

The Effects of Specific Guidelines on the Accuracy of Student Self-Evaluation

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Cette étude veut vérifier le rôle des guides pédagogiques et du magnétoscope sur la précision de l'évaluation que l'élève fait de lui-même. Dans le cadre d'un cours qui portait sur la communication, on a remis à un premier groupe d'élèves des indications précises sur l'évaluation des tâches qu'ils avaient à accomplir, à un autre groupe, des indications plus générales et à un dernier groupe, aucune indication. De plus, certains groupes pouvaient revoir à l'aide du magnétoscope la tâche qui leur avait été confiée. On a mesuré la précision de l'évaluation que l'élève fait de lui-même en comparant l'évaluation de l'enseignant à celle de l'élève. Les résultats font voir que l'élève réussit et s'évalue mieux lorsqu'on lui donne des indications précises et qu'il peut utiliser le magnétoscope; en cas contraire, c'est-à-dire en l'absence d'indications et par la non-utilisation du magnétoscope, l'élève ne réussit pas et ne s'évalue pas aussi bien. Par la suite, on discute des implications des résultats de cette étude sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage en salle de classe et sur la formation professionnelle des enseignants.

Assessing performance is an integral part of professional development. Many techniques, methods, and organizations exist to provide professionals with external evaluations of their activities, yet a major portion of professional development relies on the process of self-assessment. The ability to assess one's own performance is inherent in the concept of professionalism. Indeed, one of the central determinants of a person's behavior is a desire to assess his or her own abilities, beliefs, and values (Shrauger & Patterson, 1974). In professions where independence is valued or where close supervision and continuous training are impossible, impractical, or inconsistent, self-evaluation serves as a primary means of growth.

Teaching, for example, with its diverse styles, methods, and subjects and its tradition of freedom and responsibility is a profession where self-evaluation is particularly important. Teachers are often expected to be aware of and to recognize the effects of their methods and to strive toward self-improvement. Yet they receive little training in assessing themselves, while receiving extensive assessment by others. This gap in training is not unique to teaching, but exists for virtually all professions.

Present evaluation approaches may actually be encouraging behaviors incompatible with professional growth and development. Seligman (1975) examined behaviors which he called learned helplessness and found

that they stem from the feeling that what one does has no effect on one's life, that persons are merely victims of events, pawns in a game over which they have no control. Evaluation literature rarely discusses the role in the evaluation of the person(s) being evaluated. For example, Airasian and Madaus (1972) fail to describe how the student is involved in the evaluation process when they discuss the relationships of four different types of classroom evaluation: placement, formative, diagnostic, and summative. And while current practices emphasize the distinction between formative (on-going) and summative (grades) evaluation, the influence of the student in formulating these processes or determining their relationship to each other is often ignored.

Growing interest in self-evaluation has resulted from studies showing that teachers trained in self-assessment techniques can improve their teaching (Borg, 1969; Detzner, 1974; Roberson, 1971). These results led the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 1976 to request that all teacher training institutions help teachers develop self-analysis skills. But self-assessment is not simply a matter of objective self-rating. Many factors have been empirically demonstrated to influence the self-evaluation process.

Self-evaluation is influenced by aspirations (Hewitt & Goldman, 1974), interactions with others (Gergen & Wishnau, 1965; Morse & Gergen, 1970), and identification with others (Jones & Gerard, 1967). A person's perception of his or her personal identity will include some assessments of strengths and weaknesses and will therefore relate to feelings of self-worth. Actual ability may not be directly related to the way persons evaluate themselves: a highly skilled person may experience deep feelings of inadequacy stemming from high aspirations, whereas a minimally talented person may experience satisfaction and pride.

