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Evaluating Experienced Teachers

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Experienced teachers in North Carolina benefit from an evaluation system that sets clear expectations and combines traditional evaluation with individual growth opportunities.



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Teacher quality matters. Students cannot meet high standards of achievement without effective teachers in the classroom. More and more, teachers are called upon to develop high skill levels to address the challenging standards set by state accountability systems. Students are accountable for learning through state testing, and their teachers are accountable for providing the instruction necessary to meet those standards.

In 1998, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted new standards for teaching performance. Based on standards developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), these state standards reflected current national trends in demanding more of teachers than the state's existing teacher evaluation system. To support these standards, the state awarded contracts to develop teacher evaluation systems for experienced teachers to SERVE—a regional educational laboratory housed at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro—and five other organizations. Experienced teachers are classroom teachers with four or more years of experience. Less experienced teachers are evaluated using the Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument for Beginning Teachers (TPAI-BT), which is part of the performance-based licensure process in North Carolina.

Summative and Formative Evaluation

We based our model of teacher evaluation for experienced teachers, the Professional Review Process, on SERVE's 10 years of experience in research and development in formative teacher evaluation (Egelson & McColskey, 1998). *Formative* teacher evaluation provides a structure for individualized professional growth through a process of self-assessment, goal setting, and feedback from such sources as peer review, peer coaching, and portfolio development. Formative evaluation does not judge total teacher performance; rather, it provides an opportunity for experienced teachers to work on specific skills.

When we first began helping schools and districts examine their current teacher evaluation systems, we heard that existing *summative* systems that relied on classroom observation were not helping teachers grow professionally. We began working with districts to add a growth component to existing evaluation cycles. Experienced teachers participated in this growth component—formative evaluation—during the years that they weren't undergoing summative evaluation by an

administrator. In most cases, the state mandated the summative evaluation process, but that evaluation was separate from the formative evaluation process.

Our challenge was to develop a process for evaluating experienced teachers that could provide accountability, set high performance expectations, support professional dialogue among teachers and administrators, and encourage teacher ownership in the process. In our experience, the summative and formative components need to be separate so that the administrator doesn't have to serve as both coach and judge. For example, teachers might be afraid to try new methods if they think the principal will see only the struggles and not the successes. Evaluation that leads to professional growth requires teachers to look honestly at their weaknesses and strengths; summative evaluation by an administrator requires teachers to provide the best possible performance in a brief period of time.

We did not want to lose the formative component of evaluation, so we proposed a comprehensive system in which teachers could cycle through professional growth and traditional evaluation phases that supported each other. Local districts decide on the length of the cycle—usually three to five years. The principal determines when teachers are ready for formative evaluation on the basis of how they perform on the summative evaluation. Teachers do not participate in formative evaluations indefinitely; rather, they cycle through a summative evaluation year according to the length of the cycle that their district chooses.

Setting Clear Expectations

To meet this challenge, we incorporated several principles into our design. First, the evaluation system should provide clearly written performance expectations that reflect teaching practices that encourage learning. We theorized that, just as a road map leads to the right destination, good teaching will lead to improved student learning. We built these expectations on the North Carolina teaching standards, the INTASC standards, and the National Board standards and on research on effective teaching. We asked teachers, administrators, teacher organizations, and such groups as the North Carolina Commission for Professional Teaching Standards to review these developing performance dimensions or expectations.

The resulting analytic rubric for scoring the summative evaluation component reflects current trends in evaluation (Danielson, 1996). It defines four performance levels—unsatisfactory, needs improvement, competent, and accomplished—for 22 performance dimensions or expectations (see fig.1). This rubric provides teachers with clear descriptions of each level of performance. Teachers can use the matrix for self-assessment to understand what they are expected to do and to reach a higher level of performance.

Figure 1. The Summative Scoring Matrix

Categories	Performance Dimensions
I. Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Long-range planning with sequencing 2. Alignment with the North Carolina Standards Course of Study or the curriculum in place 3. Materials and equipment

II. Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Context of the lesson 5. Content knowledge and presentation 6. Appropriateness of the lesson and pacing 7. Use of technology 8. Effectiveness of instructional strategies 9. Strategies for underachieving students 10. Questioning strategies
III. Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Analysis of students' assessment results 12. Meaningful student work assignments 13. Quality of feedback to students
IV. Student Motivation and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Expectations and procedures 15. Expectations for student success 16. Student interest and participation 17. Classroom climate
V. Teacher Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Student progress toward school and individual goals 19. Contribution to school climate
VI. Professional Growth and Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Alignment of professional development 21. Interaction with parents 22. Teacher's records

Figure 2 shows the summative scoring matrix for measuring the appropriateness of a lesson and how the teacher has paced the lesson. Teachers can look at the rubric, assess their performance, and chart a course for improvement, if necessary. Principals can use the rubric when evaluating a teacher's level of performance on the basis of such evidence as observation data, student work samples, or lesson plans.

