

Come On, Evaluate Me

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The simplest description of a teacher is a person who performs the tasks of teaching by showing or explaining how to do something. They explain ideas, concepts, guidelines, and ways to accomplish assignments or specific responsibilities to their students. It seems simple enough. All a teacher has to do is figure out what they need to explain to their students each day, teach it the best way they see fit and go on worrying about the next class plan afterwards. But is it really that simple? Does a teacher have to think about anything else besides what they are teaching? Do they need to worry about which teaching tactics work best, how their approachability is reflected in the classroom, or keeping the class under control and student behavior? They sure do. The key is to find the best way to hit those exact areas in addition to effectively teaching.

What's the Key?

So what is the answer to that question? What is the best way to show or clarify a subject matter to a group of students while being approachable and keeping the class under control and out of confusion? What techniques will help the students actually learn just what the teacher is trying to explain? The answer to that isn't exactly solidified. However, one very efficient way to learn which tactics work best is to reflect upon student feedback provided through teacher evaluations.

Why Evaluations?

Evaluations can specifically echo how well and effectively the teacher taught the class through the use of student feedback. Student feedback is one of the best ways to reveal how well a teacher explained the subject matter to the students, and if their strategies were effective or not. In fact, within Wilbert J McKeachie's article, he stated, "All of the authors, (and I join them) agree that student ratings are the single most valid source of data on teaching effectiveness" (McKeachie, 1997). The validity of that statement falls under that fact that McKeachie included more than 50 authors within his article. So when he said, "all of the authors," he was really saying 'at least 50 other authors.' Let alone, the primary purpose of evaluations is to

provide feedback to teachers that will be helpful for improvement (McKeachie 1997). Student feedback can help a teacher improve their teaching skills and ideas for as long as they are teaching.

What IS an Evaluation?

An evaluation is an examination or survey that observes and assesses something carefully. In this case, the evaluations are the student's assessment on their teacher's strategies and teaching effectiveness.

The evaluation should be made up by the teacher, but collaboratively with other faculty and possibly administrators of the same district. Among the school district, evaluations should have little differences, if any at all. This allows for equality of student feedback that can be used to compare one teacher from another, as well as allow a teacher to receive feedback on specific teaching practices that they may have been experimenting with.

Does a Teacher get Rated?

The questions included on the evaluation should be specific, while the options for answers can be broader. When collaboratively formulating evaluations, "if personnel committees sensibly use broad categories rather than attempting to interpret decimal-point differences, either a single score or a weighted combination of factors, comparable results will be provided" (Lin, 1984). This means a numbering system should be neglected because deciphering which value each number had could be difficult and should be ignored. McKeachie recommended using only crude judgments of instructional effectiveness like the words exceptional, adequate, and unacceptable for responses from the students (McKeachie 1997). It is most important to understand the feedback, and that can be easily done when the evaluation includes components that don't need to be deciphered from.

Is it All-Inclusive?

An evaluation provided to the student asking for feedback should tackle only the following components: the effectiveness of the teacher and specific teaching practices they chose to use, how

personable and approachable the teacher was, and classroom management.

The questions should provide responses that directly reflect the effectiveness of any teaching practices each teacher decided to use. It was stated that “specific behavioral items are most likely to result in improvement” (Murray 1983). Therefore, it is more beneficial to evaluate the behavior in which the class was taught versus what exactly the students understood and didn’t understand. The feedback then allows for clearer instructions on ways to improve.

Also included in the evaluation should be the components of how approachable the teacher was. A teacher should want to interact with their students. They should strive to help them any way possible especially when it comes to their success in the class. If a teacher comes off as intimidating, causing students to stray away when they have confusion, it should be brought to the teacher’s attention. Bringing attention to the problem allows for the teacher to attempt to behave more personably. If a teacher doesn’t have at least an approachable character students are going to leave questions unanswered that he or she could have easily clarified. Again, this problem can be brought to the teacher’s attention through student feedback in evaluations.

Classroom management should be included in the evaluations as well to help the teacher see how comfortable their students were. Besides just how well a teacher taught, how productively a teacher held the attention and cognitive perception of students is just as important. Different strategies of teaching could affect the attentiveness of students. That’s something a teacher should look for in evaluations in order to see if they need to improve in that area as well.

So What’s NOT Included?

Evaluations should not include any judgments on personality. Aspects like a teacher’s enthusiasm or even organization don’t need to be included because teaching effectiveness can be achieved in many different ways by teachers with very dissimilar personalities. It is clear that, “Judging an individual on the basis of characteristics is just as unethical as judging an individual on the basis of race or gender” (Scriven 1981). Evaluations should be looking for student feedback that

provides answers to teaching efficiency, not how well liked a teacher was personally.

Put it all Together

Just as students are evaluated on the knowledge of material taught to them, teachers need to be evaluated on how well they did everything in the classroom. They should know exactly what they intended to do in each class and how they intended to do it. Asking the students questions specifically on what he or she tried to do in the classroom gives a final grade on how well it was done. That grade is the feedback.

Nobody other than the students in the class had the full impact on how the class was taught and managed, just like nobody other than the students in the class had the full learning experience of the material provided to them. So, why not allow the students to reflect on how they were taught the material? There is no good reasoning to argue against that question. Students should be given the opportunity to report their thoughts, opinions, and reflections on everything in the class. And, as much as it is important to allow for the students to provide feedback, it is even more important that the teacher take the responses in sincerely and notice areas that do and don’t need improvement.

References

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