

Teacher appraisal system and professional learning. Insights from Italian school principals' and teachers' views on multiple sources of data and indicators

Loredana Perla^a, Laura Sara Agrati^b, Viviana Vinci^c and Patrizia Soletti^a

^aDepartment of Educational Sciences, Psychology, Communication, University of Bari Aldo Moro, Bari, Italy; ^bDepartment of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Bergamo, Italy; ^cDepartment of Humanities, Letters, Cultural Heritage, Educational Sciences, University of Foggia, Foggia, Italy

Abstract

This paper explores school principals' and teachers' views of the Italian teachers' appraisal system and related indicators. In particular, the research aimed at examining the opinions of school principals and teachers regarding the domains to be considered for teacher appraisal purposes. An investigation involving 37 school principals and 868 in service teachers, from three Italian regions, is presented. The data was collected through a questionnaire and statistically analysed. Findings suggest operationalising new data sources – specifically students and parent, - is beneficial to evaluate teacher quality as a construct in data-based professional learning communities. They show different positioning: teachers seem to be really inclined to be evaluated, especially by students and parents, while school principals still seem very cautious in entrusting the teachers' appraisal to an external point of view. This paper adds to the existing research showing the perspective of a new teachers' appraisal, inspired by multi-faceted models based on multiple points of view (students, parents, not only principals) and not reduced to simplistic solutions of an accounting type. Furthermore, the study answers the call for research into teachers' appraisal as part of the professional learning actions and in view of more integrated professional leadership.

Keywords: professional learning; teacher' appraisal; indicators

1. Teacher evaluation, appraisal and professional learning

We observe, at the international level, an increasing interest for teacher evaluation and appraisal systems. Borg defines appraisal as 'a multidimensional but coherent process which acknowledges the complexity of teaching' (Borg, 2019, p. 13). Several authors argue that teacher evaluation systems can play an important role in improving teachers' effectiveness and supporting their professional learning (Stronge and Tucker 2003). As Tuytens and Devos (2017) point out, teacher evaluation could and should offer, through professional learning, the missing link between two often separate dimensions: the reality of the classroom (thus the problems related to the teaching practice) and teacher improvement. Professional learning is intended here as an internal process of active experimentation, evoking the teacher's creation of knowledge through interaction (Timperley, 2011). Stronge and Tucker (2003) argue that meaningful feedback provided through good teacher evaluation can lead to significant improvement in classroom performance. 'Just as students need feedback about performance and progress, so too do teachers. Success criteria outlining what quality teaching looks like, informed by timely feedback about how to improve and in what areas, should surely be part of a continuous learning process for both teachers and students alike' (Elliot, 2015, p. 109).

If well designed, teacher monitoring, evaluation, and feedback systems can be used as a tool to increase teacher effectiveness, achieve better student learning outcomes, and improve schools and learning environments (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). Indeed, many countries (e.g. Portugal, New Zealand, USA) have implemented teacher evaluation systems in order to improve teaching. Teacher's evaluation systems are tightly related with the quality of the teaching processes and with

the achievement of learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner 2017).

Teacher evaluation is often studied as an isolated process concerning the individual teacher and separate from other school improvement activities. The study of Tuytens and Devos (2017), instead, found that teacher evaluation is related to other organizational characteristics, such as the feedback provided by school principals not only about teachers' individual practice but also on collaboration, professional learning, shared vision, participation and orientation toward the common goals of the school. School principals' promotion of forms of collaboration among teachers and opportunities for professional learning is in line with the integrated leadership or "leadership for learning" approach (Montecinos et al. 2020; MacBeath and Dempster, 2008), which, on the one hand, emphasizes the principal's critical role in focusing on learning in the school, but, on the other hand, also establishes the importance for the school principal to involve others to support learning in the school.

Above all, research today gives us more complex visions of professional learning which can no longer be reduced to a neo-positivist model of effectiveness (Opfer, Pedder and Lavicza 2011; Korthagen 2017).

According to such visions, teachers' professional learning would take place within school communities with their own and peculiar characteristics, not within 'neutral' contexts detached from the context (Admiraal *et al.*, 2021): it would be supported by a shared school vision on learning, professional learning opportunities for all staff, collaborative work and learning practices, change in school organization, as well as learning leadership. The professional learning of novice teachers, above all, would not be favored by accountability regimes that resort exclusively to tests and which causes states of pressure and tension (Ro 2019). Instead, a system where balanced principal leadership and community support prevails could help reconcile teachers' instructional beliefs with

exam-oriented practices, thus leading to better teacher learning.