Feelings and perceptions of ourselves, particularly our sense of adequacy and worth, have been demonstrated to be more closely affected by our self-concept than by our actual achievement (Mischel, Ebbeson, & Zeiss, 1973). Apprehension about being evaluated by others has been shown to lead students to both underrate and overrate their performance. In classrooms, for example, where evaluation may be seen as threatening the self, individual students will identify with the aspirations and goals of the instructor, therefore interfering with a realistic self-assessment. Shrauger and Patterson (1974) found that when persons were allowed to select dimensions on which they could rate themselves they selected mainly dimensions on which they could rate themselves satisfactorily. Producing accurate self-evaluation is a difficult task because of the many personal and situational variables affecting the self-assessment process.¹ Cohen (1971) expressed it clearly:

Ultimately the most rewarding evaluation although perhaps the most difficult is evaluation of self. This assumes a degree of maturity and a concomitant need for objectivity that are difficult for all, and for some impossible, to attain. (p. 59)

Empirical research is necessary to provide a clearer understanding of the process of self-evaluation so that it can be adopted as a valid method of assessment.

One form of self-evaluation is self-grading, where students are asked to assign themselves a grade or mark. For the purposes of this study self-grading is defined as a person's own assessment of his/her performance on a number of criteria determined by the person or in conjunction with other persons. Can students be encouraged or permitted to take responsibility for evaluating their own performance, that is, can student-teachers who are provided with predetermined, specific, self-assessment guidelines and given opportunities to observe themselves, make accurate assessments of their performance?

This research was directed at understanding additional factors affecting student self-evaluation. Specifically this study examined the relationship between student self-evaluation and instructor evaluation. If a student in training to be a teacher can be provided with the means for accurate self-evaluation and it can be demonstrated that student-teachers can improve their teaching behaviors through self-evaluation, then the process or procedures in supervision can be more adequately directed towards professional growth and development.

Can self-assessment lead to higher performance levels? A second hypothesis was that if students are given specific evaluation guidelines and videotape feedback they will perform at a *higher skill level* than students who have no evaluation guidelines and no video feedback. Only a handful of studies have tried to demonstrate the effects of self-evaluation on performance improvement. In all the studies feedback was manipulated by the experimenter, and thus the self-evaluation was in part a reaction to external manipulations (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962; Maracek & Mattee, 1972; Schalon, 1968). Additional studies, notably Saloman & MacDonald (1970), Warm et al. (1972), and Watts (1973), demonstrated that changes in performance are influenced by opportunities to gain access to specific as compared with general feedback.

In his thorough review of the literature pertaining to responses to evaluation, Shrauger (1975) concludes that a major limitation to all the present work in the field is the almost exclusive reliance on laboratory studies. He calls for systematic investigations which take place in the "naturally occurring evaluative situations" where a person's involvement is high and the outcome of the evaluation of real importance to the individual.

It is interesting to note that the present study took place in a university where any form of self-assessment had been ruled unacceptable by the academic senate. Yet fortunately for the experiment the ruling took place after initiation of the study so the participants operated under the belief that their self-evaluations would "count."

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Forty-eight undergraduates taking an elective course in communication skills were randomly divided into six groups. All groups were required to perform a series of activities designed to achieve the course objectives. These activities were divided into ten 1–1½-hour weekly sessions. Each session was planned as an activity to accompany a lecture, discussion, or demonstration led by the instructor earlier in the week. All the students were told that their grades would be determined by their performance in these sessions, that they would be asked to rate their own performance, and that the rating would be used in determining their final grade. The students in each group were given a packet of materials that consisted of instructions, references, and objectives for each session. In addition, each group received different evaluation-of-the-session guidelines. All groups were told that their sessions would be videotaped, but that only three groups would have immediate access to their tapes, while the other three would have to wait till the end of the course. The organization of the groups is depicted in table 1.

Table 1 / Organization of the Experimental Groups

Videotape Access	Level of Guidelines		
	Specific	General	None
Continuous	Group 1 (SV)	Group 3 (GV)	Group 5 (NV)
Deprived	Group 2 (SN)	Group 4 (GN)	Group 6 (NN)

Members of Group 1 (SV) each received performance rating sheets which listed 10 specific criteria for each session. Each person was asked to rate himself/herself from 1 to 5 on each of the criteria. In addition this group had access to the videotape of their performance. While each session was planned to last 90 minutes, videotaping was limited to a maximum of 45 minutes to enable the group to have time to view their tape during their session. Group members were free to choose whether to rate themselves following the activity or/and following their viewing of the recording.

