

## Evaluation:

Using the evaluation plan you obtained from your school or place of employment and utilizing the D2L resources available, answer the following questions:

- What are the positives and negatives of this plan?
- How could the plan be improved?
- What other questions do you have concerning evaluation, supervision and coaching of staff?

In terms of my district's Teacher Learning and Evaluation Program, there are several elements that I believe are unique strengths. First and foremost, the element that sets our professional growth and evaluation program apart from many others is its foundation in what we call "short cycles." While many programs rely on the tradition pre-observation, observation, post-observation model, our short cycles are significantly more spontaneous and authentic. Continuous Improvement and Innovation Coaches (CIICs) and Principals, at a minimum, perform three short cycles with a teacher every month. A short cycle might include a classroom walkthrough, an extended observation, an observation of a PLC, co-planning a lesson, modeling a lesson, co-crafting an assessment, or any number of authentic teacher experiences that will result in professional growth. Within 24 hours after a short-cycle occurs, the CIIC or Principal has a face-to-face conversation with the teacher to discuss what was observed, gives a "keep doing" positive comment, and develops a bite-sized, growth oriented action step. This incremental approach that results in ongoing, frequent, and consistent feedback for every single licensed adult in our system is a pretty comprehensive approach to professional learning. While the traditional pre, observation, post could potentially lend itself to a "dog and pony" show, this type of everyday mentoring and feedback integrates seamlessly. The near weekly connections and face to face conversations also develops an authentic relationship between the teacher and CIIC/Principal, as well as a shared understanding around the teacher's unique strengths, interests, and needs. The inspiration for this model was inspired by Kim Marshall's essay on "Mini-Observations," in which he asserts that "short, unannounced classroom visits are the best way for principals to see representative slices of teaching (not the dog-and-pony show), give credible feedback to teachers, and be players in improving teaching and learning" (2009). Additionally, the model for providing feedback is built on much of the criteria Brookhart & Moss suggest including it being timely, comparing the work to criteria, and including aspects that are positive and clear (2015, p. 24-30).

Another strength of this model is its reliance on key indicators teachers are able to reflect on (alongside their coach and/or principal), and in turn, are able to set goals that are personalized to their unique needs. Within EdReflect, our Teacher Learning and Evaluation digital platform, teachers are able to access our districtwide Innovation Configurations (ICs) if they are tenured, or our Probationary Teacher Rubrics if they are non-tenured. Within the program, teachers set a Professional Practice Goal, Student Achievement Goal, and Student Engagement Goal, all of which are ideally aligned to the teacher competencies outlined in our ICs or Probationary Rubric. When a principal or CIIC gives feedback, they can "tag" that feedback to a portion of our ICs or Probationary Rubric so there's alignment between our district Teacher Competencies, the goals teachers set, and ultimately, the feedback they receive from their coach or administrator. This aligns nicely with the Charlotte Danielson assertion that rather than having a comprehensive checklist to "fill out" every time a classroom visit or interaction occurs, instead it is far more beneficial to have teachers ultimately work toward higher level competencies that define good teaching, and to have those in mind whether it is an experience around mentoring, evaluation, professional development, etc., all of which our ICs and Probationary Rubrics are used for (2009).

Based on my learning, one area of need pointed out clearly by Dynarski is our evaluation plan does not do enough to correlate how teachers are teaching with whether or not students are learning (2016). While we do not use a prescriptive "checklist" as a primary indicator of teacher effectiveness during observations, which would be incredibly narrow, our evaluation system does not, on an ongoing basis, align observations and teacher action steps directly to student outcomes. These elements might come up -- as in, a short cycle might involve examining formative and summative student data or a principal or CIIC highlighting indicators of student learning they observed, but that is not

explicitly built into the short cycle system. Teachers also utilize student data to set their student achievement goal, but those indicators might be based on measures collected at the end of the year (such as a NWEA MAP or MCA score), and the leading indicators that predict those outcomes might not be a central focus of coaching and evaluation conversations throughout the school year. With all this in mind, a major refinement I would suggest to our current evaluation program is to keep the goal setting, short cycles, and feedback model as is, but add more of an emphasis on the feedback conversations and action steps being built off of evidence of student learning primarily, rather than solely focusing on teacher practice. Looking at both on a regular basis is crucial in identifying the true impact of teacher practice.

