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Charlotte Danielson’s Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching
A Step Toward Developing and To Implementing An Effective Assessment of Teaching Skills that is Student Achievement Based

By N. Felland

Introduction

Charlotte Danielson’s Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in 1996, evolved from the Educational Testing Service PRAXIS 111 and is based on the PRAXIS 1111 criteria, augmented to apply to experienced as well as novice teachers and used for purposes beyond licensing of beginning teachers (Danielson, Preface x). The Danielson Framework consists of four domains attributed to teaching activities and responsibilities: Planning and Preparation, the Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. These four domains are clarified through twenty-two components; each component is defined by two or more elements that identify and describe the content of that component.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

Component 1a: Demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy
- Knowledge of content
- Knowledge of prerequisite relationships
- Knowledge of content-related pedagogy

Component 1b: Demonstrating knowledge of students
- Knowledge of characteristics of age group
- Knowledge of students’ varied approaches to learning
- Knowledge of students’ skills and knowledge
- Knowledge of students’ interests and cultural heritage

Component 1c: Selecting instructional goals
- Value
- Clarity
- Suitability for diverse learners
- Balance

Component 1d: Demonstrating knowledge of resources
- Resources for teaching
- Resources for students

Component 1e: Designing coherent instruction
- Learning activities
- Instructional materials and resources
- Instructional groups
- Lesson and unit structure

Component 1f: Assessing student learning
- Congruence with instructional goals
- Criteria and standards
- Use for planning
Domain 2: The classroom environment

Component 2a: Creating an environment of respect and rapport
- Teacher interaction with students
- Student interaction

Component 2b: Establishing a culture for learning
- Importance of the content
- Student pride in work
- Expectations for learning and achievement

Component 2c: Managing classroom procedures
- Management of instructional groups
- Management of transitions
- Management of materials and supplies
- Performance of non-instructional duties
- Supervision of volunteers and paraprofessionals

Component 2d: Managing student behavior
- Expectations
- Monitoring of student behavior
- Response to student misbehavior

Component 2e: Organizing the physical space
- Safety and arrangement of furniture
- Accessibility to learning and use of physical resources

Domain 3: Instruction

Component 3a: Communicating clearly and accurately
- Directions and procedures
- Oral and written language

Component 3b: Using questions and discussion techniques
- Quality of questions
- Discussion techniques
- Student participation

Component 3c: Engaging students in learning
- Representation of content
- Activities and assignments
- Grouping of students
- Instructional materials and resources
- Structure and pacing

Component 3d: Providing feedback to students
- Quality: accurate, substantive, constructive & specific
- Timeliness

Component 3e: Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness
- Lesson adjustment
- Response to students
- Persistence

Domain 4: Professional responsibilities

Component 4a: Reflecting on teaching
- Accuracy
- Use in future teaching

Component 4b: Marinating accurate records
- Student completion records
- Student progress in learning
- Non-instructional records
Component 4c: Communicating with families
   Information about the instructional programs
   Information about the individual students
   Engagement of the families in the instructional program

Component 4d: Contributing to school and district
   Relationship with colleagues
   Service to the school
   Participation in school and district projects

Component a: Growing and developing professionally
   Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skill
   Service to the profession

Component 4f: Showing professionalism
   Service to students
   Advocacy
   Decision-making

Levels of Performance and Documentation

Danielson provides a rationale and an explanation for each element and for assessment purposes, each element is assigned four levels of performance: Unsatisfactory, Basic, Proficient, or Distinguished. Each level is clarified by a descriptor and the assessor can determine the level of the teacher's performance according to the best fit. The text provides detailed examples of what constitutes each level for each component. In order for the assessor to determine the appropriate level of performance for each element, Danielson recommends a variety of documentation avenues that are accessible for the new and the seasoned teacher. Additionally, from the broad domain perspectives, Danielson recommends general data collection and observation practices:

Skills in domain 1 are demonstrated primarily through the plans that teachers prepare to guide the teaching and ultimately through the success of those plans as implemented in the classroom. The plans may be included in a teacher's professional portfolio; the plans' effect must be observed through action in the classroom (see pg 30).

