

APPRAISAL FOR QUALITY LEARNING

PETER GROOTENBOER

Bethlehem Institute of Education, Tauranga

ABSTRACT Educational quality is a concern for the New Zealand community and there are various views about how it can be achieved. There is significant support for the view that excellence in teaching is the key to quality education, and therefore teacher appraisal has become an increasingly important issue. Two broad schools of thought on teacher appraisal can be identified, and they are based on different assumptions about teachers and the nature of the teaching task. In this article I have called these two perspectives the bureaucratic managerial perspective, and the professional perspective. In reviewing teacher appraisal from these differing viewpoints, issues emerged around the themes of foundational issues, ethical issues, and affective issues. In concluding this article, the implications of these issues are explored for educational leadership, particularly in the context of the recent educational reforms in New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

Quality education has become a matter of increasing concern for the New Zealand community at large. The motives here may vary from economic competitiveness for New Zealand on a global scale, to securing employment, to building a sound basis for the intrinsic satisfaction of life-long learning. Whatever the motive, the concept of quality education carries with it a keen interest in schools that promote excellence in teaching and learning.

The term *appraisal* has become a part of the professional vernacular in schools over the last decade of educational reform in New Zealand. Yet, as a concept, teacher appraisal is not always clearly defined, nor understood, and it can promote anxious responses from those being appraised. The literature on teacher appraisal generally focuses on practices for appraisers to adopt with little reference to underlying assumptions and rationale, an oversight that has given rise to a number of issues (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin & Berstein, 1985). Indeed, it has been suggested that flawed assumptions and the absence of rationale have led to ineffectiveness for the appraisal process in the improvement of teaching quality and thus quality in education (Carr, 1989; Clark & Meloy, 1990; Popham, 1988).

TEACHER APPRAISAL

Teacher appraisal in schools is often problematic, yet the nature and form of appraisal experienced by teachers can have a significant effect on their professionalism and prospects for promotion (Hickcox & Musella, 1992). Appraisal is often conceptualised as an annual process that incorporates an interview and some form of classroom observational visit by someone higher up in the school hierarchy who writes an evaluative report. Many writers suggest that these evaluations are ineffective for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and they can cause significant relational problems (Buttram & Wilson, 1987; Hancock & Settle, 1990; Townsend, 1995). Haertel (1991, p. 5) has commented that the appraisal is "notoriously unreliable", particularly when applied universally across diverse classroom settings.

There appear to be two main purposes for appraisal: formative appraisal for professional growth, and summative appraisal for management and judgement (Battersby, 1991; Calder, 1992; Edwards, 1992a; Timperley & Robinson, 1997; Turner & Clift, 1988). Although these two purposes are not particularly compatible (Bollington, Hopkins & West, 1990; Laird, 1994; Popham, 1988), they are often combined in one process, with the result that many teachers are suspicious of appraisal and its value to their work (Calder, 1992; Edwards, 1992a, 1992b; Gitlin & Smyth, 1989).

The summative form of appraisal is usually hierarchical and driven by management functions. In this model of appraisal the criteria for effective performance are prescribed for teachers by the employer, and the purpose of appraisal is to test teachers to see if they meet the required, externally set, performance standards. Formative appraisal, on the other hand, is described as non-hierarchical and professionalising (Hickcox & Musella, 1992). It often involves teachers in self-appraisal and peer mentoring, and is always linked to professional development (Wright, 1993). In this form of appraisal, the professional autonomy of the teacher is maintained. It also encourages a far greater teacher commitment to the process of appraisal and teachers see its value to their work (Sanger, 1995).

These two forms of appraisal seem to serve different ends and represent different perspectives on how educational quality can be promoted. The following sections examine these perspectives which, for the purposes of this article, I have labelled the bureaucratic, managerial perspective, and the professional perspective. Proponents of both of these views are concerned with the learning of students in schools, but they differ in their underpinning assumptions, and their views on how quality learning might be advanced.

