

Teacher Evaluation: It Doesn't Have to Hurt

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1. Introduction

When many teachers hear the words "teacher evaluation," they become anxious. They may feel that their lives and their futures are in the hands of supervisors who may not even fully understand their role as classroom teachers. These feelings may arise because we often equate "evaluation" with punitive measures. This does not have to be the case, however. In this paper, I will argue for active collaboration throughout the process of designing and implementing a teacher evaluation process. Through active involvement of the classroom teacher in the process of evaluation, the teacher will feel more of a sense of ownership of the process, and will, therefore, have less fear of it.

The first part of this paper will attempt to define some basic concepts relevant to teaching and teacher evaluation. A process for designing and implementing a collaborative system of teacher evaluation will also be discussed. Finally, recommendations for getting teachers actively involved in the process will be presented.

2. Teacher and Teaching Variables

The following variables of the teacher and teaching (the act of teaching, student-centered classrooms, teacher personalities, and other factors related to teaching) are discussed in order to demonstrate the range of possible factors which affect teaching. These variables must be considered when designing and implementing a process of teacher evaluation.

The Act of Teaching

Teaching is truly a complex process with many variables to consider. Although the classroom teacher's main duty is to provide classroom instruction, other duties, such as committee membership and attendance at faculty meetings, are also expected.

Before implementing a teacher evaluation process, it is important to define the areas to be evaluated. The following table defines some of what a teacher does in relation to classroom instruction.

Table 1 Acts Related to Teaching

Teaching	Planning	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• presenting• demonstrating• monitoring• reinforcing• guiding• interacting• providing feedback• evaluating student performance• etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• preparing lessons• developing new materials• studying available materials• evaluating student work• evaluating instruction• etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• relating to supervisors• relating to colleagues• preparing reports• sharing materials• supervising non-instructional activities• etc.

Since a teacher's most important duty relates to classroom instruction, an evaluation system may focus entirely on the act of teaching. Other duties may also be considered in the evaluation process, however.

Student-Centered Classrooms

The trend in education is to involve students more actively in their own learning process. The learner-centered classroom has taken the focus off the classroom instructor and placed the focus on the learner. Differences in learning strategies, cognitive styles, and affective variables must, however, be taken into account by the classroom teacher. The teacher is responsible for facilitating interaction and learning in the

classroom, and some factors in individualizing instruction to account for learner variables should be considered. The following factors in teaching for individualization have been adapted from Harris (1986).

1. Groups are organized based on assessments of differences and similarities among the learners.

2. Learning tasks are structured and presented on the basis of learner variables.

3. Media and materials are differentiated according to learner needs even when common outcomes are desired.

4. Time and sequence are differentiated in guiding student learning.

5. Interpersonal interactions support the individual learning efforts both emotionally and intellectually.

Thus, even though the focus in the classroom has shifted to the student, the teacher still plays a major role in determining how learning takes place.

Teacher Personalities

A discussion of teacher personalities is necessary for two reasons. This first is to describe positive characteristics of teachers. The second reason is to demonstrate that people demonstrate a range of characteristics, and these characteristics may vary to some degree from one day to the next within any given person. This is important to keep in mind because an evaluation may not be based on an adequate sample of the teacher's characteristics as demonstrated through the teacher's behavior. The implication is that a number of sampling techniques is necessary in order to gain an accurate evaluation.

A number of teacher personalities have been identified by Ryan (cited in Harris, 1986) which serve to demonstrate variables within teachers themselves. Three main practices, which reflect teacher personalities, are defined. These are to be considered in degrees: warm and friendly, organized, and stimulating and creative. Positive variations of the warm and friendly personality would include interacting positively with students, demonstrating interest in students, encouraging students, etc. A well organized teacher will organize and pace activities effectively, communicate ideas clearly, etc. A stimulating and creative teacher will present materials in an interesting way, draw on student interests, use audio-visual aids, etc. While we all demonstrate varying degrees of these characteristics, it is important to keep in mind that there is variation in teacher personalities. Even a given teacher may reflect variation of these personality characteristics depending on various factors (mood, weather, etc.).

