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The Effects of Consistent Observation and Feedback on Teacher Practice and Motivation to Refine Instruction

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THE EFFECTS OF CONSISTENT OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK ON
TEACHER PRACTICE AND MOTIVATION TO REFINE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This evaluation of a pilot program investigates the effects consistent observation and feedback had on teacher practice and motivation to refine instruction. An observation-feedback loop was initiated at a high school in a large Midwestern urban school district where teachers received bi-weekly observations and were provided with instantaneous feedback. Current research has shown that teacher evaluation, if utilized appropriately and with fidelity, can be a strong lever to improve instructional practices. While the advantages are vast, few schools and districts alike are also enacting measures to roll out a companion model that has "coaching" attributes embedded to support educators entrenched in the field and who have deep anxiety and distrust over the formalized evaluation process.

Teaching is a component essential to growth and learning. This pilot evaluation not only assessed teacher and administrator perceptions on practice but also investigated the effects consistent observation and feedback had on the practitioner, particularly as it pertains to the motivation to make refinements.

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CHAPTER ONE
Problem Statement

When the Illinois General Assembly signed The Performance Evaluation Reform

Act (PERA) in 2010, a new era of teacher evaluation was born. For decades, the state had

little accountability for or guidance around measurements for teacher effectiveness. One

of the major requirements of PERA was that within two years of its inception all school

districts were compelled to adopt a research-based framework that categorizes and rates

teacher practice within a rating continuum. Districts in Illinois have been cautious in

rolling out evaluation systems given their high-stakes nature, with union representatives

attempting to strike down reforms perceived as anti-educator and not supportive to the

craft.

The aforementioned acrimony isn't entirely baseless, as it stems from the punitive

character that has existed in schoolhouses with respect to the purpose of evaluation

and/or observations. In *Ten Years Later* (2012), the report examined highlights that a

majority of evaluations that took place were summative and used for teacher dismissal,

which further spurred this contentious divide.

In 2009, *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009)

heavily criticized teacher evaluation practices in the United States. One aspect that

resonated was the following: Evaluations are short and infrequent (most are based on two

or fewer classroom observations totaling 60 minutes or less), conducted by untrained

administrators, and influenced by powerful cultural forces. Ten years later: findings from

a study of teacher evaluation practices in 100 large-scale districts (Loup, Garland, Ellet,

and Rugutt, 1996), goes further in pointing to the inability of districts to establish clear

performance standards that was seen as a major impediment towards real systematic evaluation changes that stakeholders could accept as valuable for professional growth.

Personally, as an educator for the past 17 years, I've always been intrigued by the idea of teacher evaluation and the utter fear or ambivalence of evaluation that exists in the educational community. From an early age we were inundated with homework and assignments that had a grade and comments section attached. We were told it was essential to our academic growth and that it helped instructors gauge our progress as learners. I remember being flooded with assignments that gave feedback from everything related from penmanship to grammar. One common thread was "consistent feedback" and it was heaped upon me regularly. I didn't question this practice, as that led to corrective action. To a certain degree, after experiencing plenty of anxiety over receiving graded assignments, slowly I began to value and look forward to it, since I was growing exponentially as a learner and this feedback provided evidence of improvement or reinforcement of proficiency in an area of study. Fast-forward to my experience as an educator; from my first job as a therapeutic day school teacher to my current post as a district administrator, the word "observation" or "evaluation" seems to bring shivers down teacher's spines. Personally, as a practitioner, I never received enough feedback regarding my practices. While my ratings were always "superior," I knew there were critical elements missing. Always the confident teacher in perceiving my classroom environment as one of high expectations and accompanied by student growth, I still knew there were major areas that needed careful attention and focus for me to become better at my craft. I arrived at this observation through years of teacher reflection. I felt a bit cheated that I wasn't provided consistent guidance to hone my craft. One aspect that left

me incredulous was the feeling that I was alone in this yearning. It was as if most of my colleagues wanted to fly under the radar. Why was this a common trend? Surely as human beings we crave self-improvement and the loads of literature only reinforce this craving. Why in the education field, given the high stake task of shaping young minds, was this avoidance so pervasive?

PERA and other national reform efforts aimed at ensuring the inclusion of a research-based framework provide a glimmer of hope in bringing new evaluation structures that contain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of teaching, and that could aid in producing a culture of coaching and support in schools. Ten years later, the lack of clear performance standards resonates sharply with me, as I continuously left performance reviews as a teacher searching for exemplars or criteria of what constitutes "great teaching" in my discussions. This led me to my topic of research, for, if we scale back the politics and rhetoric that surround PERA, we would see that this is a fortuitous scenario for teachers and administrators, whereas both entities can find an observation practice that specifies what "good teaching" looks like, while also maintaining a certain degree of accountability needed to reform present evaluation structures.

In response to legislative reforms, the most widely utilized framework is Charlotte Danielson *A Framework for Teaching*, which squarely aims at enhancing professional dialogue between practitioners and that honors the nuances of teaching and learning. According to Danielson (1996), the intent of the framework was to accomplish three things. First, it sought to honor the complexity of teaching. Second, it constituted a language for professional conversation. Third, it provided a structure for self-assessment and reflection on professional practice. Danielson (1996) broke down 76 elements of

quality teaching into 4 levels of performance. This criterian-referenced leveling establishes a clear framework by which real dialogue can ensue, which appealed to me for my study, as this has the capacity to alter the review process for teacher and administrators, leading to deeper conversation about teaching and learning for participants.

It is estimated that in a given school year, a principal observes approximately .1% of total teaching time. Given that the most utilized teaching frameworks (i.e., Danielson, Marzano) call for increased efforts to enhance professional dialogue amongst participants, districts will have the ability to roll out a new era of evaluation that is more strategic and intentional in its design to spur coaching and support. Therefore, the idea of devising a non-punitive informal observation and feedback model that could simultaneously parallel or support a districts evaluation requirement has been a topic of intrigue for me. My informal observation design would need to be clearly coordinated to ensure consistency of practice for both teachers and school administrators partaking to ensure fidelity.

Approach and Observation Framework Model

Given that I had an array of experiences relating to observation and feedback, I drew upon these experiences and strived to learn more. I was fortunate to have worked as an administrator during the rollout of REACH, which is the Chicago Public Schools new teacher evaluation framework created in response to the PERA legislation. This framework replaced the checklist template previously utilized by principals in the Chicago Public Schools. This new teaching framework is aligned to Charlotte Danielson's model. Not only were all city administrators trained on this model that

consisted of 5 modules, but we were tasked with training and supporting school leaders as well. As our team reflected on how to rollout this new teaching framework there was an overwhelming feeling that we needed to create a non-punitive informal structure that had alignment to the teaching framework. This could ultimately directly support the high-stakes formal element in REACH.

The informal model our team adopted paralleled the work in "Leverage Leadership" (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012), which provided a blueprint on how to build exceptional schools through the formulation of seven levers. Lever 2 particularly highlights observation and feedback and how it is essential to give all teachers professional, one-on-one coaching with the aim of increasing instructional effectiveness through feedback.

I established an observation-feedback loop at one of our alternative schools that ran concurrent to the more formalized REACH model. A major part of my research was performed qualitatively by interviewing the teachers and administrators that partook in the 2012/13 observation-feedback loop. I wanted to see if this model had a greater effect on their practices then its high-stakes evaluation counterpart. I spent a considerable amount of time observing and gathering data about the school staff to understand their behaviors and beliefs. I canvassed the vast landscape of literature and research on the effects of consistent observation and feedback and its effect on teacher practice and motivation. I then applied what I had learned by posing interview questions to school leaders and teams entrenched in the field.

CHAPTER TWO
Literature Review

In the high-stakes era of teacher evaluation there is no shortage of literature. For the interest of this study I felt it was essential to explore teacher evaluation from its early inception to the current high-stakes era. While my pilot focuses on a more informal observation-feedback approach, it was pivotal to understand evaluation practices and how they have evolved, and how the field of education arrived at a place where formal high-stakes evaluations are the norm; without additional supports embedded within these formalized structures. This study is aimed at showcasing how the emergence of a model that provides teachers with consistent feedback can be a driver to adjustments in instruction. Therefore, I decided to be intentional about how I gathered information. I divided my literature review into two relevant sections of study: History and purpose of teacher evaluation, and the current practices of today's evaluation models and their effectiveness on teacher practice.