1.1 Formative and summative function of teacher evaluation: between accountability and development

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2013) distinguishes between two main complementary forms of teacher appraisal: one that emphasizes professional improvement and teacher learning, another that focuses on accountability, performance monitoring, career management, and school administration, in accordance with managerial goals (Lillejord and Børte 2020).

These two forms, in teachers' perceptions and motivations, tend to be conflicting, if not mutually undermining, in that they expect their practices to be evaluated fairly, their needs fully recognized, their opportunities for growth enhanced, and their merit proportionately rewarded (Elliot 2015). Therefore, it is difficult for policymakers and evaluators to unite and balance them effectively in a single system (OECD 2013). As Abelha and Colleagues (2020) argue, an effective teacher appraisal system is based on subjective perceptions of its value, meaningfulness and authenticity, and usefulness in terms of professional learning, personal value, intrinsic motivation, engagement and positive emotions, and sense of self-efficacy (Korthagen 2017). If the formative dimension takes priority over the summative dimension, then teachers may perceive the teacher appraisal process as a meaningful learning opportunity that completely transcends the restrictions, constraints, and complaints of an administrative control exercise. In such an opportunity, students become co-assessors and teachers themselves take on the role of 'learners' in the assessment context (Derrington, Kirk 2017).

In order for the formative dimension to become preeminent, the model of school leadership and school organization must be set up so that the school as a whole embodies

a community of social cooperation through a consistent culture of participation, collaboration, involvement, and shared decision-making (Tuytens and Devos, 2017). The transformative quality of feedback provided by school principals is of paramount importance (Tuytens and Devos 2014). Multiple measures and sources such as classroom observation ratings, students' surveys, value-added scores, teachers' portfolios should be integrated to promote formative and improvement-oriented evaluation (Kuhfeld 2017). Teacher appraisal should be conceived as part of the operational implementation of monitoring and quality assurance in the school system at the intersection of effective schooling and effective teaching. This involves schools fostering teacher learning through appraisal, which becomes a learning tool when well-designed according to the characteristics that make professional learning most effective (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner 2017): content focus, active learning, collaboration, use of modeling and modeling exercises, expert coaching and support, feedback and reflection, and extended duration. More recently, Abelha et al. (2020) emphasized that teacher appraisal should focus primarily on the evaluation of teaching strategies, to align teachers' needs with the purposes and methods of teacher appraisal.

2. Domains of teacher appraisal and point of view of teachers and school principals on students and parents

Teacher quality is recognized today to have a significant impact on educational outcomes and teacher appraisal as an inevitable component of an effective educational system (Borg, 2019, p. 3; Flores, Darrington, 2018; OECD, 2009; 2015). However, what 'teacher quality' really is and what is to be appraised in a teacher's practice 'remain matters of substantial debate' (Borg, 2019, p. 3). Within the debate about teacher appraisal, a paradigm shift (Sandilos *et al.*, 2019; UNESCO/EI, 2019) - that has led to an increasing

interest in 'context' factors (such as the point of view of colleagues, students, parents and stakeholders for the purposes of teacher appraisal) - is easily identifiable.

The TALIS report of 2009 (OECD, 2009) already defined parents and students as 'stakeholders' and the 'feedback' of them as 'useful for teachers and for those responsible for appraising teachers' (OECD, 2009a, p. 152). However significant differences among countries in the school principals' perceptions with respect to this were noted (OECD, 2009a, p. 151).

In position paper 'Teacher evaluation' (OECD, 2009b) of the same year, although based on the summative reporting system (Borg, 2019) for the decisions about job status or promotion of teachers, however delivered a conceptual framework (Figure 1) in which the students were 'agents involved' (OECD, 2009b, p. 4) in the teacher evaluation (I level), with other teachers and school principals, and the parents in the system evaluation (III level), with communities and taxpayers.

