



# Teacher Evaluation

## From a Choice Theory Perspective

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**T**he area of school reform that has been the slowest to change is the evaluation of professional staff. Clearly, ensuring optimal teacher performance contributes to the mission of teaching and learning. Although significant educational innovations are being attempted across the

United States, teacher evaluation has undergone little change. Our teachers and students need and deserve better.

Evaluation, when done well, enhances teachers' professional growth and improvement. Equipping teachers to take responsibility for their own performance is the goal. Unfortunately, this kind of evaluation rarely takes place.

### **Two Evaluation Models**

To illustrate, let's review two of the most common evaluation models. The first is known as the *clinical supervision model* and is formative, which means it assumes that performance can be improved and that evaluation is an ongoing process. Clinical supervision generally involves announced classroom visits to observe teacher performance. It consists of a pre-observation conference, the observation visit, an analysis of the teacher's performance, a post-observation conference, and a post-conference analysis. The analysis is then written in letter form, with one copy going to the teacher and another to the teacher's employment file.

BY MARTHA HAVENS AND JIM ROY

The underlying principle here is that appropriate ongoing feedback from a knowledgeable professional will encourage teachers to consider alternative classroom strategies. This evaluation process has its strengths, especially with new or struggling teachers, but its flaws are readily apparent. For instance, many competent teachers seem to merely tolerate the process. Superintendents and principals make their observation visits and hold their conferences, yet teachers return to their classrooms and continue doing the same things as before.

**T**he second common model, *performance evaluation*, is summative, which means it summarizes or describes the employee's performance during a designated period of time and does not necessarily concern itself with ongoing improvement. Performance evaluations are generally based on unannounced classroom visits by a principal or supervisor and are conducted to inform decisions about changes in job status (promotion or dismissal). Using a checklist of desirable teacher behaviors, the supervisor indicates which ones he or she observed during the lesson. There is little follow-up. If a post-observation meeting is scheduled, it is usually a formality when the teacher is asked to sign the completed form. In public schools, these forms become the basis for future personnel actions such as termination or merit pay. In theory, classroom teachers will respond appropriately to commendations or criticisms of their performance.

Professional communication and feedback are essential for the success of teachers and principals. The question is not whether to evaluate, but how to do it most effectively. In our experience both as receivers and givers of evaluations, the models described above do not provide the kind of communication necessary to help teachers succeed. Both approaches are based on a top-down authority model and ignore the most important points of an effective evaluation process—the recipient's input and involvement in self-evaluation.

Teachers and evaluators often perceive the evaluation process very differently. Danielson and McGreal point out that “the climate surrounding evaluation may be essentially

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negative, with a prevailing perception on the part of teachers that the real purpose of the exercise is one of ‘gotcha,’ in which administrators look for opportunities to find fault. But even when the climate is positive, the teacher's role is essentially passive.”<sup>1</sup> This is why management leaders such as Deming<sup>2</sup> and Glasser<sup>3</sup> regard standard methods of evaluation as counterproductive. Often, principals and superintendents





are no more excited about such methods than the teachers who are on the receiving end.

### A New Approach

Since becoming students of Choice Theory, we have been applying its principles to the teacher-evaluation process. The model we propose involves both the teacher and the evaluator and is based on the concepts of William Glasser.<sup>4</sup> This approach treats educators as respected professionals who are offered opportunities to set their own goals and then coached in methods of self-evaluation. The process gives them both freedom and support, and leads to constant improvement.

In this model, the supervisor/evaluator also has a different role. What Glasser calls *lead-management* becomes the goal, instead of the standard top-down, authoritative approach, which he refers to as *boss-management*.<sup>5</sup> Rather than worrying about controlling employees and manipulating them through punishment and rewards, the lead-manager seeks to collaborate with them to create quality goals. A key part of this collaboration is teaching employees to effectively self-evaluate.

Glasser makes a point of distinguishing between external and internal control. External control refers to stimulus-response, which is foundational to behaviorism. External control is based on the belief we can get someone to behave in a way we choose. Expectations can be imposed or demanded. Rewards and punishments are strategically employed to motivate people toward specific actions.

Internal control, or Choice Theory, is the exact opposite. It is based on the belief that all humans choose their behavior for reasons that are important to them. Choice Theory recognizes the value of personal conviction and the satisfaction that comes from making good choices. This internal-control model holds that methods like punishment do not produce lasting success, and that workers (in this case, teachers) benefit more from coaching that helps them identify what to focus on and then use the new focus to achieve their goals. With these concepts in mind, let's look at the Choice Theory model and its implications. We will introduce a detailed form to use, as well as specific self-evaluation questions.

### The Model

The model is based on some simple questions that guide both the evaluators (superintendents and principals) and the evaluatees (teachers). The acronym WDEP can be helpful in remembering these questions. The following questions, though not exhaustive, provide some examples: First, the **W**—What do you **WANT**?

