

Profiles of Teaching Competency: A Way of Looking at Classroom Teaching Performance

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Les auteurs nous font part du sentiment d'incertitude qui les anime lorsqu'ils ont à juger de la compétence d'un futur enseignant. On y décrit les problèmes que soulèvent la définition et l'évaluation de la compétence; les auteurs ont élaboré leur propre instrument de mesure, le *Profiles of Teaching Competency*, qui comprend sept critères différents et qui aura mis huit ans à être mis au point. Les éléments devaient refléter «ce que nous valorisons dans l'enseignement» et être en relation avec l'apprentissage des élèves.

Il y a en tout dix-neuf éléments dont sept sont reliés au concept de «l'enseignant en tant que modèle à suivre», six, aux interactions élève-enseignant et six, à la relation élève-enseignant-programme.

Chaque profil a une facette positive (i.e. facilitant l'apprentissage) et une facette négative (i.e. non fonctionnelle). Nous pouvons vraiment nous rendre compte de l'efficacité de ces profils, lorsque nous les utilisons dans le but d'animer le dialogue entre les élèves-maîtres et leurs conseillers (supervisors).

On peut se procurer un exemplaire de cet instrument de mesure en communiquant avec les auteurs.

This is the city. Vancouver, British Columbia. We were working the day watch out of Simon Fraser University, looking after 500 student teachers in various school placements all over the province. My name is Wassermann; my partner is Wally Eggert. Our job: deciding which of the students are competent to teach.

We turn the car around and head down Hastings Street towards the centre of town. Fred Fonebone, the principal, is waiting for us in the office of the Archive School. "How's she doing?" we ask, expecting a preliminary report on the progress of the student teacher, who had been placed in a fifth-grade class two months earlier. "Just fine," Fonebone nods, knowingly.

"Any problems?" we raise the possibility.

"No, she has good discipline and is covering the fifth-grade curriculum satisfactorily. Her handwriting on the blackboard is a little sloppy. What's the matter with you people? Don't you teach blackboard skills at the university any more?"

Wally and I exchange glances and move up to the classroom. The regular classroom teacher greets us at the door. "How's she doing?" we ask. She stiffens her voice into professional falsetto. "Well, she's very willing to learn and very enthusiastic about teaching. The children like her, but she is a little too friendly with them, and needs to learn how to assume a more

professional role. Otherwise, she's all right." Wally and I move to the back of the room to observe.

A student's career is riding on our decision.

The lives of untold numbers of children may be deeply affected by what we decide. How do we decide if this neophyte student teacher is going to "make it?" What criteria do we use to guide our decision?

"She has good potential," Wally says, looking into our Faculty of Education issue crystal ball. "I think we should pass her."

I agree, suppressing some reservations. She may not be great, but after all, she has come this far in the education program and it would be a shame to remove her now. Not a really bad job; just very mediocre.

And thus another young person becomes certified to enter the teaching profession, to reach, touch, and teach, perhaps for years to come, the young minds of her captive charges. Have we sentenced hundreds of her future students to a prison of boredom and tediousness for their fifth-grade careers? What are we looking for when we try to assess competency in teaching? Is education the only profession where the index of performance (good handwriting, good use of audiovisual aids, good classroom discipline, neat bulletin boards, etc.) has little to do with outcome criteria (children's learning)? As we sit in the hot June sun and watch the future teachers receiving their degrees, of how many can we say, with pride and confidence, "That kid will make one hell of a fine teacher"? What does that mean, anyway? Why don't we know?

The struggle for the identification of "good teaching" goes on and on — a lot of hoo-rah, but not too much evidence that something positive is actually happening to the educational product: the classroom teacher. (Pick a school. Almost any school will do. Peer into a classroom of that school. Chances are that what you will see is representative of today's teaching: the teacher standing or sitting in front of the class, doling out information by the bushelful — filling the empty vessels with his pure, unadulterated wisdom.)

We have moved from phase to phase in our odyssey — the basic education proponents with their insistence on students' acquisition of factual content as signifying teaching competency; the accountability boys, who, smelling public discontent and a new profitable market, moved big business into the public education arena, by introducing the notion that teachers be held accountable for what their students did not learn. Now in a new flurry of activity, teacher education "experts" are suggesting that there might be some specific competencies which teachers might be required to possess in executing their craft, and that these competencies might even be identifiable.

So we have climbed on the competency bandwagon. Competency instruments pour out of teacher-education institutions and competency-based

teacher education has been elevated to the position of being lettered (CBTE) — a sure sign of status.

