

# The Inclusion of Classroom-Related Dispositions in Teacher Evaluations

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## Abstract

This paper examines various approaches to evaluating the classroom teacher and discusses the inclusion of dispositions in the evaluation process. A random sample of 150 teachers were asked to complete an online survey focusing on the inclusion of dispositions in their formal evaluations. They were asked to report what specific dispositions were evaluated, and if the specific dispositions were operationally defined. A summary of their responses to the survey items is discussed.

## Keywords

Teacher, Dispositions, Evaluations, K-12, Assessment

In almost every profession, employees are required to undergo a scheduled job-related evaluation; teachers included. Depending on the school district, the teacher evaluation period can range between 12 and 18 months, or longer, with at least annual evaluations for newly hired teachers. Yet not all teacher evaluations focus on the same measures or employ the same evaluation techniques. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education called for evaluations to include information relating to student growth and the inclusion of multiple measures (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Prior to this, many teacher evaluations consisted mainly of classroom observations (Song, Wayne, Garet, Brown & Rickles 2021). These observations frequently included various checklists that the observer (usually a school administrator) would either check off or leave blank depending on what s/he observed. Toch and Rothman (2008) referred to these types of assessments as drive-by observations. These evaluations provide little feedback to the educator, and often leave them wondering if their performance in the classroom is adequate. As Tredway, Militello, & Simon (2021) state “Such approaches are ineffective for changing teacher practice, and principals who continue to use them don’t feel effective in improving teacher practice; there is little focus on maintaining or improving classroom related skills or behaviors observed” (p. 3). In 1996, Brandt reported that both

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principals and teachers are frustrated with conventional evaluation practices that are used for tenure and promotion purposes (Brandt, 1996).

Likewise, Marzano (2012) asserted that teacher evaluation in the past has done very little to produce teacher quality, since “(1) Teacher evaluation systems have not accurately measured teacher quality because they've failed to do a good job of discriminating between effective and ineffective teachers, and (2) teacher evaluation systems have not aided in developing a highly skilled teacher workforce” (p 14). Despite this, these evaluative practices still persist in many schools. Those who oppose these evaluations feel that they provide little motivation for teachers to improve their overall classroom abilities (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

The 2014 Department of Education policy (mentioned just prior) also called for measures of student growth to be included in the overall teacher evaluation procedures. Here, states and districts are required to incorporate information relating to student growth into the overall ratings for teachers. Thus, observations alone were deemed unacceptable. As a result, many states included students' test data, often referred to as Value Added Measures, to supplement teacher evaluations. The general idea of this new approach was to try to link teachers' classroom instruction (among other variables) with students' academic growth. In 2009, only 15 states required objective measures of student growth in teacher evaluations; by 2015 this number increased nearly threefold to 43 states (Jacobs, 2009). This specific approach, however, has been criticized in that it was implemented without solid research or validity studies (Amrein-Beardsley & Holloway, 2017). Despite the serious limitations, this evaluation method has been used to make decisions related to teacher retention, pay increases, and decisions for dismissal (Berliner & Glass, 2014).

Other federal initiatives, such as Race to the Top (RttT) have led to the development of new teacher evaluation measures that include student test performance and enhanced observations (Cannata et al., 2017). Under this initiative, approaches to refining teacher evaluations was a major focus. For example, refined teacher evaluations now included frequent observations for all teachers, numerical scoring, a detailed rubric of instructional expectations, and students' standardized test score data (Derrington & Campbell, 2018). Once again, teachers were evaluated, in part, on the performance of their students in State-wide achievement tests. In Florida, for instance, teachers were rated as either “highly qualified,” “qualified,” “needs improvement,” or “unsatisfactory” based on their evaluations that included student test data (Florida State Senate, 2011).

Finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) allowed local school districts flexibility in developing teacher evaluation approaches which had previously been the responsibility of the federal government. Furthermore, it placed less focus on student growth to determine teacher effectiveness.

Most agree that teacher evaluations should include more than a simple checklist or brief classroom observation. Additionally, formal teacher evaluations are more likely to be a fair measure of teacher performance when based on multiple measures (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011). Zhang (2008) also reported that multiple evaluation methods can be used to validate each other, which in turn increases the validity of the evaluation. He cautions, however, that using peer evaluations can be problematic, in that personal relationships with peers can increase subjectivity leading to a less than accurate evaluation. Adding to this, Maslow & Kelly (2012) recommended three important categories that should be included in all

teacher evaluations: summative, formative, and systemic feedback. In fact, teachers actually prefer an evaluation that includes specific feedback that they can use to make changes as needed in their classroom approaches (Reddy et al., 2017). Finally, Looney (2011) reported that “well-designed teacher evaluation systems, aligned with professional learning and development, can contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching and raise student achievement” (p. 440).

