

*Evaluation procedures should focus on improving instruction, should be realistic and practical, and should enhance the supervisor-teacher relationship.*

# Effective Teacher Evaluation Systems

THOMAS L. MCGREAL

I have spent the last seven years working with some 300 school districts and 75,000 supervisors and teachers around the country to build local teacher evaluation systems. Out of this experience, I have identified nine commonalities associated with desirable practices.

## 1. Attitude

Traditional evaluation models have stressed teacher accountability, while supervisory models have emphasized instructional improvement. This dual emphasis requires evaluators to walk a fine line between accountability and improvement, which is extraordinarily difficult to do. Evaluators must make a choice between the two; the likelihood of success is greater when there is consistency within a system.

Generally, accountability systems are designed to obtain documentation of inappropriate teacher behavior. Supervisors are forced to collect data, use instruments, and act in a directive manner that allows for summative evaluation of performance. Approaches founded on this attitude are generally based on a misunderstanding of the requirements of documentation or a lack of basic information about what is needed for teacher dismissal. Experience and available data<sup>1</sup> suggest that evaluation systems based on accountability promote negative feelings about evaluation which, in turn, lead to a lack of participation and a lower likelihood of

teachers being willing to alter classroom behavior. On the other hand, systems built around the concept of improving instruction are always accompanied by an acceptable level of accountability information. An attitude must prevail that the purpose of the evaluation system, particularly for tenured teachers, is truly to help teachers improve instruction.

## 2. Complementary Procedures, Processes, and Instrumentation

Even when districts claim the improvement of instruction is the primary purpose of evaluation, their actual methods are too often counterproductive. They saddle supervisors and teachers with procedures and instrumentation that require ratings on standardized criteria heavily loaded toward administrative concerns, that produce high supervisor-low teacher involvement, and that promote unfocused classroom visitation.

The ultimate test of an evaluation system is whether a relationship of mutual trust exists between the supervisor and the teacher when they meet. The key to success is the amount of flexibility the supervisor and teacher have in working toward the particular skills, knowledge, techniques, styles, and so on that best fit that teacher's needs and interests. A school cannot expect to have an effective system by espousing one purpose and then requiring the persons within the system to follow procedures that don't complement that purpose.

## 3. Separation of Administrative and Supervisory Behavior

With an emphasis on instructional

improvement, supervisors should try to separate *teacher* evaluation from *teaching* evaluation. One of the major violations of this concept is the use of districtwide summative evaluation instruments (rating scales or statements on standardized criteria) as the basis for evaluating classroom performance following observation. In many instances, as high as 75 percent of these criteria are administrative in nature and have nothing to do with the type of data collected during a classroom visit. Formative evaluation techniques are used to make summative judgments on nonrelevant criteria.

Many tough, accountability-oriented boards of education accept the notion that there are minimum expectations for teachers that are primarily administrative or personal in nature (adherence to school policy, appearance, personal relationships, relationships with parents and community, and so forth). These expectations are continuously monitored by the informal, unobtrusive nature of administrators and teachers working, living, and interacting in the same environment. No special set of procedures and instrumentation need be established to deal with these issues. Violations are dealt with as they occur. Teachers accept bureaucratic rules and procedures if they are handled in an appropriate manner at the appropriate time.

There is no need to store up evaluation comments on administrative criteria for inclusion in conferences following classroom observations. These conferences should allow supervisor and teacher to focus on instructional matters, relying on formative evaluation techniques that foster

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a collegial, supervisory-oriented relationship between professionals.

#### 4. Goal Setting

In systems that function effectively, a recurring commonality is some form of goal setting between the teacher and the supervisor. The use of goal setting as a basic supervisory activity has increased dramatically in recent years, partly in opposition to evaluation systems built around standardized criteria offering no opportunity to individualize supervisory practices.

In its most effective format, the goal-setting process is a cooperative activity between the supervisor and the teacher that results in a mutually agreeable focus. The goals become the core of the evaluation/supervision process.<sup>2</sup> The ability to individualize criteria and the close cooperative supervisor-teacher relationship fostered by goal setting ensures effective evaluation/supervision systems.

#### 5. Narrowed Focus on Teaching

In order to have an impact on instructional practices, supervisors and teachers must have some common framework and a similar set of definitions about teaching from which to work. Supervisors also need thorough knowledge of classroom teaching skills.

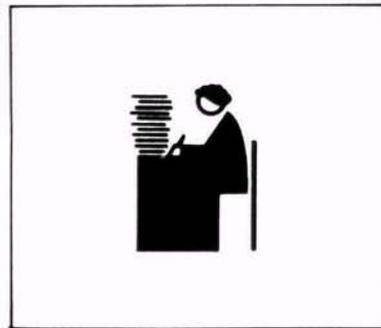
Fortunately, we now know more about teaching and its impact on student learning than ever before. The evaluation/supervision systems that function most effectively are based on a particular approach to teaching which serves as a framework for the instructional interaction between supervisors and teachers. The two most useful and frequently mentioned ways of narrowing the focus of teaching are provided by teacher effectiveness research<sup>3</sup> and by the work of Hunter and her colleagues at UCLA.<sup>4</sup> Both are useful because of their focus on teaching behaviors and because of their common-sense approach.

#### 6. Use of a Modified Clinical Supervision Format

Clinical supervision has long been a respected and recommended supervisory model. However, the complete application of the model in local school systems is not often practical, due to the required training period, the time requirements, and the inconsistencies between the philosophy of clinical supervision and the nature of

supervision as carried out by administrators when they evaluate. Nevertheless, since the major form of data collection used in schools is classroom observation, the use of pre-conferences prior to observation as suggested by clinical supervision is now frequent in schools.<sup>5</sup>

There are two primary ways to increase the reliability of classroom observation. The first is to narrow the range of things one looks for during observation by using a goal-setting process, by operating in a system based on a narrowed focus on teaching, or by using some type of observation guide or focusing instrument. The second way to increase reliability is related to the kind and amount of information a person has *prior* to an observation. Consequently, the pre-conference is a useful and practical way to improve classroom observations. Clearly, the use of at least this



part of clinical supervision can improve the effectiveness of an evaluation system.

#### 7. Use of Alternative Sources of Data

Observation is only one way to collect data about teaching. Among other alternatives are self evaluation, peer evaluation, parent evaluation, student evaluation, student performance, and artifact collection. While each method has some potential, three are especially useful. The first is classroom observation specifically directed toward collecting descriptive data relevant to established goals, and, as suggested in 6 above, use of pre-conferences before observations.

The second source of data is the use of student evaluative or, more accurately, student *descriptive* data. In terms of evaluation/supervision systems, it appears to be more reliable and hence more valuable to have students respond to written or oral statements asking for their percep-

tions of what occurs in a classroom than to have them rate the teacher. Having students respond to "Everyone is treated fairly here" is more descriptive than judgmental; having students respond to "The teacher has favorites" is a personal rating item.

The third method that should be a regular part of an evaluation system is artifact collection. Artifacts include study guides, question sheets, homework assignments, practice sets, experiments, descriptions of drill and practice activities, quizzes, and tests. Collecting and reviewing teacher artifacts takes on tremendous importance in light of teacher effectiveness research, which shows that 50 to 70 percent of the average student's day in school is spent in seat work and related activities.<sup>6</sup> Concepts of classroom planning that go beyond the traditional lesson plan can be developed through the collection and subsequent discussion of artifacts.

#### 8. Different Requirements for Tenured and Nontenured Teachers

Most evaluation systems apply the same procedures and requirements to tenured and nontenured teachers. The only difference is that "it" happens more frequently to nontenured teachers. These two groups are not the same and the requirements concerning their participation in the system should be different.

Evaluation of nontenured teachers has two distinct purposes. The first is to provide administrators with data to use in making retention decisions. Second, the system must provide beginners with a support process that improves teaching skills and gives them a positive image of what supervision can be. More and more schools are accepting the recommendation that the following conditions be part of the evaluation process for nontenured teachers: (1) Goals are established for the teachers; most beginners are not sophisticated or confident enough to set their own goals. (Goals for beginning teachers should usually relate to planning and management skills.) (2) Regular observations accompanied by pre- and post-conferences are made during a two- or three-day consecutive visit sequence. (3) At least once each semester student descriptive data are collected from one of the teacher's classes. The data are used formatively by the supervisor and teacher

and are put in the teacher's portfolio. (4) At least once each semester for a two- or three-week period, or for a unit of work, all artifacts used or produced by the teacher are collected and reviewed with the supervisor. The comments and suggestions and the artifacts themselves are kept in the teacher's portfolio.