ACHIEVING AND ASSESSING COMPETENCY

While the idea of being competent in one's craft is certainly sound, the complexity and variety of the tasks of the classroom teacher pose formidable obstacles for evaluation. Consequently, the competencies to be assessed frequently emerge as less than useful:

- he demonstrates a good understanding of how children learn (where the objective is laudable, but the matter of deciding what behavior constitutes a demonstration of this competency poses new problems)
- he has examined sets of materials used in beginning reading instruction and given an opinion of each (where the competency reflects standards of performance in a university course and where the application to classroom teaching is left unexamined)
- he can thread and operate a 16mm film projector (where the competency is reduced to the lowest level of abstraction; certainly easy to assess, but are these the things we really prize in teaching?)

For a competency instrument to work effectively towards the professional development of the classroom teacher, it must meet at least seven criteria:

1. It must assess the performance of the person in the context of the classroom. (In examining a surgeon's competency to do a kidney transplant, we would expect that whether he "had the jam" would be pretty much determined by his performance on the operating table; whether he had read at least two books on kidney transplants would be a meaningless measure, unless he demonstrated the ability to translate what he had read into surgical practice.)
2. It must focus on behavior that is capable of being observed. But,
3. It must not provide us with the lowest level of behavioral characteristics to assess, just because those are the ones that are most easily observable.
4. The competencies included should relate clearly to the furtherance of pupils' learning.
5. The competencies should reflect the educational values to which we as professional educators aspire.
6. The instrument should emphasize the identification of strengths and weaknesses, as a springboard for growth, rather than merely promote the passing and failing of student teachers.
7. The instrument should be capable of use by the student teacher himself/herself for on-going evaluation and growth.

PROFILES OF TEACHING COMPETENCY

The Profiles of Teacher Competency is an instrument which takes a stand in specifying some functionally meaningful criteria for judging teaching competency. It represents, in its current state of development, the evolution

of our efforts over an eight-year period to assess student teaching performance in a classroom context. If it has one major purpose, it is that of promoting professional growth — excellence in classroom teaching.

The selection of items included in a competency instrument is, first of all, a matter of coming to grips with what it is one values in education. Obviously, one cannot have an instrument which includes all the competencies. There are dozens of alternatives to be considered; the decisions about what to include are difficult. In generating our list, we asked ourselves again and again, “Is this what we really prize in education?” The instrument which emerges from this kind of scrutiny should reflect the values (theoretical and practical) of the teacher education program it serves.

A second factor in the selection of items reflects the relationship of the item to pupil learning. For each item, we had to be able to point to research and experimental evidence in the literature on learning and be able to say with some certainty, “If the teacher does this competently, learning will be enhanced.”

In our attempts to identify competencies, we talked with our colleagues who had considerable experience in working with and assessing student teachers. We examined the literature in teacher education which dealt with evaluation. We looked at dozens of evaluative instruments that we had collected and used over the years.

As the list of competencies began to grow, we began to see that they fell into three distinct categories. One group of competencies was clearly related to the idea of “teacher as a role model.” Another set of competencies could be grouped around the idea of teacher–pupil interactions as these must create the conditions that will facilitate pupils’ readiness to learn. The category into which the remainder of the items seemed to fall hinged on the triangular relationship between teacher, pupils, and curriculum.

We needed to resolve the problem of identifying each competency so that it would be observable without reducing it to the lowest level of performance, lest we wind up with a list of easily observable and assessable characteristics which would make our instrument professionally worthless. For that reason, we rejected the idea of the “laundry list” type of competency instrument and instead selected a behavioral pattern model, in which a particular teaching competency is identified so that a profile of a behavior emerges. To add to the power of the identification, we decided to show profiles of the behavior in both negative and positive dimensions.

In our final culling, we selected 19 items of teaching competency and then proceeded to develop behavioral profiles for each. We paired each of the items, presenting each in both a “positive” and “negative” view. In this way, we were stating explicitly that some characteristics of teaching behavior are facilitating of pupils’ learning, while others are dysfunctional with respect to pupils’ learning.

The 19 headings in the Profiles of Teaching Competency reflect the posi-

tive (i.e. desirable) side of each profile:

SECTION I. THE TEACHER

- Profile 1.* His behavior is thoughtful
- Profile 2.* He is self-initiating
- Profile 3.* He has a clear idea of what he believes and his beliefs guide his behavior
- Profile 4.* He is a problem solver
- Profile 5.* He can put new ideas into practice
- Profile 6.* You can rely on him
- Profile 7.* He has a positive outlook

