

Editor and Section Editor's Perspective Article: A Look at the Danielson Framework for Teacher Evaluation

Brian R. Evans
Pace University
bevans@pace.edu

Fran Wills
Putnam Valley Central School District
frangwills@gmail.com

Megan Moretti
Pace University
meganannmoretti@gmail.com

Abstract

In this age of teacher accountability, school districts are increasingly interested in using the best possible methods in evaluating their teachers. This interest impacts new alternative certification teachers, as well as traditional teachers. An increasingly popular assessment is the Danielson Framework, which is a set of 22 components of instruction that measure teacher effectiveness under four domains: Planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson, 2014a). In this article, the editor, section editor, and editor's graduate student give background on the Danielson Framework and interviewed 12 alternative certification teachers in New York City to understand the perceptions of new alternative certification teachers.

Keywords: alternative certification, Danielson Framework, teacher accountability

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Please contact the first author for all correspondence regarding the content of this article.

The Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching is a set of 22 components of instruction that are aligned to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards and measure teacher effectiveness. The components are categorized under four domains: Planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities (Danielson Group, 2014a). The framework was developed by Charlotte Danielson, an educational consultant and former teacher and administrator with expertise in teacher effectiveness and design of teacher evaluation systems (Danielson Group, 2014b). The Danielson Group is an organization that seeks to help the education community understand and apply the Danielson Framework for Teaching, promotes the framework to be used by schools and districts in professional development, and elevate professional practices that have a positive impact on student achievement (Danielson Group, 2014c).

A pressing concern about teacher evaluation is that many current evaluation systems are not complex enough to capture effective teaching accurately and do not support consistency among evaluators (Danielson, 2010; Johnson, 2012). Johnson (2012) said that while teacher contracts may call for careful evaluation, in practice this process is not implemented in a deliberate and meaningful manner. Danielson (2010) emphasized that it is first important to define good teaching before evaluation. By applying research on effective instruction to define good teaching, Danielson created an evidence-based framework for teaching. The framework can then be used as a rubric to evaluate teaching. Danielson (2010) emphasized that two important variables for successful evaluation of good teaching are well trained evaluators and time allowed for meaningful observations and professional conversations about teaching practice. Further, McClellan (2012) advocated for the use of video of exemplar lessons to guide the preparation of evaluators in using teacher effectiveness instruments.

Johnson (2012) advocated that teacher evaluation must be more than just the summation of student test scores and performance on standardized examinations. Under the current climate of accountability in the schools, student achievement alone, unfortunately, becomes the focus of teacher evaluation. A more robust measure of teacher quality is a complex set of components that truly measure teacher effectiveness and are used by teacher evaluators in a meaningful and substantial manner. Moreover, a substantive measure allows for authentic professional growth.

Hattie's (2011) meta-analysis of 900 meta-analyses of over 50,000 research studies on effective instruction had the goal of optimizing the impact on learning. The message from Hattie's (2011) research is that the strategies that influence instruction are founded on "intellectual quality questions" (Hattie, 2011, p. 90) that build on high expectations, rigor, higher order thinking and critical analysis, challenging student thinking, and on the supportive classroom environments that "focuses feedback on the task and not the learner," (Shute, 2008, as cited in Hattie, 2011, p. 136) indicating "what the student did well or where the student went wrong" (Hattie, 2011, p. 129) with prompts that lead the student to their thinking that results in a successful response.

Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) conducted the Excellence in Teaching Pilot to test the new Danielson Framework for Teaching implementation in Chicago schools. They found the framework to be an improvement to the former system of measurement of teacher effectiveness. It was further found that the ratings from classroom observation were valid and reliable measures of teacher effectiveness, which was because teachers who had the highest scores on the

framework had students with the largest test score gains and observers who rated the same lessons several times had the same ratings over time, providing evidence of reliability. Participants found the teacher conferences to be reflective and objective in order to assist teacher growth. It was also found that over half of the participants were engaged in the new framework.

In New York, where the authors live and work, the New York State Education Department approved the Danielson Framework for Teaching in 2011 as one of the accepted assessment models for evaluating teacher effectiveness aligned with the New York State Teaching Standards (“New York State Education Department Approves,” 2011). While many districts in New York had already adopted Danielson’s Framework for Teaching to measure teacher effectiveness, all districts in the state were required to update their evaluation system for the 2012/2013 school year (“New York State Education Department Approves,” 2011). School leaders in New York City critically analyzed what quality teaching should be for the 2012/2013 school year by integrating Danielson’s Framework for Teaching into their evaluation process (New York City Department of Education, 2012).

The Danielson Framework for Teaching establishes more detailed descriptions of effective teaching practice than earlier publications of the model and introduces “critical attributes” for each component as well as “exemplars” to provide additional guidance to teachers and observers. The more detailed description of behaviors with demonstrated effective strategies results in improved learning outcomes and provides more clarity to a training protocol that supports teacher development. The Danielson Framework honors the complexity of the teaching act by deconstructing the effective strategies in a way that supports professional practice through rich description of performance attributes.

New Alternative Certification Teacher Views on the Danielson Framework

In order to help the authors begin to understand the perceptions alternative certification teachers have about the Danielson Framework at the authors’ university, the authors interviewed six teachers in an elementary mathematics methods class and six teachers in a special education class at the partnering university with the New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF) program. The teachers were selected through volunteering for the interviews. The purpose was to serve as a case study and catalyst for understanding how alternative certification teachers at the authors’ institution perceive the Danielson Framework. All twelve teachers were enrolled in a master’s program at the partner university in New York City and were teaching in New York City public schools. The NYCTF program is an alternative certification program in New York City that began in 2000 to address teacher shortages in high need subject areas. The purpose of the NYCTF program is to prepare “a critical mass of exceptional teachers committed to a better future for the NYC students who need them most” (NYCTF, 2014a, para. 1). Teaching Fellows work in “80 percent of New York City’s 1,800 public schools and represent 12 percent of the city’s active teaching force” (NYCTF, 2014b, para. 2).

Out of the twelve teachers interviewed, six taught general education, four taught childhood special education, and two taught adolescent special education. In regard to teaching experience, five teachers were currently in their first year of teaching, four were in their second year of teaching, and three teachers had two or more years of experience.

Interviews were conducted by phone and consisted of five questions:

- How long have you been a teacher?
- Are you currently in or have you been in an alternative certification program?
- In a few sentences, what do you know about the Danielson Framework?
- What is your opinion on the Danielson Framework? Is it a good thing?
- What is your opinion on teacher evaluation?

Teachers' responses to interview questions were recorded and subsequently analyzed to find common themes, similarities, and differences. It was found that all twelve teachers had a basic understanding of the purpose and process of the Danielson Framework. Nine teachers explained that the Danielson Framework was a teacher evaluation system, involving teacher observation in conjunction with a rubric, with the goal of assessing effective teacher performance. Of the 12 teachers, two had a more in-depth knowledge of the framework, citing components such as classroom environment, planning and preparation, and professionalism.

There were mixed opinions on whether teachers thought the Danielson Framework was good or not. Two teachers expressed they did not think the framework was good. One teacher felt it was too subjective while the other felt performance evaluations really depended on the teacher and their teaching style. Ten teachers acknowledged the Danielson Framework was, or had the potential to be, a good rubric. Each of these 10 teachers, however, mentioned drawbacks of the framework. Four teachers indicated the Danielson Framework was ineffective when assessing teachers of special education students. They all disagreed with being evaluated on certain components, such as higher order thinking, questioning and engaging, and lively class discussions, in their classroom because they felt this was not always possible with their student populations. Two of these four teachers mentioned the framework might be effective for general education classrooms, but certain considerations should be taken into account for evaluating special education teachers. Six teachers mentioned problems with implementing the framework. Five of these questioned the ability to effectively evaluate teacher performance in such a short observation time while one teacher expressed concern about the subjectivity of the observations. These teachers acknowledged the importance of a quality, common rubric. However, they questioned how it was being used and how a single subjective observer could make effective objective evaluations on a lengthy list of components in a short period of time.

When asked about their opinions on teacher evaluation, nine of the 12 teachers acknowledged teacher evaluation was necessary. Two of these teachers stated the importance of having a unified, consistent teacher evaluation system working toward the same goal. Three teachers said teacher evaluations should be used as a way to provide feedback so teachers can continuously improve and develop professionally.

Many of the teachers voiced their concerns, however, about teacher evaluation. Two teachers mentioned the stress and pressure accompanying teacher observations. One teacher felt there should be some flexibility on evaluations for new teachers, citing the anxiety associated with being evaluated on standards she is learning about as she goes along. Another teacher mentioned there should be a process for acquainting new teachers with evaluation systems and better effort in ensuring everyone is trained on the Danielson Framework. Additionally, two teachers felt

teacher evaluations could potentially stifle creativity in the classroom; one of these teachers mentioned she thinks creativity might not be viewed by administrators as rigorous and thus, refrains from doing certain activities. The other teacher mentioned that teachers have different teaching styles and are just as diverse as their students. Administrators performing observations and evaluations, however, may not appreciate these different styles if they are not in line with the framework.

Three teachers expressed need for flexibility when observing teachers with children in crises. All three teachers were concerned with having students in crises when an administrator came to observe them. They feared this would become a reflection of their performance and negatively influence their evaluation results. One of these three teachers expressed hope an administrator would not blame the teacher for having students in crises. Another teacher expressed concerns that the observer may have little to no previous knowledge of his students. This teacher was worried an administrator might give him a negative performance evaluation without being aware of the student situations when the class began, how the students improved, and the students' behavior and academic progress prior to the evaluation. The last of these teachers expressed fear that having students in crisis would hinder her opportunity to show her teaching abilities. Although she felt she could be evaluated on her professional handling of the situation, she felt administrators should be flexible and return for additional observations.

Conclusions and Implications

In the age of teacher accountability we are likely to see increased emphasis on teacher evaluation with interest in valid and reliable means to determine classroom teacher quality. Currently the Danielson Framework is a widely accepted instrument to assist administrators, teachers, and parents in determining teacher quality in the classroom. However, we must be cautious to acknowledge the limitations of using a single instrument to determine teaching quality. Clearly, other variables, such as student achievement, affective variables, and demonstrated creativity, for example, will present a fuller picture of teacher classroom productivity.

It seems clear that from the small sample of teachers who volunteered to be interviewed at the authors' university, the teachers were generally fairly knowledgeable about the Danielson Framework, but teachers had some reservations on how decisions would be made based upon the information gathered from the framework. While it seems the Danielson Framework takes teacher quality and evaluation in a suitable direction in regard to accountability, caution is needed for the interpretation of results gathered from the framework.

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