The Role of Self-Reflection in Faculty Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This action research study examines the impact of reflective practice, emotions, and peer/ supervisor support on teacher self-assessment and evaluation. The purpose of the study was to determine the climate, assessment tools, and reflective skills necessary to provide meaningful and effective self-assessment and professional growth for faculty. Data were collected through archival documents, participant questionnaires and surveys, researcher journal entries, and field notes. Interventions included collaborative learning experiences and peer-supported self-reflection techniques. Assessment tools were designed to better reflect essential expectations, elements of critical reflection, and differentiate evaluation from professional growth and development. The results showed that teachers benefited from collaborative self-reflection, a deeper understanding of critical self-assessment, and an evaluation process that they deemed to be fair and relevant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Self-Reflection

❖ A regular practice of self-reflection and self-evaluation allows teachers to adjust their teaching methods, increase their feelings of self-efficacy, and put them in control of their own professional improvement plan (McFarland, Saunders, & Allen 2009; Wood & Bennet, 2000; Beatty, 1999; Jones, 1996; Schön, 1987).

❖ Self-reflection offers practitioners career-long support by assisting new teachers in acquiring and applying new skills to improve practice while affording experienced teachers the opportunity to hone and refine their craft (Brisciana, 2013; McFarland et al., 2009).

Impediments to Reflective Practice

❖ Lack of time, external pressures, negative attitudes and emotions of teachers related to evaluations, absence of administrative support, and an inhospitable school culture may be obstacles to developing a strong reflective practice (Buric & Macuka, 2018; Hopkins et al., 2016; Howard, 2012; MacRuairc & Harford, 2008; Day & Leitch, 2001).

❖ As a result, educators may only engage in surface-level reflection done for the sake of an evaluation, or *transient reflection*, versus the *critical reflection* that is well-integrated into the practice of teaching and brings about substantive change and improved classroom practice (MacRuairc & Harford, 2008; Airasian & Gullickson, 1997; Jones, 1996).

Supports to Reflective Practice

❖ An atmosphere of safety and support is imperative for reflective practice to occur (MacRuairc and Harford, 2008).

❖ Establishing and maintaining trust, utilizing observation, and offering meaningful feedback from both supervisors and colleagues play a role in the creation of reflective practice. In turn, these supports increased the ability of teachers to recognize gaps in their learning and use goal setting to address deficits and achieve professional growth (McFarland et al., 2009; Ross and Bruce, 2007; Airasian & Gullickson, 1997; Jones, 1996).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Questions

1. What role does reflective practice play in the work of teachers?
2. What is the impact of emotion on the evaluation process?
3. How does support from colleagues, supervisors and the school aid in the success of teacher self-evaluation?
4. What elements are important in the development of a meaningful self-evaluation tool?

Participants

❖ Independent Montessori school serving 250+ students 18 months – 14 years of age
❖ 14 Montessori educators
  ❖ 12 female, 2 male
  ❖ Representing each level from A-I to Adolescent
❖ Average 16 years of teaching experience
  ❖ Tenure of 6 months to 20+ years

Research Design

❖ Review of artifact documents to understand faculty attitudes toward:
  ❖ Professional development
  ❖ Self-evaluation
  ❖ Supportive relationships with other teachers
  ❖ Supportive relationships with supervisors/administrators
❖ Archival data sources:
  ❖ Employee survey – current year
  ❖ Faculty goal-setting forms – previous year
  ❖ Faculty self-assessment forms – previous year
  ❖ Evaluation meeting notes – previous year
  ❖ Faculty culture surveys – previous 3 years

Interventions

❖ Quarterly pedagogy meetings highlighting topics associated with building reflective practice and nurturing a collaborative learning environment.
❖ Creation of new evaluation & self-evaluation tools separating external review (*evaluation*) from internal self-evaluation (*growth*) (Brisciana, 2013).
❖ Orientation of faculty to new evaluation and self-evaluation tools and how evaluation differs from professional growth and development.

Data Collection & Analysis

❖ Artifact documents from previous year coded for themes related to evaluation/self-evaluation
❖ Likert-scale surveys
  ❖ Independent School Management - *Faculty Culture Profile Survey II*
  ❖ Independent Educational Services Consulting – *Employee Survey*
❖ Initial questionnaire
  ❖ Anonymous; 8 open-ended questions
  ❖ Gather thoughts and opinion on current evaluation process, reflective practice, and the role of colleagues in one's teaching practice
  ❖ Researcher journal from pedagogy meetings capturing observations and reflections
  ❖ Fieldnotes from end-of-year meetings utilizing new evaluation and self-evaluation tools

❖ Final questionnaire
  ❖ Anonymous; 12 Likert-scale questions and 3 opportunities for open-ended feedback
  ❖ Gather thoughts and opinion on relevance of pedagogy meeting topics, effectiveness of new evaluation process, and attitudes towards professional growth & development

Validity Issues and Limitations

❖ As direct supervisor to 64% of the participants, my role could influence participant response.
❖ Faculty new to the school may be unfamiliar with previous evaluation/self-evaluation tools and thus unable to accurately reflect on the pros and/or cons of the former tools.
❖ One cycle of the new evaluation/self-evaluation method may not provide enough experience for faculty to accurately reflect on the benefits and/or limitations of the new tools.

FINDINGS

Collaborative Learning and Peer Support

❖ Collaborative self-reflection model (Thomson-Grove, 2004) was most helpful and relevant intervention for participants.

Evaluation Process

❖ Participants agreed that expectations and criteria for evaluation were fair and relevant.
❖ Participants viewed supervisor feedback as supportive and conducive to professional growth.

Self-Assessment/Professional Growth & Development

❖ While many participants expressed the self-assessment process was "more difficult" than anticipated, they agreed the tool provided a way to think critically about their teaching practice.
❖ Supervisors reported that professional goals and growth plans became apparent as participants self-reflected on aspects of their work most meaningful to them.

DISCUSSION

The ability to accurately assess and adjust one's practice is foundational to the art of effective teaching. Montessori teachers may lack adequate training on reflective practice in the teacher-training process. By creating a climate that encourages teacher self-evaluation and nurtures peer collaboration, administrators can support both new and experienced teachers in meaningful professional growth and development. This in turn bolsters feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Additionally, the uncoupling of external review from internal self-evaluation allows school leadership to maintain high standards of professionalism while teachers are free to set meaningful and relevant goals without risk of failure.

Nearly one year after the initial study a third-party anonymous survey of faculty was conducted. The survey found that 79% of faculty understood exactly how they were evaluated, 92% felt the procedure was consistent (i.e. predictable), and 75% found it constructive (i.e. helpful).

Plans have been made to reassess the effectiveness of evaluation/self-assessment processes in spring 2020 through faculty survey. Similar efforts will be made with evaluation/self-assessment procedures for support staff.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS