ened understanding of the role of commentary increases student participation as students start to see that their ideas are the essential commodity in both class discussions and successful papers.

"I have to learn how to write for this professor to do well in this class. . . . My other English professor liked my writing"—those words, which many teachers have endlessly heard from their students, express the illusion under which students live: That each teacher has his or her own subjective set of criteria. The sooner teachers can get their students to come to terms with the truth that, while certain emphases may vary, objective standards govern effective, clear writing, the sooner students can set asside their defensive strategies and respond positively to feedback. As a matter of fact, what students must realize is that no writer is fully a writer until he or she has demonstrated a keen ability to comment upon someone else's written work.

NOTE

1. Erika C. Lindemann writes, "Formative comments, the kind that support learning, praise what has worked well, demonstrate how or why something else didn't, and encourage students to try new strategies" (227).

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CHAPTER 4

The Teacher's Pet Phenomenon: From Dysfunction to Learning Model

David D. Perlmutter

The dark side of the favorite pupil or the teacher's pet phenomenon has been methodically explored in the literature of student-educator relationships and classroom dynamics. Rates as high as 90% of students surveyed say that they have observed favoritism at work in the classroom (Tal & Babad, 1989). Favoritism can be expressed in many ways, from praising one student above others to various nonverbal cues of like and dislike (Rickey & Rickey, 1978). Moreover, students commonly express concern with the degree of favoritism of their teachers, especially with how it affects the amount of teacher attention and grades (Weinstein 1989; Morgan et al., 1992). In one survey, college students rate favoritism in grading as the most unethical behavior that teachers could engage in (Keefe, 1982). Even when favoritism does not seem to affect grades, it can affect the climate of the classroom (Tal & Babad, 1990).

The goal of this chapter is to examine the subject of teacher's pet or favoritism, and its relationship to written commentary on student papers. First, I emphasize the importance of the idea of teacher's pet in the contemporary classroom: how it affects students' attitudes toward their teachers and schooling in general and thus also affects how teachers' comments on paper are received—from whether they are read at all to how they are perceived as either fair or unfair and worthy of follow-up through discussion or not. Second, I make a radical argument: Rather than viewing the teacher's pet as a dysfunction, teachers should glean the positive attributes of the "ideal" student-teacher relationship and apply them to their written and oral interaction with all students. Finally, I operationalize this argument by outlining when and how to make the lessons of teacher's pet work for teachers in written commentary on student papers.

When I taught my first class of undergraduates, I kept a log of which students came to see me during office hours (and by appointment) and for how long. Purely an informal amusement at first, the data metamorphosed into a project that continues to this day. I have noted several patterns about the length and quality of student-teacher interaction; one pattern surprises me particularly: The students who came to see me most often and for the longest time were almost always the ones that I liked the most. Written commentary on their papers, or the quality of the classroom experience, or both, seemed to entice them to show up for office hours and beyond. I considered this a pedagogical success. The students who spent the most time in my office were the ones to whom I gave the most personal attention. Not only were these the students whose learning experience I enriched the most, they were the students who gave me the most gratification as a teacher. The fertile dialog was the one aspect of modern teaching not far removed from the ancient Academy, where Plato cajoled his young men, and where, as Milton put it, "the Attic bird trilled her warbled note."

Underlying all my pedagogical assumptions then is that interaction with students through comments, e-mail, or other lexical forms of communication is only one dimension of the student-teacher relationship. It seems to me that platonic dialog, without the actual moralizing and cant of the Greek philosopher, evokes the ideal teacher-student relationship, one which definitely can improve teaching in the most significant way in the contemporary classroom that even in the most well-funded small liberal arts college simply still does not allow for courses to be taught with the desirable richness of communication.

