A Phenomenological Approach: Perceptions of Teacher Evaluation and Future Implications of Practice

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF PRACTICE

by

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Jeanne Surface, Ed.D.

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Abstract

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF PRACTICE

Elizabeth Tonniges, Ed.D

University of Nebraska, 2017

Advisor: Dr. Jeanne L. Surface, Ed.D.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the teacher evaluation process, teacher’s attitudes and beliefs about teacher evaluation processes/systems, and how those impacted the effectiveness of the intended outcome of teacher improvement, resulting in greater student achievement. The Learning Policy Institute’s research cited a decline in the number of teachers exiting higher education institutions from 691,000 in 2009 to 451,000 in 2014 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Couple a decline in the number of teachers exiting college with almost an 8% reduction in workforce, and an anticipated future enrollment of students leaves many worried that a crisis is looming (Sutcher et al., 2016). There is limited qualitative research that substantiates the teacher’s voice or viewpoint as teacher evaluation is often seen as something that is done to teachers, not necessarily done with teachers. The participants in this study encompassed seven female educators, from varying states across the country that have taught in public schools and charter schools. Each participant had engaged in the teacher evaluation process as a teacher and many had engaged in more than one teacher evaluation system.

As the qualitative research was complete and coded, seven central themes emerged; time, transparency and communication with the tool and/or system, established
culture, mindset, & positive intent, relationships, equity, resourcefulness & feedback, and alternative feedback & follow up.

The themes from this study are indicative of many informal conversations that have occurred with other educators in the profession over the years. With the qualitative structure, participants conveyed that while teacher evaluation systems, yet highly complex in many districts and aren’t well articulated from the district office to teachers, can have great impact both positively and negatively on a teacher’s ability to grow as an educator and thus impact student achievement.
I dedicate this to my father, Dr. Thomas F. Tonniges. Those who knew him best called him DT. While growing up, he modeled compassion and was a champion for those who were less fortunate. He was a man of faith who was a fierce advocate for children and had a heart of gold. We didn’t always get along because our personalities were one in the same, we loved hard and could passionately argue hard about what we believed.

I began this journey with him by my side and ended this journey with him in my heart. I would spend countless hours reading and researching as he sat next to me, no longer able to speak. His presence was all I needed. In his last days, I would jokingly tell him that I could never replace him as THE Dr. Tonniges or DT, but that one day…I would be DT² and, he’d just have to be okay with that.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It takes a village to raise a child.

- African Proverb

Over the course of my research, many individuals and mentors have assisted and inspired me along the way. These individuals have also served as some of my loudest cheerleaders. I wish to give special thanks and appreciation to those who without their support, the project may have been left undone. The African proverb, *It takes a village to raise a child*, was the running theme throughout my journey for a multitude of reasons. Coincidentally, it was a key proverb that my father used to say to us growing up.

I would like to provide special thanks to my chair, Dr. Jeanne Surface, without her guidance, wisdom, and sometimes weekly championing this dissertation would not be complete. I would also like to thank the rest of my dissertation committee, Dr. Christie, Dr. Keiser, and Dr. Adcock.

Thank you to the participants of the study for opening their hearts to share their stories honestly, deeply reflect on teacher evaluation, and share their hopes for the future.

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Thank you to my mother, Jane, who always seemed to send me a text message at the exact moment I needed it reading “get it done.” Both she and my sister, Emily have been my
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Last, but most importantly, I want to acknowledge my “littles,” Chloe and Elise. Although you may not remember the journey we forged together down the road, I hope that this serves as a model to you of what can be achieved with determination and perseverance. I pray that you become life long learners and that you challenge the status quo for the betterment of others.

In essence, it truly did take a village.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2006, I was a first-year teacher straight out of college. I hadn’t taken a class dedicated to teaching those with limited English proficiency, and my coursework landed me in classrooms that didn’t provide me any exposure to teaching those who didn’t speak English. I took a job in a small town in the southwest United States teaching 3rd grade at a charter school to 23 students, 22 of whom knew very little English, as their previous teachers found it easier to teach them in their native language which was Spanish. I went with the best intentions that I could change their little world even though deep down I did not even know where to begin with instruction. I started that August, without any curriculum or resources except the ones I had created on my own. In December, my evaluator, who was also the school’s superintendent, visited my classroom for the first time. When he walked into the room, my students became instantaneously quiet. He was an older man, about 6’7” with a raspy voice and sunken in cheeks.

He took a seat in the back of the room at my desk and laid his head down. For the next 23 minutes, I think he listened as we talked about place value and math vocabulary. During the middle of the lesson, he got up and walked out. Without any initial feedback, I feared the worst and did not know what to expect as the visit did not go as I had so diligently laid out in my head.

Two weeks had gone by without any feedback. I decided it would be best to schedule an appointment to meet with him.

He came in, sat at the other end of the conference table and talked for 15 minutes about a middle school reading lesson that he had observed. He commented about the
posters on the wall, how the carpet needs cleaning and how some students uniforms were not in compliance. He concluded his portion of the meeting by stating that to make the lesson better I could put a marker on a table, spin it and then call on the person who the marker is aiming at. His reasoning is that this might help with my student participation.

He then signed my evaluation and asked that I sign it before I leave the office. I gently spoke up and reminded him that I was his lead 3rd grade teacher and that I didn’t teach middle school. His response I will never forget, “Evaluating teachers doesn’t matter anymore, this is just some paperwork we have to turn into the state so they know we’re doing our job and I know you’re doing yours.” I commented that I could not grow unless there was regular, timely and specific feedback about my instructional practices. He didn’t revisit my classroom again that year.

At the end of the year, I received a continuing contract for the following year and a bonus that was based on evaluations that I never had the chance to see and my students’ AIMSWeb scores. I finished my contract, then took a position that was closer to home the following year, where I knew I could thrive and grow.

Teacher evaluation programs are at the heart of accountability within any schooling entity. For much of the 21st century, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) focused heavily on teacher accountability and teacher licensing (Sawchuk, 2016). Due to the need for high accountability for teachers resulting in higher student achievement, language and expectations from NCLB found its way into teacher evaluation systems across the country. With the expiration of NCLB, a bi-partisan approach was used to develop the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which releases more decision making
back to individual states, and this includes looser federal laws regarding teacher accountability and licensing (Sawchuk, EdWeek Article).

Since the concept of an educational schoolhouse began, a variety of instruments have been used to evaluate teachers. The logistics of schools and how they operate have not changed much over time. In an effort to raise student achievement, address political mandates, and for economic purposes, many districts are in a constant state of change concerning implementation of new curriculum, initiatives, and programming. On the other end of the spectrum, school districts who are plagued with defunding practices and poor instructional leadership remain stagnant as the needs of students increase and the struggle to adapt to a 21st-century learner becomes more evident.

Highly effective teacher evaluation systems and tools can be essential in driving professional opportunities for teachers to increase meeting the needs of their students, thus raising student achievement. One document currently carries so much weight regarding compensation and retention. The evaluation system as a whole can be highly subjective based on the observer and it leads to questioning the characteristics of what is perceived to be a master teacher. It also questions the meaningfulness of the process as the agent to create change.

The findings can be beneficial for school districts as they begin to look at teacher evaluation as something that is done with teachers not done to teachers and to meet new state and federal ESSA requirements.

**Theoretical Framework**

The research study’s focus connects human resource experts and their perceptions of teacher evaluation, teaching and learning, and one’s innate ability to grow as an
educator. Philosophical perspectives from German researchers from the 1800’s and 1900’s were the trailblazers in formulating the idea of phenomenology research. Husserl was an early pioneer of the phenomenology method with some considering him the father of phenomenology (Baden & Major, pg 26).

Phenomenology is rooted in the understanding that what needed to be studied was how people existed within the world, rather than two separate entities of people’s existence and of the world instead of being interconnected (Baden & Major, pg 213). Husserl was aiming to look at the experience before individuals drawing their personal conclusions and categorization (Baden & Major, pg 213).

The concept of phenomenological research attempts to discover how individuals construct meaning of the human experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Hatch (2002), continues in pointing out that phenomenology describes the meaning of experiences from individuals and that phenomenology is seeking to understand the purpose or essence of the experiences.

Phenomenological research entails the researcher capturing the viewpoint of the participants by looking at what they have in common and drawing themes based on their experiences (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Also, Creswell (2007) has stated, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (pp. 58).

With qualitative research that is phenomenologically based, the key instrument is the actual researcher. The researcher navigates the process without questionnaires or other instruments from other researchers (Creswell, 2007).

**Problem Statement**
The number of teachers exiting teacher colleges has steadily declined with some states like California down over 53% since 2010 (Westervelt, 2015). Other larger states such as New York and Texas have seen a major decline as well (Westervelt, 2015). According to UCLA’s Cooperative Institutional Research Program, which is part of the Higher Education Research Institute, through a survey conducted in 2015 only 4.2% of college freshman chose education as their probable field of study compared to 9.9% in 2005 (Flannery, 2016).

The Learning Policy Institute’s research also cited a decline in the number of teachers exiting higher education institutions from 691,000 in 2009 to 451,000 in 2014 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Couple a decline in the number of teachers exiting college with almost an 8% reduction in workforce, and an anticipated future enrollment of students leaves many worried that a crisis is looming (Sutcher et al., 2016).

While there may be a multitude of reasons why there has been a sharp decline with no evidence of the trend heading upwards, one of the issues that remains central is
the concept of teacher evaluation tools and the types of feedback or lack of feedback
teachers receive from their evaluators or principals. Evaluation instruments
unintentionally create more ambiguity and miscommunication by the way they are used
or misused. If the researcher does not have a solid understanding of what the essential
components entail, and how they contribute to generating teacher change and student
improvement, which is the goal. At the same time, there is very little research in the area
of what makes a teacher effective and what contributes to instructional change, whether it
be one thing or a combination of many. There is also little research in the area of how to
make the teacher evaluation process more meaningful for both educators and
administrators, the completion of the evaluation goes beyond, “it needs to be done” to
facilitating collaborative conversations that can lead to change.

With the teacher evaluation process being central to job retention, student
achievement, overall professional growth and instructional mastery, it is necessary to
research and explore what teachers perceive to be a master teacher and the components
make the teacher evaluation process meaningful and usable for both educators and
administrators.

Research Question

Since teacher evaluation is subjective, the central research question is what impact
does teacher’s attitudes and beliefs about teacher evaluation systems and processes have
on a teacher evaluation program’s effectiveness?

The Researcher

As the researcher, I am a 34-year-old female doctoral scholar at the University of
Nebraska in Omaha. I have been an educator for 12 years with four of those years as an
elementary teacher, 2 as a reading specialist in a middle school setting and 6 as an elementary principal in both a small and larger district.

Since my very first year of teaching, the teacher evaluation process has intrigued me. Spending time in four divergent districts, each district provided a process that was very different from the next. My first year the evaluation tool was simply a checklist of attributes that did not correlate to teaching and learning, but rather superficial traits that had minimal impact on classroom instruction and student achievement. The last three districts had a more streamlined approach that included many facets of the teaching profession and were closely aligned with the Charlotte Danielson rubrics.

As I researched more about teacher evaluation systems across the country, I have come to find out that I am not alone in experiencing differentiated evaluation tools that all measure the same thing: teaching and learning. States have different requirements for teacher evaluation components, and many states have gone further in an attempt to increase student achievement by tying student scores to evaluations. With a variety of instruments and administrator perspectives, this led me to question, what makes a teacher evaluation system effective and what is the definition of a master educator?

As we see a steady decline of educators entering the profession, I can’t help but wonder why the decrease is occurring and if part of the issue is the instruments and processes that are in place to provide effective feedback to educators. Another running theme that I have experienced professionally as both an educator and administrator is the lack of time to complete a purposeful observation that provides for collaborative conversation and a realistic picture of what occurs in the classroom on a consistent basis. The time investment is one that is widely spoken about among teachers and
administrators alike. The absence or presence of time can easily translate into completing the process just to complete it, especially when teachers are veteran and are perceived to be distinguished teachers.

To gain a better understanding of teacher evaluation as a whole, I began reading books about instructional design through Madeline Hunter, Anita Archer and have studied Classroom Instruction that Works. I also sought out publications from Charlotte Danielson and Robert Marzano.

**Definition of Terms**

*Accountability*-Accountability is defined as the delivering of results (Marzano, 2005).

*Adequate Yearly Progress*-Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a measurement of student achievement and participation in standardized assessments.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*-The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965 as part of President Johnson’s “war on poverty” initiative. The act is all encompassing when it comes to student standards, academic achievement, professional development and teacher certification with a goal of increasing accountability and equalizing opportunities for all students. President George W. Bush reauthorized ESEA into what was known as the No Child Left Behind Act.

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*-Every Student Succeeds Act was an act established by Congress in 2015 following the expiration of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

*Formative Evaluation*-The act of completing Formative Evaluation is to evaluate curriculum and student programming to improve student achievement.
No Child Left Behind-No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was an act established in 2001 by Congress. The purpose of the act was to steadily increase student achievement over a certain period by meeting incremental achievement percentages. NCLB was reauthorized by the Obama administration into what was known as the Every student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Performance Appraisal-Performance appraisal is the method that determines whether a teacher has met or who has failed to meet their job requirements. It is also can be synonymous with summative evaluation.

Practitioner-A person actively engaged in the art, discipline, or profession (Websters, 2017)

Race to the Top (RTT)-A multi-billion dollar federal grant program that promotes innovation and statewide reform in grades K-12.

School Administrator/Principal-School Administrator or Principal refers to the person who is the lead learner and has the responsibility all operations at a single school site. This person is often required to complete the evaluation process for accountability.

Summative Evaluation-Summative Evaluation is the final product after analyzing data and forming a conclusion about a program. It is typically the type of evaluation that determines if a teacher has met or has not met their requirements as an educator.

Teacher Evaluation-Collecting and analyzing evidence to support or disprove teacher effectiveness.
Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF)-The Teacher Incentive Fund was established in 2006 as a means to compensate teachers and administrators in high-needs school systems who accelerate student growth and bolster student achievement.

Assumptions

Teacher evaluation models vary from district to district, and their implementation can vary from building to building. The role of the principal has shifted steadily from a management/compliance position to evaluator who needs to have a formidable skill set in instructional practices, data analysis and problem-solving. In my experiences and through conversations with educators who are at various stages of their careers, the variability is quite vast as the process is subjective.

Limitations and Delimitations

Teachers who are currently experiencing the teacher evaluation process will limit the current scope of teacher evaluation practices. The study was delimited to elementary teachers due to the relatively same school day experience, who represent various states across the country and models of teacher evaluation systems.

Significance of the Study

As districts and states become into compliance with ESSA, one component is a highly effective teacher evaluation model. While this study explores a variety of models, components, and experiences, these findings may provide insight into effective components of teacher evaluation systems that lead to increased student achievement, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. These findings could be crucial to districts and states who are developing new systems and practices. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore what exactly are the characteristics or qualities of a distinguished
educator and what components of teacher evaluation systems are highly effective in promoting continuous growth to improve craft thus impacting student achievement, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 encompasses literature that is relevant to the definition and purpose of teacher evaluation, the history of teacher evaluation, the more global models that are currently being used and the role of the evaluator, which in most instances is the building principal. Chapter 3 includes research design, procedures, and methodology. Chapter 4 provides the findings, and Chapter 5 provides analysis, interpretation and future implications.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

What is Teacher Evaluation?

As with any profession, a position is crafted with specific criteria in mind. Teacher evaluation has been evolving since the early 1900’s. What started out as long checklists mostly related to character and appearance have developed into multiple measures that assess teaching as a craft, professionalism and content knowledge. Teacher evaluation can be defined in many contexts because it is multifaceted. Fox and Shirkey (1997) and Prybylo’s (1998) describe performance appraisal criteria as, “formal, ‘scientific’ articulated by separate and nonoverlapping categories, aggregated numerically or adjectivally (e.g., ‘satisfactory’), comparative written and filed as part of a permanent record, and used in a hierarchically ordered organization to allocate scarce or limited rewards.” The Alexander Hamilton Institute (1986) and Prybylo (1998) explain performance appraisal as “a fair, formal and systematic method of judging an employee’s ability and performance.” Toch (2008) describes the traditional teacher evaluation experience:

...a single, fleeting classroom visit by a principal or other building administrator untrained in evaluation who wields a checklist of classroom conditions and teacher behaviors that often don’t focus directly on the quality of instruction.

Lastly, Milkovich and Boudreau (1998) describe performance appraisal as a “process that measures employee performance.”

While all four definitions are different, they have the same underlying theme that has been at the core of teacher evaluation since its existence. Coincidentally, due to the
nature of teacher evaluation or performance appraisals, other aspects arising out of the process such as goal setting, organizing and implementing support of personnel and the development of an improvement plan (Maroney and Buckley, 1992). This translates to teacher evaluation being comprehensive, multifaceted, and containing a variety of components to ensure reliability and sustainability.

