

EDU 820
2nd ASSIGNMENT
Submitted by GAYE DEFNE CEYHAN

Teacher evaluation is a crucial part of the teaching and learning system. For better educational practices, clear standards for student learning, well-planned curriculum materials and proper assessment strategies should be complemented with a well-organized teacher evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Darling-Hammond (2013), in her book, *Getting Teacher Evaluation Right*, points out the best practices and research studies about teacher evaluation. The book lists and explains the five key elements in teacher evaluation with practical examples. Figure 1 illustrates the five elements that are listed in the book and their interrelations with each other.

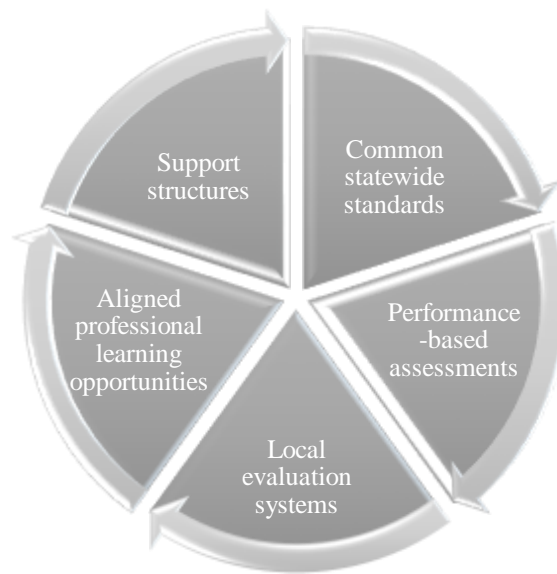


Figure 1. Five key elements in teacher evaluation

As illustrated in the figure, the five elements complement each other for an effective teacher evaluation. The first element explained in the book is setting common statewide standards. These professional teaching standards should be in accordance with student learning, curriculum, and assessment. The second element is performance-based assessments based on these standards, which start at teacher preparation and continues through advanced certification. The third element

is aligning local evaluation systems to the statewide standards. It provides continuing assessment and development around the same standards to keep the coherence and consistency of teacher development across the career (Darling-Hammond, 2013). The fourth element is aligning professional learning opportunities through various measures of teaching practice and student learning that promote teaching quality. The last element that is explained in the book for teacher evaluation is the support structures, which was described as trained evaluators who provides the necessary assistance to teachers and takes fair decisions about teacher performance.

After briefly explaining these key elements in the first chapter, Darling-Hammond (2013) clarifies these key elements in the rest of the book by (a) pointing out the issues in the alignment of the standards for student learning with the standards for teaching, (b) describing what states could do regarding the standards, (c) revealing the role of local districts in creating complementary systems of local evaluation, (d) showing the difficulty in linking student performance to teacher evaluation with effective strategies, (e) declaring the importance of continuous professional learning and collaboration, (f) providing evidence of best practices based on research studies for each element in useful, feasible, appropriate, and accurate teacher evaluation.

The book ends with summarizing the key elements by providing evidence and practical examples for how to do teacher evaluation right. Darling-Hammond (2013) suggests that a system needs to be built and designed in a way to support teaching. This system should be based on precise standards, should include analysis of student work from multiple sources, and continuous feedback that focuses on improvement, and should be embedded in teacher collaboration. Specifically, this system should promote teaching as a collegial activity instead of reinforcing isolation and competitiveness.

In this paper, I would like to reflect on two issues that are discussed in the book. The first one is the “triangulated standards-based evaluation framework” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p.51). This framework was developed by Massachusetts Teachers Association in order to reveal the integration of the factors in teacher evaluation. The second issue that I would like to reflect on is “the features of professional learning”, which is a crucial part of promoting teacher practice because “evaluation alone will not improve practice” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p.99).

Triangulated Standards-Based Evaluation Framework

According to the triangulated standards-based evaluation framework, three main components need to take place in teacher development. These are “observation of practice”, “evidence of student learning”, and “evidence of professional contributions” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p.51). These factors should be considered with regards to each other and in relation to the teaching context. The main reason why I would like to address this framework is that I believe that it is highly important to operate these components precisely in effective evaluation systems.