Indeed, there are several reasons why it is important not to restrict the learning experience to commentary. For one thing, we don't know whether students are reading it, nor do we know how they are perceiving it. For another, teachers may not even know how students are acting on it. In any case, the metacommunication of written commentary (e.g., "I, teacher, have things to tell you that you find useful") may be more important than any particular comment. It is imperative that the teachers review the commentary in person to explain, justify, and help students to apply it to future work.

Assumptions like those I have expressed do not downgrade the importance of written commentary on student papers, they only help to put these comments in context of the wider learning experience. Written commentary cannot stand alone—Students won't let it. It must be the introduction to a dialog in the classroom and in the teacher's office, not an end in itself. While the well-pointed critique of a term paper or the *bon mot* in an e-mail reply gives us some satisfaction, I argue that only through personal interaction can the written comments have full meaning for the students.[1]

Favoritism is relevant to discussions of the topic of commentary on student papers for several reasons. First, the comments teachers give students are necessarily not wholly objective. Many factors influence what teachers say to students, what teachers write on student papers, and what marks students receive for an assignment. No matter what steps teachers take to reach objectivity, they will fail partly because almost all courses provide leeway for the instructor to make judgments about the quality of student work that are based on subjective estimates. In many courses at higher levels, especially those that involve student research papers, critical essays, book reports, or term papers and writing exercises, the scope of subjectivity increases. Therefore it is vital to ask if what feeling teachers have for students affects what they get from the courses, not only in comments and grades but in learning outcomes as well.

Second, student-teacher relationships do not have to range into the obviously socially destructive (e.g., sexual) to have a possible nefarious impact on the education system. Many studies have repeatedly shown that students are aware, for example, of favoritism among teachers, and often resent it and take it as an example of inequity in the classroom (Engelberg, 1988). It matters then if we like, don't like, or don't care about the class and the individual students even if grades are not affected; the perception of favoritism, or teacher's pets and teacher's banes, may be enough to degrade the learning atmosphere for all students. Perceived inequity demoralizes students and is thus unconducive to learning. Moreover, being labeled as a teacher's pet may in fact undermine a student's relationship with other students (Moulton et al., 1998).

Psychologically, as well, favoritism and its opposite present a challenge to teachers' satisfaction with teaching. On the one hand, most "good teaching" primers advocate avoiding favoritism (e.g., Guyton, 1995; Orange, 2000). Yet, all teachers will admit that while they might "love the kids," they love some more than others. The bright penny, the engaging, interesting, hardworking, and even the polite and chirpy student who gives the teacher the most positive responses to his or her work necessarily makes him or her feel best as a teacher (Brophy, 1983; Perlmutter, 2001). Indeed, teacher assessment of students is hardly ever fickle and random: teachers unavoidably have finite sets of criteria from which they draw to assess students' behavior, which affects their relationships with students and then affects in turn teacher evaluation, although not necessarily student grades in the course (Parr and Valerius, 1999).

Trying to cut such ties would be destructive both to teachers and to their "extraordinary" student progeny. Because the absence of such reciprocity may actually lead to teacher burnout (van Horn, Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1999), there is a sense in which favoritism of this type is functional: Do not most great achievers mention a special teacher who took an interest in them? Rather than being discouraged from creating such bonds, teachers should understand the costs and implications for them as well as for the rest of the classroom.

There is an administrative component to this issue rarely considered by teachers: In any educational institution, whether private or public, it is a ubiquitous code of the teaching profession to try not to discriminate for or against students for any reason, be it of their racial or ethnic characteristics. To paraphrase, teachers are paid to teach all students well, not just some. Therefore, "all" should include students teachers like as well as those they don't like. Adminstrators have, in effect, promised parents that their children will get an equal education. If teachers let it fester without employing its positive lessons, favoritism may violate this contract.

