

Your Teacher Evaluation Toolkit

By Peter DeWitt

Think back to when you were a teacher. Remember your formal evaluations? Few of us, in my experience, learned anything valuable from the process. Too often, evaluations typically resulted in very little feedback, if any, from our principals. The process certainly didn't feel collaborative.

Here's what likely happened: Our principal came into our classroom, sat for 45 minutes watching a lesson, and then walked out. We heard from her a few days later when she wanted to go over the surface details of the lesson. We walked away with an evaluation that stated we were proficient or distinguished. After the process was completed, we went back to our classrooms and our principals went on to do another observation.

No feedback. No ongoing dialogue.

The teacher observation process should be different. Principals have plenty of teacher evaluation models to choose from, but too often we don't go deep enough to provide effective feedback. Here are six essential tools in a principal's evaluation toolkit.

Turn to these
6 tactics for
thoughtful,
constructive
evaluations.

Co-constructed goals.

1

If the observation is going to be worthwhile for the teacher, principal, and ultimately the students, you need to work together to establish clearly defined goals. For instance, let's say you'd like your teachers to boost student engagement. What will you be looking for in the classroom? How do you and the teacher define authentic engagement (versus compliant engagement)? For the observation to be truly collaborative, it's important that you and your teachers establish concrete goals together, or that the teachers choose a goal that you can support.

A written road map of the goals.

2

In their research on teacher voice, Russ Quaglia and Lisa Lande found that most teachers do not believe their principal knows their individual goals. To make the teacher observation process easier, and to help teachers understand how it coincides with their goals, ask teachers what their learning or teaching goals are at the beginning of the year. Write them down and use that as the goal for the formal observation process. Remember to always set the tone that observation is about growth.

Pre-observation resources.

3

If you know your teachers' goals, you can look for common themes and use those common themes as a faculty focus. Let's use the student engagement goal again as an example. Ask yourself how you can highlight student engagement in your professional development opportunities. Maybe you can flip your faculty meetings and refocus them with common themes (student engagement, for instance) as goals.

Student conversations.

4

This sounds simple, but during observations, many principals sit in the back of the room and take notes because they feel the pressure to write everything down. Instead, talk to students during the observation. See if they are actively or passively engaged. Ask them what they're learning, not what they're doing. If we ask them what they're learning, they have to focus on the learning intention of the lesson. Do they know it? If not, then the teacher needs to understand that. Remember, formal observations should ultimately be about the students and not about the teacher.


Feedback.

5

Give feedback to the teacher after the observation. Focus on the goals he or she chose, but always begin with the positive aspects of the observation first. Teachers need to be given evidence and feedback that centers on student learning. If possible, add a strategy the teacher could try or provide him or her with a resource that offers various teaching strategies. Tell the teacher how many students you observed who were authentically engaged.

Ongoing check-ins.

6

This is where many observations fall flat. Collaborative leadership is about providing feedback around a goal, but it also means that leaders check in on the teacher to see if there has been improvement. Because principals are often juggling lots of daily tasks, I'd suggest putting a reminder in a Google calendar to check back in with the teacher a week and also a month later. 



Formal teacher observations should not be a one-off process. Follow these six steps and keep the dialogue going.

Peter DeWitt is the author of several books, including the newly released *Collaborative Leadership: Six Influences That Matter Most* (2016, Corwin Press).