The Bureaucratic Managerial Perspective

In the bureaucratic organisation and management of schools, Darling-Hammond (1990) suggests:

Schools are agents of government that can be administered by hierarchical decision-making and controls. Policies are made at the top of the system and handed down to administrators who translate them into rules and procedures. Teachers follow the rules and procedures (class schedules, curricula, textbooks, rules for promotion and assignment of students, etc.), and students are processed according to them (p. 27).

In this model of schooling, teachers are required to *perform* designated tasks, and thus a *performance management* system is needed to evaluate their performance. The above description also implies that appraisal and performance management are hierarchical, and that the teaching role is narrowly defined in line with a conception of teaching as a form of labour (Clark & Meloy, 1990; Haertel, 1991; Winter, 1989; Wise, et al., 1985).

There are a number of issues that make a bureaucratic model untenable for developing and sustaining a healthy school climate, and specifically for the appraisal of teachers. Teachers who are reflective practitioners thrive on collaboration, knowledge sharing, collegiality, freedom, self-efficacy, professional practice and democracy. These ideals are the antithesis of bureaucracy that depends on individualism, hierarchy, competition, rewards and sanctions, secrecy,

compliance, accountability and procedures (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Rizvi, 1989; Wildy & Wallace, 1998). As educational reforms are increasingly being motivated by economic factors with concerns for international competitiveness, schools and education are being bureaucratized (Carter, 1997). This has been to the disadvantage of school teachers and students and by implication, to the process of ensuring quality (Clark & Meloy, 1990; Credlin, 1999; Haertel, 1991; Rizvi, 1989).

A Professional Perspective

A professional perspective of appraisal for quality learning is grounded in the professional practice of teaching and endorses the fundamental characteristics of a profession. The principles of a profession are: (1) practice is based on a body of knowledge; (2) client welfare is the highest concern; and (3) the profession is responsible for their professional standards (Darling-Hammond, 1990). These tenets help establish how a profession of teaching can be developed.

In a recent article, Judyth Sachs (2000) discussed a new form of teacher professionalism which she called *activist professionalism*. Central to the concept of activist professionalism is democratic collaboration where teachers form working relationships with colleagues, students and parents, shifting the focus for review and action to the collective group. She suggests that "active trust" is fundamental to the development of activist professionalism in its collective context, and from the group "generative politics can spring" (Sachs, 2000, p. 81). By promoting trust, reciprocity, collaboration and mutual respect, and not feigning political neutrality, activist professionalism provides an avenue for thinking, feeling and practising education that is in the best interests of all involved.

The promotion of teacher professionalism does not negate the need for teachers to be accountable for their practice. The issue is more who they are accountable to, and who controls the standards, practices and procedures that make-up their professional accountability (Darling-Hammond, 1990). If teaching is to be considered as a profession, then it would be appropriate for teachers to appraise and monitor themselves (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; O'Hanlon, 1993). That said, teachers need to genuinely undertake their professional responsibility and be more pro-active in monitoring their own profession. To this end, it would be appropriate for teachers to establish a professional body which dealt with the professional issues of teaching, particularly as their practice is being significantly impinged upon by legislated reform (Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Sullivan, 1999).

If there were a genuine respect for teachers' professionalism, they could then appraise their work collegially as a "community of professional colleagues" in their particular school site (Brownie, 1993, p. 35). They could thus be accountable to each other and, in the process, develop useful and meaningful knowledge about what it means to be a teacher in their particular context (Wildy & Wallace, 1998). There is considerable support for the view that greater teacher professionalism, and all that this entails, is indeed the key for improving teaching and educational provision (Bell & Gilbert, 1996; Carr, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Labaree, 1992; Sullivan, 1999). If this is so, then there is a moral obligation to promote and sustain a professional conception of teaching that is perceived, enacted and appraised as thoughtful, reflective practice.

ISSUES IN TEACHER APPRAISAL

Although brief, the review of related literature above gives rise to several issues in the field of teacher appraisal: foundational issues, ethical issues and affective issues. These three are discussed here within the framework of the bureaucratic and professional conceptions of teaching.