History and Purpose of Teacher Evaluation

One needs to look no further than the history of supervision and evaluation to truly understand its roots and ultimately the degree of variance between implementation and effectiveness. Diane Ravitch (2013) makes the assertion that the social efficiency movement can be seen as the initial driver towards understanding the nuances of supervision and evaluation. This early 19th century movement was driven by Frederick Taylor, whose time and motion study emphasized the importance of measuring the worker's output against an established metric in the manufacturing industry. In Taylor's (1911) 3rd distinct principle we can see early associations of teacher evaluation and efficacy assessments, as his language revolves around the idea of closely monitoring

work performance through "supervision" to ensure workers were using "the most efficient ways of working." It was Taylor's early studies that galvanized k-12 circles to study efficiencies and scientific management to analyze effects on teacher output.

Ellwood Cubberley (1926) attempted to assimilate Taylor's factory musings into management of schools but later expanded by providing guidance for the visitation of administrators in classrooms with an A-F rating scale with feedback on weak areas with some suggestions interwoven.

While Cubberley's work focused on a feedback model reminiscent of the aforementioned scientific measurement, it was William Wetzel (1929) who proposed measuring teacher effectiveness around student achievement data. Wetzel recommended three components as the bases for scientific supervision: the use of aptitude tests to determine the ability level of each child, the establishment of clear, measurable objectives for each course, and the use of reliable measures of student learning. One could argue that this was certainly a precursor to the present-day push in ensuring data is a central ingredient to informing instructional practices and teacher effectiveness. While fallacies existed between Cubberley and Wetzel's overreliance on scientific measures, particularly around curricular design and teacher innovation, these early approaches shaped the evolving evaluation landscape.

John Dewey (1900) worked towards restoring curricular order to meet the needs of the ever-changing industrial society. At the heart of Dewey's doctrine is the willful desire to support teachers in their pursuit of thoughtful and innovative teaching. *In Applying John Dewey: Evaluation and the Art of Teaching*, Dewey encourages policy makers and educational leaders to help create conditions in districts, schools, and

classrooms that value reflective and imaginative teachers who are free to think and create as they educate each student in and for democratic communities. This more nuanced perspective and focus on teachers as "individuals" began the mid-19th century era of clinical supervision, bringing with it uneven results, and spawning a vast array of evaluation models.

Robert Goldhammer (1969) offered a five-phase process aimed at initiating a more reflective model and encouraged supervisors and teachers to partake in collaborative conversations. The model had five distinct phases: (1) Pre-observation conference ;(2) Classroom Observation;(3) Analysis;(4) A Supervision Conference; (5) Analysis of the Analysis. While Goldhammer's work provided the beginning framework for reflective conversations, a key element missing was the inclusion of the characteristics of effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, it was Goldhammer's contention that the supervisor should have very few, if any, preconceived notions about what constitutes effective teaching.

Where Goldhammer left out effective teaching criteria, Madeline Hunter (1980), laid out a seven-step model of a lesson: Hunter's model included the following steps: (1) anticipatory set; (2) objective and purpose; (3) input; (4) modeling; (5) check for understanding; (6) guided practice; (7) independent practice. (Hunter, knowing, teaching, and supervising) Observation and script taping were critical components of Hunter's process of supervision. During script taping, a supervisor recorded teaching behaviors and then later categorized them. After script taping, supervisors conferred with teachers. During this post conference, the supervisor and teacher discussed the data in depth.

While Hunter's model embeds strategies to achieve "master teacher" status, for the purpose of my research I found it wasn't inclusive of a more holistic approach to teaching and learning where classroom environment and other competencies are explored and discussed. I also found limited guidance and structure around initiating teacher improvement via coaching and reflection. More importantly, Hunter's model is lesson-focused and can be stifling to teacher ingenuity and/or creativity in the classroom.

In reaction to prescriptive measures and to encourage more reflectivity of practice, William Glatthorn (Marzano, 2011) promoted a model that considered teacher development through the initiation of goals. Glatthorn insisted teacher input and control over the evaluation process were paramount towards encouraging overall teacher growth and development. This process calls on the supervisor and teacher to design a path conducive towards designating individual and targeted need areas. I found this relevant to my study, as this could be a driver towards teacher motivation to make instructional refinements since this speaks to the importance of supportive and collaborative dialogue between leadership and teacher.

One aspect in early literature is the omission of a set of competencies or standards by which to evaluate instruction. The Rand Report (1984), which appeared in *Teacher Evaluation: A Study of Effective Practices* (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein, 1984), found inadequacies in teacher evaluation, particularly lending credence to the idea that most models were formulaic and only served obligatory purposes. While this aspect was not surprising, one aspect that was compelling resulted from the idea that teachers preferred a more standardized process and one with a clear set of competencies. Furthermore, Wise, et al. found four consistent problems with supervision and evaluation

and they were identified as follows: Nearly all respondents felt that principals "lacked sufficient resolve and competence to evaluate accurately" (p. 22). Teacher resistance to feedback was the second most identified problem. A key source of this resistance was related to the third most identified problem: a lack of uniform evaluation practices. The hypothesized reason for this concern was the fact that, of the 32 districts in the study, only one district had a system built on a set of established teacher competencies. The fourth problem was a lack of training for evaluators, which I will delve into later in my study.

A centerpiece to my study is the importance of professional conversation, as this is an essential element to any observation-feedback loop. It was the aforementioned Charlotte Danielson (1996) who broke down 76 elements of quality teaching into 4 levels of performance. This criteria-referenced leveling establishes a clear framework by which real dialogue can ensue among practitioners in a school setting.

Nolan and Hoover (2010) also echo a standards-based ideology and argued that a high performing teacher evaluation model must be inclusive of standards that are clearly understood by teacher and administrators alike. Nolan et al. outlines several principles that are required for an effective evaluation system for teachers: (a) focusing on the broad responsibilities of teachers; (b) collecting data from multiple sources using multiple methods to base judgments; (c) providing comprehensive training for evaluators based on best teaching practices; (d) designing the evaluation model around community participation and (e) ensuring compliance with local contracts. Nolan, et. al., conclude that teacher evaluation should be differentiated based on the performance of each teacher. Thus, teachers who perform at a high level should be evaluated differently than those

teachers who underperform. This also could have implications for my study on observation and feedback and the need to differentiate depending on teacher efficacy.

In *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) the research emphasizes that infrequency of practice and lack of differentiators for teachers' matters. For the purposes of my study it highlights the need for frequency of feedback and practice. The report also highlights the lack of professional capacity of teacher evaluators. While a clearly defined standards-based model is an integral step towards improving teacher practice, if the sole evaluators lack the capacity to evaluate and drive professional conversations, the work of Danielson and other criteria-based pioneers may fall by the wayside leading to a further divide and futility.

Kraft and Papay (2012) argue that an effective evaluation system must include a component that addresses ongoing teacher development and improvement through a more collaborative approach. One piece that arose was the capacity of school administrators to provide expertise and support for teaching and learning in their respective buildings.

Darling-Hammond (2012) contends that in effective professional learning systems, school leaders must learn from experts, mentors, and peers on how to become instructional leaders. Hammond supports this notion by emphasizing that teachers need to be indoctrinated into a culture conducive for learning and growth. Furthermore, the report acknowledges that collaborative approaches to learning can be a strong lever for teachers and administrators to promote school change. Stumbo and McWalters (2010) also cling to this notion in their assertion of their seven challenges to teacher evaluation. They believe that the quality of evaluators is a hindrance. Stumbo, et. al., go on to add that the lack of evaluator training is a threat to the reliability and objectivity any given results.

Peterson (2000) also concluded in a qualitative review of literature that principals are not accurate evaluators of teacher performance and that both teachers and administrators have little confidence in performance evaluation results. Surely, this perception has led to mistrust of process over years and emphasizes the point that a building administrator's capacity to take on the evaluation work is crucial to the process.

Popham (1988) pushed the idea that the duality of the principal participation in formal and summative evaluations hinders the teacher's comfort level, as teachers recognize the shifting roles from coaching agent to unemployment counselor.

While building robust teacher evaluation systems that enable teacher and administrator to thrive and build capacity together are of paramount importance, we mustn't forget relational trust as being a driver towards cultivating coaching dialogue. Fink (1999) maintains that effective instructional leaders must create both intellectual capital and social capital within their organizations. In Fink's piece, importance is placed on school leaders to have a space to learn from peers, which in turn will provide intellectual capital with teachers by displaying emerging expertise. Even if there is a lack of knowledge one can find social capital in creating a community where collaboration and professional learning is valued.

Lastly, it is important to note that the 21st century ushered in the idea of linking teacher effectiveness to student achievement. In linking teacher evaluation and student achievement, Tucker and Stronge (2005) indicate student achievement should be used as a major criterion in the evaluation process. While the study also viewed teacher observation as an essential piece it strongly stated the following: "Given the clear and undeniable link that exists between teacher effectiveness and student learning, we support

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the use of student achievement information in teacher assessment. Student achievement can, and indeed should be, an important source of feedback on the effectiveness of schools, administrators, and teachers" (p. 102). This perspective has ignited quite a firestorm in education circles, as some onlookers view it as shortsighted, given its limited data stream to measure overall teacher effectiveness.

