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## Northern Teacher in Conditions of the Current Renewal Processes in Education

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### Abstract

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Many discussions about teacher evaluation have been discussed in Russia, where evaluation procedures are constantly under review as the teachers seek continuous improvement. Our article contributes to this discussion, first, by adding a wider international perspective, secondly, by exploring the experiences of participants (observers, in-service teachers) and, finally, by drawing on research related to teacher evaluation. The authors discuss the outcomes of the online survey conducted among teachers in Russia's Sakha Republic (Yakutia) who participated in the distant interactive educational project. The goal of the survey was to identify how teachers assess the quality of education and the formation of professional competencies.

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### 1. Introduction

Teaching is a personal, social, and complex activity and most teachers would agree that they continue to learn and develop this skill throughout their careers. Institutions often carry out different forms of teacher evaluation to help teachers develop and improve the learning experience for students and also to monitor and remediate unsatisfactory practices. They collect data, on which they construct their decisions, for instance, curriculum design and revision, focused professional development and new faculty member employment. The evaluation process is complex and often daunting for those

involved. Much has been written about the way teacher evaluation in mainstream education generates a great deal of pressure. Although the terms evaluation, appraisal and assessment are often used interchangeably, the overall focus of the article is on teacher evaluation, a general term which is used to describe an activity carried out by an institution where the quality of provided materials is the result of systematic study. Evaluation can also be defined as the systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision-making where the data obtained can be used for either evaluation or research purposes.

## **2. Problem Statement and the Research Purposes**

The current state of the Russian Federation demonstrates the importance of education through the transformation into a democratic and constitutional nation framed by market economy and driven by passion to overcome obstacles and find independent development path (Simonenko, 2003).

The research objectives are to understand the current professional and personal wellbeing of teachers caused by changes in education system of Russia and all circles of its society, to evaluate teachers and the quality of education, and to analyze the development of basic professional competences of teachers and trace teachers' qualification gap. The survey objectives inspired us to carefully study literature on teachers' evaluation. This article is based on the work of famous authors as Howard, A. & Donaghue, H. (eds.) (2015), in which we found the basic methodological approaches to the study of the problem of our study.

One of the objectives of this study was to understand how teachers are evaluated and supported throughout their careers but there were some consequent problems. We focused on problems related to evaluation of in-service teachers. A rise in managerialism in education has led to extra scrutiny as stakeholders seek evidence that teachers are effective (Deem, 2003). While such monitoring may be familiar in pre-service teacher training, for experienced teachers it may be more stressful (Howard, 2001) as they might feel that the survey questions their professionalism and yet is inappropriate. This study aimed to explore via a mixed-method approach the views of experienced teachers and analysts on teacher evaluation. The rationale for this study was born out of our own disillusion with teacher evaluation. Therefore, we sense that existing evaluation practices may need to be examined to see if they serve the best interests of experienced teachers. The study of the role of renewal processes and crisis factors of professional and personal wellbeing of teachers, revealing the qualification gaps of teachers through the assessment of professional competences and abilities will improve teachers' assessment of the quality of life.

One of the research questions is to find out the link between teachers evaluation and professional promotion. Focusing on tasks, behaviours, functions of teachers and their evaluation leads to managerialism. Major reasons for an aversion to evaluation are the sense that it does not promote professional growth (Howard & McCloskey, 2001) and its accountability and prescriptive conformity, which may conflict with a teacher's desire for professional autonomy (Fullan, 2007). These reasons are key factors why managerialism in education is often criticized. "The development of appraisal systems is part of the development of a more managerial approach to education" (Walsh in Mercer, 2006, p. 17).

Its appropriation from the market-driven private sector has transformed education into a marketable commodity (Morey, 2003) with a focus on efficient use of resources (Kydd, 1997), 'quality, improved productivity, accountability to stakeholders and emphasis on service' (p. 5). However, Deem (2003) suggests a more negative perception, which focuses on functions, tasks and behaviors. This has led tertiary sector institutions to become line-managed entities where 'professionals are subjected to a rigorous regime of external accountability in which continuous monitoring and audit of performance and quality are dominant' (Deem, 2003, pp. 57-58). Kydd (1997) summarizes the conflict effectively by suggesting that 'the intensification of management controls is replacing the wisdom, experience, and self-monitoring of the practitioner, and leading to the devaluing of capacities which are difficult to define but which make a difference between experienced and novice teachers' (p. 116). Given the high order attributes of in-service teachers and their need to be motivated by higher end needs such as esteem and self-actualization, it is perhaps understandable that teacher evaluation might be considered an unwanted and irrelevant task, especially in environments which exercise an authoritarian management style. In addition, even if an organization's sincere aim is to focus on professional development (PD) in observation, teachers may reject this due to the sense of intrusion and mistrust that they have imported concepts like managerialism and quality assurance. This rejection may be driven by negative connotations of accountability and the conflict they feel exists with the professional code of practice model traditionally associated with education. On the other hand, there is also evidence of the advantages of a focus on efficiency and quality and there are many arguments for applying this to evaluation, with some studies indicating teacher support. Summing up, when considering the value of teacher evaluation for experienced teachers, the literature suggests a partial negativity. One aim of this study was to add to the body of knowledge on evaluation in general and, more specifically, in the context of in-service teachers.

