



# TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

AND THEIR EFFECTS ON PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

Evaluation can often be viewed as a daunting and high-stakes process, seemingly creating a compliance model vs. an ongoing cycle that seeks to shift teacher practice and behaviors, ultimately resulting in higher student achievement. This paper explores three articles supporting the alignment of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) evaluation instrument to Marzano's levels of high reliability schools. Findings indicate that when school leaders conduct consistent, unannounced classroom visits, followed up with face-to-face coaching, there are significant gains in teacher practices, which increase student achievement (Marshall & Marshall, 2017).

*Keywords:* teacher evaluation, coaching cycles, mini-observations

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### Teacher Evaluation Models and Their Effects on Performance

Numerous evaluation models for teachers have emerged in recent decades as accountability measures for student growth and proficiency are more high-stakes than ever. More than ever, school leaders are intent on growing teacher practice vs. simply checking off boxes on a form once per year. It makes sense; with standards-referenced reporting, the movement to competency-based education models and the era of personalized learning, why wouldn't teacher growth and proficiency be measured similarly?

This paper examines Danielson's Framework for Teaching (FFT) Evaluation Instrument (2013), its alignment to Marzano's High Reliability Schools framework (HRS) and research conducted by Hope, Marshall & Marshall and New Leaders.

### **Teacher Evaluation Tool Analysis**

In 1992, it was reported that anywhere from one-third to one-half of all new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Merseth, 1992). In 1996, it was predicted that America's school districts would need to hire more than two million educators to respond to increased enrollment of students (National Commission on Teaching, 1996). In 2018, the United States is facing widespread teacher shortages.

In his remarks at the 2010 American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Conference, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan asked, "Why is it, as a nation that

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exalts outstanding teachers, do we continue to do a spotty job of preparing teachers and principals to lead in the classroom and schoolhouse?”

Adopted in 2012 by Chicago Public Schools (CPS) as the basis for the REACH evaluation system, Danielson’s FFT has long been used as a tool for developing and improving teacher practice. Initially utilized as a coaching tool, Danielson’s FFT has now been adopted and adapted by districts across the country. In the context of CPS, principals must pass a training and certification modules calibrating scores and ratings to align with the four domains and ratings of the FFT. Moreover, the REACH system is intended to provide teachers with a minimum of one formal (lengthier observation seeking evidence of all components of the FFT) and one informal, intended to be a 15-20 minute observation, where the evaluator might still capture as many of the critical attributes within each of the four domains.

Says one principal from CPS, “I spend hours analyzing the scripting I typed for the visit then aligning the evidence statements to critical attributes within each domain.” With a responsibility of anywhere from 30-40 teachers and minimum of two observations per year, the REACH system can unintentionally become another daunting task list item to be checked off by the principal.

Intended to coach practice and provide individualized feedback to teachers, domain one of the FFT focuses on planning and preparation, domain two on the classroom environment, domain three on instruction and domain four on professional responsibilities.

Though many districts adopt the FFT with intentions of coaching and feedback cycles, if not implemented well, it can run the risk of becoming just another checklist. The FFT is a thorough framework that highlights 20+ critical attributes with a rubric consisting of the

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following rating language: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient and distinguished. As the school leader codes evidence within the REACH platform in CPS, an algorithm calculates the educator's score. For example, if the principal coded 12 evidence statements for 2d: Managing Student Behavior, they would rate this critical attribute overall, resulting in a compilation of all the rated components for domain two, classroom environment.

Positively, this system does provide a clear focus for growth as an educator might score proficient or distinguished in domain three, instruction and receive a basic rating for domain two. The lynchpin becomes how the teacher and principal follow up within the areas requiring attention.

### **Discussion**

In another charter district within Indiana, the recent adoption of Danielson's FFT has posed difficulty. Says one principal, "The district made a decision to adopt the FFT. School leaders were not involved in the choice of the evaluation tool and I'm finding it very challenging to translate the depth of the framework to my daily walk-throughs."

