

Teacher Leader Personal Project:
How Leadership is Incorporated into the New North Carolina Teacher
Evaluation Rubric

Andrew Wit

North Carolina State University

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Dr. Carol Pope

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Introduction and Background:

Teachers' grade, they decide whether or not a student's work has earned them a failing grade, a passing grade and if it the work the student has done is worth a passing grade, the level of passing grade. Students are judged in everything they do, but they are not the only ones in schools that are judged and evaluated. Teachers are graded, err...evaluated every year, and for some reason society seems to believe that we are not held accountable for the learning, or lack of, that occurs in their classroom.

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, educators in North Carolina were introduced to a new teacher evaluation tool. The teacher evaluation rubric is not difficult to decipher, several different criteria are further divided into several different strands which is accompanied by a set of four levels in which a teacher can be graded. Each level has several requirements that can be checked off by evaluating administrators. Standard I and Standard IV objective F of the evaluation rubric are the center of this article as teacher leadership is now on the state's agenda and whether or not schools across the state will benefit from it.

Creatures of habit, which is what most teachers are; teachers are used to the way things have always been done some are content to carry on the rest of their professional careers not changing, and in some cases even resisting change. There are some logical explanations as Katzenmeyer and Moller believe that teachers become discouraged when faced with the possibility of change. (2009) Mainly because it comes from outside influences that do not have professional experience as an educator and that within a few years a new idea or innovation will come along and the cycle of change will begin again. Teachers are resistant to change because they put the time and energy into conforming to the new standards and policies only to see them

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changed after they have become comfortable teaching these new standards. Currently, a new wave of change is being implemented as all North Carolina public schoolteachers are being trained in a new set of standards known as the “Common Core”, in which I have been warned by colleagues in my Professional Learning Team (PLT) will be changed within the next five to ten years. These teachers are creatures of habit, believing students should conform to how teaching has always been done, the sage on the stage method. For this reason, change, in some cases, must be forced.

Barth (2001) states in his book, Learning By Heart, that a “school at rest will remain at rest until acted upon by an outside force”, that outside force is North Carolina policy makers that have implemented a new teacher evaluation rubric that is supposed to facilitate the cultivation of students that will be competent to compete in the twenty-first century global economy. In the following pages the new teacher evaluation rubric will be analyzed, specifically looking at the standards mentioned before, then discovering why these changes were made, and finally looking at educator feedback in regard to the inclusion of teacher leadership and the cultivation of student leadership.

The Teacher Evaluation Rubric:

Standard I of the rubric is “Teachers demonstrate leadership”, which is broken down into five different categories in which teachers are evaluated:

- A. Teachers lead in their classroom
- B. Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school
- C. Teachers lead the teaching profession
- D. Teachers advocate for schools and students

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E. Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards

Category A is the lone observable trait that teachers can be evaluated on when they come to observe a teacher in their own classroom setting. This standard deals with the idea that teachers, at a bare minimum, are communicating the importance of graduating from high school and using data to understand the abilities of their students. The category goes further in stating that an exemplary teacher helps contribute to graduate students that are globally competitive for work, ready for post-secondary education, and are prepared for life in the twenty-first century. The leadership focus is on the teacher taking responsibility for their students' learning and shows evidence that a teacher is competent in their own classroom, which is a major contributing factor to teachers being respected among their colleagues and becoming a teacher leader in their school.

Categories B through E are non-observable traits, meaning that the evaluating administrator cannot see them during the time in which they are in your classroom, because of this; teachers are required to show evidence to prove they are leading within their profession. For an educator to be considered proficient they must at least participate in some sort of professional learning community, establish positive working relationships, contribute to and support school policy making, and demonstrate behavior that is aligned to the Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators. For an evaluating administrator to deem an educator distinguished (the highest rating on the evaluation rubric), the teacher needs to take on a formal leadership role within their professional community, seek opportunities to lead professional growth activities and to model and encourage other educators to follow the tenets of professional conduct.

Teacher Leadership is not limited to the first standard of the evaluation rubric as it reappears in Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students. In order to help develop

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skills to compete in the twenty-first century teachers are tasked with cultivating leadership qualities in their students. Category F of Standard IV states that teachers should use collaborative learning as a method of instruction in their classroom. To be considered proficient a teacher need use some sort of collaborative learning in their classroom by organizing student learning teams. For an educator to be considered accomplished or distinguished they must let students create their own learning teams in order to foster the development of student leadership and teamwork skills that can be used beyond the classroom.

