Teacher Performance Appraisal: More about Performance or Development?

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Abstract: Given that "teacher appraisal can be a key lever for increasing the focus on teaching quality" (OECD, 2013b, p.9) and that many reforms in the past have failed (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004), an understanding of the various aspects of successful performance appraisal is essential. The literature has begun to refer to a number of factors that support the development of an effective performance and development system. This paper discusses some of the key research connected with teacher performance appraisal, including aspects and outcomes and points to the need for a better understanding of how they are connected to bigger ideas. Highlighting the importance of an enhanced understanding of performance appraisal as a discursive approach to building teaching quality, this paper identifies elements that need further research if we are to grasp the implications of performance appraisal.

Introduction

Enhancing achievement and providing a quality educational experience for all students has long been the most important outcome expected of schools. With evidence suggesting that "teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2005, p.26), the key role teaching and teachers play in enhancing student achievement is recognised. Given that "teacher appraisal can be a key lever for increasing the focus on teaching quality" (OECD, 2013b, p.9) and that many reforms in the past have failed (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004), an understanding of the various aspects of successful performance appraisal is essential.

Performance appraisal can be defined as the ongoing process used for identifying, measuring and developing an individual's performance in accordance with an organisation's strategic goals (Aguinis, 2009). Appraisal may involve formative aspects that focus on developing performance, such as career development, professional learning and feedback. Summative aspects, on the other hand, evaluate performance for career progression, possible promotion or demotion and termination purposes.

When used for both accountability and instructional improvement, performance appraisal that identifies and enhances teaching quality may be considered the ideal quality assurance mechanism (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The OECD (2009b) acknowledge that:

> Raising teaching performance is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in student learning.... It is essential to know the strengths of teachers and those aspects of their practice which could be further developed. From this perspective, the institution of teacher evaluation is a vital step in the drive to improve

the effectiveness of teaching and learning and raise educational standards (p.3).

As the intensity of change quickens and the emphasis on keeping up with it heightens (Day, 2013), greater transparency demands that school systems compete in a global economy. An effective performance appraisal system will, ideally, assist in meeting these demands by holding employees accountable, addressing underperformance and enhancing performance and practice (Zbar, Marshall, & Power, 2007).

This paper explores the challenges and opportunities afforded by performance appraisal and its associated measures. Previous reforms will be outlined and followed by a description of the National Performance and Development Framework for Australian schools. As the first Australia-wide arrangement for teacher performance appraisal, its key features and the issues associated with implementing an effective performance and development system will be explored.

By providing a review of key literature, this paper will identify those areas in which further research is necessary if we are to better understand the intricacies of performance appraisal.

Defining Quality: Adopting Standards

Standards describe actions and performance thus outlining the functions of individuals within a profession (Celik, 2011). For teachers, standards attempt to define quality teaching. Ranging from generic to subject-specific attributes, they outline what a teacher should know and be able to do. Standards are used in many performance appraisal schemes to evaluate and guide teacher development (Kennedy, 2010), with a general agreement that standards and a shared understanding of quality teaching are foundations of any effective appraisal system (OECD, 2013b).

Research in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a focus on teacher quality and the provision of quality teacher education programs (Ingvarson, 2010). Australia was not alone in the promotion of quality teaching, with the adoption of rigorous standards figuring prominently in public debate in the United Kingdom and United States (Louden, 2000; Sachs, 2005).

Tensions associated with the development of exemplary standards (alongside a proliferation of professional associations, national boards and agencies) meant that various groups, including teaching and subject associations, competed to represent the profession. While many developments were driven by a desire to increase the 'professionalism' of teachers and teaching, standards that reflect the intricacies of teaching, 'allowing it to be the art as well as the science' (Phillips, 2012) was-and is-a complex matter. Although standards are important, Darling-Hammond (1994) cautioned against policy that focused solely on introducing standards and claimed that it is not so much the standards that would improve the education system, but how the standards were used.

Within the performance appraisal process, standards provide scope for teachers and school leaders to make informed decisions about teaching performance and may assist in identifying future areas for growth and development. In Australia, a description of what constitutes teaching quality is encapsulated in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011). According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), standards aim to articulate expectations for teaching, foster consistency and accountability and serve as the foundation for performance review at the end of the appraisal cycle.

The Effectiveness of Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal research falls into three main groups: the first group examines the variations in student learning from teachers within the appraisal process, the second evaluates teacher perceptions of the impact of the process on their practice and levels of motivation and the third evaluates effective performance appraisal conditions (Isore, 2009).

