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Gary David Schwartz
University of Northern Iowa

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An analysis of using teacher colleagues in the evaluation process of faculty

Abstract

Teachers have often been frustrated with the typical evaluation process that has an administrator doing the perfunctory, routine, bureaucratic requirements of assessing teachers once or twice a year (Rothberg, 1979; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). Singh (1984) has claimed "some educators have charged that the existing ratings and written evaluations are of limited use in offering supervisory help to teachers for the improvement of instruction" (p. 73). Our nation, in the early days of American education, had practiced peer evaluation when the master teacher exercised evaluation responsibility over his colleagues (Ban & Soudah, 1978). As the public school system expanded and professional school administrators were trained to accept the administrative responsibility for the evaluation of instruction, the method of peer evaluation was abandoned.

AN ANALYSIS OF USING TEACHER COLLEAGUES
IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS OF FACULTY

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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Robert H. Decker

June 24, 1986
Date Approved

~~Advisor/Director of Research Paper~~

Donald L. Hanson

June 24, 1986
Date Approved

~~Second Reader of Research Paper~~

Robert Krajewski

6/24/86
Date Received

~~Head, Department of Educational
Administration and Counseling~~

Teachers have often been frustrated with the typical evaluation process that has an administrator doing the perfunctory, routine, bureaucratic requirements of assessing teachers once or twice a year (Rothberg, 1979; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985). Singh (1984) has claimed "some educators have charged that the existing ratings and written evaluations are of limited use in offering supervisory help to teachers for the improvement of instruction" (p. 73).

Our nation, in the early days of American education, had practiced peer evaluation when the master teacher exercised evaluation responsibility over his colleagues (Ban & Soudah, 1978). As the public school system expanded and professional school administrators were trained to accept the administrative responsibility for the evaluation of instruction, the method of peer evaluation was abandoned.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that "salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated" (p. 30). From this quote, it is clear that peer evaluation has not been abandoned but has been revitalized as an alternative to teacher evaluations conducted solely by the administration.

The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze the effects of using teacher colleagues or peers in the evaluation process of faculty. This analytical review will explain the two categories of evaluation, describe various approaches of using colleagues in the evaluation process, discuss the strengths and weaknesses within those methods, and give teachers' views on peer evaluation.

Categories of Evaluation

When making decisions concerning teacher evaluation, the evaluator must have a clear conception of why teacher evaluation systems exist. Generally, the primary goal of teacher evaluation has been to improve the quality of education for children. There has existed a formative/summative dichotomy of looking at evaluation purposes (Bryant & Haack, 1977; Jacobson, 1984; Peterson & Peterson, 1984; Strike & Millman, 1983; *Teacher Compensation and Evaluation in Public Education*, 1985).

Formative evaluation has been specifically used to analyze the teacher's performance in the classroom by providing data, judgments, and suggestions that will help improve their performance. The collaborative process of formative evaluation has involved the evaluator in the improvement of instruction.

The authors have agreed that summative evaluation was decision making with respect to teacher certification, hiring and firing, promotion and tenure, assignments, and salary. This evaluation process normally has used rating scales that judged how well teachers performed. The summative evaluation of teachers by its very nature has tended to have a negative connotation and it has comprised only a small percentage of the total evaluation process. Summative evaluations have usually been restrictive in nature and followed rather rigid guidelines.

The system of peer evaluation has usually been informal, unofficial, and conducted on a collegial basis for formative purposes (Peterson & Peterson, 1984). Improvement of instruction has been the primary emphasis of this system, with the goal to create a non-threatening environment, where teachers could see themselves as supportive of each other, working towards the ultimate goal of providing the best instruction possible (Singh, 1984).

Various Approaches of Using Colleagues

There have been many terms that describe using teacher colleagues in the evaluation process of the faculty. Often, it was just a matter of semantics that distinguished the differences in the terms. Peer evaluation has been the term most commonly used but research authors (Bell, 1983; Barnett,

1983; Cangelosi, 1984; Ellis, Smith & Abbott, 1979; Fredrich, 1984; Hopfengardner & Walker, 1984; Huddle, 1985; Lempesis, 1984; Teacher Compensation and Evaluation in Public Education, 1985) have used such synonymous terms as collegial support, peer supervision, peer review, peer assistance, peer observation, and peer-centered evaluations. Although the terms are synonymous to a certain extent, there are some differences in the approaches. The following approaches have been summarized from research findings to show the differences of using colleagues in the evaluation process of improving instruction.