Teachers are hired to perform specific job requirements that are pertinent to education and thus must have some way to assess their performance when it comes to achieving the criteria points (Looney, 2011; Prybolo, 2008; Fox & Shirkey, 2007). Along with job specific requirements, employers often add in other points of evaluation including characteristic traits such as: working well with others, punctuality, dependability, and so on (Prybolo, 2008; Fox & Shirkey, 2007). One thing that the majority of teacher evaluation programs have in place is the ability to reward or attempt to mediate teacher improvement. Thus those who meet or exceed the criteria points are often rewarded monetarily or through other incentives (Prybolo, 2008). This approach can, in some cases, create a divide especially when there is inequity with the children who attend the school. Those who do not, are often placed on an improvement plan or a notice of performance concern. This in of itself is a long and daunting process for anyone. Toch (2008) points out that many administrators rarely distribute unsatisfactory ratings which then weakens the effectiveness of the evaluation tool to the point where there is not an improvement in instructional delivery and thus not making a positive impact on student achievement. Due to the laborious process of placing teachers on improvement plans and ensuring follow up, many teachers are not rated appropriately thus creating inter-rater reliability issues.
History of Teacher Evaluation

The impact of teacher evaluation goes back in history to the 1800’s. The cycle of teacher evaluation has been researched thoroughly (Kersten & Israel, 2005). Some of the earliest teacher evaluation systems focused on management and character traits one thought a teacher should possess to be an effective teacher (Ellett, 1997; Prybolo, 1998). As years have passed, evaluation systems have adapted and changed in an attempt to meet the current needs of students and staff (Ellett, 1997; Prybolo, 1998) with a clearer emphasis on research-based methods to formally assess teaching staff (Wood, 1992; Prybolo, 1998). As a result, checklists were established and the criteria it included encompassed teaching behaviors that were believed to contribute to higher student achievement (Tuckman, 1995; Prybolo, 1998). During the 1980’s, many evaluation checklists were deeply rooted in Madeline Hunter’s Effective Instruction Model which took the teaching world by storm starting in the mid-1970’s (Prybolo, 1998).

One area that continues to be an area of concern for teacher evaluation processes is that there is a focus on poor performance and collecting evidence to support these practices (Crew, Everitt, and Nunez, 1984; Namaghi, 2010). It also does not open the path for conversations and plans to critically address areas of deficiencies (Crew, Everitt, and Nunez, 1984; Namaghi, 2010).

Teacher Preparation

According to Weems and Rogers (2010), teachers entering the workforce are better equipped to deal with today’s issues in education than ever before. This is partially due to the upheaval effect of No Child Left Behind that is now requiring more rigorous instruction at the collegiate level and more assessments that pre-service teachers must
pass showcasing their expertise when it comes to teaching, learning and depth of knowledge (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Teacher evaluation systems are established for two practical purposes of measuring a teacher’s ability to instruct in the classroom and to encourage professional growth (Weems & Rogers, 2010). Coincidently, Taylor and Tyler (2012) discuss their hypothetical findings in regards to the purpose of teacher evaluations. They point out that evaluation programs that are well-designed allow teachers to gain a variety of feedback through formal observation and ongoing communication. Secondly, it allows for the natural process of teachers being reflective of their practice. Lastly, Taylor and Tyler (2012) believe the process could open communication barriers between teachers and other administrators about effective instructional practices.

**Administrator’s Role within Teacher Evaluation**

According to Prybylo (1998), teacher evaluation is one of the crucial pieces of being an administrator in regard to tasks that need to be completed. Prybolo references Tucker and Kindred (1997) and Strong (1997) as he states, “instructional expertise is at the heart of the earning enterprise.” Strong (1997) points out; there is a relationship between a thriving company and its employees. What is good for one, must be good for the other. Due to that factor, teachers are the driving force that helps schools meet and achieve their goals and in some instances serve as the demise of other schools.

The administrator’s role has widely changed over the course of the century. Previously a larger emphasis was placed on a more managerial role where the principal engaged in ensuring follow through of federal, district, and school policy. While that role is still in play, a greater emphasis has been placed in the area of
instructional leadership, and this has required a shift in mindset for many who have been in the principalship for some time. Contrary to that belief, research has shown that principals are unable to balance the demands for both sides of the profession and spend a majority of their day navigating bureaucratic waves. Peterson (2001) and Barkowski et al. (2015) depicts the principal role as one that is ever changing and multifaceted when you add other duties such as supervision, behavior, parent relationships, and meetings. Research completed and compiled by Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010) discovered that principals in one urban school setting spent approximately 54% of their time in their office completing managerial tasks, 40% in what they termed “various places around the school” and the remaining 6% off campus for a variety of school-related purposes. Horng, Klasik, & Loeb (2010) also identified that on average only 13% of an administrator’s time is spent on instructional leadership with only 8% of their time inside the classroom setting.

Schmoker (1992) stated, “Research has finally told us what many of us suspected all along: that conventional evaluation, the kind the overwhelming majority of American teachers undergo, does not have any measurable impact on the quality of student learning.” Regardless of the findings, if principals are expected to evaluate instructors on their craft, quality assessments must be put in place to support the evaluation process.

Barkowski, Carl, Cosner, Jones, and Kimball (2015) address that federal mandates, such as Race to the Top (RTT), Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), have required states districts to develop a new sense of urgency when it comes to student performance and educator growth. Along
with new teacher evaluation systems, come new administrators attempting to navigate
new systems while ensuring success in developing specifically crafted professional
development along with a continued expansion of knowledge not only for procedures and
processes but conceptually needs to occur at a level that is highly meaningful and
engaging (Barkowski et al. 2015). As several researchers have depicted, “the success of
the new teacher evaluation systems partly depends on the will, skill, and capacity of
school principals, individuals who have historically been tasked with evaluating teachers”
(Barkowski et al. 2015; Hallinger, Heck, & Murphy, 2013; Halverson, Kelley, &
Kimball, 2004; Liu & Moore Johnson, 2006.)

Potential pitfalls are time demands, principal skill set, quality of feedback, and
accuracy of the instrument that is required or in some instances created by the
principal. Combined with minimal or limited training and overall consistency from a
district perspective and all could be a recipe for disaster or lead to less effective systems
for all involved (Barkowski et al. 2015).

Intentions of Teacher Evaluation

Charlotte Danielson and Thomas McGreal (2000) state that the two main concepts
behind teacher evaluation are pretty simple: quality assurance and to drive professional
development (Namaghi, 2010). The two main concepts are backed up by Duke and
Stiggin’s (1990) research which points out specifically that one large valuable piece of
teacher evaluation is to generate professional development that is pertinent to what is
needed in the classroom. Both purposes of teacher evaluation cannot stand on their own
and must be combined if teacher evolution is to occur (Namaghi, 2010). Many will argue
that summative evaluation has to be partnered with formative evaluation in order to
identify purposeful professional development (Nolan & Hoover, 2005) and do what summative evaluations are intended to do, provide tenure to highly effective teachers (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Brandt, Mathers, Oliva, Brown-Sims, & Hess 2007; Namaghi, 2010). They also suggest creating personalized professional development plans based on the findings from the evaluation system to better meet the needs of teachers and thus the students. Furthermore, the New Teacher Project (2010) extends the intent of teacher evaluation beyond the classroom advocating that the information gleaned teacher evaluation systems should benefit systems by supportive teacher development. What should remain at the forefront is ensuring each scholar receives purposeful instruction that will lead them to the path of graduation from high school and success in college or a career of their choice (New Teacher Project, 2010).

In terms of overall evaluation, it is suggested that a process and assessment that allows for teachers to take educational risks benefiting not only their scholars, but the entire learning community as a whole would be much more beneficial than many assessment programs that are continued today with the sole purpose of accountability (Prybylo, 1998; Mason, 1996; Stake, 1989; Tuckman 1995).

Just as with any profession, a job description is established along with evaluation criteria. The criteria listed has a purpose whether it has positive or negative implications and whether the program utilized has a growth mindset or one that is punitive. While each researcher has their methodology as to why teachers are evaluated, those too, have the same underlying themes. Milkovich and Boudreau (1998) and Prybylo (1998) point out four main reasons for a performance appraisal:

1.) to provide feedback to employees about strengths and weaknesses,
2.) to distinguish between individuals in allocating resources and rewards,
3.) to evaluate the human resource systems of the organization, and
4.) to create a paper train for documentation of supervisors’ actions.

The New Teacher Project (2010) argues that any teacher evaluation system’s implications should not only be used for human resource benefits (hiring, firing, retaining), but also be used to create and maintain strong instructional practices and drive professional development. The process should also hold administrators accountable for training and retaining highly effective staff (New Teacher Project, 2010).

Through Prybolo’s (1998) research and as cited by Tuckman’s research, they cite six purposes for teacher evaluation:

1.) To provide data for the reward of merit and the correction of shortcomings
2.) To assist in the selection of the best-qualified teachers for new positions
3.) To provide annual evaluation
4.) To assist in continuing professional development for teachers
5.) To contribute to the understanding of the operation of the school as a whole
6.) To act as a mechanism for school reform (Tuckman, 1995).

Some will argue (Peterson, 1995, Prybolo, 1998) that teacher assessment programs are merely there to prevent teachers who are on the path to school reform, to control the mindset of those who they employ and preserve what has been a tradition regarding teaching and learning. At the same token Peterson and Prybolo, understand the context and need for helping those teachers who are not proficient or distinguished to move out of the profession altogether.
As with any system, the effectiveness of it is measured by how well it is implemented and sustained at a high level (New Teacher Project, 2010). Many argue for clear communication, ongoing support, and a lens of continued improvement of the systems in place (New Teacher Project, 2010). Marshall (2005) believes that an effective system encompasses a variety of components including:

1.) Multiple sources of data

2.) Clear, relevant, and meaningful performance criteria

3.) Teacher goal setting

4.) Establishes and promotes trust between the teacher and evaluator.

While many researchers have varying beliefs about teacher evaluation systems, similarities can be linked back to Danielson’s extensive research about teacher evaluation and effectiveness, and the root of the system: to provide a systematic way to address teachers (from a positive incentive base and a consequence based) on a spectrum of abilities while providing evidence for professional development opportunities.

**Teacher Evaluation Subjectivity**

More than ever before are teachers being evaluated in their profession, how much they know about what they teach and their craft as an instructor (Brucklacher, 1999). The various instruments that are used can be subjective and vary regarding their intent. Much of this is based upon the evaluator’s expertise in a content area, teaching strategies, and own personal beliefs, biases, and assumptions.

Teacher evaluation at the heart of it must take into consideration whether objective and reliable assessment of practice is, in fact, inevitable to achieve (Fox & Shirkey, 1997). Prybolo (1998) insists that teacher evaluation can never be objective due
to the relationship between the assessment and human error. Complex teacher evaluation systems almost always have negative implications (Allen, Nichols, & LeBlanc, 1997; Milanowski & Neneman, 2002) as many factors go into the process.

One must also consider that to evaluate teaching staff appropriately and effectively it takes time (Schumacher, 2010). The amount of time it takes an administrator and educator to prepare and thoughtfully reflect raises a general concern towards overly sufficient ratings with the hopes to build more enhanced teacher image (Barkowski et al. 2015). As a result, better use of time for teachers and administrators may be just that; analyzing and reflecting on the teaching craft (Schumacher, 2010). Supovitz & Poglinco (2001) stress that collaboration and communication are essential for instructional improvement.

**Teacher Evaluation Effectiveness in Closing the Achievement Gap**

Many studies show that the effectiveness of teacher evaluation is key to closing the achievement gap and raising student achievement (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

While each teacher evaluation system varies in the years in between tenured teacher evaluations, Taylor & Tyler (2012) have found that within a five-year cycle, “teachers are more effective at raising student achievement during the school year when they are being evaluated than they were previously, and even more effective in the years after the evaluation.” A direct correlation between the Teacher Evaluation System (TES) model that Taylor and Tyler (2012) studied will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Standardized Test Scores as Part of the Teacher Evaluation System**

One component that many educators to agree upon is the inclusion of student standardized test scores as a single component of teacher evaluation. Teacher evaluation
should not be based solely on one standardized test looking at student achievement, considering the state of education at this point that is one concept that many fear (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardlsey, Haertel & Rothstein, 2012; David, 2010, Johnson, 2012; Marshall, 2012). Toch (2008), agrees in that he believes standardized test scores should be included as a component of the total evaluation system. Looney (2011) also points out that there is contention between what the real purpose of teacher evaluation is, including accountability as a factor, and strongly urges educational systems to find the balance.

While standardized testing is one effective component, many will argue that an effective teacher evaluation system includes multiple measures (New Teacher Project, 2010). These other components can include district assessments, student surveys, parent surveys, peer observations, etc. By using multiple measures, this ensures that the teacher’s true effectiveness is looked at holistically and creates equity for those who are teaching in more affluent areas vs. impoverished areas that portray their challenges when it comes to learning and retention of concepts.

**Potential Barriers to Teacher Evaluation Systems**

Multiple studies have also pointed to teacher’s attitudes and beliefs towards students and setting challenging goals for them as an effective component of teacher quality (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Marshall & Wiliam, 2006; Looney, 2011). At the same time, teachers who communicate low expectations have a negative impact on student achievement (Bransford et al. 1999, Looney, 2011, Rubie-Davis et al. 2006; Rubie-Davis, 2007).
One component to think about is teacher quality. Many suggest that it’s hard to quantify quality as the definition varies from evaluator to evaluator. Prybolo (2008) explained the relationship between the assessment and the human rater will always have room for error and never be completely objective. According to Education Week (2003), “Quality encompasses such dimensions as intellectual rigor in courses, skill in elucidating difficult material, accessibility to students, interest in students’ academic progress, and the ability and willingness to assess that progress thoroughly and fairly.”

One component that impacts teacher evaluation systems, implementation, professional development, and communication is a school district’s budget. In an attempt to preserve funds and ensure that new teachers are off to a successful start by balancing administrator time, veteran teachers with no visible performance issues are often observed less than their peers in many districts (New Teacher Project, 2010). This method, while widely used, is ineffective in promoting a continuous growth mindset and culture. At the same time, those who may be distinguished teachers, are often overlooked or do not receive recognition for their efforts on a continuous basis (New Teacher Project, 2010).

As previously discussed, the teacher evaluation process should be both formative and summative. There are several drawbacks to solely having a summative teacher evaluation process that Danielson and McGreal have identified in their book Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Learning (2000). With only a summative evaluation, it does not foster an environment where continuous dialogue about instructional philosophy and effective strategies are the norm. The summative evaluation only leads to a reported increase in anxiety in response to anticipated hard conversations
about areas of potential improvement. Many times there are no clear guidelines for effective improvement practices, and it does not provide consistent motivation for ineffective teachers to get on the pathway for continued improvement of practice (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

**Danielson Framework**

Danielson (2011) describes the purpose of teacher evaluation in her research as ensuring quality teachers with effective teaching practices and promoting professional development based on teacher need. To guarantee quality teaching, it starts with a quality teacher evaluation model, a consistent definition of solid instruction, a common understanding of the definition of solid instruction and evaluators who are skilled at evaluating (Danielson, 2011). Without the common definition and understanding, many evaluators simply will not know what to look for during a lesson (Danielson, 2012). One component that needs to be taken into account when developing a common language about teacher evaluation is a clear understanding of where the state and national levels are concerning expectations for teachers and the evaluation process. Danielson explains that it is often difficult to accurately define such a role in an ever-changing society, based on the needs of students that are frequently changing. Having a solid foundation in the subject area the instructor is teaching along with a multitude of instructional strategies to meet the ever-changing population of students is essential (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Looney, 2011; Monk, 1994).

One component of teacher evaluation that is highly debatable is the reliability of the instrument used and the authenticity of the measurement. If teachers are not engaged in the process, districts lose the ability for teachers to use it as a means to grow, but will
rather see it as a hoop to jump through. Danielson specifically points out, “unless we use the observation process for improving teaching, it’s fair to inquire why educators even engage in it” (2012).

Danielson (2011) makes it clear, “Principals need to devote time to the evaluation process.” A challenge for administrators is always time. To have meaningful conversations about instruction and to see teacher growth, time must be carved out for the meaningful conversations to occur authentically without distractions. Danielson is quick to point out, “evaluations that focus on quality assurance yield judgments that are fair, reliable, and valid” (2011).

**Marzano Framework**

The Marzano Art and Science of Teaching was established through the research from Robert Marzano and his colleagues. Just like the Danielson Model, the Marzano Art and Science of Teaching framework is categorized into 4 domains: classroom strategies and behaviors, planning and preparation, reflecting on teaching, and collegiality and professionalism.

Classroom Strategies and Behaviors consists of 3 lesson segments with nine design questions interwoven that are broad in scope: involving routine events, addressing content, and enacted on the spot. To address each of the design questions effectively and efficiently, Marzano includes 41 elements that assist in educating the practitioner in answering the question that was prompted.

Planning and Preparing address the diverse and specific needs of today’s learners. By breaking off into 5 different areas (Planning and Preparing Lessons and Units, Planning and Preparing for Use of Resources and Technology, Planning and
Preparing for the Needs of English Language Learners, Planning and Preparing for the Needs of Students Receiving Special Education, and Planning and Preparing for the Needs of Students Who Lack Support for Schooling) it requires educators to think through the various instructional and classroom management strategies they will employ to make the lesson successful for all students.

The third domain is addressed after the content lesson is taught and revolves around reflecting on practice. This domain is two-fold as it requires the practitioner to not only reflect on the effectiveness of lesson design/instruction, but also to monitor their professional growth plan.

The fourth domain encompasses professionalism and working with others. This domain addresses not only mentoring others and sharing ideas, but also promoting positive interactions with all stakeholders and being in compliance with policy and initiatives that are prompted by the district and school.

