

Student Respect for a Teacher: Measurement and Relationships to Teacher Credibility and Classroom Behavior Perceptions

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Abstract

This study developed a measure of student's respect for teachers. A parsimonious, single-factor solution for Student Respect for a Teacher (SR-T) was produced and internal reliability demonstrated. The validity of SR-T was demonstrated through substantial correlations between SR-T and student reports of teacher credibility (competence, character, and caring) and the student's attitudinal evaluation of the targeted teacher. Additionally, SR-T was moderately and significantly correlated with two of three measures of self-reported behavior and with student perceptions of the behavior of the target teacher. On this basis the SR-T was determined to be a reliable and valid measure of student respect for a teacher in the college environment. Future research is discussed.

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Students communicating levels of disrespect for a teacher has long been a concern for teachers and administrators around the nation (e.g. De Lucia & Iasenza, 1995; Friedman, 1994; Tom, 1998). While the majority of the concern has focused upon communication-oriented behaviors in the elementary and secondary educational levels (i.e. Friedman, 1994; Scott, 1999; Yelsma & Yelsma, 1998), there is clear evidence of an emerging concern at the higher education level, "...college faculty have become increasingly concerned about student disorder and classroom management." (De Lucia & Iasenza, 1995, p. 385). In spite of the obvious educational significance for both the teacher and the student (Scott, 1999) that is inherent to a student's respect for a college teacher, there have been no measures of such respect developed.

The current study focuses upon developing such a measure and conceptually defines student respect for teachers as the degree of regard held by a student for an instructor engaged in the teaching profession. The concept of degrees of respect for a teacher exists at all educational levels and would be related to and at least minimally predictive of other cognitions of a teacher and associated communicative outcomes. For example, a student's respect for a teacher would logically have an impact upon a student's behavior toward and communication with that teacher during classroom interactions, office interactions, hallway interactions, as well as student interactions with other teachers, administrators and other students, about that teacher. The importance of learning more about student respect cannot be underestimated.

Measurement of Respect for Teachers

The limited number of measurement tools associated with student respect for teachers have focused on summative reports of respect-oriented behaviors rather than student cognitions. Thus, one is limited to addressing issues of student respect only after the student has behaved in a clear, consistent disrespectful manner. For example, Yelsma and Yelsma's (1998) scales for evaluating social respect (including teachers) uses research subjects from high school and items focused upon "respectful social behaviors," not a measure of cognitions reflecting respect for a teacher (Yelsma & Yelsma, 1998, p. 434). Scott (1999) explores respect in the "socio-moral atmosphere" (p. 31) of students in secondary Christian schools and assesses the level of agreement upon specific disrespectful and respectful behaviors of both students and teachers by both students and teachers but did nothing to measure the cognitions representing the students' feelings associated with respect for teachers. Having access to student levels of respect for a teacher allows one to predict potential behavior as well as related perceptions that may have influence upon the learning process.

Several researchers explore related cognitions in efforts to predict student behavior frequently associated with respect. Richmond (1990) contends that "meanings in the mind of students" are important to the analysis of the students' behaviors (pg. 193). Also, Ledez (1994) refers to respect as the "inner essence of the individual" (pg. 5). Friedman (1994) suggests that students behave according to how they feel internally and describes disrespect as "lacking respect" (pg. 949) that fosters "internal and external maladaptive behaviors" (pg. 957). A continuing concern is the "favorabl[e] or unfavorabl[e]" (Gass & Seiter, 1999, pg. 41) frame of actions that are representative of a dichotomy of the respect and disrespect cognitions (Friedman, 1994; Friedman, 1995; Scott, 1999; Yelsma and Yelsma (1998). The specific relationship of student perceptions and feelings relative to impacting student behaviors has been well documented (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Teven & McCroskey, 1996; Tom, 1998). There appears to be clear evidence of the associations between such logically related variables as

teacher credibility, teacher behavior, and student behaviors (Frymier & Thompson, 1992; Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991; Tevan & McCroskey, 1996; Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998; Tom, 1998). Certainly, development of a measure of student respect for a teacher has complementary heuristic value. Exploration of causative factors that impact a student's respect for a teacher or teachers (e.g. home environment, student culture, student experience, etc.) cannot be explored until a reliable and valid measurement tool is developed. On that basis, the need for a measurement of student respect for teachers is clear. Thus, the following research question was pursued in this study:

Research Question: To what extent can a reliable and valid measure of student respect for a teacher be developed?

