

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN TEACHER EVALUATION/ SELF-EVALUATION

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Those who chose to be “teachers” also desire, in an outspoken or hidden way, to be “perfect teachers”; but nobody is born a “perfect teacher”, although all those who chose to be teachers should be endowed with the capacity of being tolerant, compassionate and humane, qualities that should be reflected in the teaching process and the relations with students and colleagues.

Besides possessing such qualities, teachers should be permanently preoccupied to develop professionally, either by post-graduate or in-service programmes which are meant to directly help and support them.

However, teachers have an urgent need: to be successful in their activity, but, in many situations, they might feel lonely on this road to success.

In fact, teachers should never have such a feeling, considering that they have their learners around them and provided that they became aware of the important support that could come from their students, in case the latter are involved in the teaching process.

An exceptional way of involvement may be represented by the students’ evaluation of the teacher, evaluation considered as feedback at the teacher’s selfevaluation.

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As well known, the evaluation of the teacher’s competence is typically the task of specialized, trained persons – the evaluators; but, these evaluations are only occasionally, carried out for promotion / different certificates etc and, in many cases, the demonstrations made in front of the evaluators become artificial and meaningless for the training process.

At the university level the frequency of such evaluations is practically null, although there are situations when the teachers reflect on their work, discuss problems with their colleagues and organize peer observation.

But unfortunately, such activities are rarely systematic or even explicit.

Thus, the persons who are “*always*” there to assess the class are the teachers themselves and, of course, their students. Therefore, we can say that systematic “observation” really exists, the only thing to do being to organize it in such a way that it could help effect improvement in any teaching / learning environment and, at the same time, develop the teacher’s skills and competences.

It is very important, even decisive, for the teachers who want to develop and be successful to know how they and / or their activity is considered / appreciated / assessed by the students.

At the same time, it is equally important that the students be adequately guided in their teacher’s assessment by well-built questionnaires, aiding them to correctly evaluate and avoid subjectivism.

There are situations when the teachers are reluctant to the idea that the students could be turned into evaluators; that is why the introduction or use of such evaluation sheets should be done tactfully and, of course, with the teachers’ acceptance and their full understanding of the positive results that can derive / be obtained from this activity.

In this respect there are two ways of involving the students in teacher evaluation: one coming from outside the classroom and the other one from within the classroom. Both of them make use of questionnaires to the students, but while the first one could be and usually is built up by a person from outside the classroom, the latter shall be made up by the teachers themselves being considered an aid to self-evaluation.

In what follows, we shall take each of them in turn and comment upon them:

1. Evaluation from outside the classroom; generally speaking, this type of evaluation is carried out in order to learn about the teacher’s dedication and

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his/her degree of professionalism; the questions are not specific to a certain lesson and, in many cases, not even to a certain object of study; they have a high degree of generality and the purpose is to give an idea of the teacher's commitment and suitability for his/her profession. Generally, the questionnaires are made up by trained evaluators, but the teachers themselves could be involved in drafting them; we dare say that this second possibility would be beneficial for both parties.

It would be also very important that not only the students be asked to answer the respective questionnaires, but also the teachers themselves be asked to try answering the respective questions, even if the request is informal. In this way the teachers have at their disposal a good opportunity of self-evaluation; at the same time, a comparison between their own answers and those of their students would be extremely interesting and useful.

This is of special importance at the university level, where there is a considerable freedom for the teachers to develop their own approach of the subject, and in many cases they define their own syllabus and select/create their own teaching materials.

This type of questionnaire could contain categories of questions referring to different aspects of the teaching activity. Such questions could be:

1) *General questions* referring to: absence rate; punctuality to courses and seminars, appearance; level of courtesy to students; experience (teaching, real world); outside interests etc.

2) *Professionalism* referring to: general competence; personality; style in front of the students; control of the class; expertise in using equipment; level of confidence; teaching methods used; ability to involve everyone (seminars); management skills etc.

3) *Classroom climate* referring to: attitude (warm, encouraging etc.); atmosphere (collaborative, competitive); treatment of errors; patterns of interaction; question strategy; student involvement (active, passive) etc.

There are some other categories of questions that are more specific, in keeping with the teaching subject, in our case, a foreign language.

For example:

4) *Pedagogy* referring to: grouping used; key vocabulary / structure presented; forms of practice used; forms of individualization, ways of supporting weaker students etc.

