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The Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS): Evaluating Music Teachers' Classroom Effectiveness

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Abstract: Our educational system has progressed over several centuries of human development. Everything we do changes regularly, including teaching styles, philosophies of educational approaches and the technologies that we use in schools. In a similar manner, systems and procedures for assessing and evaluating teacher effectiveness have evolved. Because public schools continue to go through so many changes, a better understanding of current assessment procedures is needed in order to prepare those wishing to serve in that capacity so that they can improve teacher effectiveness. Through assessment procedures, principals, who are often observers, must recognize the development of teachers and always be ready to show them new ways of educating students. Implicitly, their decision-making should lead teachers into the future. One motivator in the decision-making process should always be what is best for students. With this concern in mind, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the efficacy of the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) in specific relation to the assessment of classroom effectiveness of music teachers. This paper will highlight some of the problems and concerns of the PDAS in evaluating music teachers' classroom effectiveness. Finally, some recommendations will be discussed which might make PDAS more valuable to the field of music education, such that we might better evaluate our music teachers' effectiveness for the professional development of our teachers and, thus, our profession.

Key words: Administration · evaluation · music education · teacher`s effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important goals of today's school observers is to provide teachers with the support they need to become better educators [1]. Observers must also be mentors; they must help teachers develop their professional skills and guide them in their teaching approaches [2-5]. The practice of observation is designed to improve teachers' classroom performance. Therefore, it may be defined as a *performance* intended to increase teachers' effectiveness in the classroom [6]. Observers obtain their principal data from the events of the classroom; they focus primarily on the performance of the teacher. Analyses of this data affect the basis of the school program, procedures and strategies in order to improve students' learning by improving the teacher [7, 8]. The emphasis is on *improved teacher performance*. Once teachers have been selected and hired, they must know that the principal is there to support them and help them improve their teaching skills. One responsibility of the observer is to ensure that the teachers working in their school system are the best teachers possible. Another is to ensure that they are working to the best of their ability. Thus, the observers' role is supportive, rather than critical.

This simply means that observers must engage teachers (as well as themselves) in a never-ending process of improvement which includes keeping up with current changes in teaching styles and curriculum development. As Harvey and Larry [9] stated, "Coaching is not an option for school leaders but a basic function, along with counseling, mentoring, tutoring, confronting and supporting. All of these will increase the commitment to quality and productivity" (p.9). Moreover, Pool [10] stressed that "a problem is not necessarily something negative, it is only the difference between what is and what is desired to be" (p. 271).

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Principals must be willing to set an example for teachers by showing that they are also willing to make changes in the way that they do things. In successful coaching, observers or supervisors should stay focused on what can be described objectively: plans, actions and events. Some studies [11-18] suggest that an effective coach must define what will be done and when. They also argued that if a coach's primary task is to create commitment and to focus on employees, the coach must have a clear idea of what commitment is and what contributes to it in different realms. A commitment to superior performance is a function of clarity, competence, influence and appreciation [19]. People work best when they believe that what they are doing matters to someone else – perhaps especially if it matters to their boss. According to Schwarz [20] and McGovern *et al.* [21], coaching does not fail because of poorly endowed and poorly motivated employees; it fails because of poorly trained managers.

What Is PDAS? and How Does It Work?: PDAS has been developed with the idea to assist teachers rather than to criticize their performance. In Texas, school districts have a choice in selecting a method to appraise teachers. They can either use a local teacher appraisal system or PDAS, which is the system recommended by the Texas Teacher-Appraisal System Commissioner of Education. It was developed in 1995 by the Texas Education Agency. According to the Texas Educational Agency (TEA), a majority of schools choose to use PDAS as their evaluation tool. The state level Appraisal Advisory Committee, all professional associations and organized focus groups, including teachers, principals, personal directors and service center training personnel, participated in the creation of the process. Seventy-five teachers and twenty-five administrators joined the field trial to improve the system. Currently, PDAS consists of learner-centered proficiencies that are based on the input of 10,000 teachers in Texas [22].

