

Student-Teacher Relationship: The Student Perspective

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The student perspective on student-teacher relationship was assessed in a survey of 204 secondary school students. While the general student-teacher relationship was generally regarded to be moderate to good in schools, few students sought help from teachers on nonacademic matters, and few reported receiving praise from teachers. The desirable characteristics in teachers that students liked suggested that in addition to knowledge and skills in teaching, approachability, fairness, and the concerned and caring attitude of teachers contributed to a positive student-teacher relationship. Implications of these results for defining and assessing teacher effectiveness were discussed.

本文調查 204 位中學生對師生關係的看法。雖然師生關係被認為普遍良好，很少學生在處理非學習問題上求助於老師，而很少學生認為自己得到老師的嘉許。學生喜歡的老師特質指出除知識和教學技巧外，平易近人，公平，和關心學生的態度是導至良好師生關係的因素。本文亦就研究結果對教學效果作出討論。

Teaching is essentially an interpersonal endeavor involving students and teachers. Consequently, the nature of the student-teacher relationship is a determinant of whether teachers are able to teach and students are willing to learn. The importance of the relationship between students and teachers was recognized more than a century ago by Currie (1869) who suggested that the quality of this relationship had an impact on the student's willingness to participate in the classroom.

Early attempts at uncovering what contributed to the quality of this relationship mainly focused on the traits or characteristics that good teachers possessed (e.g., Charters & Waples, 1929), or on the behaviors and practices that distinguished good from poor teachers (e.g., Barr, 1929). Presently, a certain consistency has emerged from a careful consideration of existing research studies concerning the qualities and practices of effective teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Hudson, 1988). Effective teachers know their subjects well enough to teach them, care about their students and treat them with respect, and they are able to make wise and prudent decisions (Medley, 1982). In other words, apart from the contribution of teacher competence, the caring and compassionate attitude of teachers as in the metaphor of "teachers as clinicians" (Chan,

1992), and the teachers' empathy, respect and genuineness, the necessary conditions of a helping relation, all contribute positively to the student-teacher relationship, and in turn to effective teaching (Lam, 1984), and even to student crisis intervention (Lau, 1993). One of the implications of this conceptualization entails that teacher effectiveness should be assessed not only in terms of teacher or student behaviors alone, but also in terms of the student-teacher relationship.

Despite the proliferation of studies on teacher effectiveness, and the recognition of the importance of the student-teacher relationship (e.g., Lam, 1984; Lau, 1993), few studies have addressed specifically the student-teacher relationship especially from the student perspective in Hong Kong. In view of the dearth of studies, the present study was designed to survey students' view on the student-teacher relationship in schools in Hong Kong. Specifically, secondary school students were asked about their perception of the general student-teacher relationship in their schools, and their specific relationship with their teachers and classmasters. In addition, characteristics of teachers that students liked and disliked were assessed to shed light on what contributed to a positive student-teacher relationship and the perceived characteristics of a "good" teacher.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Two hundred and four secondary school students from six secondary schools in Hong Kong participated voluntarily in the study. Half of them were from Form 1 classes (33 boys and 69 girls), and half of them were from Form 4 classes (22 boys and 80 girls). While this haphazard sample of students appeared to be overrepresented by girls, the gender-class association was nonsignificant as indicated by the nonsignificant chi-square ($X^2=3.01$, $p>.05$), showing that the overrepresentation of girls did not apply to specific classes alone.

All respondents were requested to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit students' view on general and specific student-teacher relationship. The time of the survey was in mid-school-year so that students had adequate time to get to know their teachers. Specifically, students were requested to rate their perceived general student-teacher relationship in their schools, their own relationship with their teachers and their classmasters on a five-point scale (1, very good, to 5, very poor). They were also requested to answer yes or no to questions of their own specific relationship with their teachers such as whether they had been punished or praised by teachers or had verbal conflicts with teachers in the past week, and whether they developed liking or dislike of particular teachers, or sought help from them on personal matters in the current academic year. In addition, students were asked to select from a list three characteristics perceived in teachers they liked, and three others in teachers they disliked. The list of 20 characteristics was derived from a discussion with 30 secondary school teachers in the author's class. The desirable characteristics suggested by this group of teachers were: good appearance, good at teaching, fair to students, trustworthy, concerned about societal affairs, humorous, showing concern to students, knowledgeable, and easily approachable. The undesirable characteristics were: unprepared for class, frequently critical and punishing to students, poor teaching, unfair to students, making reports to parents, giving too much or too difficult homework, presenting lectures in a disorderly manner, unconcerned about students, marking school work slowly or not seriously, and poor appearance.