Group 2 (SN) also received the 10-item criteria list but did not have access to the videotape. Since this group (and the two other groups without access to videotape) did not need time to view the recording, they were asked to spend their remaining time in whatever way they wished; but to control for time spent by the video groups, they were asked to remain in the room until completion of the 90-minute period.

Group 3 (GV) received a general statement about the value of assessing performance, the usefulness of being specific, and the importance of

developing criteria, and suggestions for establishing criteria, but was not given any specific criteria. This group also had access to videotape of their performance.

Group 4 (GN) received the same statements as Group 3 but did not have access to videotape.

Members of Group 5 (NV) were not given any guidelines to assess their performance except an incomplete sentence which read, "I would assess my performance in today's activities in the following way(s) . . ." This group had access to videotape.

Group 6 (NN) received the same statement as Group 5 but had no access to videotape.

All group members were asked to keep their rating sheets, and neither the instructor nor teaching assistant had access to these sheets prior to the determination of the final rating described below.

The instructor and a teaching assistant (a graduate student trained in assessing the skills for the course) viewed all the videotapes (67 hours), and rated the performance of *all* the students on the 10-item specific guidelines assessment sheet. Following the completion of the 10 sessions each student regardless of group was given a 35-item rating sheet and asked to rate his/her own performance on a scale of 1 to 9 for each of the 35 items. The instructor and the teaching assistant also rated the students on the same 35-item assessment sheet, a sample of which is illustrated in table 2. The difference between the total score of the student's self-rating and the total-score rating of the student by the instructor on the 35 items was used as the dependent variable.²

The tasks to be performed by the groups centred around listening skills (reflection, paraphrasing, warmth, attending, and empathy), sending skills (concreteness, perception checking, personalness, genuineness, and self-disclosure), problem-solving skills (leadership, feedback, nonverbal behavior, brainstorming, confronting, and conflict resolution), understanding on an intellectual level (rationale, research, and readings), awareness development (attitudes, behavior change, self-concept, and expectations) and facilitating behaviors (helping others learn skills).

RESULTS

The data were transformed into a degree of disagreement measured by taking the absolute deviation that resulted from subtraction of the instructor's assessment of the student from the student's assessment of his/her own performance. Analysis of variance was applied to a 2×3 completely randomized factorial design with an $N = 8$ in each of the six groups. A fixed-effects linear model was assumed in order to test the effects of videotape feedback and generality of guidelines conditions. The results of the analysis are summarized in table 3.

The difference in mean disagreement in assessment between the guide-

Table 2 / Assessment Sheet

DIRECTIONS: Listed below are the skills, attitudes and intellectual learnings covered in this course. Rate yourself on your attainment on each statement. Where a statement involves a list, an understanding or a description, please demonstrate on the attached sheet your ability to list or describe.

1. I understand what trust is and is not.	Don't Understand	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Fully Understand
2. I understand how trust is developed in a relationship.	Don't Understand	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Fully Understand
3. I can see when another person is trusting me.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
4. I can trust other individuals when it is appropriate.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
5. In order to build trust I can take risks in self-disclosure.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
6. In order to build trust I can respond to another person's risks with acceptance and support.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
7. I can express warmth.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
8. I can personalize my statements.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
9. I understand and can describe the use of paraphrasing feelings and thoughts.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
10. I can paraphrase feelings and thoughts.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
11. I can reflect feelings in another's statements.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
12. I am aware of when another person is taking a risk.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
13. I express appreciation for others taking risks in their interactions with me.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
14. I can recognize "roadblocks" to communication.	Never	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Always
15. I can list the ways I express acceptance.	Unable	1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 8 . 9	Completely Able

