Observational Evaluation of Teachers: Measuring More Than We Bargained For?

Guest Lecture by Shanyce L. Campbell, Postdoctoral Fellow
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Abstract: Most states have comprehensive teacher evaluation systems that include classroom observation ratings. Some research suggests that observational ratings are valid and reliable measures of teacher quality; new evidence raises concerns that they may be inequitable. Our secondary analysis of Measures of Effective Teaching data contributes to growing evidence that observation ratings, used as part of comprehensive teacher evaluation systems across the nation, may measure factors outside of a teacher’s performance or control. Specifically, men and teachers in classrooms with high concentrations of Black, Hispanic, male, and low-performing students receive significantly lower observation ratings. By using various methodological approaches and a subsample of teachers randomly assigned to classrooms, we demonstrate that these differences are unlikely due to actual differences in teacher quality. These results suggest that policymakers consider the unintended consequences of using observational ratings to evaluate teachers and consider ways to adjust ratings to ensure they are fair.

Bio: Dr. Campbell’s research focuses on understanding how policies and practices influence access to quality learning opportunities for marginalized student populations. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, she explores three institutional factors associated with advancing opportunities to learn for marginalized student populations – instructional quality, school-community partnerships, and curriculum. Dr. Campbell’s work has appeared in Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, The Journal of Teacher Education and The Review of Black Political Economy. Dr. Campbell is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Michigan.