

The Friction between Faculty Evaluations and Rewards: Reconsidering Teaching's Rhetoric and Recognition

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Educators know the reality and the inadequacies of current evaluation systems – there are gaps between what is defined as good teaching, how faculty members are assessed, and how they are rewarded (or not) for their work in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Student evaluations are ineffective tools to assess teachers. Educators must be given the opportunity to show their work and achievements and to develop a rich community of support, but they also must be evaluated in various formats to provide the best learning opportunities for students.

Defining Scholarship

The expectations placed upon educators by administrators and students is a multifaceted beast; Pat Hutchings, first author of *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered*, defines it as follows in the chapter titled “Valuing – and Evaluating – Teaching”: “The scholarship of teaching and learning encompasses a broad set of practices that engage teachers in looking closely and critically at student learning in order to improve their own courses and programs, and to share insights with other educators who can evaluate and build on their efforts” (2011, p. xix). Although teaching is often thought of as consisting solely of the interaction between a teacher and students, much more is involved. Teaching well at any level of education requires exorbitant amounts of time, effort, commitment, and personal investment: Teachers must have a proficient knowledge of their subject field, base their lessons on effective teaching methodology, prepare course content, assess student learning, reflect upon past and current lessons taught, research and learn new theories and practices for teaching, and be closely involved in the institution in which he or she is teaching. Educators must do all of this and more, while being subject to formal evaluations from administration and students by which they will reap the consequences or rewards. Hutchings points out, though, that “there remains a troubling gap between rhetoric about teaching's value and the realities of teaching's recognition and reward” (2011, p. 87). The bridge between the gap lies in better defining the true goals of education and how to properly assess whether or not educators are living up to those demands.

Faculty Evaluations: My View as a Student and Future Educator

As an English education major and future educator, I have studied and applied the idea of the scholarship of teaching and learning to the academic and professional aspects of my life – these includes the reality and importance of evaluations to which I will be subject. Where faculty evaluations currently stand, there is a strong emphasis on higher education teachers being recognized and rewarded for outstanding scholarly research, student achievement, and student evaluations. However, Hutchings finds fault with this approach: “The issues of surrounding recognition and reward are complicated by the variety of activities that the scholarship of teaching and learning can involve...think of this work as a continuum, with phases (and products) pertaining to each of the familiar faculty roles in teaching, service (to the institution or profession), and research” (2011, p. 88). The world of teaching encompasses multiple facets that are difficult or impossible to evaluate using the current standards of measurement.

Hutchings cites several common examples of evaluations in use, including personal statements or self-evaluations, peer reviews of teaching materials, and peer evaluations of classroom teaching (2011, p. 99-100). While these methods of assessment could prove to be useful, they do not fully assess an educator's scholarship of teaching and learning as a whole and are therefore inaccurate if the sole basis of evaluation. Hutchings states that "This persistent theme – that teaching evaluation has simply not been up to the job – may reflect faculty dissatisfaction with what many see as an overreliance on the quantified measurements (and distinctions in performance) allowed by student evaluations" (2011, p. 100). More must be done to give educators a better method of evaluation that does not rely on public opinion.

It is true that student evaluations are an inadequate method of assessing a teacher's effectiveness and performance in the classroom, aside from the fact that such evaluations do not address the service and research aspects of the scholarship of teaching and learning discussed by Hutchings et al. These student evaluations can come in various formats, but the types that I have experienced have consisted of surface-level questions addressing various aspects of the professor's teaching, the course, and areas available for student comments and feedback. The first problem with these types of student evaluations is that they are useless when evaluating a professor with tenure. Let me speak from personal experience: the faculty member could have been unorganized, unreliable, biased, and ineffective, but he or she continued to teach the same courses semester after semester, allowing students and the teacher to slip through the system. The same evaluations can reap rewards (if heavily based on student response) for other faculty members in a grossly unbalanced way – the professor who wins the popularity contest with students vs. the less popular, strict professor who requires responsibility and quality work from students. For example, a professor under whom I have studied was promoted; it was well-known among students that this faculty member regularly canceled class, gave open-book group exams, required very little effort from students throughout the course, and yet came highly recommended. On the other hand, professors who have required more effort and responsibility of their students were evaluated harshly simply because students did not desire to produce the work needed to succeed; many of these faculty members remained as adjunct or part-time professors and were not adequately evaluated under this assessment.

What Evaluations Should Do and Become

It is clear that current evaluation systems cannot fully and properly assess the level and continuity of the scholarship of teaching and learning. In fact, Hutchings et al. state that an increasing "desire to represent richer views of teaching than student course evaluations can afford is widespread across U.S. higher education today" (2011, p. 100). But how should these evaluations be constructed in order to more accurately portray this information? The duties of a teacher should be assessed in their entirety according to what he or she is expected to do as a member of the faculty, and not be based solely upon student reviews of classroom performance. The most effective evaluation of a teacher's scholarship of teaching and learning is holistic in its approach: "In other words, work is scholarly to the extent that it exhibits clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique – characteristics that can also be used as guides for documentation and standards for evaluation" (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 91). With this type of approach, teacher evaluations would gather information pertinent to the wider scope of an educator's performance while still holding specific areas of accountability.