The Race to The Top initiative has reinforced and introduced incentives to ignite further political upheaval, as districts are competing for money based off performance data from the results of teacher evaluations. Arne Duncan, Department of Education Secretary, even exclaimed that performance pay is his office's "highest priority" in the coming years.

Rosales (2009) is clear that, while there is a link between student performance and teacher instruction, there are tremendous pitfalls with curricular restrictions and they create a logistical nightmare for subject area teachers. Glazerman (2012) provided an analysis of 40 pilot schools that provided merit pay based of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP). The conclusion was that while the TAP pilot increased opportunities for mentoring, promotion opportunity, and compensation compared to non-TAP schools, schools, and these increases alone may have translated into making Chicago TAP schools a more desirable place to continue working, as evidenced by the positive impacts on retention. However, these changes did not, in turn, pay off in terms of higher student achievement within the four-year rollout period in Chicago (p.16).

The results were somewhat different in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Dee and Wyckoff (2013) noted that in DCPS, where then Chancellor Michelle Rhee introduced sweeping evaluation reforms with IMPACT, there have been major

strides made in retaining talented teachers. The study concluded that not only have incentives helped bolster buy-in, but overwhelmingly the ability to receive substantive feedback measured against the backdrop of standards has been very effective.

While the Race To The Top initiative shattered some of the nation's decaying evaluation structures by inserting the value-added proposition, the research suggests mixed results. However, the reverberations of RTT can be still be felt as a result of Congress incentivizing states to implement teacher evaluation reform. Rucinski and Diersing (2014) noted that since 2009, shortly after RTT, 39 states and the District of Columbia have significantly altered their teacher evaluation policies.

The National Education Association (2011) adopted their first-ever policy to urging an overhaul to both teacher evaluation and accountability systems associated as a result of RTT. The policy sets clear guidance and direction for districts, particularly around the expectation that not only all teachers should be regularly evaluated on the basis of clear standards as to what teachers should know and be able to but also that evaluations must provide teachers with clear and actionable feedback. The policy goes on to add that such feedback should include regular non-evaluative formative feedback — meaning feedback that serves only to inform practice and that does not contribute to formal evaluation results — as such feedback is often the most effective way to improve teacher practice.

In *The Measure of Effective Teaching Project* (2013) (MET), a three year Gates Foundation commissioned study to determine how to identify and determine great teaching, results yielded data on the effectiveness of combining three types of measures to identify exemplar instruction: classroom observation, student surveys, and student

achievement gains. What resonated with me for the purposes of my research was the overwhelming understanding of the complexities of teaching. MET went on to add that "tailored feedback," if done regularly, can lead to continuous growth throughout the school year for its teacher participants.

While the study of policy and research in the United States has provided a framework of understanding on the ever-changing evaluation landscape, Darling-Hammond (2010) reminds us that we could learn from our educator partners abroad. Darling-Hammond (2010) states that no district in the United States does a better job in developing teaching skills than Singapore, Finland, and Korea, where practitioners provide are provided with ample opportunity in the school day to share effective strategies with each other. Darling-Hammond (2010) shares that teachers in the US spend 80% with students whereas in high performing districts teachers spend 60% with students and the other 40% planning, sharing, and honing their crafts.

Lessons Learned

It is clear from the above literature that a more differentiated model, one that is inclusive of coaching and supports, is needed. In the historical continuum leading up to the present day, we have seen a clear evolution from early schoolhouse to large-scale districts embedding high-stakes testing. We can learn from Taylor's efficiency focus as well as from Hunter's work, both of which provide essential elements of a "master" lesson. We can even learn from Glathorn and Glickman, who championed differentiated approaches. However, thankfully, as a researcher, *The Rand Report* and *The Widget Report* give credence to the idea that we need a more comprehensive model that builds evaluators capacity, as well as incorporates clear standardization and criteria to give

teachers and evaluators alike a framework for dialogue to improve both teaching and learning.

Current Practices

As stated earlier, Danielson's (2006) framework encourages collaborative conversations between teacher and administrator and is the leading standards-based model. It is Danielson's contention that those that fail to engage risk losing the most "powerful approaches at their disposal to promote teacher learning" (2006); for it is these collaborative conversations that can be igniters to improving teacher practice by spurring discussion of instruction. For the purpose of my study, my research will focus squarely on the effects of an observation and feedback model that is not only aligned to a standards-based model but also, at its core, aims to strengthen collaborative practice among educators and administrators capable of inducing motivation and instructional refinements.

This standards-based approach has seen positive effects in some sample school districts. Taylor and Tyler's (2011) research in the Cincinnati teacher evaluation system, based on the standards developed by Danielson, showed that there was student improvement in the area of mathematics when teachers' performance was measured by a standards-based model.

While championing linking student achievement to teacher performance, Tucker and Stronge (2005) examined four standards-based models employed by school districts in Colorado; Virginia; Tennessee; and Oregon. Each school district had effectively incorporated some form of student performance in the evaluation of teachers. The outcome suggested that a focus on pedagogical dialogue helped to improve student

learning. In Rethinking Teacher Evaluation (Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown, 2011), the group analyzed 955 principal observations of 501 teachers; there was a strong relationship between classroom observation ratings and test score growth. Across almost all of the Framework components, Sartain et al. found teachers with the lowest observation ratings also have the lowest value-added measured. Kennedy's (2010) work found that standards-based evaluations focused on the teacher first, while also adhering to performance standards as a way to induce real dialogue about teaching and learning.

Milanowski and Heneman (2001) examined a pilot program that utilized Danielson's standards-based model and found teachers were favorable to the process, most importantly, to the initiation of professional conversations, as the district had no clear mode for engaging teachers. Previously, where teaching dialogue was limited, the school experienced a complete 360, as teachers were having productive dialogue leading to corrective action, further developing a sense of motivation to improve their craft.

My research is predicated on the idea that frequent observation and feedback is critical towards improving teacher practice and motivation to improve. Therefore, while robust formal or informal practices that align to a standards-based model have shown effectiveness, for purposes of my research I also needed to evaluate a feedback model that occurs rapidly and consistently.

Marshall's (2009), standards-based rubric was devised with consistency of use in mind and has a rubric that quantifies good teaching. Great emphasis is placed on the rating scale and, if utilized strategically, represents a score that has accrued from subsequent observation and feedback sessions. The idea of using the rubric over time to highlight trends is appealing, as trend discovery will facilitate further development of

targeted areas of improvement for staff. This correlates with my research and only reinforces the idea on continuous feedback and its transformative attributes for teacher practice. Lane's (2010) research suggested that for a standards-based to be effective it must be aligned to professional development. Darling-Hammond (2010), outlines that, in countries like Finland, in a teacher's schedule nearly half of the day is given for teacher to hone practice through school-based curriculum work and collective planning. This not only strategically sends the message about what matters but also ensures adequate time to improve practices. Darling-Hammond (2010) goes on to add that this shift in teachers' learning conditions and styles often reflects ways that classroom learning is arranged for pupils.

In Doug Lemov's (2010) quest to find the magical ingredients to quality instruction, he initiated the idea of bite-sized feedback, which, initiated over time and consistently, can propel teacher capacity to improve practice at a more rapid pace then the obligatory evaluations done inconsistently and without sharp focus on timely corrective action. In Lemov's *Teach Like A Champion: 49 techniques that put students on the path to college*, Lemov provides school leadership with clear techniques to incorporate into feedback discussions that are high-leverage in nature and squarely aimed at corrective action. I view this as an important lever that can aid the observation-feedback model I am introducing. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) picks up from Lemov's idea of high-leverage feedback and its value and emphasizes deliverance in a timely, consistent manner. In Bambrick's observation and feedback model the theory is that consistent dialogue and feedback directly inform teacher practices. Bambrick (2012) outlines the four keys to making a productive observation and feedback model realized:

regular observation, the right high-leverage action steps, effective feedback, and accountability. This is a call to action and pushes a systematic coordination within our nation's schoolhouses.

CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Theoretical Framework/Methods

As reported previously, the topic of teacher evaluation and its ever-evolving tenets is intriguing. The mere reality that if teacher observation is conducted properly and with regularity it could significantly improve teaching and learning is powerful. As a researcher, I thought it was important to investigate previous research methodologies that have been used to study this issue already. In most instances where a quantitative design was utilized, it was nonexperimental. For instance, Bogart (2013) in analyzing the effects of teacher evaluation and classroom practice utilized a nonexperimental quantitative design by using a survey instrument for data collection, which denotes a design that emphasizes objectivity in describing phenomena in some practice. In this type of design statistics are utilized to describe phenomena. This design generally is utilized when surveying a high volume of participants in a study. In a large group of studies that analyzed "teacher perception" or "effects" of observation feedback, a qualitative design was rendered, and as Merriam (2009) points out, uses words to detail data. Qualitative research is preferable when the researcher needs to hear the stories and experiences of others to understand the complexity of an issue at a very detailed level (Creswell 2007); therefore, I chose to utilize a qualitative research methodology.

Maxwell (2005) identifies four main components to qualitative research: the establishment of a relationship with participants in the study, the site and participant selection process, data collection, and data analysis.

The school chosen for my study was an alternative high school in the Chicago region that was undergoing the initiation of the new teaching framework. For purposes of

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the study, a coaching-feedback loop, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4, was initiated at the school. I interviewed 7 teacher participants and two building administrators. These interviews provided substantive information pertaining to the effects and perceptions on how the model improved teacher practices and whether or not it motivated participants to improve as practitioners.

Population/Participants

The alternative school featured in my pilot evaluation serves 93 students from 6th grade to 12th grade, and has an overall student-to-teacher ratio of 10:1, providing a good platform for my study since the setting was quite intimate in nature. The demographic breakdown of the site was 74% African American, 22% Hispanic, and 4% white. Average PSAE fell 33% below district average. The school had an ACT average of 15.7 compared to 18 for CPS district average. The school is a strongly mission driven school, since its aim is to curb the dropout crisis in the community it serves.

Steps for Conducting Research

Merriam (2011) emphasizes that research questions need to show how the study delves into a larger phenomenon and holds significance in the field (Merriam, Designing Qualitative Research, 2011). With that in mind, the creation of two essential research questions that were concrete in nature was useful to my overall schema. The two essential questions that will guide this study and be reflected on continuously are:

1. **What were the perceptions of teachers and administrators who participated in the observation and feedback model?**

2. **Does continuous observation and feedback impact teaching practices and increase motivation to make refinements?**

In order to arrive at the above, the teachers and administrators were interviewed to gather data for the study. Qualitative research is preferable when the researcher can hear the stories and experiences of others to understand the complexity of an issue at a very detailed level (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I took the following approach:

After specification of intent and arrival at a topic of study and approval, I received Institutional Research Review Board approval from my University, which was later shared with all participants of the study. I spent the beginning of the 2012/2013 school year building the infrastructure to support the observation-feedback loop. From April to June of 2013 I utilized this period at the school to collect data and interviewed the teachers and administrators which supported the overall collection process. I interviewed seven teachers with the following questions to aide my research design:

a. How many years have you been teaching?

b. Prior to this year, on average, how many times were you observed and given feedback in a given school year?

c. When given feedback prior to this school year, did you find it had an effect on your teaching practice? Why/Why not?

d. In school year 2012/13, how many times were you observed?

e. Did you find consistent feedback with had an effect on your teaching practices?

f. Did it motivate you as an educator? Why/Why not?

I interviewed the 2 administrators with the following questions:

a. As an administrator, what has been your experience with observation and feedback prior to this year?

b. What was your training in providing feedback?

c. Describe the initiation of consistent observation and feedback practices at your site. How did it take shape over the school year? What were the results in relation to teacher motivation and practice?

d. What are your plans for next year? Any tweaks you would make to the observation and feedback process? Why?

I analyzed and interpreted interview data to discern any trends and to develop a greater understanding. My interpretation and analysis can be viewed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Preparing My Data for Analysis

For my qualitative data collection, I recorded all interviewees as they responded to my line of questioning and later converted audio files to text, which allowed for close critique and a more focused look at trends. This exploration was closely examined against my literature review themes. These results will be delved into in chapter 5 as I expand on the comparison between my results and research.

Validity and Accuracy of Findings

I chose to initiate a grounded theory approach to my data analysis, as I wanted to deviate from my own theoretical perspective. A grounded theory approach to data analysis alleges that all explanations or theories are derived from the dataset itself (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In order to ensure subjects would provide meaningful data, I differentiated between ranges of experience in the teaching field and, in general; experiences with observation and evaluation. I chose to synthesize many strands of information and linked the sources back to my literature review making assertions as to why the data was emerging itself in a particular manner.

Summary of Methodology

      My research study was made possible by spending extensive time with my subjects during the school year and through the data abstraction from interviews and classroom observations taken during my evaluation period. While the study was squarely focused on the effects of consistent feedback, other trends surfaced and the full complexity of my study began to present itself, which had effects on my findings in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR
Report of Research Findings

All of my data collection occurred onsite at the Alternative School. I spent 15

days from August 2012 to June 2013 individually observing and interviewing subjects as

they participated with the feedback loop. The first part of my findings will focus on

setting context. The second part will consist of data analysis and its connection to survey

of literature.

Context of Study

In 2008, the Consortium on School Research at the University of Chicago

launched the Excellence in Teaching Pilot, precipitated by the need to redesign current

teacher evaluation structures which were particularly lacking a process that provided

meaningful feedback or any real guidance on teaching competencies. The study's most

damning critique was that the evaluations yielded a 93% excellent/superior ratings for

teachers while, at the time, 66% of CPS schools were failing to meet state standards. The

two-year study introduced an evidence-based approach utilizing Charlotte Danielson's

model. Some of the major findings associated with the pilot were: (1) the classroom

observation ratings were valid and reliable measures of teaching practice (2) principals

and teachers said that conferences were more reflective and objective than in the past and

were focused on instructional practice and improvement (Sartain, 2008). The latter had a

distinct effect on my model, as it is my contention that consistent, collaborative dialogue

can have a dramatic impact on teacher practice. With the emergence of The Performance

Evaluation Act (PERA), which passed in January 2010, CPS mandated that a new teacher

evaluation system be constructed by the 2012 school year. REACH (Recognizing

Educators Advancing Chicago) emerged in 2012 and replaced the 40-year old outdated

evaluation model. The devisers of REACH elicited feedback from several stakeholders in the community and beyond to come to a consensus on developing a model that would help educators grow as professionals, and in particular create an evaluation model that was inclusive of competencies to help evoke meaningful dialogue amongst practitioners in the field. Given the aforementioned consortium's pilot's success, the new model adopted Danielson's framework and the work of convincing the Chicago Teacher's Union (CTU) at the collective bargaining that ensued.

While REACH eventually earned approval, CPS was left with a dramatic evaluation facelift filled with competencies rather than checklists. However, the work of building teacher and leadership capacity and selling a more "meaningful" model was a tougher sell given the high-stakes nature of evaluations, where jobs hang in the balance. It is this exact dichotomy that prompted my study; for if there were a non-punitive observation-feedback model that upheld and reinforced the new teacher competencies and encouraged regular dialogue throughout the school year, when it came to participation in the actual formal process teachers could see the high-stakes process less coercively and would feel support from the joint exploration of the new competencies leading up to the high-stakes process. In turn, school leadership could feel confident from an accountability perspective considering their responsibility of cultivating teacher development was satiated and supported on the front end.

"Teachers are like tennis players: they develop most quickly when they receive frequent feedback and opportunities to practice." (Bambrick-Santoyo, p. 65)

In preparation for initiation of a regulatory observation-feedback loop, I was introduced to Paul Bambrick-Santoyo's work at Uncommon Schools, where regular

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reflection on teacher practice was the norm. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012), found that, in major metropolitan areas, a teacher receives only two observations a year; the mean for a veteran teacher is only once every two years. In Bambrick's observation-feedback construct, every teacher receives face to face feedback every week, which would mean every teacher is getting feedback at least 30 times a year--as much as most teachers get in more than 20 years. This in turn has not only had dramatic effects on teacher mastery but also on achievement gains at schools that implement this consistent practice of teacher observation and feedback. The Alternative Network eventually adopted Bambrick's model in the fall of 2012 in conjunction with REACH. After 2 full-day sessions with network leadership and subsequent school trainings for all schools associated with the network, there was one school that performed the work with fidelity, hence opening the door to conduct my research.

Participants

A total of seven teachers and two administrators participated in the observation-feedback model at an Alternative School representing grades 6-12. I chose the teacher participants based off subject area taught and years of teaching to create a mixed, more diversified group. All participants participated in in-depth interviews based off questions (see appendix A).

Design of Study

The school's feedback model began in November 2012 and commenced full operation in May 2013. All seven teachers and two administrators would be observed for 10-15 minutes every 2 weeks by the 2 administrators in the building. The administrators were required to meet within 24-48 hours and engage in a reflective feedback session

following the following script: (1) Praise, (2) Probe, (3) problem-identification/action step, (4) Practice, (5) plan ahead, (6) follow-up timeline (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). The one important tweak that was made to Bambrick's feedback loop was number 3--problem identification/action step. In order to strengthen the capacity of teacher understanding of the competencies associated with REACH and to initiate structured professional dialogue, the leadership was required to identify elements of the new teaching framework (Danielson) that aligned with the identified problem area. The idea behind the inclusion of the framework language is to not only ensure reflective dialogue is happening regularly, but that leadership is leveraging the opportunity to practice the common language associated with Danielson's standards-based model continuously.

Participant Background and Response to Questions

The teacher participants have been organized based off years of experience for the below overview.

Patricia. Patricia entered the teaching field as an English Teacher in 2013, with a student teaching position in the Chicago Public Schools. Due to the teacher's university oversight, the respondent explained that observation occurred once a week. A core team member would observe and provide feedback. Teacher A thought this model provided for greater reflection and opportunities to adjust practices.

When Patricia participated in the case study model, at first she thought it was quite "rushed" and forced. She also felt like this could have been attributed to the rollout of new model and administrator capacity at the time. As the year progressed, however, Patricia reported that she enjoyed the feedback since it helped her gain confidence in the things she was doing and to work on areas that needed focus. Patricia emphasized that

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she liked the formal process, since it had a structure that was missing from the more informal nature of the observation-feedback loop. The fact that this was embedded helped her with "buy-in." Also, the teacher emphasized the lessening of stakes also helped her become less guarded and made the experience meaningful developmentally. During the interview, Patricia emphasized that the having the opportunity to discuss instruction and do so with more consistency enabled her to be more reflective as well which motivated refinements to instruction.

      Annie. Annie had been teaching for one year as a Math Teacher after previously coming to the school from a charter organization. Annie reported that she had been observed and given feedback "every day" by coaches. While the overall model was helpful, she indicated that the initial feedback was mostly "abstract" and lacked real focus. She also felt the daily observation "impacted" the respondent's instructional negatively at some junctures, as she needed to "be left alone" to discover her craft. This may have had something to do with the "obligatory" nature she thought this was rolled-out as well.

      In the current school year of the case study, Annie reported that she was observed "at least once a month." She felt the process lacked structure but also referenced that there was "lag-time" between the observation and feedback, which hindered the process at times. The respondent liked, however, the ability to chart progress throughout the course of the year. She didn't necessarily find "teacher enlightenment" but the process certainly initiated reflective dialogue within her head that enabled her to look at her practices. Annie also found that the feedback after administrators caught on to the new

model became better, and felt a greater sense of a "humanistic" quality when conferencing, which incited motivation.

Patrick. Patrick was a Social Studies Teacher for six years prior to participating in the case study. Four of the six years were at a charter organization. Prior to the study, Patrick explained that observations occurred only once a year at the charter organization whereas, during the pilot study, he was observed at least "twice a month." When asked about feedback prior to the study, Patrick explained that it was confusing, as there was no structures put in place and it lacked the characteristics to initiate growth. Previously, at the current school before the creation of the observation-feedback loop, observation was received via a checklist protocol. The respondent felt that this required greater "self-regulation."

During the current school year, Patrick enjoyed the REACH formal structure since the administrators had to structure pre- and post- conferences. The observation-feedback loop was at times disjointed for Teacher C, but he still felt that it was beneficial for practice and certainly motivated her to improve overall given the consistent feedback and reflective conversations.

At many junctures throughout the course of the year Patrick noticed staff and administrators speaking more about instruction, whereas in previous years discussion was more about operational matters. Overall, he felt more supported and had greater sense of clarity about her teaching.

Alex. Alex had been a Science Teacher for two years prior to participating in the pilot and stated that her teaching experience training included "10-20" observations. This consistency allowed this teacher to grow and explore teaching with supportive structures.

Alex also explained how the consistency also kept her "focused on planning," as she wanted to be prepared for each lesson. She felt the experience during the pilot study was, on the whole, positive, as the rubric and template for conversations provided consistency of practice and better understanding of criteria. She also felt that it helped her deepen relationships with school administrators, as each time she would go to feedback sessions, the more she felt comfortable exploring her craft. She also began to see her administrators as coaches "pulling for her," something she hadn't necessarily felt prior to the case study. In the end, the study provided deeper incentives, as REACH was being implemented in the district. She also felt it helped lead to deeper reflection as a practitioner.

Steve. Steve has been a Humanities Teacher for eight years at the time of this pilot. Prior to the feedback loop's initiation, Steve indicated that he had been evaluated two times formally, but none of those evaluations occurred informally. He emphasized that initially there were disjointed teaching conversations that occurred, since the framework language was embedded inconsistently. He also felt that they were "chasing" to receive feedback at times, which hurt his buy-in to model.

During Steve's interview, on a number of occasions there were feelings that the observation-feedback loop was too "micro-detailed" when instituted with fidelity and at times felt that there could have been more positive reinforcement. One aspect that the respondent detailed was that the administrators were still "learning the model" so there was some disjointedness experienced as a result. Steve felt less inclined to rate the experience as having had an effect on practice and motivation, since there was positive reinforcement absent from the dialogue and feedback sessions. However, Steve did

appreciate the school trying to focus on a model that enabled consistent feedback and hoped that it would be worked upon during the following year, since there is value to teachers and administrators working together to discuss instruction.

Heather. Heather been teaching Mathematics in Chicago Public Schools for 5 years total prior to the pilot. The first 2 years were at another high school, and the last three occurred at the Alternative School in the study. Prior to the pilot, Heather reported that she received the "standard 2 formals a year." She indicated that she had experience with informal scripting sessions prior to the observation-feedback loop that occurred. The scripted model addressed "power 42 areas" and was more interpretive for its participants. Heather explained that this model was effective but lacked consistency. She enjoyed the observation-feedback loop that was instituted, as it allowed for greater reflection and had consistency throughout the year. Heather also reported that it provided time for the teacher to fine-tune things in her classrooms in a "less punitive manner." she also noted that she had developed stronger ties to administration, as they were on the "same team" to improve instructional practices.

In the end, Heather felt she had not only a greater grasp on criteria to become a master teacher but that the consistency of conversations about teaching served as a motivator to improve. While she joked her "head was spinning at times," she felt in a [??]

Carol. Carol has been an English teacher for 23 years where 21 of those years were spent at an elementary school prior to joining the Alternative School. Prior to the pilot, she reported that observations occurred once a year and they were formal in nature. Carol explained that there was very little feedback provided during her participation these formalized reviews, and indicated that her administrators used a "checklist" and felt her

experience was very punitive in nature. During her 23 years of being observed as a teacher, she felt that almost all had "no encouragement," which hurt both the process and any motivation to improve practice. Carol shared that most of the productive encounters she experienced relating to teacher observation came from sharing with other colleagues.

As the observation-feedback loop was initiated at her site, she indicated that she had never received such consistent support and dialogue. The respondent loved the coaching attributes associated with the model and felt that she was having conversations she had never had in her entire career. While most of the feedback sessions were helpful, she felt that the administration struggled with the "encouragement piece." She shared the vulnerability and needing to feel safe, but Carol shared that this was not always the norm during the study. She relished deviation from a checklist model to a more criteria-referenced focus.

In assessing the study, Carol felt that she had been motivated by having direction for the first time and felt that she was speaking the same language as her building leaders and teachers.

Joanne. Joanne has been an Assistant Principal at the school for 2 years. Prior to being an administrator, Joanne taught for 9 years, primarily in special education. Joanne's prior experience with evaluation was having her teaching measured by a checklist that laid out essential teaching characteristics and listed strengths and weaknesses. Joanne echoed the sentiment that this model didn't provide for actionable feedback, as, while it noted "major things" that needed attention, it didn't provide "major detail." As the district moved to a more criteria-referenced platform with REACH, having this

framework along with a consistent observation-feedback loop allowed for more thorough dialogue and things to "hone in on."

Joanne went through extensive training on the Bambrick model, as well as the district's rollout to Charlotte Danielson's framework. In conversation, she regularly mentioned that she noticed the regularity of feedback provided a "guidance system," by which teachers could partake in a more "meta-cognitive" approach to their practice.

The initiation of the feedback model was "shaky" at first, as Joanne had difficulties developing "consistency of practice," but once a schedule was devised and followed with fidelity she found a rhythm to the model.