Other Factors Related to Teaching

Teachers do not create and execute their lessons in a vacuum. Many other factors besides those discussed above affect the outcome of the teaching and learning process. Some of these factors have been defined by Harris (1986), and they include context factors, input factors, process factors, and product factors. Context factors which affect instruction include whether or not the curriculum has been clearly defined for the teacher and social factors, such as expectations of sponsors. Input factors are determined by the availability of materials and other resources, equipment available to the classroom instructor, textbooks, and student expectations. Process

factors are related more specifically to teacher behaviors which promote learning and student reactions to these behaviors. These include time allowed for tasks, wait time, and giving directions. Product factors relate to outcomes such as student achievement as determined by performance on tasks or on tests.

3. Defining Summative and Formative Evaluation

Two variations of teacher evaluation must be defined: summative evaluation and formative evaluation. Traditionally, evaluation procedures have been strictly summative. Summative evaluations focus on the product of teaching whereas formative evaluations focus on the process of teaching. A summative evaluation is one in which specific decisions will be made about the teacher. These decisions can range from positive outcomes, such as promotions or merit pay, to negative outcomes, such as demotion or dismissal. Summative evaluation is usually non-collaborative in nature. Components of a summative evaluation may include an analysis of student product factors (test scores, for example), completion of an evaluation form by the evaluator, and decisions made by the evaluator regarding the teacher.

Formative evaluation, on the other hand, actively involves the teacher in the process of evaluation. Formative evaluation, also known as developmental evaluation, has the teacher's continued professional growth as its goal. Formative evaluation is generally collaborative in nature in that it involves the teacher during the entire process of evaluation, and in fact, some of the burden of evaluation is placed on the teacher. Formative evaluation components may include the teacher actively being involved in the development of the evaluation procedure,

pre- and post-observational conferences between the teacher and evaluator, and teacher self-evaluation.

While some researchers (Manatt, 1988; Frels, 1984) argue that summative and formative evaluations can occur simultaneously, other researchers (Harris, 1986; Smyth, 1990) argue that the primary focus of evaluation should be formative. "To the extent that a system of teacher evaluation is truly effective in guiding administrative decisions regarding promotion, dismissal, and merit, it cannot be effective as a guide to individual teacher improvement and program revision" (Harris, 1986, pg. 213). He goes on to argue that a system which links the formative evaluation to a summative one may be necessary in some situations. Such situations would include when merit is a consideration, when deficiencies in teaching are demonstrated, or when performance seems to be deteriorating. The summative procedures are clearly separated, however, from the formative ones, and in fact these summative procedures may not even be used in any given evaluation.

4. An Eight Step Process of Evaluation Implementation

The following eight steps to implement a formative process of evaluation have been described by Harris (1986):

1. Criteria Specification
2. Instrumentation
3. Data Gathering
4. Analysis
5. Interpretation
6. Valuing
7. Decision Making
8. Action

Criteria Specification

Criteria specification is an important step in the evaluation process. It must be clear which areas of teaching are valued and which are to be evaluated. Each institution has its own needs and context variables, so criteria should be designed with the institution's own variables in mind.

Two important aspects of specifying criteria are defining performance criteria and defining competencies. The above discussions on the act of teaching may be helpful in considering the range of performance variables. Poster (1991) has defined an elaborate system of criteria for effective teacher performance which include the following: teacher management indicators (e.g. minimizing class time for non-instructional routines and defining and encouraging appropriate classroom behaviors), teacher instructional indicators (e.g. relating instruction to students' past experiences, explaining content through a variety of methods, and adjusting instruction based on monitoring), and products (e.g. lesson plans and maintenance of student records). Competencies for these performance criteria must also be clearly defined.