Foundational Issues

The way a school and its leaders approach appraisal will stem from their beliefs and philosophies about the nature of teaching, the nature of knowledge generated through appraisal, and the context of the teaching practice. The fundamental goal of improving quality in education is common to both the bureaucratic and the professional approaches to teaching, but their foundational beliefs and assumptions about how quality is achieved and sustained are quite different. The foundational issues of appraisal discussed in this section are: the complexity of teaching and education, the epistemological basis of appraisal, and finally the tension between modernity and postmodernism in education.

Complexity

The fact that teaching is a complex task performed in a complex setting means that appraisal, too, can be complex (Credlin, 1999; Haertel, 1991; Wragg, Wikeley, Wragg & Haynes, 1996). Teachers have to meet the diverse learning needs of a range of children they face each day, and to fulfil their role they need to create a range of motivating learning experiences. Teaching work demands continual attention to cognitive, emotional and relational problems throughout the school day (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Haertel, 1991; Peel & Inkson, 1993).

If teaching is indeed a complex phenomenon in a complex setting, then it is problematic to define and evaluate teaching using specified criteria or performance standards, for however comprehensive these may be, they cannot capture the ecological nature of teaching. The practice of teaching cannot be evaluated in isolation from the context of teaching, nor from the web of relationships that constitute the classroom community. The dynamic nature of the classroom will render any definitive statements about the teaching practice in that room as outdated shortly after such statements are made. Taylor (1991) has suggested that there is an inherent contradiction when collaborative, collective, complex phenomena are analysed using individualistic frameworks, theories, paradigms and methods.

In appraising teaching the plurality of understanding and perception needs to be accepted, as diversity is not only recognised, but celebrated (Sanger, 1995). Clearly, this would be difficult in a bureaucratic perception of teaching, where teachers' work is seen as measurable and quantifiable. Complexity makes the classroom setting untidy, ill defined, and difficult to evaluate with any precision. A bureaucratic perception of teaching, through its underlying assumptions, sees the teaching context as a more definable and simplified phenomenon, that is able to be evaluated.

Epistemology

Different learning theories and epistemologies underpin evaluative processes, and their underlying assumptions need to be made explicit (Darling-Hammond, et al, 1983). The fundamental epistemology of the scientific approaches to teacher appraisal is behaviourism, as its referent for evaluation is observable behaviour (Eisner, 1982). It therefore values the observable learning product over the learning process (Kogan, 1989). Winter (1989) proposed that such an epistemology was untenable and incoherent as a theory of knowledge for teacher appraisal. He suggested that what was appropriate was a contrasting theory that acknowledged and valued the relationship between professional knowledge and professional practice. In a bureaucratic conception of teaching, knowledge is generated by the appraiser, who then communicates their evaluation to the practitioner (and others), and in the process a distinction is made between enacted knowledge and observed knowledge, giving precedence to the latter.

A hermeneutical epistemology is inconsistent with prescribed standards of performance and external monitoring because this approach cannot account for the intricacies of the teaching-learning classroom milieu (Smith & Blase, 1991). In essence, mandated standards are simplistic and one-dimensional when they are considered against the reality of teaching, and their foundational epistemology is therefore inadequate. To define excellence in such a way will always limit and misrepresent what the knowledge of quality in teaching truly is, and as such it is a flawed epistemology for evaluation purposes. Carr's (1989) conception of the professional knowledge of teachers sees it as value-laden and contextually qualified, and it is this knowledge that teachers draw upon to make judgements and decisions in their practice. Carr suggested that an epistemology of teaching involves knowledge being developed through reflection on practice, and as such is consistent with Schön's (1987) concept of reflective practice.

Modernity and Postmodernity

Many of the conflicts discussed previously, such as complexity and hierarchy, and bureaucracy and professionalism, are symptomatic of the continuing struggle between modernity and postmodernity.