Results

Perceived General Student-Teacher Relationship

Table 1 summarizes the mean ratings of stu-

dents on general student-teacher relationship in their schools separately for Form 1 and Form 4 boys and girls. In general, students perceived moderate to good student-teacher relationship in their schools, but the relationship appeared to get somewhat poorer as one moved from Form 1 to Form 4, and girls appeared to give better ratings than boys. Similar results of poorer ratings by upper class students were obtained when the ratings were on the general relationship between the respondents and their teachers and their classmasters. Form 4 boys appeared to give consistently poorer ratings. The results of the effects of gender and class on the perception of the student-teacher relationship are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1
Mean Ratings on General Student-Teacher Relationship

	Form I		Form IV	
	Boys (n=33)	Girls (n=69)	Boys (n=22)	Girls (n=80)
General student-teacher relationship in school	2.82	2.36	3.18	2.74
General respondent-teacher relationship	2.55	2.55	3.18	2.90
General respondent-classmaster relationship	2.06	2.19	3.41	2.93

Note. Lower ratings indicate better relationship.

Table 2
Effects of Gender and Class on the Perception of General Student-Teacher Relationship

	Effect	F(1, 200)	Difference
General student-teacher relationship in school	Gender	13.23**	G < B
	Class	11.45**	I < IV
Respondent-teacher relationship	Class	18.94**	I < IV
Respondent-classmaster relationship	Class	51.44**	I < IV
	Class by Gender	4.63*	

Note. G = Girls; B = Boys; I = Form I; IV = Form IV.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Specific Relationship with Teachers

Table 3 presents the proportions of students who reported specific relationship with teachers. It

can be seen that only about 15% of students sought help from teachers on nonacademic or personal matters in the current academic year. However, in the same academic year, over 60% of students developed liking or dislike of particular teachers. While more girls developed liking and more boys developed dislike of particular teachers, the gender difference was more obvious for Form 4 boys and girls. On the other hand, while more Form 1 students tended to develop liking of particular teachers than Form 4 students, the class difference was contributed more by the difference between Form 1 and Form 4 boys.

Table 3 also shows that about 16% of the students had verbal conflicts with teachers in the past week. Boys in both Forms appeared to report more such conflicts than girls. On the other hand, more than 30% of students reported having been punished by teachers as compared with less than 20% of students reported having been praised by teachers. More boys of both Forms reported being punished, and more Form 1 students tended to be praised by teachers.

Table 3
Proportion of Students Who Reported Specific Relationship with Teachers

	Total	Boys	Girls	X ² (1)	Form		X ² (1)
					I	IV	
<i>This academic year</i>							
Developed liking of particular teachers	.65	.49	.71	8.04**(IV)	.72	.58	4.21*(B)
Developed dislike of particular teachers	.67	.78	.62	4.49*(IV)	.68	.66	-
Sought help from teachers on personal matters	.15	.11	.16	-	.15	.15	-
<i>The past week</i>							
Verbal conflict with teachers	.16	.31	.10	13.19***(TF)	.13	.19	-
Punished by teachers	.32	.56	.24	19.84***(TF)	.35	.29	-
Praised by teachers	.19	.18	.19	-	.26	.12	6.33*

Note. Nonsignificant chi-square values are omitted. (IV), (TF), and (B) indicate that significant differences also apply to Form IV students, to students of two Forms, both Form I and Form IV, and to boys, respectively.

p* < .05. *p* < .005. ****p* < .001.

Characteristics of Liked and Disliked Teachers

Table 4 presents the characteristics of liked and disliked teachers endorsed by more than 30% of the students. It can be seen that the four desirable characteristics and the four undesirable ones were almost mirror images of each other. In brief, the desirable characteristics included: "showing concern to students," "good at teaching," "easily approachable," and "fair to students." While "approachability" was endorsed by more girls and more Form 4 students, "fairness" was endorsed by more boys and more Form 1 students. In addition, more girls also tended to emphasize "good teaching." In sharp contrast, the undesirable characteristics were: "unfair to students," "poor teaching," "frequently critical and punishing," and "unconcerned about students." While more boys felt "being critical and punishing" as undesirable, more girls felt "being unconcerned" as undesirable. In addition, more Form 1 students tended to emphasize "unfair to students" as undesirable.

