tell you the results of your
tests."

A few children gave physical traits for good or bad teachers.

Third grade -- "A good teacher is pretty." "A good teacher is beautiful." "She wears nice clothes and makeup and combs her hair." "She wears perfume." "She is tall and strong." "A bad teacher wears smelly perfume." "She has dumb looking clothes." "She has bad breath."

Fifth grade -- "A good teacher is very beautiful." "A good teacher is a sportsman." "A bad teacher is ugly." "She doesn't take care of personal hygiene. She smells bad; and it grosses kids out."

Seventh grade -- "A good teacher dresses appropriately." "She is young and pretty (or handsome)." "A bad teacher had body odor." "A bad teacher smokes and drinks."

**Students' Drawings**

Only third and fifth grade students chose to draw pictures of "good" and "bad" teachers. Seventh grade students preferred to describe their teachers verbally.

Sixteen fifth graders drew pictures of both the "good" and the "bad" teachers. Four students drew only the "bad" teacher.

Fifteen third graders drew pictures of both the "good" and the "bad" teachers. Four students drew only the "good" teacher, and four students drew only the "bad" teacher.
"Good" teachers were usually drawn in realistic settings -- giving praise or help to the students, understanding if homework was not finished, assigning free-time or no homework. However, "bad" teachers were usually drawn in unrealistic, often physically violent, settings -- brandishing chain saws, guns, knives and using abusive language. Since children tend to exaggerate when they feel strongly about an issue, perhaps this was an indication of how deeply they may have been adversely affected by the "bad" teacher. They have also illustrated their feelings in concrete visual terms. Since emotions are much more difficult to describe, they had perhaps chosen to illustrate their feelings in ways that were more comfortable and familiar to them -- movie and cartoon characters in physically destructive settings to illustrate the emotionally destructive capabilities of the "bad" teacher. Children that were drawn into the pictures of the "bad" teacher were often crying and/or being physically injured.

Six of the nineteen fifth grade artists used homework as the subject of their drawings. Five of the twenty-three third grade artists used homework as the subject of their drawings.

"Good" teachers were sometimes drawn as angels and "bad" teachers as devils. Antonyms were also chosen to
title the drawings -- "nice" and "mean," "cool" and "uncool."

Summary

Conversations with elementary and junior high students have provided a glimpse into what constitutes the ideal learning environment. Students had definite views on what determines good teaching. They were anxious to share their opinions and expressed a desire to contribute to classroom improvements.

Although children indicated a strong disapproval of the behaviors of the "bad" teacher as well as anger which resulted from their own negative experiences, they, nevertheless, wanted to be influential in helping the "bad" teacher become a "good" teacher.
Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

Do elementary and junior high students have opinions on what is and what isn't effective teaching? They most certainly do. Out of 117 students who were invited to be subjects in this study, all 117 actively participated in the class discussions and written activities. Not one child refused or was unable to make a contribution. All 117 students handed in a paper of written comments. There was an average of ten comments per third-grade student (five describing the good teacher, five describing the bad teacher), an average of fourteen comments per fifth-grade student (seven describing the good teacher, seven describing the bad teacher), and twenty comments per seventh-grade student (ten describing the good teacher and ten describing the bad teacher). There were as many qualities of good teaching mentioned as there were qualities of bad teaching mentioned at each grade level.

Forty-four out of 117 students also submitted drawings. All were third- and fifth-grade students. No seventh-grade students submitted drawings.

There was not one student who did not express deep feelings concerning his/her teacher(s). All children wished to have both their positive and negative feelings...
understood, validated, and recorded. Students, however, found it difficult at times to maintain the anonymity of the specific teacher(s) to whom they were referring. It seemed important to have the good teachers lauded for their contributions to education, and the bad teachers held responsible for their destruction of human spirit.

Written comments by third graders were generally shorter than those of the older students and often consisted of single words. ("kind", "friendly", "loving") Seventh graders were more likely to write complete sentences and detailed descriptions. ("She is friendly to all students and treats them like friends in and out of class.")

Comments among the classes and grade levels varied little, however, in content. In identifying the qualities that define good teaching, children at all three grade levels consistently mentioned two -- a sense of caring and a commitment to the success of children.

Caring for students was mentioned on nearly every one of the 117 written comment papers. Caring was often used synonymously with love and affection. ("She loves children. She cares about us.") It would, therefore, appear that placing children in an educational environment devoid of human compassion is tantamount to programming failure.

Central to the loving atmosphere was laughter and happiness. Teachers who were "grouchy", "grumpy", and "never smiled" interfered with a student's learning.
Commitment to the success of children was also important, but only if was accompanied by a caring, as well as a flexible, attitude on the part of the teacher. Children came to school to learn, to change, to grow. They wanted to be challenged and pushed, but they rebelled when they were forced to respond to narrow, rigid, compassionless conformity. They wanted self-determination, creative license, variety, and fun. The authoritarian teacher was totally rejected.

When the demands of good teachers were reasonable, and children were given whatever support they required to succeed, students were willing to work hard and rise to the expectations set before them. They responded to the sense of accomplishment that resulted from hard work and felt good about themselves.

Students praised teachers who unconditionally accepted their feelings, their ideas, and their shortcomings. They respected the adults who respected them. These were the "beautiful" teachers. Although students were asked not to identify teachers by name, they often did so during the informal interview. It should be noted that the teacher who was described as "pretty" most often was over 50 years of age. She was also consistently described as "loving" and "caring."