Convergent Validity

Related Cognitions: To evaluate the validity of this measure, the association of a student's respect for a teacher and the student's view of the teacher's credibility are examined. Given the conceptual definition of student respect for a teacher as a broad-based sense of regard for that person, an association with cognitions of credibility has evident face validity.

There is also a strong logical association between teacher respect and each of the dimensions of credibility (competence, character and good will) demonstrated by previous research in related areas. For example, Ledez (1994) associates teacher competence and respect for the authority figure by indicating that for students to respect the authority figure of teacher, students must perceive the teacher as competent. Thus, there would be a positive relationship between student perceptions of teacher competence and other student evaluations of the teacher such as respect (Beatty & Zahn, 1990; Cohen, 1981; Erdle, Murray, & Rushton, 1985).

Trustworthiness or character, should also be associated with teacher respect. Thweatt & McCroskey (1998) report that teacher trustworthiness is considered the essence of teacher character. The association of a student's respect for a teacher and the student's projection of the character or trustworthiness of that teacher is self-evident. Trustworthiness/character was related to teacher competence (Frymier & Thompson, 1992) where "character involved how much a person is liked, respected, and admired" (p. 388) and clearly related to teacher respect as defined in this study.

Hersrud (1994) defines respect as "warmth and caring connoted by positive regard" (p. 49) clearly establishing an association to the good will (or caring) dimension of credibility. Furthermore, Teven and McCroskey (1996) argue that caring is directly associated with good will and has a positive impact on affective learning, cognitive learning and the students' teacher evaluation. Therefore, the caring dimension of credibility should be strongly associated with respect. On that basis, the following hypotheses were examined as part of the validity evaluation measurement of student respect for a teacher.

H 1: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with student projection of teacher competence.

H 2: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with student projection of teacher character.

H 3: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with student projection of teacher goodwill/caring.

Finally, based upon the preceding literature, the validity of the measurement of a student's cognitive respect for a teacher would logically be highly associated with an established measure of their evaluative attitude toward that teacher. Thus the following hypothesis was generated:

H 4: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with their evaluation of that teacher.

Related Behavioral Self-Reports and Perceptions

There is extensive research that identifies student respectful and disrespectful behaviors, however without an adequate measure of cognitive respect little direct research support was located. There is a consistency between general cognitions and behaviors that permeates the logic underlying all hypotheses testing the validity of the measurement of respect. Behaviors are not random events but rather are preceded by some combination of cognitions that precipitate the behavioral decision. Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg, and Tannenbaum (1968) provide an excellent overview of numerous theoretical models of consistency supporting this contention that have not changed demonstrably with time.

Friedman (1994) suggests that how the student feels on the inside produces disrespectful behavior. Further, Richmond (1990) suggests that when attempting to explain classroom behavior the most important factors are students' internal meanings. Scott (1999) identifies nineteen student self-reported behaviors of respect for the teacher. Scott's (1999) study along with others (Friedman, 1994; Richmond, 1990) report that internalized perceptions correlate to behaviors. All suggest that student reports of self-behaviors will be correlated with student's orientation toward the teachers. Even though the predictive or associative link between a single cognition and a specific behavior is not strong and has been the subject of extended research efforts for some time (e.g. La Piere, 1934), a valuable measure of student respect for a teacher simply must have such an association. Thus, there is support for the argument that some cognitions are related to behaviors and sufficient literature to pursue the investigation of the validity of the measurement tool based upon the projection of a positive correlation between student respect for a teacher and the student's self-reported behavior.

On the basis of the preceding review of literature and reasoning that a valid measure of student respect for a teacher would be associated with student reports of self-behavior, the following hypothesis was developed to evaluate the validity of this measure:

H 5: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with student reports of respectful self-behaviors in that teacher's classroom.

