

Appraisal – a teacher’s voice for self-responsibility

This is a story of what appraisal might look like from the perspective of a teacher who is professional, and who is supported by a system and process that is focused on improvement. It is idealised and not designed to pretend to represent any one particular teacher.

My view

If I take a professional approach to my occupation, then I take a professional approach to my registration as a professional. It also means that I take a professional approach to the Practising Teachers Criteria (PTC).

So, because I see things like this, this is what I would be thinking and doing.

I am there to enable *all* of the learners that I teach to learn. I know that, on average, they should at least all learn in one year what other learners would learn in the same period of time. I have a responsibility to ensure that. Some will do better than that and some will not. But I take that responsibility seriously, I monitor their attendance, their engagement, their motivation and their progress very carefully. I talk with them about their engagement and progress and about what I can do to support their learning and progress. I talk with them, and enable them to learn, about how they can learn better – how they can become even more active, powerful learners.

I am conscious of what I am to teach – I am trained and expected to enable all of my learners to learn the appropriate curriculum – all of it, not just the bits I enjoy or feel more comfortable with. I ensure that I have the curriculum knowledge to be able to extend the most able of my students in all subjects. I may have had to undertake some additional learning, (in mathematics perhaps) to be able to do this.

I am conscious of the community within which I teach, the community that I serve by teaching their children. I am conscious of my school or centre and the goals and targets for improvement that we, collectively, have set. I am conscious of my role in assisting the achievement of these goals and targets. I know what these mean in terms of which learners in my class(es) or setting need to show accelerated progress or powerful learning in which parts of the curriculum. The learners also know. I take responsibility for ensuring that I learn what I need to learn in order to best ensure that my learners to reach their goals. I take seriously the reality that I am part of a team and that I need to be ready to support my colleagues and leaders in what they need to learn in order for them to perform their roles better.

I work with my colleagues to shape and refine a picture of what ‘good’ teaching looks like that maps against our country-wide description of what professional teaching looks like - the PTC. We seek indicators, descriptions, examples, pictures, videos of teaching that exemplify and enhance what we mean by the PTC, what we mean by ‘good’. We understand the basic sources of evidence that we

need to go to in order to have robust evidence of 'good practice' and be able to compare that to our current practice. We understand that all our own teaching practice must be visible to our colleagues and discussable. We would not want it any other way.

I recognise that I cannot do all the above if an evaluative perspective is not at the base of all I do. I need to be constantly reassessing what my picture of 'good' teaching and learning looks like. As part of my daily teaching I am thinking about well I actually understand the curriculum, how well I am teaching, how well learners are progressing. If I am really doing these things I will be able to compare my picture of 'good' teaching and learning with my picture of 'what is' in my daily practice so that I can detect ways in which I might improve. I wonder, I inquire, as to what I can do to teach better.

If I am actively doing all of the things above, then appraisal will be a naturally, ongoing, central quality of my professionalism. I will have evidence of my learners' progress, their self-regulation and powerful learning, and of my own practices. I will have discussed all of these elements with colleagues and leaders over the course of the year in planned and spontaneous ways. I will know to what extent I am meeting all aspects of the PTC and I will have evidenced this. My appraiser will also know. We will have moved through a simple formal process.

There are three possibilities, even given the above:

- My practice might be competent,
- My practice might be on the border.
- My practice might not be competent

Each then requires a different decision and consequent actions by my appraiser.

If my practice is competent

If I meet the criteria for PTC and have been self-evaluative, then I will know and my appraiser will know. Being evaluative and taking responsibility for being evaluative is a large part of the PTC (criteria 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). My appraiser and I will jointly be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence available or that can be obtained easily, to demonstrate my competence (eg, student progress records, students talking about their learning). We will be much more interested in deciding on challenging, interesting improvement ideas than in compiling further evidence. We will be taking a wider view of my fuller professional development and career options.

If my practice needs improvement

I will recognize when I am really struggling to meet any one or more of the criteria in the way my setting or centre expects of me, I will have identified this during the course of the year and my professional leader and I will have set a plan in place to provide me with the support to learn what I need. If by the final appraisal meeting time for the year the evidence shows that I am still struggling then it is the legitimate role of my appraiser to reach a judgment as to whether I meet the criteria or I need a more formal programme of support to help me demonstrate practice that meets the criteria.

If my practice is not competent

I will know.

Unless I am actually not like this and then I might not know until the final appraisal discussion. I might have told myself that I had all these qualities. I might have been able to ignore the visible gap between my performance and 'good'. I might have misconstrued the messages my appraiser and colleague have given me about the gap. If it comes to this then I will get a shock when I am told by the appraiser that I will need to be placed on a formal programme of advice and guidance. It might be the best thing to happen to me. I need to be aware that if I am unable to meet the criteria the possible outcome is that my application for the renewal of my practising certificate would not be endorsed by my professional leader.