Students wanted teachers who tempered their use of criticism, kept the intensity of their voice to a minimum,
and abstained from using physical force and fear as a means of controlling children.

They wanted teachers to recognize their personal needs such as going to the bathroom or getting a drink.

Students wanted the initiative to help organize classroom activities. They made a greater commitment to their own education when they were involved in its planning.

It was expected that teachers recognize and nurture the individual talents of the students in his/her classroom. Good teachers were patient and persistent with the slow students. They addressed the fact that all children don't learn in the same way.

The children interviewed would have willing spent additional time discussing these issues.

Are these opinions strongly held? Absolutely!

Implications for Future Research

Two children entered school, filled with enthusiasm, confidence, ambition, and strength. Time passed, and one emerged with the same qualities intact. However, over a period of time the other student became a pessimistic, discouraged, and depressed failure. What happened in the classroom for such contrasting attitudes to survive?

In order to solve this age-old mystery and discover what good or bad magic had been taking place in the classroom, educational researchers offered two solutions:
1. They gathered statistical information in the traditional scientific manner, which was then promptly discarded and ignored as irrelevant by teachers; or 2. They interviewed teachers and parents, and assumed that these adults knew what children were thinking and feeling. Unfortunately these methods reaped meager rewards and the failures of children continued.

It then appeared to be obvious that if adults were to discover why the educational environment was sometimes destructive to the human spirit, then they must question directly the spirit that was being destroyed and not look for the information from a second hand source. If researchers were to determine what students learn, what better way than to ask them! If researchers wanted to measure the quality of life in the classroom, what better way than to question the people who lived there every day.

Unfortunately, this idea was rejected by many researchers who insisted that adults knew what was "best" for children. Children couldn't possibly know what was best for themselves. Students were discarded as sources of information, when, in fact, they were able to provide the most valuable insights into classroom life.

In this study, students have proven to be a prime source of information about teaching quality. They have definite opinions and perceptions about what makes an effective teacher. It is interesting to note that the
opinions expressed by children in this study closely parallel the opinions expressed by other students interviewed by other researchers. (Mergendoller and Packer, 1985; Sabine, 1987; Shedlin, 1986)

This type of interview is worthy of consideration by researchers, principals, teachers, and by all who work with children and have their best interests at heart. It is certainly a method which deserves increased attention for the variety and volume of information it generates.

Implications for Classroom Practice

It is thought that the teacher may possibly be the most influential adult in a child's life. What transpires in the classroom shapes the way a student thinks, feels, grows, and performs. What better way to discover what transpires in the real world of the classroom than to talk to the real people who live there every day.

Knowing the subject matter does not make a good teacher. In fact, according to the students interviewed, it has very little to do with the effectiveness of their teacher or the learning environment of the classroom. More important were the human qualities of caring, understanding, support, and encouragement. Children begged to be recognized, valued, and loved.

Teachers may not like to hear what their students have
to say, and their comments may not even be completely true or fair. However, they are what students truly feel.

Student opinions did not materialize in thin air. They were born from experiences, both nurturing and destructive. These are the attitudes that will be taken home to be aired with the family and the community. They will even be carried into adult life, into the workplace, and into the voting booth. Can those who care about education afford not to listen to these children?
"When we grew up and went to school
There were certain teachers who would
Hurt the children any way they could
By pouring their derision
Upon anything we did
And exposing every weakness
However carefully hidden by the kids..."

lyrics from "The Happiest Days of Our Lives"
by Pink Floyd

"We don't need no education.
We don't need no thought control.
No dark sarcasm in the classroom.
Teachers leave the kids alone.
Hey, teacher, leave us kids alone.
All we are is just another brick in the wall.
All we are is just another brick in the wall."

lyrics from "Just Another Brick in the Wall"
by Pink Floyd

The Wall -- Columbia Records
New York
lyrics by Roger Waters
music by Pink Floyd
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Gruhlke, V. K. (1968). *To hell with the kids*. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing


Sheldin, A. (1986). 487 sixth graders can't be wrong. Principal, 66(1), 53.


Example of worksheet
used to record student comments
Gives freedom
doesn't have enough
lots of classes and school
no time to have fun
makes them use their phones
Gives homework every weekend
brings in food when museum
does make them read at the end
Gives homework
gets away with bad grades
Good teacher
Fun
Third Grade Drawings
I do not understand.
Here's your homework!
I'm going to kill you!

I'm getting out of here.
These cool numeric kids act like monkeys.

Look at the kids.

Cool. I agree! It's really awesome from now on!

Let's use water.
KIDS
To Day
HOMWORK
Homework
Lot's of

No Homework!
GOOD
Bad

Good
good

Jesus

Bad

Devil

Listen to me.
Here on
Get one
I'll stop
You!

You are
the boss
I don't
like it

A bad teacher
A Cool Teacher

A Uncool Teacher
Fifth Grade Drawings
A BAD TEACHER

Sit up and sit down!
A Good Teacher

FREE TIME, KIDS!
A BAD KID
SHUT UP KIDS

Jenny Lynd
A BAD Teacher
Haha! Ha!

trouble laugh

in deep, deep

You kids are

H-Hey Teacher

Stay calm.

Hey Teacher.