


Appraising Teacher Performance in North Carolina

Starting with clear expectations for classroom performance, North Carolina educators have built a focused evaluation system that promises to improve or enhance teachers' skills.

One of the hallmarks of any profession is the ability of its members to define and enforce standards of competent performance. Until fairly recently, this task was virtually impossible for educators (Lortie 1975). They were rarely asking the central questions that underlie teacher effectiveness: What constitutes effectiveness? What practices distinguish competent from incompetent teachers? Can generic characteristics or personality traits predict the success rate of an educator?

The issue of enhancing professional performance posed a similar dilemma: How can a marginal teacher's behavior be elevated to a level of solid competence? How can a "good" teacher (however that term is defined) be helped to grow toward superior levels of performance? These questions take on increasing importance when viewed in terms of merit pay plans (Murnane and Cohen 1986), calls for clinical supervision of teachers, and attacks on the quality of education (and teachers) by such national panels as the Commission on Excellence in Education. Even more important, the profound malaise that overcomes many good teachers and contributes to "teacher burnout" may be attributable, at least in part, to the education profession's inability to articulate and agree on its own tech-



Following the observation, the observer studies the data and prepares a narrative report that is the basis of the postobservation conference.

nical culture, to borrow Lortie's term.

Since 1978, the state of North Carolina, through the combined efforts of its General Assembly, State Department of Public Instruction, universities, and professional associations of educators, has been constructing a system of professional evaluation and improvement.

In this article I describe some of the activities undertaken in that building process. Please bear in mind that, while the broad goals of the program have not changed, we have altered the specific strategies and timetables. Moreover, this description runs the risk of conveying a picture of an easily unfolding process that, in reality, was never neat.

Building a Teacher Appraisal Instrument

Education in North Carolina is a joint enterprise of state and local governments. Locally, 140 school boards employ educators and establish policy for the efficient, effective education of the children of our state. Local government bears about 25 percent of education costs. At the state level, the General Assembly provides about 65 percent of the total education budget, with the balance coming from federal sources (North Carolina Board of Education 1986). The wishes of the Assembly are carried out by the State Board of Education, whose members are appointed by the governor, and by the State Department of Public Instruction, whose chief executive officer is a state-elected official.

The process of teacher evaluation illustrates how these various individuals and agencies work together. In 1979 the General Assembly enacted a statute requiring that local boards of education evaluate the performance of teachers annually using criteria established by the State Board of Education. While local boards were free to add to the evaluation process, they could not ignore or countermand the State Board's criteria. The Board asked the State Department of Public Instruction to construct an evaluation instrument that would measure teacher competence.

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To build a teacher appraisal instrument, the State Department of Public Instruction began by reviewing research literature and craft knowledge about teaching. The department circulated a draft instrument to a broad spectrum of individuals, who rated the value of each statement. We factor-analyzed these responses and produced this consensus-based instrument that was field-tested and later adopted.

Subsequently, in 1982, when the “effective schools/effective teaching” research began to work its way into the journals, the State Department of Public Instruction contracted with a private consulting firm to review the research on effective teaching. The consultants presented a list of teacher behaviors associated with increased student achievement as measured by

norm-referenced achievement tests. Moreover, these behaviors were observable in classrooms, were measurable, were alterable, and had been reported in multiple grade levels, K-12. Finally, the specific teaching behavior had been reported in more than one study. It was clear that the evaluation system would be based on research knowledge, would be generalizable, and would lead to performance improvement. In effect, the department was articulating the values of the system in such a way that the goal of personnel evaluation would be to improve performance, not eliminate individuals.

This literature review yielded 28 specific practices that could be divided among five basic teaching functions, as shown in Figure 1 (The Group for the Study of Effective Teaching 1983). A few points of explanation about these practices and functions are in order.

1. *The practices may be manifested in different ways.* For example, Practice 1.4 (maintains time-on-task) may be observed when a teacher says, “Students, let’s all look at the next sentence on page 48.” It may also be observed, however, when the teacher asks a student to respond to a specific question, or when a teacher anticipates, and explains, a difficulty of understanding that students are experiencing. In short, many behaviors may demonstrate a single practice.