### **3. Research Methods**

Every teacher has an experience of holding an exam or a test to evaluate students. When we switch roles and evaluate teachers, the reaction will follow immediately and in some cases it may prove to be stressful and not acceptable. One of such structured methods, which has been successfully applied in ESL teacher training contexts to enable teachers to reflect and talk about their practice, is the use of critical incidents. There are some drawbacks in using critical incidents. The term itself can be seen as unfortunate. The word 'critical' is most likely to be associated with the word 'criticize' and 'incident' also has negative connotations. A critical incident can be both positive and negative. Every person is guided through appropriate discourse to understand the events and reach a positive outcome in terms of learning. At the same time these incidents appear to be 'typical' rather than 'critical' at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis (Tripp, 2012, pp. 24-25). In our study, teachers were encouraged to focus on one event to describe what they felt and why this event was the most important part of e-learning process, and then this was explored and probed in depth. As in many educational fields, what we don't know about e-learning exceeds what we do know about it. Still, researchers have attempted to dissect and research the constituent parts of e-learning process by exploring numerous variables,

including student demographics, motivation, attrition, cognitive style, gender, and achievement. This has been found to be successful within the realm of teacher training for English language teachers. Through systematic questioning and scaffolding, teachers can be challenged on the premise of their comments, highlighting their underlying beliefs and perhaps revising such beliefs in light of their general professional learning. When feedback dialogue is found on critical incidents, the questions employed will tend to be practical, diagnostic, critical and reflective in nature (Farrell, 2008).

Teachers need to develop not only the techniques but also the ability to recognize deep structures of learning through rationalizing the use of particular techniques, matching them to teaching purposes and relating them to theoretical models of learning. Brockbank & McGill (2006) argue that while reflection as an individual activity has innate value, it is insufficient in terms of enhancing 'transformatory' and evolutionary learning. When teachers leave their comfort zones and are invited to an unfamiliar space, they are ready for a research dialogue. In this article, the research dialogue between interviewers and interviewees, between researchers and respondents, occurred through the online survey specially designed to collect data for the study.

Our strong belief is that the sources of motivation in the professional and personal development of teachers, integrating in creative activities to create innovative projects are curiosity and interest, setting learning goals and belief in self-efficacy. Specifying the structure of creative teaching activities, V.A. Kan-Kalik and N.D. Nikandrov define the following sequence of its stages: the emergence of the pedagogical plan aimed at addressing educational problems; concept development; the embodiment of the pedagogical design in activities, in dealing with people; analysis and evaluation of the results of the creative process (Kan-Kalik & Nikandrov, 1990, p. 61). The concept of "creativity" is used by S.L. Rubinstein as "contagion" – as creation of new, original case with social significance; as the creation of something new, including in the inner world of the subject (Rubenstein, 2006, p. 63-64). The environment, in which the North teacher can develop creatively, should have a high degree of uncertainty and potential multi-variance (wealth of opportunities). Uncertainty encourages the search for your own benchmarks rather than the adoption of what's ready; multi-variance makes it possible to find them. It is appropriate to recall the concept of A. G. Asmolov that "...in the surrounding human world objectively, there is a special social dimension created by the combined activity of mankind – the value field. This field values separate the individual perceives as "out - it - exists" ... as something that is part of his image" (Asmolov, 1996, p. 86). Environment as a value field should contain samples of creative behavior and its results. In the course of our study, we hypothesized that the combination of some of the parameters of the environment in which there is a teacher, – a low level of regulation of behavior, enriched information and representation of creative behavior patterns have a decisive impact on the innovative behavior of the teacher, which implies flexibility and creativity (Liubard and et al., 2009, p. 39, Amabile, 1982; Barron, 1988, Sternberg, Lubart, 1995).

#### **4. Findings**

In this article, we share some preliminary results of survey without a comparative analysis conducted by the Ammosov NEFU.

For this study, we surveyed 190 teachers (representing 73 from Yakutsk and 117 from districts of Yakutia). From 190 responses, some went through culling (incomplete survey answers submissions, incomplete question answers, etc.). All respondents were grouped by age: 30 years and younger – 35 people; between 30 and 39 years – 84; between 40 and 49 years – 31; between 50 and 59 years – 30; 60 and older - 4 teachers. The division of interviewed teachers by gender, 12 male and 178 female, revealed inequality and caused us to focus on gender aspects of HR in educational institutions of Yakutia. According to statistical data, male teachers form only 12.3% of the total number of teachers. In our research, we followed the official data but we believe that if providing access to education and upbringing of young generation a gender balance should be met. Different factors support it. The gender approach includes biological as well as social factors in teacher professional development. Therefore, we need to raise the prestige of the teacher profession for men. One of the goals of education should be the gradual achievement of gender equality.

