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An analysis of the influence of the subject taught by a teacher to the popularity of the teacher

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE SUBJECT TAUGHT
BY A TEACHER TO THE POPULARITY OF THE TEACHER

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Education
Indiana State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by

Laverne Samuel Blackard

May 1950

The thesis of Lavene S. Blackard,
Contribution of the Graduate School, Indiana State
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Analysis Of The Influence Of
The Subject Taught By A Teacher
To The Popularity Of The Teacher
is hereby approved as counting toward the completion
of the Master's degree in the amount of 8 hours'
credit.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Much has been written and much oral conversing has taken place concerning traits of a classroom teacher. Many studies have been made in an attempt to analyze the popularity of some teachers over others.

Some teachers have the idea that teachers of practical subjects are more popular than teachers of classical subjects.

Bryan¹ states that the reliability of student rating may be influenced by the interest in the subject. A student interested in a subject may rate a teacher of that subject high even though such a rating is not warranted. Conversely, a teacher may be rated unjustly low because the student lacks interest in the subject.

Home arts, fine arts, commerce, etc., are elective in most junior and senior high schools. Therefore, it seems highly probable that pupils would rate teachers of such subjects high because both the teacher and pupil like the subject.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this

¹ Roy C. Bryan, Ph. D., Pupil Rating of Secondary School Teachers, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1937) p. 17.

study (1) to determine whether the subject taught by a teacher was an important factor in determining the popularity of a teacher; and (2) to determine what traits pupils most desire teachers to reflect.

Limitations of the problem. A research of this same type could give different results if it were done in a different locality. For instance the attitudes and opinions of pupils from a settled agricultural community might be different from those of an industrial community.

Different age groups might return a greatly changed result. For this study only junior high school pupils from an industrial city were questioned.

Importance of the study. In order that teachers might do a better job of teaching, they should be able to create within the pupil a desire to learn. Part of building that desire to learn rests upon the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. This study points out some traits that can be cultivated by a teacher or a prospective teacher which will help create a more congenial relationship, which will ultimately lead to better education and self-adjustment.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Practical subjects. Most school subjects are practical in the long run, but pupils tend to class some of them as

useful and others as useless. In this study practical subjects are home arts, industrial arts, fine art, agriculture, music, commerce, and physical education.

Classical subjects. Some of the subjects in this classification are not classical in a true sense, but most of the knowledge is derived from books. For the purpose of this study classical subjects were taken to mean history, English, languages, science, mathematics, and geography.

III. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

Making the questionnaire. The questionnaire was so constructed as to eliminate names of pupils and teachers. By so doing it was expected that the pupils would respond with more freedom and that teachers administering the questionnaire would do so more willingly.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to determine whether the subject taught by a teacher was an important factor in evaluating the popularity of a teacher.

The last part of the questionnaire was planned to reflect what traits junior high school pupils desired most in their teachers.

The last portion of the questionnaire was arrived at after considerable study and comparison. Ten of the top

ranking traits of teachers found by Hart² were (1) is helpful with schoolwork, explains lessons and assignments clearly and thoroughly, and uses examples in teaching; (2) cheerful, happy, good natured, jolly, has a sense of humor, and can take a joke; (3) human, friendly, companionable, "one of us"; (4) interested in, and understands pupils; (5) makes work interesting, creates a desire to work, makes classwork a pleasure; (6) strict, has control of class, commands respect; (7) impartial, shows no favoritism, has no "pets"; (8) not cross, crabby, grouchy, nagging, or sarcastic; (9) "We learned the subject"; (10) a pleasing personality.

The first eight items on the last part of the questionnaire were taken primarily from the list from Hart. However, Hart's list was checked against the findings of Light³, Charters and Waples⁴, Newmark⁵, and Boardman⁶, and

² Frank Hart, Teaching and Teachers, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1934), p. 79.

³ U. L. Light, "High School Pupils Rate Teachers," School Review, 38: 28-32, January, 1930.

⁴ W. W. Charters and Douglas Waples, "The Commonwealth Teacher-Training Study," 18: University of Chicago Press, 1929.

⁵ David Newmark, "Students Opinions of Their Best and Poorest Teachers," Elementary School Journal, 29: 576-85, April 1926.

⁶ Charles W. Boardman, "An Analysis of Pupil Rating of High School Teachers," Educational Administration and Supervision. 16: 440-46, September 1930.

a close agreement was noted as is revealed in Table I.