Collegial Support System or Peer Supervision

Fredrich (1984) advocated that supervision and evaluation were two different activities, therefore the responsibility should rest with different personnel. Supervision has been a formative, supportive approach for improving teacher competence; whereas evaluation has been a summative process that should culminate a period of supervision. The principal can not serve both capacities effectively without destroying the atmosphere of trust and cooperation. The primary responsibility for supervision should rest with department heads, supervisors, consultants, and colleagues. The teacher must be able to perceive the supervision process as a means to help him or her become a better teacher.

Research studies have described the collegial support system or peer supervision as a systematic process. Teachers, who have been identified for their instructional leadership potential, have worked with administrators to help the teaching staff develop effective teaching behaviors, general professional attributes, and both short and long-range growth goals (Hopfengardner & Walker, 1984). The collegial process has de-emphasized the superior-subordinate relationship and emphasizes a cooperative relationship.

Peer supervision has provided the opportunity for classroom observational data, collected by both administrators and teachers, to be used to upgrade personal skills and to substantiate administrative decisions regarding contractual status of teachers. Peer supervision or coaching has been a way for teachers to provide companionship, mutual reflection, perception checking to other teachers, and sharing common successes and frustrations (Huddle, 1985).

The instructional leader's ability to transfer the power, to design the model, from a directive posture to a supportive posture will determine the success of the process (Hopfengardner & Walker, 1984). Principals must encourage collegial planning, public teaching, constructive feedback, and experimentation. To be effective, peer supervision must be seen as a process valuable for assisting professional

growth. Peer supervision has been used most effectively in connection with a comprehensive staff development program so that peers can offer the technical assistance needed for their colleagues. Collegial supervision can contribute to an improved climate between the instructional leader and teachers.

Peer Observation

Peer observation has been based on analysis rather than on evaluation (Barnett, 1983). Peer observation team members have assisted each other in discovering ways and means to improve instruction. The participating teachers became more aware of improvement possibilities and more enthusiastic about change and growth. Ellis, Smith, and Abbott (1979) proposed that teachers' acceptance of supervision would be more favorably received if a peer was a member of the supervisory team of clinical supervision. Clinical supervision, as defined by Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krajewski (1980), has been "that phase of instructional supervision which draws its data from first-hand observation of actual teaching events, and involves face-to-face (and other associated) interaction between the supervisor and teacher in the analysis of teaching behaviors and activities for instructional improvement" (pp. 19-20). Needs of individual teachers were identified by the principal and teachers working together. A teacher with a

particular need would be paired with two teachers who could offer assistance in that area. Each team member was observed twice by other team members using steps in the clinical supervision cycle. Teachers tended to be more receptive to supervision when peer observation was incorporated into the supervision process. Participation in a peer observation team resulted not only in improved teaching but also in an increased sense of professional responsibility and understanding.

Lempesis (1984) stated that teachers learn better teaching methods and teach more effectively simply by observing each other in action. Peer observations were also less anxiety-producing and far more fruitful when faculty members became accustomed to visiting one another's classes (Cangelosi, 1984).

Peer Review or Peer Assistance

In the report, *Teacher Compensation and Evaluation in Public Education* (1985), the Center for Public Sector Labor Relations of Indiana University said that peer review consisted of examining lesson plans, exams, examples of graded exams, and classroom observation. Teacher peers were able to take into account many context variables such as student characteristics, actual local resources and problems, current expectations, and other factors which were important in

estimating a teacher's adequacy (Bell, 1983). Peer review looked at both classroom performance and what the teacher intended to have happen, as well as other behavior that was exhibited by the assignment and grading practices. Through this technique of evaluating teachers, it has been assumed that the peers were in the position to assess competence and also could offer specific and practical suggestions for improvement.

Peer review has not generally been recommended for use in making personnel decisions. However, peer review can address many concerns of teachers and administrators as an approach that has clearly focused on the formative aspect of teacher development.

Peer Evaluation

Educational research has indicated that the concept of peer evaluation has a tremendous potential for improving classroom instruction. It also can enhance the self esteem and professional growth of teachers (Singh, 1984). The use of peer evaluation in evaluating teacher achievement can lead to teacher cooperation and acceptance of the evaluation system. Peer evaluation can serve not only as a means of dissolving teacher resistance to evaluation but also as a method for more monitoring of teacher performance. It has placed substantial

responsibility for raising performance standards of the teaching profession directly in the hands of the teachers.