Table 4
Characteristics of Liked and Disliked Teachers Endorsed by Students

	Proportion of Students						
	Total	Boys	Girls	X ² (1)	Form		X ² (1)
					I	IV	
<i>Characteristics of teachers liked by students</i>							
Showing concern to students	.64	.55	.67	-	.59	.69	-
Good at teaching	.61	.42	.68	11.36***(IV)	.59	.63	-
Easily	.59	.38	.66	13.25***(I)	.46	.72	13.68***(B)
Fair to students	.48	.60	.44	4.32*	.58	.38	7.86**
<i>Characteristics of teachers disliked by students</i>							
Unfair to students	.60	.56	.62	-	.68	.53	4.61*
Poor teaching	.48	.51	.47	-	.53	.43	-
Frequently critical or punishing	.47	.75	.37	22.84***(TF)	.45	.49	-
Unconcerned about students	.34	.13	.42	15.57***(TF)	.34	.34	-

Note. Characteristics endorsed by 30% or less of students are omitted. Nonsignificant chi-square values are omitted. (IV), (I), (TF), and (B) indicate that significant differences also apply to Form IV students, Form I students, students of two Forms, both Form I and Form IV, and boys, respectively.

p* < .05. *p* < .005. ****p* < .001.

It is of interest to compare the results of the present study with past studies in Hong Kong regarding the perception of the characteristics of a "good teacher." In asking students to identify characteristics of teachers they liked instead of asking them to identify ideal characteristics of a "good" and perhaps hypothetical teacher, the results of the present study might be more reality-based. It is reassuring that the four desirable characteristics identified in the present study coincided with three of the top ten characteristics identified by Form 5 and Form 7 students in the study by Siu and Lo (1987). Table 5 summarizes the comparison of the results of the present study with those of the studies of Siu and Lo (1987), and Lo and Siu (1988) which included perceived characteristics of a "good teacher" by students, principals, parents, and teachers.

Discussion

The present findings served to provide supporting evidence that the general and specific student-teacher relationship in our schools was rated by students as moderate to good. While boys seemed to give consistently poorer ratings than girls, what appeared more worrying was that upper class students tended to view the student-teacher relationship as poorer than lower class students. It is unknown

whether this worsening of relationship reflected a deterioration of relationship as a student progressed through classes, a changing of perception as a student matured, or the differences between the perception of two cohorts. Future studies using longitudinal designs should aim at addressing and disentangling these different sources of variations.

The present survey also revealed that few students sought help from teachers on personal or nonacademic matters in the current academic year. Such results might arise from perceiving teacher behaviors and practices solely in terms of cognitive outcomes. When desirable affective outcomes of education such as independence, curiosity, and positive attitudes toward school, teacher, and self are considered, the importance of orchestrating success experiences by using appropriate praise and feedback, a relatively uncommon teacher behavior and practice in the present findings, needs to be emphasized in promoting teacher effectiveness.

The report of desirable characteristics in teachers that students liked also helped shed light on what contributed to a positive student-teacher relationship. While knowledge and skills in teaching was desirable, concern, respect, approachability, and fairness were perceived as equally desirable. These results were consistent with past findings on the "good teacher" by Siu and Lo (1987), and Lo and Siu (1988), and had implications for taking into account

Table 5
Summary of Characteristics of "Good Teachers" by Different Studies

	Proportion of Respondents					
	Chan (1993)	Siu & Lo (1987) and Lo & Siu (1988)				
	Hong Kong Student (n=204)	Hong Kong Student (n=1749)	Hong Kong Principal (n=26)	Hong Kong Parent (n=1549)	Hong Kong Teacher (n=769)	Guangzhou Teacher (n=208)
Showing concern to students (41)	.64	-	.35	-	.32	-
Good at teaching (24)	.61	.41	.46	.31	.33	.49
Easily approachable (1)	.59	.34	-	.31	-	-
Fair to students (32)	.48	.55	.42	.48	.43	.32

Note. Numbers in parentheses are item numbers in Siu and Lo (1987), and Lo and Siu (1988).

the student-teacher relationship in defining and assessing teacher effectiveness.

The findings in this study could hardly be claimed to be representative of the state of affairs in Hong Kong schools as the sampling was haphazard, from two grades and a small number of secondary schools. The small number of students surveyed also precluded inter-school comparison. The use of nonstandardized instrument was also a reason for concern in multiple-site comparison. Thus, future studies should aim at the use of standardized instruments with more representative samples such that comparison across studies conducted at multiple sites could be made possible.

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