From Joanne's perspective, teacher practice changes when the teacher is made more "astute to his or her actions." Ultimately the greater the consistency with which teachers and administrators were engaging in dialogue about teaching, the greater the impact in the classroom and intrinsically within the practitioner, Joanne shared in our interview. She also emphasized the importance of keeping people relaxed throughout the conversations. She tried to stay true to "coaching" and wanted to make sure that the aforementioned conversations were not going to be punitive in nature and were for improvement and support. The one aspect that also resonated from the feedback loop was the informality, which allowed for teachers to be more relaxed and receptive.

Suzanne. At the time of the case study, Suzanne was embarking on her 3rd year as principal. Previously, she had worked for 2 years as an Assistant Principal in a charter organization. Suzanne utilized evaluation frameworks, like Danielson, but never initiated a consistent observation-feedback loop where teachers are regularly observed and provided feedback. She explained in detail the training that occurred to prepare for

REACH and the observation-feedback loop and liked the idea of having the informal piece, since it would help ease her teachers into the more formalized process.

Suzanne was honest in her judgment that the loop started a tad disjointed, as there was a lot of balancing of schedules and preparing for meetings that were supposed to occur with regularity. After devising a non-negotiable schedule, however, she began to participate and build a consistency of practice that she felt really enabled her to really understand her staff and work with them on targeted areas for their teaching practice.

Suzanne felt strongly that the model was fairly transformative at her school, since she noticed an uptake in professional conversations that were not only occurring with her but among other teachers in the school. The previous year, the teachers were really only exposed to formal observation, wherein sometimes only a few teachers were required to be observed. This year, all teachers were participants, leading to a more unified response, which helped to shape a more reflective culture. She also felt that her relationship with staff had shifted; whereas, previously, she was seen as the formal evaluator, in the current year she felt more like a coach, which was preferred.

Suzanne felt excited about the prospects of data analysis from the observation loop, since it will help build targeted professional development and future support to build momentum for the site.

Research Question #1: What were the perceptions of teachers and administrators that participated in the observation-feedback model?

Overall, the response to the coaching-feedback model was positive, as it resulted in more face time with administrators. It significantly increased the frequency of instructional dialogue, which had never happened at such a consistent rate for

participants. Also, it was clear that the constant dialogue contributed greatly to a sense of greater calm and confidence when the formal observation eventually took place, as there was a greater understanding of the criteria for proficiency embedded within the new framework. While teachers and administrators alike found the loop effective in producing more face time for dialogue around instruction, there were moments when there were inconsistencies with overall implementation.

The following themes emerged from the detailed interviews and additional notes taken during my study:

    A. Regular collaborative conversations with school leadership around instruction.

    B. Lessening of stakes helped make model effective.

    C. Inconsistent implementation.

Regular Collaborative Conversations with school leadership around instruction. A common thread that emerged from the data was the regularity in instructional conversations for teachers and administrators. Prior to the observation-feedback loop teachers reported that they had very little conversation with their building administrators around instruction. One teacher reported about previous experiences:

In previous years I was left to fend for myself. There were no structures put in place to grow. When there was dialogue there was no tool to even guide conversations. I left feeling lost. This year I feel that there is a template for conversations that help with growth and in understanding the big picture of the new standards-based approach.

Teachers also began to feel supported by leadership and a certain kinship developed:

I got to see my principal as an instructional leader rather than just a supervisor over

operations of building and everything. We actually spoke about instruction regularly

and not about fieldtrips.

From the administrative vantage point, the model allowed for more of a consistent handle on how their teachers were instructing, particularly around areas that needed improvement. It also provided flexibility for implementation since previous experiences were grounded with procedural restrictions, whereas the observation-feedback loop allowed for greater flexibility:

Instead of having to schedule pre-conferences followed by post-conferences, this

model allowed for me to adjust my schedule when the daily emergencies occurred

and not worry about violating personnel rights.

The administrators also felt that the model encouraged collegiality that wasn't in place before:

When really looking at the model it is a guidance system that encourages, not

discourages, dialogue.

Lessening of stakes helped make model effective. Continuing the aforementioned trend toward collegiality, there was a real sense the observation and feedback loop's effectiveness emerged from the implicit non-punitive nature. The teachers and administrators found it to be a "safe" model that aimed at producing substantive conversations about practice, but with a greater good in mind. The insertion of the Danielson language helped build knowledge around the framework in anticipation of the high-stakes evaluations. One teacher noted that the observations were "pleasant," while another went on to add that there was a "humanistic quality," which sincerely helped.

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These characteristics aided a paradigm shift where administration and teachers were able to have real conversations about teaching that weren't hindered by a rating that could affect employment or be perceived as punitive:

I felt that the feedback helped me build confidence and knowing that it wouldn't affect my job made me feel more open and less guarded in making changes.

Similarly, administrative participants felt the positive rub without the high-stakes feeling hovering around the observations. One administrator even notices its effects on relational trust:

The teachers were less defensive and began to see us as coaches pulling for them.

The administrator would go on to add that this allowed for greater "teacher metacognition," that perhaps wouldn't have existed in a high-stakes format.

Administration noted that it also helped from an organizational perspective, as there was greater leeway in when and how the observation and feedback would occur, which made it more possible that implementation would occur with fidelity. Vice versa, teachers felt that it was more realistic that the administrators saw "real instruction" and not some set time where the teachers knew they were coming for a formal observation. This had some repercussion, as one teacher notes. "I needed to be prepared every day to have someone enter my room and observe my teaching."

While there was a loosening of the stakes that made educators feel better about the process, some felt it lacked a formality that usually included clear guidance. Teachers felt that the formal process of pre-conference-post was helpful, as it ensured timely feedback, and that procedures were clearly understood, whereas the more informal approach lacked continuity and structure at times. One teacher stated that oftentimes the

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meetings felt "rushed" and that the script wasn't followed perfectly. Another teacher noted that she felt the administrator was sometimes "going through the motions."

There were some emerging patterns as evidenced through my interviews with leadership around this area. Simply put: The bi-weekly expectation, while thoughtful, was not oftentimes realistic given the ebb and flow of a school day and the school year in general. The responsibilities that were needed elsewhere in the building made it difficult to adhere to expectations leading to some quality control issues.

Inconsistent Implementation. As noted earlier, the observation-feedback loop was structured around Bambrick's 6-step feedback approach, which had a clear script to enable actionable feedback and time to discuss next steps and practice. At times, teachers reported that the implementation was inconsistent, particularly around scripting:

In the beginning the administration was [so] much focused on using a script that it felt disingenuous. It seemed like the script was more important than looking at me and talking about my teaching.

While this could have been attributed to the growing pains of a new model, other teachers also reported that at times the meetings felt more obligatory then caring and the meetings felt "disjointed," especially in the beginning. One teacher reported that the process was also "too micro-detailed," which felt stifling.

Some teachers also reported that they felt they were constantly "chasing" to receive positive feedback. There were usually "three negatives to a positive." This feedback contributed to a sense of realization that while the model is non-evaluative in nature, teachers still need to receive positive feedback regularly as teaching is incredibly nuanced and challenging.

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While administrators felt the process was beneficial overall, they were expected to implement REACH and the observation-feedback loop, which made it difficult to perform both with integrity.

REACH called for a pre-conference, 45-minute observation and a post-conference. I found it tough to do bi-weekly and do it the right way.

There was also a growing perception that REACH's rating was the true measure that mattered, which prompted the observation-feedback model to lose steam at times, especially since teachers were anxiously preparing for the high-stakes rating. It didn't help matters that at times the administration would perform the informal walkthrough but never schedule time to reflect. One teacher stated, "Whenever someone comes in my room, I want to hear perspective. There were many times I couldn't find [an] observer to discuss and it never occurred." This trend was found for both teachers and administrators, who felt overworked and short of time.

Research Question #2: Did the continuous observation-feedback model impact teaching practices and increase motivation to make refinements to instruction?

All participants reported that the observation-feedback loop affected their teaching practices. The fact that collaborative conversations were occurring on a regular basis and that the substance of these conversations contained feedback aimed at improving practice enabled the model to be effective. The inclusion of the Danielson framework associated with the new evaluation criteria in the district also produced teacher buy-in and served as a strong motivator to learn and adjust practices in anticipation of the high-stakes evaluations that ran concurrent to the informal model. The following central themes that emerged were:

A. Deeper thinking and understanding of practice

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B. Coaching conversations aligned to criteria-referenced components served as guide and great motivator to make instructional adjustments.

Deeper reflection on teaching and learning. The emergence of more reflective practices at the school was a trend in the data collection process. The majority of teachers interviewed stated that they had never experienced such a high degree of observation-feedback in their professional careers. With the historic observation mean at 2 for teachers in a year, the participants in the study received one every two weeks. This not only reinforced certain tendencies and practices of the subjects, but it allowed for teachers to practice and engage in professional dialogue in a "safe place." Many teachers reported being able to see progress, which served as a great motivator:

I went from being observed 1-2 times a year if that to every other week. My head was spinning a bit but in a good way. I was able to see my progression, which helped motivate me to keep going.

