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## A review of selected aspects of teacher evaluation

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## A review of selected aspects of teacher evaluation

### Abstract

Over the years educational leaders have produced volumes of articles dealing with teacher evaluation. Since 1980 the literature has begun to increasingly focus on those components of effective teacher evaluation, which are specifically directed to instructional improvement. Current literature elaborates many factors that are important to the successful implementation of such evaluation systems. This paper examines twenty-eight post 1980 professional educational journal articles which review selected aspects of teacher evaluation. These aspects include, purposes for evaluation, obstacles to evaluation, focus for evaluation, and understandings required for effective evaluation.

A REVIEW OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF TEACHER EVALUATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the years educational leaders have produced volumes of articles dealing with teacher evaluation. Since 1980 the literature has begun to increasingly focus on those components of effective teacher evaluation, which are specifically directed to instructional improvement. Current literature elaborates many factors that are important to the successful implementation of such evaluation systems.

This paper examines twenty-eight post 1980 professional educational journal articles which review selected aspects of teacher evaluation. These aspects include, purposes for evaluation, obstacles to evaluation, focus for evaluation, and understandings required for effective evaluation.

## PURPOSES FOR EVALUATION

Teacher evaluation serves two purposes, the first of which is to determine the continuation or termination of a teacher's employment, and the second is to improve instruction. It is for these purposes that two forms of teacher evaluation have developed. Peterson and Peterson (1984) and Stow and Sweeney (1981) identified the two teacher evaluation forms as summative and formative, respectively.

The purposes for summative evaluation according to Rath and Preskill (1982) are (a) to validate the teacher selection process, (b) to reward superior performance, (c) to identify incompetence, and (d) to justify modification of teacher assignments. Fischer (1982) suggests it is also often used to justify teacher employment.

One characteristic of summative methodology is the rating scale.

Rating scales are pieces of evidence which may be used to justify evaluation judgments. Rating scales consist of lists of teacher characteristics (instructional and non-instructional) that are judged in some fashion by the evaluator during and/or after observation. Such scales may take the form of a continuum from excellent to poor, or they may be based on a numerical value. Most evaluators who use rating scales prefer the numerical approach for determining norms and standards for teacher performance (Raths and Preskill, 1982).

Where existing state law or school board policies require summative evaluation, teacher effectiveness must be judged. The judgmental feature of summative evaluation is often threatening; yet, judgment is inevitable in summative evaluation because of its emphasis on management for efficiency and appraisal (Embretson, Ferber, and Langager, 1984; Toran, 1982).

In discussing the formative evaluation process, Feldvebel (1980) suggests the reason for evaluation as teacher improvement. The evaluative motive must be to improve the quality of education through improved instruction. However, evaluation is often something that is done to, not with teachers. Ideally the reason for evaluation is to work with teachers in developing alternate courses to professional improvement (Crenshaw and Hoyle, 1981; Fischer, 1982; Pembroke and Goedert, 1982; Savage, 1983).

Formative evaluation's emphasis on a pre-observation conference is an important characteristic, and a major difference from summative evaluation (Crews, 1981; Fischer, 1982; Jacobson, 1984; Lesse, 1981). During the pre-observation conference the administrator and teacher

cooperatively plan the observation. The evaluator may gain valuable insight into the classroom situation and conditions from this conference and gain an opportunity to determine what and how teachers are teaching and students are learning. Feldvedel (1980) recognizes the pre-observation conference as the most important part of the evaluation process. In the pre-observation conference, the evaluation process gains credibility because teachers have a stake in the observation process.

In fact, Hopfengardner and Walker (1984) and Leese (1981) promote teacher involvement through direct peer supervision. This collegial support system aims at positively effecting quality education. Peer supervision is a cooperative effort between administrator and master teachers to effect improved teaching behaviors, professional attributes, and personal growth.

Both summative and formative evaluation forms include a post-observation conference as part of their methodology. In summative evaluation, the conference offers an opportunity to pass judgment on teacher effectiveness. As indicated by Pembroke and Goedert (1982), the arrival at a judgment is a purpose of summative evaluation. From the judgment, the administrator determines the teacher's status. If the evaluation judgment consistently falls too low, the administrator has established a justification for teacher dismissal. In formative evaluation, however, the post-observation conference is for instructional growth. The conference climate should be supportive of professional interest and should be marked by mutual professional respect (Jacobson, 1984; Leese, 1981; Peterson and Peterson; 1984).

Not surprisingly those who attempt to evaluate faculty through the two basic approaches--summative and formative--for these two ends--teacher retention and instructional improvement--confront certain obstacles.