Skills in domain 2 are demonstrated through classroom interaction and captured on paper through interviews with or surveys of students. These skills must be observed in action, either in person or videotape (see page 31).

Skills in domain 3 are demonstrated through classroom interaction, either observing in person or on videotape (see page 32).

Skills in domain 4 are demonstrated through the teacher interactions with colleagues, families, other professionals, and the larger community. Some of the interactions may be documented in logs and placed in a portfolio. It is the interactions themselves, however, that must be observed to indicate the teacher's skill and commitment (see page 33).

The assessor completes the framework for each of the sixty-six elements contained in the four domains and a level of performance for each utilized element is determined. Danielson cautions that if the framework is to be used to evaluate teaching, the applicability and weight of each component and subsequent element must be determined, as all of the components may not apply equally to each teaching situation. Danielson acknowledges that use of the framework would have to conform to any applicable state law or negotiated agreement. The framework or portions thereof can therefore be used as a focus for individual goal setting and data collection as well as for a professional development plan.
Framework's General Applications

Danielson recommends that application of the framework include the following options:
1) To be a professional map
2) To assist the licensure for teachers new to the profession
3) To provide guidance and clarification for experienced teachers
4) To provide a focus for professional practice improvements, and
5) To communicate the duties and responsibilities of teachers to those outside education.

However, Danielson asserts the most powerful use of the framework "and one that should accompany any other use, is for reflection and self-assessment: (p.53). Mentoring, induction, and peer coaching are additional recommended uses of the framework. Danielson recounts a wide range of teacher performance assessment systems currently in use. Among them are individual school or district assessments, individual state approved performance assessments such as in use in many southeastern states, to the widely published standards issued by the interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). In addition, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), and the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are all in current use. She notes, "The standards are intended to guide colleges in the design or redesign of teacher education programs (p.9).

The Framework's Validity and Reliability

In selecting a teacher assessment instrument, the issues of validity and reliability arise. Danielson asserts that the framework is "based upon in developed from a solid research base" (p.12) and indicated that "...some of the research is empirical, that is, grounded in experience, with formal research data to support it. Some...is theoretical, that is. It is not [yet] or cannot be supported by empirical data. In [the lattermost] cases, the framework is based on recommendations from theoretical research on cognition and on practices that are recommended but not yet vigorously tested in the classroom" (p. 21).

In closing on this specific discussion, Danielson indicated that, "the validity of a framework derives from the professional conversations that accompany its instruction into a school or district" (p.12). The reliability of a framework, or any "large-scale assessment" system, is dependant upon training as those who use the instrument must "operate from a common vision and similar definitions of the evaluation criteria" (p. 13). To improve reliability of the framework, Danielson recommends group meetings where the components are discussed, researched and applied through videotapes to achieve the components' operational meaning are expected.

The Framework Assumptions

Constructivism

Danielson proposes that constructivism, emanating from cognitive psychology, is the reigning paradigm for teaching and learning: "Constructivism holds that people's understanding of any concept depends entirely on their mental construction of that concept - that is, their experience in deriving that concept for themselves...The constructivist approach makes explicit that different individuals, depending on their experiences, knowledge and their cognitive structures at the time will understand a given presentation differently" (p. 25). She further explains that the framework for teaching is grounded in the constructivist approach. It assumes the primary goal of education is to engage students in constructing important knowledge and that it is each teacher's responsibility, using the resources at hand, to accomplish that goal.

Unlike the concern that constructivism "is unintentionally undermining the status of the teacher as an adult with knowledge to impart" (Chandler, 2000), Danielson asserts that the instructional agenda is set by the teacher - not by the learners. Danielson does advocate
that the classroom can become a community of learners where students have some independent learning within the instructional agenda or focus. The extent depends upon the age, previous knowledge and the cognitive capabilities of the student.

Purposeful Instructional Decisions

Another assumption of the framework as proposed by Danielson is "instructional decisions are purposeful" (p. 26). Their focus on purpose sets the framework apart from other teaching frameworks. Generally teachers are asked to demonstrate that their students are on-task or that students treat one another with respect. But teachers are rarely asked to explain the reasons for being on-task or for behaving respectfully. Danielson stresses that even instructional practices that are widely considered to be good, such as integrated thematic units, may not have a significant purpose.

The Framework Clarifies Professional Role

Danielson asserts that teaching has historically struggled with its role in the professional world. Aspects of the new paradigm of teaching and learning recognizes the complexity and highly professional nature of that role - working with a "time-clock mentality" prevents teachers as well as others from thinking of teaching as a profession. If it is to be treated as a profession, all the responsibilities and benefits from that status must also apply. The framework offers definition and assessment opportunities as aspects of the teacher's responsibilities (p. 27).

Observation and Commentary

It is clear that Danielson's framework is far more inclusive that other teaching assessments that are currently in use. The uses of the framework are broad - from a thorough assessment of a practitioner's professional practice within and outside of the classroom to targeted use or limited application to providing a list of professional responsibilities for public examination. The focus is teaching responsibilities.

The Framework Implications for Supervisors

The time required to complete the Danielson framework components and assigned elements is not specified. One can reasonably conclude from the skill assessment procedures expected for each domain that the time to complete the framework far exceeds that typically allotted for most teacher professional practice assessments. It is not unusual for each principal / designee to evaluate twenty to thirty teachers per year. If teacher assessments were evenly distributed and within typical contract or state constraints, that number would translate to roughly one assessment per week. In view of the typical principal's duties, adhering to that schedule seems unlikely given the amount of supervisory time presently allotted. Targeted or highly limited use of the framework, as Danielson recommends, is more likely to be usefully applied than adoption of the entire framework.

The cost of implementing the framework in its entirety is also an issue, for the framework implementation depends on training participants. Salaries for individual, school, or district personnel participating as qualified assessors would necessarily be affected by these new responsibilities.

The Framework and Student Achievement

Danielson's framework cannot be viewed as a model steeped in proven instructional practices that advance student learning. The author acknowledges that despite state and district attempts, there is little consensus about what works, and subsequently, little progress has been made in developing concrete curriculum. Assessments of "learning goal achievements are not easily determined or implemented" (p. 23). She notes that "valid and reliable assessment measures are urgently needed for the new generation of instructional goals " (p. 22). Qualitative research has been used ito reach tentative conclusions and is presently the "best we can do" (p. 23). In cases where empirical research has not yet been conducted, the framework derives from "recommendations of
experts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as the most current theoretical literature and writings of leading authorities" (p. 23).

Validity and Reliability

The Danielson framework is limited by the same student achievement validity constraints of current teaching assessments and acknowledges this circumstance but indicates the cause is the dearth of appropriate research. She recommends that the validity is to be derived “from the professional conversations that accompany its introduction into a school or district” (p. 12). We have no assurance that these “professional conversations” will advance validity beyond what is currently being applied.

The reliability of the Danielson framework is dependent upon the training of those who use the instrument. The necessity of an appropriate infrastructure to accommodate this requirement is a prerequisite to any hope of a strong reliability measure.

Concluding Comment

A welcome assumption of Danielson's framework is that focusing the assessment on the teacher's instructional purpose rather than what the students are doing moves the emphasis to what the student is learning, a significant directional turn. In general, Charlotte Danielson is to be commended for her comprehensive framework for teaching. All of the components she stresses address critical aspects of teaching and learning. Her delineation of professional duties is helpful and appropriate in moving teaching closer to a professional status. The Danielson framework coupled with assessment procedures that focuses on student achievement and teacher assessment will do much to advance teaching to the ranks of the professionals. When teachers can be assessed by their effectiveness in meeting their purpose (effectively and efficiently educating their students) as are other professional judged, then the Danielson vision of teacher as professional may be realized.

References


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