2. *The practices interact within and across functions.* Practice 3.5 calls on the teacher to use relevant demonstrations. Clearly this relates to Practices 3.8 (brisk pace), 3.4 (ensures students understanding), and 3.3 (uses precise and fluent language). However, it also relates to Practice 1.1 (has materials ready), 1.4 (maintains high time-on-task), and the practices under Function 4. This interaction can create difficulties for the observer, but recognition of this interaction preserves and respects the complexity of the teaching art.

3. *The functions, not the practices, are evaluated.* The synergistic effects of the practices, along with our own lack of knowledge about their relative

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impact, suggest that evaluation of the individual practices is of dubious value. While some practices are more valuable in producing the desired effect (i.e., increased student achievement), the exact impact of each practice is unknown. Therefore, we elect to measure the teacher's competence at the level of the function, not the practice.

In addition to the practices in these five functions, ten additional practices, divided among three more functions, are used to evaluate teacher performance (see functions 6, 7, and 8). These

three functions are a mixed bag of research-based practices, school law, and practical necessity. For example, much research evidence points to the need for treating all students in a fair and equitable manner, but little evidence exists for extending this treatment to parents in order to increase student achievement. Here, however, we take a value position. As a representative of an organization, the teacher must work to further its goals, one of which is to treat parents, colleagues, and the public fairly (see Shulman 1986).

1. Major Function: Management of Instructional Time

- 1.1 Teacher has materials, supplies, and equipment ready at the start of the lesson or instructional activity.
- 1.2 Teacher gets the class started quickly.
- 1.3 Teacher gets students on task quickly at the beginning of each lesson or instructional activity.
- 1.4 Teacher maintains a high level of student time-on-task.

2. Major Function: Management of Student Behavior

- 2.1 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern the handling of routine administrative matters.
- 2.2 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student verbal participation and talk during different types of activities—whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, and so on.
- 2.3 Teacher has established a set of rules and procedures that govern student movement in the classroom during different types of instructional activities.
- 2.4 Teacher frequently monitors the behavior of all students during whole-class, small-group, and seatwork activities and during transitions between instructional activities.
- 2.5 Teacher stops inappropriate behavior promptly and consistently, yet maintains the dignity of the student.

3. Major Function: Instructional Presentation

- 3.1 Teacher begins lesson or instructional activity with a review of previous material.
- 3.2 Teacher introduces the lesson or instructional activity and specifies learning objectives when appropriate.
- 3.3 Teacher speaks fluently and precisely.
- 3.4 Teacher presents the lesson or instructional activity using concepts and language understandable to the students.
- 3.5 Teacher provides relevant examples and demonstrations to illustrate concepts and skills.
- 3.6 Teacher assigns tasks that students handle with a high rate of success.
- 3.7 Teacher asks appropriate levels of questions that students handle with a high rate of success.
- 3.8 Teacher conducts lesson or instructional activity at a brisk pace, slowing presentations when necessary for student understanding but avoiding unnecessary slowdowns.
- 3.9 Teacher makes transitions between lessons and between instructional activities within lessons efficiently and smoothly.
- 3.10 Teacher makes sure that the assignment is clear.
- 3.11 Teacher summarizes the main point(s) of the lesson at the end of the lesson or instructional activity.

4. Major Function: Instructional Monitoring of Student Performance

- 4.1 Teacher maintains clear, firm, and reasonable work standards and due dates.
- 4.2 Teacher circulates during classwork to check all students' performance.
- 4.3 Teacher routinely uses oral, written, and other work products to check student progress.
- 4.4 Teacher poses questions clearly and one at a time.

5. Major Function: Instructional Feedback

- 5.1 Teacher provides feedback on the correctness or incorrectness of in-class work to encourage student growth.
- 5.2 Teacher regularly provides prompt feedback on assigned out-of-class work.
- 5.3 Teacher affirms a correct oral response appropriately, and moves on.
- 5.4 Teacher provides sustaining feedback after an incorrect response or no response by probing, repeating the question, giving a clue, or allowing more time.

6. Major Function: Facilitating Instruction

- 6.1 Teacher has an instructional plan that is compatible with the school and system-wide curricular goals.
- 6.2 Teacher uses diagnostic information obtained from tests and other assessment procedures to develop and revise objectives and/or tasks.
- 6.3 Teacher maintains accurate records to document student performance.
- 6.4 Teacher has instructional plan that matches/aligns objectives, learning strategies, assessment, and student needs at the appropriate level of difficulty.
- 6.5 Teacher uses available human and material resources to support the instructional program.

7. Major Function: Communicating Within the Educational Environment

- 7.1 Teacher treats all students in a fair and equitable manner.
- 7.2 Teacher interacts effectively with students, co-workers, parents, and community.

8. Major Function: Performing Non-Instructional Duties

- 8.1 Teacher carries out non-instructional duties as assigned and/or as need is perceived.
- 8.2 Teacher adheres to established laws, policies, rules, and regulations.
- 8.3 Teacher follows a plan for professional development and demonstrates evidence of growth.

Fig. 1. Teaching Functions and Practices

Collecting Teacher Performance Data

If the evaluation instrument were to be perceived as both fair and helpful, a system for active data collection, feedback, and general evaluation had to be put into place.

While poetry may be experience recollected in tranquility, as Wordsworth asserts, teacher evaluation requires direct observation in the classroom. Too many teachers, unfortunately, have experienced evaluation as ritual: the principal summons them to the office where a blank evaluation form awaits completion. On very little evidence and often without direct experience, the principal "evaluates" the teacher's performance by completing the form. This situation provides no feedback to the teacher, offers no suggestion for improvement, and often contributes to a real cynicism in teachers about their value to the school's mission.

Under the North Carolina Teacher Performance Appraisal System, a set of carefully sequenced activities leads up to performance evaluation. While the principal usually fills the observer role in districts piloting North Carolina's career development program, full-time observers, usually drawn from the teacher ranks, are employed periodically. In these situations, both the principal and an observer/evaluator observe the teacher over the course of the year. First, the principal observes each teacher in class on at least three separate occasions. At least one of these observations is announced in advance and preceded by a conference. In this conference, the teacher and observer discuss the general characteristics of the students, special needs of individuals, and the specific lesson that will be observed. The teacher gives the observer a copy of the lesson plan, and the observer reviews the observation instrument with the teacher.

During the actual visit, the observer is present throughout the entire class or teaching period. Seated in an unobtrusive place in the room, the observer notes specific examples of the practices as demonstrated by the teacher. While the actions of students may provide clues to the observer, it is the teacher's action that is of primary con-

cern. If an event occurs outside the teacher's control—a fire drill, for instance, or the sudden onset of illness in a student—the observation is cancelled and rescheduled.

Following the visit, the observer prepares a narrative report that is the basis of a postobservation conference. Here, the observer clarifies any questions and provides feedback to the teacher based on the information collected. Areas of special strength are noted, as are areas that may be improved.

During the school year, three observations are conducted: one announced, one unannounced, and a third that may or may not be announced. In any event, a postobservation conference is always conducted.

In special cases, more observations may also be held, at the discretion of the teacher or principal.

Near the end of the school year, the principal reviews the data from each observation and assigns a numerical rating on a scale of 1–6 to each of the eight function areas (see fig. 2). The principal then shares this rating with the teacher. Based on data collected over the year, the teacher and principal collaboratively set goals and strategies that will lead to professional development. We call this individualized growth strategy a Professional Development Plan. It is a record of the action plan for improvement or enhancement of teaching skills.

