

The Dreaded “Visit”

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Few things in a teacher’s life are more stressful than the evaluative “visit” from the principal or the superintendent of education. My husband, a Level 3 teacher with 40 years’ experience, recently went through what he hopes will be his last evaluation. For several days ahead of time he had difficulty sleeping in anticipation of the “visit.” As an administrator, I know firsthand the lack of enthusiasm that greets me whenever I have to announce I will be making a “visit.” (Just for the record, I have never evaluated my husband ☺.) To make life easier for teachers, I’m writing down what administrators expect—so teachers will know what to expect.



First comes the pre-conference. This is a time when the teacher sits down with the evaluator and spends 5-10 minutes talking about what will happen during the evaluation. The evaluator will often want a seating plan, a typed lesson plan (just like the kind you used to write during teacher training), copies of student materials to be used, long-range plans, your lesson plan book, a filled-out self-evaluation, and a quick discussion about any unusual situations in the classroom that might be well for an evaluator to know. This is also the time when a teacher might request that an evaluator note certain aspects of their teaching in order to give feedback which will help the teacher grow professionally.

Next comes the actual evaluation. Techniques of evaluators vary. Some write or input constantly, some take occasional notes, others just watch and synthesize their ideas later. Whatever the technique, evaluators are really all looking for the same things. Are routines clearly established with the students? Are students respectful of the teacher? Is the teacher using good classroom management skills? Are students being taught in a clearly systematic and logical way? Is there evidence of careful planning by the teacher—not just for the lesson being evaluated but for the whole year? Is the teacher following the curriculum set out by the conference and the government, if applicable, in the subject/grade being observed? Is the teacher using varied and appropriate teaching strategies? Does the teacher have good rapport with the students? Is the classroom environment a friendly, clean, and enjoyable space? Does the teacher integrate faith and learning? If the answers to these questions are positive, then the teacher will have a good evaluation report.

After the evaluation comes the post-conference, usually on the same day as the evaluation, when everything is fresh in both the minds of the evaluator and the teacher. This is a time to discuss what went right and what “went off the rails.” Often, the evaluator will ask the teacher how the teacher felt the lesson went. This is a good time to be perfectly truthful! If a lesson did not go well, saying that it did go well will only compound any problems an evaluator saw. If a lesson did go well, it is good for a teacher to recognize that as well, of course. Self-awareness is an important quality in a teacher. The post-conference is a good time for teachers to discuss with the evaluator plans to enhance their teaching and to suggest ways in which a supervisor can help them reach their goals for better teaching.

The evaluator then incorporates this discussion into the final evaluation report which goes in the teacher's file both at the conference and at the school. The written report is usually two or three pages long and will be signed and dated by the evaluator. The teacher also signs and dates the report and may add comments of agreement or disagreement to the report.

The wise teacher will view the "visit" as an opportunity to enhance teaching, not as an exercise to be endured. Be prepared with all the important material at your pre-conference and the evaluator will already be favourably impressed before he or she ever sets foot in your classroom. Don't try to over-impress during the evaluation itself, but also don't treat it casually. Be yourself. The bulk of your preparation should be done long before the evaluator arrives by having good classroom management and good lessons established from the outset of the year. An evaluator will be able to tell quite quickly if most of the year has not been "up to speed"! So if all is well, try to sleep well the night before and try not to worry. (By the way, my husband received an excellent evaluation report!)