In the past few years, a new area of focus has become an important component in formal teacher evaluations; classroom-related dispositions. This area of focus doesn't key in on student test scores, but what some refer to as soft skills, likened to a Doctor's bedside manner, which includes communication style, empathy, compassion, and developing a positive rapport (Morrow, 2019). Specifically relating to teachers, Rogers (1995) stated that “when a teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the process of how education and learning seem to the student then the likelihood of learning is significantly increased” (p. 157). Also, McAllister & Irvine (2002) reported that teachers who students perceive as empathetic have higher learning outcomes. Furthermore, Marshbank (2017) reported that showing compassion in the classroom (using genuine praise, avoiding humiliating students) is an important component of the overall classroom management plan.

One possible reason for the changes in formal teacher evaluations is that numerous studies have focused specifically on teachers' classroom-related dispositions and their relationship to student learning (Notar, Riley, & Taylor, 2009). Klem & Connell (2004) reported that students who perceive their teachers as caring and fair are more likely to be engaged in classroom activities. They defined engaged as paying attention, staying focused, and doing more than required. These authors also reported that high levels of engagement are associated with higher test scores. Reckmeyer (2019) reported findings from a Gallup study indicating a positive relationship between student engagement and academic achievement in several areas including math and reading. Johnston, Almerico, Henriotte, & Shapiro (2011) reported that a teacher's classroom-related set of dispositions is an important predictor of teaching effectiveness. Sherman (2006) suggested that a teacher's overall classroom approach may be more important than his/her pedagogical skills and knowledge when it comes to student learning. Finally, Ekperi, Onwuka, & Nyejirime, (2019) found a positive relationship between the teacher's attitude and students' academic performance.

Another reason for the changes in the teacher evaluation process relates to the fact that many accreditation agencies now require teacher preparation programs to address classroom-related dispositions. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Professionals (CAEP), the primary national accrediting body for all teacher education programs in the United States requires that teacher education programs assess candidates' dispositions regularly (CAEP 2018), and document that preservice teachers demonstrate various classroom-related dispositions prior to graduation. Likewise, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Core Standards (2021) include several key elements that specifically address dispositions.

A review of the literature provides one with an abundance of terms, definitions, and descriptions of what are considered to be desirable teacher dispositions. Not surprisingly, communication tops the list. According to Hattie (2012), communication in the form of immediate feedback is most effective in enhancing student learning. Notar, Riley, & Taylor

(2012) included enthusiasm, sensitivity, responsibility, commitment, professionalism, skillful preparation, a sense of respect for others, communication, appropriate dress, deportment, and demeanor. Shao & Tamashiro (2013) include sensitivity to student needs, improved attitudes towards learning, and heightened awareness of varied cultural and personal differences. Finally, Jensen, Whiting, & Chapman (2018) list empathy, meekness, social awareness, inclusion, and advocacy in their summary of important classroom-related dispositions. In a study by Gallavan, Peace, and Ryel Thomason (2009), teachers were asked to rate which dispositions they themselves felt were important. They included compassion, honesty, and respect in their responses.

Assessing teachers' classroom-related dispositions can prove problematic in that the assessment of dispositions is not as clear-cut as assessing a teacher's ability to teach academic skills. To further complicate the issue, there are various definitions of dispositions, and lack of agreement regarding which specific classroom dispositions are important and need to be assessed. Additionally, what may be considered important or essential in one classroom may be considered unimportant in another. A special education elementary teacher, for instance, may be expected to demonstrate certain classroom dispositions that might be considered inappropriate for a high school science teacher.

In order to have a valid and reliable assessment of classroom-related dispositions, an operational definition of the specific disposition is essential in order for the observer to determine if it is being displayed or not. However, as Welch, et al. (2010) indicate, there is a lack of operational definitions of behaviors thought to be related to teacher dispositions which in turn limits the observer from obtaining reliable evaluation information. The assessment of "professionalism" for example, might include certain behaviors according to one observer, but not for another. Thus, again, in order to obtain valid and reliable measures of teacher dispositions, specific behaviors need to be identified and operationally defined. Even though many states have established teacher assessment tools aligned with state/regional standards, there are no universal teacher evaluation protocols that include specific operationally defined teacher dispositions; what is expected and assessed during the teacher's evaluation can differ from state to state, county to county, district to district, and even school to school. And as indicated above, classroom-related dispositions are a crucial component of the overall education process and should be included in each and every teacher evaluation.