**Implications for Professional Development**

The purpose of an evaluation system should be to provide meaningful feedback in regards to what teachers are doing well in the classroom, as well as, address and problem solve areas of potential growth (Weems & Rogers, 2010). With the outcome being, the instructor growing and modifying instruction to meet the needs of students best and moving them forward academically. Stiggins and Duke (1988) take it a step further to note that historically, teacher evaluation has tended to focus on the accountability strand more so than the professional development strand. Duke (1990) describes the difference between staff development being delivered, so all move in a common direction, versus professional development which is more of an individual journey.
In other differences, staff development is typically district or school driven, whereas, professional development focuses on the individual and their specific journey based upon recognized areas of potential growth. As school districts and states move towards a growth model and break free from the structured year-long school improvement plan cycle that may not fit their school’s or district’s needs and focus on good instruction, there are more and more examples of districts and schools who have intertwined the two seamlessly.

**Future of Teacher Evaluation**

Though historically teacher evaluation tools have been the accepted method, school districts are taking a closer look at their practices and aligning them with specific criteria that ensure evaluators are in classrooms more frequently to provide timely and consistent feedback. With an emphasis on student achievement, growth, and maximizing the educator’s role, this has caused states and school districts alike to develop more complex standards-based teacher evaluation systems that will attempt to meet and reinforce those goals (McGuinn, 2012).

With new evaluation systems cycling through and a highly emotionally attached profession, it is natural for teachers and administrators alike to feel an unbalance when it comes to positive school culture, autonomy, and best instructional practices (Barkowski et al. 2015; Hallinger et al. 2013).

Teacher evaluation systems are entrusted to support teacher growth, and a trusting relationship is at the core of that belief (Barkowski et al. 2015; Wermke, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013). If there is a lack of transparency and training, trust can begin to
diminish which will negatively impact overall teacher growth and positive school culture (Barkowski et al. 2015; Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2011).

Scales and Atkins (2011) have discovered that student improvement tends to go up with shorter, more frequent classroom visits.

**Different Types of Evaluation**

Weems and Rogers (2010) and Boyd (1989), point out that the traditional observation cycle is diminishing as school districts devise new methods of instruction that have better educational outcomes for all stakeholders. The traditional cycle includes an administrator observing for an instructional period and providing specific feedback to instructors. Other tasks are taken into account such as analyzing lesson planning to see how well instructors were prepared for the lesson, looking at assessments to gauge the carry-over from the lesson to the assignment and looking at instructional goals and outcomes. Due to the non-specificity and lack of frequency, this model is being transformed into one that provides for more frequent contact between instructors and evaluators with a true growth model that has been established (Boyd, 1989; Weems & Rogers, 2010). As accountability remains high with ESSA, states have ramped up their teacher evaluation efforts with one goal in mind: to create the best teacher evaluation system. Thus a wide variety of programming has occurred to meet the demand.

**360 DEGREE FEEDBACK**

The 360 Degree Feedback model, also known as full-circle appraisal, multi-rater assessment, or group performance appraisal (Hoffman, 1995) is a product of Total Quality Management Theory (Manatt, 1997). In 360 Degree Feedback, all stakeholder groups including principals, peers, parents, and students as well as self-reflection are
included in the evaluation process (Prybolo, 1998). At the same token, no single piece of
evidence is used in determining the status of a summative review, rather many sources
are used (Prybolo, 1998).

Hoffman (1995) noted that 360 Degree Feedback contains the components
looking at the development of needs over time. This allows schools to look at what needs
to be changed on a more global basis.

CHARLOTTE DANIELSON FRAMEWORK FOR INSTRUCTION

The Charlotte Danielson Framework has long been popular among evaluation
systems. Danielson provides four domains to which teachers are evaluated: planning and
preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional
responsibility. Additionally, the Framework includes four competency levels:
distinguished, proficient, basic and unsatisfactory (Danielson, 2007). Within the four
domains, there are 22 components and 76 smaller components (Danielson, 2007).

Danielson provides support as to why a framework is an essential component of
teacher evaluation. For new teachers, it allows them to monitor their progress at
consistent points throughout the year. She also states that interview questions can be
derived from the framework when hiring new staff. The framework is explicitly laid out
in that a new teacher can use it as a facilitation guide of how to adjust teaching to move
into other areas of the rubric. For experienced teachers, it serves as an explicit guide
regarding expectations. When looking at student achievement and school improvement,
Danielson states the rubric is designed to help enhance many areas that need
adjustment. Lastly, it takes the guessing out of the teaching profession for those who are
not currently involved and provides a clear explanation of what excellent teaching is (Danielson, 2007).

Many states such as Illinois, New Jersey, Arkansas Delaware, Idaho, South Dakota to name a few and districts across the country have relied heavily on Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Instruction as an evaluation tool or as a basis to generate their evaluation tools. One study completed by Milanowski and others (2001) determined that the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Instruction created undue levels of stress among those being evaluated due to the complexity of the framework.

Danielson (1996) specifically points out that her framework specifically identifies the components of the teaching profession, through extensive research about the teaching profession in general when it comes to improving student achievement. Danielson (1996) points out that education is constantly evolving, that assessments continue to be inconsistent and that much of the research around maximizing student learning is still somewhat ambiguous.

Danielson’s Framework for Instruction has several components to ensure inter-rater reliability. First, all evaluators must familiarize themselves with the Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2011). Familiarity with the Framework ensures that evaluators can theoretically explain the components and identify good teaching. The second step is learning how to organize pieces of evidence collected from an evaluation for each domain and element. By organizing the evidence, evaluators can see where the instructor’s strengths and challenges are. Understanding strengths and challenges help to form a holistic understanding of what professional development opportunities need to be provided. During the third step, evaluators explore and learn how the evidence matches
against the rubrics to assign a level of performance. Lastly, evaluators compare their judgments against someone else who is evaluating the same instructor, thus the inter-rater reliability piece (Danielson, 2011).

Two of the four teaching domains are observable, and two of them are not. Classroom environment and instruction can be observed, while planning and preparation and professional responsibilities often require ongoing observation and conversation. Danielson (2012) believes, “the quintessential skill of teaching is teaching, and it can be observed, we should do those observations with integrity and skill.”

During evidence gathering, there are three types of evidence to look and listen for (Danielson, 2012). The first is words spoken by the teacher or student (Danielson, 2012). What each has to say is equally important concerning higher level questioning, interaction with the subject matter and collaboration with others. The second is actions by the teacher or students (Danielson, 2012), which are found in Danielson’s domains concerning instruction and classroom environment. The last action is the appearance of the classroom (Danielson, 2012). Things to consider are the organization of the environment for the flow of the lesson, seating of students so they can learn, and if the environment is free of distraction. Danielson (2012) explains it is often difficult to only record evidence or what was heard/seen, as evidence is free from bias or personal opinion.

The conversations after an observation are equally if not more important than the observation itself. The conversations allow for self-reflection and growth to occur when the conversation is framed appropriately. Danielson (2012) believes that the majority of the discussion should focus on growth and dialog, not pointing out step-by-step what the
teacher did during the lesson. When the teacher is fully present, it allows for professional learning to occur and for them to take an active role in the improvement of their craft (Danielson, 2012).

Through conversation, the observer must be open to adjusting his or her understanding of the events in the classroom if an alternative idea is produced (Danielson, 2012). The framework, while complex, requires the evaluator and the teacher to view teaching as holistic.

**EXPECTANCY THEORY/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Developed by Victor H. Vroom, the Expectancy Theory describes that motivation is the root of three basic perceptions: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence (Vroom, 1964). He explains that the level of motivation can be determined based upon how instructors respond to an evaluation system.

Expectancy is a particular act or belief will lead to a desirable outcome (Vroom, 1964). Instrumentality refers to the individual’s belief that attaining a rigorous goal, which will lead to a desirable outcome (Vroom, 1964). Valence is the value that an instructor places on the outcomes attained as a result of the evaluation (Vroom, 1964; Milkovich & Newman, 1999).

Through research, it was found that while support for the expectancy theory was high, instrumentality was small and valence was weak according to Milkovich and Newman’s (1999) research. The lasting outcomes were considered to be weak due to the motivational force behind those feeling the process was not worth the effort those had invested (Schumacher, 2010). The Expectancy Theory is not widely used primarily due to logistics, adequate training, and the type of climate it can foster.
NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides an extra state license for teachers who meet their criteria. The certification is valid for ten years and is achieved through a rigorous process that is heavily based on peer feedback. Teachers complete online assessments to demonstrate proficiency, as well as, videotape and provide a written reflection in adjusting practice to meet the needs of the student. The entire certification process is based upon the five core propositions (Viviano, 2012):

1.) Teachers are committed to students and their learning
2.) Teachers know the subjects they teach and know how to teach the subject to students
3.) Responsible for monitoring and organizing student learning
4.) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from their experience
5.) Teachers are members of learning communities

The National Board for Professional Teaching Practice’s rigorous programming does not make it a likely candidate for ongoing teacher evaluation. While it intrinsically requires the teacher to be critical and refine practices, it lacks cyclical programming to let it be a primary evaluation tool.

PEER EVALUATION

Peer evaluation has also been an avenue that many have explored and is similar to the Peer Assistance Review (PAR) evaluation program. One key factor to point out is that many view peer evaluation to be more of a developmental process and are slim to cast judgment. Shanker (1996), was heavily involved in the peer review program in
Toledo and noted his experience in the article *Quality Assurance: What Must Be Done to Strengthen the Teaching Profession*:

[Teachers] were tougher than administrators had been, but, unlike most administrators, they also offered practical assistance to the new teachers. In addition, they set up and administered an intervention program to help more experienced teachers who were having trouble. Interventions lasted until the teacher no longer needed help or the individual was counseled into another line of work. (1996, p. 223)

**PEER ASSISTANCE REVIEW PROGRAM**

The Peer Assistance Review program (PAR), has been in effect in various school districts in Ohio (Weems & Rogers, 2010). The purpose of the program was to provide supports to teachers who were new to the profession through a mentoring partnership with an experienced teacher (Weems & Rogers, 2010). The PAR model requires full time teaching staff to be dismissed from the classroom so they may enter a coaching role anywhere from two to five years (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). Coaches are typically not staffed at a certain building, but rather move fluidly throughout the district providing supports to both provisional and veteran teachers who are needing an instructional intervention. Teachers who participate spend one year in an intensive coaching system with supports that may include informal observations, tailored professional development, modeling lessons, discussing instructional strategies, etc. (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). Due to the increased popularity of the model and the effectiveness of the
program, other school districts joined the initiative including Toledo Public Schools (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Throughout the year the coach reports back to supervisors and teachers are evaluated by a PAR panel. What is unique about the PAR panel is that typically teachers retain the majority in decision making regarding employment (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). In some cases, the teacher’s principal participates in future recommendations (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006). While the principal may not play a major role in the teacher’s employment status, the coach works to establish clear lines of communication to ensure the teacher is receiving support not just from the coach, but from their building administrator. The intended outcome of the program was to ensure that the rate of teachers who were dismissed due to underperforming levels of performance decreased (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Due to PAR, the Ohio State Department of Education was able to prove that the districts who had implemented PAR dismissed fewer teachers than other districts and teachers were more willing to seek out assistance when they were struggling than in other districts who did not implement PAR (Weems & Rogers, 2010). Teachers also reported that with PAR in place, teachers new to the profession were able to experience success in the initial stages with the support of a more seasoned teacher (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

The broad picture of the program became two-fold for those involved. For mentees, they were able to receive specific feedback on a more consistent basis from someone who they directly worked with. For mentors, they were able to observe new instructional strategies that the mentee brought to the table (Osten & Gidseg, 2003; Weems & Rogers, 2010).
Goldstein and Noguera express the many benefits that have been observed through the PAR model including that the PAR model, “reduces the burden on principals, the isolation of the classroom teacher, and sometimes even the antagonism and hostility between labor and management by involving teachers in the formal evaluation of other teachers and making them responsible for employment recommendations.” (p. 32).

One disadvantage with PAR that was duly noted is just like any program, the relationship between the mentee and mentor is crucial to the success or demise of the program (Weems & Rogers, 2010, Simon & Eby, 2003).

**TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM-CINCINNATI**

During 2000-2001, Cincinnati Public Schools began what was known as Teacher Evaluation System (TES). Teachers were evaluated based on their performance both in and outside of the classroom through observation and work samples (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).

With TES, teachers are observed four times by a peer evaluator and once by a member of administration (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). The first observation is announced the week of, and the subsequent observations remain unannounced and random. The evaluation rubric is based on Charlotte Danielson’s *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Instruction* with the appropriate domains and performance levels. As part of TES, written feedback and a teacher meeting are required to discuss the lesson in its entirety. Once the year is completed, a summative score is provided for each domain. The summative score is the only score that can be used for purposes of promotion, demotion, and termination of a teaching contract (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).
The ending results prove that teachers overall scores improved during the year in which they were evaluated when looking at student achievement (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Taylor and Tyler (2012) have noted, “greater teacher performance as measured by student achievement gains strongly suggest that teachers develop skills or otherwise change their behavior in a lasting manner as a result of undergoing performance evaluation.”

Results of Taylor and Tyler’s (2012) research discuss the highest level of effectiveness occurs within the first three to five years in the profession and that having experienced peers serve as sounding boards improves the quality of a teacher’s performance.

PORTFOLIOS

Teacher portfolios have slowly been edging their way into the teacher evaluation realm for years starting in the 1990’s. Today, conversations still occur around teacher portfolios and as to whether they can showcase a teacher’s effectiveness over time compared to the traditional classroom observation schedule.

According to Weems and Rogers (2010), Doolittle (1994), describes a portfolio as “a collection of work produced by a teacher designed to highlight and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in teaching. A portfolio also provides a means for reflection.” Portfolios can be gathered in a variety of formats both digitally and paper copy. A portfolio can go wherever the teacher goes if a teacher chooses to transfer schools or districts and can be added to throughout the year to showcase continuous growth. Portfolios can include various components that simply cannot be captured in a classroom visit including, but not limited to, volunteer experiences, professional
development, etc. One pitfall of portfolios is that they do not take into account student or family feedback about the components that are located within the portfolio, only the teacher’s opinion is demonstrated (Peterson, 2000).

Others including Petrosky and Bishop (1995) believe that portfolios serve as better means of teachers’ professional development process. Delandshere (1996) also believes in the idea of portfolios as a way to have the appraisal process be ongoing and about teacher growth.

Peterson (1995), has documented five disadvantages to using portfolios as a way to evaluate teachers:

1.) The open-ended nature of portfolios makes them difficult to use for judgments.
2.) They are bulky and can become physically unwieldy.
3.) They most often leave out a great number of needed perspectives.
4.) They seriously underplay the strengths of teachers whose quality is not in materials or student products.
5.) Mandated use of portfolios in assessment distorts the evidence they hold.

STUDENT EVALUATION

In some instances, students have the opportunity to provide input. While this is not typically a major factor, nor a popular one at this point, students have the chance to offer up their viewpoints about instructional practices and teacher dedication to education. Weems and Rogers (2010) note student evaluation as a sole entity cannot provide evidence in all domains of instruction to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of an instructor.
Tuckman (1995), believes that no one is more authentic to rate a teacher than students themselves. Through the use of the Tuckman Teacher Feedback Form, students would be given a survey of approximately thirty items. Since they are the ones that see teachers instruct and interact on a daily basis, he believes they would be the most proficient and truly providing feedback to teachers. While student evaluation can be a critical component in effective qualities, students do not typically possess the training to be evaluators and often rely on subjectivity to arrive at a composite score or opinion about instruction.

**Teacher Evaluation Framework Similarities**

Several studies have produced results that show that when a teacher evaluation system is thoughtfully created, and it aligns to professional development, it can contribute to improvements in not only a teacher’s quality of instruction but overall student improvement (Looney, 2011). Typical evaluation systems include standards, with one of the sole purposes of building capacity for teachers to continue to enhance and improve the quality of instruction (Weems & Rogers, 2010).

Teacher evaluation is constantly evolving. While Toch (2008) calls teacher evaluation systems “one-dimensional” and requests reform in more comprehensive models that look at teaching from multiple angles, Danielson (2011) does point out deficiencies as well. Deficiencies of the traditional teacher evaluation model include items such as checklists, simple evaluative comments, lack of consistency, lack of differentiation and one-way communication between the evaluator and the instructor (Danielson, 2011; Toch 2008). DuFour and Marzano (2009) are not alone in believing that the traditional method of an observer watching a full lesson and providing feedback
is not effective in improving teacher quality. According to Looney (2011), no single component can capture every aspect of teacher performance regarding contexts and best instructional strategies. Other researchers simply state what components should go into a comprehensive teacher evaluation model. According to Marshall (2012) and the Measures of Effective Teaching Project, teachers should be evaluated by three stakeholders: classroom observations, student improvement and feedback from the students themselves. By triangulating the data, Kane and Cantrell (2012) believe that it will make up for any single evaluation tool’s downfalls.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that guides the data collection process and analysis of the questions that are presented. The phenomenology approach was selected for a variety of compelling reasons, including the purpose of the study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore, discover and understand perceptions of teacher evaluation, perceived effective characteristics of educators, and how teacher evaluation systems can serve as a continuous catalyst for ongoing change.