Indeed, in light of the increasing diversity of America's schools, it is all the more important that teachers increase their alertness and sensitivity to the issue of favoritism in the classroom and the grade book. The day when college teachers and their students in this country were basically of the same ethnicity and background is ending: Classrooms, especially at larger public institutions, are fast approaching United Nations' committees in look and sound. It is natural that some of the rules of favoritism may be racist or ethnocentric, since people tend to like those who are most like them, talk like them, or look like them. J. Baker (1999) writes that, from earliest childhood, "special" relationships with a teacher whom the students perceive as paying close attention to them can be great incentives to learning and achievement. A reverse phenomenon might also concurrently exist, a sort of model minority affection for certain groups.[2]

In sum, it is important for teachers, when considering what students think about what teachers say to them, to reflect on what teachers feel about students. Love, as well as indifference, dislike, and hate, are normal human emotions that cannot be turned on or off at will. Their place within a teacher's behavior, comments, and grading toward students, however, needs to be identified, categorized, and examined. The goal is not to eliminate the biases of favoritism and disfavor but to make sure that teachers do understand and apply the positive and functional elements within teacher's pet.

Teacher-pet relations are conducted between human beings with pre-existing cognitive, physiological, emotional, and personality-driven preferences and prejudices. Therefore, teachers need to take cognizance of the likelihood that individuals may tend to seek out similar partners for the relationships. For me, I am mindful of the fact that the student most likely to be a pet in my class

is the student who might be called the bright penny. He or she is the one who tends to speak up in class (but not too much), who expresses lively interest in material, asks a relatively high number of pertinent questions and displays enterpreneurial energy and forethought about projects or studies.

This is the type of student Tal and Babad (1990) refer to as the "high expectancy" student, the one the teacher expects much from in terms of classroom performance and approval of the teacher's own teaching style and skills.[3] He or she is the student whom the teacher percieves as having a high expectancy of performance from the teacher. This is the top student, and it is he or she who gets the teacher's increased attention in terms of class time, extra-class time, and commentary on papers.

Visibly, the interaction between the teacher's pet and the instructor is generally of a higher quality; this is noticeable to other students. In this interaction, ego validation is involved: The teacher's pet gets more praise from the teacher—orally, kinesically, and in commentary on papers. As a result, the Teacher's Pet feels better about him- or herself. The situation may lead to career enhancement: The teacher's pet gets more support from the teacher in his or her advancement in education and career pursuits. Because the practice can negatively affect classroom morale, as Babad (1995) rightly notes, I think that one can argue the teacher should strive to apply the lessons of the teacher's pet phenomenon across board to all the students.

Nonetheless, the emphasis in action plans should fall on student effort, on the student's own consuming desire to learn. Teachers' sentimental concerns with equity alone can idealize, and it will not do for them to understand and desire to apply the positive elements of teacher's pet phenomenon to all students. Virtually every teacher's pet comes to see his or her teacher during office hours and at other times because the teacher has asked the teacher's pet to and he or she expects a positive interchange from the personal meeting. An underlying assumption shared both by teacher and the teacher's pet is that the teacher's oral comments include points of interest on which the teacher's pet wishes to further follow up, and the Teacher's pet sees value (grade raising, career enhancement, ego-gratification, richer learning) in further personalization of the learning experience.

Certainly, all these entry points to follow are, it should be underscored, positive ones: Undoubtedly a teacher's pet might want to learn what he or she "did wrong" as much as what he or she "did right," but it would be the rarest students (or indeed professors) who want to face an aloof being who does nothing but detail shortcomings. Furthermore, within the interaction dialog of notes on paper or discussion in the office, suggestions for improvement can be placed within a positive context. Even if a negative critique may be the result, a positive point of entry for teacher commentary obviously offers a better opportunity for inducing clarifications in student papers.