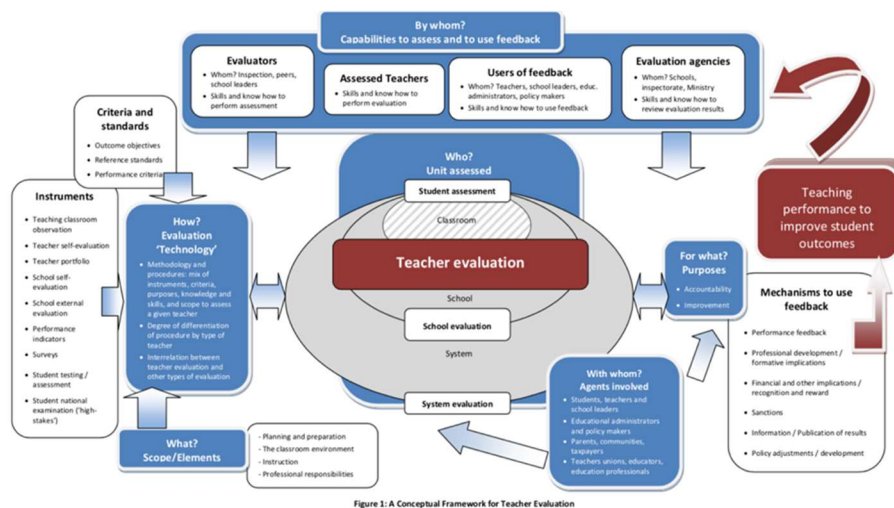


Figure 1. Teacher evaluation framework (OECD, 2009, p. 4).

While the paper merely argued that student and parent opinion survey, while useful, were a 'rarely used tool in the context of individual teacher evaluation' (OECD, 2009, p. 4), some studies already found, instead, that parents appreciated the teacher's ability to

promote student satisfaction and support pupil learning (Jacob and Lefgren, 2005; Peterson et al., 2003), somehow anticipating the notion of *student pedagogical leadership* outlined in Hill (2020).

The position paper 'Synergies for better learning' (OECD, 2013) acknowledged for the first time the relation between teacher appraisal and professionalism as well as the importance of consensus through the involvement of all stakeholders. Within the 'teacher performance appraisal' (Elliott, 2015, p. 102), it recognized both formative aspects - related to 'developing performance, such as career development, professional learning and feedback' – and summative aspects - useful 'for career progression, possible promotion or demotion and termination purposes'. The further PISA Report (OECD, 2015) definitively takes the context both as a source of information and as a domain to be appraised for the purposes of teacher professional development. The indicators of 'contribution to school development' and 'links to the community' became 'aspects appraised' (OECD, 2015, p. 510) of a teacher's work also through the information coming from the surveys of parents and students.

Today's awareness of teacher appraisal – not as a system (OECD, 2009; 2015) or a mechanism (OECD, 2018), but as a multi-dimensional process that 'combines different strategies and input from various sources' (Grissom & Youngs, 2016, p. 78), a full range of stakeholders (Borg, 2019) – recognizes the important role of school leadership (Flores and Derrington, 2017; Tuytens and Devos, 2018) and community, especially the feedback of students and parents, as 'strategic leverage'.

The holistic paradigm of evaluation (Sandilos et al., 2019; UNESCO/EI, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2013) recognizes the teaching relations – 'communication with parents and members of the community' (Borg, 2019), 'networking with stakeholders especially with parents' (CCSSO, 2013) - in the teacher appraisal domain. The studies investigate teacher

evaluation strategies, taking it as a system of information collected over time and from multiple points of view (Borg, 2019; Sandilos et al., 2019): observation of lessons that are realistic but also stressful and occasional; feedback from students and parents that are very significant but also partial, given their low preparation as evaluators (Borg, 2019). With regard to student evaluations, studies confirm their usefulness in improving the quality of teaching (Benton and Ryalls, 2016; Borg, 2018; Geiger and Amrein-Beardsley, 2019) especially if carried out through validated questionnaires (Geiger and Amrein-Beardsley, 2019) and if students are asked to evaluate only those aspects of teaching that they are qualified to judge (Benton and Ryalls, 2016) - teacher attitude, course organization, relationship with students, clarity of communication but not knowledge of the curriculum. Lejonberg, Elstad and Christophersen (2018) examined teacher distress and perceived usefulness of student feedback-based assessment. The results confirm: a. teachers' awareness of the evolutionary function of appraisal which, however, must be conducted with respect for the person and with reference to clear criteria on the part of the manager; b. the preference for appraisal strategies that are more summative than formative.

Studies are also to be mentioned on the influence of school leadership in promoting learning and teacher development and, consequently, in implementing an appraisal of 'sense' (Flores and Derrington, 2017; Vekeman, Devos and Tuytens, 2015). Vekeman, Devos and Tuytens (2015) highlighted the influence of principals' sensemaking on the implementation of the teachers' appraisal process. Flores and Derrington (2017) detected the effort of principals to balance between sometimes too centralized evaluation criteria and the need to maintain positive relationships with teachers. Lavigne and Olson (2019), instead, have found a certain insecurity of principals in evaluating teachers in relation to student achievement.