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

This study focuses on the extent to which classroom-related dispositions are included in teacher evaluations.

The research questions to be investigated include:

1. Are classroom-related dispositions included in teacher evaluations?
2. If classroom-related dispositions are included in the evaluation, specifically what classroom-related dispositions are evaluated?
3. If classroom-related dispositions are included in the evaluation, are they operationally defined?

### **Methods**

#### **Sample**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to data collection. Currently, in Florida, there are seventy-four school districts: one for each of the sixty-seven counties, one each for the four research schools, one for the school for the deaf and blind, one for the virtual school, and one for the youth development center. Out of the seventy-four school districts, four were randomly selected, and of these, three schools were each randomly selected (one elementary, one middle and one high school) yielding 12 randomly selected public schools. From these, teachers' email addresses were compiled from each school's database (email addresses are considered public domain in Florida). Finally, a random sample of 150 teacher email addresses were selected.

The randomly selected teachers were sent an email Fall 2022 inviting them to complete a survey, with the survey link included in the email. A brief discussion regarding the study was included, as well as contact information for any additional questions or concerns they may have relating to the study/survey. Potential participants were also informed that responding to the survey was voluntary and they were guaranteed anonymity.

### **Instrument**

A 19-item OPINIO survey (<https://survey.opinio.net/>) was developed and sent electronically to the randomly selected teachers' email addresses. This survey asked respondents to select their area of teaching (regular education, special education, etc.), indicate how long they have been in the teaching profession, and respond to several items that focused on the assessment of classroom related dispositions that are/are not included in their annual evaluations. Suggested operational definitions of dispositions were included in the survey (Appendix A). A copy of the survey/data summary is included in the appendix section. No identifying information was collected.

## **Results**

### **Response Rate**

Of the 150 randomly selected teachers, 72 responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 48%. Completed OPINIO survey responses were downloaded and entered into the Statistics Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 (IBM Corporation (2019)). Data entry was double checked to ensure accuracy. Additionally, following data entry, frequency statistics were compiled, printed, and compared to the original data to further ensure data-entry accuracy. Results of these data are presented next.

### **Data Analysis**

36.1% of those who responded reported that they currently teach elementary school, 19.4% reported teaching middle school, and 44.4% reported teaching high school. Additionally, 72.2% reported that they teach regular education, 18.1% reported that they teach exceptional education/inclusion, while 9.7% reported that they teach other related areas such as music, art, physical education, or other classroom area.

As for length of time in the teaching profession, 58.3% reported that they have been teaching for over 10 years, 13.9% reported that they have been teaching between 6-10 years, 5.6% reported that they have been teaching between 1– 5 years, while 22.2% reported that

they have been teaching for less than 1 year.

When asked if they are observed (live or virtual) during their formal evaluations, 100% reported “yes”, and again, 100% reported that they have a formal evaluation once every year. When asked if they felt teachers should be evaluated on classroom related dispositions, 80.6% responded yes.

The next section will look at the responses of only those who reported being evaluated on dispositions during their formal evaluations (n = 53, 73.6%). Starting with grade level taught, 41.5% reported teaching elementary school, 11.3% middle school, and 47.2% high school. 84.9% reported teaching regular education, 9.4% ESE/Inclusion, and 5.7% reported teaching music, art, or other related area. As for length of time in the teaching profession, 66% reported they have been teaching for over 10 years, 11.3% between 6 and 10 years, 7.5% between 1 and 5 years, while 15.1% reported that they have been teaching for less than 1 year. All reported to having a formal evaluation yearly and being observed during this evaluation. Table 1 summarizes these data.

Table 1  
*Summary of Responses*

	All Teachers		Teachers reporting that they are evaluated on dispositions	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Grade Level Taught</b>				
Elementary School	26	36.1	22	41.5%
Middle School	14	19.4	6	11.3%
High School	32	44.4	25	47.2%
<b>Area of Instruction</b>	n	%	n	%
Regular Education	52	72.2	45	84.9%
Exceptional Ed/Inclusion	13	18.1	5	9.4%
Other Area (Art/Music/PE)	7	9.7	3	5.7%
<b>Length of Time Teaching</b>	n	%	n	%
< 1 Year	16	22.2	8	15.1%
1 – 5 Years	4	5.6	4	7.5%
6 – 10 Years	10	13.9	6	11.3%
> 10 years	42	58.3	35	66.0%
<b>Should teachers be evaluated on classroom-related dispositions?</b>	YES	NO		
	58	14		
	(80.6%)	(19.4%)		
<b>Are you evaluated on classroom-related dispositions?</b>	53	19		
	(73.6%)	(26.4%)		

Next, the focus will be on specific dispositions that are assessed/evaluated. The summary of these findings are displayed in Table 2. When asked if they were evaluated on Oral Communication Skills, 100.0% replied “yes”; Written Communication Skills, 62.3% responded

“yes”; Appearance, 58.5% responded “yes”, Timeliness, 81.1% responded “yes”, Enthusiasm, 77.4% responded “yes”, With-it-ness, 66.0% responded “yes”, and finally, Collaboration, 100.0% responded “yes”. When asked if the classroom related dispositions (that are part of their formal evaluations) are operationally defined, 49.1% responded “yes”. Finally, the item “Including All Students in the Lessons” (100.0% responded “yes”) may be considered a general component of the lesson structure, however an important teacher-related disposition is the ability to provide unique opportunities for all students to participate and be successful in the classroom. This includes diverse students, including exceptional students and students whose first language is not English. An open-ended survey item asked respondents to list any additional classroom-related dispositions that are assessed as part of their annual evaluations. None of the respondents included anything additional.

Table 2

*Survey Questionnaire and Summary of Data (Those reported being evaluated on dispositions)*

Survey Item	n/% Responded YES	n/% Responded NO
Are ORAL COMMUNICATION skills included in your formal evaluations?	n = 53/100.0%	n = 0/0.0%
Are WRITTEN COMMUNICATION skills included in your formal evaluations?	n = 33/62.3%	n = 20/37.7%
Is APPEARANCE included in your formal evaluations?	n = 31/58.5%	n = 22/41.5%
Is TIMELINESS included in your formal evaluations?	n = 43/81.1%	n = 10/18.9%
Is ENTHUSIASM included in your formal evaluations?	n = 41/77.4%	n = 12/22.6%
Is INCLUDING ALL STUDENTS IN THE LESSON(S) included in your formal evaluations?	n = 53/100.0%	n = 0/0.0 %
Is WITH-IT-NESS included in your formal evaluations?	n = 35/66.0%	n = 18/34%
Is COLLABORATION included in your formal evaluations?	n = 53/100.0%	n = 0/0.0%
Are classroom-related dispositions operationally defined?	n = 26/49.1%	n = 27/50.9%

Further analysis of the data (again only looking at teachers who reported being evaluated on dispositions during their formal evaluations) revealed that respondents who have been teaching longer than 10 years were more likely to be evaluated on appearance ( $\chi^2 = 38.0$ ,  $p < .00$ ), enthusiasm ( $\chi^2 = 33.0$ ,  $p < .00$ ), and with-it-ness ( $\chi^2 = 38.6$ ,  $p < .00$ ). No other statistically significant findings were revealed.

## Discussion

This paper addresses a critical topic in the field of education; that of formal teacher evaluations and the inclusion of classroom related dispositions as part of the overall evaluation. To address the three research questions:

1. Are classroom-related dispositions included in teacher evaluations? 73.6% of those surveyed reported that classroom-related dispositions are, in fact, included in their formal evaluations.
2. If classroom-related dispositions are included in the evaluation, specifically what classroom-related dispositions are evaluated? Several specific classroom-related dispositions were reported by the respondents. The summary of data and the table below describes these dispositions.
3. If classroom-related dispositions are included in the evaluation, are they operationally defined? 49.1% reported that the classroom-related dispositions they are evaluated on are operationally defined.

With greater emphasis and focus on teacher dispositions, it is surprising that less than half of the respondents reported being evaluated on dispositions as part of their annual evaluations. It is possible that teachers are, in fact, evaluated on their dispositions, however, are not aware that the skills/behaviors being evaluated in the classroom are related to teacher dispositions. Additionally, operationally defining the specific dispositions being evaluated is crucial to obtain accurate information. The evaluation of “Communicates Effectively” for example may mean one thing to an evaluator and something completely different to another evaluator. Likewise, assessing the teacher’s appearance may constitute a legal issue, however most schools have a dress code (for both teachers and students). The specific item(s) on the evaluation form related to appearance can directly reflect the dress code.

Interestingly, as reported above, long-term teachers (reported teaching > 10 years) were more likely to be evaluated on appearance, enthusiasm, and with-it-ness. With greater emphasis on disposition assessments in teacher preparation programs (CAEP 2018), it is highly likely that teachers who graduated within the past several years (and teaching less than 5 years) are more aware of the assessment of classroom related dispositions (including appearance and enthusiasm) as compared tenured teachers, since these areas of assessment are an important component of their teacher preparation program.

It is also interesting to note that 18.1% of all those surveyed reported teaching Exceptional Education/Inclusion, yet only 9.4% of these teachers reported being evaluated on classroom-related dispositions. At the same time, 72.2% of all teachers reported teaching Regular Education yet 84.9% reported being evaluated on classroom-related dispositions. Since many ESE/Inclusion teachers provide instruction in the same classroom (yet different area of the classroom) as the regular education teacher, it is possible that the school administrator responsible for the annual evaluations focuses more on the regular teacher’s classroom dispositions. Additionally, many ESE/Inclusion teachers serve as Resource Room teachers, thus the focus of their evaluation(s) is more related to academic progress.

Since the research does indicate that dispositions play a key role in the education process, the inclusion of dispositions in annual teacher evaluations is crucial. In this study, 73.6% of teachers who responded did indicate that they were evaluated on dispositions. Of those, 84.9% reported teaching regular education, and 47.2% teaching high school. It is surprising that only 41.5% of the elementary teachers in this study reported that they are evaluated on dispositions, since elementary teachers provide the foundation for future



learning.

As indicated prior, there are standardized teacher evaluation tools available that assess teacher dispositions, and many states have developed formal evaluation tools or templates that include dispositions in the evaluation protocol aligned with local/state/regional standards. One example is the Framework for Teaching (Daniels Group, 2022). This Framework includes four domains Teaching Responsibility. Included in the domains are classroom environments and approaches to instruction which address general teacher dispositions. A number of states have adopted this framework. Likewise, Almerico, Johnston, Henriott, & Shapiro (2010) developed a teacher disposition evaluation tool which includes a scoring rubric for the various dispositions being assessed. However, again, the tool used for formal teacher evaluations often differs from district to district, and state to state.

### **Study Limitations**

It should be noted that the sample of teachers in this study were employed in a limited number of specific school districts in Florida. Thus, the findings might be different if teachers from other districts/states were surveyed. And even though there was a response rate of 48%, it is possible that those who did not complete the survey would respond differently than those who replied.

In thinking ahead, since the data collected for this study focused only on classroom teachers, it would be interesting to survey school principals (or the administrator responsible for the teacher evaluations) to determine if they feel that disposition assessments are important in teacher evaluations and include specific teacher dispositions as part of the evaluation process. Likewise, the survey could query specific dispositions that are assessed, and if the dispositions are operationally defined. Additional research could also focus on specific operationally defined dispositions for teachers at different grade levels. For example, is communication more important at the elementary level as compared to high school? Finally, what are the end results of the teacher evaluations that include dispositions? Based on the evaluation, are teachers more aware of their own dispositions and/or likely to make changes to improve the overall learning environment? Again, research clearly indicates that the teacher's dispositions play a key role in learning thus need to be an important part of the teacher evaluation process.

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## Appendix A

### *Examples of Operational Definitions of Dispositions*

#### Communication (Oral/Written)

Greets students as they enter the classroom  
Communicates effectively using Standard English or Language of student/parent  
Uses oral communication skills based on the age/grade level of the learner  
Delivers classroom lessons enthusiastically, in an upbeat manner  
Delivers verbal rewards in an enthusiastic manner  
Uses a firm, yet not punitive tone when reprimanding students  
Provides positive written comments to students on graded work  
Written work is completed with correct grammar/spelling  
Accepts and applies written feedback from others to improve his/her teaching skills  
Hand-written materials are legible  
Uses correct grammar/spelling when communicating with parents/guardian

#### Timeliness

Arrives punctually to work and is ready to begin the class when students arrive  
Grades student work in a timely manner within xxxx days  
Comes to work prepared to teach the daily classroom lessons  
Responds to administration queries/email within xxxxx days  
Responds to parent queries/email within xxxxx days

#### Collaboration

Willingly collaborates with others relating to school wide initiatives including serving on school-wide committees  
Partners with parents to enhance the overall learning experiences for their child(ren)  
Team teaches effectively with other professionals in the classroom

#### Appearance

Dresses in a professional manner when teaching or attending school/work related events  
Complies with the school/district dress code

#### With-it-ness

You know what is occurring in your classroom at all times (even when you are not in your classroom)  
Eyes in the back of your head