Thus, the "please see me" note, for example, must be written with caution. As research has shown, students judge the note based on the degree of the security of their attachment with the teacher and the learning institution (Perrine, 1999). The marginal learner, the at-risk group member, may perceive those three bare words as a hostile introduction to confrontation (Baker, 1999). That is why I advocate not writing "please see me" in so many words. Rather, I suggest taking specific points of interest in a student paper—positive ones—as special gateways to further dialog. For example, finding a single statement in a paper that might (legitimately) prompt: "This is interesting—I hadn't thought of that. Can we talk about it some time?" Note that this does not mean that at the meeting itself shortcomings with students' work might not be introduced and dissected, but that the bridge of perceptual understanding should be based on a positive note. In addition, the notation should be sincere, albeit this may take some effort on the teacher's part for certain students' papers.

On term papers or writing assignments, I use a number of tactical maneuvers, either together or separately. First, as an introduction to dialog, I write the "please see me," within the venue of a standard meeting, not a special invitation to doom. I attempt requiring (or giving an incentive with "give-back" points) every student to see the teacher after each exam or paper. Office sessions can be scheduled ahead of time.

Second, what I call *negative overload* is a disincentive for students to learn what they are doing wrong and indeed to understand that they are committing any errors in the first place. Negative overload is in some respects gratifying to the teacher: we fulfill our "Kingsfield" stereotype of the "tough" teacher castigating the slackers. But again, the question is, what is the outcome? (No suggestions that I have made here calls for lowering of standards or inflating grades.) Simply put: the more the red, the less it's read. Too many (critical) red marks convince most students that their case is hopeless and that further communication about how to improve is pointless. To use a sports metaphor: People will overcome a hurdle, but will walk away from a stone wall.

That's why I suggest another tactic which, although it slightly increases the teacher's workload, better lends itself to student learning. In practice, what to do is to only hand back the first page of the paper. Keep the rest of the paper in your office ready to pull out for the meeting. This first page is one that you can mark—judiciously—but save your real narrative criticisms for the rest of the document. One way to cut down on red marks is to point out the first grammatical error of a type and then leave unmarked all repetitions of the error. (This also allows for students to make corrections themselves either in the office meeting or as part of an extra-credit assignment.)

Finally, a tactic to engage students individually is to return papers without grades—for these they must come to your office.

All of these tactical maneuvers allow the teacher to push toward that office meeting. There, the teacher can, as will be expressed shortly, personalize his or her commentary to each individual student.

Teachers may expand the lessons of the teacher's pet to the actual commentary on the students' papers. Certainly, as said, reducing negative criticism to single instances will help. However, beyond that the teacher must, as a Norwegian saying goes, "include some sweet to get the child to eat the salt." In simplistic application this means finding something good in every paper (and every student). But since at the high school or college level this can draw dangerously close to ritual (insincere) praise that only invites the contempt of the student, the teacher must see to it that self-esteem is built on stone, not sand.

I think a second lesson from the Teacher's Pet that can be applied on a more sophisticated level should deal with the lure of career outcome assistance. One of the characteristics that teachers appreciate and should encourage in students is the long view, the ability to see connections between classroom knowledge and life success. Note that this should not be confused with the entirely different mindset of the "show me the money" student. In my experience, enabling students to grasp that distinction is the hardest task a teacher faces. An example from one of my classes will explain this.

In a class in mass communication theory that I teach, most of the master's students do not wish to continue on to get a Ph.D. They thus enter the course, which is required of graduate students in our school, with some fear of and a general disdain for "high falutin' theory." Part of my job is to convince these types of students that theory is part of all life and work experience. Visionary leaders, for example, develop theories that allow them to succeed in politics, war, business, and so on. Therefore, understanding how to create, review literature on, critique, and test theories is part of all successful communication and professional employment even if the workers may not call it so by name.

The majority of the professionally oriented MA students resist this "lesson." Because only a few grasp my "theory is ubiquitous" paradigm, and even fewer begin to develop examples from their own lives that can fit into it, the challenge for me becomes to discover for the student majority examples in their present work and aspired career goals that can serve as "eureka" moments for each of them. The eventual use of teacher commentary as a prompt to open up such linkages for the students is what I advocate.