The questionnaire and its administration. The questionnaire was short and to the point so as to stay within the interest span of the junior high school pupil. Questionnaires were administered to all pupils in attendance on one day.

There were 1175 questionnaires answered, but twenty-seven were necessarily discarded. Such answers as "age 6", or "grade in school 100", did not add materially to the information sought.

This study was made from replies of the pupils in Roosevelt Junior High School and Lincoln Junior High School of Beloit, Wisconsin, a city of thirty thousand inhabitants.

The ages of the pupils questioned ranged from twelve through seventeen. The bulk of the ages, however, was twelve through fifteen. The group was divided nearly equally between boys and girls. No attempt was made to separate the replies of the girls from those of the boys. Dr. Bryan⁷ states that the boys show a tendency to rate men teachers higher than girls do; and that girls show a tendency to rate women teachers higher than boys do. These tendencies are rather slight for both men and women teachers. However,

⁷ Roy C. Bryan, Ph. D., Pupil Rating of Secondary School Teachers, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1937) pp. 73-74.

TABLE I
 AGREEMENT AMONG FIVE AUTHORS
 ON THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT TEACHER TRAITS

Trait	Hart	Charters and Waples	Light	Newmark	Boardman
Helpful	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jolly	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Human and friendly	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Understands pupils	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Motivating	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Good disciplinarian	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Has no favorites	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Not grouchy	Yes	No	No	No	No
Gets subject across	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pleasing personality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

there are so many exceptions to these tendencies that it may be well to forget them.

Following is a replica of the questionnaire:

Age _____ Boy _____ Girl _____ Grade in school _____

What school subject do you like best? _____

What school subject do you like least? _____

What school subject does your favorite teacher teach? _____

What school subject does your least liked teacher teach? _____

Is your favorite teacher man or woman? _____

Is your least liked teacher man or woman? _____

Check four of the following statements which best express why you like your favorite teacher. Place a number 1 before the statement that stands out strongest; a number 2 before another statement which applies but not so strongly; likewise number 3 and number 4.

_____ 1. I can understand what the teacher is talking about and he helps me with my school work when I need help.

_____ 2. The teacher is cheerful, happy, jolly, and friendly.

_____ 3. The teacher is interested in me and understands me.

_____ 4. The teacher makes my work interesting so I want to do it.

_____ 5. The teacher has a good, busy class.

_____ 6. The teacher treats everyone alike and has no "pets".

_____ 7. The teacher doesn't act mean toward me.

_____ 8. The teacher causes us to understand the subject.

____9. The teacher teaches a subject that I like.

____10. Other. Name it. _____

IV. ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THE THESIS

Chapter II of this thesis deals with the results obtained from the first part of the questionnaire. Five tables were made from the results and treated both from the positive and negative sides.

Chapter III deals with the last part of the questionnaire. The four top ranking teacher traits as determined by the junior high school pupils were listed and elaborated upon.

Some pupil comments were given to produce a general tendency of their thinking.

Chapter IV presents a summary of the findings with conclusions and suggestions for improvement of the teacher pupil relationship.

CHAPTER II

RATING OF SCHOOL SUBJECTS

I. FAVORITE AND LEAST LIKED SUBJECTS

As an initial step in the presentation and analysis of the data upon which the conclusions of this study rest, the rank and frequency of the school subjects liked best and those liked least are presented in Tables II and III.

The data as presented are somewhat misleading and are in need of some explanation. There are some courses listed that had a much smaller enrollment than others, but they have been listed along with the required courses that had a compulsory attendance of near 1200 pupils. For instance, shop, mechanical drawing, clothing, and foods all combined did not have a total enrollment equal to English, which is required of all pupils. Art, history, music, algebra, band, Latin, French, and agriculture also had a smaller enrollment, but were listed with the required subjects. Agriculture probably suffered most from the standpoint of low numbers because of a total enrollment of not over forty pupils in comparison to the near 1200 in physical education.

The difference of the number of cases does have a bearing on the results obtained; but that difference is less significant than it appears, as the general tendency

is more important than the score of a particular item.

Fritz¹ says that children vary quite markedly in their ability to duplicate a judgment which they have once made. The score that any individual may give a particular item seems to be of little value. Perhaps only the general tendency of the entire opinions should be considered. Student ratings are of value when the combined estimate of the group is taken.