Qualitative Research Design

Creswell (2009), explains that the essence of phenomenological approaches is to capture the viewpoint, experience, and essence of what is conveyed. Teacher evaluation as a whole can be fairly subjective. By using a qualitative approach with a social constructionism philosophy, common themes can be extracted from individual perceptions as perceptions about teacher evaluations can change based upon experiences, personal beliefs, and other outside factors such as district expectations and norms.

The significance of the study lies in how states and districts can analyze their current teacher evaluation systems to make them more efficient, useful, and in essence improve teacher instruction which leads to improved scholar achievement.

Phenomenological Approach

The Hermeneutic phenomenology approach is rooted in the belief that consciousness cannot be separated from people’s experience in the real world, that at some point a person’s beliefs about the real world will affect the way they think and what they believe (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Savin-Baden & Howell Major (pg 218) describe the hermeneutic phenomenology approach as, “the focus is on shedding
light on taken for granted experiences that enable researchers to create meaning and develop understanding.” Furthermore Savin-Baden & Howell Major go on to state, “Central to Heidegger’s work was the hermeneutic circle, whereby the researcher’s interpretations move from seeking to understand a particular component of experience to developing a sense of whole, and then back again to examining a further component, in an iterative cycle.”

In digging deeper into hermeneutic phenomenology, Max van Manen has utilized the research of Heidegger and Husserl to conclude that “the purpose of phenomenology is the interpretation of a text or a study in history in order to gain understanding” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Van Manen (1990) has conceptualized phenomenology as a whole and has developed a clear structure that involves six research activities:

1.) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2.) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3.) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4.) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5.) Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6.) Balancing the research context by considering the parts of the whole.

By utilizing the Hermeneutic phenomenology approach, the researcher will be able to gain a deeper understanding of beliefs about teacher evaluation, the participant’s understanding of the components of effective teachers and evaluation systems, and develop an understanding of how their background and experiences have been influential in their perception of both teachers and teacher evaluation systems.
**Social Constructionism Philosophy**

According to the philosopher Kuhn (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), suggests that knowledge is ever evolving as people’s perceptions and beliefs change. As beliefs and perceptions change, this can lead to a paradigm shift or cultural change (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Gergen and Gergen (1991) define social constructionism by looking at how individuals construct meaning through social situations, their realities, and interactions with others (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of a researcher in a qualitative study in one in that the researcher is the instrument, Elizabeth Tonniges. Lincoln & Guba (1985) point out that when a researcher is conducting qualitative research personal bias should be discussed and addressed personally as it can affect the research as a whole.

As the researcher, I am aware that I am professionally aware and invested in the study of teacher evaluation as my current occupation requires that I participate as the evaluator and utilize a systematic teacher evaluation system for educators. I have taken part in revamping teacher evaluation in the last two districts where I have been employed. Teacher evaluation systems, the components and attempting to understand what truly is an effective teacher have been a passion of mine since my first year of teaching. I am acutely aware of the potential bias as it relates to the subject and study as a whole in conjunction with my role as the researcher.

**Participants**

Lincoln & Guba’s research (1985) state that trustworthiness of the participants is just as important as the analysis of the study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that
trustworthiness can be established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Rubin & Rubin (1995) describe four key areas in selecting participants: locating/finding a participant who is knowledgeable in the field, broadening the views and perspectives, challenge themes with those who are being interviewed and lastly, deciding which interviewees are potential candidates to push further in the qualitative interview process.

Patton (1990) states, that purposeful sampling is sufficient due to the researcher selecting ‘information rich’ cases that are then studied. The essence of ‘information rich’ cases, according to Patton (1990), is that great learning can be gleaned from the issues at hand because of the participants who were chosen. By using purposeful sampling, central themes can be discovered through conversation due to the depth that the conversations can reach.

According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological qualitative research is best done with three to ten participants. However, both Creswell (2007) and Patton (1990) suggest a smaller number as with purposeful inquiry can lead to greater conversations that may, in turn, maximize the central themes of importance.

For the purpose of this study, seven teachers who are current instructors representing both urban and suburban school districts will be asked to participate. All participants hold a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education and currently teach in the elementary (K-5) setting. The goal is to achieve at least seven participants, and this will be completed by an initial phone call or in person meeting explaining the study’s purpose and confidentiality. All participation will be completely voluntary and other than overall
school and district demographics and painting a picture of their experience, participants can choose to remain anonymous.

**Confidentiality of Participants**

Before any interviews being conducted, a consent form was provided that discussed the purpose of the study and include details that are relevant to safeguarding information and statements. The consent form also stated expectations of the researcher and expectations of the participants. Throughout the interview process, participants were able to ask any questions that they believed were necessary to the researcher. Confidentiality was ensured through effective, viable, and guaranteed best research practices. Some of the best practices included, but are not limited to:

1.) The researcher shall securely store all recorded conversations and written transcripts throughout the study.

2.) All correspondence between the participants and the researcher will be completed through one private email account.

3.) All interviews will take place away from the participants’ current place of employment and off contract time to ensure there is not a conflict with employment.

4.) All participants will have the right to review any data about the study and any data that was obtained throughout the interview process throughout the study in its entirety.

5.) Participants will have the right to review the final findings of the study and ascertain how the results can impact their current place of employment or future employers.
6.) At any point during the study, participants can dismiss themselves from the study without any ramifications or risks involved.

**Research Questions**

The research questions generated for this study were purposefully selected to assist in getting at the essence of teacher evaluation and teacher effectiveness when it comes to a teacher that is classified as ‘distinguished’ or ‘highly effective.’ The questions selected ground the researcher in ensuring that the scope of the study remains limited to a certain extent so themes can emerge. The goal is to garner themes from the primary research question: What impact does teacher perception have on a teacher evaluation program’s effectiveness? Research sub-questions were created to support the primary research question:

1.) What are the essential characteristics that embody a distinguished teacher?

2.) What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers in promoting continuous professional growth?

3.) What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers to continuously reflect on their craft?

4.) What components of teacher evaluation models are essential?

5.) What is the perception of teacher evaluation as a whole?

6.) What are the barriers of teacher evaluation models?

**Data Collection**

The intention of a phenomenology study is to be able to understand the perspective of the participant who has had an experience and is willing to share their story. For this study, the researcher will rely solely on a short survey that is sent to all
participants gathering information about their district demographics, their concrete experience as educators and background, along with a few open-ended questions that will springboard the semi-structured interview process. According to Rapley (2004), an interview “speaks to and emerges from the contemporary ways of understanding, experiencing, and talking about that specific interview topic.” While the semi-structured format will allow for some continuity, the phenomenology approach allows for authentic conversation between the researcher and participant that may veer off course at points throughout the interview. The structure allows for the researcher and the participant to go rogue if necessary to prove a point, express their emotions towards the research topic, and allow for a broad opening where participants are free to share their connections and experiences.

Interviews, via in person or technology, will be conducted in a manner that is convenient and comfortable for the participant. All interviews that are conducted by the researcher and participant will be recorded through a digital device and transcribed by the researcher. Through the interview process, the structure will allow for participants to convey their thoughts and feelings about the teacher evaluation process and what their definition of a distinguished teacher embodies. The findings will be analyzed and categorized based on common themes.
Chapter 4: Results

Teacher evaluation since the beginning of time has evolved as teaching and learning have evolved. The main purpose of teacher evaluation focuses significantly on improvement and not accountability: guide professional development for teachers and reflect on the curriculum being used as it is implemented with fidelity. Over the years, teacher evaluation has taken on another purpose as districts, states, and federal oversight has sought additional measures to ensure a return on investment through accountability. While the intent behind accountability measures was well intended, these concepts adds an additional layer of complexity when it comes to equality, retention, and overall positive experiences for both teachers and scholars alike.

Research Question and Sub Questions

What impact does teacher perception have on a teacher evaluation program’s effectiveness? The following sub-questions were generated to get at the heart of teacher evaluation and to gather field experiences to create momentum to create an overall meaningful process for both the educator and evaluator:

1.) What are the essential characteristics that embody a distinguished teacher?
2.) What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers in promoting continuous professional growth?
3.) What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers to continuously reflect on their craft?
4.) What components of teacher evaluation models are essential?
5.) What is the perception of teacher evaluation as a whole?
6.) What are the barriers of teacher evaluation models?
Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative research encompasses the stories and experiences that people are compelled to share. For this phenomenological qualitative study, developed questions that would prompt open-ended discussion and reflection on the interviewee’s part. A pre-interview email was sent to each participant explicitly laying out the research process and included a link to a short demographics questionnaire. Through individual interviews, via ZOOM technology, experiences, heart-warming stories, and challenges were shared with the interviewer. While each interview was scheduled for approximately 30-45 minutes, the length of the interview depended on what the interviewee had to share with the researcher.

All interviews were recorded via ZOOM technology and transcribed by the researcher. A transcription of the interview was shared with the interviewee through GoogleDocs to ensure that their intended message was captured accurately. Throughout the interviews, there was a consensus that the interviewees had never really taken the time to critically think about their evaluation tools, the process, or their evaluators. In two instances a challenge was expressed and then problem solved by the interviewee during the interview.

Contextualizing the Experience

The seven educators who participated in this study all had the following in common: elementary teacher, more than 4 years in the field, female, and experienced the teacher evaluation process as the recipient on more than one occasion. The educators who were chosen are regarded as highly reflective professionals, but each had a separate journey from each other. All but two participants represented different states to gain a
better understanding of the vast differences among teacher evaluation systems across the country and to gather common themes and threads that run through all of them combined.

The elements that provided for differentiation is three had experience in charter schools, three who were primarily public school teachers, and one who had experience in both charter and public school settings. The seven teachers represented experiences from Arizona, Illinois, Nebraska, New York, Washington, and Louisiana.

Six teachers come from states where they have adopted state standards that are or that highly reflect the Common Core State Standards. Out of those seven, four of them come from states where the standards are their curriculum, and they create their instructional delivery utilizing district resources that may or may not reflect a purchased curriculum. Three teachers are required to teach specific curriculums with fidelity as assigned by their school district or charter.

Four teachers were impacted by performance pay at some point in their career based upon their summative teacher evaluation provided by their direct administrator.

All seven teachers reported flaws in their current system that would classify it as “unfair” or “unrealistic” from both a teacher perspective, an administrator perspective, or from both perspectives. Their perspectives came out loud and clear during the interview process and insight into how to make the process more meaningful for all involved was gleaned.

**Essential Characteristics of a Distinguished Teacher**

The following are direct quotes from participant interviews. The first question asked participants to think about what characteristics embody a distinguished teacher. The purpose of asking this question was to see if there were commonalities among the traits
or if the traits varied. Many teacher evaluation rubrics identify the top tier as being “distinguished,” but the perception of just what is a “distinguished” teacher is subjective. While some common words or phrases were repeated, each participant had a few that were different from the other participants. Based upon my research, the factors that created the discrepancy in some cases depended on teacher training, work experience, and the communication from the district and/or administrator about the rating criteria on their current evaluation system.

Participant #1:

- “Somebody that can differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all of their students. Somebody who can also follow the standards while not allowing it to limit their instruction.”
- “Somebody who is prepared, flexible, and works well with others.”

Participant #2:

- “…they’re definitely flexible, but not like whimsy flexible, like they’re very flexible in a sense where they can make adjustments that are necessary and still be effective.”
- “Things do not always go as planned, so they have to have those backups and things planned.”
- “They take the time to get to know their students for sure.”
- “…they know the curriculum, and they know how to use it in creative ways.”

Participant #3:
• “I think it is most important for those people who are in the classroom is classroom management. Like a teacher who knows how to manage her classroom, knows how to engage those students.”

• “Management is a huge ordeal for me and is definitely something I have to look at all the time, and I have to keep evaluating what I am doing.”

• “I think the only other thing I can think of is someone who is willing to learn the other thing. So someone…I’ve seen teachers who have been teaching for 20 years who are still learning. I’ve seen teachers who are you know, think they know everything, and they struggle. I mean coming to my school where it is all direct instruction can be an adjustment for a lot of those teachers who have been doing it for 20 years, so it can be difficult, especially at our school, but just having the skills and wanting to learn and wanting to improve also greatly helps to be a really good teacher.”

Participant #4:

• “First of all, they are well planned. When I think about elementary school teachers they are planned for everything every single day. I know you can’t plan for unexpected children behaviors, but they’re well planned for the fact that they have to teach multiple subjects over the course of the day and use those engaging instructional strategies that are necessary to get that content across so the kids are actually learning and are interested in the learning.”

• “They know how to teach…It doesn’t matter if they’ve been here 10 years or if they have been here 30 years, a lot of our teachers just don’t know how to teach.
They don’t know how to do it and do it effectively so that kids actually want to learn. I think that also comes with the shift in how kids have changed.”

• “Not only knowing how to teach and having instructional practices, but they grow. The field of teaching, the world of education has changed and they don’t get stuck in those ways so that they know what’s the best way to teach kids of today and in 10 years teach those kids of that today.”

• “I think a lot of it comes down to instruction, planning and preparation, including assessments and what to do with assessments, rather they know I give this assessment because I’ve taught this content and now what do I do?” It doesn’t matter if it is a foundational skill, science, or social studies but they know the next teaching moves and the teaching moves necessary for each kiddo.”

• “…that idea of differentiated instruction and they now how to differentiate well. It doesn’t matter what grade level you’re in you have to be able to differentiate. It is a buzz word that you hear, the idea that you know how to reach every kid because all too often curriculums are out there and teacher just use them by teaching to the middle.”

• “I guess the other big one is teachers just need to be kind and caring individuals. Having been in some recent classrooms, I’m not seeing that anymore and it breaks my heart, it hurts my heart…You’ve gotta really care about them, you really do. There’s a balance of trying to get the content across but at the same time I care about the kids.”

• “Communicate, communicate, communicate! I know that’s in every field of work and maybe that’s a hole in everyone and maybe that’s a pitfall of society is this
inability to communicate. If you can’t communicate how are kids supposed to learn, how are we supposed to communicate with our parents, how are we supposed to communicate with our colleagues? Have you tried this? Have you tried that?"

Participant #5:

- “I’ll start with is just that they know kids. I think a distinguished teacher is really good at figuring out who is in front of her so that they can understand where to take them.”

- “Being perceptive, but also being able to collect a lot of data and use that data to improve instruction. It is important.”

- “I think also a distinguished teacher knows, many different ways to meeting kids. And so, they can kind of connect a kid to an instructional practice that’s going to fit for them right away. So if you don’t have as many of those strategies under your belt, it might be harder to get started at least initially.”

- “Somebody who is still learning is an important part so that you know, you know, things change so fast. Things change so fast! I don’t think kids have changed all that much, so yes, you need to know instructional practices, and you need to keep learning new ways and things, but the people in front of us haven’t really changed that much.”

- “Definitely communication with parents is a huge thing. Having a boundary like where you know, you connect with your kids, but…um…it’s still always professional. It’s important.”
• “I think a good teacher is going to be really knowing what is going on with the family, in the home, and you know…what the child’s day looks like.”

• “I think perception and intuition is important for a teacher, but I also don’t think I’m supposed to say that. I know that everything has to be based upon data, but sometimes you just know and so I guess having the data to back up what you just know is important.”

Participant #6:

• “I think a true blue, born to be a teacher are people that kind of think on their feet and can see what is coming. The people that I have worked with or who have enjoyed working with or who I have admired are the type that know something is going to happen before it happens.”

• “They create questions in a different way or guide the ship of the classroom without much effort because they’re not reacting. They’re more proactive.”

• “A third characteristic would be someone who is super organized and who can hold a million things in their head…so there are many data points and things that are constantly changing, a person needs to be able to keep track of all of that at the same time.”

Participant #7:

• “Patience, flexibility…nurturing, caring, sensitive. They look beyond the big picture kind of deal, they look more at the person.”

Methodologies or Approaches to Promote Continuous Professional Growth

The second question asked participants to think about what methodologies or approaches they think have been effective in promoting continuous professional growth.
In order to gain a deeper understanding, I added the specificity from administrators or instructional coaches and focused on strategies to see if there were any common themes in relation to Jim Knight’s work. The purpose in asking this question was to see if there were commonalities or if there were any new strategies or approaches that I had either a) heard of, but are done in a different way that might be a more effective approach; b) to gain an understanding of potential themes or commonalities from a cross-country and private/public schools standpoint; c) were new approaches that I hadn’t come across in my research. While some participants were eager to share about the initiatives in their building or district, others were concerned at the lack of professional growth opportunities. Two participants expressed vast disappointment and frustration over the lack communication of the direction of their school or district initiatives.

Participant #1:

• “I am currently in a district that has their own professional development institute, where they offer probably well over 75 different PD’s that are offered through people within the district. So they kind of send others to training and then they come back and train other people who are interested in those trainings. They provide subs, I mean it isn’t detrimental to the teacher’s own time out of the classroom, so I find that that is helpful and it is during the school day and no so much after.”

• When asked if there was a limit or if teachers sign up for them on their own accord the participant responded: “Some are requested by administration, others are just once a month sessions. The person who is in charge of those sends out emails highlighting, like, ‘hey this one is coming up this month’ or ‘this one is
coming up’ and they have a good turnout of teachers. Teachers usually take them up on it.”