PDAS requires a minimum of one 45-minute observation, which can take place as per a schedule, or at random. Teachers and appraisers can mutually decide to adjust the length of observations if they see the need. Each observation is scored according to classroom observational data, as well as teachers' responses on self-report forms. After scoring is complete, teachers obtain a written summary of their performance and an appraisal report. The appraiser must set a meeting with the teacher to provide detailed feedback on the teacher's self report-forms, observation summary forms and cumulative data. Teachers whose performance is less than acceptable are given the opportunity to improve their performance through an intervention plan.

The intervention plan is usually prepared and conducted by the appraiser to improve the teacher's effectiveness in the necessary domains (Fig. 1).

PDAS has four objectives: [To] devise a recommended system which fulfills the requirements of law found in Section 21.351, TEC [Texas Education Code][1]; to develop a fair and practical appraisal process which builds upon and makes improvements in the current TTAS [Texas Teachers Appraisal System]; to develop a system which acknowledges and reinforces good teaching practices Texas teachers; and to develop a system which promotes quality professional development among teachers in the state of Texas. (TEA, p. 2)

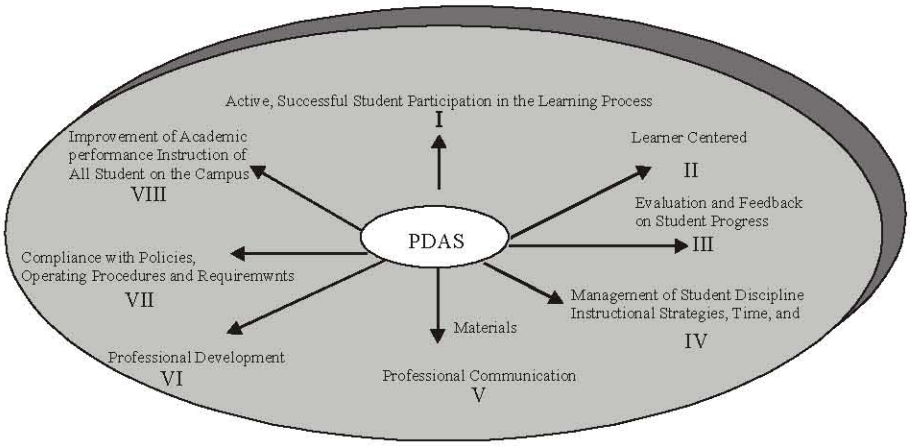

Fig. 1: The Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS): Eight Domains

PDAS extends the techniques that were used in the past to evaluate teachers in classroom settings, such as the Flanders System of Interaction Analysis, the Multidimensional Analysis of Classroom Interaction, the Galloway System, the Bellack System and the Hughes System. It consists of 52 criteria and 8 domains (Fig. 1). The domains are scored in four categories: exceeds expectations (consistently shows evidence, 90-100%), proficient (shows evidence, 80-89%), below expectations (occasionally shows evidence, 50-79%) and unsatisfactory (rarely/never shows evidence, 49% or less). The system was developed not only to evaluate students' success or teachers' effectiveness in the classroom but also teachers' contributions to the school and interaction with their colleagues.

How Does PDAS Succeed in the Evaluation of Music Teachers' Classroom Effectiveness?: Problems and Concerns: With the ever-increasing demand for evaluating music teachers in public education, observers may not be properly equipped to conduct such evaluations. Further, they may not understand all that a music curriculum entails. Consequently, observers may be placed into supervisory positions without a clear understanding of music instruction terminology and/or concepts [23].

In the training process, the PDAS observers attend three full days of training to gain a general idea of how they should use the system in their schools. During the first two days of training, participants go through the history, objectives, implementation, scoring and the intervention plan of the system to understand how it works. The third day of training is divided into two sections. In the first section, participants watch videos of different classroom settings and, as a group, evaluate teachers' performances in the classroom. This process provides trainees with the opportunity to practice what they have learned and exchange ideas with their colleagues. In the second section, the participants take a proficiency exam to become certified PDAS observers.

