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A DELPHI STUDY OF LECTURER ROLE PERFORMANCE

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The use of student rating questionnaires to assess the teaching performance of lecturing staff in institutions of higher education has been widely debated. In summary, those who oppose the use of such ratings often argue that:

- (a) they could favour the entertainer, rather than the teacher who gets his/her material across effectively;
- (b) they appear to be highly correlated with expected grades; that is, a hard grader would get poor ratings;
- (c) students are probably not competent judges of instruction since the long term benefits of a course may not be clear to them.

On the other hand, this opposition is countered by arguments in support of student ratings, such as:

- (a) they could provide feedback which the teacher might not be able to elicit from students on a face-to-face basis;
- (b) they could provide a way in which a teacher could demonstrate teaching effectiveness to those who have expressed an interest in evaluating this parameter for salary increases, etc.;
- (c) they could provide information in areas of strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

In the light of these types of arguments for and against student ratings, it seems realistic to suggest that the evidence gained from their use probably falls far short of a complete assessment of a lecturer's teaching contribution. However, if teaching performance is to be evaluated, then systematic measures of student attitudes, opinions and observations can hardly be ignored. It was on the basis of both these views that a study was undertaken in New Zealand which focussed on the use of student ratings as an assessment of lecturer role performance.

Background

Unlike most studies which utilize student ratings, this investigation employed a modified form of the Delphi Technique. Briefly, this method uses a panel of respondents to make a series of individual judgements relating to an assigned problem. The distinguishable phases of the technique are referred to as 'rounds', and these are detailed as follows:

ROUND 1 : A questionnaire outlining the problem being investigated is given to intended participants. Usually they are asked to respond to a number of questions and/or to express an opinion concerning solutions to the problem.

ROUNDS 2

and 3 : Once the questionnaires from the previous round are returned, the responses are analysed and then fed back to participants. In the light of this information they may be asked to consider the problem once again. Alternatively, the information fed back may be in itemised form where respondents can indicate, for instance, the degree of 'importance' of each item in relation to the problem.

The pioneers of Delphi claimed that the iterative nature of the technique, and the feedback of information from the previous round, promoted the gradual formulation of opinion. Moreover, recent research (Elms & Battersby, 1979) suggests that Delphi's use may overcome some of the shortcomings of the one-shot questionnaire approach, such as the lack of respondent attrition rates. In the present investigation, a three round Delphi process was used in the following way:

ROUND 1 : In designing this round it was assumed that, in evaluating the role performance of a lecturer, a student would compare 'what is' with 'what is expected'. The first consideration then was to specify—in this case—the 'ideal' role of an education lecturer by ascertaining those behaviours which students and their lecturer deemed to be very important.

ROUND 2 : The information derived from the previous round was analysed and fed back to the students in an itemised form. Students were then asked to rate their lecturer's actual role performance on each item.

ROUND 3 : The data obtained from the student ratings were analysed and fed back to the lecturer for consideration. He was then interviewed concerning the usefulness of this role performance data.

Sample

The subjects for this study were a sample of students (N = 86) undertaking a four year education degree programme in a New Zealand university. For the purposes of this paper, a case study involving a sub-sample of these students (N = 23; 19 females and 4 males) has been chosen

for discussion in this paper. These students were pursuing a fourth year course on Measurement and Evaluation and their number represented the total enrolments for this course. Along with their lecturer, these students were selected on the sole criterion that they were willing to participate.

Procedure and Results

In the first round, a 44-item questionnaire based on that used by Cooper and Foy (1967) and Magin (1973) was prepared. A sample of items appearing in this questionnaire, along with the categories used by the researcher to discriminate between them, is given in Table 1.

Early in the second term of the academic year, this first round questionnaire was distributed to the students and their lecturer with the instruction that they were to indicate, on a five point Likert scale, the relative importance of each statement in defining the ideal education lecturer. Once returned, the distribution of responses to the questionnaire items was analysed, and a ranking of the ten most important characteristics of the ideal education lecturer was obtained for: the male students; the female students; the group of 23 students; and, the lecturer.¹ Table 2 details these rank orderings and the corresponding items.

As Table 2 shows, of the ten most important characteristics derived from the male student responses, six were also highly ranked by the female students, while five of the items corresponded with those ranked important by the lecturer. In each instance, the rank orderings of these matched items varied. Altogether, six of the group's ten highest rating items were also ranked highly by the lecturer. However, those statements ranked 1, 3, 9 and 10 by the lecturer were not ranked by the students as being of importance. It can also be seen from the table that the lecturer ranked statements relating to the promotion of student autonomy first and second, respectively. In comparison, the group of students saw characteristics of instruction as being the most important attribute of the ideal lecturer, and this category of items was ranked first and second.