3. The national evaluation system and appraisal procedures in Italy

In Italy, the current procedure for appraising the teachers is entrusted to an internal evaluation committee and the school principal, that collect and process information and evidence also involving colleagues, families and, in secondary schools, students. This procedure is therefore the result of a very complex network of factors that influence the way in which professional learning translates into teaching and learning (Strom, Mills, & Abrams, 2021). The Regulation on the National Evaluation System (Law No. 107/2015 and related notes) has promoted a system evaluation model for the Italian schools. It aimed to integrate the two aspects of accountability and improvement. Italian school legislation has developed a system of teacher's appraisal by endowing schools with an ancillary pay fund in the form of a bonus reward for the enhancement of merit of tenured teaching staff at all levels, to be allocated to those teachers who had particularly distinguished themselves in relation to teaching, innovation and process organization, leaving autonomy to school institutions for its determination. The Italian system evaluation model has leveraged the quality of teachers' professional development as a form of personal investment rather than as an act due by labor contract, according to more democratic paradigms and accountability based on principles of equity, collaboration among the many stakeholders involved, and the assumption of professional responsibility by the teacher (Biesta 2017; Cochran-Smith et al. 2017).

The potential of the appraisal system through forms of teacher appreciation and participation emerged in the research "The continuous professional development of the teacher: from the Improvement Plan to the appraisal" (Author1, 2019), conducted with a group of 33 schools in Southern Italy. The research project investigated the documentation of practices (connected with school's self-evaluation, teacher evaluation

and appraisal procedures) to improve the quality of school and enhance the professionalism of the teacher. Previous research (Lucisano and Corsini 2015) found that closed attitudes toward school and teacher evaluation are more prevalent among in-service teachers than among pre-service or temporary contract teachers: if evaluation is perceived not as an element of individual and contextual development, but as a questioning of a professional status. Moreover, the research shows that teachers manifest open attitudes toward shared evaluation with colleagues, managers, students and families. Starting with the case of Italy, the research brings out the teachers' request to involve colleagues, families and students in the appraisal of teachers and in the evaluation of the school, in more organized forms and on the basis of agreed indicators. Teacher appraisal system must be experienced as valid and reliable by teachers (Lillejord and Børte, 2019).

4. Survey on teachers' and school principals' views of teachers' appraisal indicators

a. The purpose of the study

This paper draws upon data from broader research (Author1, *et al.*, 2021; Author1, 2019) born with a view to the full bottom-up participation of teachers in the processes of evaluation and reflection on their professional profile and critical re-elaboration of their practice. The research aimed at examining the link between appraisal and professional development. The general purpose of the investigation was to shed further light upon the school principals' and teachers' personal knowledge regarding the processes of evaluation at school and the valorization of teachers. The study reported in this document analyzes in particular the opinions of school principals and teachers regarding the domains to be considered for teacher appraisal purposes and explore possible conditions for more shared professional leadership. This paper addresses the following framed

questions, which were investigated through the analysis of the answers n. 1-3 in the c. section of the questionnaire (see Tab. 1):

(1) How do school principals and teachers perceive the Italian teacher appraisal system?

(2) What are the main indicators for teachers' appraisal according to school principals and teachers?

(3) How important is the point of view of school principal and other stakeholders in the teachers' appraisal according to school principals and teachers?

The study also asked a non-directional question, which was investigated by comparing what emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data:

(4) Are there conditions for a more integrated professional leadership?

b. Methods

The data was collected through a mixed questionnaire that includes closed and open-ended questions concerning the following main sections: a. sociometric-professional information, b. general knowledge on evaluation processes at school, c. perceptions about the teacher appraisal system in Italy (indicators and criteria, point of view of the manager, bonus etc.), d. personal considerations – Tab. 1. The questionnaire was designed based upon previous work within the context of a broader research project (Author1, 2019; Author1 *et al.*, 2021) and sent by e-mail to school principals and teachers in three regions of Italy - Calabria, Puglia, Lombardy. This mixed collection tool allowed to obtain at the same time quantitative and qualitative data subjected to triangulation to decide which type is more likely to provide the desired information (Creswell, 2013).

<i>Section</i>	<i>Information</i>	<i>Data</i>
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a.	sociometric-professional information	gender, age, qualification, type of school, length of service, roles of responsibility (additional assignments)	quantitative
b.	general knowledge on evaluation processes at school	learnings assessment, outcomes assessment process monitoring, system evaluation	quantitative
c.	perceptions on the teacher appraisal system in Italy	agreement with the Italian teacher appraisal system (question n. 1); main indicators for teachers' appraisal (question n. 2); importance of the school principals' and others'* point of view (question n. 3)- *colleagues, parents, students	quantitative
d.	personal consideration	proposals to enhance teacher professionalism	qualitative

Table 1. Questionnaire sections and questions, data types.