The juxtaposition between modernity and postmodernity is evidenced in teacher appraisal where educational theory appears to have struggled to change with postmodern sociology, seemingly reinventing different forms of mechanistic structures (Carter, 1997). The desire for appraisal systems with hierarchical structures that promote individual accountability through measurable outcomes is evidence of educational thought that is managerial and steeped in modernistic philosophy. These technicist notions of teaching and teacher appraisal are synonymous with the bureaucratic model of schooling where education is viewed as value-free, simple (i.e., not complex) and quantifiable, and uniformity of practice is desired (Sanger, 1995).

A characteristic of modernism is individualised structures and systems, which applied to the school situation sees individual teachers operate in their secluded, insular classroom domain within a rigid timetable structure that precludes collaboration. It will be remembered that fundamental to Sachs' (2000) concept of activist professionalism was collaboration, not individualised, hierarchical arrangements which work against such collegiality. Thus, accountability and appraisal that is individualised and hierarchical creates an

environment which is under-equipped to cope with postmodern demands for flexible learning and teaching, and continuous staff development and growth (Hargreaves, 1994).

Ethical Issues

Appraisal involves the evaluation of teachers, and is therefore fraught with ethical fishhooks and dilemmas. Codd (1999) argued recently that "... cultivating a culture of trust can promote ethical conduct indirectly by providing an ideal of professionalism"; that "trust is the essential element in the development of a professional culture", and that "trustworthiness is the first virtue of professional life" (p. 52). If his argument is valid, then the successful, ethical and just practice of teacher appraisal will need to embrace principles of trust and teacher professionalism. Some writers are suggesting that these qualities are more likely to be eroded than enhanced by the mandated requirements for teacher appraisal in New Zealand (Codd, 1999; O'Neill, 1997; Sullivan, 1994; 1999).

Trust

Effective teacher appraisal requires a climate of respect and trust, which can take a great deal of effort and time to establish and maintain (Hellawell & Hancock, 1998). Trust then, is a valuable quality and should be protected and nurtured for the benefit of all those involved in schooling (O'Neill, 1997).

It has been suggested that teacher evaluation developed from a bureaucratic model of teaching is most likely based on assumptions that teachers are motivated by self-interest and that they cannot be trusted (Clark & Meloy, 1990; Codd, 1999; Sullivan, 1994). In this case, teachers' professional practice (which prizes trust, respect and goodwill) is sacrificed in the pursuit of accountability and compliance to a minimum code. Also, it is assumed that teachers are motivated by self-interest and reward, and that their pay has to be linked to satisfactory compliance to the standards, and failure to measure-up is sanctioned through salary-capping (Codd, 1999; Sullivan, 1994).

If worthwhile appraisal requires trust, as well as honesty, openness, collegiality and co-operation, then the managerial approach to teaching is problematic (Townsend, 1995). A trusting atmosphere cannot be contrived through rules or structures, but it is possible to actively diminish trust through contractual or legislative relationships. Trust is a lived-through quality of teachers' professional ideology, and it operates through mutual respect, co-operation and goodwill. If teachers are able to practice in a professional climate, then they need not be concerned about *watching their backs* or performing for a suspicious audience, and their energies can be devoted towards productive educational goals (Codd, 1999; Duncan, 1999; Townsend, 1995). Sullivan (1994) commented on the demise of trust in the New Zealand context, and linked it to the second ethical issue in the appraisal of teachers, that being the proletarianisation of teaching.

Justice and the Proletarianisation of Teaching

The practice of teaching has undergone increasing external control through legislation and reform, and the forms and means of teacher evaluation are a significant part of that control (Carter, 1997; Densmore, 1987; Smyth & Shacklock, 1998). Again, this is largely due to the bureaucratisation of schooling.