There was no special reason for listing the data under separate headings of Lincoln Junior High School and Roosevelt Junior High School only that the comparison of the two schools was interesting. The composite score or rating will be used for all suggestions or conclusions.

Table II reveals that physical education was the favorite subject of all the pupils. Then English and mathematics, which are rather abstract in nature, took second and third places among the favorites. Since English and mathematics are required of all pupils, it would appear that shop, art, clothing, music, and mechanical drawing, some practical subjects, might well have ranked higher if the choice of favorite subjects had been figured on percentages of enrollment.

¹ Martin F. Fritz, "The Variability of Judgement in the Rating of Teachers by Students," Educational Administration and Supervision, 12: 630-34, December, 1926.

TABLE II

NUMBER OF TIMES EACH SCHOOL SUBJECT WAS LIKED BEST
BY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

Subject	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite
Physical Education	119	105	224
English	82	82	164
Mathematics	51	90	141
Shop	82	28	110
Geography	86	12	98
Science	52	21	73
Art	33	35	68
Clothing	22	37	59
History	38	11	49
Music	28	21	49
Mechanical Drawing	14	29	43
Algebra	8	19	27
Band	4	20	24
Latin	7	9	16
French	3	9	12
Agriculture	9	0	9

On the other hand a very significant fact is observed in Table III, namely that the practical subjects ranked very low as least liked subjects. The above observation shows that even though there were only two practical subjects that ranked high as favorites, there were none that the pupils disliked as much as they did the two top ranking abstract subjects.

II. SUBJECTS TAUGHT BY FAVORITE OR LEAST LIKED TEACHERS

Is there a noticeable trend toward pupils' favorite subjects being taught by their favorite teachers? Conversely, is there a good correlation between least liked subjects and subjects taught by their least liked teacher? In order that the tables could be checked mathematically, rather than by inspection, the coefficient of correlation between Tables II and IV was figured by the Pearson product moment method². The number of cases involved in the calculation was so small that the coefficient of correlation would tend to be low, but the value of the r was a very low .314.

A value of r of .314 would indicate that there is no more correlation between the pupils' choice of favorite subjects and his choice of favorite teachers than would

² Ernest W. Tieg, Tests and Measurements in the Improvement of Learning (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), pp. 379-87.

TABLE III

NUMBER OF TIMES EACH SCHOOL SUBJECT WAS LIKED LEAST
BY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

Subject	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite
Physical Education	0	12	12
English	135	95	230
Mathematics	222	80	302
Shop	4	2	6
Geography	33	108	141
Science	75	55	130
Art	13	17	30
Clothing	7	0	7
History	51	82	133
Music	8	5	13
Mechanical Drawing	2	5	7
Algebra	64	8	72
Band	0	3	3
Latin	6	5	11
French	0	9	9
Agriculture	0	0	0

TABLE IV
SUBJECTS TAUGHT BY FAVORITE TEACHERS

Subject	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite
Geography	137	20	157
English	111	122	233
Physical Education	93	36	129
History	84	13	97
Science	73	30	103
Mathematics	52	132	184
Shop	51	29	80
Music	22	7	29
Art	21	13	34
Clothing	11	20	31
Food	11	2	13
Algebra	9	55	64
Agriculture	8	0	8
Latin	4	0	4
Mechanical Drawing	3	18	41
French	0	5	5
Band	0	14	14
Study Hall	0	0	0

normally occur by a mere law of averages.

You will note that in all tables the data have been given under the headings of Lincoln Junior High School, Roosevelt Junior High School, and composite. The composite score or rank was the only item that was used. The other two columns were given as a point of interest. One should notice that different results would have been obtained if the data from only one of the schools had been treated. It was also noticed in Tables III and V that there was an extreme difference of opinion concerning mathematics. However, both schools use the same course of study and work from the same text books and are advised from a central mathematics committee of the city. It appeared to the writer that there was much more involved in the pupils' choice of favorite or least liked subjects than the material and content of the course.

Lehman³ sums it up like this. At the present time no one knows whether real teaching ability correlates with ability to "sell" oneself to his students. There are certain reasons for thinking that the correlation between real teaching ability and self-selling ability is far from perfect.

³ Harvey C. Lehman, "Can Pupils Rate Teachers," Educational Administration and Supervision, 13: 459-66, October, 1927.