The questionnaire was administered between November and December 2021 using a random criterion. 37 school principals and 868 teachers replied to the questionnaire.

c. Participants and data analysis

As for the participants, 64.9% of school principals and 91.2% of teachers are female. More than half of school principals (59.5%) and some a third of teachers (38.2%) are aged between 51 and 60. Most of school principals have postgraduate specializations (59.5%) or degrees (40%) while, among teachers, 43.3% have a diploma and 42.6% a degree. In terms of experience, participants served in schools as school principals between 2 and 5 years (40.5%) or between 6 and 10 years (43.2%), while they served as teachers for more than 10 years (69.5%). Most school principals (91.9%) and teachers (89.4%) work in institutions which include kindergarten, primary and middle schools - the Italian so called 'comprehensive' schools.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (19.0). Specifically, statistical significance was analyzed with respect to question no. C1, the binary logistic regression between question no. C1 and question no. C2 and the multiple dichotomization with respect to question n. C2.

The treatment of textual material of the open answer took place through a Qualitative Data Analysis (Creswell, 2007), based on Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2008), a bottom-up approach whereby data with which to analyze phenomena emerge from contextual situations to derive some interesting evidence. Specifically, coding was articulated by the following moments:

1. open coding, aimed at initial conceptualization of textual data into meaningful text units and identification of labels;
2. axial coding, aimed at identifying frequent macro-categories emerging from the textual strings, with indication of the number of occurrences;
3. selective coding, aimed at hierarchical and analytical ordering of the identified macro-categories, for the final emergence of core categories.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the process of data analysis a validation by another researcher was also used. The triangulation of researchers (Author 1 and Author 2), who were constantly confronted with the processes of categorization and emergence of codes, and the triangulation of analytical approaches and sources of data (a. statistical analysis of closed questions; b. coding, categorizing and conceptualisation of personal considerations from open-ended questions), was conducted to strengthen the credibility of the study (Bryman, 2016; Espedal et al. 2022). The whole research process, according to grounded and bottom-up approach, is motivated by the aim of getting a better understanding and interpretation of the reality investigated (Perla, Vinci, 2021).

d. Findings

Agreement with the Italian teacher appraisal system

The analysis highlights a statistically significant difference between the agreement expressed by school principals and teachers on the Italian teacher's appraisal system. Table 2 summarizes that teachers consider themselves somewhat agree (43.5%) while school principals mainly indicate an agreement (43,2%) and a strong agreement (29.7%).

Question n. C1 - <i>How much do you agree with the Italian teacher appraisal system?</i>		School		
		Teachers	principals	Total
Strongly disagree	<i>A.V.</i>	118	0	118
	%	13,6%	0,0%	13,0%
Disagree	<i>A.V.</i>	162	4	166
	%	18,7%	10,8%	18,3%
Quite agree	<i>A.V.</i>	378	6	384
	%	43,5%	16,2%	42,4%
Agree	<i>A.V.</i>	157	16	173
	%	18,1%	43,2%	19,1%
Strongly agree	<i>A.V.</i>	53	11	64
	%	6,1%	29,7%	7,1%
Tot. <i>A.V.</i>		868	37	905
		%	100,0%	100,0%

(Test Pearson's chi-square = 52,224 p-value<0,000)

*Statistical significance $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Agreement with the Italian teachers' appraisal system.

Indicators for teachers' appraisal

Both school principals and teachers in agreement with the Italian teachers' appraisal system consider having main importance indicators as: a. the 'feedback from parents and

students' (45,19%) and b. a balance between 'internal' (peers, executive staff teacher, expert teacher) and 'external' (inspector, other school principals) appraisal (41,99%).

However, an internal difference emerges about the indicators between the two groupings: while teachers prefer 'feedback form parents and students' (45.20%) slightly more than the balance between 'internal' and 'external' appraisal (40.20%), school principals clearly prefer the balance between 'internal' and 'external' appraisal (83.80%) vs 'feedback form parents and students' (45.90%)– see Table 2.