Variations

The first body of research compares outcomes for students whose teachers have participated in performance appraisal with those that have not. A sub-set compares student outcomes against results from the teachers' appraisals to determine whether the process was successful in identifying teacher quality. This body of research often draws on Value Added Measures (VAM), which aim to measure the teachers' contributions to student outcomes by comparing current test scores with test scores from the same students in previous years, as well as with scores of other students at the same grade level (Isore, 2009).

Although VAM have gained in popularity over the last decade as tools for measuring teacher effectiveness (Berliner, 2013; Konstantopoulos, 2012), they are unlikely to provide the solution to building teacher capabilities (Valli & Finkelstein, 2013). A failure to acknowledge the many aspects that contribute to teacher quality and student outcomes (OECD, 2005) - including the role school, peers, former teachers, pre-service programs and experiences play - makes VAM problematic (Berliner, 2013). Using student test results as the sole means of evaluating teacher quality is contentious (McArdle, 2010). Masters (2011) cautions that "when performances are evaluated only in terms of measured results, employees and organisations find ways to 'game the system'" (p.1).

While VAM may be difficult to correlate directly to the teacher, the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study (Gates Foundation, 2010) points to significant progress in the use of VAM. Used alongside additional sources of data, VAM are more likely to predict the effectiveness of a teacher and teaching and may offer, "a more accurate and nuanced view of the relationship among teacher qualifications, characteristics, practices, and student achievement growth" (Goe, 2013, p.238).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) voluntary certification process in the United States is a performance appraisal system that both develops and recognises (through certification) quality teaching. While some evidence suggests that students of teachers who obtain certification through the NBPTS system do better on standardised tests than students of non-certified teachers (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Smith, Gordon, Colby & Wang, 2005) other research suggests that there is little difference between the two (McColskey & Stronge, 2005; Sanders, Ashton & Wright, 2005): on balance, the NBPTS process appears to have a significant impact on teachers and the students they teach. A meta-analysis (Compensation Technical Working Group, 2012) of the NBPTS system concludes that students taught by a certified teacher more often than not outperform students taught by a non-certified teacher.

Although there is evidence that supports a connection between teacher appraisal and student outcomes, research findings linking student outcomes directly to the evaluation of teachers vary (Isore, 2009). Explanations for varied results may be explained by inconsistencies in teacher ratings from school to school and from one year to the next (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertelz, & Rothstein, 2013), or the shortcomings of linking student outcomes solely to the teacher.

Teachers' Perceptions

The second group of studies evaluating the effectiveness of performance appraisal focuses on teachers' perceptions of the effect of the appraisal process on their motivation and practice. Lustick and Sykes' (2006) evaluation of the NBPTS found teachers involved in the certification process went on to apply what they had learnt in the classroom and had a newfound enthusiasm for teaching and learning. The OECD's *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) which involved 90,000 secondary teachers and principals across 24 countries found that the greater the emphasis placed on a specific aspect of teaching in the feedback offered through the performance appraisal process, the greater the impact teachers believed it had on their teaching (OECD, 2009a). This provides useful insight into the formative aspects of appraisal and the extent to which teachers believe the process assists in developing their practice.

Conditions

The third group of studies examines conditions under which performance appraisal is likely to operate effectively (Isore, 2009). According to the OECD, there are four key elements in the development of an effective performance appraisal system (Isore, 2009):
1. Teachers are involved in the process. Evidence suggests that this promotes greater ownership and encourages reflection and review among the teachers themselves (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2001).
2. Stakeholders understand the process and develop a common language of quality.
3. Teachers have opportunities to express their perceptions and concerns throughout the process. Kennedy (2005) argues that teachers often reject reforms, not because they do not want to change or improve, but because many attempts at reform do not reflect what is actually happening in schools and ignore the realities of day-to-day teaching.
4. Teachers have confidence in the evaluation. The participation of multiple evaluators and sources of evidence is essential to an appraisal system's credibility (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).

The impact of performance appraisal on teaching and student learning is complex. It is clear that a diverse range of evaluations is necessary to measure the effectiveness of performance appraisal accurately and to determine its credibility as a means of developing teachers.

National and International Reforms

Signifying acceptance of the essential role of the teacher in the development of human capital (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu, 2007), reforms in the late 1990s and early 2000s continued, fuelled by greater school comparisons, choice and international competitiveness (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Connell, 2009; Kelly, 2012). Economic planning, further research and corresponding policy developments (Valli & Finkelstein, 2013) saw education policies move "toward a stronger focus on accountability and on careful analysis of variables affecting educational outcomes" (Stronge, 2002, p.viii).

International comparisons through the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the International Study Centre's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) and national comparisons through initiatives

such as My School (launched in 2011 to provide greater transparency between Australian schools) made it possible to judge educational outcomes within and between school systems.

