
Chapter 26

Approaches to Teacher Assessment

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Introduction

Although in the previous chapters, we have learned about a developmental role to supervision, we cannot forget that one of our undeniable roles as supervisors is to ensure standards are being met. We must ensure that the children in our schools are receiving a sound learning experience. In order to do this, we need to evaluate the teacher. However, we need to make sure that the evaluation is based on sound criteria which are shared with the teacher, and that we achieve a balance between the helping and assessment roles.

A Classroom Snapshot

Mona was feeling extremely nervous. She knew that today the supervisor was going to call. Of course, she wasn't supposed to know he was coming, but somebody had told her that her school was on the schedule for that day.

Last time the supervisor came, he had criticized both the fact that the children had made so many errors and the way Mona had dealt with them. He had also corrected her pronunciation of words from the book. This time Mona was determined that her pronunciation would be perfect. She looked up the pronunciation of new words in the dictionary and practiced the words with her more experienced colleague.

Mona also wanted to make sure that this time the children would not make quite so many errors, so she taught the lesson the previous day and told the children to learn everything at home so they would know all the answers and make no mistakes.

The supervisor came into Mona's class just as predicted. Despite her preparations, she could not help being nervous. The children sensed this and they became nervous too. The supervisor sat at the back of the room, writing in his book. What could he be writing?

At last the lesson came to an end. Mona was anxious to hear what the supervisor would say. Would he praise her improved pronunciation? The supervisor did indeed thank Mona for her efforts with the class, but he asked her to pay special attention to her blackboard work which, he said, was messy. He also felt she should use more classroom English.

Mona felt relieved when the supervisor had gone but also somewhat depressed. Why hadn't he commented on her improvements? If she worked hard on her classroom English and board work for next time, would he find other faults? If only she knew what he was going to look for.

Assessment and Developmental Roles of the Supervisor

As supervisors, you are expected to evaluate teachers in the legal and official sense. At the same time, you are also expected to help teachers learn to be better at their jobs by supporting their professional development. This can best be done by building a trusting relationship with the teacher.

Much has been written about the necessity of separating the supervisory role from the evaluative role. Cogan (1972) made this separation a cornerstone of the case for the clinical supervisor (see Chapter 25: *Giving Constructive Feedback*).

We no longer believe this separation is necessary or desirable because inevitably supervisors carry out both tasks. Just as teachers are asked every day to perform an evaluative and helping role with their students, so supervisors inevitably both help and assess. Just as no one claims that teaching and testing should be completely separate, so the helping and evaluative functions of the supervisor can be merged. Furthermore, if supervisors don't have evaluative data on teachers, how will they provide the specific help that is necessary to the teachers development? Let us first of all examine what we mean by evaluation.

Evaluation

Evaluation, in the sense we use it here, is the process by which teacher and supervisor assess teachers' performance and progress according to defined criteria for good practice. Evaluation is not about "finding fault" or even "praising" but about learning and noting where teachers are in their development and in determining steps to help them to develop further.

Achieving excellence in teaching can't be forced or legislated. However, when teachers are helped to focus on growth and are successful, their outcomes with students will be enhanced. Trust will also be enhanced. Real improvement of teaching will result only from teacher involvement in the evaluation. Teachers need to be aware of the criteria used in the evaluation system and of the reasons why the evaluation is important.

Why Should We Evaluate Teachers?

There are a number of reasons for evaluating our teachers. They are:

- To give teachers an overview of their teaching from the standpoint of an experienced professional (the supervisor)
- To let teachers know how effective their methods are
- To help teachers set goals for future improvement of their teaching
- To reassure stakeholders (teachers, school principals etc.) that good work is going on.

There is also a gatekeeping role to every profession and teaching is no exception. Supervisors must ensure that our teachers are meeting minimum professional standards. Furthermore, evaluation that is properly and sensitively conducted can help to motivate teachers to continue to learn and develop.

What Happens in Practice?

The system of assessing teachers varies greatly across faculties within Egypt as in many countries throughout the world. Some institutions have well-developed - and sometimes incredibly complex - checklists for supervisors to use when assessing teachers. Some supervisors use what is known as the "intuitive system" (Montgomery, 1999). Using this system, supervisors "just know" when they have seen a good lesson. Still other supervisors sit in lessons and make a list of corrective points. Unfortunately, it is not at all certain that two supervisors sitting in the same lesson would come up with the same list of points. In order for teachers to understand how they are evaluated, there needs to be agreement as to what constitutes good teaching.

What Should We Evaluate: The Good Teacher

Before deciding how we should evaluate, we need to know what to evaluate. When I asked some of our supervisor colleagues what it was that they evaluated when they went into a classroom, many said that they were trying to see whether the teacher was "good" or "competent." However, when I asked how they decided on the competency of the teacher, the answers varied. If we cannot agree on what it is we are evaluating, the danger is that different supervisors will have different ideas on what constitutes good teachers. This

could be quite confusing for teachers. Randall and Thornton (2001) describe a list, drawn up by supervisors from Central Europe, of five areas of competence of a good teacher. The five areas are:

1. Classroom management. Ability to manage the class and the learning process so that class time is actually used for learning.
2. Language ability. Effective and correct modeling of the target language.
3. Methodology. Familiarity with the course materials and sufficient methodological competence to teach the course.
4. Communication. Ability to get on well with others in a school.
5. Rapport with learners. Ability to motivate students and encourage them to learn.

When we discussed these areas with supervisors in Egypt, we found some difficulties. Some colleagues wanted to add other areas such as personal presence, punctuality and appearance. Others wondered how sufficient methodological competence could be further specified. It seemed that even if we could all share the same view of a good teacher, specifying exactly what that meant in practice was complex.

Teacher Standards and Teacher Competencies

In an effort to standardize what is meant by good teaching, many countries have tried defining teacher standards or teacher competencies. These are descriptions of what exactly teachers should be able to do or what teachers should know. By using competencies and basing both our teacher education programs and our assessment of teachers on them, we can ensure that all teachers entering the profession achieve certain minimum standards.

Recently in the United States, a group of educators has been working on standards specific to TESOL. They have come up with descriptors in a number of areas, extracts from which are given below.

Standard 1.a. Describing language. Candidates demonstrate understanding of language as a system and demonstrate a high level of competence in helping ESOL students acquire and use English in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing for both social and academic purposes.

Standard 1.b. Language acquisition and development. Candidates know, understand, and apply concepts, theories, research, and practice to

facilitate the acquisition of both a primary and a new language in and out of classroom settings.

Standard 2.a. Nature and role of culture. Candidates know, understand, and use the major concepts, principles, theories and research related to the nature and role of culture in language development and academic achievement which support individual students' learning.

Standard 2.b. Cultural groups and identity. Candidates know, understand, and use knowledge of how cultural groups and students' cultural identity affect language learning and school achievement.

Standard 2.c. Interrelationship between language and culture. Candidates know and understand the interrelationship between language and culture and the impact of this relationship on learning.

Standard 3.a. Planning for ESL instruction. Candidates know, understand, and apply concepts, research, and best practices to plan and organize classroom instruction in a supportive learning environment for ESOL students. Candidates demonstrate enthusiasm for learning a second language, serve as effective English language models, and manage the classroom effectively for multilevel classrooms with learners from diverse backgrounds.

Standard 3.b. Managing ESL instruction. Candidates know, understand and use a variety of effective teaching strategies and material for developing and integrating English listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Standard 3.c. Managing content instruction for ESOL learners. Candidates know, understand, and can implement a range of teaching strategies, structures, and models to support ESOL students in accessing the core curriculum by learning language and academic content together.

Standard 3.d. Using resources effectively in ESL instruction. Candidates are familiar with a wide range of materials, resources, and technologies and choose, adapt, and use them in effective ESL teaching.

Standard 4.a. Issues of assessment for ESL. Candidates understand various issues of assessment, e.g., cultural bias, political and social factors in assessment, IQ and special education testing (including gifted and talented), as they affect ESOL student learning.

Standard 4.b. Language proficiency assessment. Candidates know and use a variety of language proficiency instruments to inform instruction and understand its uses for identification and placement of students.

Standard 4.c. Classroom-based assessment for ESL. Candidates know and use a variety of classroom-based assessment tools to inform instruction.

Standard 5.a. ESL research and history. Candidates are knowledgeable of history, research, and current practice in the field of ESL teaching and apply this knowledge to improve teaching and learning.

Standard 5.b. Partnerships and advocacy. Candidates serve as professional resources, advocates for language minority students, and build partnerships with their families.

Standard 5.c. Professional Development and collaboration. Candidates collaborate with and are prepared to serve as a resource to all staff to improve learning for all ESOL students.

(TESOL, 2001)

These standards are then further described and discussed. See the extended narrative below describing what is expected of teachers in terms of planning (TESOL, 2001).

Interest in standards has also developed in the Egyptian context. El Naggar (2001) stated that for English language education in Egypt, the most important achievement would be to graduate teachers of English from faculties of education with adequate social, linguistic and pedagogic competencies to teach effectively. She goes on:

"If we do not have a set of agreed on standards by all those involved in the process, we will not be able to perform the mission above. Performance standards which would formally state the minimal requirements of a graduating teacher in Egypt would go a long way toward ameliorating the current situation within Faculties. (El Naggar, 2001, p.1)"

The Pendulum Swings

The discussion of teacher standards would not be complete without a word of warning. Some national education systems which have had standards in place for nearly a decade are moving away from performance descriptors and looking at alternative models. The main difficulty they have found is concerned with describing what is meant by effective teaching as "research has not unearthed any simple or comprehensive indicator of good teaching" (DES 1985, p.70). Standards in practice tend to be either so short that they are difficult to interpret or so long that they are difficult to apply. The relationship between standards and modes of assessment is also problematic (see below).

