

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS' MORALE AND BEHAVIOR

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Teacher morale has been identified by many researchers as an important variable contributing to successful teaching. Bentley and Rempel state that morale is an imprecise, although highly important, term and that some authorities consider morale to be the emotional and mental reaction of people to their jobs. They continue that the level of morale is determined by how an individual's needs are satisfied; the extent to which the individual perceives satisfaction as stemming from the total job situation. High morale is evident when there is interest in and enthusiasm for the job. Bentley and Rempel defined morale as the professional interest and enthusiasm that a person displays toward the achievement of individual and group goals in a given job situation (1970, 1-2).

A commonly hypothesized association is made between morale and performance, or teaching behavior, by many researchers (Blocker and Richardson, 1963; Greenwood and Soar, 1973; and Robinson and Connors, 1961). If this is, in fact, the case; it would provide useful information in predicting classroom performance on the basis of teachers' morale.

### *The Research Question*

Based upon the need identified above, the research question was formulated to be: What relationship exists between Virginia first-year Agricultural Education teachers' morale and their teaching behavior in the classroom?

### *Methodology*

*Design.* This study was descriptive in nature and employed survey techniques. It could be described as a post-test-only design, or a one-shot case study, of a pre-experimental nature.

*Sample.* The invited sample was all first-year teachers of Vocational Agriculture in Virginia enrolled in a course for first-year teachers in 1973-74. The accepting (responding and data) sample of the study was 29 on the *Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire*, and 27 on the *Flanders Interaction Analysis*.

*Dependent Variables and Instrumentation.* Teacher morale, one of the dependent variables studied, was determined by using a self-report instrument. The instrument used was the *Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire* (PTO). The PTO is a one hundred item instrument that yields ten factor scores and a total score. Reliability of the instrument, in terms of Kuder-Richardson internal consistency coefficients, has been established ranging from .79 to .98 with an overall coefficient of .96, and test-retest correlations are .87 for the total score (Bentley and Rempel, 1970). With morale being in the affective domain, validity is only in terms of "face validity" and the general acceptance and usage of the instrument by the educational community.

Teacher behavior, the second dependent variable, was determined by using the ten category system of *Flanders' Interaction Analysis*. Reliability of this technique depends upon the training of the observers (McGaw, 1972; Medley, 1963; and Ober, 1968). The observers in this study were the professional staff in the Agricultural Education Program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, who had been trained in the use of interaction analysis. Validity of this technique is similar to that of the PTO.

*Treatment and Conditions of Testing.* Although in the purest interpretation of the word, no treatment existed. Subjects were tested by virtue of the fact that they were first-year teachers of Vocational Agriculture and had completed most of one year in the profession. They were then self-selected.

The PTO was administered during the spring quarter at small group meetings of the aforementioned course in a classroom setting.

The interaction analysis took place during an all-day visit of the VPI & SU faculty member to the teacher as a part of the course. This enabled the faculty member to select a classroom setting for the use of the technique, as opposed to alternate settings (laboratory, etc.). Three-to-five minute time periods, twenty and forty minutes into the class period, were arbitrarily selected for data gathering by the faculty members. At this time they recorded the teacher-student interaction using the *Flanders' Interaction Analysis*.

*Data Analysis.* Norm group comparisons for representative junior and senior high school teachers are presented as calculated by the producers of the PTO. Mean and median data were calculated on the PTO.

The information gathered by the *Flanders' Interaction Analysis* would be recordings every three seconds over the two, three-to-five minute, periods sampled. This could yield recordings of any of the ten categories, as observed. Frequency counts were first made for each of the ten categories of the interaction analysis. These frequency counts were then grouped into the four groups of silence or confusion, student talk, teacher indirect talk, or teacher direct talk; as suggested by Amidon and Flanders (1963). The proportion of each, as it made up the total time sample, was then calculated.

Correlation coefficients were then calculated from the groupings of the interaction analysis and the PTO results.