A student's report of a teacher's behavior would appear to flow from one of two interactive cyclic perspectives: 1) the teacher behaved in such a manner as to create or impact a student's respect for that teacher or 2) a student's respect for a teacher provides an orientation such that the student may consistently interpret the teacher's behavior from a comparable point of view. These are supported by attribution theorists (e.g. Kelly, 1971, 1973; and Kelly & Michela, 1980) as well as the more specific literature associating related cognitions (e.g. teacher credibility) resulting from teacher behavioral changes (e.g. Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991; Teven & McCroskey, 1996). Teven and McCroskey (1996) suggest that student's favorable rating of teachers positive "caring" is generalized to perceptions of other teacher behavior. The "halo effect" literature is also strongly supportive of this argument associating evaluative cognitions with perceptions of others' behavior. (Asch, 1946; Nisbett & DeCamp Wilson, 1977; Orman, 1980).

On the basis of the preceding review of literature and reasoning that a valid measure of student respect for a teacher would be associated with student interpretations of the teacher's behavior toward students, the following hypothesis was developed to evaluate the validity of this measure:

H 6: Student respect for a teacher will be positively correlated with student perceptions of teacher behaviors representing respect for the students.

Method

Instrumentation

The measure of student respect for a teacher was developed within this study. Over thirty bi-polar adjectives representative of student respect for a teacher were initially generated via student group input. Sixteen items (see Table 1) were selected for further testing on the basis of a priori face validity representing the conceptual definition of respect presented earlier. With well-established teacher credibility measurement tools using bi-polar adjectives separated by a seven-step response pattern, the same option was utilized to measure responses to the concept of respect for a teacher.

Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 representing the three dimensions of teacher credibility (competence, character, & good will)¹ and an evaluation of that teacher were measured using established scales developed by Teven and McCroskey (1996), McCroskey and Young (1981), and Thweatt and McCroskey (1998).²

Hypothesis 5 representing respectful student behaviors was operationalized through three measurement tools developed by Yelmsa and Yelsma (1998) and Scott (1999) in the secondary and elementary classroom settings. These were revised to reflect a more appropriate collegiate classroom setting. These scales used a 1-5 response option representing frequency of each behavioral item (never, rarely, sometimes, almost always, always) and are summed across the items to provide a singular score for each participant. The three measures of student behaviors were as follows: 1) Six items³ representing the frequency of respectful student classroom behaviors (Yelmsa & Yelsma, 1998), 2) Six items³ representing the frequency of student respectful behaviors while waiting and listening in the secondary classroom (Yelmsa & Yelsma,

¹ The items representing the competence factor of teacher credibility are as follows: Unintelligent...Intelligent, Trained...Untrained, Inexpert...Expert, Informed...Uninformed, Incompetent...Competent, Bright...Stupid. The items representing the character factor of teacher credibility are as follows: Virtuous...Sinful, Dishonest...Honest, Selfish...Unselfish, Sympathetic...Unsympathetic, Low character...High character, Trustworthy...Untrustworthy. The items representing the caring or good will factor of teacher credibility are as follows: Cares about me...Doesn't care about me, Doesn't have my interest at heart...Has my interest at heart, Not self-centered...Self-centered, Concerned with me...Unconcerned with me, Insensitive...Sensitive, Understanding...No Understanding, Responsive...Unresponsive, Doesn't understand how I feel...Understands how I feel, Understands how I think...Doesn't understand how I think.

² The items representing student's evaluation of the teacher are as follows: Bad...Good, Valuable...Worthless, Fair...Unfair, Negative...Positive.

³ The items representing student classroom behaviors are as follows: I follow this teacher's directions, I use this teacher's corrections and feedback to improve my work, I use my time wisely while waiting for this teachers' help, I ask this teacher politely for help, explanations, instructions, I avoid cheating in this teacher's class, I offer to help this teacher and other staff, guest, and students in this class. The items representing student behaviors when waiting/listening are as follows: I raise my hand when I want to ask a question or comment for this teacher, I find acceptable ways to use free time in this teacher's class, I sit properly at my desk (feet on floor, facing forward, etc.) in this class, I look at and listen to this teacher when the teacher is giving instructions, I quietly watch and listen to audio-visual presentations by this teacher, I wait quietly for recognition by this teacher before speaking out in class.

1998), and 3) Five frequency-based items⁴ (Scott, 1999) relative to respectful interaction behaviors with a teacher.

