
Teacher Perceptions of the Purposes of Staff Appraisal: a response to Kyriacou

STEPHEN BARTLETT

University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT This article explores the views and experiences of 38 staff from three comprehensive schools concerning teacher appraisal. The introduction of appraisal varied from school to school, as did its effects upon the teachers involved. Kyriacou (1997) examined appraisal from the perspective of the appraisers and was generally positive in his findings. It is argued here that a different picture emerges when the views of all staff involved in the appraisal process are considered. A fuller evaluation of appraisal emerges when it is analysed from the respective positions of the senior managers and the appraisees as well as the appraisers. This highlights the very different and at times conflicting perceptions of teacher appraisal.

Introduction

Staff appraisal was made compulsory for all teachers in England in 1991. Its official aims according to the Education (School Teacher Appraisal) Regulations (1991) were to assist in the professional development of teachers and at the same time to improve the management of schools. It seemed to be taken for granted that the professional needs of teachers were congruent with those of school management. Tensions between a process which encouraged professional development whilst at the same time increasing accountability to management were apparently not considered (Goddard & Emerson, 1992).

Many evaluations carried out since its introduction have sought to show how appraisal may be part of the process of increasing school effectiveness (see Barber et al, 1995; Hopkins & West, 1995; Kyriacou, 1997). Whilst illustrating how appraisal can be beneficial in terms of whole-school outcomes, these studies have also pointed out the rather 'patchy' nature of its introduction nationally. Others have been much stronger in criticising the lack of concrete outcomes from the early experiences of appraisal (see Office for Standards in Education [OFSTED], 1996; Teacher Training Agency [TTA] & OFSTED, 1996). Woodhead

(1996), the Chief Inspector of Education, called for a more rigorous process, less shrouded in confidentiality, with more focused target-setting. Shephard (1996), whilst Secretary of State for Education, would like to have seen an appraisal process with 'teeth'.

The policy of increasing teacher accountability through quantifiable outcomes may be seen to be continuing despite a change of government. The new government's mission statement in its White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1997) suggested that a fair and robust appraisal regime is the hallmark of a profession which sets a premium on standards. This would imply that any resistance to appraisal shows a lack of concern with standards. The White Paper also suggested that changes will be made to the appraisal process to ensure that it provides an effective check on the quality of teacher performance. More recent pronouncements by government ministers have linked appraisal to pay and proposed an annual rather than the previous bi-annual system.

The history of teacher appraisal seems to follow a pattern identified by Apple (1988) whereby a potentially controlling mechanism may be introduced under the guise of professional development. Once in place its nature may be changed radically. This may be seen to support the development of neo-Fordism as outlined by Hodgkinson (1997). Here the rhetoric is of professional development but the reality is of increased management control.

Kyriacou (1997) found that appraisers viewed appraisal as of value to both appraiser and appraisee. This article suggests, however, that the introduction of appraisal has varied greatly from school to school depending upon circumstances. A realistic evaluation of appraisal needs to examine the process from the standpoints of all the principal actors. This reflects their life within the school and associated issues of power and influence. Thus, appraisal will be perceived in different ways by senior managers, appraisers and appraisees. The appraisal process is used by individuals to meet their own ends and is a significant part of the means whereby some gain power over others in the daily political life of schools (Busher & Saran, 1994).

Procedure

The research was carried out in three comprehensive schools existing in close proximity to each other in a large Midlands new town. The introduction and development of appraisal in each of the schools was followed between the autumn of 1991 and the spring of 1997. Data were collected through observation, examination of school records and publications and informal and formally arranged interviews. Most of the arranged interviews took place between the summer of 1995 and the summer of 1996, with substantial follow-up in the spring of 1997. A total of 38 staff were interviewed.

There were slight differences in how the appraisal systems were set to operate in each school. However, all three schools designed a line

management approach with seemingly no consideration of alternatives (School Two did allow some choice in appraiser but the scheme was still based on line management). Appraisal thus became part of the development of line management structures and the evolving managerial ideology described by Elliott (1991). Certainly, for many appraisers and appraisees, if nothing else, the process seemed to restate, and thus reinforce, the existing school hierarchy.

Findings

In each of the schools teachers voiced suspicion about the motives of the government in its introduction of appraisal. This perhaps reflects the mistrust of a process which purported to aid professional development, whilst also increasing accountability (Bell, 1988; Evans & Tomlinson, 1989; Goddard & Emerson, 1992). One teacher called the introduction of appraisal:

A knee-jerk reaction by a government that wanted to be seen to be trying to do something about what it perceived to be bad teachers ... they were probably quite clear at the time that it would be a fairly useless exercise, but it kept the papers busy.