Some people also feel that to have one set of standards is rigid in that it does not allow for different levels of teachers. Some systems of education are therefore starting to come up with multi-level competencies.

How Should We Evaluate?

Once we have agreed on our standards and what we should evaluate, we still need to decide how this evaluation should be carried out.

Formal Testing

If we look back to the areas that may constitute good teaching, listed earlier in this chapter, it is obvious that some of them lend themselves quite well to formal testing procedures. We can evaluate our teachers' command of English by testing them. We might also learn about their knowledge of methodology through testing, particularly if we include problem-solving essay answers. However, formal testing only tells us so much. In order to see if teachers are competent on the job, we need to enter the classroom to observe them during the teaching process.

Evaluation Based on Observation

Methods of observation have already been discussed more fully in Chapter 24: *Teacher Observation*. You will probably choose the instruments discussed in that chapter for your observation. Regardless of the specific instrument you choose, you still need to adopt an overall approach (Anderson et al., 1992; Montgomery, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1982) that includes the following :

1. Tell student teachers whether your visits will be announced or unannounced and what specifically you will be looking for. Share any forms you will be using with the teachers.
2. Observe a complete lesson using the "fly on the wall" technique. (See Chapter 24: *Teacher observation*.)
3. Make a record of the lesson using one of the agreed methods. (See Chapter 24: *Teacher Observation for a sample of observation instruments*.)
4. Base your judgment on the data you collect during the lesson. Make sure you can back up what you say with specific examples from your observation.
5. Give student teachers a copy of any documentation you create.

In some contexts, you might also choose a post-lesson discussion as part of your assessment. Encourage teachers to pinpoint for themselves their strengths and areas for improvement and to identify areas for improvement for the future. Then include these future goals as part of the evaluation. Conducting three-step supervision is very valuable for teachers in training. However, the visit, the pre and post lesson discussions, and the need to supply detailed documentation will take considerable time commitment.

The Relationship between Standards and Observation Instruments

If we are able to agree on standards, the next logical step would seem to be to design observation instruments based on those standards. Unfortunately, this is where many national systems have found difficulties. If we look back at the TESOL standards above, we can see that they use verbs such as understand, recognize the importance of etc. Understanding is by its very nature internal. In order to assess whether teachers do in fact possess this understanding, we need to go beyond the competencies themselves and make inferences. TESOL is now developing descriptors that will help teachers demonstrate achievements of standards. These standards and descriptors for the standards will soon be used in accreditation process for universities training ESL teachers.

In the UK, Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status are organized under four general areas:

- A. Knowledge and Understanding
 - B. Planning, Teaching and Classroom Management
 - C. Monitoring, Assessment, Recording, Reporting and Accountability
 - D. Other Professional Requirements.
- (Teacher Training Agency 1997a)

Many universities offer supervisors additional guidelines as to how they can find evidence of the competencies. For example, evidence of B - Planning, Teaching and Classroom Management - can be found by looking at a teacher's preparation notes, by setting them written tasks as well as by observing them in the school.

Evaluating Other Documents

Many supervisors are already overstretched and visiting schools over a wide region can be extremely time-consuming. In addition to visits, we can learn a great deal about teachers by looking at the things they produce to support their teaching. This may include looking at the following:

- lesson plans they produce
- materials they make and use for their lessons
- the way in which they mark homework.

All of the above can form part of a portfolio that student teachers prepare to offer as evidence of their progress in learning to teach. Some student teachers in Britain are required to put together Teaching Practice Files which form part of their assessment.

CONTENT OF A TEACHING PRACTICE FILE

Please sub-divide the file into sections; one general section, then one section for each class.

GENERAL SECTION - This should include:

- a) **your timetable**
- b) **information about the department and school**,
e.g. names of teachers and technicians, courses offered,
notes on your own observation in other teachers' lessons,
details of the catchment area, and the school organisation

CLASS SECTIONS

- One for each class that you teach:
Parts a) to d) should be substantially completed ready for discussion with your visiting tutor in the week before the main practice begins.
- a) **information about the pupils**
(number, age, ability range, initial comments from their regular teacher)
- b) **a list of pupils names for recording marks**
- c) **a TOPIC OUTLINE of the work to be covered**
(indicating the expected sequence of work, main activities, estimated timing, number of lessons). The precise format for this part will be suggested by subject tutors.
- d) **a seating plan** (useful for learning names quickly)
If seating varies, then sketch a "usual" pattern
- e) **OUTLINE PLANS, LESSON NOTES and EVALUATIONS for each lesson taught.**

The teaching practice file is a course requirement. Although it is not an end in itself, it should show clearly that you are building up a systematic approach to planning and keeping records. It should be available for discussion with your cotutor and visiting tutor during the practice. It is not formally assessed (i.e. given a grade) but may be called on by the Panel of Examiners at the end of the year.

Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment of student teaching is now common in many countries throughout the world. Although a great deal can be seen from observing teachers, how many times can you visit a teacher in order to make sure that you have seen a representative sample of that teacher's performance? Portfolio assessment offers an opportunity for a broader appraisal of a teacher's skills than can be done in short visits.

In programs that use portfolio assessment, student teachers are required to present portfolios representing their work at the end of their course of study. The exact content of portfolios varies according to national and regional requirements but would typically include some of the following, selected and described by the student teachers:

- 1) A series of lesson plans, including supporting materials
- 2) Teacher reflections on individual lessons or on broader aspects of teaching
- 3) Written work set by the college tutor which has a classroom focus, e.g.,
 - a) A case study of an individual learner
 - b) A mini action research project (see Chapter 28: *Reflective Teaching*)
- 4) Action plans (see Chapter 28: *Reflective Teaching*)
- 5) Notes from observations of peers or other more experienced colleagues
- 6) Extracts from teaching journals.

Teacher Profiling

A further recent development is that of teacher profiling. Instead of just giving all teachers who pass an initial teacher education course the same certificate, qualifying teachers are also given a profile of their strengths and areas to work on during their first years of teaching. This provides useful information to the schools which employ them and allows for the fact that learning does not stop after initial training.

Areas of strength in relation to the standards in place

- Very good understanding of the needs of more able pupils, reflected in planning and teaching.
- Well developed classroom management skills, particularly in relation to managing group activities.
- Involves pupils well through very skilful direct questioning.
- Excellent use made of assessment information in establishing challenging

expectations for pupils' learning and for translating these into specific learning targets.

Priorities for Further Professional Development

- Better use of homework to make a direct contribution to learning objectives.
- Structure and timing of lessons to ensure a finish which summarises and checks learning against identified objectives.
- Develop pedagogic knowledge of teaching EFL beyond that covered in the initial pre-service course.

Based on Teacher Training Agency, Career Entry Profile for Newly Qualified Teachers: Notes of Guidance p.4.

Conclusion

The assessment of teachers is entering a new phase in Egypt. Whatever approach you take, you should bear the following in mind:

1. If teachers feel that their basic competence is being threatened by evaluation, they are not going to risk showing weaknesses or entering into a serious dialogue with you about self-development.
2. You must give up the tactic of using evaluation as a weapon to threaten teachers otherwise, they will not feel they can risk honest self-disclosure and be open to discuss their teaching with you.
3. Although you address evaluation official forms during supervision, be sure to discuss and jointly negotiate the issues to be addressed with the teacher.
4. Base both your developmental and evaluative comments on data you collect during the lesson. Try to be as objective as possible in collecting and recording this data.
5. Find the time to carry out the supervision process properly. Only with adequate time will you be able to show respect to your teachers, discuss real issues and actually help them to learn and grow as professionals.

Key Terminology

Appraisal

An evaluation of teacher performance by an expert.

Competency (Teaching)

A knowledge, skill, ability, personal quality, experience, or other characteristic that is applicable to the profession of teaching. The plural is variously spelled competencies or competences.

Intuitive System

A system based on a gut feeling of what is right.

Performance Criteria

Criteria specifying the skills and behavior required of teacher performance.

Stakeholder

A person or group of persons having an interest in this case in the evaluation of teachers.

Teaching Standard

A description of the minimum required of a competent teacher.

Teaching Practice Portfolio

A collection of work selected by the student teacher to demonstrate his or her skills and experience in relation to teaching.

Understanding Check

1. Why do we need to evaluate teachers?
 2. Look at the list of characteristics of a teacher in this chapter. Would you add anything to this list? How might you assess the particular characteristics you have listed?
 3. How do you currently evaluate student teachers? Could you enrich this evaluation in any way?
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Resources

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Summary Handout for Chapter 26: Teacher Assessment

Supervisors have both developmental and evaluative role

Why evaluate?

- To give teachers an overview of their teaching and let them know their strengths and weaknesses
- To reassure stakeholders
- To ensure minimum standards for the profession

What should we evaluate?

The characteristics of a good teacher

- Teacher standards and teacher competencies tell us what teachers should know and be able to do

How should we evaluate?

- Formal testing
- Evaluation based on observation
- Document evaluation
- Portfolio assessment
- Teacher profiling