Hypothesis 6 representing student perceptions of a teacher's behaviors toward students was measured by five items drawn from Scott (1999) on the basis of the degree of agreement by students as most representative of teacher respect for students. These items were also slightly restructured to represent the environment found in higher education and measured by the same frequency scale as above.⁵

The reliability of each measurement tool in the current study was assessed using Cronback's Alpha with the following results: Evaluation Alpha = .8904, Competence Alpha = .8778, Character Alpha = .8811, Good Will Alpha = .8412, Respectful Behavior Alpha = .6103, Waiting/Listening Alpha = .5793, Student Behavior Report Alpha = .7358, Teacher Respectful Behavior = .7381.

Procedure

Students from a basic speech communication class requiring participation in research activities were asked to volunteer for this project. An option was available for those students desiring not to participate in this particular study. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire described the general purpose of the study, contained demographic questions, and then asked the student to focus upon the teacher in the class immediately prior to this class for the remainder of the questionnaire. The remainder of the questionnaire consisted of the measures described above related to student behaviors, teacher credibility, and teacher behavior. 150 students elected to participate in the study and represented the following descriptive characteristics (Males = 60, Females = 89; Freshmen = 56, Sophomores = 51, Juniors = 25, and Seniors = 18; Target Teacher Sex Males = 89, Females = 58; Teacher Target from Student Major = 50, Non-Major = 96.).

Results

The primary concern in responding to the research question through the use of factor analysis was to identify the most parsimonious solution (McCroskey and Young, 1979). There is no a priori theoretical rationale for examining a rotated factor structure nor for specifying an anticipated number of factors to extract, therefore an open principle components analysis was used to seek the simplest factor solution.

The principle components analysis used all 150 responses to the 16 items representing student respect for a teacher. Using the Scree procedure and standard item loading criteria, the procedure produced a one-factor model with all items loading highest on the first factor and all items exceeding a .66 loading. Results of the analysis indicated an eigenvalue of 9.490, 59% of the variance accounted for, and an Alpha reliability coefficient of .9533. Item-total analyses yielded a range of correlations from .62 to .84 suggesting that the items are all highly correlated.

⁴ The items representing student behaviors during interactions with the target teacher are as follows: I do not disrupt this teacher when the teacher is presenting class material, I have not been rude to this teacher, I have obeyed this teacher's rules, I do not "talk back" to this teacher, I address this teacher appropriately (Using Mr/Miss/Mrs/Dr and last name).

⁵ The items representing student perceptions of the teachers behavior toward students are as follows: This teacher treats students like adults, This teacher does not embarrass students in front of peers, This teacher apologizes when making a mistake, This teacher keeps a student's grades, papers, and conversations private, This teacher does not interrupt students when they are talking.

Realizing the potential for and the value of a reduced item size measure, examination of the feasibility of reducing the size of the questionnaire was initiated. The six items with the lowest item-total correlation were eliminated and the data submitted to the same analytic

Table 1: Student Respect for Teacher Factor Loadings Unrotated Principle Component Analysis

Items	16 Item Solution	10 Item Solution
Honorable/Contemptuous	.73	
Not Admirable/Admirable	.78	.79
Valuable/Valueless	.80	.81
Not Respectable/Respectable .	.80	.81
Important/Unimportant	.78	.80
Appreciable/Non-appreciable	.83	.85
Significant/Insignificant	.84	.86
Not Praiseworthy/Praiseworthy	.87	.87
Qualified/Not Qualified	.73	
Not Esteem-able/Esteem-able	.66	
Useful/Useless	.69	
Deconstructive/Constructive	.75	.76
Beneficial/Worthless	.78	.79
Advantageous/Non-advantageous	.79	.81
Productive/Not Productive	.73	
Not Credible/Credible	.75	

procedure. Table 1 contains the item loadings for both the 16- item pool and the reconstructed 10-item pool. The 10-item solution reported a single factor with an eigenvalue of 6.622 with 66% of the total variance accounted for and an Alpha reliability coefficient of .9427. Item-total correlations range from .71 to .83. The internal reliability of the 10-item measure appears to meet or exceed standard requirements. On this basis, the 10-item single factor solution was considered feasible and was utilized in all further testing. Table 2 contains additional descriptive statistics of the measure of student respect for a teacher used in the remainder of this study.