With evidence suggesting "that the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of the teachers" (Barber & Moushed, 2007, p.12), the impetus to compete in a global, knowledge-based market (Goodwin, 2010; Ingvarson & Rowe, 2008) highlighted the need for school systems to evolve and meet the demands of an increasingly-skilled workforce.

During this period, a suite of national and international policies highlighting teacher quality agendas emerged. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future report, What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future (1996) and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) led reform agendas in the United States, while the OECD (2005) report, Teachers Matter, contributed to international discussion on professionalism, standards and teacher quality (Connell, 2009).

In Australia, reports including Teaching Talent: The Best Teachers for Australia's Classrooms (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008) and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council for Education, 2008) contributed to national dialogue around teacher and teaching quality (Connell, 2009; O'Meara, 2011).

The Melbourne Declaration highlighted the agenda for Australian education reform and emphasised the roles teaching and teachers play for all students in accessing a quality education. Evidence suggesting effective appraisal and feedback improve teacher performance has driven many reforms. These reforms have included inspections by superintendents, various performance payment schemes and performance reviews conducted by school principals or external inspectors (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1997).

While both formative and summative means may have their place within performance appraisal, research indicates a focus on development to be the most effective in improving classroom teaching quality (Hay Group, 2012). A good performance and development process should both guide reflection and professional development and provide a framework for making a point-in-time judgement and giving feedback for further development. For many general critics of education, however, performance appraisal is often about judgement.

Many performance appraisal systems are weighted heavily toward accountability rather than the growth and development of teachers and their teaching practices (Bartlett, 2000). Many performance appraisal systems have failed to inform teachers about what needs to be improved or supported their development to do so. A study by Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern and Keeling (2009), The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness reported that of the 15,176 teachers surveyed, 75 per cent believed that nearly all teachers received high ratings (good or great) during the appraisal process and that poor performance rarely led to teacher dismissal. Less than half (43 per cent) believed that performance appraisal practices actually helped teachers to improve and that professional learning was rarely tied to the process (Weisberg et al., 2009). Other teacher-based surveys yielded similar results, with 69 per cent of respondents in one study claiming performance appraisal was 'just a formality' (Duffet, Farkas, Rotherham, & Silva, 2008) and in another 63 per cent believing that appraisals were undertaken largely to meet administrative requirements (OECD, 2009a).

In Victoria, the Performance and Development Culture Accreditation Scheme, released in 2004 as part of the Blueprint reform in public schools, aimed to promote greater consistency between school's performance appraisal processes - as each school sought accreditation and proved that their school had key performance and development processes

in place. Teacher performance, according to the literature and to the Hay Group recommendations, improves when the following conditions are present:

- opportunities for teacher self-reflection and goal setting (Ross & Bruce, 2007);
- regular classroom observation and the provision of constructive feedback from school leaders or managers and peers (Avalos, 2011);
- frequent feedback on classroom performance as an ongoing dialogue not an annual discussion (Wang, 2007);
- shadowing, coaching and mentoring from peers and leaders (Steckel, 2009) and
- opportunities to contribute to and engage in teamwork, collaboration and action learning with other teachers (Bean, 2007).

The majority of public schools in Victoria (98 per cent) were accredited in the years that followed the reform with some evidence suggesting that the performance and development accreditation process led to a more consistent approach to teaching practice (Starr, 2009). There is, however, little evidence to suggest that this process improved the quality of teaching or led to long lasting change (Kamener, 2012).

Many practitioners, researchers and policy makers would agree that most teacher evaluation and appraisal systems do little to help teachers improve (Darling-Hammond et al., 2013). Findings in Australia, including those outlined by TALIS (OECD, 2009a) and Jenson and Reichl (2011) suggest that neither feedback nor valid performance appraisal are provided consistently in Australian schools.

As part of the agenda to drive quality teaching in all Australian schools, AITSL has introduced a National Performance and Development Framework that outlines key aspects of a performance appraisal process and emphasises that all teachers should undergo performance reviews (Dinham, 2013). Perhaps in a bid to move away from an over-emphasis on evaluation - now considered part of an outdated definition of performance appraisal - the National Performance and Development Framework outlines the process for both evaluating and developing teachers.

Key Features of Effective Performance Appraisal

AITSL's National Performance and Development Framework encompass both formative and summative aspects of appraisal. Alongside registration, accreditation and certification processes the framework seeks a consistent approach towards teacher performance and development to develop, retain and advance teachers. AITSL propose three broad phases of school performance appraisal: reflection and goal setting, professional practice and learning and feedback and review.