Reasoning for the Change:

The new standards include qualities that need to be instilled in educators and there are several reasons why teacher leadership was included in the new teacher evaluation rubric. The first is that the state realized there is a need to change the culture in many of their public schools, and that teachers and administrators were not going to do it on their own. Secondly, the changes were made to empower teachers to take ownership of their profession, and improve overall teacher retention and satisfaction. The final reason why teacher leadership and the cultivation of students' leadership skills were included in the evaluation rubric is to create a better place for students to learn and grow.

For educators to realize their potential as agents of change within their schools, the culture needs to change from the typical top down structure and become more collaborative; but for an institution as old as public education changing the culture may be very difficult. Teachers are not just faced with the obstacle of an administrative team that does not want to relinquish their power, but they may face the opposition from their colleagues as well. Therefore, with the teacher leadership criteria added to the evaluation rubric schools have no choice but to come to

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the realization that the largest force in education are the people in the classroom. Now the task is for educators across North Carolina to embrace this new responsibility and to change the culture in public schools. This change will not be immediate as Katzenmeyer and Moller believe that teachers often did not become leaders for fear of how their colleagues may view them, that they may be singled out among the faculty and a teaching culture not specific to any single school that has valued treating all teachers the same. (2009) Teachers will need to overcome the fear that, if they take on a leadership role, they could possibly face reprisal from colleagues because a school's culture is where its power lies.

A schools culture can dictate how students behave, how teachers teach, whether or not teachers feel like professionals and in turn how administrators view educators. Barth states that "every school has a culture... [and] A school's culture can work for or against improvement and reform" which is why teacher leadership is now a standard in the evaluation rubric, because the hope is that when teachers take up a cause they will be able to change a toxic school culture or to improve a hospitable one. (2001) Roby believes that a school's culture "power lies in the ability to dictate everything about a group, from what it discusses to the beliefs group member hold in common and values the group teaches". (2011) There is a need for teacher leadership, as many schools need to reform their toxic culture whether it be the top down administrative approach or the age old idea of "that's just how things are done around here". (Barth 2001) These current cultures tend to make teachers feel more on the level of the student in the school hierarchy rather than on the level of the administrator, making them feel that they are not considered professionals. (Katzenmeyer 2009) With the implementation of the new evaluation rubric it is the hope that toxic school cultures will change. If a school does not expect much from its teachers,

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then what will it expect from its students; as there is a “strong correlation between certain aspects of a school’s culture and how well students perform academically”. (Roby 2011)

Changing a school’s culture is not an overnight transformation, it will take time, but the results are worth it as the new evaluative rubric hopes to empower teachers, improve teacher retention, and overall job satisfaction.

The new evaluation rubric specifically describes that being a teacher leader is building positive relationships among colleagues and to actively engage, if not lead, in some sort of professional team or development. These added objectives to the evaluation rubric were done to give the teachers a sense of empowerment, making leadership roles no longer off limits or taboo. Barth noted in an article from 2001 in which a teacher viewed themselves as “just a teacher” and that the leadership found in the school began and ended with the administrative team, this aggravated Barth because he was sure this feeling was not an anomaly.(2001) This idea of being just a teacher comes from the fact that an educator can go through almost the entire school day and hardly come into contact with other educators. The only time in which all educators are together, which they could possibly see their true strength in numbers is in a faculty meeting, that is of course led by the administrative team cementing the feeling of being “just a teacher”. Teacher isolation is a major concern as it hinders the ability of teachers to build relationships with their colleagues and gain the confidence to lead. (Roby 2011) Katzenmeyer and Moller take this notion further as teachers “are approachable and influence primarily through their relationships, which [are] the foundation [of] teacher leaders”. (2009) When teachers have the opportunity to gather they are pigeonholed into making very few decision in regard to the classroom and school policy; mainly textbook adoption and curriculum planning. (2009) The

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new evaluation rubric attempts to break down these barriers as it focuses on what teachers are doing to empower themselves and to get involved in the leadership culture of a school.