Even the few that felt they had achieved complete enlightenment or progress conveyed that they had reflected in a manner like they never had before as an educator. It also allowed for them to view the administration as being with them in the "foxhole," as one teacher related. The prior year, they only had sit-down meetings with building administrators 1-2 times a year or if there was a crisis. The evolving expectations have shifted for building administrators from operational supervisors to instructional leaders. The teachers at the school began to see this and appreciated this expected shift.

While uncertainty exists as to whether the process had a significant impact on student outcomes, the idea that each teacher was getting critical feedback and sufficient support to hone their craft certainly brings forth the assumption that there should be a

correlation with student growth. One teacher noted, "I came back after the conference and felt excited to address areas that needed addressing and wanted to try new methods in my class to help my students."

For the administration tasked with raising student achievement, their work with instruction was seen as integral as never before. While the constraints of time was mentioned as a hindrance previously, when leadership was able to fulfill their observation-feedback obligations, a more nuanced perspective on teaching and learning emerged, as well as a greater degree of knowledge about the capacity of teaching at the school. As one administrator noted:

I was actively engaged in instruction every day. Trends emerged. It helped me structure professional development and reaffirmed previous held beliefs about certain teachers and what their needs may be where previously I didn't necessarily have data to support.

This deeper reflection on teaching and learning enabled school leadership to tailor PD days to fit trends observed and to feel confident with direction of training and resources allotted for the professionals at the school.

Coaching conversations aligned to standards-based framework served as motivation to improve. The school district adopted the standards-based framework of Charlotte Danielson. This approach relied on a set of predetermined research-based criteria for mastery teaching. The observation-feedback loop embedded the Danielson language in hope of building teacher capacity and confidence with the new set of criteria. The overwhelming majority of participants viewed the standards-based conversations as the essential link to not only becoming comfortable with the new set of expectations but in realizing that teaching is multi-faceted and nuanced. For self-improvement, having this

set of criteria consistently reinforced significantly affected reflective practices. This in turn markedly affected what was then occurring in the classroom. As one teacher noted:

When the new evaluation system was set up I was really nervous and anxious about what it would mean for my career. I was used to the old way (checklist). The framework seemed scary. Within months of repeatedly speaking with my supervisors in the observation program I felt I understood what was needed to be successful. I also liked learning about the domains. It was making me become a better teacher. I wanted to try new things.

The pilot's assertion that the previous evaluation model was ineffective in improving teacher practice was reinforced in my interviews. Many teachers shared that the checklists were not meaningful and that, while they were happy to receive "distinguished" marks, they really weren't being pushed. As one teacher shared:

I liked feeling secure and the old evaluation rated me as excellent. While I felt like a good teacher I didn't have an understanding of what was excellent and also didn't know what I needed to work on from year to year.

While the new standards-based model created anxiety, it also was welcomed since it outlined clearly what characteristics make a proficient/master teacher. While many felt the observation-feedback loop at times felt "uneven" and "vague," the alignment and constant reference to the standards-based framework contributed to a sense of "usefulness" and "worthwhileness." The mere fact that the administrators were acting as "coaches" slowly allowed fear to dissipate and allowed for joint dialogue around instruction that served as an igniter to improve professional practices. One teacher noted:

I loved the coaching conversations that I was having with my administrators. I didn't

feel like they were out to get me but there to help.

The administrators at the school also saw the standards-based alignment as
beneficial in multiple ways: First, they were having in-depth conversations with their
staff around instruction that they found useful in motivating staff to improve teaching and
learning. Second, the usual acrimony was dissipating, as the teachers viewed them as
"coaches" trying to get the most out of them in the field. One administrator noted:

I saw teacher changes in attitude as we had more rich conversations in our feedback

meetings. They didn't view me as being out to get them but as someone to help. Major

culture shift occurred.

Previously, I mentioned that what may emerge from the observation-feedback
loop is a cake and eat it phenomenon. It is clear from my data that teachers felt more
supported than ever before during participation of the study, and in turn when high-stakes
evaluations ensued, there was a level of mutual satisfaction that supports were in place to
feel that supportive work was done on the front end to accept results and accountability
from the high-stakes formal measures.

Connection to survey of literature. I began my research with the idea that a key
ingredient to improving professionally lies in receiving regular feedback. Some of my
early memories of schooling were the anticipation of grades and instructor feedback, as
this was a validation of my work. I thrived off getting feedback and making corrections
where necessary to advance as a learner. When I entered the world of education, I was
stunned at the existing dichotomy. The disdain for teacher evaluation was visible and the
acrimonious relationship between administration and the teacher faculty was palpable. It

prompted me to initiate a study into the creation of a model that provided consistent non-punitive feedback to educators. In turn, it was my assessment that this could bridge the divide and have a dramatic effect on teacher practices and ultimately could be a driver in motivating educators to improve. The literature from my study was divided into two sections: history and purpose of teacher evaluation and the current practices of today's evaluation models and their effectiveness in improving teacher practice.

While history and purpose provided more of a context for the study, there were some correlations that emerged from the data that parallel some of my themes. When applying John Dewey: *Evaluation and the Art of Teaching*, the book encourages policy makers and educational leaders to help create conditions in districts, schools, and classrooms that value reflective teachers. The Dewey study had ramifications on era of clinical supervision, which contributed to a closer focus on personnel as "individuals." This variable was present during the observation-feedback loop, as teachers and administrators alike valued the reflective nature of conversations that occurred. The data also suggested this had a dramatic effect on relational trust which ensued due to the emergence of collaborative dialogue.

Goldhammer's (1969) five-phase process included tenets designed to encourage reflective conversations, largely revolving around the emphasis Goldhammer placed on sit-downs with staff. In my model, participants felt that the ability to sit down and discuss instruction was an overwhelmingly appealing attribute.

Glatthorn's (1989) model, which centered on teacher development and the initiation of goals, resonated with my study as, after each feedback session, the school administrators would create a follow-up plan to observe. The purpose was to observe the

targeted area discussed prior and to gather more data for teacher development. Glathorn insisted teacher input and control over the evaluation process were paramount towards encouraging teacher growth and development. In my study, one teacher noted the ability to see "progression" over time as being a great motivator to improve practices and aided the paradigm tremendously.

From the *Rand Report* (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, & Bernstein), which highlighted the inadequate makeup of teacher evaluation structures, pointing to the lack of clear competencies, to *Ten Years Later*, where Garland, et. al., reported that the impediment to systematic change resulted in a lack of clear performance standards, the growing trend in early literature and within my study was the preference given to being able to view a standards-based framework when discussing the craft of teaching. When teachers assessed the feedback conferences as being "rushed" or "vague," the prevailing feeling was that the administrator failed to measure performance against a set of competencies that could be understood. The administrators of my study were candid in admitting that they sometimes were unable to hold conferences consistently and with fidelity (using the script), which resulted in uneven implementation at times.

According to Danielson (1996), the intent of the framework was to accomplish three things. First, it sought to honor the complexity of teaching. Second, it constituted a language for professional conversation. Third, it provided a structure for self-assessment and reflection on professional practice. After the insertion of the Danielson competencies in the feedback script, the result was met with positive trends. As one teacher stated:

Being able to know what I'm being evaluated against even when I'm not being

evaluated per se allowed me to relax and enjoy the substance of feedback

conferences.

The purpose of my pilot was to provide consistent observation and feedback. *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009) heavily criticized teacher evaluations due to the infrequent nature of their occurrences. As relayed earlier, the mean of teacher evaluations was 2 for the school participating in the pilot. The bi-weekly observation-feedback loop allowed for a degree of consistency that none of the participants had ever experienced, and was widely accepted due to its regularity of feedback. This encouraged corrective action and deep reflection.

Papay (2012) argued that an effective evaluation system must include a component that addresses ongoing teacher development and improvement through a more collaborative approach with teacher and evaluators. In my study, the administrators saw the loop as an effective measure in choosing professional development form trends emerging during the observation-feedback loop.

Darling-Hammond (2012) contended that in effective professional learning systems, school leaders must learn from experts, mentors, and peers on how to become instructional leaders. Hammond supported this notion by emphasizing that teachers need to be indoctrinated into a culture conducive to learning and growth. The trend data suggests that a culture was emerging due to the commitment and frequency of the model.