Reflection and Goal Setting

Reflection and goal setting are key drivers for improvement within the AITSL framework. During this phase teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching practice, informed by evidence and feedback, and set measurable goals related to their performance and development. Bandura (1997), acknowledges an important source of motivation comes through goal setting and self-efficacy, with efficacy determining the type of goals people choose and their ability to persist on tasks. Goal setting and reflection have been found to have a powerful impact on action (Locke & Latham, 2002). The setting of goals is central to the development of a self-regulated learning capacity and assists teachers to identify what they need to do to improve their practice (Timperley, 2011).

Professional Learning and Practice

The next phase of the framework has been identified as a significant method of improving performance. It involves access to professional learning to support teachers as they work toward their goals.

Professional learning signifies a shift in thinking away from the "perceptions and presumed 'baggage' associated with poorly conceived, fragmented, one-shot and de-contextualised in-service workshops" (Mayer & Lloyd, 2011, p.3) to a predominantly school-based, ongoing learning process that is linked directly to teachers' work (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

According to Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss and Shapley (2007), professional learning affects student achievement in three steps, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Professional Learning - Effect on Student Achievement

Professional learning enhances teachers' knowledge and skills, leading to improved teaching and improved teaching raises student achievement. While these causal effects have been identified, the challenge is in evaluating student achievement as a direct consequence of the professional learning.

Drawing on various studies (Hattie, 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007; Yoon et al., 2007) effect size methods - used to compare results from students over time and between groups - assist in measuring the impact of professional learning on student achievement. For example, Yoon et al. (2007) examined nine studies that measured gains in student achievement as the result of a professional learning activity and found the effect ranged from 0.53 to 2.39, with 0.54 constituting the average. Similarly, Timperley et al. (2007) found effect sizes from 0.48 as reported in Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald's (2001) study, through to English and Bareta (2006) who described a writing professional learning experience that reported effect sizes of up to 2.1 - for the lowest-achieving students.

Among the 97 studies examined by Timperley et al. (2007), professional learning led to significant improvements in student achievement when:

1. Learning focused on student outcomes and demonstrated a link between the learning and its impact on student achievement.
2. Worthwhile content was introduced that involve challenging and purposeful discourse.
3. Learning involved the integration of knowledge and skills.
4. What students needed to know and do was used to identify what teachers needed to know and do.
5. There was sufficient time to learn, practise and embed changes. Yoon et al. (2007), found the impact on student achievement was greater when programs offered between 30 and 100 hours of professional learning and were spread over a six to 12-month period. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), claimed that teachers needed close to 50 hours of professional learning in a given area to improve their skills and thus their impact on student achievement.
6. Approaches were responsive to learning processes. Engaging teachers in the process and challenging their existing ideas and assumptions was important in developing congruence between new information and practice.

7. Opportunities were provided for teachers to process new learning and work on their skills together.
8. External expertise was sought and often necessary to challenge existing assumptions.
9. Leaders developed expectations and promoted professional learning opportunities.
10. Momentum was maintained to develop new knowledge, work on inquiry and teachers were provided with the support to do so.

Some evidence suggests that effective professional learning may result in improved student achievement, and, in some cases, substantial improvements (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007; Yoon et al., 2007). However professional learning's average effect (0.51) does not place it into a high-stakes category of influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). "We know we need to get better at evaluating the impact of what we do – individually and collectively – and smart at using what the research can tell us about what works for diverse students in different contexts" (English, 2007, p.xiv). Improvements to the quality and quantity of evidence on professional learning's impact on student achievement needs to be a priority.

Professional learning has taken a prominent position among educational policy emphases as a tool that invests in building teacher knowledge and skills (Ingvarson, 2003), and has been regarded as a key lever to improve teaching (OECD, 2005). A relationship between appraisal and professional learning is essential for improving teaching practice, as "without a clear link to professional development opportunities, the impact of teacher appraisal and performance review will be relatively limited" (OECD, 2013b, p.62).

Feedback and Review

This phase of the National Performance and Development Framework comprises of formal and informal feedback on performance. It usually includes a teacher being provided with written feedback against their goals. During this phase, an evaluation of performance is made against the agreed action plan and new objectives are set for the next review cycle.

According to the 2009 TALIS report (OECD, 2009a), appraisal and feedback have a strong influence on teachers, increasing job satisfaction and improving teaching practice. Performance appraisal needs to provide feedback to teachers about their professional practice and offer opportunities for improvement. Although Donaldson and Donaldson (2012) report that teachers need constructive feedback from skilled practitioners in order to improve their teaching, research suggests that feedback is often not a common occurrence in schools (OECD, 2009a; Zatynski, 2012). Just as students need feedback about performance and progress, so to do teachers. Success criteria outlining what quality teaching looks like, informed by timely feedback about how to improve and in what areas, should surely be part of a continuous learning process for both teachers and students alike.

