

REFLECTIONS ON THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION OF TEACHING PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION¹

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University teaching in Ibero America has been increasingly the subject of national and international politics, with efforts to assure high educational quality. There is a clear need for better strategies for the evaluation of teaching. Recent studies at various educational institutions have shown of the assessment of instruction to be weak both theoretically and methodologically. Many efforts at evaluation have been tied to politics. Concern for economic resources and certification processes has exceeded the concern to know, to understand and to obtain appropriate conditions for the improvement of educational practice.

The Ibero-American Researchers Network for the Evaluation of Teaching (RIIED)—after extensive investigation--reaffirms the role of teaching as one of the central agents of educational development and the role of evaluation of instruction as a key support. The contribution of evaluation, however, depends on a focus on formative and permanent improvement. The evaluation of professors is a topic that has facilitated individual, collegiate and institutional reflection about teaching and learning, providing grounds for examination of the complex social relationships that have developed in diverse instructional situations.

The intention of this document is to share some of those reflections with various authorities and constituencies, especially those most directly in charge of evaluation of instruction in higher education, especially the professors and the students. It describes the strong implications and repercussions of this responsibility, indicating that each member of the latter groups contributes to a consolidation or a dismissing of evaluation as a tool to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Likewise, it attempts to contribute to the discussion of this topic within the greater community interested in increasing knowledge of and searching for better conditions to propitiate educational development.

Some aspects and recommendations that may encourage the reflection about the design and implementation of programs for the evaluation of teaching have grouped into the following five categories to explain the complexity of the task and the impact this may have on individuals, institutions and the society in general.

1. POLITICAL DIMENSION OF EVALUATION

1. Evaluation is a social practice with implications for public and private practice and with potential repercussions for the society, institutions and individuals--therefore its political and ethical character should be recognized.
2. The evaluation of teaching should be consistent with institutional philosophy and with other evaluation processes throughout the university. It should be recognized that any program of this nature should move in explicit ways to support achievement of the Institution's mission.
3. The design of evaluation policies should take into account the context of the institution, heeding the necessities and characteristic particular to each institution.
4. Explanation of the purposes and the problems of evaluation of teaching is an indispensable condition for any assessment system, acknowledging that costs and benefits can affect an and all who are involved, designers, those who evaluate and those who are evaluated, and other constituents—thus altering each to guide their actions toward the execution of the agreed-upon goals.

5. It is important to distinguish between two critical functions of evaluation: quality control and improvement of teaching, noting the special use of each. The first is a judgment function to identify merit and shortcoming for administrative control and decision making and the second is a diagnostic and training function leading to improvement of the teaching and learning processes.
6. Involving the different sectors and participants of an educational community-- whether they are administrators, professors or students--is fundamental to all stages of the process, design, starting up, maintenance, and revision. Although the expectations of different actors can be different, even contradictory, presenting great difficulty to reconcile them, the fact that the participants perceive that the program reflects their interests and necessities will constitute a platform for the eventual success.
7. A program for the evaluation of teaching should work toward: participative decision-making (not hierarchical), positive reinforcement (building self-esteem) and pro-active pedagogy (encouraging the self-reflection). In accordance with these attributes, an evaluation program for higher education should guarantee dialogue between the one who evaluates and the evaluated one, on equal terms, taking care of the ethical aspects involved.
8. Evaluation is not a panacea. It possesses no intrinsic characteristics to assure its kindness. It is important to be aware that a dysfunctional evaluation program can have noxious effects in the university community.

2. THEORETICAL DIMENSION

1. The rationale for the teaching model, including for the evaluation of teaching, should help define the concept of teaching quality across the institution. The rationale should be accessible to the whole educational community. Likewise, the evaluation paradigm that is adopted should require consensus of the university community as a whole.
2. Considering the variety of functions required of a faculty member (particularly teaching, research and extension services) and the need to assess more than once each one of them, the parameters and instruments and protocols will differ depending partly on the purpose of that particular assessment.
3. The contributions of the humanities and social sciences, in connection with the complex processes of the education profession, form an indispensable source of knowledge to guide the educational evaluation programs.
4. Evaluation of teaching as a social practice constitutes a fundamental resource for the improvement of educational processes, as long as it is conceptualized as an opportunity to reflect and to question the characteristics that are considered essentials to the experiences of teaching and learning.

3. METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION - PROCEDURAL

1. The antecedents and previous experiences of evaluating teaching at the institution usually provide useful background information. It is advisable to collect this information before beginning or re-launching an educational evaluation program.
2. Previous to design and initiation of a new evaluation program, it is important to consider how teaching and learning have been managed. Evaluators should review the particularities of the educational context, especially regarding the management of the academic and administrative syllabus, the formal and informal definition of duties, and the uniqueness of each professor's specific conditions. Among the considerations are: the disciplinary area, the hiring procedure, the number of hours expected in front of a group, the quantity of subjects to assist, the total number of students, the teaching modality (theory, demonstration, distance education, collaborative projects, laboratory courses, shop, field work. Also it is important to consider the institutional culture, the group norms and values shared by organization members, in particular those related to collegiate and collaborative work.
3. Among the considerations should be the use of different information sources, whether or not they complement each other, recognizing the reaches and the limitations of each of them. They contribute to understanding the complexity of teaching and the specificity of the different educational contexts. Review of these factors exposes the unseemliness of limiting the evaluation of teaching to standardized questionnaires and rating scales.
4. The credibility of the evaluation process in general is an important aspiration. Making explicit and public the evaluation approach can contribute. Likewise, the mode of representation of the results of the evaluation, attending to the interests of the professors and students, can strengthen the trust of all participants in the program.
5. To plan and monitor the application strategies of the evaluation program can contribute to their good development. Among aspects to be resolved would be their obligatory or voluntary character, periodicity, duration, the communication forms and the sense one expects to engage each participant and audience.
6. There should be engagement of an academic team at least in part specialized in program and personnel evaluation. It should operate under institutional conditions that assure the continuity and integrity of the evaluation processes. The team should help consolidate a perspective toward improvement of both evaluation and instruction.

4. USE DIMENSION

1. Some effort should be made to delimit the uses of the results. The design of the program and procedures for collecting the information do not provide information valid for all purposes. The data will be used in ways not intended. Narrowing the expectation is a key factor for achievement of the intended goals. In general, the common administrative expectations are for making decisions such as assignment to courses and for providing economic incentive and promotion. At the same time, the common pedagogical expectation is to improve teaching and educational quality in general. Good data for one do not always work well for other purposes.

In this scenario, clarifying the use of the data and monitoring the problems of misuse are fundamental.

2. A decisive activity in the evaluation process is communication to the professors the results of the evaluations, seeking ways to facilitate the improvement of practice.
3. A promissory horizon might have strategies designed to link the results of evaluation directly to the design of teaching improvement. Current research does not support a mechanical linking of evaluation and improvement, but specialists in professional development and the professors themselves should reflect upon the possible linkages.

5. EVALUATION OF THE EVALUATION DIMENSION

1. Supervision of each one of the phases of the evaluation program (design, implementation, review, revision), is fundamental to the sustained improvement of the program. That supervision should maintain a sensitive attitude to identification differences and disagreements among participants as they arise.
2. Internal and external collegiate communities should participate in the meta-evaluation and improvement of the processes, procedures, indicators and instruments used in the evaluation of teaching.
3. Efforts should be made to develop studies supporting the construction of new theoretical-methodological approaches for the evaluation of teaching. There should be a gathering of testimony as to how evaluation has been carried out in the different institutions. There should be openness to new perspectives and to advancing together in the collective knowledge of one of the most important functions in the educational institutions: teaching and its evaluation. Los cuerpos colegiados internos y externos pueden participar en la valoración y propuestas de mejora de los procesos, procedimientos, indicadores e instrumentos utilizados en la evaluación de la docencia.

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