

Title of example of practice: Mentors' assessment of students during school placement

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Institution and initiating department/faculty

(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):

Faculty of teacher education, Umeå university

Departments/faculties in which initiative implemented/to be implemented:

all departments involved in school placement at the university

Abstract

(QA question: What are/were you trying to do?)

At Umeå university a template has been designed that is meant to make the assessment process more transparent and fair. It offers a grid for mentors' discussions with students to ensure that different aspects of teaching, including planning and evaluating teaching, are made the object of reflection. As it is filled out by the mentor before being sent to the teacher educator as part of the grading process it also offers a way of making mentors more equal partners by incorporating their expertise more systematically in the assessment process.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative

(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)

Methods for assessing teacher students during school placement have traditionally varied across departments. Some have observed students' actions in class, others have asked them to hand in different sorts of written assignments, still others have relied entirely on mentors' assessment. In general a combination has been in use.

The variety of methods has been accompanied by an equal variety regarding the object of assessment, i.e. what to observe or grade.

The lack of (verbalised) consensus on methods and objects can pose a risk to justice and transparency. Since assessment criteria have not been made explicit to students they have sometimes questioned grades. Their opportunities for being responsible for their own development have also been limited.

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

Since 2007 all curricula and syllabi for higher education in Sweden list expected learning outcomes as can-do-statements. This template is the first attempt to put these to use also for mentors' assessment of students during school placement.

Learning outcomes are grouped together in the assessment grid around seven themes:

1. The student shows knowledge of national and local documents and is able to interpret and apply these;
2. The student has relevant knowledge of the subject or subject area and is able to combine these with didactic knowledge;
3. The student is able to plan, carry out and evaluate teaching in a way that in accordance with reflected practice and research findings promotes learning;
4. The student is able to track, document and assess pupils' learning and development in relation to goals;
5. The student has an attitude based on the core values of the national curriculum and acts out clear democratic leadership;
6. The student is able to organise teaching from a gender perspective;
7. The student discusses teaching and learning, shows an interest in developing the work-place and its activities and has the ability to rethink his/her own actions and view-points.

Each student is equipped with a copy of the template before each period of school placement. The mentor at school indicates on a line with the endpoints "barely" and "highly", what is applicable to the student and can also give more the student specific comments or advice for further development.

Both the mentor and the student sign the form after it has been filled out and hands it to the university teacher who uses it along with other forms of documents and usually also his/her own observations in the grading process.

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

Initially mentors were unwilling to write down their assessment of students, probably because they felt more observed than before. It was also considered time consuming. After having tried it out once or twice mentors are now more positive. The template is also seen and used as the basis for discussion.

For the student the template makes the grading process more transparent. It also makes visible what is expected of a teacher student and of a teacher.

The benefits for the university teacher are the reduced risks of misunderstanding the mentor's observations and assessment since all is written down.

Some mentors have felt restricted by the set groups, and some have criticised that the groups of learning outcomes are too wide and big for one comment.

The template has only been in use for two semesters and a proper evaluation has not yet been carried out.

Advice to others

It is probably essential to involve school teachers/mentors at an early state in the process when developing an instrument of this kind. Further it should be tried out on a smaller scale in the first instance and possibly revised before implementation.

Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

Compared to other templates for assessing teacher students during teaching practice criteria are in this template brought together in seven groups. Apparently, the groups are too big and thus too abstract in this version. This is a problem when giving advice to students and for grading. It might be an advantage, though, when using the template as the starting point for mentor–student talks.

Further details

e.g. web links; relevant references/publications; alternative contact names

The template can be downloaded from the website of the School of Education. It is only available in Swedish, but also the layout could be of interest:

http://www.use.umu.se/digitalAssets/5/5156_bedomningsunderlag.pdf