Reading the new evaluation rubric, a teacher may become discouraged and lose the feeling of empowerment because of the open endedness of the objectives for each category. However, this open endedness was done for a purpose, as it allows for teachers to assume leadership roles that align with their comfort level. Harrison and Killion do an admirable job of helping teachers gain that sense of empowerment by defining ten roles for teacher leaders, both formal and informal along with varying degrees of responsibility. (2007) The key to teacher empowerment, as stated by Harrison and Killion is the belief that “whether these roles are assigned formally or shared informally, these build the entire school’s capacity to improve”. (2007) The aims of changing or improving a school’s culture and to empower teachers are included in the new evaluation rubric; but the evaluation’s main purpose is to create a better environment for student learning.

The focus of any teacher evaluation should be to help teachers become better educators and to ultimately serve their students better. Teacher evaluative tools have come under scrutiny which led to implementation of the new evaluation rubric last year. Donaldson’s article, No More Valentines, wanted to link the teacher evaluation with instructional improvement and increased student learning. Donaldson cites several factors as to why teacher evaluations in the past have been ineffective. Poor evaluation instruments tended to focus on things that could be measured during an administrators’ time in the classroom, not necessarily indicating high-teacher quality. The evaluator also came under fire as it is believed the lack of evaluator time and skill contributed to the poor quality of teacher evaluations. The most indicting accusation was the lack of evaluator will; as administrators are not typically held accountable for conducting rigorous

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evaluations and creating a “culture of nice” as they could possibly be hiding critical feedback that is needed to help improve teacher quality. (2010) Standards for teacher evaluation have been mulled for a long time. The main desire is for the evaluative instrument to have consistent standards because the previous model often hinged on the evaluating administrators interpretation rather than on clear standards and that evaluations were never used to help teachers improve their practice. (Sawchuk 2008) When teacher evaluations do not improve teacher quality they became just something administrators and educators have to endure, rather than a tool to help them better serve the needs of their students, which is what the ultimate goal of the evaluation should be.

The new evaluative tool, with the inclusion of teacher leadership and cultivation of student leadership, will help change the culture of schools and create a better learning environment. Standard Four of the new evaluation rubric deals with teachers facilitating the learning of their students, assessing pedagogical content knowledge. In category F of Standard Four it specifically asks what a teacher does to cultivate the leadership qualities of their students. It is interesting that teachers are responsible for cultivating leadership qualities of students rather than just focus on teaching their specific content. A survey was taken of a group of educators from a couple secondary schools in Wake County, these educators varied in discipline from traditional core subjects to electives such as dance and art.

When the question was posed as to whether or not teachers should bear the responsibility of cultivating leadership qualities of their students in class every single educator answered positively. With these positive results the new teacher evaluation rubric can succeed in creating a better learning environment for students; as teachers will help students see themselves as leaders by informing them that it is their school and they have a choice to positively or negatively affect

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change on their school's culture. In the classroom, students should not consider themselves as passive receptacles where knowledge is dumped, but as classroom citizens who are responsible for coaching other students, leading small groups, greeting visitors, and presenting solutions to classroom issues. (Zemelman & Ross 2009) Teachers responding to the survey had many different approaches to cultivating leadership qualities in their students; most teachers said that they attempt to model the qualities of good leadership for their students before expecting students to be able to lead. The administrator answers to the question on how they try and develop student leadership were that they provide "feedback when they are a leader on what works and what they can change to be more efficient." (Administrator 2012) This is integral to cultivating leadership in the class as the final grade is not important but the improvement of the student. This is a goal of the new evaluation rubric, not just to assess but to provide sound feedback that will allow teachers to become better leaders.

It is interesting that thirty-three percent of the teachers polled believed that if a teacher does not consider themselves as a leader, it is not possible to succeed in Standard Four, Category F. This correlation could mean that there needs to be more professional development focused on cultivating leadership qualities of teachers in order to achieve high ratings in Standard One. This would lead to the goals of the new teacher evaluation rubric: changing or improving a school's culture, empowering teachers and improving job satisfaction, and creating a better environment for student learning.

Conclusion:

Before this current generation of new educators finally retires, the teacher evaluation rubric will undoubtedly be changed; it is the hope that this rubric will empower teachers to

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become leaders and to craft the new rubric instead of waiting for change to be forced upon them again. After all, teachers are creatures of habit. As long as teacher leadership becomes a new habit, rather than an attempt to get high ratings on an evaluation, the education field will be better off for it. If this is the case, school cultures will become a place where cooperation is valued among the administrators and faculty as teachers will be empowered to affect change in their schools creating a better environment for their students and overall job satisfaction.

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