

# “I Said That?”

## How to Improve Your Instructional Behavior in Just 5 Minutes Per Day Through Data-Based Self-Evaluation

Cassandra L. Keller • Mary Lou Duffy

**Do you ever wonder how you sound to your students? Well I didn't, until one day I heard a group of my students playing school in a corner of the classroom. One of the students was pretending to be the teacher. He was using such an ugly tone and so much sarcasm that he caught my attention. Then to my surprise, I realized that he was just mimicking me, the teacher. After that day, I knew how I sounded to my students. I didn't like it and made a promise to myself to change. To assist me in this effort, I decided to use the 7-step data-based self-evaluation procedure described in this article.**

Many teachers do not have a systematic method to help them improve their instructional behavior. If a lesson does not go as intended, they may think about it but continue to use the same unsuccessful style to instruct. Reflection is a popular concept that requires teachers to think about their actions but not necessarily make a change in behavior as a result of their thoughts. An important component of reflection called *self-evaluation* can help bring reflection to action by providing teachers with a system for reflection. Self-evaluation is a process by which a person can make judgments about the adequacy and effectiveness of performance for the purpose of self-improvement (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997). Therefore, self-evaluation requires that teachers not

only look at their practice but also make a change in their behavior as a result of the reflection. (See box, “What Does the Literature Say About Self-Evaluation?”)

The problem with most self-evaluation procedures is that they are based on teachers' opinions about their performance rather than on data from their actual classroom performance. One

### What Does the Literature Say About Self-Evaluation?

The goal of self-evaluation is to help teachers identify and make decisions about their strengths and weaknesses (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997). It gives teachers control over what they need to change in the classroom and puts responsibility for identifying problems and making improvements into their hands. It is an assessment conducted by the teacher and for the teacher that gives teachers a voice in their own professional development. Wildman and Niles (1987) note that when teachers exercise responsibility for their own growth, they experience a feeling of power over their own learning, gain a more positive self-concept, and experience cognitive growth. Such researchers as Bullard (1998), Kilbourn (1991), and Sutherland and Wehby (2001) have identified self-evaluation as a method that promotes the increased use of effective practices by teachers.

**Many teachers do not have a systematic method to help them improve their instructional behavior.**

method of obtaining data from the classroom is for teachers to audiotape or videotape their instruction and then record the data from the tapes. This technique gives the teacher an avenue to self-evaluate and become actively involved in learning by taking on the responsibility of being the participant, the observer, and the goal setter. Videotapes not only provide audio samples but they also include a visual history. However, most teachers consider videotaping quite intrusive, and it can distract students. Audiotape recording, on the other hand, allows teachers to hear themselves as the students hear them and is perhaps one of the most objective observation techniques available (Acheson & Gall, 1987). Using audiotape to record instruction gives teachers an opportunity for reflective inquiry that is based on specific data from their classroom (Freiberg, 1987). Teachers can use audiotape recording as an unbiased means of collecting data on their performance (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997; Bullard, 1998). Teachers can self-evaluate their instructional behavior by listening to audio-

tapes of their instruction and then making data-based decisions.

### Benefits of Self-Evaluation

Teacher self-evaluation has numerous advantages over traditional means of teacher evaluation. According to Airasian and Gullickson (1997) and Shake (1986), the benefits of self-evaluation for teachers include the following:

- It focuses improvement at the classroom level where teachers have the greatest impact and expertise.
- It gives teachers a voice in and control over their own development.
- It makes teachers aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their practices.
- It can take place whenever and wherever the teachers wish.
- It may be more accurate than external traditional evaluations.
- It is psychologically nonthreatening.
- It allows the teacher to focus on a plan for improvement.
- It encourages continuous development and discourages static routines and methods.