Many of those interviewed felt that appraisal was no longer a threat to their position. Teachers themselves had managed to retain certain safeguards and controls. As it was also widely felt to be of limited use for professional development, this begged the question as to the reasons for continuing with such a process at all. As the deputy head at School Three said:

If the Government had had the power to set a much tougher system up, they would have done so, but they didn't have that power. So they had to put in a half-baked system which they could get away with ... its one of those things where you're forced to do it but nobody checks up to see if you have done it.

Some misgivings did still exist and there was an awareness of how this unthreatening state of affairs could change. Rather than being dropped, the appraisal process could be 'tightened up'. This possibility was understood by the teachers and was reflected in the care taken by them over what was written down during the appraisal process. A significant minority did see appraisal in its current form as a threat and as an increase in surveillance over them.

Many staff held an image of the teacher as extended professional (Hoyle, 1980, 1995) and would have liked to see the development of collaborative cultures. In these cases more appropriate forms of appraisal would be manifest as the peer or action research processes suggested by Winter (1989), Burgess (1989), Elliott (1991, 1993) and Humphreys & Thompson (1995). As one of the teachers interviewed said:

It would be nice if we could all have the opportunities to go into each others' lessons and watch how different people tackle things ... that could be far more valuable than doing this kind of thing ... form filling and writing reports.

The power relationships involved in the appraisal process become more apparent when appraisal is viewed from the different positions of those taking part. The perspectives of senior management, appraisers and appraisees will now be considered.

Senior Management

The management of School One would have liked the targets 'sharpened', with the appraisers taking more of a lead in the process. The stated aim of this was to have a greater effect on classroom practice. These changes, endorsed by government agencies (TTA & OFSTED, 1996), would have served to further strengthen line management authority and increase the monitoring of classroom teachers.

The head of School Two would have liked appraisal brought more into the departmental review process. He was also hoping to appraise those heads of department that he had not appraised so far. This again was in line with government agencies' recommendations (TTA & OFSTED, 1996) in terms of linking appraisal into other school monitoring procedures and strengthening line management accountability. This change could be presented as promoting more open and purposeful management which involved discussion and collaboration between departments and senior management. It may also be interpreted as the head attempting to increase his power whilst strengthening the role of middle management. Monitoring would be increased and, at the same time, the issue of appraisal statements' confidentiality rendered less important by linking them to the review process.

The senior management of School Three would, in the first instance, have liked to ensure that it was able to enforce appraisal procedures. To do this it had been suggested by the deputy head that every member of staff would be appraised in a 2-week period at the start of the academic year. It is difficult to see the benefits of such an exercise apart from the fulfilment of a legal requirement and the successful enforcement of a management procedure.

Bottery (1996) would see these developments in appraisal as part of management attempts to increase quality assurance. These involve a growing desire to monitor the work of teachers in order to manage the educational process even down to the classroom level. One deputy head had compared part of the appraisal process to the teacher trainer observing lessons from the back of the room. He suggested that it was stressful for the appraisees but that he tried to put them at their ease as much as possible. He felt that the positive feedback had made appraisal ultimately beneficial to the appraisee.

Many of those in senior management, however, were themselves cynical of the externally imposed appraisal process and attempts to link it to school development planning. This influenced to what extent they enforced and supported appraisal and also how they themselves appraised staff. Thus, one appraisee, when speaking of being appraised by a sympathetic deputy head, said:

In this school there's always been, it strikes me, a relationship, a good working relationship between colleagues. Obviously there are different personalities but people do pull together ... The deputy head was doing much the same as I was doing, he was going through it and trying to make the process useful.

Appraisers

Whilst these teachers will also be appraised themselves, it is their role as appraisers which is of central significance here. Kyriacou (1997) saw the role of appraiser as of prime importance in the whole appraisal process. He considered the role of appraisers in the classroom observation, the appraisal interview and target-setting, reporting that the concern of the appraisers was to be fair and sound in their judgement, and to do the appraisee justice. The appraisers in his study felt that they themselves had benefited by observing colleagues and also getting to know them better:

Other benefits included the development of personal and managerial skills in dealing with a colleague; the opportunity to negotiate set targets that would help the school; and the satisfaction of helping with a colleague's professional development. (Kyriacou, 1997, p. 39)

In order to optimise the benefits from these developments, the appraisers in Kyriacou's study looked to further training to develop their appraisal skills. A number of appraisers interviewed in the study reported here echo the responses of Kyriacou's sample. Taking a micropolitical view of school life, this perhaps shows how appraisal may be used to develop the power of the appraiser over the appraisee. It is the appraiser who acquires the management skills, gains information about subordinates and ultimately stands to gain most from the process. Thus, one appraiser commented:

The positive things were that I was able to observe somebody doing their normal job in a situation where we'd already pre-set what we were going to be looking for. So it wasn't just me popping through seeing something happening. So it was a very positive sort of thing in that light. ... I think it [appraisal] gave me a perspective as to how [the appraisee] works. I obviously do go in there and see her work but, it gave me a better overview.