16. I work to be aware of how others perceive me.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
17. I can demonstrate the skill of summarizing.	Unable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely Able
18. I am aware of the attitudes necessary for active listening.	Unaware	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Fully Aware
19. I can list rules for feedback to be effective.	Unable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely Able
20. I am able to receive feedback without embarrassment or defensiveness.	Unable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely Able
21. I can list all the conditions necessary for me to express feelings directly.	Unable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely Able
22. I can express my appreciation of others through my verbal behavior.	Unable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely Able
23. I can accept comments about my behavior from others.	Rejecting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Welcoming
24. I can receive feelings from others without apologizing, defending or depreciating the other person's feelings.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
25. I can identify when I am intellectualizing.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
26. I understand and can describe the use of clarification (mirroring).	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
27. I demonstrate clarification skills in my behavior.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
28. I can ask and request facilitative questions.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
29. I can give feedback in a facilitative manner.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
30. I am able to teach others how to express feelings directly.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
31. I am able to teach others how to set goals.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
32. I am able to teach others how to resolve conflicts using a no-lose approach.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
33. I can recognize when my verbal and nonverbal behaviors are incongruent.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
34. I can teach others how to listen actively.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always
35. I can list the advantages and disadvantages of self-evaluation.	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Always

Table 3 / An Analysis of Variance: A Test of Effects of Guidelines and Videotape Feedback on Degree of Disagreement Between Instructor and Student in Evaluating Student Performance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Guidelines (A)	1887.13	2	943.57	57.44**
Videotape (B)	184.08	1	184.08	11.2**
(A) × (B)	89.29	2	44.65	2.71
Error	690.5	42	16.42	

* $p < .01$

** $p < .001$

lines groups was in the expected direction. Students in the specific condition were more accurate in their self-assessments than students in either the general or no-guidelines groups, $F(2, 42) = 57.44$, $p < .001$. In addition, the videotape conditions appeared to be significantly related to differences in self-assessment, $F(1, 42) = 11.2$, $p < .001$. The interaction between the videotape conditions and the guidelines conditions was not significant, $F(2, 42) = 2.71$, $p < .10$. The main effect of the guidelines and the guidelines $\times$ videotape interaction is depicted in figure 1. The skill level of

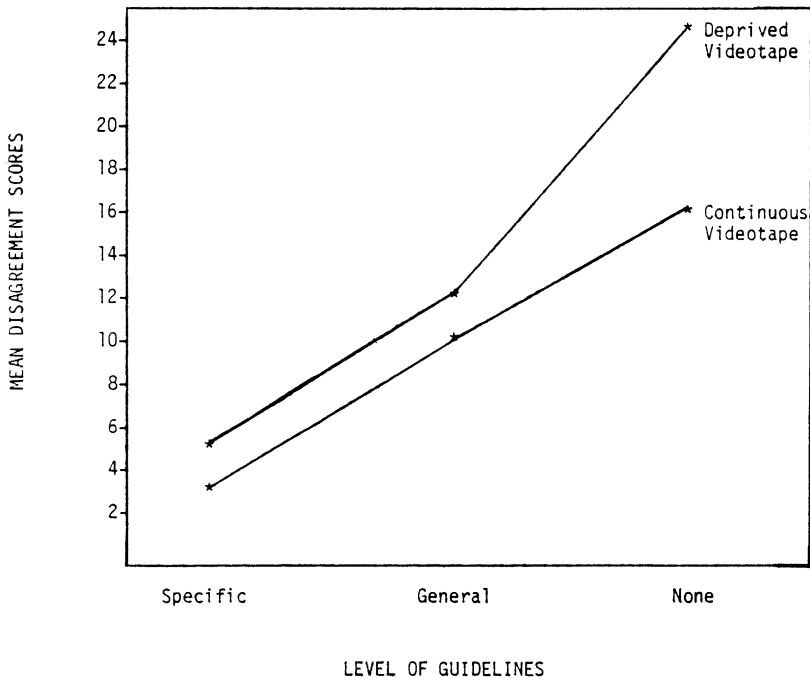


Figure 1. Differences in accuracy of self-evaluation between the continuous and deprived videotape groups in their guidelines level.

all students was also affected by guideline conditions as the students in the more specific groups scored significantly higher on performance ratings. Table 4 depicts the instructor’s mean ratings of performance on a 9-point scale. The scale corresponds to the 9-point letter-grade system in use at the instructor’s university, the number 9 being equivalent to an A+ grade and the number 1 being equivalent to an F grade.