### Results

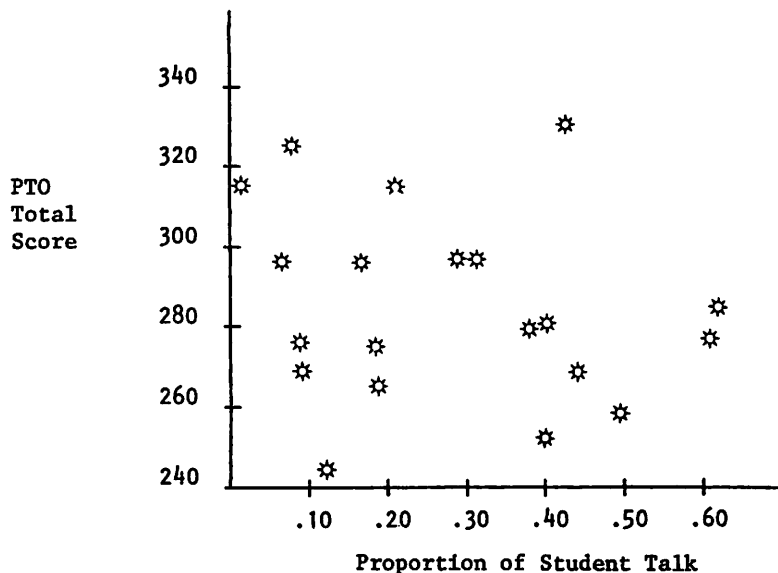
The data from the interaction analysis and PTO were first correlated addressing the problem statement: "What relationship exists between Virginia first-year Agricultural Education teachers' morale and behavior?" Only one correlation of a moderate nature was found, for "student talk," as shown in Table 1. A scatterplot was then made to determine the linearity of this relationship (see Figure 1). The direction of slope is negative and the magnitude of correlation for the variables on the scatterplot is .52. This would indicate, with moderation, that as respondents' morale (total score on the PTO) decreased the more students were allowed to talk during class; or conversely, as respondents' morale increased the less students were allowed to talk.

Table 1  
Correlation of Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire  
with Flanders' Interaction Analysis  
Groupings

Grouping	PTO
Teacher Talk - Direct	+ .17
Teacher Talk - Indirect	+ .20
Teacher Talk - Total	+ .18
Student Talk	- .52
Silence or Confusion	+ .07

Figure 1

Scatterplot of PTO and Interaction Analysis Groupings for Student Talk



These findings would indicate that, with the one exception noted, these variables do not vary together and that one cannot predict one by knowing the other.

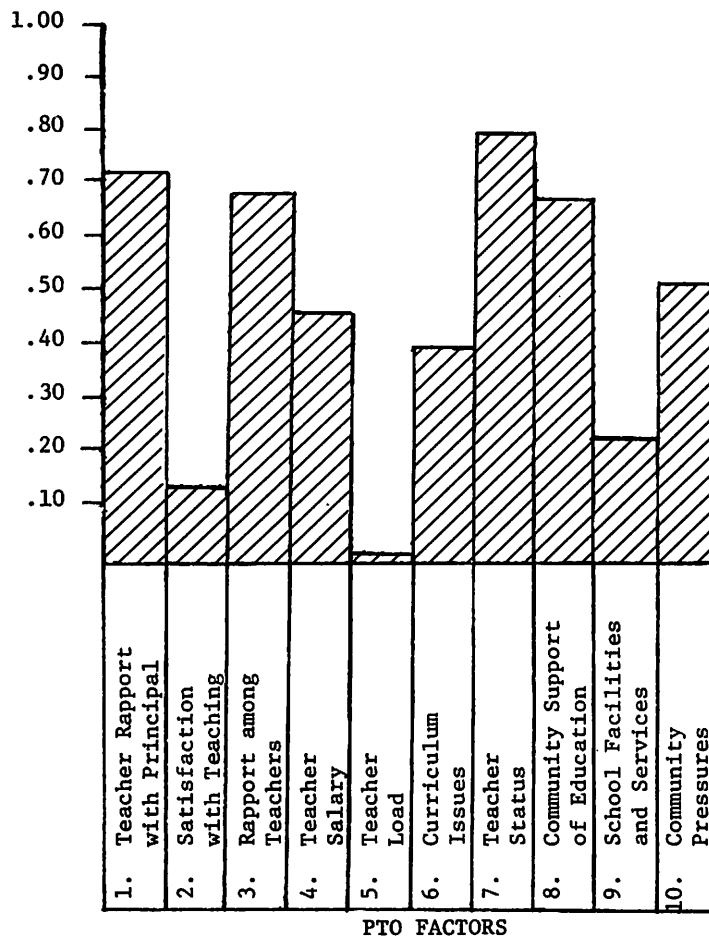
Figure 2 illustrates the comparison of the Virginia first-year teachers of Vocational Agriculture with the norm group of representative junior and senior high school teachers.