A number of heads of department spoke of how appraisal had helped them to be more aware of the work of members of their department. Some also mentioned that appraisal had aided them in their departmental planning. For

example, the head of one large department spoke of how appraisal had enabled her to link individual staff targets to department targets. As head of department she held departmental meetings which covered all aspects of the work within the department. She had conducted personal interviews with many of the staff involved in these meetings regarding the sensitive issue of their professional performance. This extra 'private' knowledge could be used to her advantage in controlling the outcomes of these public forums and would involve the subtle use of techniques bordering on bribery or blackmail. This head of department said that she preferred to think of appraisal as aiding her in effectively managing the department and professionally developing the staff according to their needs, rather than as increasing her personal power. This view was not totally shared by appraisees within the department.

The thoroughness with which each stage of the appraisal cycle is carried out may be very much at the initiative of the appraisers and the importance that they attach to the process. Whilst some saw appraisal as useful for managing their departments, others felt it was a threat to themselves and their colleagues. In these cases they responded to appraisal as they saw appropriate, by trying to protect colleagues and to choose 'sensible targets'. Thus, one head of physical education, when speaking of appraising a member of the department said:

Everybody has got certain weaknesses, I can tell you my weaknesses, I can list them! but, I'd really rather that the headmaster didn't read them, because that's no help, if you know what I mean.

*... well, I finished up writing quite a nice appraisal for **** ... okay, he's only been teaching like 12, or 18 months or whatever it was, and he did all right. The kids were under control, they were learning, they were working quite well, things were going on. There were things that we polished up, but then again it took me 6 years to learn to teach basically, you know, so ... you finish up writing quite a nice pleasant little appraisal. You identify one or two areas ...*

When asked if targets were set he replied:

Yeah, but we already knew those you see, we both felt that gymnastics was a weak area for our teaching because we're not really into it ... so we decided an education gym course would be good to go on.

Thus, targets were chosen generally rather than for the specific individual. In this way the appraisee was not made directly accountable for quantifiable outcomes.

Appraisers were able to adapt the process to reduce the perceived threat to the appraisee. One head of English said:

How it was being implemented seemed quite foreign to the way we work in this school ... quite a hierarchical system sort of thing and it's almost

like checking up on people. Well, we don't go in for that, at least not at a middle management level.

Concerning the observation of the appraisee he said:

Well we discussed it and I said "I've seen you teach over the years, there's no point me sitting at the back of the class, it's a waste of my time and it's a waste of yours so unless you want me to I won't do that" ... I mean I observe the way she teaches just by teaching next door. I go in there and she comes in my room and so on.

Several appraisers, disliking the bureaucratic and threatening nature of appraisal, had thus attempted to carry it out as sympathetically as possible. In explaining how she had conducted an appraisal of a member of her department, who felt threatened by it, one appraiser had said:

It's not that he felt the appraisal process was of benefit, it was more the fact that it went through peacefully and therefore he felt reasonably happy with it.

Even carried out in such a sympathetic way, the line management approach can enhance the power of the appraiser over the appraisee. One appraisee, on being informed of the postponement of his appraisal, was told by the appraiser that he had nothing to worry about and that he did a good job. This illustrates that a 'kind' word by an appraiser to an appraisee may actually reinforce the paternalistic position of benevolent manager. Ozga (1995) has suggested that the development of surveillance processes, such as appraisal, enhance the professionalism of some staff, in this case the appraisers, whilst at the same time intruding upon the professional autonomy of the appraisees.

For some, appraisal becomes something to get out of the way, as one head of year put it when talking about his appraisal and appraising others:

Once it's over with you think "oh well that's it. It's over with for another couple of years. I can get on with what I was doing before".

Appraisees

Within this group reactions to appraisal varied greatly. This depended upon certain significant points such as whether they were appraisees only and not appraisers too; their status and position within the school hierarchy; their age and how long they had been teaching.