In mid-third term, the second round questionnaire, consisting of all the items shown in Table 2, was fed back to the students. They were informed that this list of items represented those characteristics of the ideal education lecturer which they and their lecturer had ranked as being important. Accompanying this information were instructions relating to the assessment of the actual role performance of their lecturer. Specifically,

1. In order to obtain a ranking of items from the lecturer, a second questionnaire was prepared. This contained all those items he had marked as 'very important' in the first round. He was instructed to rank the ten most important items.

TABLE 1

A Sample of Round One Items and their Categorisation

INSTRUCTION (13 items) : (I) * Summarises the major points of a lecture * Knows how to interest students * Speaks clearly in lectures	These items suggest qualities relating the techniques of classroom communication strategies of instruction, e.g.,
STUDENT AUTONOMY (5 items): (SA) * Is patient with students who stress their own individuality * Really encourages students to think for themselves * Encourages students to pursue independent study	Items in this category suggest a fostering of each student's individuality and independence, e.g.,
STUDENT RELATIONS (10 items): (SR) * Knows students by name * Is not sarcastic with his students * Really talks with students, not just at them	These items are associated with lecturer-student relationships, e.g.,
STUDENT WELFARE (10 items): (SW) * Spends time helping a student with his/her problem * Is available when students want to talk to him * Is patient with students who do not seem to understand what is presented	These items relate to the lecturer's interest in students, their problems and his willingness to give counsel, e.g.,
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS (6 items): (PC) * Has a sense of humour * Has considerable ability in carrying out research * Is a well known authority in his field	These items suggest qualities of academic and research ability on the part of the lecturer, e.g.,

TABLE 2

Item Rankings Derived from Round One Responses

Lecturer	Rankings				Items	Category*
	Group	Male	Female			
		9			Discusses religious and moral issues	I
7	7	=1			Spends time helping a student with his or her own special learning problem	SW
8	5	5	4		Encourages students to seriously question his (the lecturer's) interpretations and conclusions in class	SA
2	4	3	6		Really encourages students to think for themselves	SA
	2	=1	5		Gives assignments that focus on significant aspects of his course, not on obscure points	I
			=9		Speaks clearly in his lectures	I
	10	10			Encourages students to pursue independent study	SA
6	1	6	1		Knows how to interest students	I
	6		3		Is not sarcastic with his students	SR
4	8	7	=9		Really talks with students, not just at them	SR
			7		Summarises the major points of a lecture	I
		4			Goes out of his way to simplify difficult problems	I
1					Presents opposing viewpoints and encourages students to make up their own minds	SA
3					Stimulates curiosity about particular areas of his course	I
9					Is available when students want to talk with him	SW
10					Treats students as equals rather than as subordinates	SR
	9		8		Sets textbooks which cover the course adequately	I
5	3	8	2		Considers the students' needs and interests in planning his course	SW

* See Table 1

the students were asked to indicate, 'How often their lecturer had done each of the following...'. Answers were to be given according to the code: always, or almost always; usually, sometimes; rarely or never; or, not sure. It was decided that only a 'yes/no/not sure' option should be provided on the last two questionnaire items shown in Table 2.

In analysing the returns from this round, a frequency count was made of the response distribution to each of the items as illustrated in Table 3. A folio containing this table, Table 2 and a brief accompanying description was then fed back to the lecturer several days after the completion of round two. This constituted the third round of the study.

Having been given the data on his students' rating of his role performance, the lecturer was then invited to comment on the data's usefulness. Below are some of his remarks:

The results have been helpful, particularly as an aid in my self-evaluation. They have also given me an interesting insight into my students' perceptions of my performance and this has been most beneficial. I think for an instrument such as this to have optimum value you should take the Delphi one phase further. That is, have a fourth round whereby the results are taken back into the class situation and are discussed. In this way particular areas of concern may be highlighted. In fact, as an instrument to generate this kind of discussion, I can see this technique having great potential . . . What was also advantageous about this approach was that you [the researcher] made no assessment of me—this is good. Having been left to do the assessment of the data myself, I tended to reflect on my teaching performance through the eyes of my students. This would have probably been impossible had you presented your assessment of me as a *fait accompli*.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined a procedure whereby a lecturer could undertake a formative evaluation of his role performance by having students compare his role behaviour with the role definition of the ideal lecturer. It is suggested that the three stage approach piloted in this research is advantageous in that the role definition of the ideal lecturer is agreed upon by the student and the lecturer before an assessment of the lecturer's role performance is attempted.