#### OBSTACLES TO EVALUATION

Evaluation is threatening to many teachers. Unless administrators take the time to implement an effective and fair evaluation system, an erosion of administration and staff relations may result. Five persisting obstacles present impediments for any evaluation effort:

First, in most cases, principals are given neither the resources nor the time to evaluate teachers effectively. Many administrators involved in evaluation feel hurried to meet evaluation deadlines. Thus, classroom observations are often poorly organized, brief, and one-sided. The problem that eventually arises is that evaluation in this circumstance fails to accurately assess the teacher's performance (Bailey, 1984; Cuccia, 1984).

A second problem, according to Lamb and Thomas (1981), is that current evaluation practices are often slighted or ignored not only because of the demand of other tasks and lack of time, as noted by Bailey and Cuccia, but also because of uncertainty with the evaluation process and a lack of interpersonal skills. When evaluation is utilized as a judgmental tool and these problems come into play, administrators risk confrontation and harm to working relationships.

Third, many evaluation efforts are often too narrow and strictly defined (Soar, Medley, Coker, 1983). Teachers thus view evaluation



negatively because of the restricted and shallow perspective of the process. It is hard for teachers to understand and administrators to justify this situation. Teachers feel that they have been professionally prepared for the job, yet they are evaluated by someone who may know little of teaching generally and nothing of their teaching discipline specifically. Consequently, many teachers suspect that it is not their teaching that is being evaluated (Crenshaw and Hoyle, 1981; Embretson, Ferber, and Langager, 1984).

Peterson and Peterson (1984) and Savage (1982) question whether observed teacher behavior is truly representative of the instructor's ability and performance. They believe that to rely on the impressions gained from limited observation risks confrontation and harm to working relationships.

A fourth obstacle is the perceived termination factor. The termination factor erodes the confidence and trust of teachers in the evaluation procedure. Teachers often believe that, no matter how it is disguised, the real purpose of evaluation is to find justification for dismissing teachers. Many evaluation practices leave teachers with a feeling that administrators are doing something to them, rather than with or for them. Under these circumstances, it is very difficult to build a constructive relationship between administration and faculty (Lemley, 1983).

A fifth obstacle to effective teacher evaluation is the administrator's inability to grasp the correct focus for evaluation. The ability of the administrator to assess instructional effectiveness is crucial to an effective evaluation system. An administrator who

possesses little understanding of instructional techniques will not be capable of developing an evaluation system directed to instructional improvement. However, an administrator competent in evaluating the quality of instruction is in a position to develop and implement a comprehensive teacher evaluation program. It is this writer's contention that the correct focus for evaluation are the components of effective teaching and teacher functioning within the school community.

#### FOCUS FOR EVALUATION

A prerequisite for effective evaluation is the ability of the evaluator to identify qualities of effective teaching. Six qualities of effective teaching are prominent in the literature:

First, Raths and Preskill (1982) identify the careful preparation of a lesson plan as an important aspect of effective teaching. In the lesson plan, the teacher organizes appropriate materials and plans strategies for their effective use. Peterson and Peterson (1984) and Petrie (1982), claim lesson plan construction and utilization are essential to quality teaching. The lesson plan is so important to evaluation. Familiarity with the lesson plan helps an evaluator place focus on its utilization and its effectiveness for student learning. Dunkleberger (1982) maintains that the lesson plan is vital to the establishment of realistic goals, and goals lay the groundwork for the development of objectives. When viewed through the perspective of Jacobson's (1984) use of the Hunter program of objective directed teaching this makes good sense. The final evidence that supports the lesson plan as an important component of effective teaching is its

function as a guide for the productive use of time (Slubojan, 1984).

Second, knowledge of subject matter is an important component of effective teaching. It is partly from knowledge of the subject that teachers gain confidence and a sense of mission. Yet, while knowledge of subject matter is important to effective teaching, it presents problems for the evaluator. Cuccia (1984), for example, believes that evaluators need to possess a certain level of subject matter expertise. While agreeing that this would be helpful, Raths and Preskill (1982) argue that requiring the possession of such expertise is unrealistic. The perception that the evaluator obtains of a teacher's knowledge is mostly impressionistic. Thus, as Peterson and Peterson (1984) suggest, evaluation of a teacher's knowledge of subject matter is often based on the teacher's exclusion of material or misstatement of facts.

According to Lamb and Thomas (1981), the use of interpersonal skills when relating to students is a third requirement for effective teaching. A warm and caring environment allows students to function and learn to their fullest capacity. Savage (1982) believes that non-threatening interaction with students encourages acceptance and respect. Skillful use of interpersonal strategies reflect a high degree of professionalism.

Fourth, communications is emphasized by Dunkleberger (1982) as being crucial to effective instruction and classroom management. Good management leads to a productive environment and few discipline problems. Management and control of the class leads to the creation of a motivating environment (Lamb and Thomas, 1981). The main benefit of skillful management and class control is the reduction of disruptions. This

results in more time on task for teachers and students (Slubojan, 1984).