Instrumentation

Instruments should be designed with the institution's needs and context in mind. The process of developing instruments to assess teacher performance can involve studying what other institutions use for teacher evaluation and then either selecting or adapting these instruments. If this is not deemed appropriate, then special instruments must be designed.

Instrumentation also includes developing the procedures which will be involved in the evaluation process. This aspect

of instrumentation needs to be carefully considered and clearly defined so that all parties later involved in evaluating or being evaluated are in clear agreement about different aspects of the process, such as timelines and steps involved in the process. The process should clearly define what the purpose of the evaluation is, and what options, if any, the teacher has if he or she is not in agreement with the outcomes. It is essential that teachers understand the purpose of the process.

Data collection devices which clearly relate to the performance criteria must be designed. Examples of data collection devices are tests, questionnaires, and observational guides. Teacher self-evaluation reports may be one aspect of data collection for an institution to consider. The teacher knows what goes on in his/her classroom on a daily basis. It is also a cost effective form of data collection. Another device which may be employed is observational reports. Student reports may also be considered. The students have extensive opportunities to observe the teacher in action, and if objective forms are developed, student responses can be reliable. Teacher peer reports are a further area which may be considered. Although teachers are usually not privy to what happens in their colleagues classrooms, they do serve together on committees and meetings, and there are also usually numerous opportunities to collaborate on projects or share materials. Especially if the purpose of the observation is formative and not summative, peer reports can be a cost-effective and reliable source of data.

Instrumentation also includes testing the instruments and revising them if necessary. This step should not be overlooked. Manatt (1988) suggests a three year time period for developing

an evaluation system. During the first year, the system is developed. During the second year it is tested and modified, and finally during the third year it is implemented.

An important aspect of instrumentation which should not be overlooked is training the users. Clearly results will be more consistent, and thus more reliable, if the evaluators are carefully trained in using the instruments.

Data Gathering

Any data gathered about the teacher must be clearly viewed as samples of behaviors or characteristics. The procedures should allow some flexibility in providing for additional data gathering procedures if the evaluator or teacher feels that the data sample collected was not typical of the teacher's performance.

Data gathering includes scheduling observations, administering questionnaires, and recording the data.

Analysis

From the data collected, the evaluator can begin to tabulate frequencies or assign scores. The purpose of analysis is to manipulate the data into a form which can clearly be presented to the users (supervisors and teachers). Preparing profiles and content summaries are also a part of analysis.

Interpretation

The focus of interpretation is not to place a value on the analysis but simply to review it. The analysis might be compared to the teacher competencies outlined during criteria specification or to other factors such as the context.

Valuing

Valuing is the part of the process where personal judgment of the teacher's performance begins to be a factor. This step is often overemphasized in the evaluation process. First, both teacher and evaluator must understand the analysis, then values can be placed on the performance. Valuing must clearly be related to current theory of professional standards. It must also take into account local variables. Positive or negative weights can be added to the analysis at this point.

One negative aspect of valuing to consider is what Manatt terms "the nice guy syndrome" (1988, pg. 106). With the "nice guy syndrome," the evaluator may try not to place negative values on the analysis due to his or her wish to maintain complete harmony. Boyle (1993) also refers to the developmental stage of the evaluator vis-a-vis that of the evaluatee. When the evaluator gains his or her identity from outside rather than within, for example, he or she may be unable to place value on another person's performance.

Decision Making

Decision making follows from having assigned values. Disagreement over the values can create a real challenge in decision making. Arbitration or turning to additional sources of data can help resolve disagreements.

Decision making can include exploring alternatives, identifying actions which could be taken, and selecting appropriate actions.

Actions

Objectives, related to the selection of actions made during decision making, should at this time clearly be specified. An

outline, including a timeline, should specify implementation of the actions.

Discussion

The last three steps in this evaluation process may appear to be summative in nature, but even in formative evaluation, some sort of growth plan for the teacher should be developed. This growth plan is an accumulation of both evaluator and teacher valuing certain behaviors, identifying alternative behaviors, and deciding on a plan of action for implementing change.