With regard to questions related to evaluation, supervision, and coaching, my main question focuses on how a principal balances their multifaceted workload to ensure that observation, feedback, and coaching, as the instructional leader of the building, are prioritized. So often, I would think it would be very easy as a building principal to get pulled in to the “fire drill” of the day, and let the observations or walkthroughs you intended to do fall to the wayside. I wonder what suggestions others might have for how principals ensure that this time stays “precious” because truly, being the instructional leader in the building is likely the most important hat a principal wears.

## References

Brookhart, S.M. & Moss, C.M. (2015). How to give professional feedback. *Educational Leadership*. 72(7), 24-30.

Danielson, C. (2009). A framework for learning to teach. *Educational Leadership*. 66(9). Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/summer09/vol66/num09/A-Framework-for-Learning-to-Teach.aspx>.

Dynarski, M. (2016, December 8). Teacher observations have been a waste of time and money. *Brookings*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/teacher-observations-have-been-a-waste-of-time-and-money/>.

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## Difficult Employees:

### Questions

- As an administrator, what are two major concepts or strategies set forth by each of the authors of these articles that will help you deal with difficult or marginal teachers or other employees?
- Why did you choose these concepts or strategies?
- List some examples where you could use these strategies.

While there were several high quality strategies and concepts suggested in the resources explored, there are two that I will absolutely take with me as I continue on my journey as a leader in education.

The first strategy I deeply appreciated is the “three question litmus test” suggested by Todd Whitaker in the article, “Power Plays of Difficult Employees” (2003, p. 12). What I appreciated about the three question strategy is it is both simple, yet powerful. Rather than planning for the least effective employees in an organization, it instead asks us to consider our most effective employees and “plan up” to their level. The three questions Whitaker suggests we ask ourselves before making any decision are “1. What is the true purpose in implementing this rule or policy? 2. Will it actually accomplish the purpose? 3. How will my most positive and productive people feel about it?” (2003, p. 12). By asking these three questions, we ensure we not only increase the likelihood of achieving our desired outcome, but we honor our most effective employees in the process.

In the article, Whitaker describes several scenarios when you might apply these questioning techniques. One area I thought of where I might apply this to avoid a negative outcome is something we chatted about quite a bit during my time teaching in middle school, which was ensuring that students had something engaging and interesting to do right

when the bell rang. The idea was this would increase the likelihood that students would be to class on time because the start of class was always engaging and important to the remainder of the period. Inevitably, throughout the course of the year, you might expect that some teachers would become less invested in these first minutes of class. Following the examples outlined by Whitaker, you might expect that in the next staff meeting, a principal would provide a stern warning to “remember that you are expected to have something engaging and interesting to do right away at the start of class!” If you apply the questions, here’s how I might answer them for the aforementioned scenario:

- What is the true purpose of implementing this rule or policy? The true purpose is to ensure that students feel valued right at the start of the class, and are motivated to be there on time.
- Will this actually accomplish that purpose? Maybe. While this might “kick into gear” those that have let the practice slide, it likely won’t achieve this for all. As Whitaker stated, “if someone is doing something inappropriate, they probably already know it” (2003). Therefore, those that have given up on having something planned for the start of class are already aware it is expected, and while they could choose to change, they also likely know that the chances of being able to continue as they currently are is expected. Even if they do change, it’s important to consider how this message might impact our most effective teachers.
- How will my most positive and productive people feel about it? Likely, they’ll either feel offended knowing they are putting in the work, or, even worse, they’ll worry that what they’re doing is not good enough and feel stressed.

Instead, I wonder if, in that same staff meeting, rather than starting off with a stern reminder, recognizing someone who is doing well would be a positive reminder. For example, “I noticed in \_\_\_\_\_’s class yesterday, they planned \_\_\_\_\_ activity for the start of class” or “\_\_\_\_\_’s team implemented \_\_\_\_\_ this week to kick off class.” “Let’s get into groups to chat about some of the ways you have started off class so we can learn from each other and build up our bank of ideas.” This not only honors our highest achievers, but also gives those people a chance to spread their knowledge.