Table 4 / Mean Observer-Assigned Ratings of Performance for Level of Guidelines Under Each Videotape Condition

Videotape Access	Levels of Guidelines		
	Specific	General	None
Continuous	7.9	6.8	3.7
Deprived	7.1	6.4	4.1

DISCUSSION

The results of the present experiment lend weight to the idea that students who have specific guidelines and continuous feedback such as video playback can use these tools to develop accurate self-evaluations. When general statements are made or no assistance is given regarding criteria for evaluation, students tend to assess themselves either higher or lower than the instructor. In addition, specific guidelines assist students to perform at higher levels; thus the specificity of evaluative criteria has a motivating effect on performance. Evaluative feedback has been considered to be an important factor which affects performance. Miller, Brickman, and Bolen (1975) demonstrated the value positive feedback has on performance, while Zajonc and Brickman (1969) describe the importance of negative feedback. In addition, Brickman, Linsenmeier, and McCareins (1976) distinguished between relevant feedback and irrelevant feedback in order to establish a connection between type of feedback and performance. Snyder and Clair (1976) demonstrated that when students were given feedback that indicated they succeeded in performing a task, the students attributed their performance to their own efforts, but when they were given information that they did not succeed, the students attributed their low performance to the instructor. However, in all of these studies, at no time were the subjects given the opportunity to evaluate their own performance or to even view the criteria that would be used to judge their learning. This situation seems akin to many classroom settings where criteria for evaluation are made explicit, but students are not given sufficient opportunity to evaluate themselves.³

But the results of this study must be taken cautiously. Are the students judging their own behavior or are they essentially predicting what the instructor will say about them? Since the instructor knew the hypotheses

and the students were aware of the overall design, both the instructor and student ratings may have been unduly affected. While students were asked not to show their rating forms to other group members, it seems likely that in the 10-week period of this study, several students may have discerned the purposes of this research.

Encouraging students to be responsible for their own evaluation motivates students to perform at a higher level. Students who have an opportunity to control the evaluative criteria have a greater sense of working for themselves and hence greater opportunity for reinforcement of internalized direction. The student has an expectation of control or mastery which transcends the learned helplessness described by Seligman (1975). The results of this study show that students who are untrained and inexperienced in a particular area can accurately assess themselves when they have knowledge of the specific criteria of the assessment. On the other hand, students who are given no guidelines tend to assess themselves at levels both higher and lower than actual performance. This may explain why other authors (Mischel, Ebbeson, & Zeiss, 1973) have found that self-concept strongly influences accuracy of self-assessment. Given a relatively ambiguous evaluative context, the student will act to enhance or maintain the self-concept and then will rationalize performance based on needs rather than on actual performance. Students in the no-guidelines groups who gave themselves higher scores than the instructor gave them on the rating sheets, when asked to describe their reasons for any particular score, often remarked that they "learned a lot," "couldn't be specific right now," or "I'm really the best judge of where I'm at." Upon further probing they would often state that grades don't mean much anyway, or that they didn't care about evaluation.

In other words, given no specific guides for evaluation, self-esteem, achievement motivation, expectation, and self-perceptions may all influence a student's performance rating. Defensive postures emerge and receptivity to alternative feedback decreases, thus decreasing the likelihood of achieving a change in performance. Johnson (1975) demonstrated that students with strong needs for success overestimated their abilities. Kukla (1972) found that those students who were high need achievers were more likely to believe they were responsible for their own success, regardless of their actual performance. The findings of the present study are consistent in that some of the students who were in the no-guidelines groups overestimated their performance and expressed comments indicative of severe frustration at trying to figure out ("psych out") what the instructor's criteria were. In Watts's (1973) study, subjects underestimated or devalued their abilities, and some of the students in the no-guidelines group also continually underestimated their performance. But while over- and underestimation may be related to particular personality characteristics or needs, it appears from the present study that situational