This sentiment resonates with many school leaders, arguably for the adoption of any evaluation tool. A tool is only as impactful as the environment, conditions and people who are operationalizing it on a daily basis. Perhaps if the right work and professional learning are conducted with the FFT, districts have a better understanding and capacity with which to influence teachers.

Marzano's HRS framework contends that there are five increasing levels of reliability:

1. Safe and collaborative culture

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2. Effective teaching in every classroom
3. Guaranteed and viable curriculum
4. Standards-referenced reporting
5. Competency-based education (Marzano, 2017)

Danielson's FFT provides succinct depth and breadth for accomplishing each level within the HRS framework. However, districts often fail when it comes to maintaining scalability and accountability in order to create sustainable systems over time, the ultimate outcome of the HRS framework.

One solution to the disconnect between some of the pedagogical concepts within the levels of the HRS framework is to examine evaluation and model measurements similarly for pre-service teachers. Many university and transition-to-teaching programs still utilize antiquated approaches for ongoing evaluation of students within programs. This creates a learning gap when they enter the workforce within a school district.

Another remedy that might impact teacher retention beyond the first few years hinges upon the principal. Evidence suggests that principals who involve first-year teachers in assessing their own progress during evaluation are more likely to retain them (Hope, 1999).

Though the FFT has district models that reflect this approach (like CPS who requires a goal-setting pre-conference and feedback-based post-conference with the teacher setting goals), the ongoing feedback and coaching cycles used within the day-to-day operations of the school day are what can become difficult to implement, yet seem to be the most high-leverage in school improvement, specifically effects on teacher practice.

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Former Boston principal Kim Marshall asserts that mini-observations can provide continuous improvement for teaching. Principals adopting this model can see what's really going on in classrooms, diagnose classroom problems early, and provide specific and focused coaching (Marshall & Marshall, 2017).

Another solution to dissecting the FFT as an annual evaluation tool is to chunk the critical attributes and focus on coaching cycles dedicated to one indicator. This can provide small chunks of reaching “distinguished” for teachers in their daily actions, as opposed to attempting to demonstrate this only once per year in 20+ critical attributes. Through a broader lens, with well-established systems for tracking daily mini-observations, principals can inform professional learning opportunities and develop a clear focus for each school year based on gap analysis of how teachers collectively performed.

Principals often require practice with feedback conversations to grow teacher practice, all built upon trust. By conducting mini-observations, leaders also grow in their comfort levels to specifically diagnose challenges, celebrate growth and prioritize coaching and feedback accordingly.

Overall, Marshall challenges that establishing the keystone habit of mini-observations can realistically produce more than 12 benefits for principal-teacher relationships, collaboration and leadership development; an exponential return on investment for a commitment of 60 minutes per day. (Marshall & Marshall, 2017).

Essentially, when principals develop systems to leverage teacher feedback and coaching, it arguably builds the most rapid road to success, not conducting one long evaluation per year.

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“Principals have a good deal to gain by creating opportunities to share leadership at their schools. In order to support effective teacher leadership, they should:

- Prioritize shared leadership as a critical strategy for school improvement;
- Define potential shared leadership responsibilities based on school needs and the diverse strengths and specialized expertise among school staff;
- Support targeted opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills.” (Valdez, Broin & Carroll, 2015).

Clearly, in order for principals to build a shared leadership model, they must utilize a succinct approach when it comes to coaching and feedback. In order to identify skills and build leadership capacity vertically and horizontally within teacher teams, it must begin with the alignment of daily feedback to the larger framework utilized for annual evaluations, thereby creating deeper impact, meaning and growth.

### **Conclusions and Future Study**

To obtain a complete understanding of the effectiveness of a teacher evaluation tool, such as Danielson’s FFT, and its impact on school-wide, student and teacher performance, it is vital to consider the environmental support factors associated with implementation beyond the model itself. This may include, but is not limited to, day-to-day principal actions, support models for coaching school leaders at the district and building levels, teacher response to feedback and coaching and ongoing non-evaluative systems to track teacher growth beyond annual and semi-annual evaluations (such as mini-observations).



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