During the PDAS training, however, examples of all classroom settings are not provided. The focus is primarily on science, mathematics, English literature and history. Observers can participate in any of these classes and analyze the effectiveness of the teacher based on the teacher-student verbal interaction in the classroom. We must realize that music classroom activities and the interaction with students in a music classroom setting are quite unique. These interactions are based more on musical activities and terminology rather than on verbal exchanges typical of, for example, an English literature class. One cannot thoroughly understand the dynamics of the music classroom and the effectiveness of the teacher during the lesson without knowing the meaning of these activities and the musical terms that are used throughout the lesson.

Although PDAS amalgamates most of the general features of an effective teacher, such as teacher-student interaction modes[2], leadership, motivation and class management[3], it does not specify the effective instructional strategies[4] that take place in the music instructional setting. The question then becomes: To what extent can PDAS observers evaluate music teachers if they are not from the same field?

CONCLUSIONS

PDAS must make an effort to stay on top of the needs and developments of music teacher effectiveness within the public education system. Principals must accept the responsibility of being prepared to support and guide their music teacher through challenges that may emerge. It is of utmost importance that principals be not only trained for the general characteristics of effective teachers but also for *the specifics* of each realm, such as music education. Thus, during their training of PDAS, principals must have specific *guidelines on how to observe the instructional strategies in a music classroom.*

Another solution to this problem might be allowing music supervisors as well as the principals to participate in the PDAS observation system. When a music supervisor conducts the PDAS observation to increase the effectiveness of music teachers in the classroom, it brings three main benefits*: awareness, strategic planning and constructive decisions.* Music supervisors' awareness of music teaching strategies could improve the accuracy of teacher effectiveness evaluations. Through strategic planning, music supervisors could support music teachers in formulating their pedagogical styles-perhaps particularly with respect to a specific technological or educational situation. Furthermore, music supervisors, because of their experience in the field, might be more constructive in broadening the decision-making process to shape the music teacher as well as the course content in desirable directions. In this regard, they might develop better scenarios for desirable goals and initiate innovative processes based on these scenarios.

Whether observers decide to specialize in their evaluation field, or whether they decide to use the help of experts from different fields, PDAS must be modified if it

is to serve as an effective evaluation tool in all domains of teaching and learning. Observers must understand that each field requires different educational approaches and, therefore, different ways of assessment. Obviously, it is an enormous task to keep up with all of the required knowledge, styles, philosophies and techniques that are continuously evolving. However, if principals/observers do not show a willingness to stay current, then how can their teachers to do so?

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[1] 21.351. Recommend Appraisal Process and Performance Criteria:

a) The commissioner shall adapt a recommended appraisal process and criteria on which to appraise the performance of teachers. The criteria must be based on observable, job-related behavior, including:

   1) teachers' implementation of disciple management procedures, and
   2) the performance of teachers' student

b) The commissioner shall solicit and consider the advise of teachers in developing the developing appraisal process and performance criteria.
c) Under the recommended appraisal process, an appraiser must be the teacher's supervisor or a person approved by the board of trustees. An appraiser who is a classroom teacher may not appraise the performance of another classroom teacher who teaches at the same school campus at which the appraiser teaches, unless it is impractical because of the number of campuses or unless the appraiser is the chair of a department or grade level whose job description includes classroom observation responsibilities.
d) Under the recommended appraisal process, appraisal for teachers must be detailed by category of professional skill and characteristic and must provide for separate ratings for each category. The appraisal process shall guarantee a conference between the teacher and the appraiser. The conference shall be diagnostic and prescriptive with regard to remediation in overall performance and by category. (TEA, p.19)

[2] Some examples of teacher-student interaction modes are clear instructions, explanations, involvement of students in modeling and problem solving, and variation of student participation (full group, small groups, or individual.

[3] Class management skills include, among others, organizing classroom, preparing materials ahead of time, cultivating positive environment for students, being aware and dealing decisively with inappropriate student behavior, adapting quickly to unanticipated circumstances, varying activities to sustain focused participation.

[4] The followings are considered effective instructional strategies: identifying and diagnosing student musical and technical problems, employing effective tactics that lead to solution of musical/technical problems, setting high standards at an appropriate level of difficulty, conducting with gestures that are precise, and readable, and communicating through musical style.