### Steps for Self-Evaluation

The data-based self-evaluation process has 7 simple steps. By following these steps, which are adapted from Airasian and Gullickson (1997) and Sutherland and Wehby (2001), teachers can learn to change their instructional behavior permanently. The materials needed for self-evaluation are available in most schools: an audiotape recorder (micro-cassette recorder recommended), a lapel microphone, a minute timer, and graph paper. The 7 steps are as follows:

- **Step 1:** Choose the content area (subject area) that you would like to improve upon and tape record your instruction for 5 days. Record at least the first 15 minutes of instruction each day to establish a baseline of your instructional behavior.
- **Step 2:** Identify the instructional behavior that you would like to improve, and make a prediction. If you have trouble identifying an instructional behavior, you may want to listen to one or more of your audiotapes from Step 1. (See box,

“Instructional Behaviors for Self-Evaluation” for examples of behaviors that you might choose.) You can predict the frequency with which you think you use your targeted behavior in a 5-minute period of instruction, the amount of time that you wait before calling on a student after asking a question, or the amount of time you talk versus the amount of time



that students talk. Be sure to write a specific definition of the behavior that you chose to improve.

- **Step 3:** Listen to a 5-minute sample from each of the five audiotapes, and graph your targeted behavior. You can listen to random samples of your instruction by rewinding the tape and

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**Teachers can use audiotape recording as an unbiased means of collecting data on their performance.**  
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then fast-forwarding the tape while counting aloud to a random number between 1 and 7. Count to a different number between 1 and 7 each day. Graph each day's frequency or amount of time on graph paper. You could use a simple line graph to record the frequency of your behavior (for example, specific praise) or amount of time (for example, wait time). For academic questioning behavior, you could use a seating chart of your students to indicate how often you call on each student to answer questions.

- **Step 4:** Examine current literature to determine best practices and poten-

### Instructional Behaviors for Self-Evaluation

- Specific academic praise.
- Specific social praise.
- Academic questioning.
- Multiple questions.
- Reprimands.
- Wait time.
- Teacher talk versus student talk.

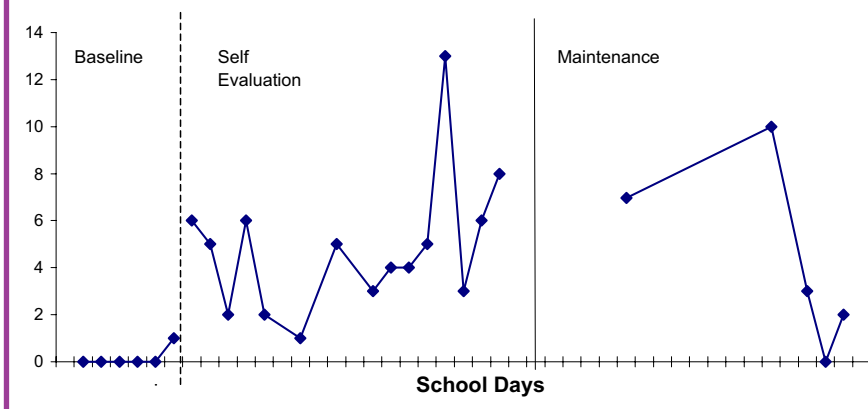
tial benefits of the behavior that you chose to target.

- **Step 5:** Develop a personal goal for improvement. Compare your prediction with the data that you gathered from the first five audiotapes that you recorded. If you are not satisfied with the frequency with which you use the behavior, set a personal goal for improvement. If you are satisfied, choose another behavior to target. Write your personal goal on the top of the graph paper, and draw a goal line.
- **Step 6:** Brainstorm strategies to help you meet your goal. You might brainstorm with a mentor or with a trusted colleague. Sample strategies could include a cue card with specific praise statements or academic questions written on it or a picture of a question mark or happy face taped to the overhead projector. Use the strategy or strategies each day to help you reach your personal goal.
- **Step 7:** Audiotape your instructional behavior during your targeted content area, and listen to a 5-minute sample of your instructional behavior each day. Continue this routine until you reach your goal. Once you reach your goal, continue for at least 3 to 5 more days. You can discontinue taping and graphing your behavior for a week or two, and then audiotape your instruction again and listen to learn whether you are still reaching your personal goal.