Table 2: Student Respect for Teacher Descriptive Statistics

<u>M</u>	<u>Mdn</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>skewness</u>	<u>kurtosis</u>
56.0	58.0	55.0	9.929	-.796	-.056

The convergent validity of this single factor solution was examined in response to the hypotheses generated earlier. First, Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were examined through correlations of SR-T with student perceptions of teacher credibility in the form of competence ($r = .73$, d.f. = 290, $p < .000$), character ($r = .72$, d.f. = 288, $p < .000$), and caring or good will ($r = .75$, d.f. = 284, $p < .000$). The substantiation of these hypotheses provides further evidence of the strength of the SR-T predictive validity. Next, Hypothesis 4 was examined through the correlation of SR-T with their evaluation of that teacher ($r = .87$, d.f. = 288, $p < .000$).

Hypothesis 5 was examined by correlating SR-T with three reports of student behaviors: 1) student's report of self-behaviors representing general classroom respectful behaviors ($r = .46$, $d.f. = 284$, $p < .000$), 2) student reports of self-behaviors representing waiting/listening behaviors associated with that teacher ($r = .21$, $d.f. = 280$, $p < .000$), and 3) student reports reflecting self-interaction behaviors with the teacher ($r = .05$, $d.f. = 288$, $p = .29$). On this basis, SR-T validity was evaluated as receiving a low to moderate level of support with two of three tests of the fundamental hypothesis confirmatory.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 was tested through the correlation of SR-T with student reports of the target teacher's behaviors representing respect for the students ($r = .46$, $d.f. = 282$), $p < .000$). The SR-T validity received further confirmation from the substantiation of this hypothesis.

Five of the six validity hypotheses were fully supported. The fifth hypothesis was supported in two of three different operationalizations. On this basis, the convergent validity of the SR-T was considered to be confirmed.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that cognitions representing student respect for a teacher are measurable within the context of the college educational system. The data demonstrates adequate internal reliability and establishes sufficient validity to proceed with the use of this tool.

SR-T was examined relative to associations to four other cognitions, specifically student reports of three factors of teacher credibility and the student evaluation of the teacher. There was a strong positive relationship between the students' perceptions of respect for a teacher with regard to reports of the teachers' competence, caring, and character and the student's evaluation of the teacher. As expected, these correlations were fairly high. The conceptual relationship between SR-T and credibility and evaluation is very strong and the data provide credence to these associations. Future research should explore further this association and identify distinguishing aspects.

Student reports of general classroom behaviors and of behaviors during periods of waiting and listening were moderately and significantly associated with SR-T. However, student reports of interaction-oriented behaviors with that teacher were not correlated with SR-T. The latter may be an instance where our cultural guidelines for public interactions with teachers take precedence in the mature college student such that low levels of respect are not influential upon interaction behavior decisions. This, of course, may not be the case with elementary students or even secondary students who may not yet have that cultural guideline as well established.

SR-T was correlated with student reports of the target teacher's behavior that was considered as representative of the teacher's respect for the student. This clearly indicates the strong communicative value maintained within the communication style and specific behaviors of the teacher when interacting with students. If a teacher is perceived by students to behave disrespectfully to students, students respect for that teacher will be reflective of that state. Future research should explore this association from a cause-effect foundation. With the classroom behaviors of elementary and secondary teachers better prepared through their educational certification process than are typical college teachers, we may find the proportion of SR-T variance accounted for by disrespectful teacher behaviors in the college environment to exceed that found in lower educational levels. Should research confirm this speculation, higher education administrators may wish to address this concern during the various teacher development programs available for the college instructor.

Now that a reliable and valid measurement tool is available, there should be expanded

investigation of the sources that may have impacted and/or generated different levels of respect for a teacher (e.g., parents, peers, personal experience, impression-making) at all educational levels. And future research should explore student respect for teachers as a group, again at all levels of education. Also at the collegiate level there should be more specific investigation of learning outcomes as a function of the student's respect for teachers. And finally, researchers should investigate the potential for positive impact options available to teachers and administrators.

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