Strengthening of the link between professional learning and performance appraisal and allowing for greater differentiation of professional learning to address the individual needs of teachers are necessary. Given that performance appraisal helps teachers link professional learning to standards and individual goals (Gilbert, 2011), understanding how these fit together within an appraisal cycle is important.

Next Steps – Performance or Development?

Performance appraisal in education has not been without controversy. The evaluation of teaching and teachers is problematic (Kennedy, 2010) as too are the validity and

reliability of the various evaluation methods (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983). Mixed empirical evidence on the effectiveness of performance appraisal, a lack of validity regarding some performance measures and a conflict of interest between government systems, has led performance appraisal, to be deemed, in many cases, a meaningless exercise (Danielson, 2001; Marshall, 2005).

Implementing valid performance appraisal systems in schools present a range of challenges (OECD, 2013a). To evaluate and improve teaching, a shared understanding of quality teaching needs to be adopted. This in itself presents a challenge: do teachers use generic or subject-specific standards, or a mixture of both? Once these standards have been agreed upon, how are teachers evaluated and assisted to develop, and by whom? Putting all the weight of appraisal onto one person to carry out these duties without the necessary training or time to do so is likely to fail (Day, 2013). Attaining a balance between formative and summative appraisal methods and understanding the dated language associated with the system being purely about assessing teachers is vital.

A process that is seen as a means to 'manage' teachers needs to be reconsidered if a credible performance appraisal system is to be accepted by them (Ingvarson, 2012). Given initial talk of guiding ranges, ranking of teachers and balanced scorecards (Australian Education Union [AEU], 2013; Peace, 2013), the 2014 introduction of a new appraisal scheme in Victoria had a controversial inception. For:

> Rather than being done with and for teachers, many measures
> advocated and being hastily and poorly implemented in the quest to
> improve teaching and learning are essentially being done to teachers
> and without their involvement, almost guaranteeing resistance,
> minimal compliance and inefficiency (Dinham, 2013, p.94).

With little time for teachers to become familiar with a new appraisal system and limited training to assist evaluators in the discrimination between the four performance levels, policy makers need to be cautious that these initiatives are portrayed as, and, act as effective mechanisms for improving school, teacher and student performance.

Intense debate over the 2014-2015 performance cycle led key changes to Victoria's adaptation of the National Performance and Development Framework, including the:

- removal of the balanced scorecard;
- removal of the percentage weightings for each domain;
- removal of the numerical ratings for each domain with assessments now to be determined as either 'met', 'partially met', or 'not met';
- removal of a numerical rating for the overall assessment, with the final assessment now determined to be either 'met' or 'not met'; and
- the removal of the online assessment calculator, and final assessment threshold.

With less of an emphasis on ratings and rankings, only time will tell as to whether the proposed performance appraisal process in Victoria has been refocused to be a more about developing teachers and less about evaluating them.

While there is substantial evidence about the aspects of performance appraisal considered effective, it is not so much now the design of the appraisal system that needs examining, but the application of the process itself (Biron, Farndale & Paauwe, 2011). The issue of whether performance appraisal processes lead to better performance across the profession continues to be questioned (Forrester, 2011; Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1997).

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that the key to effective appraisal is getting the balance right between assessing performance and assisting personal development. The paper highlights the complexity of evaluating performance appraisal and its impact on teacher effectiveness and acknowledges a need for further research in this area. Bearing in mind that performance appraisal, teacher standards and professional learning are difficult to isolate, these influences need to be considered as "part of a wider, more complex web of factors that impact in significant ways upon the work of teachers, and the learning that happens in schools" (Tuinamuana, 2011, p.79).

Clarity about the purpose and therefore implementation of performance appraisal is essential. All too often initiatives are adopted in good faith but come across as misguided and demeaning, constrained by political agendas and extant discourse. The development of systemic approaches is required; one that approximates best practice and seeks to develop a collaborative professional culture that facilitates the ongoing refinement of effective teaching is required (Reardon, 2013).

To provide every student with access to high-quality schooling (Ministerial Council for Education, 2008) is not as simple as access to teachers from the 'right' university course or with the 'right' set of characteristics or behaviours. As has been highlighted in this paper, teaching that leads to improved student outcomes requires various methodologies and is best developed through a range of associated strategies including personal development, professional learning and performance appraisal (Goe, 2013). It is imperative that we draw on the evidence available and that systemic, significant and sustained performance appraisal processes are developed that lead to improved outcomes for all students in all schools.

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