

Industrial management and teaching evaluation programs

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For those interested in following the vital signs of the profession, and the signs of its malaise, there is that ever reliable symptom, our educational jargon. Some years ago, as a professional body, we were breaking out in "rigorous logic" and "structure"; later we came down with "richness," only to catch "modules" and "behaviors." Currently, in an age of burning management fever, we rave about "input" and "objectives" and "systems." We may not be dangerously ill this time—there will always be teachers, as they say—but it's true that we're now under pressure to *perform* as teachers. Consequently, we have become interested in certain home remedies: practical and credible teaching evaluation programs, controlled at the department level. The question is, how should we administer these evaluation programs? Perhaps it would be wise to consider a remedy that matches the symptoms: if there is talk about "managing" our departments, we might as well investigate the techniques that industrial managers, in fact, use to evaluate their own personnel.

In the following remarks, I will try to show that some basic principles of personnel management can help us to administer practical and effective teaching evaluation programs in most academic areas, including teaching writing. To preserve the clarity of this discussion, however, it will be necessary to make certain assumptions about evaluating teaching, and to avoid others because they are not directly relevant to the issue at hand. I am assuming, for instance, that evaluating how well college instructors teach is worthwhile, both for the instructors and for their institutions. Those who are in fundamental disagreement with this premise will simply have to grind their teeth and pass on. I also step around the distinction between teaching and the results of that activity—i.e., the degree to which a teacher's behavior affects students' learning processes—since that is an issue which fits more easily into a discussion of testing or of student evaluation of teacher performance. On the other hand, I do assume that evaluation is best used for helping teachers improve, not for providing evidence for decisions on faculty promotion, tenure, and retention. In taking the "helping" side, I will mention some advantages of focussing on specific classroom techniques rather than trying to evaluate the entire teaching effort of any one individual.

Keeping in mind that all techniques of management have to be adapted carefully to one's particular situation, it is possible to isolate three basic principles that most managers in business and industry consider workable. Perhaps the most important of these is conducting evaluations regularly over a period of time to encourage employees' development and to measure their progress. A second principle is requiring individual evaluation conferences between the manager and

each employee, during which employees receive the official statement of their evaluation. The third principle involves giving employees a chance to commit themselves to goals compatible with those of the company and then holding them accountable for achieving these goals.

1. Regular evaluation. The backbone of most business and industrial evaluation programs is the regular, frequent, and detailed evaluation of employees, a time-consuming but necessary part of the total production effort. At the lowest levels, the evaluation instrument is usually a check-box rating form with ten to twenty categories such as Reliability, Quality of Work, Quantity of Work, and so forth. Foremen make out one of these forms on each worker three or four times a year. The forms are detailed and comprehensive because most evaluators at this level would probably have a hard time writing up an independent evaluation of each person's work.

For higher-level jobs, however, the evaluation forms contain considerable space for written commentary by the evaluator, in addition to some check-box responses. And the ultimate form, according to some managers, would be a clean sheet of paper: both the supervisor and the employee would write evaluations of the employee's work, then read each other's statements, and finally work together to construct a list of objectives for the employee. This clean-sheet-of-paper evaluation is seldom used, because there are few employees or evaluators in business and industry who can write an unaided evaluation. As a general rule, though, managers require as much written commentary as possible in evaluations of middle- to upper-level personnel. Written evaluation, completed regularly, can provide a precise, detailed description of the way an individual does his or her job. Such a description makes possible the close analysis of performance and can help to set goals for improving it.

In the evaluation of teaching there is a similar need to transcend the check-box forms. It has been common practice in some departments—and may still be—to assign as evaluators or "observers" faculty members untrained in evaluation procedures, merely turning them loose with a stack of evaluation forms. These forms generally bear a close resemblance to the check-box evaluation sheets that foremen use to evaluate people who assemble airplane parts on a production line. This kind of rating is crude, but it is handy for comparing and thus ranking teachers whose performance it is supposed to describe. Unfortunately, it is also inaccurate or, at best, extrinsic to what teachers really do in the classroom.

Still, paving the way for written teaching evaluations is not easy. Observing classes and writing up reports on them takes more time than the average academic can spare, as well as more concentration and training than most would be willing to devote to it. But the underlying problem is that the teaching profession, unlike industry, was not conceived with the idea of surveillance in mind. While foremen and division heads are expected to spend part or even most of their time overseeing their subordinates, consulting with them, and collecting evidence they later use for personnel evaluation, department chairs and program heads are expected to do anything but "interfere" with their colleagues' teaching. Consequently, when adequate observation of teaching becomes necessary, new administrative structures have to be formed to sustain it.

