Making Performance-Based Evaluation Work for You: A Recipe for Personal Learning

Audrey Church

Longwood University, churchap@longwood.edu

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So, as school librarians we’ve documented our effectiveness, met with our administrators, and received our summative evaluation. What do we do with the data? What do we do with our ratings? We use the data collected to drive our professional growth.
Teacher observation and teacher evaluation are a given in our schools, and Charlotte Danielson’s work in teacher effectiveness and professional practice has guided evaluation efforts for many years. There is a new, big kid in town, however. As Race to the Top requires documentation of student growth and research shows that teacher effectiveness is a key factor in student learning, we see full implementation of performance-based teacher–evaluation systems in states and school districts across the nation. The goal of performance-based teacher evaluation is actually two-fold: first, to document teacher effectiveness and, second, to guide professional growth. We mustn’t lose sight of the second goal, professional growth, in our focus on the first; in fact, teacher effectiveness is a logical outcome of quality professional growth. Well-prepared teachers fully involved in professional learning are more effective teachers.

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (n.d.) asserts that it is critical that we align teacher evaluation with professional learning. If we are to generate greater teaching effectiveness, we must focus on several factors: shared understanding of effective practice in our schools and in our teaching, evidence-based feedback that documents the job that we do, and credit in the evaluation process for learning and collaboration. If we are to link teacher evaluation and learning, we must provide high-quality professional-growth opportunities for teachers, professional-growth opportunities that are strategically based on evaluation feedback.

Looking across the nation, states are at various stages in the development and implementation of performance-based teacher evaluation for school librarians. For example, Ohio has just begun the process of developing a state-wide school librarian evaluation (Harper 2012). Missouri spent the last year developing new standards and a continuum of performance expectations for school librarians (Antrim 2012). North Carolina has developed new professional standards for school library media coordinators (school librarians) and will have a new performance-based evaluation instrument ready for use by January 2014 (North Carolina Dept. of Public Instruction. n.d.). Tennessee, in its First to the Top efforts, has instituted the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), which includes school librarians and involves “a combination of frequent observation, constructive feedback, student data and meaningful professional development” (Tennessee Dept. of Ed. n.d.). When the formative performance-based assessment system EDUCATEAlabama was introduced in Alabama in 2009, a group of librarians worked with the state’s Department of Education to revise the continuum to create the EDUCATEAlabama Continuum of Practice for Librarians (Starkey n.d.). Librarians self-assess on indicators that encompass the state’s teaching standards and select two to five of these indicators to address in their Professional Learning Plans (PLPs) (EDUCATEAlabama 2011).

In Virginia, our Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers are in effect as of July 1, 2012. Based on these Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers, teachers in Virginia are to be evaluated on seven standards: Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Delivery, Assessment of and for Student Learning, Learning Environment, Professionalism, and Student Academic Progress (Virginia Dept. of Ed. 2011). Evaluations will be based on a preponderance of evidence from multiple data sources: observations, both formal and informal; student surveys; portfolios/document logs; self-evaluation; and student achievement. To determine an overall rating of Unacceptable, Developing/Needs Improvement, Proficient, or Exemplary on each standard, evaluators use sample performance indicators and the four-point performance rubric. Based on the four-point rubric, an experienced teacher is expected to perform at the Proficient level; Exemplary is to be noted as truly exemplary. In the larger scheme of things, each of the first six standards (Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Delivery, Assessment of and for Student Learning, Learning Environment, and Professionalism) is weighted at 10 percent toward the summative evaluation; Student Academic Progress is weighted at 40 percent toward the summative evaluation.

Now What?

So, as school librarians we’ve documented our effectiveness, met with our administrators, and received our summative evaluation. What do we do with the data? What do we do with our ratings? We use the data collected to drive our professional growth. Working toward continuous improvement, we closely examine standards at which we are rated Proficient and identify what is needed to...
move to the Exemplary level. If we are rated at the Developing/Needs Improvement level, then we identify what is needed to move to the Proficient level. Remember, as librarians, we are the ultimate independent, information-literate, lifelong learners. Personal professional growth is as much a part of our culture as is breathing. It is time for us to develop a professional learning plan and a perfect opportunity to make full use of a personal learning network.

