***Teacher Evaluation***

*http://www.danielsongroup.org/coaching.htm*

An effective system of teacher evaluation accomplishes two things: it ensures quality teaching and it promotes professional learning. The quality of teaching is the single most important determinant of student learning; a school district's system of teacher evaluation is the method by which it ensures that teaching is of high quality. Therefore, the system developed for teacher evaluation must have certain characteristics: it must be rigorous, valid, reliable, and defensible, and must be grounded in a research-based and accepted definition of good teaching. The *Framework for Teaching* provides such a foundation. In addition, however, the procedures used in teacher evaluation can be used to promote professional learning. When teachers engage in self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation, they become more thoughtful and analytic about their work, and are in a position to improve their teaching. Evaluators can contribute to teachers' professional learning through the use of in-depth reflective questions. By shifting the focus of evaluation from "inspection" to "collaborative reflection" educators can ensure the maximum benefit from the evaluation activities.

***New Trends in Teacher Evaluation***
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***http://www.danielsongroup.org/articleEvaluation.htm***

***Overview***
After years in the educational wilderness, teacher evaluation is back in the news. This reflects more than the familiar fad *du jour* to which educators are prone to succumb. Instead, it reflects recent research on teacher quality (it matters!) and increased calls from the public and their legislators for educator (as well as student) accountability. All over the country, educators are re-discovering their systems of teacher evaluation (intended to ensure teaching quality), and are revising these systems to reflect what is now known about good teaching and how to best promote it.

However, in most places, it is not a pretty picture. Most existing systems of teacher evaluation are taken seriously by neither teachers nor administrators. They are based on outmoded criteria, observations are conducted on the run by poorly-trained evaluators who are not sure

what they should be looking for, and virtually all teachers are rated at the top of whatever scale is used. That is, the way evaluations are conducted in the vast majority of districts, they serve neither of the functions for which they are intended, ensuring quality and promoting professional learning. There are a few (thankfully only a few) teachers who should not be in the classroom, and the evaluation system contributes nothing to professional growth.

And yet it matters. There are proposals to radically alter teacher compensation, probably linking this in some manner to local evaluations. If this is done, it is critical that district evaluation systems be able to differentiate the truly excellent teacher from the merely competent, and that they be able to do so in a manner universally regarded as fair and valid.

***Elements of a Comprehensive System***

What, then, are the characteristics of evaluation systems that would meet these rigorous standards? As I describe in a book I co-wrote with Tom McGreal (*Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*, ASCD, 2000), we can think of teacher evaluation systems as being comprised of three major components: a clear definition of good teaching (the "what"), fair and reliable methods to elicit evidence of good teaching (the "how"), and trained evaluators who can make consistent judgments based on evidence.

These elements are discussed more fully below.

***The "What"***

Central to the notion of the evaluation of teaching is a clear and coherent definition of exemplary practice. That is (in the vernacular), what do good teachers do? And to what extent is what good teachers do the same or different in different contexts (such as second grade or high school biology)? This should not be a controversial idea; in assessing performance for any purpose (awarding a driver's license, permitting candidates to graduate from medical school, accepting candidates to the bar, it is first essential to determine what constitutes acceptable practice. Every other part of the system for evaluation rests on the successful completion of this step; when reasonable people disagree about an individual's evaluation, it can be explained, virtually always, by lack of agreement, or poor communication, on the issue of what constitutes good practice.

Many districts have found the components of professional practice described in *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (Danielson, ASCD, 1996), useful as a structure for describing teaching in general. Figure One lists the four domains and 22 components.

**FIGURE ONE**

- **Planning and Preparation**
- Demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy
- Demonstrating knowledge of students
- Setting instructional outcomes
- Demonstrating knowledge of resources
- Designing coherent instruction
- Designing student assessments

- **Classroom Environment**
- Creating an environment of respect and rapport
- Establishing a culture for learning
- Managing classroom procedures
- Managing student behavior
- Organizing physical space

- **Instruction**
- Communicating with students
- Using questioning and discussion techniques
- Engaging students in learning
- Using assessment in instruction
- Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness

- **Professional Responsibilities**
- Reflecting on teaching
- Maintaining accurate records
- Communicating with families
- Participating in a professional community
- Growing and developing professionally
- Showing professionalism

As part of defining good teaching, it is important to establish the relative importance of the different criteria (Are they all equally important?). Or are they all equally important in all settings? Some might be more important for the elementary teacher, others for the content specialist at the secondary level. In addition, educators must determine what it looks like at different levels of performance (what does it look like when it is done well?) and a standard for acceptable, or exemplary, performance (How good is good enough, and how good is very good?). The standards of performance must be clear and unambiguous, and both publicly known and publicly derived.