- When inquiring about personal experiences with evaluators that were meaningful the participant responded: “The best evaluators were the ones that weren’t looking for the “I gotcha’s,” like they were very clear with what they were looking for. During pre-conferences, post conferences and before the lesson they are very clear and at the end of the evaluation when you are meeting with them if there was something that they thought you could use a little more strength in they had PD’s readily available to recommend to help with that area.”

Participant #2:

- “For me, definitely going through the *Growth Mindset* book more than once with Carol Dweck (this book was a book study at her school led by the administrator). Going through it twice helped a lot. I think through conversation there’s a lot of times where it’s very easy to get caught up in the overwhelming world of education and when you have that conversation with somebody else it’s like an outside or an onlooker it is a bit easier for them to be like, “Well did you do this? Or did you do this?” so having those conversations with peers and colleagues and being open and vulnerable and not doing those things helps me for sure.”

- “I constantly seek out new information. I want to know…I want to try different things; I want to see how it works. I like figuring out what works for my kids and what doesn’t.”

- “I also don’t like to beat around the bush because you’ve gotta be direct, because the more there is a sense of political correctness, but if I need to do something I
Just want to know so I can grow. I don’t like to sit and talk about everything for 5 hours.”

*Participant #3:*

- “My first year was a big struggle as any teacher who’s doing their first year of teaching, it was a really big struggle, so my biggest thing I struggled with was having support and having administration kind of help me find mentor teachers or people who can help me because what works for me isn’t always going to work for someone else but you can pick and choose.”

- “I’ve gone and observed classrooms, even thought I am rated as a highly effective teacher now, it is one of my goals this year is to still observe classrooms just to get other ideas. That has been a really big support for me because I like to talk through things rather than read them on paper.”

- “I think the biggest thing is to promote, for me, is to promote communication on how we will do things because I like think a lot of teachers have different ways of doing things and not that everyone needs to do it the same way.”

- When asked about how the teacher logistically goes about observing colleagues, the participant responded: “I’ll use my preps, I have 2 half hour preps a day right now so I’ll go in for like 15-20 minutes…at most about once a month is my goal.”

*Participant #4:*

- “In my experience, no. At one point in my life, a couple of years ago, actually quite a few years ago the district through in structured collaborative learning and kind of made that their whole focus. It was great because the whole district was into it.”
• “The difference between my previous district and my current one is that my previous district brought people to us. They brought Marzano to us and he spent multiple days with us. They brought Kagan to us and it was a little bit larger school district than this one. This one I’m in now, they don’t bring anything to us, they might send us off to go learn about Danielson for a day but then I can’t tell you anything about Danielson and I have been evaluated on it for…four years now. I could still tell you element 41 of Marzano, but I can’t tell you anything about Danielson.”

Participant #5:

• “Yes, absolutely! Yes, we have an instructional coaching…um…system in our district. And that was started I wanna say was probably 8-9 years ago that that started? We’ve been kind of learning how to do it for a while and implementing that. But anything in-house has been the most powerful thing for me.”

• “Having coaches in-house has been amazing because they can watch me do what I do and help me do it better.”

• “My principal wants to be here all the time and he does make a great effort to be present in the building but when it comes to him kind of saying “I saw this, this was good, here’s where you can tweak this a little bit..” He’s not in my room enough to see that, but my coach is.”

• “One thing that our coaches have put in place is having lesson studies within our district and in our building. I find that I grow the most or learn the most is when I’m in somebody else’s room watching them.”
• “The other thing that we have done is to have some specialists come into our building, and we’ll have lesson studies within our own classrooms but led by another person…um…Kate Roberts came last year to my building and so she taught few different lessons at a few different grade levels, but we were in-house you know, watching the action. It was very helpful!”

*Participant #6:*

• “We have opened up our classrooms and have done more peer observations where it is an observation and not like an evaluation.”

• “So going into lessons and observing where we give specific, actionable feedback, not just like “that was great” or “that went south fast” and then I think promoting self-reflection whereas teachers I don’t feel we have time to do.”

• “Having that self reflection at the end of lessons, I know that when I did National Boards that was the biggest part that made me grow so much because I know when something didn’t work out and didn’t go the way I wanted to and to stop and think about why it didn’t go well and actually putting it on paper.”

• “The big shift is that observations are not evaluations and having teachers rate themselves honestly contributes 100% (to the teacher’s personal growth).”

*Participant #7:*

• “I would say conferencing and goal setting meetings. We have goal setting meetings three times a year currently. I think those, just self reflection and knowing personally what you want to grow upon, how you want to improve rather than the all school PD’s that we do are more general and don’t always apply specifically to everyone.”
“Those meetings have been very helpful and it forces you to be very reflective because we don’t sit and think about our goals, we sit and talk about our student’s goals. We don’t really take the time to sit down and reflect that we have goals, too.”

**Assisting Teachers to Continuously Reflect on Their Craft**

The third question, was similar to the second, but asked participants to think about what methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers to continuously reflect on their craft, thus creating that cyclical teaching experience of planning, teaching, reflecting. The purpose in asking this question was to see if there were commonalities in how teachers go about reflecting and how they may have developed an intrinsic reflective system. All seven participants stated that they have found themselves in the mindset of completing the teacher evaluation requirements as a checklist at some point in their career.

All participants also expressed that they seek outside colleagues for feedback if their evaluator doesn’t a.) provide meaningful feedback or b.) they disagree with the feedback that was given. All participants also conveyed a longing to be a part of a collaborative culture or pointed out that they were grateful that they worked in an environment that values collaboration.

*Participant #1:*

- “Having schedules where you have common plan time within your grade level or within a grade band. This gives you that ability to have a daily reflection on, “hey, I taught this lesson, and this is what happened” type of thing. It gives teachers time to be able to do that.”
Participant #2:

- “The SIP (School Improvement Team) has those classroom observation forms, I don’t know how many people have actually been using them, but I went ahead and stuck them outside of my door because I want that feedback and I don’t want it to just come from my admin, but from my colleagues as well.”

- “I feel that there are a lot of people who have a lot of different strengths, and it isn’t always easy to be in someone else’s classroom but that times that you do…1) it kind of re-energizes you a little bit, 2) you end up finding out that you’re not alone in dealing with different behaviors and those kinds of things and 3) you end up picking up on little things whether it was a way they approached behavior, it was a way they re-explained something or what they did that you just hadn’t thought of. So taking time outside of your room to go observe, I think gives you a whole different place to pull ideas from rather than sitting and talking about it.”

- “So, I think having people come in and look at those has been really helpful for me at least because then I have a whole folder I can go through (for ideas).”

- When asked about specific strategies that administrators used that helped promote continuous reflection on craft, the participant responded: “…she was very good about listening to what you were saying and then pulling sentences out and asking questions like, “What do you mean when you say that?” or “Like really this is the problem you are stating, but what really is the problem?” Just conversations with you where you’re like, “You just need to stop and think about this.” Because I go. So the admins who take the time to understand my quirks, my flaws, and who I
am, they take enough time to look at me and say, “Stop, you need to look at this” I think is where I’ve made the most growth.”

Participant #3:

- “God honest, I’m a perfectionist. Like I am the person who, if you give me a 1 on my formal, that like if I miss one single point I’m going to ask you what I did wrong because I don’t like not being perfect and that’s really hard for me.”
- “We have an instructional coach who is just there to help teachers get better at what they’re doing…it doesn’t count against me (regarding evaluation points).”

Participant #4:

- “Nothing. That is a horrible answer. That’s just not happening in my district, my building.”
- “I’m going back to the second question, when the principal comes in and watches you, for the 2 years I’ve been observed as a teacher I can count on one hand how many times I did see my principal. And three of those were usually about behavior on the field and it was just…I had my observations, I met, that was it. She suggested I work on using higher order thinking question stuff, but I mean it wasn’t like, “Here’s some resources, this would help you, go try this…” It was like, “I’d like to see more of this from you.” My response was, “Okay, so how do I do that?” It wasn’t like, “Here, go watch these videos. Go read this book.” I know that through National Boards I learned to do that reflecting piece, but that wasn’t encouraged. I haven’t had that opportunity in my setting to be like “go be reflective about your teaching.”

Participant #5:
• “The things that I found most valuable our building does have a Rising Star Committee. It’s a leadership committee for the building. We work on the school improvement plan. So our committee, that’s the purpose of our committee is reflecting on what is happening, what’s working, what’s not working and making changes or adjusting our plan as needed.”

• “We do have weekly staff meetings and there’s a lot of discussion at our weekly staff meetings of what’s been happening and what we want to grow or change.”

• “We do have some built in time to reflect on how things have been going. At those staff meetings monthly we have at least one entire meeting a month dedicated to technically, it is an MTSS plan, but really it is dedicated to looking at student data and reflecting on whether what we have done for core instruction is producing the results that we want or not and talking about how we can change that or tweak that for the future.”

• “It is part of the schedule and I think that keeps us consistent on reflecting because it part of the schedule.”

• “One thing that we have done differently this year is to improve is we’ve selected a more focused thing, so all teacher in the building have a specific assignment to reflect on math instruction and then within literacy instruction to pick one area like word student or reading/writing.”

• “We do have an observation schedule, but a lot of what we’re asked to do at in-service days as well is, we have time to journal, time to you know, think about the focused question.”
• “The other thing that is unique is that between classrooms there’s a small office that the teacher’s share. If you share an office with someone on your team it’s constant, the conversation “how did that lesson go? What works for you here? What didn’t work for you?” It is a constant conversation during specials and lunch if you share an office with a teammate. I find that the layout of the building actually really impacts how much reflection happens between the team.”

Participant #6:
• “I have not seen that in practice. So we’ve done the whole meet with our PLC’s where we meet once a week, and we have specific kind of discussion points, we have a goal. The goal forced teachers to reflect on their teaching, so we’re talking about narrative writing this week so we’d at least have to reflect on that. That was partially helpful, but it is a bit phony. I’ve not seen it in practice, where it’s done well. I mean…I think a lot of that is time. If I was told I had to reflect every day for 5 minutes I’d tell you I don’t have time for it. I think it needs to be more authentic than that, but I haven’t seen it.”

• “Give elementary teachers time off throughout the day. High school teachers get an hour off, at the elementary level, we barely get anything. We eat lunch our kids, we teach them PE, and we’re lucky to get anything. I’m pretty sure some of them don’t get zero minutes off during the day. I think just building time within the day that allows for buffer room; you know a pause. I’d like to see time built in, not just for group PLC, but time for teachers. I think some places are trying to do that. I’ve seen the 4 day work week thing where on day 5, where every Friday
you get time to plan for the next week. You do that anyway but you do it on Sunday at your house by yourself.”

Participant #7:

- “Lot of series of informal meetings. We do a lot of those. They are always followed up with feedback within 24 hours. It is very informal. Just having those informal meetings or drop-ins are more effective than the formal observation. Obviously, if you are coming in I’m going to try and act a certain way. We all act differently when it is a formal observation. When they come in informally that is when the feedback is most helpful for growth because that is your natural state rather than a planned lesson where you’re trying to put on a show.”

Essential Components of Teacher Evaluation

The fourth question was not tied to any specific type of teacher evaluation, but asked the participants to think about teacher evaluation as a whole and what components they thought are absolutely essential to their growth. The purpose in asking this question was to see if there were overall broadly stated commonalities such as classroom management or planning or if there were more in-depth commonalities that were more specific such as classroom environment or lesson design.

Three participants reflected on their current teacher evaluation system and believed that were fair and the components were essential. All three of these participants had teacher evaluation systems that were Charlotte Danielson’s or Marzano’s frameworks or were created based upon either of those frameworks.

Participant #1:
• “I think that there needs to be…kind of a not so much of a broader focus, but more of a narrowed focus as to what you feel makes an essential teacher or an essential classroom. I say that because there was a district where the rubrics were no joke, they had 15 pages of rubrics and that is a lot for a teacher to memorize for each component.”

• “It needs to be attainable. The evaluation model needs to allow for teacher personality to be put into it and not so much; you’re not looking for robotic scripted classes if that makes sense.”

• “Overall the evaluation should be structured around what embodies an essential classroom. The essential elements of instruction. Which depending on your district viewpoint could determine what your district feels is essential.”

Participant #2:

• “I think an objective is a key piece to every lesson, from your curriculum, how you are using it and what you’re wanting from the lesson. It has always been consistent in every evaluation, and I think you need that to ground you when you are teaching to have it laid out, and pre-thought of before everything else.”

• “Opportunities to respond is another. I think it is key because there are a lot of times where I’ve gone through lessons or experienced lessons where it is a whole lot of sit and get. So having those opportunities to respond would have made it better.”

• “The classroom environment one. That’s the one I didn’t hit until I got to my current district. That’s a huge piece of the lesson that’s not usually looked at. How are you using your proximity, and how are your students sitting next to each
other and working with each other. That’s factored into everything in your classroom climate.”

- “Professionalism has always been on there. And that makes sense.”

- “I feel like what we have laid out I really like, although sometimes it’s a little broad, a little vague, where I think that you should be having a conversation you have to find time for that conversation and time is…you know…something that we just don’t have half the time.”

Participant #3:

- “I really like the observations because if you’re going to evaluate someone on their teaching style or their teaching methodology, I think that you’re going to need to look at them throughout the year rather than just doing two major pieces.”

- “I think involvement in school is also super important for them to build relationships with students and with families, they should take that into account.”

- “I think some parts of the evaluation such as we miss points if we call in sick, and no one can control that or it is an unplanned absence and I think that’s ridiculous that you’re going to count points off of someone for being sick or their kid being sick. I don’t think that’s fair.”

- “I personally struggle with doing state testing because I work in a rural, low-income school so a lot of my kids struggled and I didn’t get 100% of my kids passing that test. Now SPED is factored into your performance evaluation as well. For me, giving a kid a test now on a computer, as much as they put computers into it, it stresses me out, like how that is all intertwined with how
teachers perform. You can’t control what a kid answers or doesn’t answers on that particular day.”

Participant #4:

• “So definitely having the opportunity to be evaluated on how well you do plan and prepare for lessons.”

• “Having someone come in and evaluate how you do teach and assess and how that drives your instruction would be really awesome.”

• “In our state, we have these 8 critical components, and then they show Danielson to somehow fit into those. Two of them relate to student data.”

• “When teachers do get to do this whole goal setting about what they want to be evaluated on it always seems to be admin drive. So, I think as part of the evaluation system it would be nice if it was teacher driven.”

• “Sometimes the 80% goal doesn’t happen and then it ends up being a worthless goal. I want valuable goals within the teacher evaluation system.”

• “In our new system you have to prove that you are a good teacher with pictures and artifacts. Then I got in trouble because I had 50-60 photos of everything and anything to try and prove that I met and I got called back, “well, please don’t do that. It’s too much for me to look at.” I do like the new evaluation system because it is more about that I get to prove, but don’t tell me it’s too much.”

Participant #5:

• “So the model I started with was kind of home grown. The model we’re using now is also kind of home grown but it’s really based on Danielson. Pretty much the Danielson Framework, my district just made a couple of tweaks.”
• “We have a rubric and teachers are literally given a score based on where they fall on that rubric and then your score translates into…my district has basically a rating system.”

• “That (the rating system) determines really what it’s used for in determining our placement on a sequence of honorable dismissal list, but it’s really a lot more than that. We have to have an evaluation system. There has to be a list, something that works with that.”

• “One thing that has changed is that in order to be considered an excellent teacher, you had to participate in a lot of district committees or teams or something like that. At first I was like, alright, but some people have kids and other commitments at home. It’s not necessarily fair to everybody, but the more I thought about it…if we’re going to have a hand in where our district is going, if we want ownership over like one thing we’re going through right now is finally changing. Within the next couple of years we’re going to standards-based grading which we really need, if we’re going to have a hand in all of that then we really have to participate. I really like that part of the scale.”

• “I wouldn’t say that there’s a lot of things I’d take off of our system. I think planning and preparation are important. I think it is really important to maintain professional relationships. Instruction matters so that needs to be on the form.”

• “Classroom environment matters because if you’re not setting up a space that’s going to work for people, it’s not going to work for them and it will impact kids.”

• “I have to say I really wouldn’t change much about what’s on the rubric; I think our system is really good.”
Participant #6:

- “So our end of the year evaluations were half value added based on test scores and half evaluation. One announced and one unannounced.”
- “My best feedback was when they were scripting me, it sounds intensive, but I got to see the script that was where I learned the most about myself.”
- “Our evaluation system requires the evaluator to give two strengths and two weaknesses. I had evaluators that would tell me I had nothing to work on. I didn’t get as much out of it, I wish they would have given me, “You did this well, but here’s 2 places you could do better in.” I felt the 2 growth areas helped push you, because you didn’t want them, but you’re human and you will have them. It at least opened up the conversation.”

Participant #7:

- “I’m not a strong lover of performance tasks, test score indicators, or when they pull up the grades of the class and ask about the class average. They begin to question if kids get it or not based upon that indicator. More so, kind of like whole picture looking at all the things you do.”
- “Not only the lesson plans. Not only the portfolios, but looking at everything that goes into it including scaffolded materials, homework assignments, graphic organizers that were used, the kind of things that go unseen.”
- “I also think evaluation systems where you look at the whole person and not just one snap shot, so not just one lesson, but there are so many other hats that are work so looking at the professional as a whole.”

