

A Different Way of Looking at Teacher Evaluation Practices

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At one time teacher evaluations were largely based on principal and supervisor observations but in recent years evaluations based on the opinions of peer teachers have received a good deal of attention (Johnson & Fiarman, 2012, Kumaravadivelu, 1995). This approach is fraught with all the personal factors that could easily cause faculty friction and dissent and the forms required by both the teacher being evaluated and the evaluation team are complicated and somewhat overwhelming. Teacher evaluation based on the opinions of other teachers is fraught with all the personal factors that could cause faculty friction and dissent. The forms required are complicated and somewhat overwhelming. I was a classroom teacher many years ago when such a procedure was used. It resulted in influences from personalities, friendships, and cliques among the faculty. The program was eventually scrapped and left behind many “hard feelings.”

What is missing from the supervisor and peer teacher approaches is feedback from the students themselves, the “consumers” of the services being rendered. In the non-school world of products and services it is the readers of books, the viewers of films, the customers of restaurants, and the users of products that provide opinions about the usefulness and satisfaction of a product or service. And in most institutions of higher education, end-of-course evaluations are routinely sent to students and the results are summarized for the instructors. This usage is considered to be a type of formative evaluation—providing feedback that will result in teacher improvement rather than termination or reprimand.

The description of this *formative* evaluation research procedure we have been examining to evaluate various aspects of teachers’ work uses comparative data gathered from both teachers and students. It is less threatening and gives teachers the options to look for ways to improve their “scores” on factors where there was variance between their ideal and perceived goals as compared with the opinions of students. The formative evaluation system that we have developed to determine the extent to which teachers provide students with opportunities to develop imagination, creativity, and innovation (Renzulli, et al., 20210) uses a 15 item

instrument is entitled *The School Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation (ICI) Index and Portfolio*. Students are asked to rate 15 items related to ICI (e.g., *My teachers ask me to look at things in different way; My teachers ask me to come up with my own ideas*) using a five-point scale ranging from Never to Almost Always. Students' responses were considered to be the **Actual** level of instructional application and were tagged with the letter A. Teachers were asked to complete two editions of the same instrument. The first edition simply asked them how often they used the strategies listed in the instrument. Their responses were characterized as their **Ideal** behavior and tagged with the letter I. Their second completion asked them to **Predict** how they thought their students would respond to each item and was tagged with the letter P. This procedure could easily be adapted to examine other aspects of teacher behaviors.

Essentially, we were looking for the “distance” between the As, Is, and Ps for the responses to each item (e.g., if all three responses received the same ratings by teachers and students it would be considered a good hit). We conducted exploratory factor analyses in SPSS using Principal Axis Factoring with Direct Oblimin Rotation to differentiate the factors as much as possible. For the initial extraction, 14 factors were identified, with three factors having noticeably higher eigenvalues than the rest. We next conducted an exploratory factor analysis of each subject area separately. In the second set of exploratory function equation modeling (EFA), the items loaded onto 2 factors in each subject area except Art. This suggests that the initial 14-factor solution was differentiating by subject area rather than by latent factors (i.e., each item loaded as a separate factor). Because items 1–10 and 11–15 consistently loaded together regardless of subject area (except Arts) and based on feedback from participants that the instrument was too long, we removed the subject-area distinctions for the second pilot. We also tested a 3-factor solution with each subject area, excluding Arts, to test whether the data would support the hypothesized structure. The 3-factor solution was deemed acceptable because the items that loaded on each factor almost all followed the initially theorized structure. Perhaps the best results from this study were that surveyed teachers said that they would like to have professional development on how to promote more ICI in their classrooms.

A full length article of the research can be found at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/MTCMRXZGU2R9E2ZJPCIK/full>

Teacher evaluation has always been a complex and challenging enigma for the education profession. We believe that a design such as the one used in this study is a non-threatening way to give teachers feedback that may lead to changes in their teaching behaviors as related to imagination, creativity, and innovation; and as mentioned above, the same design can be used to examine and provide feedback for other identified teaching strategies.

References

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