5) *Lesson* referring to: main aims; aims achieved; the (proper) plan; pace; focus (practice and accuracy / fluency), ratio of the four skills; linguistic content taught as "grammar" etc.

6) *Teacher's Talk / Command of the Language Dialogos* ● 4/2001

referring to: accuracy (examples, patterns etc.); fluency; native-like intonation and accent/stress; clarity (voice); use of mother language; ratio of teacher-student talk / student-student talk; comprehensibility of the language of instruction etc.

7) *Preparation and Support* referring to: teacher produced teaching aids; teacher produced tests; state of student record; quality of student reports; evidence of interest in the student exercisebooks; usefulness of homework; marking etc.

8) *Student organization & results* referring to: composition of the class; the length of the period dedicated to learning the language; the period of study with the same teacher; readiness to initiate and respond; correct use of the language; lesson enjoyment; existence of texts/text books for individual study etc.

It is desirable that the questionnaire be drafted using boxes for each answer, thus offering the possibility to rate the answers on a sliding scale from left to right; judgement will be passed using ticks. (A tick to the left will show strong disapproval, a centre one – an "average" performance, while the right tick the highest appreciation). Inevitably, some categories require a written comment and boxes cannot be used; in this case a space is needed to put down the answers.

It is very important that the questionnaires be made available to the teachers before being handed to the students; the teachers must know what the questionnaire contains and, at the same time, they should be free to suggest modifications in order to make it cope with the respective situation and also include cases of possible initiatives and / or experimentations.

It is equally important that the filled in questionnaires be again made available to the teacher; they will offer the teacher a clear guidance of how he / she is perceived by the students as personality and a professional, if the lesson format is successful, what support is mostly appreciated, a.s.o.

In this way the feedback got from the students is essential for the teachers; they have the right response as to how successful they are, which are the sections where some weaknesses have been noticed, requiring decided action for improvement.

Although the teachers might experience some disappointment when learning about some weak points perceived by the students in their activity, they should not feel angry or frustrated; on the contrary, they should be happy to have been offered the opportunity to become aware of the situation and

should try to avoid or eliminate such weaknesses in future, on their way to success.

These questionnaires are better than an evaluation sheet coming from an accidental observer / evaluator even if he / she is a well trained one; only one lesson observed cannot entirely cover the multitude of aspects included in a well-drafted questionnaire, filled in by those who are the permanent beneficiaries of the whole sequence of lessons.

2. Evaluation from within the classroom; it could be seen as a form of teacher self-evaluation for which he / she calls the assistance of the students / learners; this self-evaluation should be considered as a normal (everyday) activity for all teachers interested in their continuous professional development; it goes without saying that it is very helpful for the teachers who are at the beginning or in the early years of their careers, but not only.

Therefore, the teachers should draft their own questionnaires and hand them out to their students; the questions asked will represent the problems they want to get an answer to, as well as the possible solutions that stay unknown as long as the learners' attitude towards the respective problems is unknown.

Thus, the feedback coming from the learners who are asked to evaluate their teacher's performance, as well as the results of their own activity, will be really helpful for those teachers who really want to improve, both, themselves and, implicitly, the teaching process.

As Corder says "*teaching cannot be carried out successfully by following a set of rules of thumb, when our knowledge of all the factors involved is incomplete, and when, consequently, many of the decisions on how to proceed must be left to the private knowledge and experience of the practitioner*" [1,47].

When starting to draft such a self-evaluation questionnaire in view of using the learners' feedback, the teachers shall bear in mind four guiding principles concerning teaching, namely:

Teachers should:

- 1) establish adequate study conditions, under which effective learning can take place and develop
- 2) maximize the opportunities for rapid and effective learning
- 3) maximize the learners' response to the respective opportunities
- 4) have confidence in themselves as professionals.

As regards FL teaching, teachers shall have in view that an effective unit of learning includes three stages: presentation, practice and application. The presentation introduces the students to a text that clearly expresses specific language functions, linguistic items for them and the contexts where that

language is necessary and appropriate; the practice requires the students to develop some activities, from direct control to loose guidance; the application requires the students to cope with a given situation without any or a minimum aid from the teacher.