SECTION II. THE TEACHER AND THE KIDS: INTERACTIONS

- Profile 8.* He prizes, cares about, and values each individual
- Profile 9.* He knows how to observe, diagnose, and deal with pupils with behavioral difficulties
- Profile 10.* He uses clarifying responses in his classroom interactions
- Profile 11.* He promotes pupils' thinking
- Profile 12.* There's a lot of interaction among pupils in his class
- Profile 13.* He is a real person to his students

SECTION III. THE TEACHER, THE KIDS, AND THE "STUFF" — THE CLASSROOM

- Profile 14.* He knows what he is doing in the classroom and it makes sense
- Profile 15.* He is knowledgeable in his field
- Profile 16.* He uses evaluation to promote learning
- Profile 17.* His classroom is a vital, alive and zestful place
- Profile 18.* His teaching materials are varied, imaginative, and relevant
- Profile 19.* He unifies the group

In the instrument itself, the pairing of the positive and negative views of the behavioral pattern appear as thesis and antithesis. For example:

Profile 1. His behavior is thoughtful

At the highest level, you would say that this person's behavior is thoughtful; that he acts out of having considered alternatives; that his choice for action is a reasoned choice; that his actions are appropriate to his expressed goals. He seems to have a built-in monitoring system which aids him in analyzing his actions and this analysis is based upon objective criteria rather than on personal bias. You would be apt to conclude about him that he is "in touch" with what he is doing and what he does seems to have been considered and reflected upon in respect to his goals.

The antithesis of the thoughtful person is one whose actions seem generated out of whim or caprice; his behavior is clearly inconsistent with expressed goals. This person has not considered what to do before he does it; he does not appear to have considered alternatives; there seems to be a gap between what he says and what he does. When confronted with his actions, he may deny them (I didn't do that), becoming extremely defensive. The impression he gives is that he has not thought a lot about what he says or does.

Profile 8. He prizes, cares about, and values each individual.

At the highest level, you will find the person who allows his pupils to express their ideas, opinions, beliefs, feelings and who accepts these. Not only is he sensitive and considerate of his students' feelings, but he communicates his sensitivity in ways they can understand. "I am with you" is what is communicated to his students. In his interactions with them, his facial expressions, the tone of his voice and his language give explicit evidence of warmth, praise and encouragement. His interactions reveal his close relationship with his students, free of attempts to dominate them. After a brief interaction with him, one usually comes away feeling a little better about himself.

Antithetically, you will find a person who shows a lack of sensitivity to his students. In his interactions, he may appear passive rather than warm, disinterested rather than encouraging, mechanical rather than sincere in his praise. He frequently rejects the ideas and opinions of his students. His criticisms are cutting and devaluing and seem to be made without regard to the students' feelings. He doesn't seem to be able to understand how his students feel; indeed he seems hardly aware that they have feelings at all.

(Copies of the complete instrument *Profiles of Teaching Competency* may be obtained by writing to Dr. Selma Wassermann, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia.)

The first field testing of the Profiles was done with a sample of 100 student teachers. In this field test, student teachers rated themselves on the instrument, along with ratings by their school associates (classroom teachers) and faculty associates (supervisors of student teaching). We interviewed the student teachers, faculty associates, and school associates to obtain their feedback. We also solicited anonymous feedback from the three groups. We were able to discern which items produced a high level of discrepancy among the raters and used all of these data in refining the Profiles.

When the Profiles had been modified, we then subjected them to an additional field test in which we found a reliability coefficient of $+ .70$ among 20 raters who rated one teacher.

Using the Profiles

What we have tried to do in the Profiles of Teaching Competency is to provide the student teacher with a set of behavioral guidelines which we believe to be related to positive learning outcomes. What's more, we have tried to provide the means by which the student teacher may, from his first day in the classroom, assess his/her own teaching behavior in relationship to these guidelines. As we see it, the most effective use of the instrument will occur when (a) the student teacher rates himself/herself; (b) supervisory

personnel rate the student teacher; and (c) all raters engage in dialogue, on each profile, in an attempt to promote the student teacher's analysis of his performance.

CONCLUSION

In the manner of educational innovations of the past, we may be deluged by a flood of instruments which purport to assess teaching competency. With such a prospect, perhaps the best advice one can offer is: Let the buyer beware! Assessing teaching competency can be very anxiety-provoking to teachers, to student teachers, to supervisory personnel. If one is going to assess teaching competency, it might be advisable to consider some questions which might serve as guidelines to the "buyer." Does the instrument reflect my educational values? Are these the behaviors that I truly prize in a teacher? In what way are these behaviors related to pupils' learning? Does the instrument provide for continued self-scrutiny and professional growth? If we can answer these questions in a way which is satisfactory to us, we may have the rudders to guide us through the sea of instrumentation and to give us some measure of confidence as we take the risks involved in assessing teaching competency.