The implementation of performance management and teacher evaluation are political decisions made with consideration to the various views of many stakeholders in education (Mathias & Jones, 1989). The stakeholders include politicians, businesspeople, advocates of particular educational philosophies, educational administrators, teacher unions, boards of trustees, students, and parents, but in the New Zealand reforms it seems as if the business advocates have had the most political clout in influencing the form and structure of teacher appraisal (Peel & Inkson, 1993). It has been suggested that the bureaucratic evaluation system that has been mandated has ignored the voice of teachers, and empowers managers with control over the practice of teaching (McNeil, 1981; O'Neill, 1997). Ker (1992) comments that appraisal is primarily concerned with managers ensuring that teachers are complying to their requirements, and as such it significantly proletarianises their professional lives.

Affective Issues

To reiterate on previous comments, the bureaucratic nature of the present teacher evaluation and performance management reforms ignore the affective dimension of teaching, and therefore creates tension and anxiety for teachers and principals as they try to reconcile conflicting demands in their practice. Because appraisal involves analysis and change, it will often involve emotion as teachers come to terms with issues of self-efficacy and public perception of their practice (Credlin, 1999). Indeed, there is research and anecdotal data to suggest that the implementation of performance management has created pressure and anxiety for teachers and principals (Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1997; Credlin, 1999; Duncan, 1999; McLellan & Ramsey, 1993). Gibbs (1999), amongst others, suggests that the quality of teaching and learning suffer when teachers' efficacy is challenged, and it is ironic that the very reforms that were introduced to increase quality in practice appear to work against it.

Anxiety and Risk

Appraisal is often a threatening process, even for those who value and promote its benefits (Townsend, 1995). The sense of suspicion and anxiety is greater in a hierarchical system where a superior is evaluating a teachers' work for bureaucratic purposes (Calder, 1992; Darling-Hammond, et al, 1983). In their research, Gitlin and Smyth (1989), and Gibbs (1999) report that teachers were apprehensive about appraisal, and that they were particularly fearful of not measuring up to external demands.

To overcome the anxiety teachers experience about appraisal, a collaborative supportive environment is needed where teachers can explore issues related to their practice and take risks without fear of retribution. Teachers who could operate as reflective professionals in communities of colleagues could develop trust and empathy which would support them as they continuously appraised their own practice (Hargreaves, 1994).

Collaboration

Collaboration has been acknowledged by many as an essential component for effective and developing schools and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Sachs, 2000). It is seen as fundamental to professional practice,

as teachers work collegially to better understand their work. Hargreaves (1994) has suggested that collaboration offers moral support, improved effectiveness, reduced overload, political assertiveness, increased capacity for reflection, continuous improvement, and opportunities to learn from one another. Clearly there are great benefits from having a school community that is based upon collegial relationships and a collaborative climate. This can lead to administrators structuring a form of collegiality that is manufactured and artificial, or contrived (Hargreaves, 1994).

Teachers who share a school community with a common enterprise can be involved in reciprocal learning as they evaluate how *they* are doing, and what they can do corporately to continue to grow (Duncan, 1999; Shanker, 1990; Townsend, 1995). The role of the leadership in this form of collegiality is to create and manage school structures that make space for teachers to truly collaborate and reflectively appraise their practice (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994).

IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHER APPRAISAL

Leadership Issues and Obligations

In the context of the reforms in New Zealand education, leadership in the appraisal of teachers involves academics, government agencies, principals and teachers. However, it is the school principal who is left *between a rock and a hard place*. As a teacher, the principal is a colleague of teaching staff in the school, but the reforms also position the principal as a member of the Board of Trustees, thus having legal responsibility for the implementation of legislated reforms.

A number of writers have identified and commented upon the dilemma principals face as they attempt to implement bureaucratic systems of appraisal and maintain collegial relationships with their staff (Brownie, 1993; Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1997; Haertel, 1991; McNeil, 1981; Stewart, 1997; Sullivan, 1994; Townsend, 1995). It would seem impossible to sustain both facets in a meaningful way, particularly if the principal is trying to be involved in both summative and formative appraisal (Popham, 1988). The corporatisation of schooling and bureaucratic conceptions of teaching mean that the principal needs to be particularly careful with appraisal, as it seems that in many respects they are in a lose-lose situation (McLellan & Ramsay, 1993).