Since an evaluation system for tenured teachers should focus on improving instruction, the teachers should be active participants in the goal-setting process and data sources should relate to the established goals. While nontenured teachers go through the evaluation process continuously, tenured teachers go through the system only every second or third year. This is based on considerable experience showing that extensive contact between supervisor and teacher over the course of a year in a well-developed goal-setting system is much more effective in altering classroom behavior than the perfunctory, unfocused yearly visit that characterizes most local evaluation systems.

Multiple sources of data are generally not required of tenured teachers, but rather are used by agreement between supervisor and teacher as dictated by the type of goals set by the teacher.

### 9. A Complete Training Program

An evaluation system is effective in direct relation to the amount of training received by all the participants. Too often teachers and supervisors are expected to operate within systems that demand skills or understandings to which they have not been exposed. Consequently they are forced to fall back on old practices and attitudes that are not appropriate or supportive of a new system.

From the perspective of the commonalities discussed here, an appropriate training program would include goal-setting skills for both supervisors and teachers; definitions, explanations, examples, and practice in the selected teaching focus; explanation of and practice in use of student descriptive data and artifact collection; classroom observation skills for supervisors; conferencing skills for supervisors; and a general review for all participants covering the prevailing attitude toward the purpose of evaluation in the local district and how the system

and the expectations toward the participants in the system are congruent with that attitude. In many instances, the training can be accomplished in relatively short periods of time. Much of the initial training can be handled in six to eight hours for supervisors and five hours for classroom teachers.

The nine commonalities I have listed are offered not as a model evaluation system but as a basis for reviewing current practices in a district. Districts wishing to redesign their present systems may use these commonalities as a starting point.

School administrators intending to increase effectiveness of their district's teacher evaluation system must do two things:

1. They must look at the existing system, particularly with regard to its purposes, procedures, processes, and instrumentation. What the district wants its system to be and do, and what the system requires of the people involved, must be congruent.

2. They must provide all the members of the school with appropriate training and guided practices in the skills and knowledge necessary to implement and effectively maintain the system.

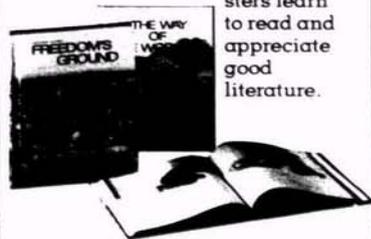
This concern for the procedural side of evaluation is not intended to deny the importance of the relationship between the supervisor and the teacher. Experience shows that a positive, supportive relationship between a knowledgeable supervisor and the teacher is still the most effective way to improve instruction. Unfortunately, the relationships that exist in the average school setting are not always positive. In many instances the breakdown in these relations is fostered by the system and its unrealistic demands and expectations. It is apparent that not only must adequate training be provided to all the participants, but they must also be provided with a system that supports and enhances supervisor-teacher relationships. ■

<sup>1</sup> M. J. Zelenak and B. C. Snider, "Teachers Don't Resent Evaluation—If It's for the Improvement of Instruction," *Phi Delta Kappan* 55 (January 1974): 384.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on the attitudes, definitions, and strategies that characterize goal setting systems, see Thomas L. McGreal, "Helping Teachers Set

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Goals," *Educational Leadership* 37 (February 1980): 414.

<sup>3</sup> As an example of some of the encouraging work being done in the area of teacher effectiveness, see C. Denham and A. Lieberman (eds.), *Time to Learn. A Review of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study* (California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing, 1020 "O" Street, Sacramento, California). For an example of the use of the teacher effectiveness research in a local district evaluation system, contact Dale Jones, Assistant Superintendent, West Aurora Public Schools, Aurora, Illinois.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, M. Hunter, "Teacher Competency: Problem, Theory, Practice," *Theory Into Practice* 15 (April 1976): 169; and M. Hunter, *Prescription for Improved Instruction* (El Segundo, Calif.: TIP Publications, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> For a practical discussion of clinical supervision, see K. Acheson and M. Gall, *Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Barak Rosenshine, "Content, Time, and Direct Instruction," in *Research on Teaching*, ed. P. Peterson and H. Walberg (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1979).

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