One suggestion offered in the text is that of the "course portfolio," which would be used "to assess student learning and allow faculty to make 'midcourse corrections'" (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 101). This method of evaluation, described by Hutchins, is an effective way "to create a genre that would allow faculty to

improve their courses based on critique and conversation about the materials with colleagues, learn from each other's experiences in more systematic ways, and provide a platform for further work in the scholarship of teaching and learning" (2011, p. 101). This approach would be similar to certain teacher education course requirements that I have been required to complete as an English education student. In teaching-methods courses, students must provide numerous examples of teaching materials – grading rubrics, unit themes, lesson plans, rationales, etc. – to professors; in turn, the teachers that grade these assignments are able to appropriately and effectively assess student knowledge and application of the given topic. We must prepare lesson plans in many circumstances; our performance and methods are evaluated by the professors. Education majors must also partake in sixty hours of field experience (also known as time inside a real classroom with actual students) before our semester of student teaching; again, we are evaluated by the teacher whose room we have invaded. In addition, in order to obtain our teaching certificates, all education majors must complete an "e-portfolio" – an example of our best and most crucial work involving field-specific artifacts. These examples are not so different from those that professors would be required to complete in the course portfolio.

But what would be the purpose of the course portfolio? It would not only be to ensure that the educator is attempting to do the work that he or she is expected to do, but it would also provide an avenue by which to develop and maintain an enriching community of administrators and fellow faculty members. Through the course portfolio, constructive criticism and thoughtful suggestions or ideas would prove to be beneficial for all parties involved. Hutchings encourages this idea: "Such guidance is critical: the best portfolio in the world will not be useful unless colleagues read it and know how to discern levels of quality in the work" (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 101). The course portfolio should by no means be the only way by which educators are evaluated, for it provides no opportunity for real-time observations; nor should the importance of the portfolio be placed above the actual scholarship of teaching and learning – it should provide a concise and comprehensive view of a faculty member's work and accomplishments, but it cannot and should not assess every aspect of a teacher's job. The course portfolio would require a significant amount of time and effort on the faculty member's part, and it is possible that the evaluation process could be lengthened with this method of assessment. Much training and staff development would be needed in order for the course portfolio – or any evaluation like it – to be effective and meaningful, but professors must be given a way to show that they know how to properly explain and demonstrate the chosen teaching methods and reflect on whether or not these are useful for maximum student learning. Hutchings (2011) understands both the amount of effort that this method of evaluation would require as well as its degree of importance:

More important, this approach to evaluation would invite all faculty to regard teaching as an occasion for inquiry into learning, for becoming familiar with the relevant pedagogical literature, for finding colleagues to work with, and for joining a community that can understand, evaluate, and support their contributions. Clearly, though, moving in this direction will require a comprehensive undertaking, one in which all who care about learning in higher education have critical roles to play (p. 104).

The best professors do the above on a regular basis and of their own accord; they surely know the value of such work and reflection and deem it as critical to their practice.

This could be why the English education department at UCO (and I assume many other education departments) becomes a closely-knit group of people – as future educators who have learned numerous methods, theories, pedagogies, strategies, etc., we often seek new ways of learning or presenting what we have learned. It is not uncommon for education students to frequently rely on

peers to “understand, evaluate, and support” our methods and decisions in the preparation of our lessons and teaching assignments. We constantly seek constructive criticism from others that know the requirements of our field. The majority of education majors fully embrace the fact that each of us can continually work toward becoming a better teacher, simply because we understand that the quality of our teaching directly affects the students in our classrooms for years to come. Why would educators within colleges and universities not desire to do the same? Figuring out an in-depth, comprehensive evaluation for educators is crucial to the ensure the proper, full assessment of faculty members – the students deserve to have the best professors as their teachers and mentors, and the professors deserve to have fair evaluations and rewards.

Solution and Resolution

What is the solution? Administrators and students – anyone in the position of evaluating a teacher – must look at the complete teaching repertoire that includes the three elements of the scholarship of teaching and learning: teaching, service, and research (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 88). Similar to education majors during student teaching, faculty members must be evaluated in the classroom over the course of the term, and given constructive criticism and opportunities by administrators to improve pedagogical application. This will take time and money, of course, but it must be done. If we require these things of teachers in public education, why should not professors who teach those future educators be held to the same evaluation and performance standards? This is not to say that the entirety of a professor's recognition should come from the classroom – that is only a fraction of what it takes to be a teacher. Evaluators must value teaching and the scholarship that it entails, as well as redefine what it means to become proficient in all areas of the scholarship of teaching, if the worthy educators are to be valued and rewarded as they should be. Those who evaluate the teachers of the world must strive to provide them with adequate support and recognition, for the educators hold the key to a successful future for their students.

Reference

Hutchings, P., Huber, M.T., & Ciccone, A. (2011). *The scholarship of teaching and learning reconsidered*. Stanford, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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