Younger, newer teachers tended to assume that current practices had always been in place. They spoke of the right of management to have information and to monitor teaching. They also thought that appraisers, as experienced members of staff, would be able to offer advice and direction. Appraisal was seen by many of these new teachers as important in terms of

career advancement. Thus, one newly qualified teacher saw appraisal as important because:

For a lot of the time that's how senior management are getting their feedback on you. ... if you're planning to get promoted, or move up the ladder, obviously it's going to be very important to have good appraisal all the time, to be seen to be doing your job well ... and taking on board any criticism ... it's nothing to be frightened of, it's nothing to be apprehensive about. I think it's a fairly vital part of making sure that everyone's staying on stream and doing the things they're expected to do. I think it's got to be a positive thing ... I'd see it as a fairly central stage in career development and that's the bottom line. As long as it's done properly, I think it could be quite valuable ... for the individual and for the school as a whole it's got to be done, ... people if they weren't being checked on, they were just insular in their own classrooms the whole time, no one ever coming through the doors, they could do what the hell they like. Over the years people just drift completely off track and no one would know.

In contrast, more experience appraisees saw appraisal as a compulsory chore in which little of value should be conceded. It was, in fact, referred to by a number of appraisees as a game but one in which you needed to be careful:

You know how easy it is to manipulate, you get anybody who's worth his salt as a manager, and they can manipulate, "You've got to have something down – how about this?"

*I'm also able to analyse it and play the game a little bit, I'm not sure how successfully. But I can imagine other people who are perhaps good at their job but not that good at playing the game ... I've been 'done' twice, by the same person, who I get on well with. But you see when you get into that interview, I can see *** changing. Once we get in that room, ***'s changed. *** sees himself in that role and he gets himself into that role quite nicely. So it's not the same relationship. And whether *** is aware of that I don't know.*

Several appraisees said that they were aware of how confidential, personal information could be used by appraisers as some kind of 'hold' over them in the future. Several were very fearful of the appraisal process and its possible consequences. They could not admit this to their appraiser or other senior managers as it would only draw attention to the source of their worry. Appraisees were in a particularly difficult position if they mistrusted their appraiser. To make this public may only have served to aggravate the problem and they often felt they were the ones in the most vulnerable position. In one instance an appraiser had refused to comment adversely on her appraiser in a report she had to submit to an external examiner as she felt that this would have affected her next appraisal. This appraiser was

concerned about departmental reorganisation within the school and felt her job to be particularly insecure.

A number of appraisees spoke of serious concerns regarding their future employment and how appraisal could only be seen as a threat. With this in mind one appraiser commented on the need to ensure a 'good appraisal':

You try and kid yourself that it's all very positive and this is going to help everybody. But the fact that's on everybody's mind when you're on the receiving end is this could be a disaster. Is it what's wrong with what I'm doing that's going to be picked up on? Is my job going to be on the line? Is the Head going to look at the appraisal statements and pick out from that who is the one to go? I mean logically the answer is no but the fear is there.

Some appraisees felt more controlled by the process than others, illustrating how relationships between appraisees and appraisers varied. Even though many were sceptical as to whether appraisal had any effects, all were very careful about what was agreed and written down:

It makes you think "well, have I got something to hide?" ... you could be thinking, "well, I don't really want to say that, although that's what I feel ... I'm going to write this instead", because ... you want to cover your own back.

Not all were fearful of the process. Several appraisees, being unhappy in some way with their current position, were using appraisal to highlight this. In one case an appraiser, in collaboration with his appraiser, had listed a number of points in the appraisal statement as to why he could not perform his current responsibilities adequately. He also supplied a number of actions required to rectify this, which had financial implications. This was done to put the senior management on the spot by exposing appraisal as being for management information purposes only and not for responding to the needs of teachers. Thus, the appraiser, describing the appraisal interview, said:

We both knew it was just a bloody game, and we played the game ... he actually wrote the statement! He said "this is what I want you to say" I said "yeah okay, I'll write that up. Can I add a bit about your use of resources?" He said "no, not really", and I said "why not?" He said "because if you say that I'm good at it I'll have to keep doing it, and I might not want to in the future ..." I want it to be open ended, I want it to be woolly, and I want anything specific to be to do with other people who have got to do things to make my job easier is what he was saying.

When asked about target-setting:

Target-setting was, I think he needed to go on more courses to find out more about RE (religious education) ... because he was isolated here ... again it was the game playing. So, we've got some targets, so if I go back to him I would then say "have you gone on any courses?", and he

would say “no, cos there’s no bloody money!” So I then write down no he has not been on any courses because there hasn’t been any money.