Although this three stage technique did receive favourable comment from both the students and the lecturer, some limitations to its application were noted, and these are summarised as follows:

TABLE 3
Response Distribution to Round Two

Items	Always, or Almost Always		Usually		Some- times		Rarely or Never		Not Sure	
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Discusses religious and moral issues					1	1	3	15		3
Spends time helping a student with his/her own special learning problem	1	9	3	5	4					1
Encourages students to seriously question his (the lecturer's) interpretations and conclusions in class		4	1	7	3	5		3		
Really encourages students to think for themselves	1	5	3	10	2			2		
Gives assignments that focus on significant aspects of his course, not on obscure points	4	6		12	1					
Speaks clearly in his lectures	2	8	2	4	6			1		
Encourages students to pursue independent study	2	11	1	5	1	2		1		
Knows how to interest students	3	3	1	9	6			1		
Is not sarcastic with his students	4	9		6				4		
Really talks with his students, not just as them	2	10	2	7	1			1		
Summarises the major points of a lecture		1	2	10	2	4		1		3
Goes out of his way to simplify a difficult problem		8	4	7	3					1
Presents opposing viewpoints and encourages students to make up their own minds		4		8	4	3				4
Stimulates curiosity about particular areas of his course	1	2	3	9	4			3		1
Is available when students want to talk with him	3	10	1	6	2			1		
Treats students as equals rather than as subordinates	2	14	2	4	1					
Sets textbooks which cover the course adequately	m f				m f				m f	
Yes	2	15			No			Not sure	2	4
Considers the students' needs and interests in planning his course	m f				m f				m f	
Yes	4	15			No			Not sure		4

1. In focussing on the role performance of an individual lecturer there is the possibility that a picture of the 'collective' role behaviour of the lecturer will not be presented.
2. The factor of relating teaching performance to the teaching provisions, policy and organisation of the lecturer's institution is not taken into account.
3. The questionnaire used in round one is almost invariably concerned with 'student statements', thereby cutting off from the item pool aspects of role performance perhaps better known to the lecturer himself.

Besides these limitations, several recommendations were made for the benefit of those who wish to use the technique. These are:

- (a) that the round one questionnaire be administered at the commencement of a course, and contain a five point Likert scale with dimensions from 'extremely important' to 'of no importance'²;
- (b) that the second round questionnaire employ those items which the lecturer and the students deem to be 'extremely important'. It is suggested that this second round questionnaire might also be given to the students at regular intervals (e.g., once a term) so that data may be compiled on changes in student assessment of lecturer performance;
- (c) that the results of the second round questionnaire be used to generate discussion between lecturer and students concerning items of particular concern.

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2. In this study a five point Likert scale with dimensions 'very important' to 'of no importance' was used.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A SCHOOL-BASED SCIENCE PROGRAMME : A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

This paper tells the story of the first two years of a science programme which was planned and implemented by the staff of a local primary school. The programme formed the core of a submission for government funding* as a school-based innovation. The study describes the degree to which the submission's aims were achieved and attempts to analyse the factors contributing to the project's outcomes.

The aims of the project submitted for funding were as follows :

- (i) to introduce materials-based inquiry programmes in four conceptual areas, with integration of these areas across grade levels;
- (ii) to provide the school with the materials and specialist-assistance needed to implement the programmes;
- (iii) to develop confidence in and expertise of teachers implementing their science programmes.

As such, the project aims were teacher-oriented, with the emphasis on providing each teacher with the expertise, resources and confidence to conduct inquiry-centered science lessons. However, the planners also anticipated consequences for the children such as "a deeper awareness, understanding and appreciation of life" and an "observable environment that is practical as distinct from theoretical" (Griffith, 1977, p. 1). It is useful at this point to present the teachers' rationale for the project since it expresses clearly the focus which the project had.

The teachers felt that assistance was needed for two main reasons :

- (i) To establish all four syllabus concepts, namely, Plants, Animals, Matter, and Energy. The policy of flexibility and open inquiry is our "ideal", however, due to lack of experience and confidence, this very flexibility has tended to evolve a programme within which the biological science has become predominant. No matter how vitally a teacher feels convinced of the need for effective coverage of all facets of Science, it is acknowledged that choosing areas of study is largely determined by familiarity and confidence in that area, rather than searching and scrounging for materials

* Schools Commission Grant.