#### *Summary*

The most noteworthy findings of this study came from the results obtained from the PTO, since very little correlation was found between teachers' morale and behavior. One must consider that this is survey research, conducted upon a self-selected (class members) sample, that the validity of the instrument is limited to face validity and that the study was conducted with only Virginia teachers. However, even with keeping these limitations in mind, the results from the morale variable are worthy of further consideration. Therefore, a further discussion of the PTO will be presented in this summary.

Figure 2

Percentile Comparison of First-Year Teachers  
with Representative Junior and Senior  
High School Teachers



*Teacher Rapport with Principal.* This factor deals with the teachers' feelings about the principal. As shown in Figure 2, the first year teachers located at the seventy-first percentile. These data would seem to indicate that the respondents did not possess as secure a working relationship with the principal as they might have. At least twenty-nine percent of this norm group reported a better working relationship than the sample studied.

*Satisfaction with Teaching.* Items within this factor dealt with respondents looking at other occupations, job competency, love of teaching, and job satisfaction. The twelfth percentile response would indicate that eighty-eight percent of the norm group were more satisfied with teaching.

*Rapport among Teachers.* The sixty-seventh percentile response for first-year Vocational Agriculture teachers in Virginia would indicate that thirty-three percent of the norm group saw themselves with a better rapport.

*Teacher Salary.* This factor deals with the teachers' feelings about salaries and salary policies. Teachers responding placed this at the forty-fifth percentile. Fifty-five percent of the norm group would have better feelings about this factor.

*Teacher Load.* This factor dealt with such matters as record keeping, clerical work, community demands, extra-curricular load and keeping up-to-date professionally. Particularly low scores were noted on the questions of this factor that dealt with "red tape" and required reports, community demands, teaching loads, hours of teaching, and the class being a "dumping ground" for problem students. This factor was at the first (.01) percentile. Ninety-nine percent of the norm group perceived their load more favorably than did the sample. This would indicate that all facets of the educational community in Virginia should take a serious look at the teaching load of first-year Vocational Agriculture teachers.

*Curriculum Issues.* This factor was placed at the thirty-eighth percentile by the respondents. It deals with how well the programs are meeting student needs and preparing students for effective citizenship.

*Teacher Status.* This factor deals with the security, prestige and benefits afforded by teaching. This factor, placed at the seventy-eighth percentile, is the highest percentile comparison made.

*Community Support of Education.* This factor deals with community understanding and willingness to support a sound educational system. As compared with the norm group, respondents were placed at the sixty-seventh percentile.

*School Facilities and Equipment.* This factor is concerned with the adequacy of facilities and efficiency of procedures for obtaining materials and services. This factor was at the twenty-first percentile. Looking at items under this factor, the adequacy of aids and equipment afforded the highest median response, with the adequacy of clerical services receiving the lowest item rating.

*Community Pressures.* This factor relates to community expectations regarding a teacher's personal standards, participation in outside-school activities and freedom to discuss controversial issues in the classroom. As compared with the norm group, respondents placed this factor at the fiftieth percentile. The lowest item response on this factor dealt with having their nonprofessional activities outside school unduly restricted. Their highest item response indicated that pressures from the community did not restrict their teaching affectiveness.

*Overall Norm Group.* Data were also available on the PTO for all teachers who took the instrument and not just the representative junior and senior high school teachers. The comparison of the first-year teachers' ratings with this overall norm group is noteworthy. In no case do the first year teachers rank above the ninetieth percentile. A large number of the factor medians fell between the tenth and fiftieth percentile. Satisfaction with teaching and teaching load were below the tenth percentile.

### *Implications*

A very real concern has evolved from this study concerning the morale of the first-year teachers of Vocational Agriculture in Virginia. These concerns become of an exigent nature when implications are considered, particularly in terms of teacher retention and the teacher shortage. It has been illustrated that teacher load and satisfaction with teaching placed this group below the tenth percentile.

The tenet has long been maintained that Vocational Agriculture teachers are, as a group, a contented group with high morale. These findings do not support this tenet. Steps should be initiated to ameliorate the difficulties that are encountered by first-year teachers that contribute to low morale. Because of the nature of this study, casual relationships cannot be drawn. However, further research might be justified.

*Implications for Further Study.* Some suggested questions for further research resulting from this study are:

1. Are teachers with low morale more likely to leave teaching?
2. What characteristics of the teaching position contribute to high or low morale?
3. Are Virginia first-year Vocational Agriculture teachers representative of other Vocational Agriculture teachers?

4. Are Vocational Agriculture teachers' morale congruent with other vocational teachers?
5. What is the morale of first-year teachers in other states?

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