Fifth, Bailey (1984) suggests that appropriate methodologies, strategies, and instructional techniques are important components of effective teaching. The teacher's success at pedagogy depends upon an understanding of several methodologies. Through the use of appropriate strategies teachers may motivate students, provide varied quality activities, and promote open communications. Instructional techniques (verbal and non-verbal) must be non-threatening and promote an active participation by the students.

The final dimension of effective teaching involves the evaluation of learning. Meaningful evaluation of learning must be based on course objectives and provide the student with immediate feedback (Dunkleberger, 1982; Savage, 1982).

According to Lamb and Thomas (1981), it is necessary for the evaluator's emphasis to extend beyond the classroom to include the teacher's performance within the total school community. This is often difficult to determine, and the administrator must rely on human perception. An effective teacher contributes to healthy parent, community, and colleague relations. A quality teacher also promotes the total school through intra-school cooperation. Cuccia (1984) suggests the importance of teacher interest in student extracurricular activities. Through this interest the teacher may establish and nurture a productive relationship with the students.

#### UNDERSTANDINGS REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

A fundamental motive for evaluation is to improve the quality of

education. To accomplish that goal the evaluator must take care to avoid unnecessary conflict, anxiety, and confusion. If evaluation is to be successful, it must result in a healthy evaluation climate for teaching and professional growth (Savage, 1982). Seven key understandings seem particularly important to the development of a healthy evaluation climate:

First, the evaluation process is most successful when developed cooperatively with teachers. When teachers participate, the quality and intensity of the process increases dramatically (Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1983). Cooperation and openness are essential, and when teachers have a sense of ownership, they become more deeply involved and willing to accept evaluation. A cooperatively developed evaluation system fosters the feeling of mutual benefit (Crenshaw and Hoyle, 1981; Fischer, 1982; Toran, 1982).

A second essential, according to Larson (1984), is that performance criteria should be known and clearly understood by the evaluator and evaluatee. Such understanding will help clarify the expectations associated with instructional competence. Dunkleberger (1982, p. 9) claims that "evaluation processes must be constructed in a fashion consistent with the philosophy of helping teachers grow professionally." What all of this points to is that teachers need to know what to expect from the evaluation process.

The third understanding according to McGreal, Broderick, and Jones (1984), involves artifact collection as a beneficial procedure in teacher evaluation. Artifact collection includes all types of teacher materials relevant in day-to-day instruction. Material compiled by the

teacher is submitted to the evaluator for objective inspection. With the insight gained from this material, the evaluator is better prepared to evaluate the teacher.

Fourth, observation of direct teacher instruction is clearly the most significant aspect of teacher evaluation. Observation enables the evaluator to witness and judge the quality of the interactions between teacher and students (Lemley, 1983; McGreal, Broderick, Jones, 1984). It is important that evaluators observe the entire classroom. The total environment of the classroom (visual aids, resource accessibility, seating) is important to successful instruction (Lamb and Thomas, 1981; Peterson and Peterson, 1984; Savage, 1982). Opinion about the number of observations each teacher should experience varies greatly. Fischer (1982) believes that three observations of one hour each is ideal. Crews (1981) and Peterson and Peterson (1984), however, claim that the number of times a teacher is observed should be determined by the teacher's educational attainment, experience, time in the system, and ability.

Observation should focus on what the teacher does. Two schools of thought exist on how these behaviors should be recorded. Jones and Sherman (1980) contend that the evaluator needs to take extensive notes during the observation. Notes provide a complete and accurate narrative from which an account may be written later to explain what was observed. Abstention from note taking during observation is the other school of thought, and suggests the evaluator should be focusing on the total class experience. Following the observation, impressions to facilitate the post-observation conference can be recorded (Crenshaw and Hoyle, 1981; Crews,

1981; Fischer, 1982).

Fifth, the evaluation process should be marked by objectivity and helpfulness. Effective evaluation requires discussing, advising, listening, and responding in a critical but positive way. Productive interaction can only be established through open communications built on trust and understanding developed through frequent contact on all levels (McGreal, Broderick, & Jones, 1984). Madeline Hunter, in fact, claims that the reason for evaluation is to bring administrators and teachers into a close relationship where the effects of the teacher's classroom instructional decisions can be discussed in a supportive environment (Jacobson, 1984).

Sixth, evaluators need to be aware of teacher personality differences. Knowledge of teacher personality patterns will enable school administrators to adapt leadership style and comments to the needs and perceptions of particular teachers. Teacher evaluation needs to be individualized if instructional improvement is to be effected. Evaluators must do their homework, be understanding, honest, and sincere, but it is particularly important that they be insightful and sensitive (Henjum, 1984).