Peer evaluation was developed as a participatory method of evaluating teachers. Cooperation among administrators, teachers, supervisors, school boards, and teacher organizations was needed for improving the evaluation of teacher performance. The chief beneficiary of peer evaluation was the teacher. The objectives of peer evaluation as established by Ban and Soudah (1978) were as follows:

1. Peer evaluation was an effective mechanism through which teachers participated and were exposed to the techniques and styles of others; made teachers aware of their strengths and weaknesses as perceived and assessed by a significant number of their peers; and provided an effective means of determining what types and degrees of instructional assistance teachers, schools or school systems needed through in-service education for improvement of instruction.

2. Peer evaluation moved teaching closer to true professionalism by giving teachers the responsibility for helping ensure high quality instruction.

3. Peer evaluation provided a system of gathering information about quality instruction to assist in the formulation of more effective criteria for assessing quality instruction.

4. Peer evaluation provided a system through which teachers could participate in the removal of incompetent teachers.

There have been many approaches to peer evaluation. Three common approaches that have been used in the development of a system of peer evaluation included team teaching, reflective teaching, and videotaping (Singh, 1984).

The first approach, team teaching, provided a structure for collegial feedback and appraisal. Requirements of time, training, and trust were needed to make this approach effective.

Reflective teaching provided an opportunity for a teacher to teach demonstration lessons in the presence of his/her peer group. These mini teaching sessions allowed the peer group to observe and practice what their colleague had taught. The teacher and colleagues then "reflected" what was taught and collectively made suggestions for instructional improvement.

Videotaping of classroom instruction provided a means of immediate feedback for teachers. A review of a videotape with a colleague was helpful in providing supportive and constructive suggestions for improvement (Dienst, 1981). These colleague approaches were based upon the formative teacher evaluation method.

A peer evaluation plan that has proven to be effective was instituted in the Toledo school district of Ohio (McCormick, 1985; Lawrence, 1985). This evaluation plan made a difference in both improving teaching quality and arriving at fair personnel decisions. The Toledo Plan was endorsed by the teachers, backed by the union, and supported by the administration. In this situation, peer evaluation shifted the responsibility for improved teacher performance to those who needed improving. The plan consisted of two parts: an intern program for incoming teachers and an intervention program for veteran teachers whose performance was not up to standards.

The high quality and commitment of the consulting teachers were keys to the success of both the intern and intervention programs. Consulting teachers were selected after administration and union officials reviewed references from colleagues and principals, conducted interviews, and considered written applications. Active consultants had no teaching responsibilities and were selected for three years after which they must return to the classroom.

The intern program was intended to ensure that only competent teachers received tenure or long-term contracts. The first year of intern teaching was probationary. The interns were not evaluated by the principals but two formal

evaluations were completed by the teacher consultants or peer evaluators. The principals were briefed on the progress of the interns. If the intern was allowed to continue teaching in the system for the following year, the principal took over the evaluation process.

The intervention program aimed at helping the incompetent teachers was the final measure given to incompetent teachers who had already been provided special services to improve. The consulting teachers worked with the poor performers until either their teaching became satisfactory or a recommendation for dismissal was issued by the consulting teacher to the school's personnel office.

Peer evaluation was significantly helpful in providing teachers with an awareness of what constitutes excellence in teaching. Shared responsibilities has lead to quality control of the educational profession.

Strengths and Advantages

The use of colleagues for evaluating instruction has been a constructive, positive, humanistic, and non-threatening method for improvement of instruction. Bryant and Haack (1977) stated that "one of the greatest reservoirs for improvement of instruction exists in the competence of excellent teachers in every school building in this nation" (p. 609).

Some educational reformers saw colleague evaluation as a mechanism to strengthen staff competency and remove incompetent individuals. Peer evaluation gave teachers greater responsibility for their own professional growth (Phelan, Performance Evaluations, 1983; Lawrence, 1985; McCormick, 1985). Dienst (1981) had indicated when colleague evaluation was strictly for improvement purposes, greater flexibility and informality methods was possible. A positive development of collegial relationships was accomplished by encouraging mutual assistance and support in the improvement of teaching. This contributed to the faculty's confidence in the evaluation process.

Lujan and Daugherty (1986) at the North Central Annual Conference in Chicago explained the progress and findings of using peer evaluation in Colorado. Some of the major findings after the peer evaluation process had been in existence for four years were as follows:

1. Teachers participating in the peer evaluation process were observed more often than when evaluated by an administrator.
2. Peer evaluation participants had found this method of evaluation more useful for improving instruction.
3. Teachers were engaged in discussions with colleagues about teaching practices more than in the past.