In another example, a member of staff had been promised more responsibility as second in the department in his previous appraisal. As nothing had come of this the appraisee had raised the same issue in the next appraisal. This time he had asked for information to be gathered from the headteacher as evidence. The appraisee, in this way, hoped to force a response from the head and at the same time embarrass the head of department, his appraiser.

Many experienced teachers felt that as appraisees they had little to gain and could therefore only lose from such a process. When appraised by those with a similar opinion this led to collusion on the part of appraiser and appraisee. Thus, in School Three very few appraisals had been carried out. Appraisers had not initiated the process or had allowed it to lapse. As one mainscale teacher who had not been appraised said:

No, I don’t think I’m that bothered ... it’s not all buzzing round the staffroom, and people aren’t saying “oh, have you been appraised?” “No, have you?” etc., because it’s not a major issue with anybody, people don’t discuss it. But you don’t feel, oh God I haven’t been appraised, I’ve been left out. You see, you’re talking about the minority that have been appraised, not the majority, as far as I’m aware ... There’s a tremendous amount of staff here who haven’t been appraised.

By not objecting to the failure to conduct the appraisal interviews, the appraisees had been complicit in disrupting the introduction of appraisal. This is indicative of what Hargreaves (1994) would term the Balkanisation evident amongst groups of staff at this school. It also shows how teachers are able to resist the imposition of policies which they see as potentially threatening. The same mainscale teacher also said:

People are reluctant to have it done, so they don’t pursue it, they don’t pressure anybody into doing anything. So unless you’ve got somebody at the top saying, “it must be done and I am coming to check up on you”, then you’re not going to get anywhere, because normal teachers – mainscale ones with a few responsibilities – aren’t going to bother. Heads of department are not being put under any pressure so you’re going to say, well then...unless somebody else is going to get it done this week ... Do you know what I mean?

Discussion

By considering the views of appraisers regarding their experiences of appraisal, Kyriacou (1997) has evaluated the process from a middle-management position. This article has, however, proposed that there are many, sometimes conflicting, perspectives within a school. It is suggested that appraisal can more usefully be analysed in terms of the three

main groups involved: senior management, the appraisers and the appraisees. Consideration needs to be given, in the case of each group, to the gains and losses they have made during the appraisal process. Analysing appraisal from these three standpoints highlights the different ways in which appraisal may be used. The power relationships between the three groups thus become apparent. This analysis implies that it is the form which appraisal takes and the particular power relationships which exist that help to divide staff into these three groups.

The introduction of staff appraisal as discussed here is portrayed as part of the growing dominance of managerialist ideology. A line management system of appraisal has, after all, been imposed on teachers, many of whom would prefer to learn from each other in a collegial manner. The development of staff appraisal as a control mechanism becomes apparent with the increasing desire of government to 'sharpen up' targets and to seek quantifiable outcomes. The stated purpose is to make appraisal a more effective part of the process of raising standards in schools (DfEE, 1997).

To see teachers as being clearly divided into these three divisions is, however, too simplistic in terms of how schools operate as complex political organisations. As Hoyle (1986) has pointed out, heads and deputies have themselves risen from the main body of the teaching profession. They will still in many cases retain their initial teaching ideologies and professional allegiances to colleagues in spite of pressures to behave in a more managerial manner. This will influence their actions concerning the enforcing and carrying out of staff appraisal. In a similar way, not all appraisers align themselves with a line management system. They may see appraisal as an externally imposed threat to their autonomy and relationships amongst colleagues.

Within all three groups, how individuals see appraisal and react to it will reflect their views of the nature of teaching as an activity. The actual outcomes of appraisal will be a result of the political process which has taken place. This will differ from school to school and also between staff within each school.

The future of appraisal is uncertain. What is apparent is the contribution of the process to the development of managerialism under the guise of increasing school effectiveness. This requires the increased monitoring of the work of teachers, which appraisal can help to provide. Appraisal also helps to develop and reinforce the line of management control. It does this by developing the managerial skills of the appraisers and enhancing their power over the appraisees. However, it is also clear that teachers do not obey authority without question. They will react to and use appraisal in a manner which is in their own interests. Thus, playing a part in the development and distribution of power within each school, appraisal must be recognised for its significance in the politics of school life.

Correspondence

Stephen Bartlett, School of Education, University of Wolverhampton, Walsall Campus, Gorway Road, Walsall WS1 3BD, United Kingdom.

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PURPOSES OF STAFF APPRAISAL

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