Perception of Teacher Evaluation
The fifth question asked participants to think the perception of teacher evaluation as a whole from their perspective, from their colleague’s perspectives, from what they’ve heard from others, and from what they have learned with the different models they have utilized. The purpose in asking this question was to see if there were any biases towards teacher evaluation programs as a whole and to see if there were any commonalities among the various participants who represented so many diverse categories.

Two teachers expressed that they have come to an understanding about teacher evaluation and view it as a positive experience. Five participants expressed that the teacher evaluation process can be viewed as punitive and just a process to go through that wasn’t meaningful or beneficial to their growth. Two participants were very frustrated that the process created a negative culture in their buildings or districts due to performance pay or the lack of clarification provided ambiguity that negatively impacted themselves and their teammates. Interestingly, all seven teachers expressed hope that their process/system would improve and become a meaningful tool.

Participant #1:

• “In my current environment, I feel that the teacher evaluation model is not so much something that is dreaded because it is a not high-stakes evaluation. I mean there is really no bonus attached to having a stellar observation, and there’s not really a severe punishment.” They do offer improvement plans for teachers that fall into those scores, but it’s very rare because our district really does try to do a good job of preparing their teachers for what they are looking for in the classroom.”
“Other districts in other states, not so much. I mean there are states that have their evaluations attached to yearly adequate progress of their students and that makes it extremely stressful. And in my opinion, the teacher is so focused on that evaluation that they have lost that element of actually instructing their students.”

Participant #2:

“The immediate thought is that it is a pain, nobody likes to be observed, nobody likes to be evaluated. It’s awkward; it’s not fun. If you are like me, you panic. It’s just not fun, that’s my first thought.”

“From there it depends on the person’s mindset of who you are talking to. If you are talking to someone who has a fixed mindset, they are very offended by all of this. But growth mindset, you have more people who accept it and kind of roll with it.”

Participant #3:

“It depends on who you talk to, that’s probably the biggest thing.”

“I don’t think that people are necessarily mad at the person who is doing it, I think they’re mad because they’re used to having more freedom and having more ability to do what they want and to not necessarily have people breathing down their neck at times.”

“The current idea is to have conformity and to have everybody kind of be the same. The problem is with teachers is that no one is exactly the same. A lot of teaching is your personality and so when someone comes in who has a completely different personality to evaluate you that can rub people the wrong way if you
critique everything they do instead of focusing on some of the positives and
giving them 1 piece to work on instead of 10 pieces to work on and 1 positive.”

Participant #4:

• “We all hate it. We all hate it because none of us know what’s going on or how it
currently works.”

• “It is a lot of confusion right now. People are very confused about what they’re
supposed to do. Teacher evaluation is not clear right now, I’m not saying it is
bad, it’s just not clear.”

• “I wonder if our principals understand what they’re evaluating teachers for.”

Participant #5:

• “For the most part, it seems like most people in my building are pretty happy with
how teacher evaluation goes.”

• “I guess the one thing that can be kind of difficult is having somebody present
enough to see those things happening. It really is difficult to bring your entire
school year or two years into one meeting with your principal and say, “This is
everything I’ve done,” when there’s so many things that you do all the time,
they’re just second nature.”

• “There has to be an evaluation system in any career; it is a necessary thing.”

• “I think that there have been some other schools in my district with different
administrators that maybe have had different experiences than we’ve had, there’s
been a lot of training for our principals to make sure that they are consistent with
teachers across the district. I think that training is ongoing.”

Participant #6:
• “There’s no way to capture true teaching unless you’re in my classroom every day. There is no way my evaluator can come and sit in my classroom every day.”

• “I’ve been in different schools, I’ve been in different parishes, I’ve been in other people’s classrooms where I am the evaluator, and in every place it looks different.”

• “In many places, it still isn’t a very trusting place because it seems like still an “I gotcha” which is not what it’s meant to be and I think the whole part that they call it evaluation is part of it, but I’m not sure what you’d call it then.”

• “My last school I had a good experience, but it was because I had an amazing principal who I trusted who was in my classroom enough that if she saw something that didn’t go right, she had been there enough to see the good.”

• “I have been in places, seen places, and they have said this one evaluation was terrible and you shouldn’t be a teacher after one observation. It happened to me my 2nd year of teaching, and on that note, I probably wasn’t very good, I was pulled in and told that this wasn’t the profession for me. Had I listened to that person and had I not been full of myself, I would have gotten out of teaching, and I wouldn’t be where I am today. It can’t be an all or none; it has to be a piece of the puzzle.”

Participant #7:

• “I think there is a negative perception associated with it. There are a lot of teachers who associate things like money or job security and things like that with teacher evaluation.”
• “It kind of makes people feel uncomfortable. It is almost like there’s a divide of someone coming in and now they are going to judge what you’re doing. Teachers are almost on the defensive.”

• When asked if there were times where the participant didn’t feel the divide as they described, their response was, “Yes, more recently and I think that is only because I was actually friendly with the person before she got promoted to the position. So, we had a different relationship beforehand and now our relationship is obviously a little bit different, but we had a basis first rather than just this one person who you never see and is always in their office is now in your room critiquing you as a teacher even though they know nothing about you. When she came in it was almost like she had background knowledge about me and she had already been exposed to my teaching. She knew a couple of personal things about me, so I feel like she got a better picture, not that she was biased, but she understood me.”

• “The relationship is the key.”

Potential Barriers of the Teacher Evaluation Process

The last question encompassed the potential barriers to the 2 main reasons why teacher evaluation exists. The purpose in asking this question was to see if there were barriers that could be easily removed to make the process more meaningful or to see if commonalities were system-wide issues or personal issues that evaluators and teachers could work to improve to thus, improve the teacher evaluation process.

While many barriers were presented, there were quite a few that would be minor to implement without cost. Some of the measures put in place, such as performance pay or
required extra curricular activities regardless of outside time, impact the building culture and impacted scores on their rubrics. Three participants expressed frustration that there was a focus on items that seemed to be farthest away from the actual teaching such as, a way the teacher dresses or requirement of outside duties.

Participant #1:

- “I think it depends on the administrator and it also depends on what pressure that administrator has on them. So in one school district I was in, principals have been told they can only give a limited number of their teachers at each site high scores so that is a huge barrier because you may have more than just 3-4 teachers at your site that are hitting every aspect of their evaluation but you have to find something to not give them high scores.”
- “Part of the limitation comes from two aspects. One is they have limited funds, so they can’t give everybody in their district the bonus. The other piece of that is, if these teachers are truly exceptional than their test scores would be higher. So if you have a teacher at an underperforming school, but the principal is giving teachers every year high marks they look at it as that’s not quite matching up.”
- “Whereas barriers that get in the way here (in their current district/position) is not so much, they’re not major barriers, but different administrators do different components. You have to know your administrator well enough to know that they’re looking for.”

Participant #2:
• “People willing to be vulnerable, I think there are so many steps that go into each individual teacher before you even get to a comfortable evaluation and you don’t have time to do that.”

• “You have to build a relationship with your teachers.”

• “Being able to read my admin, and being able to figure out where I need to be and what I need to do is important.”

• “The relationships with my admin is important, being able to read my admin, has always factored into my perception.”

• “So if you don’t have a good evaluation with your admin, you really don’t want them to come and evaluate you or it will diminish the effect of the evaluation. If you don’t like the person, you may not want to work for them. You want to make it work, but that’s hard. That’s something we can run into.”

Participant #3:

• “I think sometimes when you’re evaluating someone, while you want to be an authoritative figure, I think there also has to be an understanding. Rather that an understanding of, “you seem to know what is going on in my life.” Life changes so much, realizing that things can change and people can change. You have to feel comfortable with that person.”

• “Right now I have an administrator who tries, but I don’t feel it is genuine. If the interactions are not genuine it doesn’t come off the way it is expected, it doesn’t come off like she cares.”

• “In the 5 years I have known her, I’ve never heard her ask me about my personal life. In the last 5 years, I’ve gotten married, I have dogs…like all of those things
you could talk to me about that, but at least, “Hey, how’s it going? How’s your husband? How’s the house?” like, it’s having those conversations.”

- “It is a barrier if I know that you don’t care about me as a person.”

- “I guess I’m a very personable person, but just having those conversations with staff, if they walk past your office at least wave and smile instead of looking at your computer intensely. I know there are other important things, but that’s what I struggle with is if you’re constantly writing things I need to be doing and you do not know me for who I am as a person.”

Participant #4:

- “I think the people who are doing the evaluation struggle through helping a teacher, a good teacher, a bad teacher, whoever figure out the right professional development.”

- “I’ve had evaluators who weren’t actually teachers in the areas that I teach in, so my current principal was a high school principal and I’m an elementary teacher. I think one of the barriers is they don’t even know how to offer advice or suggest professional development because they themselves don’t know the answer.”

- “I think another barrier is on the teacher’s part and that is we just keep putting up a wall. We don’t want to be judged and that’s the hardest part.”

- “I thought the dog and pony shows were supposed to go away. We still feel this need to put on a dog and pony show because we’re being evaluated rather than just being who we are as teachers and how we teach every single day.”
• “How do you bring this conversation down to the level of communication it needs to be to the person who had 3 kids have a meltdown in the classroom today, a chair thrown at you, and a kid bent your finger back?”

• “I just think there’s a huge disconnect between teachers understanding the evaluation system. Something’s happening here that’s not getting across what we’re expected to do and why it’s valuable and here’s why the principal has to do it. Like there’s just this gigantic disconnect.”

Participant #5:

• “I don’t know if this is an okay answer to say, but pride. I think that pride gets in the way a lot. It can be really, really hard to show your weaknesses but that’s how you grow. So if there’s a culture of competition among teachers in the building or if a principal or an administrator says things that makes one feel as though like I wish you were teaching more like so and so kind of thing that can get in the way and wound your pride a bit.”

• “Vulnerability is the place where growth happens.”

• “Just like our classrooms have to be safe, the building has to be safe for teachers to show weakness to see what’s working or not working.”

Participant #6:

• “It’s 100% trust. That’s it.”

• “Also the growth in teachers and mindsets, I feel like it has shifted that way, like we’re learning how to be better teachers. With the standards shifting, it mad us be that way, because if you’ve aught the standards for years and you’ve taught the same lesson, you couldn’t anymore.”
• “I think if you have the trust it will work, change it away from the “I gotcha” and I’m not sure how you do that.”
• “It is the relationship.”
• “It is the understanding of this is what it is for, and this is what it is not for, and this is what it is going to do, but when it is tied to your job, and it’s tied to money which is new for us, that’s hard for everybody.”

Participant #7:
• “I would say the snapshot. Things like time of year are often things that get in the way. There is a lot happening at the beginning of the year and at Christmas with not much in between. You’re trying to get into the groove. It seems like they (evaluations) pop up at the craziest times of the year and not in the middle of February where nothing is really happening.”
• “I also feel like especially for professional development it kind of misses the mark; there’s not always the conversation between “I saw this…” “What did you see?” “This is the PD I’ll recommend…” I feel like there isn’t always a conversation, which could be a barrier.”

Common Themes

The first question that was asked simply inquired what are the essential characteristics that embody their definition of a distinguished teacher. While there were common themes among the seven participants, there were a few outliers as well. Seven common themes emerged from the interviews: Time, Transparency with the Tool or System, Communication, Established Culture, Mindset, and Positive Intent, Relationships, Equity, Resourcefulness & Follow Up, and Alternative Feedback &
Coaching. The themes emerged from the basis of the participant’s life experiences and sometimes, current realities, as a result of the questions that were posed by the researcher.

**Distinguished Teacher Commonalities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonality</th>
<th>Number of participants who included it in their response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility or being able to anticipate what is coming up during a lesson and being able to adequately respond</td>
<td>6 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong interpersonal skills (i.e.: collegiality, ability to get along with others, professionalism)</td>
<td>4 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with scholars</td>
<td>4 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to differentiate the curriculum and instructional strategies to meet the needs of their diverse learners</td>
<td>3 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to follow and teach the standards as they are designed</td>
<td>2 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being prepared and having lessons completed</td>
<td>2 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong classroom management skills and strategies</td>
<td>2 out of 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to communicate well with not only scholars, but</td>
<td>2 out of 7</td>
</tr>
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One of the largest barriers to an effective teacher evaluation system is time. It is a barrier not only for teachers but also for everyone involved including administrators and district personnel. All participants expressed time as a hindrance. Participants expressed that they wished administration was in their classrooms more providing specific feedback for improvement on a more consistent basis, but understand the demands of an elementary administrator and the constant strive for balance they make. Three participants referenced the time and effort their administrators put in to being an instructional leader and the positive impact it has collectively made in understanding what teaching is really like in today’s classrooms.

All seven participants expressed that teaching has become even more complex than before and while they see a need for instructional minutes, the amount of additional items that have been added to the plate cannot be completed in the amount of time that is
provided. Where before they may have a 50 minute plan time, now they are expected to meet with their teammates during that time, analyze math data, make more parent phone calls and devise plans to meet the needs of a more diverse set of learners.

*Participant 1.* This participant has experienced a variety of school settings. One aspect that she found powerful in assisting teachers to continuously reflect on their craft was ensuring that schedules accommodated common plan time within a grade level or grade band to ensure conversations were ongoing.

*Participant 2.* This participant talked quite a bit about not having the time for meaningful dialogue, frequent walk throughs or time to process, “I think you should be having a conversation you have to find time for that conversation and time is…you know…something that we just don’t have half the time.”

*Participant 3.* Participant 3 discussed her experiences as a first-year teacher who was struggling with classroom management. She had to utilize her plan time as it was difficult to find people to class cover due to time so that she could gain those experiences. She explained the process she went through as a relatively new teacher who was on an improvement plan and the time investment that her administrator invested in her weekly versus now that she is rated as a highly performing teacher.

*Participant 5.* Participant 5 described her relationship with her principal as being positive and supportive, but understands the demands that are placed on administrators that impact the classroom; “My principal is phenomenal, so I don’t think it would be an evaluative conversation if he was saying, “Hey try this...” It wouldn’t make me feel like he was criticizing, you know, what is happening. He’s just not around enough to see that.”
In terms of building professional development and time to process teaching and systems, participant 5 was pleased with the amount of time that is dedicated to reflection, “So, we do have weekly staff meetings and there’s a lot of discussion at our weekly staff meetings, of what’s been happening and what we want to grow or change.” She went on to discuss the structure, “At those staff meetings monthly we have at least one entire meeting a month dedicated to technically, it is a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) plan, but really it is dedicated to looking at student data and reflecting on whether what we have done…um…for core instruction is producing the results that we want or not.” She also discusses how that structure helps her take time to reflect, “it’s part of the schedule and I think that keeps us consistent on reflecting because it is a part of the schedule.”

Participant 5 also discussed the perception of teacher evaluation and how it is intertwined with the visibility of the principal when it comes to some teacher’s perceptions, “People in my building are pretty pleased with how the evaluation system has gone. I have heard some things you know…from individuals like “I don’t think my principal was really in my room enough to see that and then I’m kind of judged for this, but they really didn’t get a picture of that part of the day or part of my rating really looked like.” She went on to comment, “So I guess the one thing that can be kind of difficult is, having somebody present enough to see those things happening because it really is difficult to bring your entire school year or two school years into one meeting with your principal…when there’s so many things that you do all the time, they’re just second nature.” While she expresses respect for her administrator and points out that he has created a positive working environment that is supportive, she turns to her
instructio

nal coach more frequently as that person is able to in her classroom more often than her administrator because, “for us we just have the same person who just sort of handles all of those things.”

Participant 6. In the state where participant 6 was located, teachers did not have plan time built into the day unlike the rest of the participants. She shared her thoughts about how administrators could help facilitate the process of assisting teachers to be continuously reflective of their craft, “Give elementary teachers time off throughout the day. High school teachers get an hour off; at the elementary we barely get anything. We eat lunch with our kids, teach them PE; we’re lucky to get anything. I’m pretty sure some of them get zero minutes off during the day. I think just building time within the day that allows for buffer room; you know a pause. Our kids get here at 7:20 and you work until 3:20 and there are no minutes to pause or think through that day. Even when you think I should do this, by the time you get to the end of the day it’s gone.”

Interestingly, she did not complain about have all of those additional duties on their plates that had been different from the other participants. Instead she longed to have time to collaborate with her colleagues other than on a Sunday afternoon by herself. She acknowledged the need to interact with other colleagues to ensure the needs of her students were being met. On the other hand, the three participants who had over 50 minutes of plan time each day commented that it was not enough to fulfill their obligations.

Participant 7. Participant 7 expressed that time was an issue when it came to effective teacher evaluation practices, “(teacher evaluation can be more effective) over an elongated period of time, rather than a snapshot moment of an evaluation. They see you
once in September and then in June you get this write up of reflection from September and there has been no follow up in between.” Part of this she attributed to administrators have a lot on their plate, but the other part was teachers being overloaded and not having time.

Participant 7, not only cited the amount of time, but also the time of year effects teacher evaluation processes negatively, “There is a lot that happens (evaluation wise) at the beginning of the year and at Christmas with nothing much in between. You’re trying to get into the groove. It always seems like they pop up at the craziest times of the year and not in the middle of February where nothing is really happening. I think that hinders the growth because then things like PD (professional development) are recommended based upon what is seen at those times, but it might not be what is needed.”

