

**How reliance on teachers affects students' perception of
effective lecturers:**

The case of community college students in Hong Kong

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Perception of Effective Lecturers

- In studying students' perception of effective lecturers, researchers (e.g. Onwuegbuzie et. al, 2007; Schonwetter, Clifton and Perry, 2002) adopt a contingent approach.
- Whether lecturers are perceived to be “good” by students should depend on the context where the lecturer and student interact.

Different students, different experience

- If students with different attributes should have different perception on effective lecturer => different students will have different learning experience even when they were taught by the same (or similar) lecturers.

The study

- Methodology: The present report is extracted from the qualitative phase of a mixed methods study which aimed to examine students' perceptions of a good lecturer
- Samples: Recruited by snowball sampling, eighteen recent graduates of a community college in Hong Kong were interviewed.
- Data analysis: Thematic analysis.

The result

- One of the themes identified is the ‘Degree of Reliance’ of the students on their lecturers.
- The study reveals that students can be classified into three distinct groups based on their Degree of Reliance on their lecturers: *Prescriber, Pathfinder* and *Inspirer*.

Prescriber

- Students from the *Prescriber* group have no ideas about what they need to learn, and how they can learn them. They rely *completely* on the lecturers to find out what they needed to learn, to prepare the materials and then deliver it to them.
- To a certain extent, students view themselves as *patients* and their lecturers as *doctors* who can identify their problems and prescribed medical treatments that were needed to cure their sickness (Shi, 1999).

Verbatim Quotations from *Prescribers (1)*

- In discussing how difficult the class should be:
“ ... *I assume our teachers know about our level or our ability ...*”
- Lecturer should identify the key points in the teaching materials for the students: “... *I would prefer my teacher just telling me these are important, and I can focus on those materials...*”

Verbatim Quotations from *Prescribers (2)*

- Lecturers are expected to select important information from the textbooks or other sources, and then to convert or reorganise the more difficult materials into a form that can be accepted by students. “*Sometimes, the textbook does not explain some of the concepts clearly, and the teacher has to help the student to understand...*”

Verbatim Quotations from *Prescribers* (3)

- So, if the students cannot learn something, it is the failure of the lecturer as he cannot *take the initiative to help* the students (Wilkenson, 1992):
“... *Not everyone is very active, those passive ones, they will be too afraid to ask ... if you don't actively ask them whether they have any questions, they will keep silence ... they will take a lot of time in searching for the answer ... rather than asking you for the answer or discuss the problem with you ...*”

Pathfinder

- Students of this group are more active. They have the desire and the basic ability to learn but they are unable or unwilling to tell the right from wrong, or to differentiate the important from the unimportant.
- They are just like the tourists who do not know how to get to their destinations, so they had to rely on the pathfinder to show them the correct path and guard them from the wrong path.

Verbatim Quotations from *Pathfinders* (1)

- Lecturer should separate the important from the unimportant: “... *so the teacher must play a very important role, and he points out to the students which parts are important ... which parts are ‘good to know’ but not ‘must know’ ... an ordinary person would not have the ability to remember the whole book, it is impossible ... they have to focus on important things.*”

Verbatim Quotations from *Pathfinders* (2)

- The lecturer is expected to be a source of reliable information and knowledge: a student expected her lecturer to “*collect information from several books, summarise this information and use it to supplement the weakness of our textbook*”. The lecturer must tell her not just what was in the textbook, as it would “*really does not mean much*” to her. The lecturer must go beyond that and tell her about the strength and weakness of different books – something that she cannot do.

Verbatim Quotations from *Pathfinders* (3)

- Student relied on the lecturer to supply the most updated, and more useful, materials to her:
“...our subject (social work) is directly related to the society, and society keeps changing ... some outdated teaching materials may not be useful/true anymore ... even though we read newspapers every day, but no one reads all newspapers... but if the lecturer can tell us the most updated information, and then we can search for a little more, then it will be perfect”

Inspirer

- Students from the *Inspirer* group are generally independent of their lecturers, yet inspirations from lecturers are considered important.
- Students are motivated to learn and they have high expectations for their lecturers.
- Lecturers should know a lot more than that is in the textbook, and they are expected to have in-depth knowledge in *cross-subject* issues as they are expected to help students to see things from a different angle or to understand matters from a different perspective.

Verbatim Quotations from *Inspirers*

(1)

- A student elaborated on why different perspective was important: “... *for sociology students like me, some teachers have their own viewpoints, or some writers may have their own viewpoints ... they may have different understanding, and they have confidence in their viewpoints, that is sufficient ... they don't have to be perfect, that is not necessary, I feel that if they can lead us to seeing thing from a different perspective, that will be more important.*”

Verbatim Quotations from *Inspirers*

(2)

- These students prefer in-depth theoretical discussions to flexible or interesting activities because they perceive the former can give them “*deeper understanding*” of the materials: “... *These reasons about why some workers are so poor, the reasons behind all these, have to be understood through multiple angles... multiple perspectives ... and you have to use some more boring methods (like lecturing) to get (a deeper) understanding, you cannot achieve that by some superficial methods such as role play.*”

Verbatim Quotations from *Inspirers*

(3)

- Challenging examination can actually inspire these students (Parris, 2008) “... *if I cannot answer it (a difficult question paper), that could mean I have some deficiencies in learning this subject ... if I have deficiencies ... then I may fail in competing with others when I enter university ... then this difficult question paper may even stimulate students to study harder.*”

Suggestions for teaching *Prescribers*

- The passive *Prescribers* can still be very hard working; they rely on the lecturer to *tell them what to do*. Teaching methods that are highly organised can benefit them. (Hancock, 2002)
- If the lecturer can give these students very *clear and specific instructions* and the *suitable materials*, they are willing to follow the instructions, and ‘learn’ these materials and even get fairly good grades in their examinations.

Suggestion for teaching *Pathfinders*

- Teaching these students can be a difficult task as lecturers are expected to be well informed and very updated.

Suggestion for teaching *Inspirers*

- Lecturers can challenge students so that they can be motivated to improve (Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2003)

Conclusion (1)

- Students who have high reliance on their lecturers (e.g, *Prescribers*) are more sensitive to *human skills* of the lecturers.
- As these students rely heavily on the lecturers for suitable content and instructions that are required on their learning process, lecturers with poor human skills can break this vital connection and make students' learning difficult.

Conclusion (2)

- Students who have lower reliance for their lecturers (i.e. *Pathfinders* and *Inspirers*) are more sensitive to *technical skills* and *conceptual skills* of the lecturers. These students prefer a lecturer who knows a lot about the subject and who can deliver the materials in a challenging way.

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