Typically, classroom discussion—right from the first class day—will elicit the students' self-reports about what they want out of school and their career. I have them write a short essay on the following topic: If, upon graduation, I could make a phone call and get you any job in the world, what would it be and why do you want it? Almost always students (graduate students) take this question seriously. They do not list silly fantasies but real entry-level career starting jobs. I keep track of these and find ways to insert what might be called *personal enhancement prompts* into paper comments. For instance, if a student wants to work as a manager for bands in the music industry, I tailor comments to known research on marketing of popular music: audience targeting and segmentation, demographic and psychographics, predictive patterns and models. These prompts are targeted by comments, such as "I want to talk about this. Could you come by for a chat?" I prepare follow-up information for the personalized discussion.

What I am arguing here is that, contrary to much of what has been written on the subject, favoritism can be a positive classroom force, but only if we teachers learn from what makes favoritism functional and apply some of its lessons in dealing with the rest of class. In short, we should find a way to allow us to think of some students as special (although perhaps more in personal interactions), but all students as equals: more *primus inter partes* than head-and-shoulders above the class. The teacher's pet is a good thing, placed in a personal context, and only becomes dysfunctional in the modern large classroom, where it translates into inequity that causes disruption for the rest of the class. I cannot therefore call—as some researchers have done—for the elimination or dilution of the teacher's pet because I see it as integral to the entire educational apparatus—not just teacher job satisfaction. Indeed, it is one gem passed down to us from the original model of the Platonic student-teacher continuing dialog. The lesson of all of this is that, if we as teachers may have in any particular course one student who is our special favorite, that does not mean that we are released from making the necessary extra effort to find enhancement items in the papers—and minds, hopes, and dreams—of all of our students.

NOTES

1. I have often joked with my colleagues that office hours are more fun than teaching; one-on-one interactions with students that allow extensive discussion (in the tradition of the Platonic dialog) are stimulating, presumably to the student as well. Obviously, the highly motivated, capable, high-achieving student is also more likely to show up to office hours and to be invited to "come by and talk about" topics of interest, including their career goals. Thus our oral extra-class commentary for such students may play as important a role in enhancing student-teacher relationships as what we write on their papers—in fact more.

2. I have heard many colleagues say, for example, that they like students from mainland China because they are "so hardworking and cooperative." It, therefore, seems to me that favoritism of that nature can work against the demographic realities

of modern teaching and thus become even more disruptive to the fair education that would normally be expected.

3. As noted most prominently by Lewis and Hastings (1992) as well as Pichaske (1995), at the other extreme of the teacher's pet phenomenon are relations based on mutual or one-way (harassment) sexual attraction or kinship ties (nepotism), or actual articulated hatred of race, ethnicity, or other demographic factors. All such relations cannot fall under our category because they compromise teacher volition.

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CHAPTER 5

Teaching Generation X: A Dialogical Approach to Teacher Commentary

Robert Samuels

Teachers' commentaries have been changing, and they will no doubt continue to do so in the foreseable future. In this chapter, I will argue that institutional and cultural contexts are the most important determinants of the nature of comments teachers make, for they are the factors that help to shape the student-teacher relationship, especially in the writing classrooms. I will look closely at the social and subjective aspects of the current state of writing instruction and argue for the dialogical model of commentary that takes into account the particular demands facing insecure and untenured composition faculty. One of my primary areas of emphasis will be on the ways that the stress on student evaluations in writing programs alters the basic relationship between students and teachers. While the unstable nature of most writing positions creates a situation where the writing instructor must constantly monitor his or her interactions with students, the consumerist attitude of many "Generation X" students produces an environment of entitlement and defensiveness on the part of the "consumers" of higher education.

In his book *Generation X Goes to College*, Peter Sacks discusses this situation, whereby contemporary college students in America tend to press a sense of entitlement that leads to a low tolerance for any type of criticism or negative feed-