5. Observation in Teacher Evaluation

Observation is a vital component of most teacher evaluation systems. Although observation has a high cost in terms of hours dedicated to gathering this data, the evaluator can gain valuable insights into what is actually happening in the classroom.

McGreal (1988), Hunter (1988), and Harris (1986) feel that observations should be announced in advance. "An ineffective teacher will not magically develop preparation and teaching skills the night before the observation..." (Hunter, 1988, pg. 46). Announcing observations in advance gives the teacher and the evaluator a chance to meet before the observation to discuss various aspects of the class and the particular lesson to be taught. Unannounced observations tend to make teachers anxious, and their anxiety may well affect their teaching performance.

The recent emphasis on classroom-based research, in which "...teachers should be encouraged to observe, analyze, and evaluate their own teaching..." (Nunan, 1989, pg. 116), has shifted the focus of an outsider observing to the teacher

performing the observation him or herself. The data collected from this type of action research could be included in data gathering. Often systems of evaluation have been trainer-centered even though we are promoting student-centered classrooms. Getting the teachers actively involved in the observation process "... provide[s] an opportunity for teachers to develop their own judgments of what goes on in their own classrooms ... [which] should heighten their ability to evaluate their own teaching practices" (Williams, 1989, pg. 85).

Since so much happens in the classroom at any given time, a given focus for the observation may help limit the scope of data collection. Wajnryb (1992) advocates the use of observation tasks which focus very narrowly on one aspect of classroom dynamics. Although these tasks were developed for teacher training purposes, they could equally be applied to formative evaluation. Harris (1986) also believes it important to focus on specific aspects of classroom interaction in order to control bias, limit the sampling of events, and produce adequate records of the observation.

6. Feedback in Teacher Evaluation

Post-observational feedback is a vital component of formative teacher evaluation. Some possible goals of the feedback sessions could be to identify effective teaching behaviors observed, to discuss other possible effective behaviors, to identify behaviors that the teacher is not satisfied with, to identify less effective behaviors of which the teacher may not be aware, and to promote continuing growth. Feedback should be collaborative in nature. It should be based on the data gathered through the process, and any decisions made

as a result of the feedback session should involve consensus building.

Feedback can also be channeled through the written mode, and Boyle (1993) and Thornbury (1993) believe that the process of having the teacher write his or her impressions of the whole process can lead to more reflection on the part of the teacher.

7. Collaboration in Teacher Evaluation

As Frels tells us (1984, pg. 4), "Like any successful personnel procedure, the evaluation system must be founded on open communication between the teacher and his or her supervisor." Collaboration can take place during all phases of the evaluation process, from criteria specification to deciding on actions to take as a result of data analysis. Teachers will feel more secure and respond better to a process which they helped to develop. Some may feel that if the teachers are too involved that the evaluation process will "...result in a watered-down appraisal system..." (Manatt, 1988, pg. 81). However, through assisting in the evaluation process, teachers express their desires for professional respect and accomplishment, and it's a challenge for them to develop something which will work (Manatt, 1988).

8. Conclusion

Based on the above, it seems both practical and necessary to involve teachers in forming and implementing the evaluation process. Being involved with the process will lessen their sense of apprehension of it.

Since theories related to classroom practices and student learning change over time, it seems necessary to periodically review and revise an existing evaluation practice. Ongoing

collaboration between administrators and teachers will assist in this review process.

Finally, since the goals of any evaluation system are to improve conditions for the students, evaluation of administrators should not be left out of the process. According to Scriven (1988, pg. 112), "...there can be no full accountability of teachers without accountability of administrators." Teachers rely on support from administrators, and their performance is affected by the administrator's performance. It also cannot be seen as entirely ethical to evaluate only the teachers without also evaluating their supervisors. Perhaps a similar process can be initiated to design and implement an equitable supervisor evaluation process. If both teachers and administrators are important parts of the process of designing a system of supervisor evaluation, the system is more likely to be viewed as fair.

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