

Book Review

What Really Matters when Evaluating teachers? Lessons from Successful Education Systems

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Linda Darling-Hammond (2013). **Getting teacher evaluation right: what really matters for effectiveness and improvement.** New York: Teachers College Press, 178 pages.

Teacher evaluation is an area that has emerged rather abruptly in the field of educational research. The philosophy behind teacher evaluation policies, the way these evaluations are implemented and the conclusions drawn from their results have a growing impact on education policy-making, teacher culture and the operation of the school system as a whole. Chile has by no means been a stranger to this issue. The last decade, marked by changes to the *DocenteMás* teacher evaluation as well as the implementation of the *Inicia* test for graduates of education programs, speaks to how crucial having good quality teachers is for the future of Chilean education. The renowned professor Linda Darling-Hammond, of the School of Education at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, has contributed to the discussion with her holistic model of teacher evaluation, which could help shed some light on the current and future situation of teacher evaluation in Chile.

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Getting teacher evaluation right: what really matters for effectiveness and improvement is the result of Darling-Hammond's long career in the United States education system. Her experience has led her to approach teachers not just as problems in the system, but as the main protagonists of educational change. As a school teacher in Camden, New Jersey, which has one of the highest concentrations of violence and vulnerability in the United States, she saw the impact that good and a bad teacher could have on the daily lives of the country's poor. As a professor of education policy and teacher education at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York and later at Stanford, she has led the way in studying the best and worst teacher evaluation practices. As the education advisor to Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, and with her name echoing to this day as candidate for Secretary of Education of the United States, she has been able to gain a perspective from within the political system on what is necessary and what is superfluous in teacher evaluation when it comes to addressing the interests of society as a whole. It is this professional and life experience that forms the backdrop for her work.

Darling-Hammond qualitatively analyzes teacher evaluation models in different U.S. states, while drawing on examples from different educational systems worldwide. She considers the lack of consistency and clarity in the standards of good teaching practices, the lack of emphasis on improving practices, the limited time and human resources for evaluation, the little or complete lack of consideration of student results and the failure to use teacher evaluations to help teachers with their specific learning needs as constituting the core of why teacher evaluations ultimately do not improve the quality of education in education systems. Before turning to her proposal, the author proposes a definition of *teacher quality*, understanding that without this it will be difficult to move forward in improving the quality of education and the education system as a whole. This definition is based upon genuine knowledge and command of the subject matter, an understanding of the way the learners develop, the general skills needed to organize and present ideas, the ability to handle prejudices in diverse environments and a collaborative attitude towards other teachers.

Her proposed systematic approach to teacher evaluation and support is explained with order and clarity. Each chapter of the book addresses one of the steps in the systematic approach: i. Constructing comprehensive statewide standards; ii. Performance evaluation based on the standards; iii. Local assessment based on the same standards; iv. Appropriate support from qualified evaluators and mentors; v. Professional learning opportunities to improve teaching quality. Testimonials from teachers on their experiences with teacher evaluation systems and summary boxes that highlight the most important elements of each chapter make this academic text easy to follow.

The way that Darling-Hammond presents this systematic approach, indicating that its purpose is to address evaluation and support for teachers, is significant. By recognizing that evaluation should support the teachers themselves, she launches a frontal attack on the many forms of evaluation that, rather than helping, end up strangling the teaching profession and, in its wake, the status of education programs, the quality of education, the credibility of the education system and the dreams of students and their families.

With the aim of reversing the detrimental dynamics of many educational systems around the world, in the epilogue the author offers her readers some criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher evaluation systems of which they are a part. Some of these criteria emphasize the importance of multidimensionality in evaluation, incorporating teaching practice, student learning and professional contributions. Others stress teacher collaboration in the evaluation process, as assistants and reviewers, for example. Interestingly, some parts of Professor Darling-Hammond's approach have become a part of the reality of teacher evaluation in Chile. Certainly the changes to the *DocenteMás* teacher evaluation, with its self-evaluation aspects, peer evaluator interview, third-party reference report and portfolio, support this multidimensional outlook. However, the teacher collaboration element could be more fully incorporated and promoted in Chile for a more complete evaluation.

Taking the book's global perspective into account, but particularly focusing on the case of the United States, which serves as the basis for Darling-Hammond's reflections, it is important to consider the similarities of Chile's structural problems with those of the U.S. With the U.S.'s high levels of segregation in schooling, the failure of its teaching profession to attract academic talent, and its crisis in quality public education for the poor, observing the United States and the teacher evaluation proposal analyzed in this context can be a great help for Chile. Common problems can lead to common solutions. Finding these solutions is not just a job for education professionals, but rather for everyone, as Darling-Hammond notes

at the end of the book: “The model offered throughout this book... can provide assistance to districts, states, teachers and teachers’ unions to begin to build systems that can combine evaluation, the development of the teaching profession and collective learning to sustain and support a teaching force that grows in know-how, retains its best teachers and improves or expels those who cannot teach effectively” (p. 152).