

NATO BILC CONFERENCE - LORETO, ITALY
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REPORT- STUDY GROUP 1
“Towards an Effective Teacher Evaluation Framework”

The study group, that consisted of nineteen participants representing thirteen different nations, explored how to develop an effective teacher evaluation system and concurred that teacher evaluation is a key lever for increasing the focus on teaching quality, continuous professional development for teachers and enhancing teaching practices to improve student outcomes. To achieve these goals and raise education standards the whole evaluation process must be systematically organized, transparent and informative. Since the majority of the participants had no evaluation system in place at their institutions, the study group took a systematic approach outlining the most significant steps to be used in developing a new evaluation system and in assessing and refining the work-in-progress of existing systems. An overview was provided of what some of the steps entail as well as insight into some of the challenges associated with the design and implementation of a teacher evaluation system. The most significant steps to use to help guide the work and process are as follows:

Define the rationale and why embark on a teacher evaluation system;

Step 1: Define the vision and goals of the system;

Step 2: Articulate a theory of action;

Step 3: Determine the information requirements;

Step 4: Identify infrastructure requirements;

Step 5: Identify capacity requirements;

Define the rationale and why embark on a teacher evaluation system:

It is necessary to clarify the reasons behind developing a teacher evaluation system as this will guide and orient the work, as well as communicating a coherent message to the stakeholders that will help avoid misunderstandings that could undermine the effectiveness of the system.

Example: Teachers vary widely in their effectiveness and an evaluation system should identify and address this variation as well as confronting underperformance that undermines student achievement. For evaluations to be successful, the primary goal of the evaluation system should be to support teacher growth and development.

Getting started:

While the design and implementation processes must engage many, a single “champion” should be appointed and charged with orchestrating the entire process and the streams of work required to get the system up and running. Appointing a champion would have strategic and symbolic significance as it would signal the organization’s level of commitment to the evaluation work. Additionally, coming to an agreement and establishing what constitutes “effective teaching” and the development of teaching standards and the framework to measure teachers against, needs to be worked on as a priority right from the outset. Engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders and multiple perspectives to the conversation is essential as this will lead to a more comprehensive vision and goals and their involvement will also build engagement in and ownership of the work.

Step 1: Define the vision & goals of the system:

Before defining the specific goals of the evaluation system the school’s values and overall vision should be clarified. This will help build a commonly shared understanding of where the evaluation system fits within the larger system, how it reflects the larger system’s values and how it contributes to realizing the vision. Once, how the evaluation system can support the school’s values and vision is established the specific goals can be articulated. The goals define the purpose of the evaluation system -what you want it to do- and guide both its design and implementation. They also signal to teachers what the system values and for

these reasons defining the goals is the first essential step. The group was given a series of questions to guide their work and to help identify and prioritize their specific goals. Overall, the goals identified had two principal purposes: the accountability (summative) function where teacher evaluation focuses on holding teachers accountable for their performance associating it to a range of consequences, and the improvement (formative) function that seeks to improve the teacher's own practice by identifying strengths and weaknesses for further professional development. The school has to make decisions on the balance between the two functions but systems at the forefront have found that for evaluations to be successful teacher growth and development need to be built into the system.

Step 2: Articulate a theory of action:

This step helps to make explicit the implicit beliefs on how teachers improve and what steps need to be taken by them to support improvement. Developing a theory of action requires conversations about how to improve teachers' practices; what the system's responsibility is relative to supporting instructional improvement; and what all of that means for the work of teachers, directors, and other key players in the system. It is a simple statement that says "If we do X, Y, and Z then teaching will improve and" The school context and capacity will determine and define to what extent it can provide support for growth but for teacher evaluation to be successful it is necessary to assume that schools have an important responsibility in helping teachers improve.

Example: If we regularly observe teachers' practice and provide them with specific, actionable feedback and follow up observations to verify implementation then teaching practices will improve and positively impact student outcomes.

Step 3: Determine information requirements:

This step should determine what information is required to evaluate teacher effectiveness and how it will be collected and presented. The measures and sources of evidence chosen will be influenced by the school context, contractual and hiring policies etc. Four categories of information were discussed which included teacher inputs, student feedback, student outcomes, and professionalism:

1. Teacher inputs: Measures of the quality of teachers' planning, delivery of instruction, and assessment of student learning.

-Observations against teaching framework: quality assurance/developmental, announced/unannounced
-Lesson plans; Graded student work; Artifacts -portfolios, project work etc.

2. Feedback from students: Measures of the perceptions of other people in the school community regarding the effectiveness of the teacher. This includes surveys, interviews etc.

3. Student outcomes: Measure of teacher impact on student learning and achievement which includes standardised test results, value-added measures and student growth.

4. Professionalism: Measures of both basic professional responsibilities and how the teacher contributes to work with colleagues, the instructional program and overall health of the school.

Including all of the four measures is not necessary but ensuring that the information included supports teachers in improving their practice is critical. Many systems suggest that the integrity of the evaluation system needs to include multiple measures which taken together create a composite story. However, the school context will determine which measures can reliably be considered and factored into the evaluation. The issues and challenges associated with each measure were discussed, for example, factoring student standardised test scores into teacher evaluation can be inherently unfair and debatable because a wide variety of factors can influence test scores that are unrelated to teaching ability. Conversely, measuring student growth in learning and achievement can be a more reliable measure and classroom observations are held by many to be the most relevant sources of information of professional performance.

Step 4: Identify infrastructure requirements:

This step involves identifying the policies-governance and standards- and procedures that need to be put into place to support and develop the design and implementation of the evaluation system. Choosing the teaching framework, that is, the standards and rubrics against which teachers are evaluated is an enormous decision as it defines what constitutes effective teaching in the school system. Some schools adopt or adapt existing rubrics or develop their own so that they can address the specific needs of the school and student population. The policies that need to be put into place, quality assurance and developmental observations, procedures including post-observation conferences that provide actionable feedback, promote reflective practice, self-evaluation and development plans were discussed but due to time constraints these aspects and others related to this step needed to be further developed.

Step 5: Identify capacity requirements:

This step focuses on how the people in the organization need to function and the capacity -knowledge and skills- they need to implement the teacher evaluation system in a way that supports teacher growth and development. This step was not systematically elaborated but the following aspects were commented on throughout the group discussions. The effectiveness of evaluations and classroom observations crucially depends on whether evaluators have the knowledge and skills to evaluate teachers reliably in relation to established criteria. Consequently, identifying and building the capacity of a cadre of evaluators to lead this work is an immense undertaking that requires training and monitoring. Evaluators need to have a host of skills, including the ability to score observations accurately and provide specific, actionable feedback to teachers about their performance to guide improvement. To do this they need to be adequately trained, monitored and held accountable. Multiple evaluators as opposed to single evaluators for performance reviews allow teachers to be observed from different perspectives and can be seen as providing more objectivity. Using both school leaders, who institutionalize teacher evaluation and peer evaluators, who provide qualitative actionable feedback to teachers was considered a preferable option.

Conclusion:

The study group discussions were intended to facilitate conversations, give input and elevate some of the important issues that underpin the design and implementation of an evaluation system. The discussions and work provided guidance and essentially an overview by outlining the most significant steps to be used and areas to analyse and further develop when building teacher evaluation. Throughout the work, although not comprehensive, the importance of utilizing a systematic and transparent approach in organizing the process, and building continuous improvement and professional growth into the design and implementation of the evaluation system, was reinforced. To fully realize the potential of evaluations, the work needs to develop each teacher's capacity and effectiveness. In this context, teacher evaluation can be viewed as a means, not an end, on the path toward educating students and improving student achievement.