The first step in establishing a sound evaluation program is to designate evaluators and give them released time to consult with teachers as well as observe

teaching performance. The second step is to make sure the evaluators know what kinds of evidence to collect in a classroom observation. "Consulting" means asking for teachers' own perceptions of their classes and learning their goals for the course and for the particular class to be observed. In turn, a teacher may want to know what the evaluator is going to do (or not do) during the class period. The preliminary consultation or "preevaluation conference," whether it takes place over the phone or over coffee, does its job if it opens up a two-way communication and establishes a context for the classroom visit itself. As such, a preevaluation conference is the brief equivalent of the industrial manager's constant attempts to make sure personnel know what the company's goals are and how the evaluation system works.

But the analogy with business weakens considerably when we consider methods of collecting and evaluating evidence about teacher performance. The obvious difference is that while employee behavior can often be evaluated against the quantity and quality of output, teaching is valid only in terms of its effect on student learning. These effects are hard to isolate.¹ So many variables are involved in learning that researchers are reluctant to identify particular cause and effect relationships, especially in regard to such complex skills as composing. For this reason, the CCCC Committee on Teaching and Its Evaluation in Composition has taken the position that although "a description of the activities that occur in the classroom . . . may permit a fairly precise characterization of the class as an experience, [of] the behavior of students, and [of] the acts of the teacher, [it] is of uncertain value in an analysis of the teaching of writing."²

Nonetheless, techniques of classroom observation have had a long period of development and are indeed helpful in identifying behavior that encourages the transfer of information from teacher to student and facilitates investigative or questioning behaviors in students. Also, it is certainly more practical to concentrate on specific classroom techniques than—as the CCCC committee on evaluation seems to suggest—to attempt a global analysis of the person's teaching, which would require the additional examination of student evaluations, the teacher's written comments on student papers, the teacher's self-evaluation, and students' performance on tests. None of these additional types of evidence is, by itself, as significant as the teacher's classroom performance, and trying to consider all of them would be next to impossible if more than one teacher were to be evaluated.

There are, moreover, some proven ways to improve classroom evaluation. Quite recently, for example, some excellent accounts of what evaluators should try to record have become available, stressing the importance of *describing* the class "in minute detail, avoiding generalization, analysis, and evaluation."³ These detailed notes on what happened in the classroom are helpful during the postevaluation conference, when evaluator and teacher look for patterns in what happened during the class that might indicate a need for the teacher to reinforce, change, or discontinue certain behaviors. The effectiveness of this technique depends, of course, on the perceptions of the evaluator. In general, evaluators should be guided in their observations by their knowledge of what the teacher is trying to do and by their own experience of what does or does not work well, given the teaching style the instructor has adopted. Still, a short list of common types of evidence, like the one below, is a good memory aid and may increase the

uniformity of observations if the program has more than one evaluator:

1. Behavior (of students and teacher) before class begins.
2. How teacher begins the class.
3. Patterns of talk.
4. Classroom movement.
5. Eye contact (teacher-students, as well as between students).
6. Use of blackboard and other visual equipment.
7. Teacher's questions and directions.
8. Teacher's voice and mannerisms.
9. How teacher ends the class.⁴

[Michael Flanigan's discussion of each item on this list will be found on pp. 17-24 of this issue. *Ed.*]

2. Evaluation conferences. But gathering evidence for evaluation is merely the beginning. The central part of an evaluation program is the conference between evaluator and teacher, where the teacher is informed about the evaluation and makes plans to correct his or her deficiencies, if any. The evaluation conference is another technique that industrial managers insist upon. They plan the conference carefully, because it is here that the employee may have to accept the responsibility for changing his or her behavior. As manager at the Beech Aircraft Corporation once explained, an evaluation conference in business or industry takes place in four stages:

1. Acknowledgement of employee's achievements.
2. Identification of minor faults.
3. Identification of major faults.
4. Planning for correction of deficiencies.

In evaluating teaching, the postobservation conference should take place immediately after the class is observed. There may also be an additional conference later on—at the end of term, perhaps—between the teacher and the department chair or program administrator. Based on the industrial model, in both immediate and later conferences the procedure might be something like this:

The first stage is an introduction. Here evaluators go over the evaluation report briefly and mention what the teacher did well. Second, they point out minor aspects of the instructor's teaching that need attention: small matters, like spending too much time handing out papers at the beginning of class. After this, the way is cleared for the main part of the conference. Here, evaluators indicate important weaknesses that the teacher should do something about immediately. These are faults which directly reduce the teacher's effectiveness, and they should be identified as specifically as possible. Examples would be failure to present material coherently and in sequence, neglecting to explain assignments, and failing to respond adequately to students' questions. These are problems that should be mentioned to the teacher in conferences during the semester. In a final conference, such comments should never come as a surprise, but as a reinforcement, an official acknowledgment of the person's need to change. It is helpful to evaluators at end of term if they can also refer to student evaluations collected from members of the teacher's class. The students' comments may either confirm or contradict an evaluator's analysis and may also suggest additional ways in which the teacher can improve.

To end the conference, evaluators should help teachers think of ways to correct their immediate faults. For instance, the instructor might need to plan a regular schedule which would allow more time for preparation of lectures, handouts, and other activities. Here, however, it is important that evaluators not insist too strongly that they have all the answers or pound dogmatically away at their own points of criticism. Instead, evaluators should try to create an "area of understanding," adjusting their analysis so that it is clearly possible for the teacher to attain the objectives that have been outlined and to apply his or her own talents in doing so. Also, evaluators have to keep in mind that teachers are taking a chance in attempting to change their behavior. They need "freedom to fail" without being punished for it. Otherwise, teachers will only take on easy and "safe" challenges and fail to develop their skills.

3. Accountability. Careful planning and tact are important to evaluation conferences because evaluation will have little effect unless individual teachers accept responsibility for improving their own performance. In business and industry, the key to this transfer of responsibility is the authority of the evaluator. Evaluators must be able to give orders: their job is not to record employees' excuses for bad performance but to make sure employees come to terms with their errors and plan to correct them. Indeed, evaluator conferences would be pointless unless both the evaluator and the employee considered the evaluation process part of their on-the-job responsibility and recognized that both of them are accountable for their participation in it.

In colleges and universities as well, faculty members are, of course, held responsible for the work they do. But postsecondary education lacks the ironclad rank structure of industry. Academic departments depend too much on cooperation and compromise for department chairs and deans to feel comfortable using the evaluation of teaching as the basis for decisions on promotion and tenure. This is why they so often prefer, instead, to count a teacher's publications and assume that good results on student rating forms are an adequate indication of adequate teaching.

To be effective, therefore, evaluators of teaching must become adept at transferring the responsibility for change to teachers themselves. Evaluators must show teachers how to take charge of their own development. Here, again, the business community has some help to offer. Business and industrial managers have found that to help an employee develop *objectives*—that is, goals for improvement—is one of the best ways to transfer responsibility for change. This is called "management by objectives." Of course, the employee's objectives must be compatible with those of the company—a requirement that can lead to abuse if applied too literally in the academic world. For example, suppose a manager simply communicated the company's objectives to its employees and then, at the end of the year, determined whether or not these goals—usually sales or production quotas—had been met by each employee. Translated crudely into academic terms, this system might suggest that colleges require teachers to produce so many hundred credit-hours of instruction within a given year. This is obviously a destructive criterion, because no one would have paid any attention to *how* the teaching had been done.

A better way to think about "management by objectives" (MBO) has been suggested by George Odiorne:

In . . . ordinary language, MBO is a system under which the manager and subordinate sit down at the beginning of each period and talk until agreement upon job goals is achieved. During the period, the subordinate is given wide latitude in choice of method. At the end of the period the actual results are jointly reviewed against agreed upon goals, and an assessment of the degree of success made.³

Odiorne rightly emphasizes that the manager and employee should use the evaluation conference to work out an agreement on job goals. But for our own purposes, there is no reason why these goals should not be specific enough to require a discussion of methods as well as results. Ultimately, the teacher's goals have to be beneficial to the department and to the institution as a whole, but they should also be *job specific*, so that achieving them is equivalent to performing each part of the job in an acceptable manner.

For example, a teacher might set two basic goals: improving communication between teacher and students in regard to writing assignments and increasing the effectiveness of the classroom as a learning environment. The evaluator would then help the teacher set a series of secondary goals which would "describe" improvement in those two major areas. Improving communication might involve short-term goals like setting aside time at the end of each class for giving editorial advice on papers or making up handouts to guide students through the longer writing assignments. Turning the classroom into a better learning, or writing, environment could be attempted by having the students work on editing and other projects in small groups of two to four people, by scheduling times to be used for free writing and group (the whole class) writing, with the teacher at the blackboard as a scribe, and by holding class discussions of common problems students are having with a certain writing assignment. In these ways, a teacher could try for immediate, tangible improvement, while keeping the more general objectives in mind as a strategic guide.

There are several standard objections to any attempt at faculty evaluation, including the expense of released time for evaluators, doubts as to the *need* for such evaluation, and at the bottom of it all, fear of criticism and distrust of any colleague in the role of evaluator. These fears were brought to light some time ago by a pamphlet called *Faculty Development in a Time of Retrenchment*, issued by *Change* magazine. Its authors concluded that teachers need more evaluation, not less, but that they should also be able to seek advice and criticism without endangering their chances for tenure and salary increases.⁴

This is an important point. No carefully run program to evaluate teaching should constitute a danger to job security. To meet this criterion, evaluators can be carefully selected for their ability and circumspection—selected from outside the department, if necessary—and an evaluator's report need not go to anyone but the teacher, unless both parties feel it might improve the teacher's record. If the members of a tenure and promotion committee know precisely what a faculty member has done to improve his or her performance, for example, they may be

less inclined to give undue attention to a few negative pieces of evidence, such as a low set of teaching evaluations or a student's complaint. But most important, these procedures keep the evaluation at the department level. They allow us to become competent in judging ourselves. This is a necessary capability. Paul Dressel reminds us that "it may now be that only by accepting the necessity for continuing evaluation can the faculty avoid the use of evaluation in destructive ways."⁵

As for cost-effectiveness, the question seems to be whether or not program administrators and department chairs can justify giving released time to one or two teachers to act as evaluators, devoting perhaps a third of their efforts to helping other faculty members improve their teaching. The answer to this question lies in the fact that as our economic crisis deepens and enrollments continue to fall, good teaching becomes ever more crucial. The real question, therefore, is not, can we afford to include in our budgets the cost of what industry would call "quality control procedures"? The real question is, can we afford not to?

Notes

¹Because measuring the effect of teaching on student performance is problematic, many administrators supplement the results of classroom evaluation with student rating forms. These have proven to be fairly reliable indicators of the overall quality of a teacher's performance. For a positive account of student evaluations and related matters, see Kenneth E. Eble, *The Recognition and Evaluation of Teaching* (Salt Lake City: Project to Improve College Teaching, 1970).

²"Evaluating Instruction in Composition: An Art Not Yet Born," unpublished report by the CCC Committee on Teaching and Its Evaluation in Composition (March, 1979), p. 8. See also the ninety-seven-item student rating questionnaire (March, 1979) that the committee has designed specifically for writing classes. For information about both documents, write to Richard L. Larson, Editor, *College Composition and Communication*, Lehman College, CUNY, Bronx, New York 10468.

³Michael C. Flanigan, "Observing Teaching: Discovering and Developing the Individual's Teaching Style," *Teaching and Learning*, 4, (November, December 1978). This material appears in a revised form on pp. 17-24 of this issue of *WPA*. Flanigan has also made a videotape (in color) that demonstrates various techniques of classroom observation, including managing the preobservation interview and the postobservation conference. Another brief but useful article on observation techniques is Roberta D. Blackburn's "Through a Glass Darkly: Or, Teaching Observation Can Be Fun," *CSSEDC Newsletter* (Conference for Secondary School English Department Chairpersons), 25 (January, 1979), 1-3.

⁴Adapted from Flanigan, "Observing Teaching: Discovering and Developing the Individual's Teaching Style," Part II (December, 1978).

⁵George B. Odiorne, "Management by Objectives," *College and University Journal*, 10 (1971), 14.

⁶*Faculty Development in a Time of Retrenchment* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: *Change* magazine, 1974), p. 61.

⁷Paul L. Dressel, *Handbook of Academic Evaluation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976), p. 332.

Further Reading

For those interested in reading more about the evaluation of teaching, the following references are offered as an introduction to study:

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