Question n. C2 - <i>What are the main indicators for teachers' appraisal?</i>		Questionnaire		Tot.
		Teachers	School principals	
delegation by the school principal	<i>A.V.</i>	47	5	52
	%	5,40%	13,50%	5,75%
involvement in extracurricular activities	<i>A.V.</i>	114	5	119
	%	13,10%	13,50%	13,15%
involvement in school projects	<i>A.V.</i>	56	5	61
	%	6,50%	13,50%	6,74%
feedback from parents and students	<i>A.V.</i>	392	17	409
	%	45,20%	45,90%	45,19%
internal (peers, executive staff teacher, expert teachers) and external (inspector, other school principals) appraisal	<i>A.V.</i>	349	31	380
	%	40,20%	83,80%	41,99%
other	<i>A.V.</i>	304	7	311
	%	35,00%	18,90%	34,36%
Tot.		868	37	905

Table 3. Indicators for teachers' appraisal.

Importance of the school principals' and others' point of view

As regards the school principals' point of view on the teacher's appraisal (question n. C3), significant differences emerged between the considerations of the teachers and those of the school principals.

	Average teachers (n. 868)	Average school principals (n.37)	T	Sig.*
Question n. C3 - <i>In appraising the teacher, how useful do you consider the school principal's point of view?</i>	3,535	4,243	-4,289	0,00

Table 4. Average perception of the weight of the school principals ' point of view in teachers' appraisal.

Table 4 shows the average responses on the Likert scale of 1 to 5. While teachers find the school principal's point of view quite useful, school principals find it very useful. This data confirms the evidence already highlighted by the position papers according to which school principals consider their own judgment necessary in the teachers' appraisal. The significantly negative T value indicates the clear difference between the sample mean of the responding teachers and that of the school principals.

Conditions for a more integrated professional leadership

In reference to the school principals' and others' - colleagues, parents, students - point of

view on the teacher's appraisal, the previous data are comparable with what emerges from the qualitative data analysis carried out on question n. D1. Text coding was carried out separately on the answers to the open question of school principals (a textual corpus of 37 responses) and of teachers (a textual corpus of 868 responses)¹.

Focusing on the core category 'how to appraise' (see Table 5), school principals do not refer to other sources of information than the standard methods (e.g. inspection visits), while teachers, on the other hand, in axial coding 'levels and sources', refer to students and parents and to colleagues and the school principals.

Respondents	Core category	Axial coding	Open coding	No textual occurrences
School principals	How to appraise	Methods and/or tools Levels and/or sources of information	Inspection visits	2
			Students	72
			Parents	39
			Colleague and school principals	44
Teachers	How to appraise	Methods and/or tools	Inspection visits	12
			Observation	12

Table 5. Categories and codes from school principals' and teachers' text corpora.

¹ The number of textual occurrences is higher than the number of textual strings because some very long responses were coded with more than one label/category.

The qualitative data show noteworthy aspects: a. the point of view of 'other stakeholders' is only taken into account by teachers, not by school principals who only consider conventional methods, such as inspection visits; teachers seems to be more sensitive to external evaluation (111 occurrences) than internal evaluation (44 occurrences); teachers consider students and parents as a priority source to be considered for teacher evaluation (72 and 39 occurrences, respectively) compared to colleagues and school principals (44 occurrences). This last figure suggests operationalizing new data sources - specifically students and parent, - is beneficial to evaluate teacher quality as a construct in data-based professional learning communities (Timperley, 2004). 'Students' has more occurrences than all open codings; various meanings can be found in it related to the improvement of outcomes, the level of interest and motivation and the feedback.

Respondents	Core category	Axial coding	Open coding (no textual occurrences)	Excerpt
Teachers	How to appraise	Levels and/or sources of information	Students (72)	'A teacher's professionalism is valued every day when students of him/her enter school with happiness and serenity, when there is feedback from them (...). I feel valued when my students learn, it means that I have done a good job' 'By observing the progress which students make in 'learning' 'By the students' attention, interest, curiosity, participation and learning' 'Evaluation by the students'

Table 6. Categories and codes form teachers' text corpora (excerpts – Students').

5. Discussion

The answers to the questions in part c. of the questionnaire - agreement with the Italian teacher appraisal system (question 1); main indicators for teachers' appraisal (question 2); importance of the school principals' and others (as colleagues, parents, students point of view) (question 3) - were analyzed statistically. The answers to the questions in part d. - personal considerations - were analyzed inductively using the qualitative data analysis method. The mixed tools made it possible to "obtain a better interpretation of the investigated reality" (Author1 et al., 2021, p. 254): they collected numerical data and significant data concerning the visions of school leaders and teachers regarding the role of students and parents in teacher appraisal.

(1) How do school principals and teachers perceive with the Italian teacher appraisal system?