4. Teachers were engaged in analysis of their teaching behavior more often.
5. Teachers received more help in resolving problems.
6. There were more attempts at using new methods of organizing teaching.
7. Teachers received more motivating praise.
8. Peer evaluation eliminated some feelings of isolation.
9. Staff members could openly discuss concerns about personal teaching performance with peers and administrators.
10. Most teachers felt that the process provided helpful feedback about specific aspects of their teaching.

Benzley (1985) described in a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, a unique teacher evaluation system which included peer review and assistance for deficient teachers. This performance assistance system was instituted in 1975 at the Salt Lake City School District. There was a high level of teacher acceptance of the peer review process because of the following reasons: it provided general help to the profession, helped in the removal of poor teachers, provided a more democratic process, and also helped teachers solve their own problems. Direct instructional effects of peer review were improved teaching and positive morale factor was developed by the teachers.

Teachers of the Salt Lake City District in Utah liked the idea of shared governance in the program. Teacher involvement in design and implementation of the educational system was highly correlated with teachers' acceptance of the system. A recommendation by the teachers was that peer reviewers should be drawn from other schools, thus minimizing the possibility of disruptions of professional peer relationships.

Teachers' perceptions of the indirect benefits gained from participation as a peer evaluator ranged from self-reflection to increased involvement with other professionals, a source of ideas and a means to improve their own teaching, and a broader perspective on teaching and the profession.

Grossnickle and Cutter (1984) stated that the advantages of collegial evaluation included increased validity, a mechanism for formative evaluation, and an opportunity for professional development. Also, the system could be perceived as more valid because of the frequency of visits would be greater. In addition, teachers believed that fellow teachers have more expertise than administrators when teacher evaluation is involved.

The collegial system increased the opportunity for formative evaluation. Suggestions for improvement were more likely to be heeded when they came from peers. Peer

evaluation also exposed the teacher to a variety of techniques and philosophies, and provided the administrator with a better appraisal link between organizational goals and actual classroom activities (Grossnickle & Cutter, 1984).

Weaknesses and Detractors

Colleague observations may be criticized on the grounds that the observation itself will affect the teacher's teaching, causing either an extreme amount of preparation and an enhanced performance, or undue anxiety and a weakened performance. Levine (1984) identified that the interaction effects between the observer and observee can also be a criticism of colleague observations. Variables, such as sex, personality, and teaching style may influence the outcome of the evaluation. Matters of politics, friendships, styles and role expectations have accounted more for the variance in evaluations than did the actual variety of teaching (Bell, 1983).

Some faculty members were more likely than others to give out high evaluations, regardless of whom they observed, whereas others tended to give out low evaluations. Peers generally rated teachers much more leniently (Ford & Hassel, 1984). The difference in leniency could be due to different expectations among observers, amount of sympathy and

compassion for observees, and the use of different baselines against which the observees were judged (Levine, 1984).

The lack of evaluation skills for the evaluator in peer evaluation was another criticism. Constructive peer criticism can be a powerful tool in improving instruction and stimulating professional growth, but few were skilled at peer evaluation, and planned in-service was needed to use the skills constructively (Eckland & McElhinney, 1977).

One of the major complaints from teachers was that there was not enough time to perform all their duties. Lempesis (1984) had found that teachers were reluctant to give up any more time than necessary from their already overcrowded schedules. Peer evaluation would require more time if the system was to be implemented effectively (Grossnickle & Cutter, 1984). School districts frequently have not given staff the time or access to observe colleagues at work. If the school district did provide the time for the peer evaluator, the major problem would then be locating qualified substitute teachers (Benzley, 1985). The quality of the substitutes has appeared to be a concern of the teacher participants in the peer evaluation process.

Phelan (1983) in his paper about professional collegiality had indicated that teachers' leaders frequently have identified colleague evaluation as decisive and damaging

to staff cooperation. Teachers were apprehensive about judgments of others. Instructors feared that requests for peer assistance could reflect badly on their competency. Bell (1983) had stated that "peer evaluation is limited by such professional phenomena as isolation and professional modesty" (p. 8).

Feedback to the faculty member was important if the evaluations were to have any usefulness for the improvement of teaching, but the problem of confidentiality must be taken into consideration. This was particularly true when the peer evaluations were to be used as part of the personnel process (Dienst, 1981). When peer observation was used in making personnel decisions, there was strong faculty resistance on the grounds of academic freedom or the sanctity of the classroom.

Teachers' Views and Concerns

The main emphasis of this section is to clarify the understanding of how the teachers feel about colleagues in the evaluation process. It is important to understand what teachers think and how they feel instead of just the researchers' views on this subject.

Faculty reactions to the implementation of colleague evaluation and classroom visitation depended significantly on the manner in which such evaluation procedures were implemented

(Dienst, 1981). It was important to have a set of explicit criteria by which colleagues could make their evaluations. For colleagues observed strictly for evaluation purposes, the criteria helped to guide the observations. The criteria selected should reflect aspects of teaching that has broad departmental consensus and also so that the observer would be in the best position to provide information.

Kauchak (1984) had found that the most consistent concern voiced by teachers when asked about peer evaluation was the possibility that this practice would lead to increased professional competition and isolation in schools. The teachers were afraid that some possible consequences of peer evaluation would be spying, jealousy, personality clashes, bitterness, and resentment. Teachers suggested that peer evaluators be recruited from different schools to help this problem.

The background of the evaluator was also another concern of the teachers. It was suggested that the peer evaluators come from the same subject matter area or from the same grade level. The concern was that the evaluator be knowledgeable about the problems and conditions encountered by the teacher being evaluated.

Teachers were hesitant to serve as an evaluator because of their professional roles and part from concerns about

professional self-competence. Teachers did not see the responsibility for evaluating teachers as part of their role definition. Teachers felt that they did not have the professional competence or expertise.

Phelan (Performance Evaluations, 1983) had hypothesized that teachers would want peers to be involved in the evaluation process but his research had some very interesting conclusions regarding staff reductions and performance evaluations. In 1980, he had surveyed sixteen school districts in a geographical spread from northwestern Massachusetts to Cape Cod. The survey indicated that older teachers were more protective toward their jobs. Senior teachers, particularly those born before 1940, with seventeen plus years service, were more likely to endorse administrative responsibility for classroom observations and evaluation. Younger colleagues were more likely to see evaluations by administration as essential to staff reduction decisions. Junior staff members were less accepting of administrative control but were more willing to trust such authority if their jobs were at stake. Elementary school teachers were most accepting of administrative control over evaluations. The more established staff members rejected peer input.

If school staffs were involved with "team teaching", there was greater favoritism toward colleague participation.

Joint teaching had represented an opportunity to have professionals observe one's teaching. Under such circumstances teachers showed signs of acceptance of peer judgments and less acceptance of administrative evaluations.

Acceptance of administrative evaluations was contingent upon a principal or department head's visibility. Accessibility and visibility, rather than intrusion, were the important elements of acceptance of administrative evaluations. Colleague involvement in the evaluation process was viewed favorably, but not at the expense of administrative control.

Conclusion

Bell (1983) had emphasized that peer evaluation works and works well or it would have been abandoned years ago. Higher education has used peer evaluation in an effective way for promotion in academe.

In a quote from Bell (1983), he stated that "these advantages (peer evaluation) are urgently needed in the elementary and secondary school teaching ranks if we are to revitalize the profession. As we become more sophisticated in measurement and evaluation of teacher performance, we will still face the interpretation and decision making process. This is best done with the participation of teachers and other

interested and professionally competent persons sharing their best knowledge" (p. 11).

Colleague observations should be a very important part of the evaluation process, but only if the integrity of the process can be maintained (Levine, 1984). Collegial evaluation has given the teacher a more realistic appraisal of his/her performance in the classroom and it has exposed a variety of teaching skills. It inherently provided many opportunities for formative evaluation, thus improving instruction. Peer evaluation also provided for increased time and attention to evaluation.

The use of teacher colleagues in the evaluation process also has its disadvantages. The authors cited the following weaknesses: the interaction effects between the observer and observee, leniency of the colleague evaluator or observer, evaluator's lack of evaluation skills, additional time required to effectively implement the system, and the problem of locating quality substitute teachers for the evaluators. Although the use of colleagues in the evaluation process is questioned, it would appear that the benefits do provide a means to instructional improvement.

It should be kept in mind that peer evaluation has not been designed to replace evaluations done by principals and other supervisory personnel, but to provide administrators

with additional data to assist in the general monitoring of the progress and productivity of all teachers in the system. Administrators in school districts can provide the catalyst for the development of peer evaluation systems.

Singh (1984) is convinced that peer evaluation, carefully structured with guidelines and objectives clearly defined, has the potential of enhancing the self-esteem and professional growth of teachers. Peer evaluation could also have a tremendous impact in terms of improvement of instruction in our educational system. An effective program of peer evaluation can assist in improving teacher performance, as well as the general school climate, and therefore can have a positive influence on student achievement (Rothberg, 1979).

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