The online survey included set of questions titled Teacher in the Current Renewal Processes in Education. The goal was to identify the relationship of teachers to the quality and accessibility of education of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), as well as their professional value orientations. In response to questions, teachers expressed their attitude to the current state of education of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). They expressed their assessment guided by two criteria – quality of education in relation to the past and its availability. 140 teachers evaluate the quality of education in Yakutia as "excellent", "very good", and "good" (respectively, 0.5%, 12.08%, and 64.28%). It proves to be a serious factor that 24 teachers (13.18% of total respondents) have no opinion in this respect. 100 teachers (54.9%) believe that today, the quality of education in Yakutia is better than in the past. This is explained by the respondents as a positive effect of the implementation of state educational policy aimed at improving the status of teachers, facilities' improvement of educational institutions and social partnership development. An important indicator is the teacher's satisfaction level with work.

In terms of difficulty or on the contrary to advantages in education, the vast majority of teachers (116) believe that such benefits will undoubtedly be possessed by residents of cities. Some of the difficulties in education, according to 95 respondents, are experienced by rural residents. 138 teachers believe that for people with disabilities it is difficult (49.4%) or very hard (37.9%) to obtain the desired degree. At the same time 11 teachers indicated that this group of the population, on the other hand, has certain advantages. With respect to nomadic people, 9 respondents (5.7%) reported them having advantages in this area, and 95 (60.1%) reported significant difficulties.

Answers by teachers showed that at least 2 to 6 of them are not able to adequately assess their professional skills and to analyze the results of their professional activity. 5 to 36 people chose the answer "maybe" – that is 1.3% to 24% of teachers found lack of maturity of such basic competence as a personal truth, a competence that gives a person the ability to use new information and communication technologies, come up with new solutions, show flexibility, face rapid changes, be persistent and strong in face of difficulties, be prepared for self-education and self-organization. A number of personal competences are also included which are: ethics, communication skills, listening skills, rapport, teamwork orientation, integrity, prudence, efficiency, perseverance, self-confidence, dedication to the organization and business orientation.

47 percent of teachers possess advanced communication competences. 27 percent have experienced atypical conflicts, 59 percent have a partial knowledge of such conflicts. 55 percent know how to stop and avoid conflicts, 39 can do it partially. 39 percent of teachers have perfect interaction skills, 10 percent find it hard to interact with parents and other agents of education process. 51 answered that they somewhat experience problems in interacting. Mitina (1998) summarized that cheerful and welcoming conversation accommodates creative cooperation and brings ready-to-help behavior, respect, gratitude, and sympathy. Competence features: awareness of atypical conflict moments, mature teaching mind, ability to use standard and uncommon ways to stop conflicts, ability to create a safe environment, ability to establish partnership and friendship. Teacher's qualifications are the direct indicator of the quality of education. It is highly important to identify qualification needs in professional competences of teachers and then work on improvement. On a global scale, STEM and IT literacy of citizens and a number of educated people play a paramount role in nation's competitiveness.

## **5. Conclusions**

For this study, we reviewed the results of the 2015 survey among teachers of Yakutia. The study results show a large range of opinions. Teachers were independent and sincere in sharing their views regarding important issues of education, including education quality, education accessibility, education policy, teaching career and teaching competences.

This gives us grounds to assume the existence of a certain number of misplaced people in the profession (from 7.3% to 16%), who may have realized the error of their choice only at this stage of their lives. This is evidenced by the fact that these respondents are not trying to gloss over their views on education, openly declare their indifference, therefore, the question of how to make education better is not relevant for them. In any case, it does not mean that these groups of respondents are bad teachers because, despite the lack of vocations, we can be good professionals in any field, and this survey does not focus on the identification of good and bad teachers. Conducting an online survey among participating teachers of the project allowed us to paint a certain picture concerning the quality of teachers and accessibility of education in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia); as well as certain preferences of teachers in their immediate occupation. The survey aimed to identify the formation of professional competences in the context of the current requirements, compliance with professional standards for teachers, reveal qualification deficits in teachers of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), both urban and rural, and they, in turn, determine the educational needs of teachers in secondary vocational training – training courses or retraining. From a personal perspective, the findings have shown us that our questioning of the value of evaluation is shared to a certain extent in that there are signs of discontentment among the population. However, there is also an apparent belief in the purpose of evaluation, if it is designed and implemented in a way which motivates teachers and helps them become better practitioners. Therefore, we may have to forego our own opinions, knowing that teachers often find it a worthwhile activity, as ultimately staff improvement leads to better teaching and learning and this means higher education quality. While teacher evaluation may have negative connotations for

some, quality does not, so if we all aim for quality in teaching and learning, it certainly would seem like a worthwhile endeavor.

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