North Carolina's appraisal system, as described, is not merely a theoretical

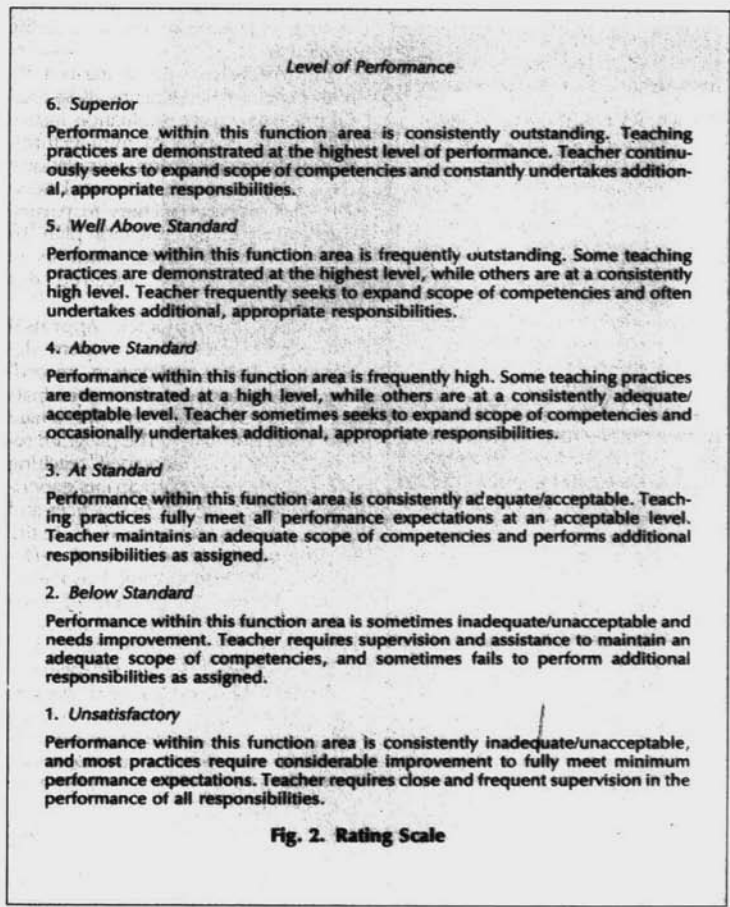


Fig. 2. Rating Scale

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construct or paper plan. Rather, teachers and principals in 48 of the state's 140 school districts have been using the system since September 1985. Moreover, this plan, with modifications, is being used as part of the mentoring process for all teachers in all districts who have received Initial Teaching Certificates.

Providing Training to School Districts

The Personnel Services Area of the State Department of Public Instruction is responsible for monitoring teacher education programs at the state's universities and colleges, certifying all educators in the state, providing staff development training, and developing evaluation procedures for all certified personnel employed by local education agencies. To assist districts in implementing the appraisal plan, staff members designed several training programs.

Effective Teaching Training is a 30-hour program that explains all 38 critical practices on the evaluation instrument. Using videotapes, mini-lectures, role-plays, small-group simulations, and other strategies, Personnel Services staff prepare teachers to participate actively in the evaluation plan. To date, more than 42,000 educators in North Carolina have received this training.

Teacher Performance Appraisal Training is a 24-hour program designed to teach observation, recording, and evaluating skills to principals and other educators who will evaluate teacher performance. The program relies heavily on videotaped teaching episodes that give participants experience in observing the 38 practices and making appropriate evaluations. In the initial training period (November-December 1985), staff trained 893 individuals. Seventy-five percent of them were able to accurately rate teachers' performance on the instrument's five major functions on a test videotape.

Professional Development Plan is six hours of training designed to teach principals how to develop growth plans that respond to individual needs and take into account local resources for personnel improvement.

Mentor Training is a 24-hour program that helps teachers who will work with initially certified teachers in the first two years of their career.

Based on the effective teaching practices and a variety of models of adult growth (see, for example, Oja n.d.), this training develops the skills needed to help induct new teachers into the profession.

In addition to these programs, Department of Public Instruction staff have prepared or are in the process of designing several other training modules. Some are designed to maintain reliability among the raters; others will offer teachers expanded training on specific functions.

Commitment Yields Reward

The level of commitment exhibited by North Carolina educators to this program of performance appraisal testifies to the importance our state places on teachers. Having established clear expectations for teacher performance, North Carolina has helped propagate those standards by disseminating information about effective teaching to literally every school building in the state. While the investment of money and time has been great, the return on the investment—in terms of better educated children and more professional teachers—will be even greater. □

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