For school leaders, the tension of the analysis above can predicate many problems. Peel and Inkson (1993) and Calder (1992) have reported situations where principals espoused a professional notion of teacher appraisal, but in practice they enacted a managerial form of accountability. Hellowell and Hancock (1998) reported that principals felt isolated and lonely because the requirements for accountability had removed them from the collegiality of the teaching staff.

There is a challenge for educational leaders to determine and enact concepts and systems that will indeed contribute to a higher quality of learning for all students, and to carefully negotiate what inherent tensions they need to address. They need to accept that their own approach to appraisal may be a cause in the failure of others to perform, and there cannot be a neat causality relationship between all events and outcomes (Duncan, 1999). Sockett (1989) suggests that the challenge for educational leaders is to create a community of leadership where teachers are encouraged to exercise their professional authority for the mutual enhancement of all in the school community.

Obligations for Educational Leaders

The fundamental obligation of educational leadership is quality education, irrespective of whether one holds a bureaucratic or professional perspective of schooling. A key to quality education is quality teaching, and many would suggest that reflective practice is the essence of quality teaching. If this is so, then leaders have an obligation to promote reflective practice as a model for teaching.

I have suggested that true reflective practice cannot be contrived, and therefore there is an obligation, in my view, for leaders to actively encourage and facilitate true thoughtful, professional practice and resist any and all attempts to contrive a form of reflective practice. This would involve school principals and other educational leaders creating space, in terms of time, resources and school structures, for collaboration and reflection. A significant part of this responsibility would be the facilitation of a non- or less-threatening appraisal environment where teachers felt valued, respected and trusted. It would also mean that they would need to find ways to subvert, side-step, or creatively satisfy the demands of legislation for bureaucratic notions of appraisal without damaging the professional status of their teaching colleagues.

For principals, there is an obligation for them to enact forms of teacher appraisal that are consistent with the metaphor of the thoughtful professional practitioner. An important aspect of this responsibility is the obligation for principals to undertake their own work as a form of thoughtful reflective practice, embodying and modelling the qualities and actions that promote quality education. To this end, they would be particularly vigilant about issues of hegemony and proletarianisation as they view soberly their own positional power.

Educationalists do need to become more assertive in the political arena. Sachs' (2000) notion of the activist professional endorsed *generative politics*, where teachers exercise their political position through collaboration and trust. Sullivan (1994) highlighted the urgency for teachers to develop a professional body, and indeed this would be an appropriate vehicle for teachers to address the inconsistencies of the current approach to teacher appraisal. Such a body could speak on behalf of teachers on professional issues such as teacher appraisal, and could advise the Minister of Education as he currently seeks to establish groups such as the Education Council.

Considering the prior debate, there is a continuing obligation for all those in education to continually investigate issues of quality in education. Perhaps there is an imperative that some research be conducted into the effects of teacher appraisal on the quality of education. For those who support a bureaucratic perspective of schooling, there is a need for research into whether the mandated requirements for performance management have indeed improved the quality of student learning. Similarly, those from a professional approach need to research and document aspects of growth and development in educational quality given their perception of appraisal, teaching and schooling.

CONCLUSION

A fundamental argument of this article has been that the current reforms in teacher performance management are based on flawed assumptions about people and schools. They are founded in bureaucratic notions of teaching that assume that teachers cannot be trusted to practice to a high professional standard, and therefore they need to be kept under surveillance. The problem with this form of

appraisal is that it requires teachers to work in unnatural ways – a contrived form of professional or reflective practice where reflection is mandated through a mechanism of performance review.

If appraisal is to be a part of an effective development process for teachers, then there is little place for any externally referenced, competency-based assessment. There is even less scope for a dual-purpose appraisal system, when different functions require different processes to collect different forms of data (Wise, et al, 1985). For teachers to be sincerely involved in appraisal, they need to have ownership and control of the process in a supportive and collaborative environment. The focus of the appraisal has to be development rather than formal assessment, with the purpose of critically improving the professional practice of the teachers involved.

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