How do you want your classroom to look and feel?



What are your specific curriculum expectations?  
How will you know when your students achieve competence?  
What kinds of student behavior and attitudes do you want to foster?  
Do you want to share power with your students?  
Do you want your students to like you?  
What constitutes a great class period in math (or science, or English)?

Second, the **D**—What are you **DOING**?

What time do you leave work each day?  
How much work are you bringing home each evening?  
In what class are you doing your best work?  
In your third-period class, what evidence do you have that students are engaged in the learning?  
What is happening during recess or as the students enter the classroom that creates management problems?

Third, the **E**—**EVALUATION**, or is it working?

How do you feel about your “getting the day started” procedures?  
(If your management system is based on incentives and punishments) On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being terrible and 10 being perfect, how would you rate your management plan?

Which of your strategies work well in communicating with parents?

In general, how would you describe your relationship with your students? Is it creating the class atmosphere you want?

Is your current grading system helping the students to learn better?

Do you consistently feel stressed?

And fourth, the P—What is your PLAN?

What could you do tomorrow that would start the day better?

In dealing with that student who is causing continual problems in music class, what are your options?

How can you improve your working relationship with the pastor?

What three things could you do in biology class next week that will make the learning relevant for students?

## Teachers and evaluators often perceive the evaluation process very differently.

What are some things you can do to ease your stress?

(Each of the above questions can also be stated in first person by replacing *you* and *your* with *I* and *my*. The questions then become effective self-evaluation tools. The questions can also be customized to fit a specific classroom or content area and a variety of situations.)

Table 1

### Generic Questions to Guide the Evaluation Process

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade/Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

1. PLANNING AHEAD:

**FINDING THE GOAL/TARGET/PURPOSE/VISION**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

What is your lesson going to be about today?

As you see the lesson unfolding, what will students be doing?

What do you see yourself doing to produce these student outcomes?

What will you want me to look for and give you feedback about while I am in your classroom?

2. DURING THE VISIT:

**INFORMATION/FACTS/ACTIONS**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

What happened during the class period?

Describe the students' level of engagement during the period.

Describe your own thinking and behavior during the period.

Are there examples of situations during the period that you anticipated and planned for, or that you did not anticipate and had to deal with spontaneously?

3. AFTER THE EPISODE:

**SELF-EVALUATION**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

How well would you rate the learning experience during the period?

To what extent did things go as planned?

Is your management plan contributing to a quality learning level?

What went well during the period? Why do you think it went so well?

4. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE:

**THE PLAN**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Is there an area for improvement on which you want to focus?

How attainable is this goal?

What are some steps that might be important in achieving the goal?

Is there a person, or list of people, who can help you achieve this goal?

NOTE: The questions above are intended as a sample. The questions, but not the categories, will change, according to the focus or goal for growth. Some of the sample questions were taken from the book *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools* by Art Costa and Robert Garmston (Norwood, Mass.: Christopher-Gordon Publ., 1994).

These kinds of questions, when posed artfully by a supervisor or colleague, can lead to effective self-evaluation and improved performance. As we began to work through the evaluation process with teachers, we realized that such questions, and in fact the entire WDEP format, could become a helpful evaluation form. For instance, the (W) *what do you want* questions can form the basis for the observation pre-conference. The (D) *what are you doing* questions can focus on the actual events during the observation. The (E) *evaluation* questions are the focus of discussion during the post-observation conference. This discussion then leads to the (P) *what is your plan* questions, which produce the elements to be summarized in the follow-up letter. (See Table 1 on page 46 for a sample form.)

The key to this Choice Theory evaluation model is the teacher's involvement in identifying strengths, blind spots, and weaknesses. The supervisor may see these same things, but the power of this approach lies in skillfully leading the teacher to effective self-discovery. As Kendall Butler, assistant superintendent of the Oregon Conference, says, "It is better to get it out of their mouth than to put it into their ear."

### A Coaching Model

Traditional evaluation is based on one human being judging another and telling him or her where and how to change. It is easy to see why this approach can lead to frustration, misunderstanding, resistance, and even antagonism. On the other hand, evaluation based on a coaching model, where the person being evaluated is assisted toward accurate reflection, can lead to compassionate and genuine communication, positive relationships, and a passion for ongoing improvement. W. Edwards Deming<sup>6</sup> and Costa and Garmston<sup>7</sup> have stressed the important role of the person being evaluated. Although these writers were not necessarily motivated by Christian principles in achieving their insights, we have benefited nonetheless. We can learn from their research and apply their ideas, especially Glasser's Choice Theory, within a Christian framework. Effective questioning and coaching can affirm and celebrate success, identify specific traits and practices, and compassionately confront ineffective tendencies and strategies, all the while maintaining positive relationships. ✍



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