Figure 2. Performance Dimension 6

Appropriateness of the lesson and pacing

Unsatisfactory	Needs Improvement	Competent	Accomplished
<p>The pacing is usually too slow, too rushed, or both, with inappropriate use of instructional time. Students waste time by avoiding work.</p> <p>Most activities do not reflect developmentally appropriate practices.</p>	<p>The pacing is inconsistent. Opportunities for student engagement are limited with inconsistently appropriate use of instructional time.</p> <p>Frequent off-task behaviors observed.</p> <p>Activities are not always developmentally appropriate.</p>	<p>The pacing consistently offers opportunities for active student engagement with appropriate use of instructional time.</p> <p>Activities always reflect developmentally appropriate practices.</p>	<p>All students are actively engaged in a variety of meaningful ways, with maximum use of instructional time.</p> <p>Activities reflect developmentally appropriate practices that challenge but do not overwhelm students.</p> <p>Activities consistently build on prior knowledge of students.</p>

Instructional presentation is a key component of teaching, but not the only one. The second principle of our evaluation system, therefore, is to provide a system that considers a broader view of teaching. *Observation* should no longer be synonymous with *evaluation*. When administrators observe teachers, they gain valuable data and feedback, but they don't have enough information to judge a teacher's total teaching performance. Teachers do much more than present a lesson; they plan it, assess it, reflect on it, develop strategies for presenting it, and build parental involvement for it.

We identified six categories of teaching: planning, instruction, assessment, management and motivation of students, teacher impact, and professional growth and contributions. We grouped the 22 performance dimensions within these categories (see fig. 1). A principal who helped us test the evaluation system commented that she often overlooked planning in classroom observation unless the lack of it was obvious, but that this system allowed her to address specific weaknesses in an otherwise strong teacher's long-range planning.

Active Teacher Involvement

One problem with traditional evaluation methods is that the teacher's role is largely passive. In such cases, the teacher has little opportunity to comment on his or her performance. To move beyond total reliance on classroom observation, our system provides a structure that encourages a teacher to gather supporting evidence or documentation of all aspects of teaching. Teachers should not do anything for evaluation that they are not doing for their students, so the data they collect during the year in which they undergo summative evaluation should reflect actual teaching practice. Such data might include samples of student work, lesson or unit plans, documentation of

professional activities, letters to or from parents, and survey data collected from parents and students. The samples collected allow teachers to individualize the process. Teachers can use the scoring matrix to assess themselves at the beginning of the school year and then select or develop evidence that best supports their level of teaching. Focusing early in the year on the expectations for performance encourages teachers to reflect on their current teaching practices.

Following a self-assessment using the summative scoring matrix, for example, one experienced teacher realized that she had not been analyzing student assessment results to guide instructional planning and intervention strategies (Performance Dimension 11). She had been assessing student progress primarily through grading papers, but student achievement did not really *guide* her planning. Besides, the teacher usually had her next week's plans already written and turned into the office before she graded papers from the previous week. She also rarely looked closely at her students' achievement levels when they entered her class in the fall because she didn't want to judge the students before meeting them.

This veteran teacher realized, however, that she would need to know more about her students and that she had overlooked assessment as a tool for doing so. To be competent in the performance dimension, she needed to demonstrate not only that she was proficient in analyzing student assessment results—both state testing and classroom work—but also that she had adjusted her instruction accordingly. To be accomplished in this area, she would have to demonstrate skill in designing assessments for diagnostic and formative purposes. The teacher chose to focus on this performance dimension for her professional growth this year.

Our system also provides a structure that encourages reflection through a professional dialogue—the final interview—at the end of the summative year. The teacher and the evaluating administrator participate in a structured interview in the teacher's classroom. The teacher presents authentic evidence of his or her teaching and reflects on such activities as planning lessons and analyzing student assessment results and student progress.

During the final interview, the principal takes notes, guides the discussion through questioning, and—most important—listens to the teacher. The principal conducts the interview using structured interview questions designed to ensure that the teacher is given the opportunity to address all of the performance dimensions. The teacher might pull various student work samples to illustrate a point. Teachers may also use bulletin boards or classroom computers to demonstrate an instructional or motivational strategy they wish to highlight. In one final interview, for example, a 6th grade math teacher demonstrated how she used a computer program to allow her students to design their own T-shirts in a unit on tessellation. We repeatedly heard teachers say that they appreciated the opportunity to show their principals what they did all year, not just during classroom observations.

We designed the final interview to give the teacher the opportunity to provide input about his or her performance and to promote teacher ownership of the evaluation process. With the scoring rubric as a guide, the teacher's self-assessment and reflection combine with the principal's feedback from the summative component to provide the teacher with a complete picture of his or her teaching.

We field-tested the professional review process with 47 classroom teachers and 8 administrators. These participants provided us with invaluable feedback and suggestions for training materials and revisions. One principal commented,

Including information concerning the impact on students is very valuable when assessing the overall performance of a teacher. It provides opportunities for the teacher to analyze data as well as receive feedback from students and parents.

A teacher noted,

I liked having the opportunity to show the principal things that I do in my classroom that

he or she may not be able to observe during a formal observation.

Twenty districts are in the initial phases of implementing our system, with support and training from SERVE.

Linking School and Teacher Performance

Teacher evaluation can serve as a link between teacher and school performance. If schools are to meet the challenges of high-stakes accountability, principals must incorporate teacher evaluation into the school's strategy for continuous growth and improvement. If evaluation is added to an already overburdened job or viewed as just so much paperwork for compliance, principals will miss the opportunity to support their teachers' development and will not meet the goals of their schools. Involving teachers in their own assessments, helping them develop goals that are aligned with those of the school and district, and providing clear expectations and feedback encourage the type of professionalism and growth essential to high-quality teaching.

References

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