As school librarians, we often fly solo in our buildings. Most schools contain multiple English teachers, multiple math teachers, multiple fourth-grade teachers, but usually just one librarian. To survive and thrive professionally, therefore, we’ve had to build personal learning networks (PLNs). When I first became a school librarian in 1980, my PLN consisted of librarians in my school district; as I grew professionally and became involved in my state organization, my PLN expanded to colleagues in my state. I wholeheartedly embraced LM_NET in the 1990s and the AASLForum when it was created. I was connected! Fast forward another decade or so, and we have Web 2.0 tools through which we can connect.

In his blog post “Personal Learning Networks for Educators: 10 Tips” Mark Wagner’s first four tips are Connect, Contribute, Converse, and Request (2012). Wagner argues that we must actually connect with people in our PLNs—that reading, listening, and watching are not enough; that we must contribute and share our experiences and expertise; that we must participate in conversations to develop relationships; and that we can then make requests. As librarians we have an abundance of tools to use as part of our PLNs to facilitate professional growth. We can make use of older tools such as e-mail and listservs to accomplish these activities as well as our newer Web 2.0 tools. We can regularly read blogs of school library professionals, and we can follow via Twitter. In her “PLN Starter Kit” Jennifer LaGarde (2012) provides librarians with excellent links to both blogs and Twitter accounts. We have Nings for school librarians, and webinars abound. AASL has just opened eCOLLAB, a collection of webcasts, podcasts, and other resources from professional-development events, allowing us to immediately connect with and learn from experts in our field.

How then do we effectively use our PLNs as part of our professional growth plans? We must be specific, strategic, and deliberate. Using data from our summative evaluations to determine areas in which we need to grow, we must be specific and focused on our area of need. Next, we must be strategic; we must choose and connect with those who evidence best practice in this area. Finally, we must be deliberate. We must be completely committed to the validity of using our PLNs in this manner. Most likely, those who evaluate us will not be experts in the field of school librarianship. We may have to convince them that working through our PLNs will provide the most appropriate targeted learning opportunities for us.
From Theory into Practice

Let’s suppose I am a school librarian in Virginia, and my summative evaluation indicates that I need improvement for Standard 4: Assessment of and for Student Learning. I carefully examine the performance indicators under this standard to determine what I need to do to improve. I focus on the following:

- 4.3 Uses a variety of formative and summative assessments that are valid and appropriate for the content and students, and
- 4.7 Uses student achievement data to assess the effectiveness of instruction and adjust teaching (Virginia Dept. of Ed. 2011, 10).

I know that Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs (AASL 2009) suggests regular assessment of student learning, but perhaps this entire concept of assessment in the school library is something new to me, and I’m not sure exactly where to begin. I may post some queries on my state listserv, LM_NET, and AASLForum. My colleagues direct me to the work of Vi Harada [http://www2.hawaii.edu/~vharada/Books.htm]. I read her Assessing for Learning: Librarians and Teachers as Partners (2010) and find not only ideas about what to assess but also sample checklists and rubrics that I can use.

I’d also go to Kristin Fontichiaro’s blog at School Library Monthly [http://blog.schoollibrarymedia.com/index.php/category/assessment] and read everything she’s posted there in the category of Assessment. I find posts that deal with inquiry, and formative and summative assessment. I write the use of these tools into my professional growth plan.

I’d connect with Buffy Hamilton’s Unquiet Librarian blog and find that in one of her posts on assessment she has forms to share best practices/examples and links to results/responses—more helpful material for me to use [http://theunquietlibrarian.wikispaces.com/assessment].

I’d then use what I’d found to write my goals for my professional-learning plan. Through my actions, I’ve been specific (focused on the area in which I need to grow), strategic (used my connections to identify best practice), and deliberate (used what I’ve discovered to set appropriate learning goals for myself).

As school librarians, we are connected educators. Our personal learning networks are rich and deep. In this time of performance-based evaluation, we can use our PLNs strategically for professional growth.

Audrey Church is an associate professor of school library media at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. She is the author of Leverage Your Library Program to Raise Test Scores (Linworth 2009), “The Instructional Role of Library Media Specialists as Perceived by Elementary School Principals” (SLMR 2008), and “Secondary School Principals’ Perceptions of the School Librarian’s Instructional Role” (SLMR 2010). She currently serves as the Educators of School Librarians Section representative to the AASL Board of Directors.

Works Cited:


