Technology Evaluation Tools and Teacher Performance in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was, (a) to describe the introduction of MVAL software and Charlotte Danielson Rubrics (CDR) as teacher evaluation tools; (b) to compare the process and outcomes of the new initiative with traditional systems, and (c) to evaluate the software from the perspective of participants in the system. This study highlights the need for public school district to improve the process of teacher evaluation using technology evaluation tools such as the mVal software. Additionally, educational policy makers ought to examine effective standards-based criteria and the impact of technology tools on teacher evaluation and reflective practices.

Keywords: Assessment, Charlotte Danielson Rubrics (CDR), MVal Software, Performance, Teachers, Technology

INTRODUCTION
Recent teacher evaluation policies include accountability-based teacher evaluation practices as education has repositioned as a competitive system operating according to the values and approaches of the market, (Olivia & Pawlas, 2001; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007; Toch & Rothman, 2008). Teacher evaluations vary according to their objectives, what they measure, format and mode of referencing. Evaluation occurs at regular points throughout a teacher’s professional career; this includes initial teacher training and the evaluation of on-the-job performance-based assessments, appraisals or evaluations. Teachers operate within a web of evaluations and are assessed, appraised and monitored closely throughout their educational and professional careers (Larsen, 2005). While this premise is supported by the array of theoretical frameworks and state legislation designed to make this a reality, there is evidence to suggest less rigorous evaluation to be the norm in the many American public schools (Danielson & McGreal; 2000; Peterson, 2000; Toch & Rothman, 2008).

Most states have now implemented teacher evaluation systems based on cognitive performance measures. mVal, created by Media-X Systems, is one example of technology software
developed to “support collaboration between managers and staff in all aspects of the process of teacher evaluation and staff appraisal,” Media-X 2004, p. 1). The mVal system, originally designed for Ontario, Canada, is developed on a clinical supervision model of teacher support and evaluation. The software includes a library of more than 15 sets of American and Canadian standards and the potential for editing to suit new contexts. Forms to support pre-observations, post-observations, summative assessments, and improvement plans may be generated to enable “principal and teacher to work together on all aspects of the appraisal process,” (Media-X 2004, p. 2).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was, (a) to describe the introduction of mVal software and Charlotte Danielson Rubrics (CDR) as teacher evaluation tools; (b) to compare the process and outcomes of the new initiative with traditional systems, and (c) to evaluate the software from the perspective of participants in the system. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What process has been adopted to introduce mVal software and Charlotte Danielson Rubrics to support teacher evaluation in the study district?
2. How has the introduction of mVal software and Charlotte Danielson Rubrics impacted teacher evaluation and reflective practice of teachers?
3. To what extent does mVal and Charlotte Danielson Rubrics meet the perceived assessment needs of teachers, building, and district administrators?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic Interactionism

Teacher evaluation is supposed to improve classroom teaching by enhancing teacher thinking, reflection, and understanding of instruction. However, a study by Peterson (2000) shows that despite what teacher evaluation is intended to be, many teachers experience only formal evaluation, “a principal’s report of teacher performance, usually recorded on a checklist form, and sometimes accompanied by a brief meeting” (p. 18). In adopting the theory of symbolic interactionism, it was believed that the study would reveal what teachers and principals might be learning in the context of the Minnesota school district and the implications this might have for the future of teacher evaluation using mVal software and a modified version of standards developed by Danielson (1996) and Danielson and McCreal (2000).

Studies guided by symbolic interactionism focus on the meanings of things and events conferred on them by individuals as they interact with others. For example, Ponticell and Zepeda (2004) use the theoretical lens to examine what supervision meant to participating teachers and principals in two Southwestern states. The authors argue that symbolic interaction has not been well-used as a purposeful lens for examining supervision. Blumer (1969) argues that symbolic interactionism theory rests on three main premises: (a) “... human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they have for them;” (b) “... the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellow;” and (c) “... these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.”

The above described framework was used to provide understanding of the meanings participants attach to the implementation of mVal and changes in teacher evaluation and reflective practice at a participating school district during a school year. Evidence from the study provides valuable insights into participants’ understanding of supervision and evaluation and how both work against adult learning. Additionally, the study might help to evaluate new teacher assessment practices using reflective theory as an organizational framework; inform decision-making and policy development in
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