Teacher perceptions of the Ontario teacher performance appraisal (TPA) system

What is this research about?
First implemented in 2002, and amended in 2007, the Ontario teacher performance appraisal (TPA) system requires new teachers to be evaluated during their first and second year of teaching, and once every five years subsequently. Evaluations are usually carried out by either the school principal or vice-principal and includes a pre-observation meeting to review teachers’ annual learning plans (ALP), a scheduled classroom observation, and a post-observation meeting to discuss the appraisal results.

This study evaluates the ways in which the original TPA process was implemented in various schools across Ontario and examined teacher perspectives of the affects and implications of the program. In particular, the research was guided by the following research question: What can we learn from teachers’ experiences about the effects, intended and unintended, of the Ontario teacher performance appraisal system?

What you need to know:
This study examined both the ways in which the Ontario teacher performance appraisal (TPA) system have been implemented and teachers’ perceptions of the impacts of the system’s implementation. Overall, the study found that the TPA has been implemented in a variety of ways. Results also indicated that the majority of the 125 teachers in the study perceived their TPA experiences as having negative impacts and unintended consequences.

What did the researcher do?
From 2006 to 2007, 125 teachers completed and returned a paper survey that had been distributed by principals in 40 secondary and 50 elementary schools.
across Ontario. The survey was comprised of one open-ended question which allowed teachers to add their own comments on the TPA and two sections of closed ended questions that asked teachers to answer questions by choosing from a list of predetermined responses. Closed-ended questions asked teachers information about:

1. their background, such as gender, years of teaching experience, number of evaluations undergone, school type (Catholic or public), and level (elementary or secondary);

2. their TPA experiences, such as the impact of the TPA on their relationships with administration, colleagues, and students. As well as their opinions of various aspects of the TPA and how they impacted their professional growth, and their overall rating of their TPA experience.

Interviews were also conducted with 25 teachers from 11 different school boards. These teachers were not part of the original pool of survey participants. Instead, they were recruited through a call for participants sent through Ontario teacher federations. Interviews focused on teachers’ perceptions of how the TPA process had impacted their relationship with their colleagues, administrators and students as well as their opinions of the TPA process in general.

In total, 150 teachers (108 female and 42 males) from 55 secondary and 60 elementary schools across 12 school boards participated in the study. Schools included in this study represented a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural contexts. Teaching experience ranged from 1-32 years with an average of 14 years of teaching experience.

What did the researcher find?

Interview data revealed that the TPA was not implemented in the same manner in all schools:

- pre-observation meetings took on a number of formats including group and one-on-one meetings. ALPs were reviewed in only a handful of cases;

- classroom observations ranged from 30-120 minutes. In some cases, the principal or vice principal took many notes and in other cases, sparse notes were recorded;
- the timing of the post-observation meetings ranged from a few days to three weeks after the classroom observation. In a few cases, there was no post-observation meeting;

- only one-third of teachers reported receiving their evaluation report in a timely fashion.

Survey data also revealed:

- only 8% of teachers felt that the TPA process had positively impacted their relationship with their principal. These teachers had all prepared their ALP in consultation with their principal and reported having a positive relationship with their principal prior to their appraisal;

- 80% of teachers did not feel that they had received the support they expected from their vice/principal during the TPA process;

- Less than 20% of teachers felt that the ALP promoted professional growth;

- less than half of teachers felt that the TPA process had enhanced their sense of themselves as professionals.

Almost half of 150 teachers in the study reported that the TPA was a stressful process. Stressors identified included preparing overly detailed lesson plans, updating daybooks, pressure to demonstrate their competency, and feeling that they were being judged. Teachers were also frustrated by what they perceived as evaluators' reluctance to give exemplary or unsatisfactory ratings.

The researcher concluded that, for the majority of participants in the study, the TPA process had several unintended, negative impacts including undue stress, self-doubt, and the deterioration of teachers' relationship with their evaluators.

**How can you use this research?**
This research points to the complicated nature of implementing teacher evaluation policies. Research findings suggest that administrators may want to be aware of the potential negative impacts of the TPA on teachers and on the relationship that teachers have with their administrators, colleagues, and students. Administrators may also wish to consider the following:
ensuring that TPA practices are consistent and in accordance with the official implementation policies;

• providing teachers with their final reports in a timely fashion;

• beginning the TPA process in a positive manner by addressing teachers’ potential stress and anxiety during pre-observation meetings.

• ensuring the TPA process is as transparent and open as possible through regular discussions with teachers scheduled to be evaluated.

Original article:
To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:


About the researcher:
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About this summary

The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

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