One of the main goals of teacher evaluation systems is to improve the quality of instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Clarifying expectations for effective teaching and helping teachers meet those expectations can be provided through high-quality feedback and support. Observation of practice, which is one of the factors that is represented in the three-cornered stool, aimed at giving teachers the opportunity to receive detailed and direct feedback about their practice. Besides, classroom observations may also inform the development of resources to help teachers address areas of improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Darling-Hammond (2013) states that systematic observation protocols provide indicators of effective teaching and professional standards. One example provided in the book is from San

Mateo Union High School District in California. The standards in the protocol examine teaching in different dimensions and are detailed to guide observations and feedbacks. Although the standards and the subcategories are clear and cover the necessary aspects of effective teacher evaluation, I believe that the rubric needs to be more concrete to reduce the potential confusions and to increase the quality of feedback. For instance, the subcategory about the use of instructional strategies classifies the limited use of instructional strategies as unsatisfactory but it does not provide information about how many different instructional strategies are considered as limited and lack of variety. Therefore, clarification in the rubric supported with evidence from various resources such as lesson plans, assignments, and samples of student work may provide a strong standards-based evaluation.

Evidence of student learning and evidence of professional contributions generate the other factors that are represented in the triangulated standards-based evaluation framework (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Multiple measures of student learning and professional contributions are supposed to validate judgment about practice and the practitioner. The measures include student progress on learning goals, classroom assessments and state measures if possible and available. Massachusetts's teacher evaluation system is given as an example to present the multiple measures system of evaluation (Darling-Hammond, 2013). In this system, standards for teachers integrate teacher practice with student outcomes and professional contributions. I found the Massachusetts system powerful because it requires teachers and the evaluators to examine and analyze evidence of student learning to reflect on and to plan instruction. However, I also believe that it is crucial to be careful about the interpretation of the measures of student learning as that information itself is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher.

The Features of Professional Learning

The most effective forms of teacher evaluation are those that help teacher development (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Teachers must receive supportive feedback for continuous development and meaningful goal setting. Professional learning can be effective when it is integrated into teachers' instructional practice, teaching, and learning goals, and when it provides an opportunity to teachers to share expertise. By bringing the research findings and practical experiences together, Darling-Hammond (2013) describes four important features of professional learning in her book. I will summarize and reflect on these features in the following paragraphs.

The first feature of successful professional learning is that it should be intensive, sustained, and connected to practice (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Research findings revealed that occasional workshops are mostly disconnected from practice and do not allow teachers enough time or opportunity to reflect on the results and implement them in new situations. National survey results showed that teachers find ongoing professional programs more effective, and they rate professional development as more useful when it includes sustained efforts with practical applications, and when it is sustained over time and longer in duration (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

The second feature of the successful professional development is the focus on "the teaching and learning of specific academic content" (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 102). Research suggests that professional development is more effective when they address specific challenges of teachers on teaching particular subjects. Teachers have limited time in and out of the classroom to plan each lesson. Therefore, they tend to benefit more on practical, to the point, and hands-on activities, which address student outcomes and local context. Research also suggests that professional development is highly effective when it provides teachers an opportunity to analyze student performance data, determine misconceptions, and develop instructional strategies to overcome

those misconceptions. I believe this kind of professional development is crucial in increasing the effectiveness of teaching and learning process as overcoming misconceptions and creating a conceptual change is one of the key points in deeper learning.

The third feature of the successful professional development is being connected to other school dynamics (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Research suggests that activities that are connected to school initiatives and local practices are more effective and sustainable than isolated and disconnected activities. Darling-Hammond (2013) gives the Discovery program as an example, which is supported by National Science Foundation and implemented in Ohio state. This program aimed at a sustained support for teachers to improve student performance in science. Seminars, on-demand supports and site visits from regional experts are provided in addition to instructional practices connected to state standards. Results of an independent evaluation of the program suggest, “This combination of support led to a significant increase in and continued use of inquiry-based instructional practices in line with the science initiative promoted across the state” (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 104). This is an important finding for program developers and teacher evaluators who aimed at creating sustainable professional learning environments for teachers.

The last feature of successful professional development that is explained in the book is building relationships among teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Increasing the communication and cooperation within academic departments and across them helps building productive working environments for teachers. For instance, a peer-observation system developed by the National Reform Faculty is given as an example in the book. This system comprises several activities to support collective inquiry of teachers by (1) observing each other’s teaching practices and giving constructive feedback, (2) examining student performance data, (3) analyzing student work, and

(4) analyzing curriculum units and state standards (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Researchers who evaluate the implementation of this system found that “teachers’ instruction became more student-centered, with a focus on ensuring that students gained mastery of the subject as opposed to merely covering the material” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p 106). This may be because teachers have more opportunity to make peer-evaluation and self-reflection regarding their instructional strategies and teaching practices.

In conclusion, Darling-Hammond (2013) points out the key elements in effective teacher evaluation systems by providing evidence from best practices and several research findings. Systems offered throughout the book provide insights to policy-makers, teachers, and evaluators to integrate professional learning and evaluation for high-quality teaching and learning environments.

References:

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 103(6), p. 1013-1055.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). *Getting teacher evaluation right: What really matters for effectiveness and improvement*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.