Levels of performance are included in *Enhancing Professional Practice* for the components of teaching identified there. The four levels of performance are named "unsatisfactory," "basic," "proficient," and "distinguished." A sample, for one of the components, is provided below.

**Questioning and Discussion Techniques**

*Elements: Quality of questions, Discussion techniques, Student participation*

| Element | Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Quality of Questions* | Teacher's questions are virtually all of poor quality, with low cognitive challenge, single correct responses, and asked in rapid succession. | Teacher's questions are a combination of low and high quality, posed in rapid succession. Only some invite a thoughtful response. | Most of teacher's questions are of high quality. Adequate time is provided for students to respond. | Teacher's questions are of uniformly high quality, with adequate time for students to respond. Students formulate many questions. |
| *Examples* | | | | |
| *Discussion Techniques* | Interaction between teacher and students is predominantly recitation style, with the teacher mediating all questions and answers. | Teacher makes some attempt to engage students in genuine discussion rather than recitation, with uneven results. | Teacher creates a genuine discussion among students, stepping aside when appropriate. | Students assume considerable responsibility for the success of the discussion, initiating topics and making unsolicited contributions. |
| *Examples* | | | | |
| *Student Participation* | A few students dominate the discussion. | Teacher attempts to engage all students in the discussion, but with only limited success. | Teacher successfully engages all students in the discussion. | Students themselves ensure that all voices are heard in the discussion. |
| *Examples* | | | | |

The important work for educators in the deciding what constitutes good practice is to develop a set of shared values and assumptions that can then guide the further development of the system. Because this is hard (although professionally rewarding) work, many practitioners have begun their conversations with The Framework for Teaching, and have adapted it to their setting.

***The "How"***

In order to ensure a valid evaluation system, it is necessary that all the criteria identified as contributing to good practice be capable of being demonstrated. If, for example, communicating with families is one of the evaluative criteria, how will teachers demonstrate

their skill? Since this skill is not visible in a classroom observation, other procedures will have to be devised.
The "how" includes a number of items, ranging from the general procedures (possibly differentiated for novices and experienced teachers), the timelines, the personnel involved, and the specific forms and procedures used. All these should be clear to everyone involved, and implemented in an equitable manner. For example, will observations be conducted, and if so, how many will be there be? Will they be announced or un-announced, and who will conduct them? And when? Will formal lesson plans be required, and will these be evaluated for evidence of skill in planning? What else in addition will teachers be asked to do as part of their evaluation? Should they be asked to submit samples of their systems of record-keeping? If so, how many? Must experienced teachers be formally evaluated every year, or is a multi-year cycle acceptable? If so, what do they do in the "other" years? What about the performance of the students? And how should that be determined?

Using student performance to evaluate teacher skill is fraught, in all cases, with challenges. Students themselves vary tremendously in what they bring to the setting, and some of these factors are beyond the control of the teacher, and even the school. Furthermore, valid assessments of important student learning are not always available, and certainly for not all areas of the curriculum. But if designed carefully, with appropriate measures of growth (assessments before and following a year's instruction, for example), the systems can be fair to teachers, and can include information central to the work of teaching, namely, student learning.

Evaluation processes must allow for reasonable judgments to be made regarding the quality of teaching, and there must be procedures to offer intensive assistance, if needed, to teachers who are struggling to perform adequately. And, if performance is not at least minimally acceptable, after assistance has been provided and all the requirements of due process have been followed, there must be manageable procedures for termination.

In addition, there is room in most procedures for teacher evaluation for the teachers themselves to assume an active role in the process. They do not need to be completely passive. In a traditional system, of course, it is the administrators who do the lion's share of the work: they conduct observations, they take notes, they write up their notes, they meet with the teacher to provide feedback on the lesson. Instead, in many newer systems, it is the teachers who take an active role. They explain what they are trying to accomplish in the lesson; following the lesson, they interpret the events that took place and provide contextual information. And if teachers submit artifacts from their practice, they describe these, and interpret them against the levels of performance.

When teachers assume an active role in the processes of their evaluation, when they are asked to reflect on the success of an observed lesson, when they are asked to analyze student work, they actually become more skilled and more thoughtful as a result of these activities. Therefore, many districts are finding that they can vastly enhance the impact of their evaluation systems on the quality of teaching by asking teachers, as part of the process, to participate actively. Furthermore, the process then becomes more collegial, and more professional. If designed to support it, the "how" of a teacher evaluation system can promote dialogue and professional conversation. To be sure, the buck in teacher evaluation stops with the evaluator. However, it

need not start there, and when teachers assume an active role, the experience is, overwhelmingly, professionally rewarding.

***Trained Evaluators***

Those making evaluative judgments must be adequately trained so their judgments are accurate, consistent, and based on evidence. From the standpoint of those being evaluated, it must not matter who is conducting the evaluation; the result should be the same regardless of the identity of the evaluator. This consistency of judgment on the part of trained evaluators is an essential guarantee of the reliability of the system as a whole.

The training of evaluators has several important elements.

First, they must be able to recognize examples of the evaluative criteria in action. Classroom events and instructional artifacts constitute mere data; which of them should be selected as evidence of the different evaluative criteria? The evidence selected should not only be relevant to the various criteria; it should also be representative; not only negative evidence, for example, should be identified. Next, the evidence for some aspect of teaching must be interpreted against the evaluative criteria. As any careful observer of teaching recognizes, there is more than one possible interpretation of an event; correct interpretation is an important aspect of professional judgment about teaching. Lastly, the evaluator must make a judgment about the teacher's performance, linking the interpretations to the descriptions of levels of performance. In addition, evaluator training should also include attention to the skills of reflective conversation and providing constructive feedback.

The evaluation of teachers in many subjects presents a particular challenge for the training of evaluators: that of evaluator expertise. Not every high school administrator has the academic background to fairly assess a chemistry lesson, or a music rehearsal. Similarly, very few school administrators at the elementary level, are highly sensitive to the latest research in early childhood learning and teaching. This suggests the desirability of engaging subject-matter experts (either department chairs or district level supervisors, if available) in the process. It also suggests a role for teachers themselves in explaining and interpreting their practice.

***Summary***

The evaluation of teaching, like the evaluation of any complex performance, must be organized around a coherent set of principles:

- Educators must be clear about what they are evaluating, and must communicate this to those being evaluated (the "what" of the evaluation process, what constitutes good teaching.) If possible, this definition of teaching should be formulated jointly by both teachers and evaluators.
- Procedures for documenting all aspects of performance must be clear and clearly understood by all involved (the "how" of the evaluation process.)
- Those evaluating performance must be adequately trained to be able to make consistent judgments about teaching.

In light of these requirements, most recently-developed (or revised) systems of teacher

evaluation share certain important characteristics:

- *Differentiated procedures for novices and experienced teachers*. Typically, teachers new to the profession and/or to a school district, receive more intensive support and supervision than do experienced teachers.
- *Multi-year evaluation cycles for experienced teachers*. In many new systems, experienced teachers are formally evaluated only every three, four, or even five years. In the other years they engage in self-directed professional growth, frequently with colleagues in a study group.
- *Required activities that promote professional learning*. Whether discussing an observed lesson, or analyzing student work, or selecting samples of family communication to include in a professional portfolio, teachers engage in activities, as part of the evaluation process, that engage them in reflection and conversation about their practice. To the maximum extent possible, these activities also represent a "natural harvest" (to borrow a concept from the National Board) of teachers' work; that is, what they do for their evaluation is not extra work.

Missouri has indicated that it is serious about evaluating teacher performance. To the extent that the identification of excellent teaching is organized through local systems of teacher evaluation, those systems must be robust, rigorous, and fair. Attention to the design principles described in this article can ensure that they are.