TABLE V
SUBJECTS TAUGHT BY LEAST LIKED TEACHERS

Subject	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite
Geography	15	90	110
English	90	94	184
Physical Education	5	30	35
History	34	56	90
Science	73	50	123
Mathematics	196	33	229
Shop	7	5	12
Music	9	14	23
Art	20	15	35
Clothing	10	2	12
Food	12	36	48
Algebra	119	0	119
Agriculture	0	0	0
Latin	0	12	12
Mechanical Drawing	13	13	26
French	0	11	11
Band	0	4	4
Study Hall	0	10	10

Student ratings of teachers will be worth while if the rating is confined mostly to the mechanical and routine aspects of teaching.

The argument that teaching is best which pleases the majority of students is surely a most glowing example of the "democratic" fallacy.⁴

The questionnaire of each pupil was checked to see how many times the favorite subject of a pupil was also the subject taught by his favorite teacher and to see how many times the least liked subject was also the subject taught by their most disliked teacher. The results showed that in 650 cases the favorite subject was not the same as the subject taught by the favorite teacher. In only 494 cases were the subjects the same.

When the least liked subjects were compared with subjects taught by least liked teachers, the agreement was better, but still very insignificant. There were 710 cases where the least liked subject and the subject taught by the least liked teacher was the same and 535 cases where the subject was different.

⁴ Lehman, loc. cit.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the comparison of the similar items in Tables II, III, IV, and V.

1. There seemed to be no correlation between subjects and teachers; that is, a teacher is not a favorite because he or she happens to be teaching a subject which especially appeals to the pupils.
2. Least liked subjects are rarely those subjects with a practical or immediate use.

CHAPTER III

RANKING OF TEACHER TRAITS BY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS

I. TEACHER TRAITS

The second part of the questionnaire that is given in Chapter One furnishes the basis for this chapter. Item number nine is not a trait and was not gathered from established sources but was added in an attempt to see if the subject taught was a basis for teacher popularity. Table VI reveals item two as the top ranking desirable trait for teachers to reflect. The pupils in both of the schools like a teacher best because she is cheerful, happy, jolly, and friendly. Over one third of all the pupils placed that trait above all others.

One very interesting fact was that with the exception of items four and six, which were interchanged, the opinions of the pupils from both schools were in identical ranks. That would indicate that the results obtained were valid. Also, item two ranked in second place in Table VII as a second choice.

The four highest traits in Tables VI, VII, VIII, and IX which represented the pupils first four choices of positive traits were checked and totaled to find that trait number two (cheerful, happy, jolly, and friendly) was mentioned 796 times.

TABLE VI

THE PUPILS' FIRST CHOICE OF STATEMENTS THAT EXPRESS
WHY THEY LIKE THEIR FAVORITE TEACHER

Statement	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite	Composite Rank
2	244	162	406	2
1	143	124	267	1
4	62	40	102	6
6	55	71	126	4
9	36	26	62	9
3	20	24	44	3
8	16	17	33	8
7	7	13	20	7
5	4	8	12	5
10	13	8	21	10

TABLE VII

THE PUPILS' SECOND CHOICE OF STATEMENTS THAT EXPRESS
WHY THEY LIKE THEIR FAVORITE TEACHER

Statement	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite	Composite Rank
2	107	87	194	6
4	107	78	185	2
6	101	103	204	4
1	86	64	150	1
9	48	38	86	9
8	43	32	75	3
7	34	24	58	8
3	30	49	79	7
5	21	21	42	5
10	6	3	9	10

TABLE VIII

THE PUPILS' THIRD CHOICE OF STATEMENTS THAT EXPRESS
WHY THEY LIKE THEIR FAVORITE TEACHER

Statement	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite	Composite Rank
6	113	98	211	6
4	82	74	156	4
1	67	62	129	1
3	67	38	105	9
8	62	46	108	3
9	64	47	111	8
7	48	38	86	2
2	46	50	96	7
5	26	29	55	5
10	8	6	14	10

TABLE IX

THE PUPILS' FOURTH CHOICE OF STATEMENTS THAT EXPRESS
WHY THEY LIKE THEIR FAVORITE TEACHER

Statement	Lincoln Jr. High School	Roosevelt Jr. High School	Composite	Composite Rank
4	93	66	159	4
9	87	68	154	9
8	86	60	146	8
7	62	43	105	6
6	59	60	119	1
1	56	51	107	7
5	55	27	82	2
2	45	52	97	5
3	19	31	50	3
10	14	28	42	10

Trait number four (makes my work interesting) was second having been mentioned 692 times. Trait number six (treats everyone alike and has no pets) was third having been mentioned 660 times. Trait number one (understands what the teacher is talking about) was fourth having been mentioned 653 times.