The second strategy I will implement is from *Shifting the Monkey* by Todd Whitaker, in which he suggests we must “treat everyone well” (2012, p. 31). This simple yet true adage does not mean that we let things slide or that we do not hold high expectations. Just the opposite. It means we come in assuming good intentions and assuming everyone will meet our high expectations. From there, as Whitaker points out, “Treating everyone well validates the good, responsible, productive people and makes the irresponsible, lazy, unpleasant people feel uncomfortable” (2012, p. 34).

I honestly can see this simple mind shift being applied to basically any situation I might run into as a school leader. Any time a new initiative is rolled out, a new school-wide expectation is set, any time I walk through a classroom, any time I observe a PLC, and so on. Coming in first assuming good intentions, competence, and treating everyone well will show that I value the hard work that is occurring, and will also continue to demonstrate to everyone the high expectations I expect from each.

## References

Whitaker, T. (2003). Power plays of difficult employees. *School Administrator*, 60(2), 12-16.

Whitaker, T. (2012). *Shifting the monkey*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

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## Twitter and my PLN:

1. Describe your efforts in using Twitter. Share your Twitter “handle” with the class so classmates can follow you.
2. What do you see as the possibilities for you in the future using Twitter or other social media as personal learning tools or as a professional communication tool.!
3. How does Twitter fit into your PLN development?

1. I began using Twitter professionally in 2010 after hearing about it at an Ed Tech conference. Since then, I've ebbed and flowed in my use, but it has remained a relatively consistent part of my professional life for the last eight years. From the

beginning, I have used Twitter to follow educational leaders, I tweet out articles or thoughts I think my PLN might appreciate, I have participated in educationally focused Twitter chats using content or topic specific hashtags to learn from others, I use it heavily while attending conferences to learn from other conference attendees, and I also often tweet highlights from my school district using our district specific hashtag #SLPPantherProud.

My twitter handle is @elizeducation.

2. There are so many possibilities using Twitter professionally, and after eight years, I have only just scratched the surface!

If you are new to using Twitter professionally, I would definitely suggest participating in a Twitter chat. In a Twitter Chat, you hold a digital conversation in real time where you can follow other participants using a specific hashtag. It helps to use a hashtag thread tool such as TweetDeck (<https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/>). Typically, questions are posted around the topic of the chat, and participants respond to learn from one other. If you are looking to try this beyond our in-class Twitter chat, here is a handy list of educationally focused Twitter chats:

<https://sites.google.com/site/twittereducationchats/education-chat-calendar>. This is something I would like to continue using in the future as well.

I also deeply appreciate following leaders in education. A few of my favorite educational leaders and resources on Twitter are George Couros (generally inspiring and forward thinking thoughts in education - @gcouros), José Luis Vilson (excellent voice in equity in education - @TheJLV), and Todd Nesloney (learning technology and general ed leadership - @TechNinjaTodd). Twitter is great because you can peruse at your leisure, find quick snippets of information or inspiring thoughts, and if you're compelled to, you can click on links or dig more deeply into any information that is shared. In that way, it can lead to quick and easy or substantial and in depth learning, depending on your particular needs and how much time you have available.

3. Twitter helps ramp up my PLN network, which also consists of face to face contacts. I love attending local learning opportunities for leaders in my area including EdCamps (<https://sites.google.com/nfld.k12.mn.us/edcamptc/> or <http://www.edcampmsp.org/>) or our Metro Area Curriculum Leaders group that meets each month. Many of the people I learn from professionally at these face to face opportunities are also on Twitter, so we can continue our learning together 24/7. The wonderful thing about establishing a network like this is I am able to reach out to these people if I have a question or are curious about how another district approaches something. Just the other day I received a direct message on Twitter from a PLN colleague asking me about how we approach something in Spring Lake Park, so the sharing definitely goes both ways. It is incredibly collaborative, and reminds me constantly that we are so much more effective when we work together.