

EXAMINING THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE THROUGH STUDENT DRAWINGS

Regina P. Schlee, School of Business and Economics
Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA 98119, (206) 281-3638

ABSTRACT

This study examines students' classroom experiences through an analysis of student drawings as well as responses to open-ended questions. The sample consisted of 121 students enrolled in undergraduate business classes at Seattle Pacific University, Autumn quarter 1993. Seven different classes were sampled in order to randomize error due to the effects of the professor and subject.

Students were given a questionnaire and were asked to draw the type of individual they consider a "good" or "bad" professor. In order to make these drawings easier to interpret, students were asked to place "good" and "bad" professors in a setting that illustrates why he or she is a "good" or "bad" professor. Students were also asked four open-ended questions: to describe a typical hour in a class they enjoyed a great deal and in a class they disliked intensely, and also to write the characteristics of a "good" and those of a "bad" professor. The last page of the questionnaire included some basic demographic information on the students.

The drawings and the open-ended questions were coded by me after a focus group discussion with students from my Marketing Research class. In order to determine the reliability of the coding, the Marketing Research students were also asked to code a subsample of the drawings and open-ended questions.

In this study, "good" professors were drawn and described as caring about students, as friendly, approachable,

moving around the classroom and getting physically closer to the students, and as encouraging student participation in the classroom. Students seem to prefer a hands-on education where they learn by doing. "Good" professors make the material appear relevant and use "real world" examples. In contrast, attributes such as being especially articulate or entertaining were included less frequently by students.

When students drew or described the "bad" professor, they often presented someone who lectures the whole time, does not allow enough time for questions, and is not open to different points of view. "Bad" professors seem to drone on and are oblivious to what is going on in the classroom. "Bad" professors are also often seen as unfriendly and unhappy with their job. Some students appear to be especially sensitive to power differences between themselves and professors and resent any attempt to exercise the professor's power.

Interestingly, looking at many of the "bad" professor drawings, I did not think that the person depicted was doing a "bad" job. Many of the professors who were drawn or described as being into power games were simply trying to stimulate or challenge students to learn. Similarly, when I was looking at drawings of professors who were lecturing the whole period, I thought the professor was trying to communicate important information to students. The students' perception, however, was different.