The statistical analysis carried out reveals a general moderate agreement with the Italian teacher appraisal system but a significant difference between school principals and teachers – clearly greater by the former, more moderate by the latter. Such statistically significant difference is highlighted above all in the polarizations (see Table 3): on one hand, there are no 'strongly disagree' school principals, the teachers in 'strongly disagree' are 13.6%; on the other hand, there are only 6.1% of 'strongly agree' teachers, the school principals in 'strongly agree' are 29,7%.

Therefore, school principals are definitely in favor (note the absence of complete

disagreement), teachers are more moderate and express themselves on all levels of agreement.

These data would seem to confirm the studies according to which school principals are the vectors of change, especially with respect to school reforms in the area of evaluation (Vekeman, Dvos and Tuytens, 2015; Flores and Derrington, 2017). It would be interesting to verify in a few years whether this marked propensity of school principals towards the reform in progress will have influenced the perceptions of teachers by increasing the figure for the agreement, which is more moderate at the moment.

(2) What are the main indicators for teachers' appraisal according to school principals and teachers?

The analysis highlights the 'feedback from students and parents' as the most appreciated indicator, in general, by school principals and teachers but, also in this case, a difference between the former and the latter (see Table 3). In the meantime, it is surprising that the percentage of school principals and teachers in favor of the 'feedback from parents and students' indicator is almost entirely similar (just over 45%). Teachers would like to be assessed first through 'feedback from students and parents' and immediately afterwards through the equal use of internal and external procedures. School principals, on the other hand, would like teachers to be evaluated strongly through the equal use of internal and external procedures and partly through feedback from students and parents. Therefore, also with regard to teachers' appraisal indicators, a generally moderate preference emerges towards 'feedback from parents and students' which, however, is not confirmed in the analysis of the answers of school principals who, instead, strongly lean towards the use of normal internal and external appraisal procedure.

(3) How important is the point of view of school principal and other stakeholders in the teachers' appraisal according to school principals and teachers?

The statistical analysis clearly highlights the importance of the point of view of the principals, clearly on the part of the principals themselves, slightly less on the part of the teachers (see Table 4). The qualitative analysis of the text corpora of the open answer, on the other hand, brought out the substantial difference between principals and teachers (see Table 5): the former report scant references to evaluation methods for other canons (inspections), the latter report significant indications to the appraisal performed by students, followed by the appraisal performed by colleagues and school principals and by parents. The qualitative analysis therefore shows better the divergence between school principals and teachers with regard to teacher evaluation indicators, with respect to the 'students' and 'parents' component - which prevails in the texts of the teachers but which, instead, disappears in the texts of the school principals. This aspect, in clear contrast to the data emerging from the statistical analysis, could somehow seem to recall a certain insecurity of principals in appraising teachers in relation to the students' perspective (Lavigne and Olson, 2019).

(4) Are there conditions for a more integrated professional leadership?

The integrated leadership or "leadership for learning" approach (Montecinos et al. 2020; MacBeath and Dempster, 2008) refers for school institution to incorporate perspectives intentions of administrators, students and teachers who need to collaborate for teaching to produce learning. Such an approach implies 'multivoicing in conversations' (Montecinos et al. 2020) and a 'shared leadership' (MacBeath and Dempster, 2008) vision that bring school principals to recognizing the importance of the voices of others (stakeholders, i.e. relatives and students) and to involving them in a continuous process

of feedback and socialization.

Through a triangulation of the data, the analysis highlights, in general, the common desire of teachers and school principals for a "choral" teachers' appraisal, i.e. based on multiple voices (students, parents, not only principals). However, the qualitative analysis reveals a different positioning in this regard: teachers seem to be really inclined to receive students and parents' feedback for their professional growth; school principals still seem very cautious in taking into account the voice of students and starters with respect to teachers' appraisal.

Therefore, the perspective of a new teachers' appraisal - inspired by multi-faceted models and not reduced to simplistic solutions of an accounting type (Margolis and Strom, 2020) - would seem to dwell in the representations of teachers and school managers. However, there is still enough to work on the ways of thinking of school principals so that teachers' appraisal is fully part of the professional learning actions (Strom *et al.*, 2021).

6. Conclusions

Multivoicing in conversations is the basis of a learning environment that favors the professional learning of teachers and, consequently, of students (Montecinos et al., 2020). Added to this is an educational institution that places learning at the center, which is capable of transforming schools into environments of learning and which shares leadership and accountability (MacBeath and Dempster, 2008).

A teacher appraisal system can and should honour the complexity of teaching by involving multiple sources of data in the teacher appraisal system. Teacher appraisal is where leadership and learning meet or don't meet. The presented study described the different perspective of teachers and the school principals on teacher appraisal sources and indicators. It also brought out the different weight given by teachers and principals

to the voice of the stakeholders, primarily students and families, indirectly on the school improvement.