factors such as specific guidelines and feedback may play a strong role in neutralizing the effects of personality. Johnson (1975) concluded that student self-reports cannot be used with any accuracy as a measure of performance since they are distorted by student needs. There is a parallel in the concept of letting students "do their own thing" in the classroom. Rather than generating freedom to learn in the classroom setting, permissiveness of the type experienced in the no-guidelines groups may actually interfere with learning. The videotape sessions of the two no-guideline groups were characterized by at least 50% of the students' time being spent in trying to figure out what to do, even though they had a specific task to perform. The group without access to videotape or guidelines seemed totally lost as the sessions continued. While this aspect of the finding was not a focus of the study, it appears that these groups experienced a paralysis in trying to accomplish the group tasks.

While the focus of the study was on the role of self-evaluation in training students in communication skills, it is likely that similar results would be attained in physical science, mathematics, or other content-centred courses. The process of evaluation is independent of the content, and it is equally as crucial for physicists, historians, or statisticians to be able to accurately assess their performance.

There is some evidence to indicate that evaluation methods which are controlled by the instructor may actually serve to decrease the permanence of student learning. Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett (1973) developed what they called the overjustification hypothesis, which states that when persons expect to be rewarded for an intrinsically motivated behavior, they will work only for the reward, and the intrinsicness or enjoyability of the behavior will be diminished. Their findings may explain the apparent resistance to evaluation that students experience, in that a basically enjoyable activity (self-knowledge) is turned into an annoying task because an external person rewards behavior which was formerly intrinsically motivated. A person shifts from an internal to an external orientation, and thus relies on the external source as a reference for judging behavior, no longer believing that the individual has control over that behavior. Evaluation systems which are wholly under control of the instructor may increase helplessness, decrease personal enjoyment, increase belief in fate affecting performance, and decrease learning performance, regardless of the task to be learned.

In no way are the conclusions of this study intended to support a wholly self-evaluative approach, but rather they are intended to provide evidence for adjusting the weight given to external evaluation. In a report of their experiences in trying to implement self-evaluation in their own university courses, Sullivan and Seidman (1976) discuss not only the problem of giving too much weight to self-evaluation but also the rather dramatic effect self-evaluation had on their own teaching styles and

relationships with students. They concluded, "We did not find that the new emphases and the new relationships we tried to achieve meant that subject matter was discarded . . . knowledge was sought rather than merely delivered" (p. 8).

The need for more research into the factors affecting self-evaluation is readily apparent when one examines the role self-assessment plays in professional development. To partial out the factors which influence accuracy in self-assessment is of great benefit to all institutions concerned with professional training. Also the practical value of convincing researchers, who in the main have teaching responsibilities at universities, to base their practices regarding course evaluation on demonstrated research findings will narrow the gap between research and practice.

NOTES

1. In the context of this study the term "accurate" means that a person's evaluation of himself/herself agrees with another person's evaluation. This definition of accurate is presented with significant reservation. The assertion that an instructor's rating is more objective and therefore should be used as a standard against which a student's self-rating is compared has significant philosophical implications beyond the scope of this study.
2. The teaching assistant's ratings were used as a reliability check for the instructor and were made independently. Pearson product-moment correlation between instructor's rating and teaching assistant's rating ranged from .79 to .99. However, only the instructor's ratings were used in the calculation of the dependent variable. Copies of instructional materials and evaluation ratings are available on request.
3. It may appear obvious that telling persons the specific criteria upon which they will be assessed will not only assist them in doing better on those criteria but will also increase agreement with the instructor's assessment as compared with those who do not have the criteria or are left to intuit the criteria; but it has been my experience that many instructors do not make their criteria explicit enough for students to actually understand them and assess themselves. In addition, the focus of this study was not only to verbally encourage and support self-evaluative activities, but also to provide continuous opportunity for self-evaluation to occur.

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