### Classroom Application

Tracey (a novice special education teacher) used the seven-step strategy to help improve her instructional behavior.

**Figure 1. Frequency of Tracey’s Social Praise Statements Used During Instruction**



Here is how she used the self-evaluation strategy:

- **Step 1:** Tracey chose the content area that she calls “calendar time.” Calendar time was a time when her students orally practiced functional math and oral language skills. Tracey chose calendar time because her students exhibited the most behavior problems at that time of day. She recorded the first 15 minutes of her instruction for 5 days to establish a baseline.
- **Step 2:** Tracey identified specific social praise as her targeted instructional behavior. She predicted that she provided specific social praise statements three to four times in a 5-minute period of instruction. Her definition of specific social praise was verbal statements demonstrating

approval of a student’s social response that specify the behavior being praised.

- **Step 3:** She listened to the audiotapes and graphed her targeted behavior, as shown in Figure 1. She discovered that she used specific social praise statements only one time during the 6 days of data collection.
- **Step 4:** Tracey then reviewed current literature on specific social praise, determined how to administer effective praise statements, and learned the potential benefits of using specific social praise in her classroom.
- **Step 5:** Tracey compared her prediction of using three to four specific social praise statements with the data that she gathered from the five audiotapes. She was not satisfied with the frequency with which she was using specific social praise statements, so she set a personal goal for improvement. She set her goal for providing specific social praise statements at seven to eight times per 5-minute period of instruction. She then wrote her personal goal on the top of the graph paper and drew a goal line.
- **Step 6:** Tracey brainstormed strategies to help her meet her goal. She decided to make herself a cue card and tape it to the back of her classroom where she could see it while she was teaching. Figure 2 is her cue card

showing her strategy for increasing effective praise statements.

- **Step 7:** Tracey recorded audiotapes, listened to them, and graphed the frequency with which she used specific social praise statement behavior every day for 3 1/2 weeks. Her frequency increased from an average of 0.3 specific social praise statements during baseline to an average of 4.8 specific social praise statements per 5-minute period of instruction while she was using the self-evaluation strategy. She then discontinued taping and graphing her behavior for a week, after which she recorded her instruction again and found that she was still using an average of 4.4 social praise statements per 5-minute period of instruction. Figure 1 shows a graph of the number of social praise statements that Tracey used during self-evaluation and maintenance, as well as the number of social praise statements used during baseline. Tracey was happy that she improved her use of social praise. She then revised her personal goal to five praise statements per 5-minute period of instruction and decided to repeat this strategy in a month to learn whether she was still meeting her goal.

### Final Thoughts

Researchers have touted self-evaluation as a beneficial, nonthreatening method to help improve teachers’ instructional behavior. The self-evaluation strategy presented in this article gives teachers a data-based, systematic strategy to help them improve their instructional behavior. This strategy enables teachers to become actively involved in their own professional development and can result in long-term personal change.

**Figure 2. Tracey’s Strategy for Improving Social Praise Statements**

### Catch ‘em being good!!!

Effective praise has Good **V I B e S**

**V** aried

**I** mmediate

**B** ehavior descriptive

**S** incere and contingent

She learned that seeking out the positive behavior of her students is better than dwelling on negative behavior.

After using the self-evaluation strategy presented in this article, Tracey found that the process of self-evaluation made her more aware of what she was saying and how it affected her students' behavior. She believed that she learned that seeking out the positive behavior of her students is better than dwelling on negative behavior. She said that the self-evaluation process allowed her to reflect on her day and help her become more aware of what she was saying to her students and how she was saying it. Tracey stated that this heightened awareness helped her improve her instructional behavior in using more specific social praise and changing the tone of her voice to a more positive tone, which in turn made her whole classroom a more pleasant place to teach.

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