

The Attributes of a Comprehensive Educator Evaluation

Terese Jurgensen

iEvaluate 1.2

Mary Jane Stites, Instructor

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Initially, I signed up for the iEvaluate 1.2 course because it was a necessary requirement for my professional administrator license with the State of Iowa. I have discovered, however, that this course is so much more of a reflective tool as well as a series of working documents to improve educational teaching practices and my practice as an educational leader. As I have completed the course work, I have thought back to my time at Drake and learning about teacher evaluation. It seems like yesterday, but over the years I have evaluated many teachers, some were put on improvement plans and others taught me what it truly means to be an outstanding teacher. For the purposes of this paper, I will reflect on the attributes of a comprehensive educator evaluation system through the five components of standards and criteria; quality evidence-observation data; coaching and conferencing- questioning techniques; engaging in and supporting collaboration in the evaluation process and finally, promoting continuous improvement. “These Iowa Teaching Standards appear in Iowa Code 284.3(1) and were developed by the Iowa Department of Education and were adopted by the State Board of Education on May 10, 2002” (Iowa Model Evaluator System, pg. 8).

“Teacher evaluation is not an event. It is an ongoing learning opportunity that is intended to improve professional practice by engaging in peer reflection and coaching and continuous professional learning” (Iowa Model Evaluator System, pg. 26). I like this quote because it is so important for all members of the educational community to

understand and know. There are eight Iowa Teaching Standards and each one outlines what all teaching is measured and evaluated. I am very familiar with the standards and it was my first “go to” for evaluation prior to taking this class. I now see, however, that there is more to the evaluation process that can be utilized to improve the art of teaching. Having said that, I still believe that it is the foundation of our work. The key attribute of the standards is that they are standards that basically say what we want our teachers to know and to be able to do.

My first experience in evaluating teachers came many years ago when I was the Director of Special Education for a small district. Much to my dismay, I found that the current principal, whom I had taken the responsibility of evaluating special education staff, had not done any evaluations for nine years. This was concerning enough, but what was even more disturbing was that one of the teachers was so low-functioning herself she simply couldn't do her job. Specially Designed Instruction and writing IEP's is very difficult and demands knowledge, strategies, writing abilities and so on. Within a few months of taking on this responsibility it became glaringly obvious that this same teacher was changing the answers on Iowa Assessment Tests to make it appear that her students were making gains. Such great gains, in fact, that they had some of the highest reading scores in the district. I brought this to the attention of the Superintendent and ultimately the teacher resigned. I don't know if she lost her license, but I do know that if the Teaching Standards and Criteria had been utilized and evaluations had been done

accordingly, this teacher may have had the opportunity to learn and improve. More importantly, the countless children who struggled and suffered in her care may have not been affected by her less than quality teaching practices.

“In many schools and districts, administrators use checklists to observe classrooms. After observing and checking off practices from a list, a school leader might leave a thank you note or provide brief feedback to the teacher” (Tredway, L., Militello, M., & Simon, K. (April 2021). The key attribute for quality evidence-observation data is to use multiple measures of data and then make important decisions or give quality feedback based on that data. There are many ways to gather observational data outside of the scheduled evaluation of a teacher. My practice has always been to use Tuesdays and Fridays as “Walk-Through” days. I created a Google Doc that put in the teaching standards that I would be watching for during my walk-throughs. The teachers were notified on what week and day, but not the exact time, I would be doing these 10 minute observations. On the Google Doc, I had the things I would be looking for and after the observation, I would fill their Google Doc in and share the feedback. It was then the teacher’s responsibility to email me with any thoughts or comments. They could also ask to see me to discuss the comments in person or if I believed I needed a follow-through conversation, I would contact them. These walk-throughs were designed for teacher quality and were also linked back to the district goals.

In the article, “What Educators Want Observed,” the authors, Art Costa and Bob Garmston, state that teachers desire, “Usable amounts of data to be collected in ways that build reliability, validity, fairness, objectivity, and directness. Ultimately, the data should be used to improve the educator’s practice” (Adapted from the Art of Cognitive Coaching). Therefore, reinforcing the fact that a key attribute of observations is to gather data from multiple means such as student artifacts, multiple walk-throughs, purposeful conversations with teachers, visiting PLC’s, summative assessments and the list goes on. It is as varied as to the length of collaboration the teacher and the principal agree on through an IDPD, or throughout the school as needed.

The key attribute of coaching and conferencing is two-fold from my perspective. First and foremost, it is important that these conversations are rooted in growth mindset thinking. We are all on a continuous journey to improve, and I believe adversity defines us in that it can make us better educators and hopefully better people. I especially appreciated the article on the Coach and the Evaluator which highlights this point. “From an organizational point of view, evaluation is a key function of bureaucratic organizations, whereas development is a key function of professional organizations” (Tschannen-Moran, B., & Tschannen, M. October 2011). The second attribute is to improve student achievement through teaching practices. I view coaching and conferencing as an ongoing strength based process. Just like the coach on the football

field may tell his students during the off season to keep lifting weights, principals can coach our teachers multiple ways.

Coaching teachers is vital for continual improvement as reflected in my walk-through example in the previous paragraph. Great coaching conversations occur from data, feedback that is positive as well as informative, teachers have buy-in to the process and opportunity for written and personal conversations. Coaching can and should be a very positive experience. Finally, utilizing ORID questioning techniques as well as data-driven feedback during coaching and conference sessions puts the focus back onto the teacher and helps them to self-reflect, rather than having a principal “tell them” what to do or how to improve.

When Teacher Leadership was beginning in Iowa the past few years, I had the opportunity to engage in what best practices looked like for a Teacher Leader. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn even more about collaborative evaluation practices with teachers. My pedagogy as a teacher is not to necessarily teach student’s content, but to teach them how to LEARN the content. How to make it meaningful for themselves and how to apply it to their life. Answering the question, “Why should I learn this?” The same principle holds true for the evaluation process. It is critical that the teacher understands and knows that becoming a better teacher is first and foremost for their students, but it is also for them. This is a very difficult job and one third of teachers don’t make it past the first few years. However, it also offers the greatest joy and satisfaction to

those who embrace the art and the craft of teaching. The opportunity for this experience is through collaboration with administration, the evaluation process, IPDP's, PLC's, TLC's and the acronyms go on. Gone are the days of, "Shut your door and teach," which never worked well.

Finally, the key attribute of promoting Quality Continuous Improvement is critical to the teaching field and to the evaluation process. The evaluation process, as noted in this paper, is an ongoing process and an exciting one as we set goals, obtain them, experience the joy of student achievement, and never fear failure. Because we will fail and that is okay. Edward Deming, the father of the improvement process stated, "If you can't describe your system as a process, you don't know what you are doing!" This is why as educators we continually return to data, systems and practices to constantly improve and become better educators.

In conclusion, this point ties in well with what I am seeking to improve upon in my current work as a principal for Iowa Net High Academy. Educating students and supervising teachers and mentors virtually is a new experience for me. One that I gladly accept and hope to create for future educators and principals of the current day and the future of education. INHA is a Tier 3 Intervention for most schools across Iowa. I am creating and designing intervention tiers within our system to innovate new ways to get students to engage online, to see a positive and purposeful future and to relieve the trauma they have experienced in their lives. It is definitely an ongoing process, and I have

a lot to learn! With the help of the knowledge, resources and the materials I have gained from this class, I have more tools in my tool belt for quality continuous improvement in this work. *“It is not enough to do your best; you must know what to do, and do your best”* (Deming Management, pg. 27).

Bibliography

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