Item nine of the questionnaire which was placed merely to invoke thought on the part of the pupils failed to change the opinion of many of them. The positive traits still followed the pattern that was suggested by Hart¹ as stated in Chapter One of this thesis.

Table X was compiled to determine whether there was a marked preference to either sex of teachers. The student body of both schools was evenly balanced with boys and girls; also, the faculty was divided nearly equally between men and women. The composite figures in Table X should be a reliable indication. The figures indicate that men are favored slightly over women, but the figure is so close that no decisive conclusions were drawn. On the other hand there was decided dislike for women teachers. There was no definite method for deciding why there was that difference; but judging from the rank of desirable traits in Tables VI through IX there is an indication of

¹ Hart, loc. cit.

TABLE X

A COMPARISON OF THE POPULARITY OF MEN AND WOMEN TEACHERS
BY THE COMPOSITE STUDENT BODY

	Favorite Man	Favorite Woman	Least Liked Man	Least Liked Woman
Roosevelt Jr. High School	345	180	250	234
Lincoln Jr. High School	352	264	54	432
Composite	697	444	304	666

a personality difficulty in the teacher.

Since the greatest number of least liked teachers were from Lincoln Junior High School, Tables III and V were searched for a likely indication of the department or departments which caused the trouble. Mathematics seemed to be the only subject which in itself could have caused the difficulty. There were four teachers of mathematics in that school and three of them were women. Therefore, it was suggested that some of the top ranking positive teacher traits were not present among one or more of the teachers of mathematics at Lincoln Junior High School.

II. PUPIL COMMENTS

To give a further varification to the trend of Junior High School thinking and feeling some of the comments that the pupils made on item ten of the questionnaire are presented. All of these remarks were reasons for liking their favorite teacher.

1. He takes interest in outside work and helps us with it.
2. She talks to us about our boyfriends and acts just our age.
3. He doesn't lose his temper easily.
4. The teacher is just nice and makes you feel ready to work.
5. He wants discipline in the school and that is what more schools need.

6. She lets us talk in class.
7. He's just nice, that's all.
8. He gives me breaks that no other teacher could.
9. She never loses her temper.
10. She can take a joke and give a joke and is always friendly.
11. He has a variety of things to do.
12. He is good outside of school.
13. All teachers are not mean just a few.
14. The teacher doesn't treat me like a child.

The above statements are a sampling of the various other traits that Junior High School pupils enjoy. In many cases the statements could have been classified with traits listed in the questionnaire. Many other statements suggested the enjoyment of fun, joking, and being entertained.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I. SUMMARY

This research was an attempt to determine the popularity of some teachers over others. The suggestion was made that the subject taught might be the key to that popularity. A questionnaire was given that attacked the problem from eight different angles.

1. The favorite school subject.
2. The least liked school subject.
3. The least liked teacher.
4. The subject taught by the favorite teacher.
5. The subject taught by the least liked teacher.
6. The sex of the favorite teacher.
7. The sex of the least liked teacher.
8. The traits of the teacher.

No special group of subjects took precedence over any other. In other words practical subjects did not necessarily stand out as favorites over abstract or classical subjects. There seemed to be little or no correlation between the favorite subject of a pupil and the subject taught by his favorite teacher.

Sex of a teacher had very little effect on that teachers popularity. It appeared that a jovial personality,

a thorough understanding of people, fair play, and talking down in the world of the pupils had more bearing on the popularity of teachers than anything else.

II. CONCLUSION

The original assumption of this study was nothing more than a pedagog's dream. In other words this study indicates that the subject a teacher teaches has nothing to do with the popularity of that teacher.

The sex of a teacher has very little bearing on that teacher's popularity. The personality of the teacher is the keynote of popularity. If a teacher is jolly, happy, and vivacious enough to entertain junior high school pupils for five to seven periods a day the pupils will feel that they have been taught well and the teacher's popularity vote rises.

On the other hand teachers must be able to make the work interesting, be sure it is near the pupils level of understanding, and stand aloof far enough to show no favoritism and then they might be well liked by most of their pupils.

A word of caution is necessary so that one does not take student opinion in preference to administrative understanding. Information of a sort can be gathered from pupils, but to use that information as if the pupils are familiar with the aims and objectives of education would be questionable.

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