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Moving beyond means: revealing features of the learning environment by investigating the consensus among student ratings.

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Summary: Student ratings, a critical component in policy efforts to assess and improve teaching, are often collected using questionnaires, and inferences about teachers are then based on aggregated student survey responses. While considerable attention has been paid to the reliability and validity of these aggregates, much less attention has been paid to within-classroom consensus, and what that consensus can reveal about classrooms. This study used data from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project to investigate how the consensus among student ratings in a classroom can enhance our understanding of the learning environment, and potentially could be used to understand features of instructional practice. The results suggest that consensus is related to teacher effectiveness, the questioning strategies used by teachers, and the demographic heterogeneity of students. The possibility of instructional subclimates and the implications for the use of overall averages in teacher appraisal are discussed together with directions for future research.

Classification: C70 C60 D40

Keywords: climate; consensus; instructional practice; student ratings

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