While the "practice" should be *meaningful*, "application" should be "purposeful", creating the need for communication. It is important that each stage be present in the learning unit in some form or another.

Assuming that teachers can improve their teaching with self-awareness through confrontation of problems, we suggest in the following, as an example, a type of questionnaire to generate the trainees' opinions about the teaching/learning process.

The framework of such a questionnaire is presented below; it includes three sections around which the questions are centered: 1) *general aspects*: (a. goals; b. teaching material; c. previous learning and linkage; d. main stages of the learning unit – presentation, practice, application etc); 2) *communication between teacher and students or students and students* (set; closure; demonstrations / instruction / explanation; questioning; supervision of class work etc); 3) *teaching management* (classroom organization; pacing; use of teaching acts etc.).

The answers will be ticked on a scale like

-2	-1	0	+1	+2
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 or YES / NO.

Questionnaire to the Students

(To understand your requirements in the teaching / learning process and help your teacher to understand and teach you better; we would like you to answer this questionnaire and give it back to your teacher. Take the appropriate box from -2 to +2 or YES/NO boxes).

Section 1 – General Aspects

- a. • Were the goals of the lesson
 - explicitly indicated?
 - carried out in teaching?
 - understood from the process?
 - Were the goals appropriate to your level?
 - Was the learning activity related to the goals?
- b. • Were the teaching materials related to the goals?
 - Were the teaching materials appropriate to your competence?
 - Were the teaching materials interesting / stimulating / difficult / easy / boring etc
- c. • Was the lesson closely related to your previous learning?
 - Was the development of the four skills balanced?
 - Were the previous lessons directly relevant to the goals of the lesson?

- d. • Could you understand the material presented?
- Was the material presented orally / in a written form / both?
 - Was there enough language input for a clear focus?
 - Was your attention well focused on the skills to learn?
 - Was the practice well connected to presentation?
 - Was the practice intensive enough?
 - Were the teacher's explanations well balanced with the practical activity?
 - Were the practical activities logically related / progressively sequenced / interesting and stimulating / helping towards independent work?
 - Was the teacher's feedback provided immediately / efficiently / effectively?
 - Did the teacher give your clear instructions for a communicative task?
 - Were you able to use the focused language freely / independently?
 - Was the amount of focused language work maximized?
 - Was the need to communicate created in the design of the task?
 - Was the task given appropriate / challenging / up to your level / up to your interests?
 - Could you competently handle the task?
 - Was the teacher aware of the unexpected problems derived from the task?
 - Was the teacher helpful with the problems derived?

Section 2 – Communication between teachers and students; students and students:

- Were the teacher's skills appropriately used for the different stages of the unit?
- Was your attention properly directed to specific tasks and learning sequences?
- Did you understand the tasks / learning sequences?
- Were you properly directed to completion of tasks and sequences?
- Were the demonstrations / instructions / explanations given at the right moment / was the language clear / were these unambiguous?

- Were the explanations well-supported with examples?
- Could you follow the explanations / instructions?
- Were the questions clearly understood / meaningful / answerable?
- Did the teacher handle silence adequately?
- Did the teacher deal with incorrect responses adequately?
- Was the teacher interested in your reactions?
- Did you raise questions?
- Was the teacher interested in your progress?
- Did you indicate / provide remedial work when necessary?
- Were you stimulated to intercommunicate?
- Were the intercommunicative activities interesting / stimulating / well-focused / focused on new phrases, vocabulary, structures etc?

Section 3 – Teaching Management

- Was the class organization appropriate for each task?
- Were the groups of students of mixed abilities / approximately equal abilities?
- Did the teacher use teacher – class discussions / individual work / pair work / group work / intergroup work?
- Was there enough time for student work after the teacher's instructions?
- Was the teacher aware of your progress and was it decided flexibly on the time required?
- Were the aids (hardware / software / realia) efficiently set up / used?
- Did the aids serve the purpose of the lesson / tasks?
- Were the aids suitable for your level?

The model suggested includes 50 questions, but, of course, their number can be reduced or enlarged, their content can be changed or adapted according to the requirements the teacher considers, in order to make this activity useful and efficient.

The use of such questionnaires, contributing to the teacher effective self-evaluation, aims at producing self-confident, successful teachers, who are able to choose their own methods, approaches and techniques appropriate to the teaching / learning process, on the basis of personality factors and specific situations.

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