Seventh, the post-observation conference is crucial to effective evaluation. The post-observation setting provides an opportunity to prove concern for instructional improvement. An effective evaluator utilizes interpersonal skills to reinforce strengths and initiate needed changes within the teacher. Using open and closed questions, the evaluator directs the teacher in search of self-realization. The evaluator must skillfully direct the process if instructional improvement is to result.

Once the teacher identifies and claims ownership of certain instructional weaknesses, the evaluator intervenes to help develop improvement strategies. Cooperatively the teacher and evaluator establish improvement goals. Care needs to be taken to ensure the teacher leaves the conference whole, feeling the principal's respect and concern (Fischer, 1982).

Administrators should develop a yearly evaluation schedule. This requires an investment of time in planning, sequencing, and organizing. However, this must be done if evaluation is to become a tool of instructional improvement. The essence of teacher evaluation is compatible with the mission of the school, and that is to provide the best possible education for the students.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Summary

Teacher evaluation is of two types: the summative process that is principally concerned with the evaluation judgment, and the formative process that focuses on instructional improvement. Summative evaluation is a product of systems for determining teacher competency. Formative evaluation has emerged from an increasing commitment to quality education through attending to instructional improvement.

There is hope that teacher evaluation is turning a corner for the better. For too long many teachers have been subjected to an educational trial by fire. In the past, teacher evaluation procedures often created anxiety, mistrust, and insecurity among teachers.

The promoters of formative evaluation provide a variety of



alternatives for teacher evaluation. These alternatives focus mainly on a non-judgmental approach to instructional improvement. However, due to tradition or statutory requirement, many formative evaluation systems must incorporate, or work around, a judgmental component. When this situation exists, a major effort is needed to maintain teacher confidence in the instructional improvement objective of evaluation.

The formative evaluation system is teacher centered and focuses on the components of instruction and teacher effectiveness. However, the establishment of a non-threatening, efficient, and productive system requires a great deal of time and effort by the administrator. Time may not pose a problem for larger schools that are able to hire a full time supervisor/evaluator. It does create a problem for administrators in the majority of schools that are small and unable to hire a full time supervisor/evaluator.

Another problem that must be considered is the abilities of the evaluating personnel. To function as an effective formative evaluator requires more than a college degree. It is unwise and ineffective to place an individual in a system for which they are not qualified. Therefore, it is important to develop a system around the abilities of the personnel. We must not abandon our hopes of formative evaluation. Evaluator abilities suggest a thoughtful approach to systems development. It also indicates a need for administrative preparation in the area of formative evaluation.

### Conclusion

Seven characteristics of successful teacher evaluation systems emerge from the contemporary literature.

First, evaluation systems developed cooperatively between administration and teachers will be more readily accepted. Teachers want to be valued as educational thinkers. When teachers are included in the development process, they may claim ownership and feel they have an investment in the success of the system.

The second characteristic is the need to establish a non-threatening evaluation setting in which growth can occur. This requires teachers' confidence in the ability and intentions of the evaluator. School administrators involved in evaluation need to be knowledgeable in the areas of effective teaching. Skillful use of this knowledge can enhance the non-threatening interpersonal relationship essential to instructional improvement.

Third, the existence of a teacher evaluation schedule is an important characteristic of a successful system. Organized time allotments effectively coordinate evaluator/evaluatee contact. The schedule ensures that proper time will be devoted to teacher evaluation. Furthermore, the schedule is a positive indicator of the importance of teacher evaluation and the school's commitment to instructional improvement.

Fourth, the pre-observation conference presents an opportunity for the evaluator to meet with the teacher and discuss the lesson plan, instructional materials, areas of teacher concern, and evaluation procedures. This interaction between evaluator and teacher establishes a productive evaluation climate and relationship. Through a mutual understanding of what will be evaluated and how the evaluator will proceed, open and productive communications can be established.

The fifth characteristic is the class observation. The evaluator should focus on the items discussed in the pre-observation conference, but remain cognizant of the total class climate. During the observation the evaluator relies on his/her perception, and compiles notes after the observation to serve as a guide for the post-observation conference.

Sixth, the evaluator and evaluatee meet for the post-observation conference. During this conference the evaluator encourages the teacher in self-discovery. Open and closed questions can direct the teacher in search of self-realization. Skillful use of the process by the evaluator leads to the teacher identifying and claiming ownership of certain instructional weaknesses. When this occurs, the evaluator intervenes to help develop improvement strategies. Cooperatively, the evaluator and the teacher establish improvement goals.

Seventh, the evaluation system should be cyclical in nature. The teacher must have time to effect improvement toward the attainment of established goals. The time period should be clearly identified in the existing schedule, and followed by another evaluation process.

Evaluation focuses on instructional improvement, and acts as an affirmation of instructional abilities. Evaluation is teacher centered at all times, with the teacher leaving the evaluation cycle as a highly motivated professional. With thoughtful consideration and careful planning, teacher evaluation can become an important element for instructional and educational improvement.

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