The next research initiatives could be dedicated to the connection between the teacher appraisal system, professional learning and shared leadership, starting from the outline found in the present study.

The findings of the survey call for overcoming evaluation models centered on mere control of the result (suffered by teachers, rather than participated in) and recovering a practical rationality capable of understanding the teacher's actions in the situation, equipping Schools with agile, understandable teacher evaluation/assessment systems, shared by school communities and territories, requiring teachers', families' and students' co-participation. No improvement is possible, indeed, without the co-participation of the teaching staff in the evaluation procedures of the system, without equipping the schools with tools that support the self-managing of the performance cycle (Author1 2019).

The results of the study allowed to deepen the most significant meanings of a complex theme, the enhancement of teacher professionalism. This theme can be translated into effective practices if taken within the culture of self-determination of professional learning. The community perspective is at the heart of the concept of the school as a learning organization: in schools that function as professional learning communities (Admiraal *et al.* 2021), teachers refer to the context in which the data are found and not from 'best practice' approaches to teaching that are avulsed from the context. Evaluation should provide an opportunity for teachers in a learning community to test the effect of their practices using data.

Evaluation cannot be based only on neo-positivistic paradigms of "Teacher Effectiveness" who do not adequately consider the complexity of teachers' professional learning (Opfer, Pedder and Lavicza 2011; Ro 2019): performance management and

standardized approaches for appraisal intensify teacher burnout (Holloway and Brass, 2018) and fails to consider that good teaching is grounded in “ethical teacher professionalism” (Benade, 2015, p. 190). As Mockler (2013) argues, the concept of teacher professional learning as ‘identity work’ represent a policy problem and concerns the processes in which teachers engage when they actively expand, refine, and modify their practice, not through "one shot" professional development experiences or passive fruition of professional development courses (one-time workshops, seminars, or lectures). There is a significant difference between the systematic career progression associated with professional development and the broader, more reflective, more critical and lower performing approach to continuing professional learning (Timperley 2011; Fenwick and Nerland 2014; O'Brien & Jones 2014). Teachers’ professional learning is interactive, job-embedded, collaborative, sustained and continuous, aligned with school goals, standards and assessments (Labone and Long 2016; Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner 2017). It encourages teachers’ responsibility, agency and leadership (King and Holland 2022), also involving and supporting teachers to analyze and identify teaching and learning challenges (Calvert 2016, p. 6), therefore through the promotion of research skills on teaching practice (Bergmark 2020).

Regarding effective teacher professional learning, it is necessary to consider the multi-level and multidimensional nature of teacher learning (Korthagen 2017) and to employ training strategies that consistently demonstrate a high correlation between professional development, teaching practices and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner 2017). In general, it would be necessary to critically assume the studies that put a simple and direct relationship between input factors and output factors without adequately investigating what is in the middle – like the didactic mediation of the teacher, full of implicit not always observable but fundamental for the 'action. The complexity of

educational and teaching relationships requires merit-related evaluation processes that do not depend solely on performance accountability logics but also leave space for possible improvements from an improvement perspective.

Another decisive element, which emerged from the research, concerns the role of the principal in the improvement process: a *pivotal lever*, which must, however, dialogue with other data sources, primarily students and families. One of the major risks for the internal evaluation process in schools (*internal evaluation* or *self-evaluation*) is, in fact, that of self-referentiality, especially if the process is not accompanied by external parties that provide feedback.

With this work, we have tried to give back to the research and professional communities a contribution to reflect on what it means to address a crucial point of the contemporary debate on the school: the link between improvement and professional learning. Appraisal, evaluation and improvement help to connect the quality needs of the school's stakeholders with the urgency of restoring authority and value to the teaching function. This is also why we believe that training support devices can be useful: telling the schools that quality is an achievable landing place, not just an abstract and distant project.

Author Contributions

Loredana Perla wrote the paragraph 4 *Survey on teachers' and school principals' views of teachers' appraisal indicators*.

Laura Sara Agrati wrote the paragraphs 2. *Domains of teacher appraisal and point of view of teachers and school principals on students and parents* and 5. *Discussion*.

Viviana Vinci wrote the paragraphs 1. *Teacher evaluation, appraisal and professional learning*, 1.1 *Formative and summative function of teacher evaluation: between accountability and development* and 6. *Conclusions*.

Patrizia Soleti wrote the paragraph 3. The national evaluation system and appraisal procedures in Italy.

All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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