Some issue that arose were teacher perceptions that administrators were "rushing" conferences or deviating from the script which led to an unevenness at times. Stumbo and McWalters (2010) believe that the quality of evaluators is a hindrance. Stumbo et al. go

on to add that the lack of evaluator training is a threat to the reliability and objectivity of any given results. It was clear that, while the initial training laid the foundation of the work, there were still capacity-building issues based on time and resources. Surely, this perception could lead to mistrust of the process, but overwhelmingly the professional conversations incited from Danielson still produced worthwhile ratings from participants.

In *Ten Years Later* (2012), the study found that a majority of evaluations that took place were summative and used for teacher dismissal, which spurred a contentious divide. The teachers felt the observation model alleviated stress and mistrust once formal evaluation took place. As one teacher noted:

The amount of conversations that occurred during the school year prepared me for the formal and made me less anxious then ever-before. I knew what I needed to work on.

The relational trust factor was a promising theme that arose from the pilot. Fink (1999) maintained that effective instructional leaders must create both intellectual capital and social capital within their organizations. Collaboration and professional learning was heavily valued by all participants and was an important theme in the study, as it added motivation to refine and converse further with leadership.

While my pilot doesn't provide specificity on its impact on student achievement, and the trend that teachers shared around their experiences and its effects on teaching practices, one can surmise that this can in turn influence students in a positive manner. Taylor and Tyler's (2011) research in the Cincinnati teacher evaluation system, based on the standards developed by Danielson, showed that there was student improvement in the area of mathematics when teacher performance was measured by a standards-based

model while Tucker and Stronge's (2005) examination into the four standards-based models employed by school districts in Colorado; Virginia; Tennessee; and Oregon suggested that a focus on pedagogical dialogue helped to improve student learning.

In *Rethinking Teacher Evaluation* (Sartain, Stoelinga, Brown, 2013), the group analyzed 955 principal observations of 501 teachers and found a strong relationship between classroom observation ratings and test score growth while Kennedy's (2010) work found that standards-based models focused on the teacher first, while also adhering to performance standards as a way to induce real dialogue about teaching and learning. While these results stemmed from a formal process, the real value emerged from having real conversations on teaching and having a clear set of competencies, which influenced attitudes to adjust and improve. Henman and Milanowski (2001) only reinforces this as the pilot program utilized Danielson's standards-based model and found teachers were favorable to the process; most importantly, to the initiation of professional conversations as the district had no clear mode for engaging teachers. Previously, teaching dialogue was limited. The school experienced a complete 360, as teachers were having productive dialogue leading to corrective action, further developing a sense of motivation to improve their craft.

My research is predicated on the idea that frequent observation is critical towards improving teacher practice and motivation. Therefore, while robust formal or informal practices that align to a standards-based model have shown effectiveness, for purposes of my research I also needed to evaluate a feedback model that occurs rapidly and consistently. Campbell's (2013) research examined perception of teachers and administrators using mini-observations. Campbell utilized Marshall's standards-based

rubric with consistency of use in mind. The study reinforced attitudes about the effectiveness of having mini-observations that occur rapidly. The following themes emerged: 1. Significantly stronger relationships were built between the teacher and administrator due to the frequency of classroom visits and the reflective conversations that quickly followed each observation; 2. The evaluation process for both teachers and administrators significantly improved the authenticity of supervision and evaluation. This improvement was accomplished primarily through the reflective professional conversations that were frequent, focused, real, and rich; 3. Administrators and teachers viewed the mini-observations as a low-stakes event where stress was significantly reduced due to the frequency of visits, collaborative reflective conversations, and the elimination of the "dog and pony show" where teachers were only observed a few times during the year; 4. The immediate feedback provided by the administrators after a mini-observation was viewed as highly desirable, as teachers could implement the recommendations immediately and administrators could observe those changes during their next observation; and 5. The mini-observation model and reflective conversations led teachers to think far more deeply and pedagogically about their practice. When asked, 92% of teachers and 100% of administrators indicated they preferred the mini-observation model of evaluation to the traditional evaluation model.

     This study connects with my research themes and further reinforces the need for an observation-feedback model aimed at producing consistent dialogue capable of generating refinement and improvement of practices among its participants

CHAPTER FIVE
Conclusions and Further Reflections

Conclusions

My research set out to explore the effects of consistent observation and feedback on teacher practice and whether it motivates teachers to make further refinements. I conducted a qualitative research design that focused on two essential research questions: (1) What were the perceptions of teachers and administrators who participated in the observation and feedback model? (2) Does continuous observation and feedback impact teaching practices and increase motivation to make refinements?

Overall, the results of the pilot show that the participants perceived the observation-feedback loop as effective on multiple fronts. First, the observation-feedback loop was able to induce regular collaborative conversations with school leadership around instruction whereas in the past they were non-existent apart from a formal 1-2 times a year. Second, the loop was viewed as lower-stakes, which encouraged a general openness. The mere fact that teachers viewed the action of leadership as non-punitive strengthened buy-in and improved relational trust considerably. Third, at times there were inconsistencies in implementation. As with any model that is new and relies on a large degree of consistency among its participants, especially given a shortage of resources and time, this was not viewed as uncommon. To a large degree, the snag was the formal process (REACH) that carried tremendous weight for the school year. School leadership was tasked with being trained and completing formal observations that required extensive coordination to complete with fidelity. In turn, the finding the balance to conduct informal observations linked to the observation-feedback loop was challenging.

In terms of the model's effectiveness on practice and motivation to make refinements, the data suggested the following: A deeper thinking and understanding of practice emerged from the abundance of professional dialogue that existed during the feedback sessions. The inclusion of a clear set of competencies was the most transformative element. One can deduce that the set of competencies removed the ambiguity factor pervasive in previous models for the participants. For the first time there was a greater understanding of the complexities of teaching, and its criteria-referenced components were viewed and reinforced consistently during the feedback sessions. The idea that teachers became more reflective was gleaned from the competencies. The fact that these sets of competencies were also part of the high-stakes process for the teachers was also a motivator, which as a researcher I found understandable, since finally having a blueprint of competencies and expectations was pivotal and essential to teacher practice. From the research, having a common language and non-punitive space to communicate and practice with leadership consistently was the positive igniter. The coaching conversations aligned to criteria-referenced components served as a clear guide which motivated participants to make instructional adjustments. What emerged from the coaching conversations was not only a large gain in the depth of understanding of practices, but the accruing of human capital. All participants were engaging in dialogue with leadership like never before. This had an overwhelming effect on the motivation to make adjustments in practices. The perception that leadership was regularly engaged contributed to an environment conducive to reflection, which is an essential starting point for all practitioners.

Further Reflections

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While there has been a shifting landscape in education around teacher supervision, the majority of research is centered on formal evaluation measures and standards-based framework models. While this shift is positive, given criteria have been established leading to greater depth of understanding around the nuances of teaching for practitioners, it is a great fallacy to enact these models solely for formal usage. The conceptualization of any criteria-referenced model or framework is bred from the idea that individuals can improve by having an established set of competencies to measure one's proficiency against. This requires a high degree of trial and error, as teaching is incredibly nuanced and complicated. It is my contention that we have fallen short on initiating informal observations, which, if implemented consistently, can have a dramatic effect on teaching and learning.

The emergence of more informal observation structures can also be a significant driver in motivating educators, as having the space to practice and fine tune-methods without fear of punitive actions strengthens school culture where relational trust is tested regularly between administrators that need to evaluate effectiveness of staff and teachers who must perform proficiently to maintain employment. In the same vein, with an abundance of highly qualified educators fleeing the profession due to the lack of capacity building and support, having supportive structures in place can only strengthen the retention issues that plague our nation's schools.

While my research indicated favorable data regarding effect on practice and motivation to adjust instruction, there still needs to be greater analysis and research as this design pertains to student achievement. Theoretically, when a teacher is receiving regular feedback and support, and there is a tangible shift in practice, it should impact

achievement. For my research to have far-reaching implications a correlation must be

identified and studied further.

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APPENDIX A Interview Protocols

Teacher Interview:

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. Prior to this year, on average, how many times were you observed and given feedback in a given school year?

3. When given feedback prior to this school year, did you find it had an effect on your teaching practice? Why/Why not?

4. In school year 2012/13, how many times were you observed?

5. Did you find consistent feedback with clear high leverage action steps had an effect on your teaching practice?

6. Did it motivate you as an educator? Why/Why not?

Administration Interview:

1. As an administrator, what has been your experience with observation and feedback prior to this year?

2. What was your training in providing high leverage actionable feedback?

3. Describe the initiation of consistent observation and feedback practices at your site. How did it take shape over the school year? What were the results in relation to teacher motivation and practice? (We will have data from tracker to view teacher practice results)

4. What are your plans for next year? Any tweaks you would make to the observation and feedback process? Why???