Transparency and Communication with the Tool and/or System

The common theme of transparency ran rampant throughout 6 of the 7 interviews. Transparency with their administrator’s expectations, transparency with the district’s
expectations for the administrators and teachers, transparency on the intent of their teacher evaluation system, and transparency on the process or what to do after an observation is complete were expressed as frustrations. The experiences shared depended on the current stance of the district, professional development that had been offered to both administrators and teachers, who their administrator was, and how the process had been (or in some cases had not been) communicated to all parties involved.

Six participants expressed that they believed their administrators did not receive adequate training on the tools they were using to rate teachers. They also expressed lack of consistency and greater variability between evaluators. One participant applauded her district for acknowledging this was an area of deficiency and described how their district is taking greater measures for on-going principal training and cross-training between buildings to ensure the tools are used with as much fidelity as possible.

Participant 1. This participant expressed much could be accomplished if there was transparency with what the evaluator was looking for and with the evaluation tool itself. Regarding promoting professional growth, this participant believed that to grow a “very clear and defined rubric or goals for what the evaluator is looking for or what the district is looking for” is essential to her growth as a professional. The participant believes that with a more clear and narrow focus, the evaluation process would be more meaningful for the teacher, “It needs to be a little bit more narrowed down and attainable.” Participant 1 felt that she was most successful when her administrators “were very clear with what they were looking for” throughout the entire process (pre-conference, during the lesson and post-conference).
Participant 2. While participant 2 expressed that her current evaluation system is “a little broad, a little vague” she expressed that it is more about the conversation for her rather than the tool. She expressed a desire to have a clear understanding “being able to read my admin, and being able to figure out where I need to be and what I need to do” was essential to her success (or lack of success) from her viewpoint. “I also don’t like to beat around the bush because you’ve gotta be direct…but if I need to do something I just want to know so I can grow.”

Participant 4. Participant 4 championed for clarity when it came to the feedback that administrators provide, “She (administrator) suggested I work on using higher order thinking questions, but I mean it wasn’t like, “(participant’s name), here’s some resources, this would help you, go try this.” It was, “I’d like to see more of this from you.” My response was, “Okay, so how do I do that?” Participant 4 discussed this common theme of providing feedback in a larger capacity, but then being unable to articulate how it pertains to that specific learning environment or what many would consider what it “looks like and sounds like” outside of the feedback.

Participant 4 also expressed the lack of transparency when it came to the process and actual tool that was being utilized, “It is probably the wrong thing to say, but it is a joke because none of us know what we’re being evaluated on except that one stupid goal.” She expressed frustration in stating, “People are very confused about what they’re supposed to do.”

Participant 5. Participant 5 discussed some of the training experiences her district is providing to administrators to increase consistency and decrease variability with evaluations. She believes this is a positive effort for both teachers and
administrators. After discussing her positive experiences with the evaluation process, she continues, “I think that there have been some other schools in my district with different administrators that may have had different experiences so we’ve had, there has been a lot of training for our principals to make sure that they are consistent with teachers across the district. I think that training is continuing.”

Participant 6. Participant 6 discussed her experiences in how she and others perceived the evaluation process and relationships was a theme, “I’ve been in different schools, I’ve been in other people’s classroom where I am the evaluator and in every place it looks differently.”

Established Culture, Mindset, and Positive Intent

Mindset and positive intentions with the tool and with the process ran rampant throughout each interview. Four participants described their positive experiences as ones where the administration was not out to “get” them, but rather a treasure hunt of what they were doing well with specific feedback on areas for improvement.
Mindset and positive intentions were both described from the teachers' perspective, but also from the administrator’s perspective and their experiences, really set the tone of how successful the teacher evaluation process can be. From a collaborative standpoint, all seven described working with other teachers who had a closed mindset and how they hindered their ability to move forward as individuals or teams. All seven described approaches to assist themselves such as isolating themselves, providing resources to their team, having tough conversations, or acknowledging that they cannot change someone else’s behavior.

Both mindset and positive intentions from both sides establish the positive, or in some cases negative, culture of a building. One participant spoke about teacher favoritism and how that shaped one experience she had into one where people typically did not take the evaluator’s feedback. Another participant described a culture where all teachers were respected and valued for their opinions and teaching craft. This established a higher level of collaboration and increase in taking administrator feedback.

Participant 1. This participant discussed her experiences in working for a school district that issues performance pay in conjunction with teacher evaluation scores. She expressed discontent with the overall fairness of the established program, “principals have been told that they can only give a limited number of their teachers at each site high scores so that is a huge barrier because you may have more than just 3-4 teachers at your site hitting every aspect of their evaluation but you have to find something to not give them the high scores.”
This participant expressed that the times where she’s been the most successful is when her evaluators “weren’t looking for the I gotcha’s,” but were rather “clear with what they were looking for.”

*Participant 2.* The second participant spoke highly of her work her administrator did as she led the teaching staff through the *Growth Mindset* book study by Carol Dweck. She expressed that it was more impactful going through the book the second time individually and how that has helped shape her views of herself as a teacher regarding areas of potential growth and how she approaches them now versus before. The book has helped her shape her views, “I want to try different things, I want to see how it works, I like figuring out what works for my kids and what doesn’t.” “This is supposed to help you grow, not a check to see if you’re doing your job or to see if you’re blowing it.”

This participant also spoke highly of her administrator’s willingness to learn the curriculum, model lessons to increase understanding of where feedback was needed, and the positive and collaborative culture and how that impacted her taking her current administrator’s feedback into greater consideration than others.

*Participant 3.* Participant 3 discussed the perception of teacher evaluation in relationship to the number of years an educator has been teaching and how she believes there is possibly a relationship, “There’s been teachers who have been here for 9 years who having someone come in and evaluate them is normal. They’re used to it. There are other teachers who have been teaching for 20 years who complain…I think they’re mad because they’re used to having more freedom and having more ability to do what they want and to not necessarily have people breathing down their neck. The problem with teachers is that no one is exactly the same.”
Participant 5. Participant 5 expressed the ideation of pride being her number one barrier to the teacher evaluation process. She went on to explain, “I think that pride gets in the way a lot. It can be really, really hard to show your weaknesses but that’s how you grow.” Participant 5 discussed how the culture and climate have an impact on the process, “Just like our classrooms have to be safe, the building has to be safe for teachers to show weakness so that they can ask for help in the areas of their weakness.”

Participant 6. Participant 6 described the shift that has occurred when her state adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), “The growth mindset in teachers, I feel like it has shifted that way (in a positive way), like we’re learning how to become better teachers. With the standards shifting, it made us be that way, because if you’ve taught the standards for years and you’ve taught the same lesson, you couldn’t. By everyone having a fresh start, the growth mindset has shifted a bit. Just making sure that we’re all open to building our students up with the standards is a plus.”

Relationships
Relationships and trust ran as a common theme consistently through all seven interviews. All participants expressed that they were more likely to be vulnerable and grow when their evaluator knew something personal about them or their family. When probed further, one participant explained that they’d rather have an evaluator that they had a great relationship with over a higher salary. All seven participants described experiences where they had great relationships with evaluators and connected it to growing substantially more as an educator than experiences with evaluators who they did not feel like they had an established relationship.

Three participants pointed out the analogy of how they need to establish positive relationships with students in their classrooms to move the students forward compared to administrators needing to establish positive relationships with teaching staff to move the staff forward.

Inquiring deeper, trust and a positive relationship was the top factor in determining if they would take their evaluator’s feedback and make adjustments in their classroom.

Participant 1. This participant expressed understanding your administrator well enough to be (or feel) successful, “you have to know your administrator that is coming in well enough to know what they are looking for.”

Participant 2. “So the admins who take the time to understand my quirks, my flaws, and who I am.” “you have to build a relationship with your teachers” “getting people in your room so they don’t panic and so it doesn’t feel awkward.” “If you don’t have a good evaluation with your admin, you really don’t want them to come and evaluate you or it will diminish the effect of the eval.”
Participant 3. “I had a principal that would take notes about what I was saying, I didn’t feel like she was paying attention or really cared. She was very cold.” With this experience, the participant described a scenario where issues were never addressed until the final summative at the end of the year, and by then it was tied to performance pay. On the other hand, she describes a different scenario where her current principal is “very supportive, but not intrusive, but she seems happy and she kind of knows what is going on in people’s lives or at least attempts to know what’s going on in people’s lives, and realizes reality. Where my 2nd principal who I struggled with just wasn’t warm and fuzzy and that’s what I realized I needed.” Lastly, when discussing the barriers to teacher evaluation models, participant 3 circled back to relationships, “I’ve seen sometimes when you’re evaluating someone while you want to be an authoritative figure, I think there also has to be an understanding. That understanding is between like where you feel like, “Okay you seem to know what’s going on in my life” because lives changes so much, realizing that things can change and people change. I just need to feel like you care just a little bit. You have to feel comfortable with that person. It doesn’t take much to get those conversations.” Participant 3 concluded the interview by stating, “I know there are other important things, but that’s what I struggle with is if you’re constantly writing things I need to be doing and not knowing how I am as a person. It makes the process difficult.”

Participant 6. Participant 6 discussed her experiences in how she and others perceived the evaluation process and relationships was a theme, “In many places, it isn’t a very trusting place because it seems like still an “I gotcha” which is not what it’s meant to be and I thin the whole part that they call it evaluation is part of it. Just that teachers
are not as trusting of it (the evaluation process) because it depends on who comes and sees you and what day it is.”

Participant 6 went on to describe an experience she shared with her last principal, “I had a really good experience, but it was because I had an amazing principal who I trusted and who was in my classroom enough that if she saw something that didn’t go right, she had been there enough to see the good. But if I only see you twice a year and my evaluations aren’t that good, my first reaction would be “well you’re not here” I think that building the trust and saying, “I’m going into this evaluation, I know you’re a good teacher and I understand that your entire life is not on that paper” (is essential to a teacher’s growth.)

Participant 6 also described another experience with her first principal, “I have been in places and they have said this one evaluation was terrible and you shouldn’t be a teacher after one observation. It happened to me my 2nd year of teaching, and on that note I wasn’t very good, I was pulled in and told that this wasn’t the profession for me. Had I listened to that horrible person, had I not been full of myself, I would have gotten out of teaching and I wouldn’t be where I am today. It can’t be all or none; it has to be a piece of the puzzle.”

When asked about the barriers of teacher evaluation models, “It’s 100% trust. If you trust the person give you the feedback, they’re doing it for the right reasons, and it is a positive experience where they’re not doing it to get you is huge.”

Participant 7. Participant 7 described her current teacher evaluation experience; “I was actually friendly with the person before she got promoted to the position (an administrative position in her building and evaluating her). So, because we had a
different relationship beforehand and now our relationship is obviously a little bit different, but we had a basis first rather than just this one person who you’ve never seen and is always in their office who is now in your room critiquing you as a teacher even though they know nothing about you. When she came in it was almost like she had background knowledge about me, and she had already been exposed to my teaching. She knew a couple of personal things about me, so I feel like she got a better picture, not that she was biased, but she understood me. It was more comfortable because she knew more about me as a person rather than someone who I have never had a relationship with whatsoever and they kind of work in a bubble come in, write it all up, send it to you, and you barely see them again. The relationship is key.”

**Equity**

Teacher equity continues to be a debate across the nation as many states have turned to performance pay, Common Core State Standards, and evaluation systems that remain complex. Three participants described their experiences with the struggles districts have faced, as the amount allocated by the district for performance pay is not
enough to credit the amount of teachers who are excelling at their job. In all three instances, the lack of equity created a divisive wedge among staff. While the participants pointed out that fair is not always equal, they were passionate about their job and duty to their children regardless of what was happening politically in their district or at the federal level.

Participant 3. Participant 3 used to teach a grade that is currently assessed at the state level. She expressed the anxiety and the great amount of stress standardized testing had on her life as it was tied to performance and ultimately pay, “so our bonus money is tied with this (evaluation process) with our performance pay so our first year I was on an improvement plan and I almost didn’t get signed back and I didn’t get performance pay.” Participant 3 also expressed the inequity within their current system with performance-based pay, but now also factoring students who qualify for special education’s scores into the pay system.

Participant 5. Participant 5 discussed how culture and climate are effected by inequities, which she believes hinder the full purpose of the teacher evaluation process, “Competitive atmosphere among teachers in the building would not be good. So you could say we can only have 3 teachers in the top field, good luck everybody, that’s going to negatively impact kids because people won’t be collaborating and sharing as much in regards to what is working. Keeping that open that everybody can be doing really well and you’re only competing against yourself (is a positive thing).”

Participant 6. Participant 6 also comes from a state where state funding is tied to evaluation practices, “When it (teacher evaluation) is tied to your job, and it’s tied to money, which is new for us, it creates inequity. As long as they’re still going to attach it
to my livelihood, my life, my bills, like I know you have to be a good teacher, but until that goes away it is always going to have a shade of gray over it.”

Participant 7. Participant 7 talks about what she would consider being a “divide” among teachers over the teacher evaluation process, “I think there is a negative perception associated with it. There are a lot of teachers who associate things like money or job security and things like that with teacher evaluation. It kind of makes people feel uncomfortable. It is almost like there’s a divide of someone coming in and now they are going to judge what you’re doing. Teachers are almost on the defensive.”

Participant 7 offered up a different way to do teacher evaluation that she believed was more equitable to teachers, “…it is the same person that evaluates you every year where there is a whole admin team so it would be nice to change it up and have them all watch you and they collectively come up with something. Rather than you versus the one person.”

Resourcefulness & Follow Up
All of the participants that were interviewed longed for their administrator or evaluator to provide actual resources that were beneficial. When asked about the types of resources, a variety was provided such as an article, or a teacher to go observe that was perceived to be distinguished in the area that they needed to grow in, or a professional development session. Four participants were frustrated with the lack of clarity with the feedback that was provided to them, such as asking higher level questions, and wished their administrator would have also provided a resource to help them understand exactly what their administrator wanted to see.

Three participants pointed out that they really felt supported when their principal followed up with them in the weeks after the formal evaluation to check in on the progress they were making. There was a consensus that they would be more likely to take the feedback and implement it as long as there was a.) clarity in what the administrator wanted them to do, b.) follow up and feedback in the subsequent weeks, and c.) if the feedback directly tied towards improved student achievement.

*Participant 1.* “…They had PD’s readily available to recommend to help with that area.” She discusses her current situation where her district offers “well over 75 different PD’s that are offered through people within the district” and where “it isn’t detrimental to the teacher’s own time out of the classroom.”

*Participant 3.* Participant 3 expressed how helpful it was for their administrator to be able to provide master teachers to observe or to reach out to if they, the administrator, did not have the answers or suggestions themselves. “They (principal) would point me in the right direction of another person like, “Hey, this person is doing really well why don’t you go ask them. Maybe they can come in and observe you and
give you some tips.” Participant 3 conveyed that when the positive collegiality was in place, she was much more open to on-going dialogue about instruction and classroom management regarding seeking them out for resources or when she needed assistance. Whereas, if the openness wasn’t there, she was less likely to take feedback from her administrator and be vulnerable if things were not going well and she needed to problem solve. In these instances, participant 3 turned to her teammates more and searched for answers and ideas via online forums, education journals, and other scholarly avenues and learned through trial and error.

Participant 4. Participant 4 expressed what her previous district had done in terms of bringing in national experts in the areas of Kagan instructional strategies and Marzano’s teaching strategies, and what that did to transform her district as a whole, “They brought Marzano to us, and he spent multiple days with us. They brought Kagan to us, and it was a little bit larger school district than this one.” She expressed, “…it was great because the whole district was into it.” She discussed what she was experiencing in today’s reality, “I’m not seeing a ton of that where principals or admin are coming in and providing that…now I’m trying to do that with my staff. It is pretty hard because now it is about curriculum at this point.”

Participant 7. Participant 7 felt that the lack of conversation about resources and professional development at the end of a formal evaluation meeting was a barrier to a teacher’s overall growth, “I feel like especially for PD (professional development) it kind of misses the mark, there’s not always the conversation between, “I saw this…” “What did you see?” “This is the PD I’ll recommend…” I feel like it isn’t always a conversation.”
Alternative Feedback & Coaching

Question two and three focused on the outside factors that elicit a teacher continuously reflect on their craft and promote professional growth. All seven participants discussed how their colleagues were a support to them throughout their journey. With two participants, they expressed gratitude for working with teammates who they felt made them better teachers due to their collaboration efforts. One participant described feeling somewhat isolated on her team and seeking out other colleagues in the building. Two other participants longed for opportunities to bond and grow with their team, but their school day structure wasn’t conducive to fostering growth in that capacity.

Two participants discussed their experiences with their instructional coach and felt that since their instructional coach’s only job duty was to support teachers that they were the ones that fostered continuous growth among teams of teachers. Both participants explicitly outlined what their instructional coach did to directly support them
instructionally. Both articulated the importance of this position by discussing how the instructional coach role promoted growth in a variety of capacities, but that all learning was personalized to what the teacher or team needed to work on or learn.

Participant 2. Participant 2 was comfortable enough to seek out her teammates. She verbalized the collegiality and collaborative network she is trying to establish to get perspectives from multiple people, “I do want that feedback (from colleagues), and I don’t want it to just come from my admin, but from my colleagues as well.”

Participant 3. Participant 3 fondly talked about her experiences with her instructional coach, “we have an instructional coach who is just there to help teachers get better at what they’re doing.” She went on to talk about how the instructional coach was instrumental to ensure she was on the right path after a formal observation with her principal and was subsequently put on an improvement plan within her first few years, “it’s not going to be negative or count against you…it helps, especially if it is such a specific thing, you want everyone to be the same. It helps to know what to do.”

Participant 3 discussed the preferred approach that she believes is successful when providing feedback if the administrator is wanting the teacher to take and implement the feedback, “It can rub people the wrong way if you critique everything they do instead of focusing on some of the positives and giving them one piece to work on instead of doing ten pieces to work on and one positive. You have to kind of balance it. So, it’s kind of like when you do parent-teacher conferences. When you give the sandwich, do a positive, give the negative, end with the positive. I think that is kind of a model that some administrators struggle to remember; it’s kind of like dealing with
parent or kids you’ve got…we’re similar in that respect because this is something that is very important to a lot of people. It’s their job and they want to do well.”

Participant 5. Participant 5 agreed that her experiences with her instructional coach helped transform her teaching, “Having coaches in-house has been amazing because they can watch me do what I do and help me do it better.” One thing she found helpful that her instructional coach coordinates for continuous growth experiences is lesson studies; “One thing our coaches have put in place is having lesson studies within our district and in our building. It is nice to have someone watch me and give me feedback on what I’m doing, but also I learn things that I want to try when I am watching other people, so that’s really, really helpful!”

Participant 6. Participant 6 describes her experiences in being able to observe other teachers and vice versa as part of her plan for growth and reflection, “We have opened up our classrooms and have done more peer observations where it is an observation and not an evaluation. So going into lessons and observing where we give specific, actionable feedback and then promoting that self-reflection whereas teachers I don’t feel we have the time to do.”

Participant 7. Participant 7 said that she does listen to her evaluator’s feedback and reflects on what their suggestions are, but doesn’t always agree to take it and implement it. Participant 7 also seeks out others in her professional circle, “I don’t necessarily shut it down, but kind of see if I agree/disagree and then go back with someone that might be more meaningful or valuable to me as a teacher for professional development. Often times, I’ll ask around to those who know me. The people I work with, a co-teacher, you know someone who pushes into the classroom. I’ll ask them if
they see it in my work, I work with them daily, so they know me and my teaching on a more consistent basis. You don’t always see yourself or what other people are saying sometimes.”
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion

Significance of the Study

As districts and states become into compliance with Elementary Secondary Schools Act (ESSA), one component is a highly effective teacher evaluation model. While this study explores a variety of models, components, and experiences, these findings may provide insight into effective components of teacher evaluation systems that lead to increased student achievement, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. These findings could be crucial to districts and states who are developing new systems and practices. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore what exactly are the characteristics or qualities of a distinguished educator and what components of teacher evaluation systems are highly effective in promoting continuous growth to improve craft thus impacting student achievement, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Discussion of Findings Relative to Research

Throughout the interviews, one word kept coming to mind and that was: clarity. Clarity over the evaluation tool and how it is utilized. Clarity about the type of culture that is established regarding the “why” and how it is connected to teacher appraisal. Clarity about the criteria that are used and what the administrator is “looking for.” Clarity about who is observing them and the observation schedule. Clarity over how the results will be used. One participant was passionate about clarity when it came to professional development, expectations for teachers, and communication from the district to administration to teachers and finally to parents. She expressed grave concern for the teaching profession as administrator training of the evaluation tools was considered bleak
and therefore from her perspective, teachers were stuck making decisions about what is in
the best interest of the students versus the new initiative that was implemented every 2 or
3 years before moving onto something else because in their minds, “it didn’t work.”

Teachers expressed hope that evaluation systems would be come more
streamlined in the future and in two cases, the expectations of teachers would become
more, “reasonable” for what a human could achieve. An underlying concern remains;
our students are arriving at school with more life experiences. Some of these include:
English language learners, diverse family units, migrant students who come with
traumatic backgrounds, students who are exposed to families with substance abuse, child
abuse, domestic violence in the home, students who are enrolled in multiple activities
outside of school that impact time, and the list goes on. Each student’s background plays
a role in the classroom. With so many factors that cannot be controlled by teachers or
administrators, at some point there is an impact on the teaching/learning environment and
direct implications to a teacher’s evaluation or performance.

Two teachers who received some sort of performance pay discussed the inequality
among those who teach students with additional challenges versus ones who come from
very supportive environments starting at birth. While their heart is teaching those
students, they continuously face adversity. These challenges come from all aspects as
students may not perform at the level that is expected.

We live in a society where high expectations academically for all and the
understanding of reality on a daily basis can clash. It is a fine line between empathy and
sympathy versus high expectations and low expectations. In larger districts, students can
be known as a number or a score, which takes the personal aspect out of teaching and
learning. As an effect, the teacher evaluation system is impacted as they can also be viewed as a number, score, or in some cases as evidenced from the interviews, a rank. Either way you look at it, number, score, or rank, all participants felt that none of them contributed to greater collaboration experiences, higher student achievement (as some teachers had a higher rank, but not higher achievement as measured by their assessments), or encouraged on-going reflection and growth as an educator. In at least three interviews, it had the exact opposite effect.

One of the major themes during the interviews was relationships. Relationships with administrators. Relationships with families. Relationships with colleagues. And relationships with students. We have to realize that we are teaching students, our future, many times their ability cannot be quantified with one assessment that is then tied to their teacher’s evaluation. During the interviews frustration was conveyed student achievement directly tied to standards became paramount over relationships and real world learning with students. Three participants also expressed frustration as they lacked autonomy in their environments to teach as their students expressed interest in new ideas or concepts because they may not be in alignment with standards or district expectations.

Another area of contention was around transparency of the evaluation tool and administrator training. Extensive training needs to occur and be on-going if districts are requiring administrators and other evaluators to use the tool with fidelity and decrease variability between evaluators. Participants described that their experiences could be vastly different based upon who was observing them.

Schmoker encompasses quite a bit of this conversation in one of his Education Week (2012) commentaries:
Done right, teacher evaluation could ensure precisely the kind of systematic action that would guarantee immediate improvement, i.e., by clarifying a minimal set of the most essential, widely known criteria for effective curriculum, such as rich content taught largely thought literacy activities and sound instruction. Once clarified, evaluation would then focus on only one or two elements at a time, with multiple opportunities for teachers to practice and receive feedback from their evaluators. Teachers' progress and performance on these criteria would be the basis for evaluation.

The results of teacher evaluation, if done right, not only provide the administration with the documented capabilities of the teacher but also serves the scholars inside that classroom well when it comes to a quality educational experience. By equipping administrators and evaluators with knowledge about the tool and building up their instructional capacity, they will be able to support teachers more extensively as they will have a larger repertoire of instructional strategies and classroom management strategies to draw upon. It will also provide the clarity that so many teachers are seeking around the evaluation tool and make it less ambiguous as administrators are better able to articulate the tool and how it is utilized.

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2012) weighed in on her thoughts about teacher evaluation and providing feedback. Her sentiments correspond with sentiments from the interview participants when it comes to continuous growth, “My ideal evaluator would help me construct my own options for how I might use feedback to move forward as a
professional, rather than dictate next steps. That approach would help me find my own way, take ownership of my growth, and increase my autonomy as a professional. At the same time, he or she would provide concrete support for my continuing growth.”

Tomlinson also points out in her *Educational Leadership* (2012) article that it is imperative that evaluators “communicate a vision of the potential power” of the teacher’s teaching ability, serve as a mentor or be knowledgeable of others who are experts in areas of potential growth, and be in classrooms often to get a global perspective of the environment and the teacher’s true ability.

In Danielson’s research (2016), she cites trust as being essential to the cycle of continuous learning, “learning can only occur in an atmosphere of trust. Fear shuts people down. Learning, after all, entails vulnerability. The culture of the school and of the district must be one that encourages risk-taking.” Through her research, it is the principal or the head of the site that is responsible for establishing the norms and positive culture of the building. Internally, teachers want to be the best teachers they can possibly be. By fostering a positive environment that allows teachers to be vulnerable with each other, only growth can occur as they push each other to reflect, grow, and adjust their practices to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

Danielson (2016) also addresses the mindset of teachers in relation to the culture of the building. She describes teaching as something that is never finished, “The culture must include an expectation that every teacher will engage in a career-long process of learning, one that is never "finished." Teaching is simply too complex for anyone to believe that there is no more to learn.”
Lastly, Danielson (2016) describes what she believes, based upon her research, to be the best method for learning and growth, “policymakers must acknowledge that professional learning is rarely the consequence of teachers attending workshops or being directed by a supervisor to read a certain book or take a particular course. Overwhelmingly, most teachers report that they learn more from their colleagues than from an "expert" in a workshop. When teachers work together to solve problems of practice, they have the benefit of their colleagues' knowledge and experience to address a particular issue they're facing in their classroom.” Participants of the study overwhelmingly expressed that they have learned the most from watching and observing other teachers or having teachers observe them and having time to process. Very rarely do these opportunities exist, but they are essential for on-going growth and establishing a culture of trust where specific feedback becomes the norm.

**Future Implications**

**Recommendations for Districts**

Many districts are continuously looking for ways to make the process more meaningful based upon federal mandates, state mandates, and the overall growth mindset of improving the process for all involved as evidenced from the multitude of teacher evaluation systems that have been implemented, tried, and revamped. Often many of these changes occur without a long-range implementation plan. While timing isn’t always ideal, from the research and participants, it is necessary to have a plan in place to ensure clarity and communication about the tool and process. This all begins with ongoing training for administrators in how to use the tool and when possible,
opportunities for administrators to score together to decrease variability among usage of the tool especially when if it is tied to performance pay or teacher ranking.

We also have to come to an understanding that teaching isn’t black and white each minute of the day. Saphier (2008) writes, “teaching is one of the most complex human endeavors imaginable.” A shared understanding that lessons won’t always go as planned and that only observing one or two lessons a year doesn’t give you a full picture of what the educator is capable of. More frequent and shorter observations with specific and actionable feedback are recommended to gain a better perspective of what a typical day looks like and to monitor and support teacher growth on a consistent basis.

While performance pay, bonuses, or other compensation methods to award teachers who achieve high scores on their evaluation systems seem like a good idea to motivate teachers, my research points out that it actually has adverse effects. If school districts want to boost student achievement, eliminate all extended pay and use those funds to support in-house professional development or hire additional instructional coaches where teacher learning is their main job function.

Take a clear look at your district or building’s culture and climate. If the overall structure of the day or calendar for the school year is not conducive to teacher collaboration, make adjustments if you can to allow for opportunities to discuss student work, plan together, and to observe each other. Cultivate a climate where competition is minimalized, and collegiality is prioritized as the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

**Adjustments In Practice**
Since interviewing the participants for this dissertation, I have taken steps to change my practice based upon their feedback to see if the process moves further away from something that “has to be done” to a positive step in the professional development journey of something “we get to do together”. What I realized is that the teacher evaluation journey is just as much of a growth opportunity for the person evaluating (me) as it is for the teacher who is participating. For it to be effective, we must both be invested at a high caliber.

At the end of our pre-conference meeting, I talk with the teacher about the steps that occur after the observation and before the post-conference meeting. I have now included statements such as, “I want you to take ownership of this growth process, so I am asking that you come to the post-conference meeting with 1-2 areas where you’d like to see yourself grow in the next semester.” By incorporating short increments of time, the goals that teachers have established have become more attainable and more focused.

I have always tried to provide meaningful, specific feedback, but through these observations, I have realized that that is simply not enough for many of our teachers. We now spend more time during the post-conference establishing an action plan that carries over into the next 4-8 weeks, or sometimes semester in an area they’d like to improve. For example, one teacher wanted to work on incorporating higher-level questions and tasks for her gifted scholars during math time. Instead of me providing her that feedback (oddly enough it was the feedback I had in my head), she took ownership of it.

Together we brainstormed exactly how and where she could insert higher-level questions without it being a separate lesson or disjointed from her lesson. We then brainstormed places where she could turn to in crafting higher-level tasks. In this
instance, our curriculum provides task cards for scholars who are above level, so we agreed she would pull those out and find ones that corresponded with the same topic. I also encouraged her to reach out to our gifted facilitator. We also discussed how scholars could use the same topic and take it a step further by completing the problem with a different strategy or confirming their answer with a different strategy. Lastly, we discussed pairing them up next to each other and have them verbalize their thinking utilizing the higher level stems during math talk. The teacher was able to walk away with resources, an action plan, actual resources to utilize to be successful within the realm of the current curriculum, and we discussed what she would need to do regarding classroom management to have the small group operate successfully within the classroom. As part of that support, I increased the number of times I was present in her classroom during her math block and provided specific, timely feedback about her progress. Not all of those times were documented as part of the process, but the presence of an administrator even just for short instances, increases the awareness of what the learning environment is truly like on a daily basis rather than the 2-6 visits that are required each year.

As I talked with one participant that is closer to my inner circle, I had made a comment about not realizing the power of personal relationships being higher on the list of reasons why or why not people take feedback from their administrator and her comment was, “because you’re too close to it.” This was validation on my part as we continue to preach that relationships are essential for scholars and teachers if we want to shape behavior and if we want to teach and see our scholars grow. Even as adults, the same concept rings true. I continue to capitalize on this area of strength in seeking out new ways to connect with staff on a personal, yet professional level.
Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for research are endless when it comes to the process of teacher evaluation because through my research one size doesn’t fit all as teachers have different experiences, training, and possess a range of mindsets. Granted, there can be frameworks, such as Marzano or Danielson that can guide the process, but the overall structure, implementation, and delivery have to be tailored to individual district’s needs and mandates.

The concept of time was one that I knew would be high on the list just with my experience with educators and administrators. Just with personal lives being “busy”, if we want the process to be meaningful we need to foster it and invest in it and this includes our time. Further research into the amount of time, but also how to structure time differently to ensure there is a laser focus on growth is necessary as we all strive to find the balance.

Summary

What we have to remember is that while teacher evaluation has accountability tagged to it, it is the evaluator that sets the tone in whether it stays just that, or becomes one that truly fosters growth consistently within each individual.

If we truly want teacher evaluation to serve it’s intended purpose of guiding professional development, promoting continuous growth, and seeking validity of the curriculum we must view it as an investment not only in our teachers, but the positive results impact the classroom. Adequate feedback and evaluation practices cannot be learned in a one-time training experience during the summer.
The intent of teacher evaluation, the usage and validity of the tool, and conversations about how to establish positive school culture around teacher evaluation need to be continuously at the forefront and integrated into all we do.
References


trust for learning, teaching, leading and bridging up (pp. 335-352). New York: Springer.


A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF PRACTICE

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Sub Questions

1. What are the essential characteristics that embody a distinguished teacher?

2. What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers in promoting continuous professional growth?

3. What methodologies or approaches have been effective in assisting teachers to continuously reflect on their craft?

4. What components of teacher evaluation models are essential?

5. What is the perception of teacher evaluation as a whole?

6. What are the barriers of teacher evaluation models?
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Appendix B

Introductory Email

Dear ____________________.

As part of the requirements of my doctoral degree, I am conducting a qualitative study that looks at teacher perceptions of distinguished teachers, your beliefs about teacher evaluation programs, and how to make the process more meaningful to promote continuous teacher growth.

The purpose of my research will be to explore what exactly are the characteristics or qualities of a distinguished educator and what components of teacher evaluation systems are highly effective in promoting continuous growth to improve craft thus impacting student achievement, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. As interviews take place, I will attempt to locate common themes, experiences, and perceptions from all participants. This study has been approved, IRB # 562-17-EX.

Since the topic of the research is subjective and of high importance in the education field, confidentiality will remain in place before, during, and after research is completed. Your anonymity will remain a priority.

As part of my research, I am asking you to complete two pieces of assessment:

1. A brief survey sent via GoogleForms
2. An in person interview that will be approximately 45 minutes

The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure I capture the essence of your message and accurately reflect upon your experiences and intended message. The recordings will remain private as transcription and analysis will be conducted by myself. You will be sent the transcription afterwards for review. After the research project is complete and findings are presented, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the research questions, the research process, or how the findings will be presented.

Thank you for agreeing to participate, your message will be an incredible asset to districts who are looking at their teacher evaluation processes and systems.
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH: PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER EVALUATION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF PRACTICE

Appendix C

Google Forms Demographic Survey

1. What state do you currently reside in?

2. What is your age range?
   a. 21-25
   b. 26-30
   c. 31-35
   d. 36-40
   e. 41-45
   f. 46-50
   g. 51-60
   h. 61-65
   i. 66 and above

3. What is the highest degree you have attained (specifically attained, not in progress)?
   a. Bachelor’s Degree
   b. Master’s Degree
   c. Specialist Degree
   d. Doctorate Degree

4. How many years have you been a teacher?
   a. 1-5
   b. 6-10
   c. 11-15
   d. 16-20
   e. 21-25
f. 26-30 
g. 31-35 
h. 36-40 
i. 40 and above

5. How many scholars are in your current district?

6. What teacher evaluation system/model does your district currently use?

7. Where do you teach?
   a. public school 
   b. private school 
   c. charter school 
   d. other: _____________________________

7. What is one thing you wish your administrator knew about you and your teaching?